

The Declaration of Independence

Sent to Pope John XXII by the Estates of Scotland, convened under the presidency of King Robert the Bruce at the Abbey Church of Saint Thomas at Aberbrothock on 6th April, 1320.

THE DECLARATION A Translation by Agnes Mure Mackenzie.

"To our Lord and Very Holy Father in Christ, Lord John, the Supreme Pontiff, by God's Providence, of the Most Holy Roman and Catholic Church, his humble and devoted sons"—here follow the names of the Nobles and Commons in Parliament assembled and " other barons and freeholders, with the whole Commons of the Kingdom of Scotland. With all filial reverence devoutly do we kiss your blessed feet."

" From the deeds alike and the books of our forefathers, we understand, most Holy Lord and Father, that among other noble nations our own, the Scottish, grows famous for many men of wide renown. The which Scottish nation, journeying from Greater Scythia by the Tyrrhene Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, could not in any place or time or manner be overcome by the barbarians, though long dwelling in Spain among the fiercest of them. Coming thence, twelve hundred years after the transit of Israel, with many victories and with many toils they won that habitation in the West, which, though the Britons have been driven out, the Picts effaced, and Norwegians, Danes and English have often assailed it, they hold now, in freedom from all vassalage: and as the old historians bear witness, have ever so held it. In this kingdom have reigned a hundred and thirteen kings of their own Blood Royal, and no man foreign has been among them. Of their merits and their noble qualities we need say no more, for they are bright enough by this alone, that though they were placed in the furthest ends of the earth, Our Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the King of Kings, called them among the first to His most firm faith, after His Passion and His Resurrection. Nor did He choose to confirm them in the Lord's Faith by any one less than His own first Apostle (although he stands second or third in order of rank) the most gracious Andrew, brother of Peter's self, whom ever since he has established their Patron.

" Bearing all these things carefully in mind, those holiest of fathers, your predecessors, adorned and fortified this kingdom and people, as belonging specially to Peter's brother, with many favours and many privileges. Thus our nation till now has lived under their protection in peace and quiet, till the Magnificent Prince, Edward King of the English, the father of the Edward that now is, did, under cover of alliance and friendship, invade and occupy as an enemy our kingdom and people, who then had no head, who had in mind no evil towards him, and who then were unused to war or sudden invasion. What that king has done in wrongs and slaughter and violence, in imprisonings of the leaders of the Church, in burning and looting of religious houses and the massacre of their communities, with his other outrages on the Scottish people (sparing not sex nor age nor priestly orders) is something that is not to be comprehended save by those who know these things from their own experience.

" Yet, at last, by His help Who heals and sains the wounded, we are freed from these innumerable evils by our most valiant Sovereign, King, and Lord, King Robert, who to set free his heritage and his people faced, like a new Maccabaeus or Joshua, with joyful heart, toil, weariness, hardship, and dangers. By the Providence of God, the right of succession, those laws and customs which we are resolved to defend even with our lives, and by our own just consent, he is our King: and to him who has brought salvation to his people through the safeguarding of our liberties, as much by his own deserving as by his rights, we hold and choose in all things to adhere. Yet Robert himself, should he turn aside from the task that he has begun, and yield Scotland or us to the English King and people, we should cast out as the enemy of us all, as subverter of our rights and of his own, and should choose another king to defend our freedom: for so long as a hundred of us are left alive, we will yield in no least way to English dominion. We fight not for glory nor for wealth nor honours; but only and alone we fight for freedom, which no good man surrenders but with his life.

" Because of these things, most reverend Father and Lord, praying earnestly from our hearts that before Him as Whose Vicar on Earth you reign, before Him to whom there is but a single weight. Who has one law for Jew and Greek and for Scots and English—before Him will with honesty consider the manifold anguish and tribulation which we and the Church have suffered through the English, and will look upon us with a father's eyes. We pray you to admonish the King of England (to whom his own possessions may well suffice, since England of old was enough for seven Kings or more) that he should leave us in peace in our little Scotland, since we desire no more than is our own, and have no dwelling-place beyond our borders: and we on our part, for the sake of peace, are willing to do all within our power."

" Most Holy Father, it is your part to do this, or surrender to the barbarity of the heathen, let loose for the sins of Christians on the Faithful, and daily forcing the bounds of Christendom, and you know it would mar the security of your fame if you looked unmoved on anything which in your time should bring dishonour on any part of the Church. May Your Holiness therefore admonish those Christian princes who falsely claim that their own wars with their neighbours now hinder them from relieving the Holy Land: though indeed they are hindered only by their belief that they will find more profit and less toil in crushing neighbours smaller than themselves, who appear to them also weaker than themselves. He Who knows all knows that if the King of the English would leave us in peace, we and our own Lord King would go joyfully thither which thing we solemnly testify and declare to the Vicar of Christ and to all Christian people. But if too readily, or insincerely, you put your faith in what the English have told you, and continue to favour them, to our confounding, then indeed shall slaying of bodies, yea and of souls, and all those evils which they shall do to us, or we to them, be charged to your account by the Most High.

" We are always bound to you, as God's Viceregent, to please you by a son's obedience in all things. We remit our cause to the Highest King and Judge, casting our care on Him, in the hope and faith that He will grant to us both strength and valour, and bring about our enemies' overthrow.

" May the Most High preserve for many years Your Serene Holiness to His Holy Church.

" Given at the Monastery of Arbroath in Scotland the sixth day of April in the year of Grace one thousand three hundred and twenty, and in the fifteenth year of the King named above."

[From the copy of the Scottish Declaration of Independence in the Register House, Edinburgh.]