NEGLECTED DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE FOR THE CURRENCY OF 14th CENT. SCOTTISH COINS IN N.E. IRELAND

By COLM GALLAGHER

The still unpublished although calendared Register of Myles Sweetman, a late fourteenth-century Archbishop of Armagh, contains the document quoted below which seems never before to have been cited in a numismatic context. For the following transcript I am indebted to the generosity of the Registrar of the Armagh Province (C. of I.), Canon H. W. Love:—

In Dei nomine Amen. Nos Milo Dei et Apostolice Sedis gratia Archiepiscopus Armachanus Hibernie Primas de consensu tam nostro quam magistri Odonis ecclesie nostre Cathedralis Ardmacanae ecclesiarum Rectorum perpetuorum Vicariorum presentium absentiumque pro———(?) nostro dioecesis Ardmacanae commemorantium die Veneris proximo post festum Sancti Michaelis Archangeli Anno Domini MCCCLXXIX in ecclesia beate Marie de Mandevilestone de unanimitate consensu et concilio totius eleri nostri universaliter uniformiter et concorditer statuto Domini Regis (Anglie) et Domini Hibernie nos merito conformantes statuentes quod grosse pecunie Scoticanae per totam pro libertate ecclesie et utilitate terre per nullam personam exponatur alteri vel tradatur seu recipiatur nisi pro valore trium denariorum argenti pecunie Anglicane contra vere facientes sint auctoritate presentis constitutionis ipso facto excommunicati sententia Excommunieationis majoris et terra ad quam hujus transgressores declinabunt sit ipso facto ecclesiastico subposita interdicto.

Contractions have been of course silently expanded, but no attempt has been made to supply punctuation. The document is usually referred to as Register Siveteman, Entry No. 254. For commemorantium we should doubtless read commorantium; for statuentes, statuimus; and for vere, vero. The document may then be rendered something as follows:—

In the name of God, Amen. We, Myles, by the Grace of God and of the Apostolic See, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, both with our own consent and with that of Master Odo [= Aodh], (Dean) of our Cathedral Church of Armagh, and with that of the Rectors and Perpetual Vicars of the churches, both present and absent, and with that of the Proctors (?) of our diocese of Armagh, (all) being assembled, on the Friday next after the Feast of St. Michael the Archangel in the year of the Lord 1379, in the church of Blessed Mary at Mandevillestown, with the unanimous consent and counsel of the whole of our clergy, and universally, uniformly and wholeheartedly in proper conformity with the statute of the Lord King (of England) and Lord of Ireland, ordain that everywhere, for the liberty of the Church and for the utility of the land, the groat of the money of Scotland shall not be tendered by any person to another, nor passed nor received save for the value of three pennies of silver of the money of England, and that such as shall do to the contrary shall be by the authority of the present constitution automatically excommunicated with a sentence of greater excommunication, and any territory to which offenders may resort shall automatically be placed under ecclesiastical interdict.

The background of this edict is probably more familiar to Scottish and English students than to Irish. Originally the Scottish penny, and later the groat, had been struck to the same weight and fineness as the English counterparts, but in 1356 the English complained that the new Scottish money was inferior in both respects1. The situation was for a time remedied

and the great recoinage of 1357 was, in theory at least, a coinage to the English standard. Within a decade, however, there was again a marked falling off where weight at least was concerned, and in 1367 there was an official reduction which meant that the Scottish groat weighed only six-sevenths as much as the English. Naturally the discrepancy was prejudicial to acceptance of the Scottish coin outside Scotland, and in 1374 the English enacted that Scottish pieces should be current in England only at the rate of four pence Scottish to three English. The boot was now on the other leg, for the true value of a Scottish groat was rather more than threepence. The Act of 1374, several times re-affirmed, is, however, an English enactment, and applied only to England, but seems surely to be 'the statute of the Lord King' to which our document of 1379 refers.

Previous to this, English legislation concerning the coinage had at times been either imitated or confirmed in Ireland, but as it happens no Irish version of this statute is extant, and none figures in the standard listing of laws known to have been in force in Ireland. In 1380 the English Commons linked the 'new money . . . made in Scotland and Flanders' with the general shortage of silver, but when the Anglo-Irish Parliament dealt with the same topic the problem of the Scottish coinage was not one which was considered worthy of inclusion in their petition on the subject. The absence of a statute might even be said to be corroborated by this silence, so that it would have been tempting indeed to argue that Scottish coins had not reached Ireland in quantity. Our document, however, is good evidence to the contrary, and it is corroborated by hoard-evidence the importance of which cannot well be over-emphasized.

In a recent paper in this Journal, Mr. W. A. Seaby, F.S.A., has listed a surprising number of Irish hoards with Scottish coins of this very period, and it is noteworthy that all but one of those which are known to have contained the offending groats are from Ulster. This in itself goes far towards explaining the relative affluence of the Ulster Museum and poverty of the National Museum of Ireland where Scottish groats are concerned. In this connection it is doubly unfortunate that the find-spot of the one hoard not from Ulster can be indicated with no greater precision than 'Connaught', a blanket-term which could blind us to the possibility, or even probability, that the county was Sligo or Leitrim, an area which in the fourteenth century looked to Ulster rather than southwards. In Leitrim, too, we are not more than a few miles distant from Pettigo, a notorious hoard from which suggests that the native Irish of the district were producing highly ingenious forgeries of precisely these Scottish groats several decades before the 'O'Reillies' provoked not one but two Acts of the Anglo-Irish Parliament. The hoard-evidence, then, confirms the impression that Scottish groats of the 1370s enjoyed a wide currency in Ulster and its environs, but did not circulate freely in the rest of Ireland.

From all this it will be grasped that the Armagh document here published in full has a very considerable interest for the student of the monetary history of our island. Mandevilles-town—the modern Mansfieldstown—lies in mid-Louth, somewhat further to the south

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1 Burns, p. 240; Stewart, p. 31.
2 Ruding, p. 233: Burns, p. 270; Stewart, p. 35.
4 Ibid., p. 101, no. vii (= Inventory 310 ('Pettigoe'), cf. M. Dolley & W. A. Seaby, '“Le Money del Oraylly” (O'Reilly's Money)’, infra, pp. 114-117. The acts referred to are those of the Parliaments of 1447 (Trim) and 1456/1457 (Naas).
than any known hoard with Scottish groats of the offending issues, but well within the boundaries of the archdiocese of Armagh and of the Northern ecclesiastical province. At this period, too, the Primate's position as regards the effective political power in Armagh itself was such that it was perfectly normal for a synod of his clergy to be convened at some place where the jurisdiction of the English civil power was more likely to be effective, so that the choice of Mansfieldstown, then a place of much more importance, need occasion no surprise. Readers, too, who are unacquainted with the continuing interest of the Irish Church in financial matters may wonder at the interest shown by mediaeval diocesan clergy in such sordid matters as the 'exchange-rates' of groats and pence. In fairness it must be observed that the business in question was not entirely of their own seeking. The late fourteenth century in Ireland was a period of almost continual warfare against the resurgent Irishry, and an increasingly impecunious Anglo-Irish administration was putting the screw on the clergy in particular. In 1413, for example, it was demanded in so many words of the clergy that they should send their proctors to Parliament armed with full powers to grant aids or subsidies. This power to assent in their name was generally granted by the clergy at a diocesan convocation before Parliament itself met, and 'after the meeting of Parliament, the question of assessing and levying the subsidy was again referred to a convocation'\(^1\). There is evidence that this system did not grow up overnight, and already in the fourteenth century the clerical proctors had an important fiscal function—which is one of the reasons why it has been suggested that we should expand the pro... of the Armagh document as proctorum. Considerable portions of the archdiocese of Armagh lay inter Anglicos, and there at least the clergy would be faced with demands for aids and subsidies. If, as we suspect, quite a proportion of the money circulating in these districts consisted of the light Scottish groats, it would have been essential that the coins in question should be assigned an agreed value in terms of the official coin of the realm, and natural that this value should be identical with that proclaimed by the English king\(^2\).


\(^2\) It only remains for me to acknowledge gratefully the help I have received in the preparation of this paper from Mr. Michael Dolley, M.R.I.A., of the Queen's University of Belfast. For help with certain difficulties presented by the transcript we are both indebted to the kindness of Dr. Gearóid MacNiocaill, M.R.I.A., of the Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies. In neither case, though, are the views put forward in this paper necessarily shared by either of the gentlemen in question.