

I.

NOTICE OF THE ANCIENT BELL OF ST FILLAN. BY THE RIGHT REV.
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When I was on a visit to Lord Crawford at Duncacht this autumn, I met an English gentleman, with whom I entered into conversation on the subject of the Early Scoto-Irish Church. He stated that in the house of a relation of his in Hertfordshire there was preserved St Fillan's Bell, which the father of that relation, partly in frolic and partly to abate a still existing superstition, had carried away, on the 8th or 9th of August, in the year 1798. We subjoin in a foot note an extract from the journal of this gentleman, not only as giving an account of the circumstances under which the bell was taken, but for its valuable and accurate historical

information! He added, that the family was not anxious to retain possession of it, to which I replied that it ought certainly to be sent back to Scotland. The result was that the bell was handed over to the custody of the Earl of Crawford and myself, and it is to-night exhibited on the table of the Society.

St Fillan's bell has been preserved by this gentleman's family up to this day—October 24, 1869.

In the "Old Statistical Account," vol. xvii. p. 377, there is a note to

¹ "Aug. 9, 1798.—Arrived at Tyndrum by 4 o'clock. Rode, after dinner, with a guide to the Holy Pool of Strathfillan. Here, again, is abundant cause for talking of the superstition of the Highlanders. The tradition avers that St Fillan, a human being who was made a saint, about the beginning of the eighth century, by Robert de Bruce, consecrated this pool, and endued it with a power of healing all kinds of diseases, but more especially madness. This virtue it has retained ever since, and is resorted to by crowds of the neighbouring peasantry, who either expect to be cured of real diseases, or suppose themselves cured of imaginary ones. This healing virtue is supposed to be more powerful towards the end of the first quarter of the moon; and I was told that if I had come there to-morrow night and the night after I should have seen hundreds of both sexes bathing in the pool. I met five or six who were just coming away from taking their dip, and amongst them an unfortunate girl out of her mind, who came from thirty miles' distance to receive the benefits of the waters, and had been there for several moons together, but had never derived the smallest advantage, and, indeed, she appeared so completely mad, that whatever may be the virtue of St Fillan's Pool, I am sure Willis would pronounce hers to be a hopeless case. A rocky point projects into the pool. This pool is by no means the fountain head, for the water runs from a long way up the country; yet is not supposed to receive this virtue till it comes to the very place [Strathfillan derives its name from the saint—*strath*, in the Gaelic language, signifying a plain between two mountains. Near Strathfillan a famous battle was fought between King Robert de Bruce and the MacDouglass, which the former gained, owing to the assistance afforded by the prayers of St Fillan], on one side of which, the men bathe, and on the other the women. Each person gathers up nine stones in the pool, and after bathing, walks to a hill near the water, where there are three cairns, round each of which he performs three turns, at each turn depositing a stone; and if it is for any bodily pain, fractured limb, or sore that they are bathing, they throw upon one of these cairns that part of their clothing which covered the part affected; also if they have at home any beast that is diseased, they have only to bring some of the meal which it feeds upon, and make it into paste with these waters, and afterwards give it to him to eat, which will prove an infallible cure; but they must likewise throw upon the cairn the rope or halter with which he was

this effect:—"There is a bell belonging to the Chapel of St Fillan that was in high reputation among the votaries of that saint in old times. It seems to be of some mixed metal. It is about a foot high, and of an oblong form. It usually lay on a gravestone in the church-yard. When mad people were brought to be dipped in the Saint's Pool, it was necessary to perform certain ceremonies, in which there was a mixture of Druidism and Popery. After remaining all night in the chapel, bound with ropes, the bell was set on their head with great solemnity. It was the popular opinion, that, if stolen, it would extricate itself out of the thief's hands, and return home, ringing all the way. For some time past the bell has been locked up, to prevent its being used to superstitious purposes."

The "New Statistical Account" (No. 44, Perthshire, 1088), gives more led. Consequently the cairns are covered with old halters, gloves, shoes, bonnets, nightcaps, rags of all sorts, kilts, petticoats, garters, and smocks. Sometimes they go as far as to throw away their halfpence. Money has often been called the root of all evil, but for the disease of what part of the body these innocent halfpence are thus abused I could not learn. However, we may venture to suppose that they seldom remain there long without somebody catching the disorder again. When mad people are to be bathed they throw them in with a rope tied about the middle, after which they are taken to St Fillan's Church, about a mile distant, where there is a large stone with a nick carved in it just large enough to receive them. In this stone, which is in the open churchyard, they are fastened down to a wooden framework, and remain there for a whole night, with a covering of hay over them, and St Fillan's bell is put over their heads. If in the morning the unhappy patient is found loose, the saint is supposed to be very propitious; if, on the contrary, he continue in bonds, the cure is supposed doubtful. This bell is of a very curious shape, and has an iron tongue. St Fillan caused it to fly to this church; and a soldier seeing it in the air, fired at it, which brought it down, and occasioned a great crack in it, which is still to be seen. I was told that wherever this bell was removed to it always returned to a particular place in the churchyard next morning. This church has been formerly twice as large as it is now, as appears by the ruin of what has been pulled down—a striking proof of the decrease either of population or of religion in this country. In order to ascertain the truth or falsehood of the ridiculous story of St Fillan's bell, I carried it off with me, and mean to convey it, if possible, to England. An old woman, who observed what I was about, asked me what I wanted with the bell, and I told her that I had an unfortunate relation at home out of his mind, and that I wanted to have him cured. 'Oh, but,' says she, 'you must bring him here to be cured, or it will be of no use.' Upon which I told her he was too ill to be moved, and off I galloped with the bell, back to Tyndrum Inn."—*Extract from a Journal of a Tour in Scotland.*

details about the treatment of the mad people, stating that the ceremony was performed after sunset on the first day of the quarter, old style, and before sunrise next morning; that the dipped persons were instructed to take three stones from the bottom of the pool, and walking three times round three cairns on the bank, to throw a stone at each. They were tied to St Fillan's bed, in St Fillan's chapel, all night. If found loose in the morning, the cure was deemed perfect. The Account goes on to say—"The bell referred to in last Account was about the size of a handbell, and was an ancient relic of the chapel. It was stolen by an English antiquarian forty years ago. Popish tradition endowed it with the power of returning to its resting-place; but it would seem England is deemed a congenial home."

A religious cultus, surviving so long, naturally suggests the question, Is anything known historically of St Fillan? To answer this question we must apply to the Irish and Scottish Hagiological writers. Colgan (*Acta Sanctorum Hib.*, p. 104,) gives nineteen saints of this name, one of whom was a celebrated Continental martyr, the brother of St Fursey of Peronne, and of St Ultan, whose acts are to be found in Capgrave's *Nova Legenda*, folio cxlix., and in Colgan, p. 99, and who was killed at Hainault, in A.D. 655. But the Scottish saint of this name must be either the saint whose commemoration is found both in the Scottish and Irish Kalendars on the 9th of January, or a saint whose day is the 20th of June, "Faolan the Stammerer, of Rath-Erran in Alba; and of Cill-Fhaelain in Laoighis in Leinster, of the race of Aenghus, son of Nadfracch, *i.e.* King of Munster" (*Martyrology of Donegal*, p. 175). Colgan calls him *Leprosus*." The original is *Amlobar*. Probably it is the first of these saints. According to Colgan (vol. i. pp. 49, 50), the oldest record of him is in the *Martyrology of Angus the Culdee*. His name occurs in that of Tallaght, of Marian Gorman, in the *Kalendar of Cashel*, and in that of Cathal Maguire; the *Martyrology of Donegal* epitomises all that was recollected of him in Ireland in the seventeenth century—"Faolan of Cluain Maosgna in Fearatulach." We have to apply to the Scottish authority of the *Breviary of Aberdeen* for more details concerning him; and the life of his mother, *Kentigerna*, of *Inch Caelliach*, in *Loch Lomond*, further supplements our knowledge.

Briefly, then, *Felanus*, *Foilanus*, *Fillanus*, *Faolan*, *Foelanus*, or *Foelan* (commemorated in the Irish and Scottish Kalendars on the 9th January),

was the son of Feradach or Feriath, a nobleman probably of the race of Fiatach Finn, by Kentigerna or Quentigerna, Caentigern or Coentigern, daughter of Kellach Cualann, king of Leinster, and sister of St Congan of Turriff and Lochalsh. St Fillan's epoch is determined by the dates of his mother and maternal grandfather, who died respectively in A.D. 734 and A.D. 715, by the fact of his being educated by St Ibar, and by his receiving the monastic habit from St Munna, the saint who is known in Ireland as St Fintan-Munna MacTulcain, who died in 635, and whose name is preserved in Kilmun, on the Holy Loch, in Argyleshire. We therefore must reject Camerarius's date of 649, and place him a little after the commencement of the eighth century.

We cannot determine in what monastery of St Munnu St Fillan was trained. Dr Lanigan throws discredit on the accounts that give him any other monastery than Taghmun, in the county of Wexford. He is called St Munnu, of Kilmund and Dissert, in the Breviary of Aberdeen. If the Dissert be the Desert of St Serf, now Dysart, we may understand how St Fillan's name should be preserved in the nomenclature of his cave, a little farther to east of Fife, in Pittenweem; but the chief scene of his labours was in the uplands of Perthshire, in the parish of Killin. There we find a river and a strath called after him; there we find a church dedicated to him. Nay, but for the difference of pedigree and day of commemoration, the proximity of Strathearn to Killin suggests the probability that Faolan the Stammerer is the same with the saint of whom we are treating, inasmuch as it is said of him that he was born with a stone in his mouth, which caused his father to throw him into the pool of water, where he was guarded by angels till St Ibar brought him out and baptised him. Ratherran is Dundurn, in the parish of Comrie, near which is the village of St Fillan; there is also a Killallan in Renfrewshire (Reeves' "*Adamnan*," *Life of Columba*, p. lxxiv.), and a place of worship dedicated to him at the chapel yard, parish of Largs, (Orig. Paroch. vol. i. p. 89.)

Again, we find traces of St Fillan farther north. In the life of his uncle, St Congan, in the Breviary of Aberdeen, it is said that he fled from Ireland to Lochalsh, in northern Argyle,—a description of the locality which incidentally proves the antiquity of the authority from whence the narrative is taken, for it afterwards was termed Ross-shire, on the occasion

of Alexander II. granting it to the Earl of Ross. There St Fillan built a church to the honour of his uncle; and true enough, at the present day, Kilkoan and Killellan, the churches of Congan and Fillan, bear testimony to the fact.

The proximity to Pittenweem, where the saint's cave, already alluded to, is shown, would account for St Phillans being the alternative name of the parish of Forgan in Fife, though the parish church had an after dedication to St Andrew, as we see by a *confirmatio* of Pope Adrian IV. given in the "Registrum Prioratus et St Andreae," p. 51.

The estimation in which St Fillan was held in Scotland was greatly enhanced by the part he was supposed to have taken in the victory of Bannockburn. Boece gives the legend in Latin, but I prefer to read it to you in the racy Scottish of Bellenden:—

"All the nicht afore the batall, K. Robert was right wery, having great sollicitude for the weill of his army, and nicht tak na rest, but rolland al jeoparddeis and chance of fortoun in his mind; and sometimes he went to his devut contemplayon, making his orison to God and Saint Phillane, qhuais arm, as he believit, set in silver, was closit in ane cais within his palyeon; trusting the better fortune to follow bi the samin. In the mene time, the cais clakkit to suddenly, but ony motion or werk of mortal creaturis. The preist astonist bi this wonder went to the altar quhere the cais lay; and when he found the arme in the cais, he cryit, Here is ane great mirakle; and incontinent he confessit, how he brought the tume cais in the feild dredoned that the rellik sold be tint in the fiöld, quhere sae greit jeoparddeis apperit. The king rejosing in this mirakell, past the remanent nicht in his prayaris with gud esperance of victory."—*Bellenden's Boece*, vol. ii. p. 391. Ed. 1821.

It was to the "merakle of Sant Phillane" that the king alluded in his speech before the battle, after that Mauritius, abbot of Inchaffray (the *Insula Missarum* in Stratherne), had "said masse on ane hie mote, and ministret the Eucharist to the king and his nobillis." If St Fillan be the Faolan of Ratherran, we here see a reason for this particular relic being brought into the camp; and it will be recollected that Killin, the special seat of the cultus of the saint, was a church under the jurisdiction of Inchaffray.

Another relic of St Fillan still exists, viz., the Coygerach or pastoral staff of the saint, which has been preserved to this day. There is a curious

account of an inquest as to its custody in the third volume of the "Spalding Club Miscellany," pref. p. xxi. and p. 237. See also Proceedings Soc. Antiq. Scot. vol. iii. page 233 and plate xxvi. for a description and figure of the crosier.

It is a happy accident that both the bell and the bacul of St Fillan should have been preserved. These were the commonest relics of the Irish saints. St Ternan's bell is alluded to in the legend of the Breviary of Aberdeen. In the same venerable authority is the account of the miraculous formation of that of St Molocus (June 25); and in an extract from Giraldus Cambrensis, given at the end of the notice of Killin, in the "Old Statistical Account," these two objects are mentioned as the objects of veneration of the early saints. "This must not be passed over, that the people of Ireland and Scotland, as well as those of Wales, hold in great honour the saints' bells, hand-bells (*campana, bajulas*), and pastoral staves, curved at the upper part, and formed of gold, silver, or brass, so that they fear to take oath on these and to perjure themselves more than they do upon the Gospels. For contemners of these are often punished by a certain hidden and divine power implanted in them, as well as by a certain vindictiveness of which these saints seem exceedingly susceptible." The element of the "*vindicta, cujus præcipue sancti illi appetibiles esse videntur*" is constantly illustrated in the lives of Irish saints. In the Martyrology of Donegal (p. 445); speaking of St Maoltuile, it is said "His *bacul* works miracles on perjurers before they go out of the church. His well, and his *yellow bell*, and his *bacul*, and his statue are there still."

All writers on Irish antiquities allude to these, *e.g.*, Dr Petrie, who has written a tract upon the Quadrangular Bells, and refers to them specially in his work on the Round Towers; and Dr Reeves has given us a valuable monograph on the bell of St Patrick, and on a collection of bells in the possession of the Anglican Archbishop of Armagh.

Indeed, one of the most curious forms of Celtic tenure was that connected with the hereditary custody of these bells and baculs. Because certain oaths were sworn upon these in the rough justice of the tribal life of the early Scots, certain lands came to be assigned to the custodiers of them. The lands of the Kirktown of Strowan are held by the possession of a bell. Dr Stuart has alluded to this in his preface to the docu-

ments connected with the Coygerach, and calls to remembrance that Mr Joseph Robertson had directed attention to the remarkable fact that the bell of St Kessog and the bell of St Lolan were included among the feudal investitures of the Earldom of Perth. He has also shown that the possession of the bell of St Kentigern gave origin to the armorial bearings of that city (*Libr. Coll. N. D. Glasg. p. xxv., cit. Spalding Club Misc. vol. iii. pref. xxiii.*) I may add that St Medan's bell had certain lands attached to it which constituted part of the dowry of the Countess of Airlie; and that the villain Moyer, who was so discreditably mixed up in the judicial murder of Archbishop Oliver Plunket at the time of the Popish plot, was the hereditary keeper of one of the most precious relics of St Patrick.

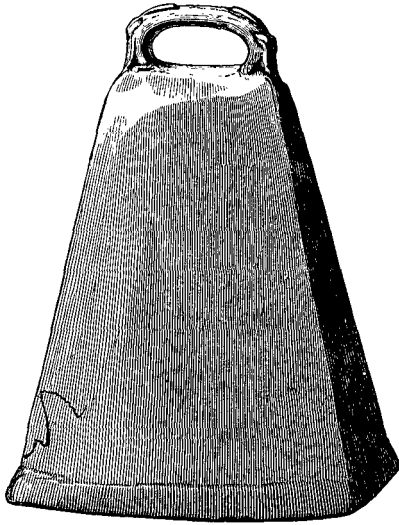
The following are extracts from the Inventory of the Earl of Airlie's Charters as to Saint Medan :—

“ Instrument dated within the Castle of Airlie on 5th June 1447, on a Resignation by Michael David of the Bell of Saint Medan, of which he was Tenant and hereditary possessor, into the hands of Sir John Ogilvy of Luntrethyn, Knight, the Superior of said Bell, after which the said Sir John gave the Bell with its pertinents to Lady Margaret Ogilvy, Countess of Moray, his Spouse, for her liferent use. Witnesses— Sir Walter Ogilvy of Deskford, James Ogilvy, William Cargyl of Lasingtoun, Esquires; Duncan Stronach, Senior, and Duncan, Junior, his son, burgessis of Monros; Patrick de Fenton and Edward Pedy, with many others.

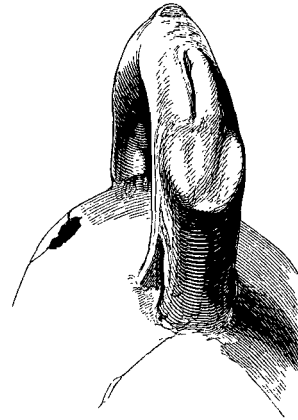
“ Instrument of Sasine in favour of Margaret Ogilvy, Countess of Murray, wife of Sir John Ogilvy of Luntrethin, Knight, of a Provision in her favour. Sasine was given by James Ogilvy, Brother German of the said John at Luntrethin, near the Church, at the House or toft belonging to the Chaplainry of St Medan. The symbols of delivery were the giving of earth and stone, and the shutting of the Lady into the said house, all others being first put out, 18th July 1447.”

The bell of St Fillan is very similar to the Ronnell bell at Birnie, but not so large. It is 12 inches high, four-sided like most of the ancient bells, 9 by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches, with a handle of which more hereafter. It has been cracked, and there is a hole at the top which greatly impairs the sound. The present tongue of iron is of recent manufacture, probably since it went to England. It will be observed that the part worn by the ancient clapper does not correspond with the present tongue. It must have been rung by being beaten by some object that worked on a pivot outside of it. The weight of the bell is 8 lbs. 14 oz., and its composition is a mixed metal. It is not riveted together, but cast in one piece.

The handle, however, is the most remarkable part of the bell, for there we find twice repeated the well-known heathen emblem of the phallus. (See annexed woodcut, figs. 1 and 2.) This symbol has, I believe, never hitherto been found in any of the Scoto-Irish metal-work, although the



1.



2.

Fig. 1. The Bell of St Fillan (12 inches high).

Fig. 2. Enlarged View of Handle of Bell.

cultus of the men-hir, which is the same in stone, still survives among the cognate race in Brittany. I have seen at Dôl, in that country, the corn in a field at the foot of one of these tall stones, crowned indeed by the cross, crushed by the knees and feet of the votaries, who came there to be cured of sterility.

That this form of nature-worship prevailed in Scotland and Ireland in what used to be called Druidical times, is certain; indeed, it is common not only to all the Indo-European races, but even prevails in the Semitic family,—the Asherah, or, as it is translated, the grove, in

the authorised English version of the Bible being of this nature, though Dollinger associates this rather with the devotion to the female goddess Astarte. In India the Linga is connected with the Sivaite sect; and one subdivision of these, the Jungums, who wear the badge in a silver box, are the puritans of the East. Their code of morals is preserved in the verses of Vemana.

The policy of the Mediaeval Church, when it was strong enough, was to cast down and to root out such symbols. Sometimes, however, the local regard for them was too great, and then they were consecrated to the use of the new religion. I have no doubt that many of the ruder sculptured stones in Scotland are of heathen origin. Sometimes we see the cross marked on them, manifestly as an after thought, as in the case of that at Ulbster (Stuart, vol. i. plate xi.). It is, therefore, a moot question whether St Fillan's bell is Christian or pre-Christian.

My learned and accomplished friend, Lord Crawford, entertains the notion that the bell belongs to Christian times, because he doubts whether such bells were in use before the extinction of publicly professed paganism. In a letter addressed to me, he says,—

“This symbol carries the antiquity of the bell back to a very distant period, and seems to me to link it with pagan antiquity—not that I think it pagan, but Christian. The phallus (derived from the root found in the Sanscrit *bal-a*, strength, the Semitic *bal*, and the Pelasgian *poll-ere* and *vol-ere*) was the symbol of health, life, regeneration, and thus attributed to Baal (the Celtic Bel or Belinos), among ancient deities. Taking this fact, and the ornament on the bell, and the sanitary use to which it was put till seventy years ago, together, it appears to me, either that the ornament was employed designedly to indicate the virtue always indeed supposed to reside in bells, or that such virtue was supposed in a peculiar degree to belong to this particular bell from the ornament upon it, at a time when the phallus symbol was still believed to possess the power of repelling evil in Scotland, as it so long did in Italy. The symbol may appear strange as a Christian one, and yet, what is stranger, and what may illustrate my belief, that it was designedly put (although in a very modest and out-of-sight way) on St Fillan's bell, is the usage that prevailed at Isernia, in the kingdom of Naples, till nearly the end of the last century, and which perhaps exists still—and this with the full

sanction of the Church—the usage, namely, of presenting and consecrating votive offerings of simulachra of this description moulded in wax,¹ in gratitude for recovery from illness, to the two medical saints, St Cosmas and St Damian, at their shrine there. The very name Fillan has a curious resemblance to Belinas, and I should not be surprised if St Fillan's feast was fixed by the early missionaries on some day sacred on the spot to the pagan god, for the purpose of superseding his worship.”

With much admiration for this learned and ingenious speculation, I cannot bring myself to believe that St Fillan's bell is the product of Scoto-Irish hands, in Christian times. I believe either that it belongs to the Bronze period anterior to Christian times, or if Christian, that it has been imported from southern lands, where the heathen ideas living on into Christian times were expressed in more definite forms. When I remember that neither on the sculptured stones, nor on any of the beautiful bronze cambutas, shrines, or bells of the ancient Irish Church, is there any trace or indication of this symbol, I cannot bring myself to believe that such a bell so ornamented would be fabricated in the eighth century in Ireland or Scotland. If the work of Celts, it must have a more remote antiquity. There is not the impossibility that it may have been imported from Italy; and it will be borne in mind that St Ternan, according to the legend, received his bell from the Pope. St Teiliao received a bell remarkable for its powers at Jerusalem. It may be, therefore, that the bell of St Fillan came from a land where no notion of coarseness was attached to the simulachrum; and the bronze of Magna Græcia and Latium, which, perhaps, once was part of the statue of a Sejanus, may have undergone the possible doom pronounced on it by Juvenal (Sat. iv. 61),

“Fiunt urceoli pelves sartigo patellæ,”

and in the form of this bell have been carried to a distant land, beyond the power of the “immensa Romanæ pacis majestas,” to work on the imagination, and to animate the faith of the descendants of the opponents of Agricola.

I am aware, that in maintaining the improbability of the native construction of this symbol, I shall be met by the strange story told in the

¹ See R. P. Knight's “Account of the Worship of Priapus in the Kingdom of Naples.” 4to. London, 1761.

Chronicle of Lanercost of the doings, or rather mis-doings, of a certain John, the parochial priest of Inverkeithing, in the year 1282, who came to a bad end for introducing a Dionysiac procession in his parish during the Easter week. Not to mention that there may have been much exaggeration in a friar's account of a secular priest's evil conduct, the whole story is told (Chron. Lan. p. 109) as something quite exceptional, and not a hint can be gathered as to its having been traditional in Scotland. That remains of the older religion maintained themselves till very lately in the Beltane fire and other rites I admit, but in none of the searching canons of the Mediæval Church (those fertile repertoires of condemned practices) do we find in Scotland or Ireland any allusion to this peculiar form of nature worship.