

## II.

### NOTES OF EARLY MONUMENTAL ART IN THE WEST HIGHLANDS. By JAMES DRUMMOND, Esq., R.S.A., F.S.A. Scot.

In April 1869, I read a paper before this Society upon the style of art sculptured on some monumental slabs, in various churchyards in the West Highlands ; and at that time promised, as occasion offered, to add to my collection of such drawings. Since then I have visited many interesting localities, and will this evening show to the meeting the result of my wanderings. I finished my last autumn peregrinations by revisiting Iona. On going into St Oran's churchyard, and looking over the various monuments which I had seen a couple of years ago, placed within two enclosures and surrounded by an iron rail, I was astonished to find one of them amissing. This was the memorial slab to the four priors, thought by many to be the finest specimen of Celtic art in the cemetery. Opinions differ as to this, though certainly it is the most elaborate and perfect, but I am afraid it will not long continue so, as I found it between the two enclosures, and over it every tourist now walks on his way to the chapel. On inquiring what was the meaning of this, I was told that it had been claimed by a journeyman smith, working at the Duke's granite quarries in Mull, who says that it had cost his grandfather seven milk cows and seven bolls of barley. This is too ridiculous ; for who could have a right to sell such a thing ? But the claim was admitted by the Duke's chamberlain, and there it now lies a sort of pavement for every sacrilegious foot to tread on. Another fine stone was claimed by an old woman, who was a pauper, on some frivolous pretence of the same sort ; and one beautiful specimen, which is unfortunately broken in two, was

during last season raised that the child of a labourer might be buried under it. A few more removals of such a stone, and it will be done for. In St Oran's Chapel is a richly decorated stone having sculptured on it the figure of a prior under a canopy. This was carried off a long time ago from Iona and used as his family tombstone by a proprietor near Scoor, in Mull. It goes by the name of "the stone of the boll of barley," such having been the bribe to the ignorant boatman who committed the theft. It was returned a few years ago. Now, surely this system of appropriation ought to be put a stop to, and that by the strong hand, for it is an utter impossibility that the monuments of those old chiefs and ecclesiastics can be the property of these people, many of whom hardly belong to the island. No better illustration could be given of the utter indifference and carelessness, not only of custodiers, but of all connected with this neglected region, whose duty it is to protect from destruction these precious illustrations of the monumental art of a bygone time, than the McLeod memorial stone, over which the turf was allowed to grow, and so thick was this covering that the very position of it was forgotten, and yet this was one of the most interesting and perfect remaining. It is curious from having a small figure of the chief introduced in a sort of niche formed by the ornamentation. It has always been asserted that he is dressed in the kilt or philabeg. On examining it closely I found the dress the same as the chiefs are usually represented in, namely, a conical helmet and hood with a surcoat reaching to the knees, also a small triangular shield and a spear in his hand. The upper part has a galley, and an inscription, partly illegible, "Hic jacet MakLeod." Close by this I uncovered another stone, over which the turf had been allowed to grow. On it is a cross, a sword, and the usual scroll work. Besides the more ornamented stones, there are numbers having crosses of various designs incised upon them. The finest of these is what is called an Irish cross. A large rude one on red granite is said to have covered a French king. Lying face downward, and partly under ground, was one of granite, the surface a stratum of sandstone of about an inch thick. This was cut through in the form of a simple cross, leaving the granite as a sort of background. Perhaps the most curious in the whole place—unfortunately a mere fragment—I found among a quantity of other pieces (only the morning I left) too late to make a large drawing. On one side, scroll basket work and one of those odd serpent-

looking creatures twisted through itself, which is often represented in early Celtic manuscripts; on the other, what appears to have been a large galley filled with figures, the most distinct of these being a figure to whom a dragon-like winged animal is holding up his paw. This must have been a very choice cross, and makes us regret more the fragmentary state in which it is. It has often been asked—Is there no way of preserving these invaluable relics? I should say no difficulty whatever, seeing the old order has been departed from; and as no stone is now in its original position, there can be no delicacy in the matter, if the powers that be would only move or sanction some scheme. In such affairs the simplest plan is always the best, and the object would be gained if a simple stone bench, about 1 foot high and 2 feet wide, were built round the inside of St Oran's Chapel, and on this, ranged against the wall, the finest of the slabs, those of figures being placed at the east end, and in front of all an iron rail, to prevent inquisitive people from meddling. But let no sacrilegious hand put a roof on this chapel as has been proposed. Let the more common specimens still lie inside the barriers. Let us glance at the cathedral and the state of matters there. Think of the sacred precincts in connection with it being now let to the innkeeper to graze his cattle—an opening having actually been made in the surrounding wall to give the animals free ingress and egress. Not that the wall is of much use in keeping strangers out, it being quite low; for was it not but the other year that the stewards of two yachts lying in the sound, because the custodier refused them admission on a Sunday, landed in the gloaming, went over the wall, and were disturbed in the act of breaking up the beautiful figure of M'Lean of Ross—one-half of the head being smashed before they were scared and escaped from their impious work! In the grounds surrounding the cathedral stands the magnificent St Martin's Cross. This is considered a model of handsome proportions, but from this opinion I always differed, the upper arm, so to speak, seeming to me too high for the side ones. On looking at it carefully I noticed grooves in the side wings as if for something sliding into. A ladder being procured, I was able to examine them more clearly, and found my conjectures right, the grooves being mortices for something additional of stone or metal fitting into, which would entirely alter the proportion.

Mr Drummond showed drawings from Kilmory and Kiels in North

Knapdale, also from Kilean, Kilkerran, Saddell, Kilkenzie, Kilcousland, and Kilceven, remarking upon the nature of the symbols sculptured on the slabs in the various localities, and referred to the inaccuracies of representation in a series of illustrations of the antiquities at Saddell, showing in what respects they differed from the originals; the figure of Christ, for instance, which on the cross has the legs straight down and the feet separate, was drawn cross-legged, Templar fashion; in the effigy of a knight with a spear in his hand, the spear was left out altogether, and other mistakes of a kindred nature were pointed out, while part of a shield, having an open hand distinctly carved upon it, is figured and described as "the stump of what may have been an animal."

I shall now refer to Eileanmor, which is about two miles from Kilmory. Nearly in the middle of the island is a small chapel, dedicated to St Cormac, as nearly perfect as may be, and having some peculiarities of construction, the most curious being an upper chamber to which access can only be got by means of a ladder. It is supposed to have been for concealment. Adjoining the chapel is another apartment which is roofless; this may have been for secular purposes. This most interesting specimen of early church architecture is only 15 feet by 8. It is now converted into a cowshed, and was in such a disgraceful state of filth that it was almost impossible to go into it—in fact, I had to wade through a quagmire to get near the effigy of a priest which lies under a canopy on one side. This is a most admirably sculptured figure; unfortunately the head has disappeared. The ornamentation on the dress is nearly as perfect as the day it was cut. On the highest point of the island there stands part of the shaft of an ancient cross. When Mr Muir visited Eileanmor in 1864, it occurred to him that other parts of it might be lying about, so he sent his boatmen to search for them; they were successful in finding the disc of the cross, which, for safety, he had deposited in the niche at the chapel, "alongside of the truncated priest, where," says he, "I hope you will find it in peace, should you ever revisit the small grassy Eileanmor." There I found it not, but lying in a corner I saw a flat boulder-looking mass, which, on my boatmen pulling forth, turned out to be the disc of the cross, but so begrimed that, had I not known of its existence, certainly would never have suspected this mass to be the curiously sculptured stone it turned out to be, and which was

with difficulty made visible, after hard work in scraping and picking. On one side is a quaint representation of the crucifixion ; on the other, a scroll-work of foliage. It is entirely different from the Macmillan Cross at Kilmory, looking earlier in style. While hunting up these antiquities, the remark of my namesake, that "property has its duties as well as its rights," often occurred to me, and the thought would force itself upon you—How strange that men possessing fine properties, full of archaeological remains, of ruins brimful of association and suggestive of romantic story, of monuments to men, not the less interesting that in many cases their very existence is a dream, but whose strong arms and restless stirring lives must have influenced for good or evil the times they lived in,—remains, which to them should be the more precious, that in our country art antiquities are scarce, and should therefore be the more cared for, yet such are not only neglected, but in some cases have been defaced.

The armour of the knightly effigies found in the West Highlands is a most puzzling matter. One thing I have not yet found, at any place which I have visited, what we now term the Highland dress; the nearest approach being on a cross at Kilkerran, but it is not the belted plaid, the true old form of wearing the dress. A figure at Kilmichael Glassary at first sight struck me as so dressed, but, on examination, it proved to be the same as most of the others, only very rudely sculptured. One peculiarity about these figures is the form of the helmet, which is almost invariably of the same type—the bascinet of the thirteenth or fourteenth century, that of M'Lean of Duart, at Iona, having a dragon as a crest; the same is also on his shield. The surcoat, which is generally sleeved, is unlike any other knightly dress I know of, apparently made of leather or strong cloth, quilted in regular folds, and held to the arm by bands of steel above and below the elbow. In the figures of Maclean of Duart and Maclean of Ross this is different, seemingly of different material, but not quilted, and in no other but these did I find an indication of plate armour. Where the feet remain the toes are generally pointed, thus indicating an early date.

A conversation followed the reading of this communication, and, on the motion of Mr W. F. Skene, a small committee was appointed to call the attention of His Grace the Duke of Argyll to the condition of the buildings and monuments of Iona.