

Scotland in Revolution

I.

This article has no reference to happenings either of the present or of the recent past, and it has nothing to do with anything that certain dissatisfied and truculent agitators may desire to see in the future, immediate or ultimate. Hence the censor, should he ever scan the pages of our little monthly, has no cause to feel alarm. We have nothing to do with events that have occurred within the memory of living man, nothing that even our grandparents can recall. We are chronicling incidents antecedent to Workers' Committees, Shop Stewards, or even Trade Unions.

They have to do with the Parliament House, upon the High Street of Old Edinburgh, with High Courts, and with noble lords and worthy judges. They concern such troublous vagabonds as Fife miners, but they treat of these persons long before the ancestors of McLean or M'Manus were so far uprooted from the age-long homelands of their clans and septs as to have afflicted the masters of Forth and Clyde with their rebellious progeny. We write not of arms and agitators, but of quillpens and lawyers, of parchments and legislators who set us many a precedent in the processes of revising social systems and subverting the forms of property.

Having been dubbed a revolutionary and denounced as a "Bolshie," it occurred to the writer of this article to pry into the records of the Realm of Scotland and to discover for himself whether such characters were without parallel in the history of the northern kingdom. With that intent he betook himself to the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh, and surrounding his desk and pad with barricades of vellum and leather-clad tomes, dived into the Manuscripts' Commission's reprint of the Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland.

And these were some of the things that he retrieved. Here beginneth the First Lesson!

There seem to have been men of substance and of weight in 15th Century Scotland who were concerned that all able-bodied persons should work, for we find in 1425: "Inquisition to be made of ydill men that has nocht of thare awin to leif apon," and that such men must get a master or a craft within 40 days or be punished. In 1427,-29,-57,-78 and 1503 further legislation of this kind was passed. For the land of Scotland was by this time beginning to be appropriated to private uses, and the poor were forced to take to a vagabond existence, as in contemporary England.

Craftsmen such as smiths, baxters (bakers), brewers and sellers of salt and victuals appear about the middle of the following century to have been charging "exorbitant prices"—not for their labour-power, but for those things wherein that power was embodied; and this called for drastic parliamentary action on the part of the Estates, who were interested in the well-being of a limited community of mere consumers.

But all this was but as the brewing of the great storm that now broke over the old order in Scotland when the Roman Church, with its abbeys and priories, cathedrals and colleges, was swept into ruin or plundered without ruth or respect. An Act of 1551, providing for "the making of an universall wecht and ane universall mesoure" gives the clue to what was happening to make the feudal state and the Catholic Church unsuitable to the requirements of a changing economy. Commodity production was making its appearance and required uniformity of standards throughout the areas wherein exchange values were in constant and continuous process of circulation.

The number of laws for dealing with beggars bears abundant testimony to the change that must have been coming over the nobles and lairds who, discharging their retinues, were settling down to cultivate their holdings and to increase their revenues. Once set upon this, they made swift and drastic riddance of the idle monks who stood between them and enjoyment of the

comparatively rich lands of Arbroath, Abercorne, Cambuskenneth, Glasgow, Paisley, and many another church estate. In 1567, we find these gross materialists laying sacrilegious hands upon holy rood and holy kirk so "that ordoure may be taken for all abbacyis as weil for the present as for tymes to come As also for benefices and kirkis anneexat and dissolution to be maid thairof and ane act to be maid thapoun."

Quite summary in its language and its operation was this method of annexing to the Crown lands, benefices and buildings hallowed by centuries of piety and donated according to immemorial custom. Next we find that "the teinds" or tithes were to pertain to the Church, but that "the temporal lands" were to be "disposit be avysis of the parliamet." So, after a while, they were "disposit be avysis of the parliamet"—the parliament of the propertied estates—to landlords! From Church to Crown, and from Crown to Crown favourites and creditors who happened to control the king, to have lordships entitling them to a seat in the Lords, or to have influence with the Lower House.

Thus, in 1593: "Act in favour of the Duck of Lennox anent the superioritie of the bishoprics of Sanctandrois and Glasgow." And in 1606: "Erection of the abbacie of Balnuirrenoch with the landis and baronies of Kirknewtoun and Ballerno unite thairto in ane temporall lordship in favouris of the lord Balnuirrenoch." So, in this same session, Dryburgh and Cambuskenneth were made temporal lordships "in favouris of the erle of Mar," Jedburgh and Coldingham Abbeys were given ("for services rendered") to the Earl of Home and a long list of other Crown forfeitures was transformed into private property. It was this very year, 1606, when the nobles and lairds were helping themselves to lands, rich in soil and forest, heath and minerals, that they legislated the coal miners and workers at the salt pans into a condition of permanent serfdom, binding on themselves, their wives and their descendants. The following is a literal translation of the somewhat difficult old Scots in which a part of this Act "anent coilzearies (colliers) and saltaris" is phrased:

And the said colliers, coalbearers and saltworkers to be esteemed reputed and holden as thieves and punished in their bodies, viz. :—so many of them as shall hold themselves back for wages and fees. And the said Estates of this present parliament gives power and commission to all masters and owners of coal-haughis and (salt) pans to apprehend all vagabonds and sturdy beggars to be put to labour.

Under this Act, unrepealed until 1775 and not completely out of operation until 1799, the Dukes of Buccleuch and Hamilton, the Earls of Rosebery (or that family) and Wemyss, and many another Scottish lord and laird forced their workers to labour as virtual slaves, as serfs transmissible with the estate, what time in unblushing and shameless defiance of the law of 1592 they worked Crown minerals without paying their legal "teinds" or tenth-part to the State.

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(To be continued.)

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