

ON CROSS-LEGGED EFFIGIES EXISTING IN IRELAND.

NOTHING is, perhaps, so interesting to the student of antiquity as the investigation of customs connected with the dead, and the universal desire evinced by all races, at every period of the history of man, to keep the departed in honourable remembrance after they had passed away from the busy scenes of life. In this universal custom there is shown an instinctive feeling of the great truth of a future existence for the body, even amongst the most debased tribes of mankind. The rough pillar-stone, the rude mound of earth, the piled up cairn, the ponderous pyramid, the rugged cromleac, and the richly-sculptured Christian monument, though widely different in age and execution, all have the same end in view—the commemoration of the dead. If we take any of the classes of sepulchral monuments here enumerated, we shall find that, although the purpose may be the same, certain peculiarities distinguish the class into subordinate sections; for example, amongst the Christian monuments of Ireland, how diverse will be found their distinguishing features;—the monumental cross, the cross-inscribed slab, the effigial tomb, all have their varieties, and would amply repay investigation. It is but to one variety of the latter subdivision as confined to one locality that I mean at present to call attention. I allude to the cross-legged effigies existing in the County of Kilkenny.—Most persons are familiar with the numerous examples of this class of monument in England, and those who have visited the Temple Church in London, cannot fail to remember the mail-clad knightly figures of this kind, which form one of the greatest attractions of that beautiful building. Perhaps indeed from the existence of this class of monument in the famed church of the Templars, the opinion may have become prevalent, that by the crossing of the legs was indicated the fact, that the individual commemorated had taken upon himself the cross, and had joined in the crusades, or at least was under vow to do so at the time of his death. The discovery, at Cashel, on the site of the Franciscan Abbey, of

three *female* effigies of the XIIIth century, sculptured in the cross-legged position, as described and figured in the interesting memoir by Mr. Du Noyer (*Journal*, vol. ii. p. 121), appears to show the unsoundness of this assumption; and the opinion which seems least open to objection is, that the position of the limbs was designed to be symbolical of the Christian faith of the deceased.

I have observed that such figures are common in England. In Ireland they are very uncommon; in a note to the paper already alluded to, Mr. Du Noyer states that, in addition to four monumental figures at Cashel, "one other effigy only has been described as existing in Ireland,"—namely, that on the south side of the nave in Christ Church, Dublin, supposed to represent Richard de Clare, Earl of Pembroke and Strigul, surnamed Strongbow. This statement is, I believe, correct. None others had up to that period been described—but some exist, like too many of Ireland's antiquities, unknown and undescribed. In the County Kilkenny two examples are found, a notice of which cannot fail to be acceptable to the student of Monumental Antiquities.

The first of these interesting monuments hitherto unnoticed is a cross-legged effigy, sculptured in high relief, on a slab which has been inserted in one of the walls of the ancient Abbey of Graigue-na-managh, now used as the Roman Catholic place of worship of that parish. The figure, which is very rudely executed, is larger than life, and represents a knight clad in a complete suit of mail, over which a surcoat fitting closely round the throat is worn; the right hand grasps the sword-hilt while the scabbard is held by the left; the left leg is thrown over the right, and the entire attitude gives the idea of one starting forward prompt for action, and in the act of drawing the sword. A broad belt, attached by curiously contrived straps to the scabbard, and buckled in front over the hips, sustains the sword. A fracture extends across the waist of the figure, and from the deficiency of the lower portion of the slab towards the feet, the spurs

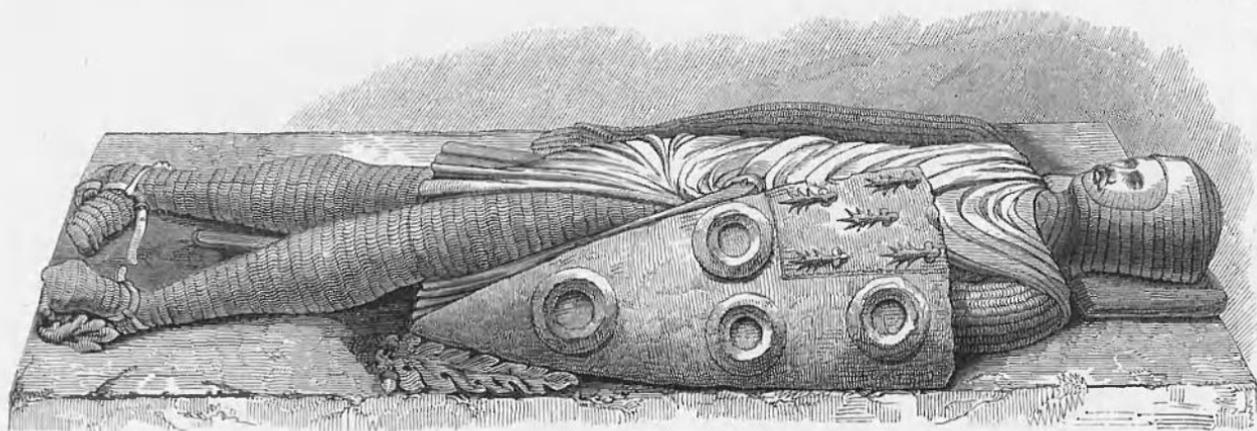


Details of sword-belt and scabbard. Effigy at Graigue-na-managh, co. Kilkenny.

are not visible to assist in fixing the date. The effigy has not been represented with a shield in this instance, so that heraldry does not, any more than tradition, serve to indicate the family to which this monument belonged; but from the character of the armour, it may be assigned to the early part or middle of the XIIIth century. It should be observed that the hood or chaperon of mail conforms to the globular shape of the head.

The wood engraving, which accompanies this account, gives a faithful representation of another example of this class of monumental sculpture, afforded by the County of Kilkenny. The old church of Kilfane, in the Barony of Gowran, appears from its existing sculptured details to have been built at the close of the XIIIth century, or commencement of the XIVth. On the erection of the present parish church, the older structure became disused as a place of worship, and served as a school-house; and I have been informed by several individuals who some thirty years since attended as children at this school, that this sculpture lay on the floor, and that the punishment for idle or refractory urchins was a compulsory kiss bestowed on the stony lips of the "*Cantwell fadha*," the Tall Cantwell, as the effigy was traditionally named in the Irish language. Subsequently the figure was buried beneath the surface to save it from injury, and so it remained for many years. In September, 1840, I well remember working hard with spade and shovel to disinter the knight for the purpose of obtaining a drawing: when the rubbish was cleared away I saw at once that this was no common monument, and the necessity of doing something for its preservation strongly presented itself; accordingly a subscription was entered into, and an attempt was made to remove the slab to the aisles of the Cathedral of St. Canice at Kilkenny; from several causes, however, the project fortunately was not put in execution. I say fortunately, for from the mode of transit contemplated, and the immense weight of the slab, it is extremely probable that some injury would have resulted to this valuable monument. From the period alluded to, down to the summer of 1852, matters remained as before, and the knight lay safely beneath the protecting rubbish. Several circumstances, however, combined to force on the committee of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society the importance of saving

CROSS-LEGGED SEPULCHRAL EFFIGY IN IRELAND.



Effigy of one of the Canteville family, at Kilfane, in co. Kilkenny.

the sculpture from possible destruction. It was accordingly determined to obtain a mould from the effigy itself, as the most effectual way of perpetuating its peculiar features; this has been, by the kind permission of the Archdeacon of Ossory, effected; and four casts have been made therefrom, one of which was exhibited at the National Exhibition at Cork, and rests finally in the Museum of the Royal Cork Institution; a second has been transmitted to the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, and has there elicited much interest; a third has been executed for the Court of Irish Art, in the Great Industrial Exhibition of 1853, now open at Dublin; and the fourth has been reserved for the Museum of the Kilkenny Archaeological Society.

These measures have been undertaken by the committee of the Kilkenny Society as calculated not only to preserve a curious, and in Ireland almost unique, relic, but also as tending to make the Society favourably known to the Irish public, as being alive to the importance of saving the monuments of the past from demolition.¹

The Cantwell, or de Cantaville, family was amongst the early Norman settlers in the counties of Kilkenny and Tipperary. Thomas de Kentewall is one of the witnesses to a charter granted by Theobald Walter, first chief butler of Ireland, to his Town of Gowran, in the reign of Henry II. The Cantwells early possessed large property in the county of Kilkenny, on which stood the castles of Cantewell's Court near Kilkenny, and of Stroan and Cloghsreg in the immediate neighbourhood of Kilfane. That this monument represents a Cantwell is proved by the evidence of Heraldry. The shield is charged with a bearing, which, without the tinctures, may be blazoned as—four annulets, a canton ermine, the bearing seen on the seal of John Cantwell, attached to a deed of Walter Fitz Peter de Cantwell, and Peter Fitz Peter de Cantwell, dated 46 Edw. III., and on the seal of another John Cantwell, affixed to a deed dated 15th Henry VII.² Probably this effigy was sculptured in memory of Thomas de Cantewell, who, by a writ dated at Thomas-

¹ A special subscription has been commenced to defray the cost incurred, which the ordinary funds of the Society are inadequate to meet.

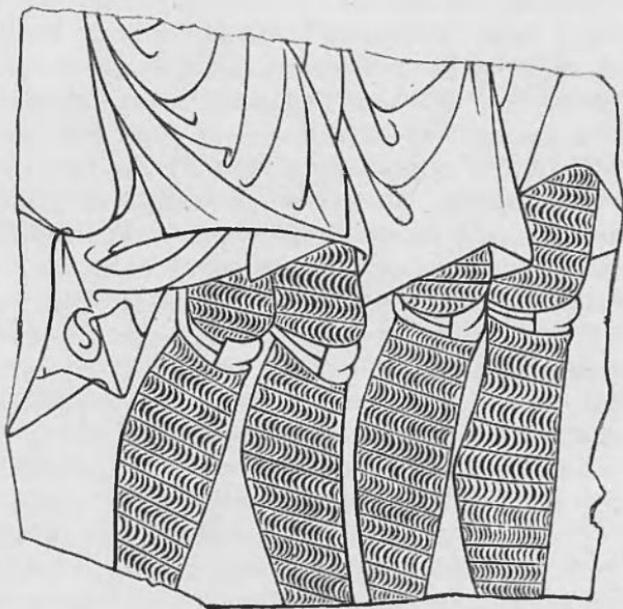
² These documents are preserved in the

Record Room, Kilkenny Castle, amongst the Ormonde MSS. Burke gives—Gules, five annulets, and a canton erm. (another, six annulets or), as the coat of Cantwell, in Ireland. General Armory, &c.

town in the county Kilkenny, in the year 1319, was exempted from attending at assizes, on the plea of being worn out with age (Rot. Pat. 13 Ed. II., No. 33). Tombs, it is well known, were occasionally erected by persons before their decease,—perhaps such was the case in this instance. A suit of mail, without any portion of plate, defends the body, the head and throat are protected by a chaperon of mail which falls over the hauberk; the chaperon is flattened at top, presenting the appearance of a slightly elevated cone; a long triangular shield, very much curved, and charged in relief with the arms before described, is supported on the left side by the shield-strap, passing over the right shoulder, and some acorns with oak leaves are carved in the stone as a support for its point. A surcoat is worn over the hauberk, confined by the sword belt at the waist, and the sword lies under the body, the end appearing between the legs; the right arm (the hand being bare, and the mailed gauntlet hanging by) is extended by the side; and the right leg crossed over the left. The feet are supported by well carved clusters of oak leaves with acorns, and the spurs are broadly rowelled. The effigy is well sculptured, apparently in Kilkenny marble; the contour of the head and neck is fine, the legs and feet are well formed, and the folds of the surcoat are disposed with considerable elegance; but the shoulders are narrow, the chest flat, and the right arm badly designed. The entire absence of plate armour prevents us from assigning this effigy to the successor of Thomas de Cantwell, as the latter was not dead in 1319; but as he was an old man at that period, the broad rowelled spur forbids us to assign it to his predecessor, who must have died early in the XIIIth century, and the character of the oak-leaf foliage would also point to about 1319. It is carved with the marked vigour and truth to nature, characteristic of the Decorated style of architecture which then came into vogue. It seems also probable from the style of the building that this Thomas de Cantwell was the founder, or at least re-builder, of the ancient church of Kilfane.

In addition to the two remarkable relics of Monumental Sculpture, which have been described, I am desirous to bring under the notice of the Institute a fragment of a very singular example of early Irish art, likewise to be seen in the county of Kilkenny. It is a portion of an engraved

INCISED SEPULCHRAL MEMORIALS IN IRELAND.



Fragment of an incised slab, discovered amongst the ruins of Jerpoint Abbey,
co. Kilkenny.

(Dimensions about 2 ft. square.)

slab, possibly sepulchral, resembling the incised stone memorials of frequent occurrence in England, and it exists at Jerpoint Abbey, where it at present serves as a headstone to the grave of some peasant, there interred in recent times. This curious specimen of incised work exhibits, as will be seen by the accompanying representation, the lower portions of two figures, of dimensions rather below life-size. They are armed in mail, represented by parallel rows of rings, according to the earlier mode of indicating that kind of armour, as seen on the effigies of the XIIIth and early part of the XIVth centuries. In this instance the chausses, or hose of mail, are fastened below the knee by straps of a very peculiar kind, formed with a broad piece in front, and narrow double thongs passing round the limb behind. I am not aware that any representation of such an appliance of military costume, resembling a garter, at this period, has been noticed, either in works of Monumental Art, or illuminated MSS. An able writer on Costume, indeed, in his curious remarks on the origin of the garter, and its choice as a knightly symbol by Edward III., affirms that he had doubted whether any garters were worn by men in those days, no indication of such an article occurring upon any monument or in any illumination.³ The feet of the figures, on the curious slab at Jerpoint Abbey, are unfortunately deficient, and the upper part of the slab has likewise been broken away. In its mutilated condition it is difficult to ascertain the precise intention of the design, and posture of the figures; but I may mention that some persons, who have examined it with care, have entertained the notion that one of the figures is represented in the cross-legged attitude, and that this slab may be added to the list of examples of that peculiar conventionality in the earlier Sepulchral Memorials of Ireland.

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³ Planché, *History of British Costume*, p. 146. In the later edition of 1847, the author observes that he had found men-

tion of garters (cintolini) in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, written in the times of Edward III.