

II.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL ANTIQUITIES OF THE DISTRICT OF KNAPDALE, ARGYLLSHIRE, AND THE ISLANDS OF GIGHA AND CARA. BY CAPT. T. P. WHITE, R.E., F.S.A. SCOT. (WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.)

The last time I had the honour of addressing the Society my subject was the Ecclesiastical Antiquities of the Peninsula of Kintyre, in Argyllshire. On the present occasion I have to give the results of my labours in the adjoining district of Knapdale, with its interesting offshoot, the island named Eilean Mor, and also the little known islands of Gigha and Cara, lying off the Kintyre coast.

In illustrating the relics of these localities, I have proceeded upon the same plan adopted for Kintyre, and endeavoured to embody exhaustively, in the series of drawings which are exhibited this evening, every sculptured fragment, great or small, to be found above ground.

Time, however, will not permit me to do more than run rapidly over the various sites, and describe the salient features of their sculptures. But this I may say at the outset, if any one supposes that there is nothing new to learn from the mediæval works of art in these parts beyond what he has met with in others of the West Highland districts, he is very much mistaken. An experienced archæologist, who has made these monuments the study of many years, said to me, on taking up the exploration of Knapdale—"You are entering the richest part of the field;" and I believe he was right. An inspection of the drawings exhibited this evening, will show what a wealth of inventive designing power and manipulative skill lay with the architects of the Knapdale tomb carvings. But it will show more than this. It will show that in all probability the destroyers of ecclesiastical relics have been less busy here than elsewhere, either from the greater seclusion of the localities, or from the operation of other causes. And thus we have a richer variety of material, and mementoes of still more ancient days than in other directions, along with the unchangeable glories of landscape which add such a charm to the labours of the wanderer among these solitudes.

Opposite Tayinloan, about midway along the west coast of Kintyre, are

two low-lying islands named Gigha and Cara, and forming one united parish. Cara presents a bold front to the southward, but, on the whole, the impression one derives, viewing the islands from the mainland, is of a land which has had a struggle with the sea, and has barely succeeded in getting its head above water. Gigha is nearly seven miles long by two at its widest. The ferry is about three miles across from Tayinloan. The principal ecclesiastical site of ancient times on the island of Gigha is Kilchattan, which has a namesake in the peninsula of Kintyre and elsewhere. Among the interesting groups of sepulchral mediæval monuments of these islands, the principal is one with the appearance of having Ogham characters engraved on it. With one other exception, this is believed to be the only Ogham stone yet discovered in the West Highlands. A cross at "Righ a Chai-beal," or the kings' burial places, as it has been translated, is also among the number. Some of the sculptures here are of great beauty; and the old font, octagonal in shape, is almost unique in the old church architecture of Argyllshire.

It was off Gigha that King Hakon's fleet lay in 1263, when he met the Highland chiefs of Kintyre and the Grey Friars of Saddell. Turning to Kilberry parish, in the district of Knapdale, no vestiges of the old church dedicated to St Barr or Berach, the monastery, or the castle remain, but the tomb sculptures are very fine, and one or two of them of remarkable types. Among them is a cross with a contorted figure of the Saviour, and a pedestal retaining the marks caused by the knees of penitents, also a slab with a device suggesting the sceptre and crescent symbol of the eastern Scottish pillar-stones. Another of the carvings represents what tradition calls St Peter's Cock. Two fine alto-relievos of knights are seen here also.

Among other religious sites in this parish is "Dalchairn," which has been supposed to represent the place "Delgon," named by the early Irish annalists as being in Kintyre, where fell in battle Duncan, a near relation of King Aidan, and many of his followers. Kilanaish is another ancient site, with its holy well. Passing through Kilberry to the next parish, we find that it includes one of the most interesting ecclesiastical sites, and one among the richest in sculptured monuments to be met with in the Western Highlands, Kilmory of Knap. It also takes in the estuary of Loch Caolisport, on the north side of which is Cove, a spot of singularly salient ecclesiastical association. Passing the sites of Kilmaluag, Ormsary,

“Sqeir an Fiodha” (rock of the wood), and other places, we come to Cove. Here there is a chapel and ancient burying-ground dedicated to St Columba; also a cave with rude altar, and over it a pretty little cross, cut out of the solid rock. This cave is closely connected with a legend of St Columba, deeply rooted in the locality. “It is told that on the memorable voyage of the great missionary, when, heart-sore, he turned his face northward from the beloved land of his birth, the wind bore him into this pretty cove of Loch Caolisport, and that here he landed, and for a time ministered to the Knapdale folk, inhabiting the larger of the two caves. But it fell out on a certain day that, for the first time, he chanced to climb the hill which rises steeply above the chapel, and gazing out to sea from a particular point, saw in the magnificent panorama which opened out before him the dim outlines of the Irish coast. Hastily descending, he collected his followers, and departed to seek elsewhere for his home a still more distant spot, out of sight of the land which could arouse such painful recollections.”

“Cladh Bhile,” near Cove, is an ancient “kil,” situated in the covert of a thick wood, without enclosures of any kind. Its relics, the existence of which is scarce known to any one, are of very antique types. Kilmory of Knap is a site wonderfully rich in sculptured remains. Macmillan’s cross is a very fine specimen. Two fine slabs have each a galley, represented as pierced for eighteen rowers. Wolves, winged quadrupeds of strange type, otters after fish, birds, richly-bound missal-books, and so on, are among the objects seen on the Kilmory slabs. One unique type of object is a creature with a single long curved horn growing from its forehead, and a face with a half-human expression. Two slabs with ecclesiastics are here—one tonsured and in plain habit, the other vested in full sacramental robes. Another richly carved tombstone has two axes introduced along with the sword. Two handsome full-length effigies of knights are also within the chapel area. There is a curious tradition of certain characters in Gaelic having been in ancient times engraved on a rock at the point of Knap, setting forth the hereditary right of the Macmillans to the lordship of this part of Knapdale. The tradition adds that the Campbells destroyed this writing, because it was held that so long as it remained, so long would a Macmillan rule over the land. And in course of time the Campbells made their way into this part of the country, and into the adjacent territories of the Macneils.

The chapel in the interesting island of Eilean Mor is quite a curiosity, some of its architectural features being of a remarkable type. There are remains of two, if not three, ancient crosses here. On one is an ancient inscription, from which we learn that a lady of the isles, in conjunction with one John, priest and hermit of the island, set up this cross. There is also a beautifully carved effigy of a full-vested priest here, popularly believed to represent St Carmac, patron of the island chapel, and of the neighbouring one at Keills. In a cave at the south end of Eilean Mor is carved a small cross, similar to the one at Cove. Some traces of an anchorite's cell and other ancient buildings were also referred to.

Keills, in North Knapdale—a picturesque site with an old church in fair preservation—has a fine cross, which is very Irish in character, and possesses some marked features. The group of tomb-sculptures here are, for finish and variety, unsurpassed in the western mainland. Take, for example, one with an admirably detailed harp on it, every string of which is brought out, and an ornament introduced on the frame. The execution of every part of this carving is in keeping with the harp, even to the straps of the sword-scabard. Another slab, very similar in style and refinement, has an inscription very perfect, yet, as often happens, very difficult to read with certainty. I have had the assistance of a veteran archaeologist and competent Gaelic scholar, well known to many of you, and his reading is as follows, translated into English:—“Here lies Terence M'Lean O'Lin of the hunt of Kil-ma-Carmalg.” It is, he considers, a Latin rendering of Gaelic names in their old Celtic garb, hence the difficulty of interpreting the inscription. A fine tableau of a stag, hounds, and a hare or rabbit, on this slab seem to square with the view that the individual here commemorated was a renowned hunter. Another especially noteworthy slab is one with twelve animals—a larger number than I ever saw before on any single tombstone in the west. The bird on this stone is believed to be the sheldrake, or some variety of the “waders” that haunt this district. Here also we see the first example of the fox I have met with. On one or two of the slabs we find the same wolf-like animal seen elsewhere; and in one case I think we have the wild-cat. A curious tombstone, with a round hole perforated through it, has a characteristic legend attached to it. At Taynish House, near Keills, a curious antique cross was found.

Captain White then referred to the topographical nomenclature of this

neighbourhood, in which a decided Norse character can be detected. Reference was next made to the ancient religious sites of "Druim a' Chladha," "Kilbride," "Ach Cill Bhranain" (the place of St Brendan's cell), "Cladh Eoin," and "Eilean Louain," with the dedications and attached traditions in each case. Kilmichael of Inverlussa, the site of the present parochial church of North Knapdale, has one other remarkable post-Reformation slab, partaking of the character of the older mediæval sculptures. The traces of an old chapel, with the priest's house as it is called, and a holy well, are among the ancient remains here. Two very antique sculptures, thoroughly Irish in character, are found at "Ach-na-Cille," and Kilmory of Oib, the one at the latter place having a central cross and four birds, three of them with their beaks pressed into it, as though the sculptor wished in this way to express that it was fitting even for the fowls of the air to do homage to the holy symbol. Kilmahumaig, Kilduolan, and an old "Kil," near Stonefield House, are other religious sites in Knapdale. There is a beautiful and uncommon type of slab at Kilmichael Glassary, one at Appin, two in the island of Seil, and two at the head of Glen Fine, a few miles from Inveraray. The last-named site is locally known as "Clachan," but ecclesiastically as Kilmoriche, doubtless another of the numerous western "Kils" whose tutelary saint was not, as popularly supposed, the Virgin Mary, but St Maelruve of Applecross, in Ross-shire.

This concludes my review of the collection of illustrations immediately connected with the subject brought before you this evening. For their artistic merits I have nothing to say, but as regards their substantial accuracy I venture to challenge comparison with any other set of drawings that may be brought into the field. I am in hopes to see my way shortly to their publication as a second instalment of the work on Kintyre, accompanied by a fuller letterpress notice of the many interesting legends, topography, and other interesting materials the district contains, than I could possibly have given you within the compass of a single evening.

There are other sketches and drawings selected from jottings made in my survey travels through Scotland, Wales, and the Isle of Man; and this being the last occasion I may have for a good while to come of personally addressing you, I have thought it worth while to exhibit them. Having received orders to go on a tour of foreign service, I must, for the present, bid farewell to the further prosecution of the work I had, in some sort,

systematically begun in Argyllshire. I do so with very great regret, for when one has got over the alphabet of a subject, and the inevitable mistakes which beset the path of every beginner, and with a ripening experience has begun to warm to one's work, to be forced away from it by circumstances is not agreeable. But whether or not I ever again have the opportunity of resuming my work here, I shall always look back with pleasant recollections upon the time I have spent amongst you, upon the friends I have made amongst you, and upon the deeply interesting studies which it is the object of this Society to promote.