

AN ACCOUNT OF SOME MONUMENTAL AND WAYSIDE CROSSES,

STILL REMAINING IN THE WEST OF CORNWALL.

THE ancient crosses, which I would now present to public notice, belong to an early period of the history of our Church and country : the oldest of them to the time when the Romans held sway in Britain ; and the remainder to the period immediately succeeding the final departure of that people from these parts. They may be regarded therefore as monuments of primitive Christianity, and as a specimen of crosses which prevailed numerously, not only in Cornwall, but also, and perhaps more numerously, in other parts of ancient Britain. It will be seen that they possess all the distinctive marks which our limited acquaintance with this subject leads us to look for in them ; and also that they illustrate and confirm, in a remarkable manner, the history and character of the times to which I have ventured to attribute them. One great use of such antiquities is in the confirmation they afford to tradition, and that confirmation is the more valuable and interesting in proportion to the importance and interest of the history to which they refer. Now of all histories and traditions, perhaps none are more valuable and more interesting than those which relate to the introduction and establishment of Christianity in these islands ; and yet it must be admitted there is scarcely any part of our history, as a Church and nation, which is less generally known ! There are many who do not know that the religion of the Cross has prevailed in some portion or other of our land, without intermission, for nearly 1800 years^a ; there are many who are incredulous on the point ; but of the generality of persons it must be said they have not thought upon the matter. When we think of Romans, we are predisposed to regard them only as heathens ; when we think of the aboriginal Britons, the horrors of Druidism present themselves to our imagination. But surely it cannot be unknown that a great many Romans were Christians, even in the first century of the Christian era. It cannot be unknown that Christianity prevailed more in Britain during

^a See Williams' *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of the Cymry*, pp. 49—62.

the third, fourth, and fifth centuries, than in any other part of the Roman dominions which at that time comprehended a large portion of the known world. We know these facts and many more which it would be tedious to rehearse here, but we do not generally make any effort to realize this part of our history. It is the object of this paper to turn attention to this subject. The remote times to which I would lead the reader's thoughts, are not unrepresented by characteristic remains, which, few and fragmentary though they be, are yet venerable, interesting, and almost unknown.

In introducing these primitive Christian remains, I would divide them into three classes :

First, that of Roman crosses or incised slabs, for the Romans appear to have been instrumental in introducing and establishing Christianity on these shores.

The second, of Roman-British slabs and crosses ; and the third, of Irish crosses, which class resembles in all its varieties the crosses still remaining in Ireland. These last occupy chronologically the period intervening between the departure of the Romans from Britain, early in the fifth century, and the invasion and conquest of Cornwall by the Saxons under Athelstan, early in the tenth.

The two first examples I adduce of Roman crosses are from St. Just in Penwith, a parish not far from the Land's End, where many Roman coins have been found especially in the excavations and among the heaps of the ancient tin works. The examples referred to are deposited in a recess in the chancel of the parish church, where they were placed by the late Rev. John Buller, formerly vicar of the parish. The former of these, here figured, was found built into the wall when the chancel was taken down in 1834, to be rebuilt. It was probably a monument erected over the resting-place of Silus, in the cemetery of the primitive foundation^b, which occupied the site of the present church. The slab is of granite, and about three feet six inches



St. Just, Penwith

^b There are some rude heads cut in stone, similar to those which formerly ornamented the south doorway in St. Piran's oratory, in a garden wall adjoin-

ing the churchyard. Also a register of the existence of a church in this spot in the time of Edward the Confessor.

in length by fourteen inches in width, and nine in thickness. The inscription upon it is still legible, and is read thus in full, *SILVS HIC IACET*. On the adjoining side, the surface of which is more carefully chiselled, there is a line incised along the edge for a border, and in the middle, cut rather deeply, is a monogram representing a cross, and also the two Greek letters *XP*, the initial letters of the sacred word Christ. Those who are acquainted with the Roman coins of the fourth and fifth centuries; and who know also the "Roma subterranea" of Aringhius; or who have seen an interesting work lately published by Dr. Maitland, called "The Church in the Catacombs," will recognise in this figure a favourite monogram of the early Roman Christians.

The next example, which is here figured, is a small cross with the same monogram incised upon it. It was found in the cemetery of St. Helena's chapel^c, on Cape Cornwall, or "St. Helen's promontory," also in the parish of St. Just. It measures about eleven inches by nine, and has the appearance of having been a gable-cross.



St. Just, Penwith

There is nothing save the monogram in this cross to mark it as Roman, but this it may be said is no slight evidence, for this sign was common and frequent among that people, and is not found at all on any remains known to be British. It was the sign which was represented on the coins of Constantine the Great, and upon the standard of the Roman empire during the reign of that first "nursing-father" of the infant Church; and may perhaps be taken, in these parts at least, as a distinguishing mark of Roman Christian remains. Nor is there any thing in its form as a gable cross which betrays anachronism in our assumption: A gable cross implies a gable, or at least a structure of some kind. Churches, such as they were, we know, were erected throughout the land prior to the reign of Diocletian, *circa* A.D. 300, for during this time the primitive Church was tried with a severe persecution, in which, it is stated, "*many churches were destroyed.*" And as regards the matter of decorating churches with crosses, we have sufficient allusion and intimation in the writings of fathers of the fourth and fifth centuries to assure

^c This chapel is noticed in a paper on the ancient oratories of Cornwall, in vol. ii. p. 235 of this Journal.

us that Christians not only erected the sign upon their churches, but painted and impressed them upon their doorways, upon their houses, upon their substance, and even upon their persons. From Eusebius we learn that Constantine the Great erected a statue of himself, in a public square at Rome, holding a cross to commemorate his glorious victory over Maxentius; we learn also that he erected crosses in the chief streets of Constantinople and in his palace; upon the outside of the great church which he built in that city, and also upon the altar within. Crosses were introduced in and upon churches in this reign, "non tantum interdum sed et frequenter et quidem veteri more." These remarks will serve in some degree to enable us to realize the history and character of the early time to which I am referring.

The next instance of a Roman cross which I would adduce is given in this illustration. It represents a little cross in the parish of St. Buryan, about three miles from the Land's End. It is situated about a mile from the "Church town," in the corner of a road turning down to some ancient ruins called "the Sanctuary." In dimensions it is about two feet high by two feet in breadth, and one foot in thickness, and it stands on a massive base three feet square and about sixteen inches high.



Sanctuary. St. Buryan.

This cross I am inclined to attribute to the Roman Christians, because it is unlike the other ancient crosses which remain in this county; and because, in the squareness and massiveness of its proportions, it possesses something of a Byzantine character, and resembles in form the few illustrations which are preserved of the old crosses of Constantinople. This however is only a conjecture, and like some antiquarian conjectures may be but a baseless dream.

But there is one important feature in this cross deserving of particular notice, and which serves to draw our attention to the subject of the crucifix, or human figure displayed upon

the cross. It is well known that the idolatry or worship of this image among others, was boldly protested against by the Church in England, more than a thousand years ago. When the so called second Council of Nice, in the year 787, sanctioned the practice, Alcuin attacked it, and having produced scriptural authority against it, transmitted the same, in the name of the bishops of the Church of England, to the emperor Charlemagne, who having protested and written against the error, summoned a council at Frankfort, in the year 794, in which the worship of all images was denounced, and the decrees of the second Council of Nice "were rejected, despised, and condemned." But though the worship of images was thus denounced, it appears that the human figure was carved and depicted on the cross, even in the time of Constantine. The historian of this great emperor says that he erected crosses in the principal streets of Byzantium, but in his palace he erected "the sign of the Lord's passion," and with such honour did this prince regard that figure, that "I do believe," says the historian, "the prince regards it as the palladium of his empire." Lactantius, a writer of this time, it is said, saw this figure, and alludes to it thus,

*Respice me * * **

Cerne manus clavis fixus bractosque lacertos

Atque ingens lateris vulnus, cerne inde fluorem

Sanguineam, fossosque pedes artusque cruentes.

I learn also from Gretzer that the crucifix was in use even in the time of Tertullian, who lived before Constantine; and Prudentius, who wrote some years after Lactantius, evidently refers to more than a mere cross. Such allusions and references might be multiplied on this subject by those who have access to the necessary books. I will not however detain the reader longer on this matter, than merely to state that the human figure displayed upon the little cross before us, is no evidence against the antiquity I am disposed to claim for it. This figure is carved upon many crosses in Ireland, and upon several round towers, which it appears were erected not much later than the fifth and sixth centuries.

With a brief allusion to pieces of Roman pottery stamped with parts of a cross and the monogram, in the possession of Mr. Thomas Kent, of Padstow, in this county^d, and reminding

^d Examples of Roman fictile vessels thus ornamented are believed to be of very rare

occurrence in this country. A fragment of "Samian," found at Catterick, York-

the reader of the many Roman coins which are impressed with the sacred signs above stated, I will close this notice of Roman Christian remains. I have adduced a few, but I trust sufficient, to turn attention to the facts so much neglected, which justify the belief that the Romans, during their sojourn in these islands, were in some part Christians. We cannot realize the early history of the Church without admitting this.

We may readily suppose that the Britons among whom the Romans lived, were not backward in receiving the true faith, for they were involved, both Romans and Britons, in one common persecution, which was inflicted by their rulers on account of the Christian faith. This trial doubtless united them, and drew them closer to each other in bonds of amity and it may be consanguinity. We find on various incised monumental slabs in this county, Roman and British names, evidently proving that such relationship actually existed^e. I have drawn only two of these slabs, for the others have no cross or other sign by which they may be distinguished as memorials of Christians. The former of these is here given: it is a rough unhewn slab of granite, about eight feet in length. The inscription upon it is thus rendered, CIRVSIUS HIC IACET CVNOMORI FILIUS.



Flwy.

Here we have Roman letters and a Roman inscription, purporting an intimate connection between a Briton and a Roman. On the opposite or reverse side of this inscribed surface there is a large Tau cross, which we may suppose indicates that the person to whom the memorial was erected was a Christian. There is also something engraved just above the names, now almost obliterated; it has the ap-



shire, in the Roman station, and now in the possession of Sir W. Lawson, Bart., is ornamented with the cross.

^e See Borlase's Antiquities of Cornwall pl. 35. p. 391.

pearance of two crosses, one before the name of the son, and the other before that of the father. It may however have been intended for a branch. Carew, in his "Survey of Cornwall," gives the following interesting episode on this cross, or "grauedstone:" "In a highe way neere this toune (namely Fowey) there *lieth* a big and long moore stone, contayning the remainder of certaine ingraued letters, purporting some memorable antiquity, as it shoulde seeme, but past ability of reading. Not many yeres sithence, a gentleman, dwelling not farre off, was persuaded, by some information or imagination, that treasure lay hidden under this stone: wherefore in a fair moone shine night, thither with certaine good fellowes he hyeth to dig vp: a working they fall, their labor shortneth, their hope increaseth, a pot of gold is the least of their expectation. But see the chaunce! In the midst of their toyling, the skie gatherith cloudes the moone light is ouercast with darknesse, downe fals a mightie showre, vp riseth a blustering tempest, the thonder crackith, the lightning flashith: in conclusion, our money-seekers washed, in stead of loden; or loden with water in stead of yellow earth, and more afraid, then hurt, are forced to abandon their enterprise, and seeke shelter of the next house they coulde get into^f. Whether this procedith from a naturall accident, or a working of the diuell, I will not undertake to define. It may bee, God giueth him such power ouer those, who begin a matter, upon couetousnesse to gaine by extraordinarie meanes and prosecute it with a wronge, in entring and breaking another man's land, withouten his leave, and direct the end thereof, to the prince's defrauding, whose prerogative challengith these casualties." This big long moore stone has long since been set up right again, and is now still to be seen near Castledour on the road to Fowey, about a mile out of that interesting little primitive town.

The other incised slab of this character is one which has already been noticed in this Journal^g. It is the monument of "Isnioe Vitalis, the son of Torricus," which had long served the purpose of a gate post; and is at present preserved

^f A similar fate has attended more than this one party of the hunters of "yellow earth." There are many well attested accounts of barrow hunters being thus overtaken in the midst of their spoil, and deservedly drenched, if not terrified. Let

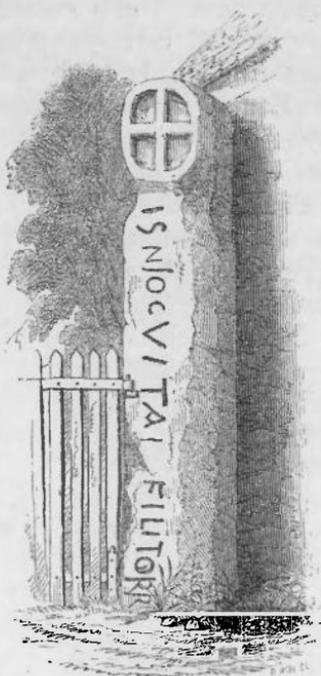
philosophers account for this "chaunce" as they may, I profess to relate only what I believe to have happened in very many cases.

^g Archæol. Journal, vol. ii. p. 78.

in a more suitable position, by the consideration of the present vicar of St. Clement's, near Truro, in the precincts of whose vicarage this memorial of other days has remained from time out of mind. It is here represented in its old position of a gate post; let the reader imagine the crooks and gate removed, with the adjoining wall which abuts upon it, and he will have a true notion of the present state of this venerable stone.

The inscription, which is in true Roman letters, is still very legible, and it will be observed, in accordance with the usual rule, it is read downwards. The cross with which it is surmounted, or rather which is cut upon the head of this stone, is a simple one encircled in a border. We know not who Isnioe was or his father Torricus, no records remain to tell where and when they lived; all that we gather from this monument is, that Isnioe was a Christian, and probably that he lived, if not earlier, during the fifth century of our era.

We pass now to the period when the Romans having departed to their own proper country, left these their acquired territories unprotected, and in an enervated state, a prey to rapacious neighbours; while the Picts attacked, and the Britons, by the assistance of the Saxons, repelled their invasions, this western part of Britain seems to have remained in peace. Missionary bishops and priests, and other holy persons, came hither at this time from Ireland, (now "the university of northern Europe,") and they came not in vain. With few exceptions it appears that they and their message were well received, for almost every parish in West Cornwall, and a great many villages, still retain the names of these heralds of the Cross, and in some instances the primitive structures which they erected for the service of God, still



St. Clement s.

remain, though in a ruined state^h. The churches or oratories they erected correspond in general character with those yet remaining in Ireland; and we have wayside crosses here which also resemble those in Ireland. It is not unfair to suppose that these crosses were cut during the lifetime of the missionaries I have referred to above.

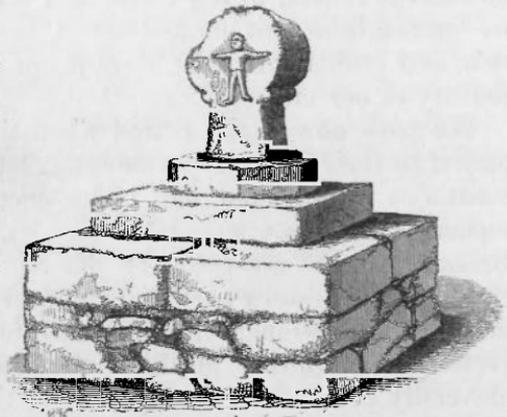
The examples which our woodcuts illustrate represent three numerous classes. The first of them which is here shewn was sketched in a village in the parish of St. Buryan, in the west, called "crouzenwraze," i. e. "cross and circle," in the old Cornish language, a name evidently taken from this little cross, indicating the respect with which it was regarded. It is not more than three feet high above the ground, and is hewn in granite.

The next example here figured is taken from the market place or open space of a village near the church of St. Buryan, called after the custom in Cornwall, "the church town."

The cross in this instance is formed with a human figure, the arms of which are extended at right angles with the body, upon a disc or round-headed stone post. In the churchyard



St. Buryan



St. Buryan, Church town.

^h See an account of some of these in a paper on the ancient oratories of Cornwall, in vol. ii. p. 225 of this Journal.

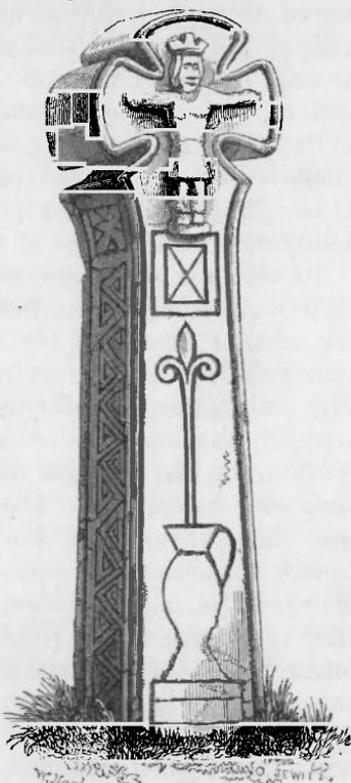
on the south side of the church, and not far from the porch, there is another larger and handsomer cross. It is a Greek, or Maltese cross, the limbs of which are bound by a circle; on the western side of it there is a human figure extended in the usual way; and on the east side there are five roundels, one in the centre and one at each extremity. These are supposed to represent the five wounds. This cross is also raised upon granite steps, and presents an elegant appearance.

Another form of the Cornish cross is figured in the annexed illustration, sketched from the churchyard in Sancreed, a parish about four miles from Penzance. It stands about six feet high above the ground, and is more ornamented than the generality of crosses in this part of the country. In this instance it will be observed that the disc or head of the stone is cut into the form of a cross, and the figure displayed upon it is crowned. The ornament on the front surface of the shaft seems to be a lily in a vase, which is placed on a base.

The triangular ornament running up along the side of the shaft, is a pattern common upon British ornaments of jewellery, and upon articles of earthenware.

These examples will serve, I trust, to give a general idea of the character of the Cornish wayside crosses. In minute detail and execution there is some difference between most of them, but in general outline they may be said to belong to one great class.

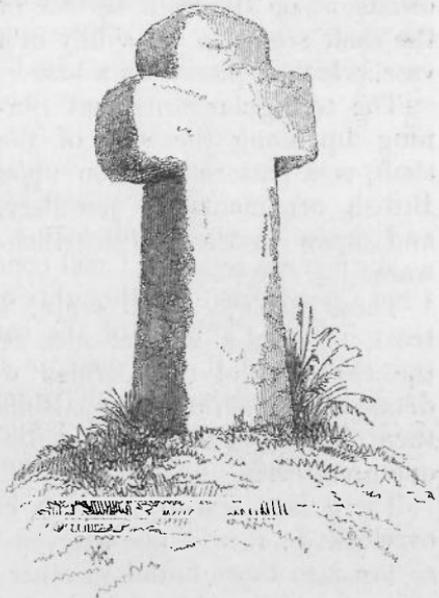
There is a feature in these crosses which should not be overlooked; it will be observed that they are *Greek crosses*, as are also those found in other outlying and rocky parts of Britain, whither the original inhabitants fled from the tyranny and persecution of the Saxons, who had been invited to de-



Churchyard, Sancreed.

fend them from other invading foes. This circumstance calls our attention to a well attested fact of our Church history, as to its communion with the eastern branch of the Church Catholic. For though Christianity was introduced hither, as we have seen, by the instrumentality of the Romans, it is equally true that at the time of St. Augustine's arrival into England, the British Church was strictly observing the customs and ceremonies of the eastern communion, professedly received through Irenæus, bishop of Lyons, who was the disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of St. John. The form of our ancient crosses illustrates and confirms this portion of our history, and it would appear, moreover, that this was the primitive form of the cross, and that which was most generally employed before the disagreement between the rival branches of the Church at Constantinople and Rome, which led to their assuming distinct forms as their respective badges.

In the war of extermination waged by the Saxons, after their conversion, at the instigation of St. Augustine, against the small remnant of the eastern communion in Wales and Cornwall, the Latin cross was the standard of the invaders. The only cause of offence on the part of the Welsh and Cornish, seems to have been their firm determination to retain freedom in the exercise of their own ceremonies. The war thus begun was unequally maintained for several centuries, till generation after generation inherited bitter hatred of the Saxon name. At length, overcoming by numbers, Athelstan forced his conquest even to the Land's End, near which place, on a mound or barrow, situate beside the ancient British road, there, is this Latin cross. It stands near the place to which tradition points as the battle field where many Cornish men were slaughtered while defending their ancient rights and



Land's End.

privileges. Another rude stone in this vicinity has a sword engraved deeply upon it, with the point downwards, also representing in form a Latin cross. These, in all probability, are monuments of Saxon triumph.

We have now seen the use of these crosses in the confirmation they afford to history; let me, in conclusion, allude to their original use, and the object of their erection.

In "Dives et pauper," a worke empynted by Wynken de Worde, in 1496, there is the following quaint assertion: "For thys reason ben crosses by y^e waye, than whan folke passynge see the croysse, they shoulde thynke on Hym that deyed on y^e croyse, and worshippe Hym above al thyng." This may have been the reason in de Worde's time, and perhaps was partly so, even in the early days when these crosses were erected; but the alleged reason in the old writers, and object of wayside crosses was, to "guide and guard the way to the church." With respect to the former of these objects, I can attest that very many of these crosses evidently still answer this purpose, to which they were originally appointed. In several parishes there are "church paths" still kept up by the parish, along which crosses, or bases of crosses, yet remain, and generally it will be found that they point toward the church. Where the path has been, as in most cases, obliterated and lost, the crosses in some instances still remain, not facing the west according to the invariable rule regarding church crosses, but pointing and guiding in the direction of the church. As to the allegation that they "*guard the way to the church*," there can be little doubt that in those early, and it may be "superstitious" times, such was regarded to be the efficacy of the holy sign.

With these remarks I will conclude this paper, hoping that I have not turned the thoughts of my readers unprofitably to the interesting subject of the early history of Christianity in our land; and if this memoir should, however unworthily, produce further notices of primitive Christian antiquities, I shall be greatly rewarded. Such visible and tangible evidences at this time will avail much, and cause the history of the ages to which they belong to be realized and practically believed.