

I.

NOTES MADE DURING A WANDERING IN THE WEST HIGHLANDS;
WITH REMARKS UPON THE STYLE OF ART OF SOME MONU-
MENTAL STONES AT IONA, AND IN OTHER LOCALITIES. BY
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During rambles in the West Highlands in search of the picturesque,
old and sometimes neglected churchyards are now and then come upon,

in out-of-the-way places, where a class of antiquities is occasionally found to which comparatively little attention has hitherto been paid by antiquaries—I mean the tombstones of the old Highland chiefs and ecclesiastics. My attention was first called to these in the autumn of 1865, while on a visit to a friend in Lochaber. On a lovely August day we rowed up Loch Leven, and landed on that most picturesque of burial-places, facing the entrance to Glenceoe, St Mungo's Isle, where repose at peace the rival clans, Cameron and Macdonalds, of Glenceoe. In the churchyard, which means the island, there seemed nothing noteworthy among its memorials, or of the ruined and neglected chapel itself, in the farthest corner of which I found two most beautiful tombstones. Next season, spending my holiday at Minard Castle, we made frequent antiquity-hunting excursions, more especially, as far as I was concerned, in search of these interesting tombstones. A few miles from Minard (going towards Inverary) is the old churchyard of Kileven. Here I found a most interesting relic, being the shaft of a very ancient cross about nine feet long. This is so rude that the arms of the cross had been made by a stone being put through a hole in the shaft. Some miles beyond Lochgilphead is the church and churchyard of Kilmichael Glassary, in which are some of the most choice monuments in the West Highlands; but one was wanting which I was anxious to have seen. In the year 1827 the old church was taken down, that the present commonplace erection might be put up. On taking down a door, the lintel was discovered to be a very ancient cross. It was put on the gable end of the new church; from this it was taken down, to be erected as the village cross; but instead of this being done, it was for some unaccountable reason removed to the village of Ballanoch on the Crinan Canal, where it long lay, neglected and broken, until Mr Nichol, who supplied the horses for the canal boats, had it carted back to Kilmichael, clamped with iron, and erected as the village cross, perhaps where it stood previous to the Reformation, and was again the pride of the villagers, and looked upon as the one object of their district worthy of being taken care of and preserved. Some few years ago, the then proprietor of the district built a private chapel and burial-place in the grounds near his house, and, thinking that this precious relic would give a consecrated feeling to the place, had it carried off in defiance of the objections of the villagers, as if they, because they were poor, had none of

the higher and more sacred feelings of our nature—feelings of a kind particularly keen with the Celt almost to a national characteristic. The next parish is Kilmartine, the churchyard of which is, perhaps, as rich in these monuments as any other, excepting Iona; and here again complaint must be made for an incredible act of Vandalism. In the centre of the churchyard is an iron railing of a most imposing height, surrounding some seven or eight of the finest memorials of the ancient chiefs of the district, which have been selected and thus protected as the tombs of the ancestors of the now ruling family. Some of these have actually been shortened that they might go within the enclosure, and to make assurance doubly sure, the sculpturing has been defaced for 6 or 8 inches at the top of most of these, and in great staring letters, carved "Poltalloch." This requires no comment.

This selection was made some few years ago, and the defacement was carried out under the superintendence of Mr Campbell of Prospect, then factor on the estates; this same gentleman has the credit of the first migration of the Kilmichael cross. Surely it is the duty of such a Society as this to protest against this removing of interesting land-marks, and the defacing of these ancient and beautiful national memorials.

At Iona I found matters little better; a sort of re-arrangement of the monuments was going on, left entirely to the judgment of two masons or quarrymen from Mull. What strikes one most is the fact, that most of the monuments placed in an upright position are upside down. In St Oran's Chapel out of six, three are so; at the Nunnery nearly every one.

As a rule, among monuments of this class of a mediæval period, the sword or claymore, as we would expect, is the principal feature; and where it or some other military indication does not occur, we may safely ascribe the slab to an ecclesiastic. A galley is very frequently introduced; now and then a small group of figures, or a hunting scene, occasionally birds and fish, sometimes an ecclesiastical bell, a chalice, a prayer-book, or a harp. Then we have a pair of shears, a mirror, or a comb, to mark the grave of a female. At first I thought the shears a monkish allusion to cutting the thread of life; but, after seeing the slabs at the Nunnery, Iona, where this symbol is of frequent occurrence, I had no doubt. Where both the sword and shears occur, I should suppose husband and wife to have been buried there. As to the style of art upon

these monuments, many and conflicting opinions have at various times been advanced as to where and how it originated, some claiming an Eastern, others an Italian origin for it. Byzantine was for long a favourite theory, while Scandinavia has had its advocates, apparently on better grounds; but it seems now pretty clearly settled that it was imported there by missionaries from this country, returning again with some national peculiarities, but long after the art had been brought to perfection here. It were needless for me to pursue this point further on the present occasion, after the learned and exhaustive treatises by Mr Westwood and Dr Stuart. Sufficient for my purpose to call it "Celtic," for surely no other name could so well characterise an art so peculiar to Iona, where the class of monuments we are treating of seems to have originated, and from whence, as from a school of design—which I believe it to have been—its educated priests and monks were scattered over its dependencies in the West Highlands, among the now solitary churchyards of which these beautiful memorials are still to be found. In connection with these, a very common idea prevails among the modern Highlanders that they were all brought—or *stolen*, if you prefer it—from Iona. This theory is easily disposed of, as each locality has peculiarities of its own, differing from anything now remaining at Iona. At Kilmartin it is so; at Kilmichael Glassary to a very marked degree; and the same may be said of Strachur, where one might suppose the same man had designed them all. Then the old cross at Strathlachlan is entirely different from anything else I have seen; and at St Mungo's Isle they are sculptured in slate from the quarries on the opposite shore of the loch. Date is a more perplexing matter, there being so little to guide us; but I should think somewhere between 1350 and 1500, about the period of their execution, although some seem to me of an earlier date than this. In conclusion, I would say a word to all who, like myself, are collecting drawings of these or any other class of antiquities. Let all such be made lovingly and earnestly, adding nothing, leaving out nothing; but let every weather-worn feature, every chip, and every break be honestly jotted down. Of all things shun restoration. We all know how much easier it is to restore than to copy faithfully what we see before us; but it is only by proceeding in this spirit that such drawings acquire value as guides to the antiquary, historian, and artist.