

VII.—*Observations on the Ancient Bell and Chain discovered in the Parish of Kilmichael-Glassrie.*

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[*Read to the Society 29th January 1827.*]

“The Bell invites me.”—MACBETH.

OF the conjectures offered by MR THOMSON regarding this relic, I consider that the most plausible is, that it was a Bell. To describe it more correctly, however, it was a Bell inclosed in an outer case. The hollow piece of hammered iron (fig. 4 of Plate IX.), is the actual portion of the Bell that remains; the clapper of it, which must have been of iron, and very small, being wanting:—it was probably destroyed by rust.

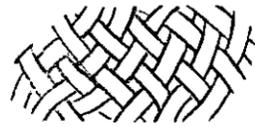
Figures 1 and 2 represent different sides of the case in which the Bell must have been usually contained, having been fabricated as a mark of respect to the miraculous power with which it was supposed to be gifted. Figure 3 shows the perforated base of the case. There is little doubt but that the Bell was concealed during some period of religious animosity and persecution. The woollen cloth, with which the whole was invested, may have been wrapped around it, as well for the purpose of suppressing the sound that would necessarily be made during the removal of the Bell, as for protecting it during its concealment from decay.

With regard to the ornaments on the Case, I conceive them to be decidedly Norwegian. The crown with which our crucified Saviour is invested, to the exclusion of the crown of thorns, is in shape very similar to that which, in certain early Scandinavian memorials that are transmitted to us, is placed on the head of King Olaus Tryggiason, who reigned over Norway and her colonies at the close of the 10th century.

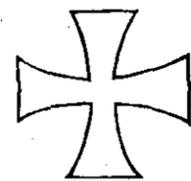
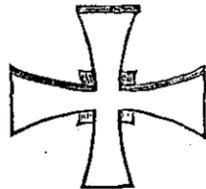
King Olave Tryggiason's Saga, written in old Gothic by Oddur Munck, still exists. A fragment was in the year 1665 printed at Upsal, from an old manuscript in parchment, under the editorship of Olaus Verelius; and in an

ancient representation of this Monarch, of which the annexed is a copy, it will be seen that his head is surmounted by a crown which bears a close resemblance to that which, in the ancient Bell now before the Society, appears on the head of Christ.

Again, all the ornamental engravings on the various faces of the Bell are Scandinavian. Many of them are made to imitate well-known runic knots. A peculiar plaiting, which is here represented, may be traced on several Scandinavian monuments of the 12th or 13th centuries in the Isle of Man.



The Chain and Cross found not far from the Bell are likewise Scandinavian. In a work entitled "Monumenta Lapidum aliquot Runicorum," published by Laurentius Bureus, the figures of various monuments illustrative of the age when Christianity was first successfully preached to the Scandinavians are given; and it is curious that there is no occurrence of the figure of a cross which does not possess the peculiar shape of that which is appended to the chain of the Relic now before the Society. The subjoined figures are copied from the crosses represented on these ancient monuments.



The country from which the Bell and Cross are derived being now, as I trust, satisfactorily established, it may possibly be interesting to the Society, to advert to that period of the ecclesiastical history of the Western Islands, to which their introduction must have been attributable.

The Western Highlands appear to have been originally peopled by the Caledonians and Picts. Afterwards the Scots of Ireland colonized Argyll, and, spreading themselves over the circumjacent districts, superseded the Pictish government. About the close of the 6th century St Columbus successfully laboured to convert the Picts, founding the religious establishment of Iona, which was afterwards destroyed by the Scandinavian Sea-Kings who in the

eighth and ninth centuries made the Hebrides their abode, and fortified the coasts with their strongholds or burghs, issuing from them only to commit new ravages upon Europe. In conjunction with the Vikingr of Orkney and Shetland, they, lastly, steered their piratical barks to the country of Norway, from which they originally came. This provoked the indignation of Harald Harfagre, who, visiting in succession all their haunts, reduced them to an unwilling obedience, and united them under the dominion of one Jarl or Earl, from whom he required fealty. At this period, then, namely the 9th century, the Scandinavians possessed under one government the whole of Orkney and Shetland, the Hæbudæ or Western Isles, and Man. They were also an unchristianized race, who had everywhere altars dedicated to the rites of the Edda.

In the year 995, as it is stated by Torfæus, King Olave Tryggjason, himself but recently baptized in England, first introduced Christianity among the colonies of Norway at the point of the sword. Landing at South Ronaldsay, he invited Earl Sigurd on board one of his vessels, with which request the unsuspecting chief, accompanied by his young son Hindius, complied. "You are now," said the monarch, "fallen into my power, and I propose to you one of these two conditions:—Profess, with all your soul, the Christian religion, present yourself at the font for baptism, yield me homage, and while your liberties are enjoyed according to the usage of your ancestors, consider your possession of the country as due to my courtesy; be also my friend for ever, and, by obeying the mandates of God, participate with him for the time to come in his heavenly kingdom:—Or, on the other hand, hesitate to comply with my demand, and immediate death awaits you! Unless, also, your followers choose to embrace upon this very spot, what will be to them true liberty,—the rites of Christianity, the whole of these islands shall be destroyed by fire and sword. Refuse me, and ye may expect, as mere mortals, that at this instant of time an extreme calamity awaits you, while *hereafter* a much more severe consequence will ensue,—an eternal punishment." "Truly, O King!" replied the Earl of Orkney, with much mildness, "I cannot be induced, either by choice or fear, to prostitute the religion of my fathers, or to deny the established worship of the Gods; for I am not conscious of being more clear-sighted than my ancestors, nor do I know in what respect that adoration which you command excels our own." The King seeing him thus obstinately bent upon idolatry, drew his sword, and seizing upon Hindius, exclaimed, "Now be assured that I shall keep my word, that I shall spare no one that is opposed to the worship of the

Heavenly God, and to the gospel which I announce. You are a father obstinately bent against your own interest, and unless you and all your subjects shall profess yourselves the servants of the great Deity whom I revere, your son shall perish before your eyes, and one common destruction shall follow." Earl Sigurd could not resist this powerful argument:—he submitted, along with his son and the whole of his people, to baptism.

The Historian afterwards adds, that the King, after taking Hindius as a hostage, set sail with pious delight to communicate his success to the good people of Norway, leaving behind him ministers of the divine word, with other holy men, to give the proselytes farther instructions.

It is most highly probable, then, that as the Bell and Cross now before the Society (which were found in the Western Highlands of Scotland) have a date referable to the period when Christianity was first taught by command of Olave Tryggjason, they were introduced into this country by some of the Norwegian Missionaries, to whom the conversion of the Scandinavians who inhabited the Hæbudæ was intrusted. According to this view (and I have endeavoured to show the great probability of it), it was in no bad keeping, that a sovereign who obliged his subjects to acknowledge our Saviour at the point of the sword, and thus identify the kingdom of Christ with that of a temporal monarch, should cast away the crown of thorns, as too humiliating an emblem for the impatient and uncontrollable spirit of the fierce Vikingr, and array our Saviour with an earthly crown, which indicated that obedience to the spiritual doctrines of the gospel was to be enforced after the self-same coercive means by which the common laws of Norway commanded regard. Nor is the emblem quite at variance with the manner in which the missionaries of after-ages have been sent forth to convert the heathen world. History will show, that the meek emblem of our Saviour's spiritual government has been too often discarded for the iron crown of an intolerant autocrat.

Regarding the use of the Bells, which appear to have been thus early employed by the Norwegian Missionaries who visited the Hebrides, I shall say little. A figure which I have copied from an ancient Runic monument shows the ancient reverence which was paid in Scandinavia to these ecclesiastical relics. In short, Bells were always objects of superstition, being regarded as capable of performing cures, and of allaying tempests; hand bells, as well as the larger bells contained in Belfreys, having been alike used for this purpose.



"En, ego campana,"

says a monkish rhyme,

—————"nunquam denuntio vana,  
Laudo Deum verum, plebem voco, congreo Clerum,  
Defunctos plango, vivos voco, fulmina frango,  
Vox mea, vox vitæ, voco vos ad sacra, venite.  
Sanctos collaudo, tonitrua fugo, funera claudio,  
Funera plango, fulgura frango, sabbatha pango:  
Excito lentos, dissipio ventos, paco cruentos."

APPENDIX TO THE FOREGOING COMMUNICATION.

This paper has undergone a very slight alteration since it was read at the Society's meeting. I conceived at first that it was probable the Case might have been permanently attached to the Bell by some soldering which had decayed; but from comparing the Scottish relic with the account of one of a similar kind which was found in Ireland, I have renounced my opinion.

When my paper was read, few members of the Society were inclined to adopt my notion of the nature of the relic, and, in particular, my much esteemed friend Mr Drummond Hay rather conceived that it was an ecclesiastical reliquary. Fortunately, however, on the following day the description of a similar relic was pointed out to me by a Lady, in a work entitled "Historical Memoirs of the City of Armagh, by James Stuart, A. B. printed 1819." This was said to have been the gift of Domnald O'Lochluin (or O'Lachlin) King of Aileach Nied, to his friend Domnald (or Donald) Mac Amalgaid, who was promoted to the see of Armagh in the year 1092. From this curious account I give the following extract:

"This relic consists of an antique, four-sided hand bell, of rather uncouth form, and composed of two pieces of hammered iron, connected by brass solder and by twelve rivets.

"The bell itself has probably been designed for the internal use of a chapel, being only 9½ inches in height, 5 in length, and 4 in breadth. When struck by the tongue, a dull, solemn tone is produced. So far there is little interesting about it, except that it is an instrument of considerable antiquity. But it is accompanied by a splendid cover, unique in its kind, which serves at once to preserve it from injury and to announce the veneration in which it had been held in former times. The taste, costliness, and beauty of the numerous and singular decorations of this cover, demonstrate it to have been the production of a much later age than that of the bell itself. The ground of the cover is brass, edged with copper, and enriched with a great variety of elegant ornaments raised in all its parts. Its top represents a compressed mitre, one side of which is adorned with fine gold fillagreean work, and silver gilt. The silver work is partly scrolled in *alto relievo* and partly in *bas relief*, resembling the knots in the

collar of the order of St Patrick. In the centre of the top is a blue stone, set in fine gold, and insphered in a glass bead. In its centre are four pearl-coloured stones, with four green ones of a similar size representing an intersected cross. Under this is a circular space, now vacant, which had probably been once occupied by a gem. The other side of the mitre is silver, cut into various crosses.

“ One of the quadrangular sides under the mitre is formed into thirty-one compartments by silver divisions. Nineteen of these are filled with various ornaments, in pure gold fillagreen, exhibiting the forms of serpents and snakes, curiously entwined. Two of the other compartments are now vacant. In two of the remaining ten are considerably projecting oval pieces of polished transparent rock-crystal, or Irish diamond, each about one inch and a half in length, and set in silver. The setting of that which occupies the central compartment is silver, representing on its edge small *fleurs de lis*. Of the eight smaller divisions, one is occupied by an oval garnet, and three by oval cornelians; the remaining four have lost their ornaments.

“ The other side of the mitred top is of silver, which has been substantially gilt. The top is in bas relief, with scroll work representing serpents; the remainder of it is divided into three compartments. In the central one of these appear two birds; the other two present the profile of a non-descript animal. The area of the quadrangular surface under this side of the mitre is covered with a substantial plate of silver, cut into 32 crosses.<sup>1</sup>—An inscription on its four edges or margins, in old Irish characters, indicates, as far as it has been deciphered, “ *that the bell was presented by Domnald O Lachlin, to Domnald, the comorbha [or successor] of Patrick.* ”—The letters in this inscription are not separated into distinct words, and the difficulty of interpreting it is considerably increased by the points or marks formed by the rivets, as well as by the injury which it has sustained in the lapse of ages. In the areas of the two other narrower sides or ends are pear-shaped sapphires, adorned with silver, which has been gilt.

“ On one of these sides, which is beautified with stones, there are ornaments of fine gold, representing serpents, curiously and elegantly intertwined in most intricate folds, and in various knots, like the complicated involutions in the collar of the order of the Knights of St Patrick. It may be worth remarking, that on one of the ends, and below the knob and ring by which it is suspended, there are eight serpents, so singularly infolded and intermingled with one another, that it requires minute attention and considerable discrimination to trace each separately, and to distinguish it from its fellows.

<sup>1</sup> “ The number of thirty-one compartments on one side, with the two compartments on the mitre, make thirty-three, the years of our Saviour's age; and thirty-three crosses might be easily made out on the other side, by joining two of the incomplete ones. The two rock crystals which remain in the principal front of the sides, with a niche where a third had been, may have indicated the three years of Christ's ministry.—These conjectures are perfectly consistent with the spirit of the times to which we allude.”

Their eyes are skilfully formed of blue glass. Above the cross are four of the same kind, and in each of the compartments into which it is divided there are two golden serpents in relief. Below the knob of suspension, on the opposite end or side, are six other serpents, with blue eyes, but differently intertwined. On the top is a strange representation of two of these creatures with two legs.

“ In the compartments of the cross are knots resembling those in the collar of the order of St Patrick. On each of the two suspending knobs of the case two of the sides and ends are also ornamented in a similar manner.

“ When the bell is inclosed, a sliding brass plate, on which it rests, fills the bottom of the case.

“ Domnald's bell was, as we are assured, for some generations in the possession of a family named Mulholland, and latterly in that of Henry Mulholland, a worthy old schoolmaster, now deceased, who lived in Shane's-castle, formerly Edenduff-Carrick, the seat, as is well known, of one of the ancient and princely septes of O'Neill.”

“ Bells of similar size and form are not uncommon. One of these was found concealed in an ivied wall in the ruined church of Kilbroney. It was agitated and rung by the wind during the continuance of a storm, and having been discovered by this singular accident, was, a few years ago, conveyed to Newry chapel. A physician in Belfast has another, which was raised in a field near Bangor, in the county of Down. It is formed of iron, with a perfectly smooth surface and rounded corners; its height 12 inches, by 8 in breadth and 9 in width. A similar hand-bell, which was found at the Route, in the county of Down, is now in possession of another physician in Belfast.”

I shall now only add, that upon showing this description to Mr Drummond Hay, he took the earliest opportunity to revoke the opinion he had given, in a learned Dissertation, which he afterwards read to the Society on the subject of the Bell, wherein, at the same time, he animadverted on the misconception into which I had fallen regarding the possible attachment of the Bell to the outer case. I am very sorry that Mr Hay's long distance from Scotland has prevented his Dissertation from following the notice of Mr Thomson, as I was much inclined to withdraw my own paper to make room for the far more elaborate one from his pen.

S. H.

<sup>2</sup> “ The name Mulholland (Moalcholuim in the original Irish) signifies a person of a family dedicated to a religious life, under St. Columba, founder of Culdeism, who was frequently styled Columkill.”