THE BALIOL LE SCOT FAMILY AND THEIR HEART STONE.

By Joseph Bain, F.S.A., Scot.

Legendary stories are dear to the average mind; and about a year ago, a writer under the sobriquet of "Peter Lombard," who seems rather credulous in antiquities, in an article on "Heart Burials,"[1] retailed a story contained in several letters to himself, on the "Heart Stone" of Brabourne, in Kent, which he said asserted—

That the manor of Brabourne was connected with the above family as far back as the 11th or 12th centuries—that on the death of John Balliol (founder of Balliol College) in 1269, his widow Devorgilla had his heart embalmed and incased in a casket of silver and ivory, and on her own death in 1289, it was deposited on her bosom in her tomb near the high altar of the abbey founded by herself, 7 miles from Dumfries, called *Dulce Cor* or Sweet Heart.

That this abbey was probably desecrated in the War of Succession, and in ruins within 40 years of its foundation, and but a small part of her tomb remains. That then the relic was probably secretly conveyed by one of her children to a place of security and repose; and if so, where so likely as to Brabourne, a quiet out of the way place? The Balliol family being then more or less under the ban of excommunication! That Balliol's son was a Cluniac monk, and Brabourne was probably a church attached to the Cluniac monastery of Monks' Horton, adjacent.

Such is the substance of this strange story given by "Peter Lombard." The only facts in it are Devorgilla's foundation of Sweet Heart Abbey, and burial there with her husband's heart—all else is pure fancy. It is certain from the public records that this manor of Brabourne, in Kent, was held by the Earls of Atholl (of the Strabolgy family) from about 1260, by marriage with the heiress of the family of Dover or Chilham (its owners from the time of K. John), till on the death of the last of these Earls, about 1371, it fell to his two daughters, coheiresses—Elizabeth, wife (1) of Thomas Percy, *junior*, (2) of John le Scrope, and Philippa, wife (1) of Ralph Percy, (2) of John de Halsham. These two ladies owned it in 1400, and their heirs for at least forty years later.

The only Balliol ever connected with Kent was Sir Alexander Balliol, of Cavers, in Scotland, who as second husband of Isabel, Countess of Atholl, heiress of the Dover family,[2] held her Kentish estate of Chilham by courtesy, for a few years, till the majority of his stepson, John, Earl of Atholl.[3]

It is almost needless to point out the absurdity of the statement that one of Devorgilla's children[4] conveyed her husband's heart all the way from Dumfries to a place in Kent that he had no concern with, and probably had never heard of! Thus is family history evolved from a legendary basis.

[1] *Church Times*, 8th March, 1897.

[2] She lies in the crypt of Canterbury, where the vergers show her tomb as the "Duchess" of Atholl.

[3] In a valuable paper by Mr. J. A. C. Vincent, it is clearly shown who this Sir Alexander Balliol was (*Genealogist* for January 1882).

[4] One only of her four sons survived her, John the youngest, afterwards King of Scotland; the Cluniac monk is mythical.