

## II.

ON TWO MONUMENTAL STONES WITH OGHAM INSCRIPTIONS RECENTLY DISCOVERED IN SHETLAND. BY GILBERT GOUDIE, Esq., F.S.A Scot.

The fact that Ogham-inscribed monuments have been found only in Celtic districts, or in districts where Celtic influences have at one time prevailed, invests with considerable interest the discovery of relics of this description in outlying districts where few Celtic traces now remain. Such is the case in the Shetland Islands, where the Pictish people and language have disappeared before the Scandinavian race and Teutonic dialect, which have held entire sway in the islands for more than a thousand years.

Only five specimens of Ogham-inscribed stones have hitherto been found on the mainland of Scotland. In Ireland and Wales they are much more common. The Scottish Oghams consist of the well-known Newton Stone; the Scoonie Stone, presented to the Museum in 1866; the stone from the churchyard of Aboyne, a cast of which was added to the collection in 1873 by the Marquis of Huntly; the stone in the Museum of the Duke of Sutherland at Dunrobin; and that at Logie-Elphinstone, Aberdeenshire.

In the year 1864 the Bressay Stone, a slab of chlorite slate richly sculptured in low relief, with an Ogham inscription on the edge, found in the island of that name in Shetland, was presented to the Museum by the late Rev. Dr Hamilton. In 1871 a smaller slab, bearing the incised outline of a cross, with an Ogham inscription, found in the Broch of Burrian, in the island of North Ronaldsey, in Orkney, was presented by Dr Traill of Woodwick; and, more recently, a fragment with two letters in the same character was found in the parish of Cunningsburg, in Shetland, by Mr Robert Cogle,—these discoveries thus adding Shetland and Orkney as a new province to the known domain of Ogham relics.

The Scottish Ogham monuments were thus in all eight in number—five from the mainland, one from Orkney, and two from Shetland—until the stones now exhibited were discovered in the summer of 1876.

The best known remains of antiquity in Shetland are the Standing Stones and sepulchral cairns, and the Brochs or circular towers of the Picts, which have appeared so frequently in the Proceedings of this Society, and have contributed so largely to the collection in the Museum. But there is another

class—the early ecclesiastical remains, which are also numerous, and not less interesting. In the island of Unst, twenty-four sites of churches are said to have been identified;<sup>1</sup> and the other districts, if carefully examined, would probably show numbers in proportion, though in most cases the remains are in ruin or have entirely disappeared. Sir Henry Dryden, who has done so much for the antiquities of the North, has taken the measurements of a number of these remains in the northern districts; those elsewhere have been but little noticed.

On the west side of the southern promontory of the Shetland mainland, in the parish of Dunrossness, is the small isle of St Ninian's (locally termed St Ringan's), with the site of a chapel presumably dedicated to that saint, and which seems to have survived the Reformation, and to have been in existence within comparatively recent times.

If we except the account of the remarkable voyage of Nicolo Zeno, the Venetian, in the year 1380, the first detailed description of the Shetland Islands is given by Buchanan (1582),<sup>2</sup> in which no mention is made of St Ninian's Isle. It appears, however, as "S. Tronons Yle" in Timothy Ponts' map, prepared about the year 1608, and published in the great atlas of the Blaeus of Amsterdam.<sup>3</sup> This may be read either as a misprint for St Ronon's Isle, or possibly as St Tronon's, seeing that, according to Bishop Forbes, St Ninian has been known in some northern districts of England as St Trinyon.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the figure of a house surmounted by a cross denoting a church, there is adjoining to it, on the map, the mark indicating a mansion or hamlet, most probably the remains of what was originally a monastic residence, and latterly the dwelling of the resident priest up to the Reformation, but all which has now disappeared.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sir H. Dryden, Bart.—*Ruined Churches in Shetland*. Privately printed, 1868.

<sup>2</sup> *Rerum Scotticarum Historia*, apud Alex. Arbuthnetum. Edin., 1582.

<sup>3</sup> *Orbis Theatrum Terrarum*. Amsterdam, 1654.

<sup>4</sup> *Lives of St Ninian and St Kentigern*, p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> I do not know to whom the island belonged prior to the middle of the seventeenth century. On 2d August 1667, the lands (18 merks) were wadsetted to Laurence Stewart of Bigtown by James Sinclair of Scalloway, with consent of Arthur Sinclair, his eldest son, and Grizel Sinclair, heiress of Hous (Condescendence in Process, *James Scott v. J. B. Stewart*, 1779). In 1709 the isle was conveyed by Charles Stewart of Bigtown to his son John Charles Stewart (*Register of Sasines, General Register House*). In 1732 the property devolved to Clementina Stewart, then a

The island is pretty accurately described by the Rev. Mr Brand, in the year 1701, as follows :—

“To the North West of the Ness lyes St Ninian’s Isle, very pleasant ; wherein there is a Chappel and ane Altar in it whereon some superstitious People do burn Candles to this day. Some take this Isle rather to be a kind of Peninsula, joynd to the Main by a Bank of Sand, by which in an Ebb People may go into the Isle, tho’ sometimes not without danger.”<sup>1</sup>

The resemblance here to the Isle of Whithorn, the supposed site of the original Candida Casa of the Saint, is striking. It, too, at present a peninsula, is, I believe, insulated at certain tides ; suggesting the idea that the founders of St Ninian’s in Shetland were not unacquainted with the little isle in Galloway which was consecrated by the life and labours of the saint. Indeed, we know that he who was especially the Apostle of the Britons, and of the Southern Picts, was also revered as a father by the Celts of Ireland, to whom Whithorn was a favourite resort. And as on the mainland, close to the Isle of Whithorn, a splendid church and a priory were in the course of time erected, so we find that there was also on the adjoining mainland in Shetland, at a place bearing the suggestive name of Ireland,<sup>2</sup> very near to St Ninian’s Isle, a church of more than usual pretension, the walls and steeple of which were standing so late as 1711.<sup>3</sup> There is reason to believe, on the authority of Brand (1701), that this was a church with a round tower, like the famous Church of Egilsey in Orkney ; but I have sought in vain for any vestige of it, though the spot on which it is believed to have stood has been pointed out to me by natives, whose account from tradition is entirely consistent with what we learn regarding it otherwise.

Brand’s description of St Ninian’s Isle is repeated by Martin (1703),<sup>4</sup> and in Sir Robert Sibbald’s book, published in 1711,<sup>5</sup> it is particularly minor, who, on her marriage in 1744 to John Bruce (Stewart), disposed the whole lands to him (*Henry Blair v. J. B. Stewart*, Nov. 18, 1783) ; and he, it is stated, demolished the remains of the chapel and built the retaining wall. It ceased to be inhabited about 160 years ago, when the peat fuel failed.

<sup>1</sup> Brief Description of Orkney, Zetland, Pightland-Firth, and Caithness, &c. By the Rev. John Brand, 1701, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps, however, this name may be a modern form of *Eyrr-land*, a place adjoining a gravelly bank by the sea-shore.

<sup>3</sup> Description of the Isles of Shetland. Sir R. Sibbald, 1711, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> Description of the Western Isles, &c. Martin, 1703. <sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

referred to in much the same way. Dr Arthur Edmondston, the historian of Shetland (1809), gives it a passing notice, with an allusion to a tradition as to the church having been erected by a Dutch captain in acknowledgment of preservation from a storm at sea<sup>1</sup>—a tradition common to many similar sites in the islands, but which does not deserve serious notice. The isle is again referred to by Dr Hibbert (1822), who (quoting the Rev. Mr Low's MS. of 1770), states that—

“The lower storey of the kirk may be distinctly traced, which, having once been vaulted, is supposed to have served for a burying place.”

And lastly, Mr T. S. Muir, in his *Ecclesiological Sketch*, bewails the disappearance of these slight traces when he examined the site in 1862.<sup>2</sup>

In July last I visited the island, in company with the Rev. J. C. Roger, in the hope of being able to trace some portions of the foundation of the chapel, and possibly of finding some relic of early times. But scarcely a trace remained of the shrine of St Ninian. Time and, still more, the barbarous hand of man, had accomplished its demolition, almost every stone, not earthfast or beneath the surface, having been removed by a late proprietor, and built as a retaining wall close by, at the only point where the isle is accessible—the termination of the beach of sand which connects it with the mainland. Though the chapel has thus disappeared, and the island is now entirely devoted to grazing purposes, the site retains a traditional sacredness in the eyes of the natives of the neighbouring mainland district, to whose forefathers it has been for many ages the last resting place—interments having been discontinued only within the memory of the present generation.

All was desolation and silence except for the moaning of the waves, the screeching of sea-fowl, and the bellowing of cattle. The prediction popularly ascribed to St Columba, in reference to the future of his island sanctuary, seemed to be more literally fulfilled here than even in Iona :

The time shall come when lauding monks shall cease,  
And lowing herds here occupy the place.

Indeed there was some difficulty in prosecuting a search on the site, the cattle contesting possession of the ground, and tossing the skulls and

<sup>1</sup> *A View of the Ancient and Present State of the Zetland Islands*, vol. ii. p. 116.

<sup>2</sup> *Shetland. An Ecclesiological Sketch*. Privately printed. 1862.

trampling the bones which are strewn about the sand-blown surface, or protrude from beneath. Some of the interments are evidently of great age; others are comparatively modern. Two tombstones now prostrate, bearing dates about forty years back, and two smaller stones with rudely cut initials, were apparently the only inscribed monuments remaining. But on a more careful search I found embedded in the sand a monument of the earliest times—the Ogham-inscribed stone now exhibited, and which I have the honour of presenting for acceptance by the Society. Two other stones, similarly inscribed, I soon after found. They were fragments, somewhat defaced by exposure, and have since disappeared, but I hope to be able to recover them. The stones originally composing the fabric of the church, and now forming the retaining-wall before referred to, were also examined, but no carving or lettering was found. The stones are naturally smoothfaced and in regular layers, and have been brought apparently from the cliffs opposite on the mainland.

The attention of Mr Roger having, by this discovery, been directed to the subject of such early inscribed relics, he has since kept his eyes open to purpose; and within a month after our visit to St Ninian's Isle, he found in a cottage in the parish of Lunnasting, 30 or 40 miles distant, a stone also bearing an inscription in Ogham characters, and which I have now the pleasure to present, in his name, for your acceptance. The inscription is in an admirable state of preservation; and it is remarkable that the stone, as stated by the former possessor, was found at a depth of 5 feet from the surface, in a moss at a distance of some miles from any known ruin.

We have thus, by these discoveries, an addition of two Ogham monuments (besides the two unrecovered fragments at St Ninian's) to the eight previously known to us as existing in Scotland. The St Ninian's



FIG. 1.—Edge of St Ninian's Stone.

stone is an oblong almost rectangular slab of sandstone 2 ft. 6½ in. long, by 10½ in. broad, and 2 in. in thickness. The inscription is perfectly distinct, but unfortunately imperfect at one end, where the stone appears to be fractured.

The Lunnasting stone is 3 ft. 8½ in. long, by about 13 in. in breadth, and 1½ in. in thickness, and is inscribed on the flat surface (see fig. 2.)

The St Ninian's stone is a carefully prepared slab, such as would not be much out of place in a modern churchyard; indeed, it is not improbable that its sides may have been sculptured, although by the scaling off of the surface, no positive traces of this have been left. The Lunnasting stone, though a fine clay-slate, smoothfaced, is very much in its natural state—a weird-like waif, most strikingly suggestive of a rude district and a remote age.

Through the kindness of Dr John Stuart, I have had the opportunity of submitting the inscriptions on both stones to Dr Ferguson of Dublin, the eminent Ogham scholar, who pronounces them most interesting specimens, and undoubtedly Celtic. Mr W. F. Skene, LL.D., has also favoured me with his views, which concur with those expressed by Dr Ferguson. I have further to express my indebtedness to Sir Henry Dryden, Bart., for kind suggestions, in reference to the reading, and, generally, to Mr Anderson, our curator, for his valuable aid, so readily accorded to every member of the Society in investigating questions of history or archæology.

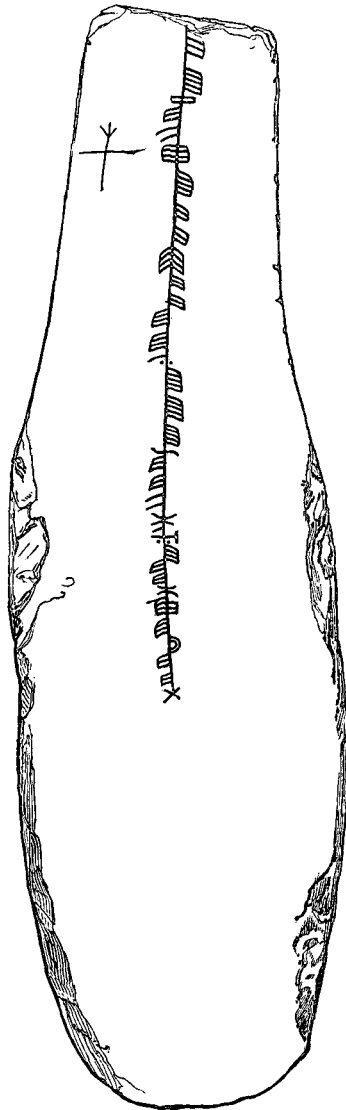


FIG. 2.—Lunnasting Stone—Face.

The characters on both stones present divergences from the usual types on the Irish and Welsh monuments. In the case of the St Ninian's stone, the inscription is on the edge ; in the Lunnasting stone it is on the face ; while most generally the *corner* of the stone is used as the *fleasgh* or stem-line. Again, in both stones there are letters formed by digits projected *obliquely* from the stem-line on either side, instead of, as more generally, at right angles to it ; and in the Lunnasting stone, as in the Orkney one, the further ends of these strokes forming each separate letter are connected by a cross line (see fig. 2). The Lunnasting stone also bears combinations and markings which seem to be entirely new. Apart from the inscription proper, there is an incised marking, resembling, at first sight, a rudely-formed cross, the Runic character  $\Psi$  (M), or a masonic mark ; but though this strange figure is probably of cardinal significance in the interpretation, we are as yet without the means of determining its character or value.

These peculiarities present obstacles to interpretation by any of the common keys,<sup>1</sup> as explained in the ancient Irish manuscripts, and would seem to suggest the inference that these Shetland monuments and the Orkney specimen before referred to are examples of a system or school of Ogham writing in the Northern Isles founded upon the original Irish models, but developing in the course of time independent characteristics of its own. Attributing, however, to the characters the powers of those most nearly resembling them according to the ordinary alphabet, the St Ninian's stone reads—

( \* \* \* \* ) ESMEQQNANAMMOFFEST

and the Lunnasting stone—

EATTUICHUEATTS: MAHEADTTANNN: HOCFFSTFF: NCDTONS

The latter especially seems a strange and inexplicable aggregation of consonants ; but while a satisfactory rendering of neither stone has yet

<sup>1</sup> Accounts and illustrations of the Ogham alphabet are given in the Book of Ballymote (written about 1370), the Book of Leinster, and the Book of Lecan ; and facsimiles have been published by the Royal Historical and Archæological Association of Ireland. The Welsh Ogham monuments are figured in Hubner's recent work, "Inscriptiones Britannicæ Christianæ," Berlin, 1876. The Irish monuments are described from time to time in the Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy.

been got, I trust that, ere long, through Dr Ferguson or others skilled in Celtic philology, we shall be in possession of an explanation of their meaning which will restore to us, in all likelihood, the long-lost names of two Céli-Dé ("Culdees") or Pictish saints, these monuments seldom containing more than the mere name and father's name of the person commemorated; as in the celebrated bi-lingual stone found at St Dogmael's, near Cardigan, to the inscription on which that on the St Ninian's stone bears a marked resemblance, and which reads—

Sagramni maqi Cunotami

with the equivalent in Roman characters

Sagrani Fili Cunotami

= Sagrani the son of Cunotam.<sup>1</sup>

The presence in some form of *megg*, *meccu*, *maqi*, (= "son,") which we find here and on the Bressay and St Ninian's stones, is a striking peculiarity very frequent in these inscriptions.

While we are thus as yet without a satisfactory interpretation of their inscriptions, what may we venture to assume as the historical import of these Shetland and Orkney monuments? It may be concluded, I think

1*st.* That they are of Celtic origin.

2*d.* That they are Christian memorials.

3*d.* That their dates may be determined as prior to the Scandinavian occupation of the islands in the ninth century.

If these positions can be satisfactorily established, the stones have an important historical bearing; they stand before us as material and indubitable proofs of a fact, the probability of which could only be based previously upon inference and conjecture, viz., that the Irish monks penetrated to these Northern Isles in the early middle ages, and that Christianity, introduced by them, flourished among the Pictish inhabitants long before the overthrow of the latter in the 9th century by the Pagan Norsemen.

The introduction of Christianity in the Northern Isles is usually ascribed to the incident in the Bay of Osmundwall in Orkney, when,

<sup>1</sup> This stone is figured in the *Archæologia Cambrensis* for April 1860, and in the "*Inscriptiones Britannicæ Christianicæ*," supra cit. See also Mr Whitley Stokes's *Three Irish Glossaries*, p. 56.



in the year 1000, the Earl Sigurd was compelled by King Olaf Trygvissou, at the point of the sword, to abjure Thor and Odin, and with all his men to accept instead the Christian faith and baptism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed the chronicles of the Norsemen would almost imply that the islands were not only destitute of Christianity, but actually uninhabited, before their arrival. "In the days of Harold of the Fair Hair," according to the Orkneyinga Saga, "the Orkney Isles were settled," or colonized, "but previously they were a retreat of Vikings."<sup>2</sup> And the Saga of King Harold Harfagr, which describes more in detail the overthrow of those Vikings, wholly ignores in the same way the aboriginal inhabitants.

The existence of the Pictish islanders, whether eventually exterminated by, or amalgamated with, their Scandinavian conquerors, need not, however, be doubted. "The Orkney Islands were discovered *and conquered* (by Agricola), and Thule was seen," says Tacitus;<sup>3</sup> according to Eutropius, they were added to the Roman Empire a short time before this (about the year A.D. 43), by the Emperor Claudius.<sup>4</sup> "The Orkneys were steeped in Saxon gore, while Thule ran warm with the blood of Picts,"<sup>5</sup> says Claudian,—whatever weight we may be disposed to attach to such testimony from classic authors. Coming down to the Middle Ages, were we, like Mr Fergusson, in his "Rude Stone Monuments," to follow Geoffrey of Monmouth (1147) as a trustworthy guide, we should accept the islands, on his authority, as not only inhabited,<sup>6</sup> but as also Christianised (as undoubtedly they were), and as contributing at the early time of which we are speaking, the very flower of Christian chivalry—Sir Gawain, Sir Gareth, Sir Gaherys and Sir Agravayne, sons of Lot, King of Orkney—to the brotherhood of the Round Table at Arthur's Court at Caerleon!<sup>7</sup>

But though all history were silent, and all romancing discarded, the

<sup>1</sup> See the account in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, and in the *Saga of Olaf Trygvissou*.

<sup>2</sup> *A dögum Harollds hins hárfagra byggðuz Orkneyjar, enn ádr var þar Vikinga-böli.*—*Orkneyinga Saga*.

<sup>3</sup> *Insulas quas Orcades vocant invenit domvitque; dispecta est et Thule.*—Tacitus—"Life of Agricola."

<sup>4</sup> *Quasdam insulas etiam ultra Britanniam in Oceano positas Romano imperio addidit quæ appellantur Orcades.*—Eutropius, Lib. vii.

<sup>5</sup> *Maduerunt Saxone fuso Orcades, incaluit Pictorum sanguine Thule.*—Claud.

<sup>6</sup> *Historia Britonum*, chap. ix., &c.

<sup>7</sup> See *La Mort d'Arthur*, *passim*.

Pagan Picts of the Northern Isles have yet left enduring monuments behind them, whose evidence cannot be gainsaid—the Brochs, monoliths, cairns, and megalithic circles, which, as Malcolm Laing observes, were grey with the moss of ages before the first Norwegian prow touched the shores of Orkney; and the Ogham-inscribed monuments discovered within the last few years establish the facts both of the existence and the Christianisation of those early tribes beyond a doubt.

A lingering belief has indeed come down the ages that the religion of the Cross flourished among the Picts until it was overwhelmed by the torrent of Gothic Paganism, which deluged the islands with the arrival of the Norsemen in the ninth century. It is stated by the Iceland chroniclers that books, bells, and crosiers, left by Irish missionaries, were found there and in Ferøe by the first settlers; and the names of Papa and Papyli, still preserved in Iceland, Orkney, and Shetland, have been regarded (with good reason, as is now apparent) as referring to the retreats of those early Culdee saints.<sup>1</sup> Express reference to their contemporary existence with the Picts is made in a native document, the Diploma of the Genealogy of the Orkney Earls, prepared at Kirkwall, about the year 1453. for King Eric (the Pomeranian), by Thomas, the then “Bishop, by the grace of God and of the Apostolic see, of Orkney and Zetland.” According to this document:—

“In the time of Harold the Hairy (*Comatus*) King of Norway, who was in possession of the entire kingdom, this land or country of the Isles of Orkney was inhabited and cultivated by two nations, namely, the Peti and the Pape (*inhabitata et culta duabus nationibus scilicet Peti et Pape*) which two nations were utterly uprooted and destroyed by the followers of the doughty Prince Rognald, who so pressed upon those nations of the Peti and Pape that none of their posterity remained. But true it is that the land was not then called Orkney, but the land of the Pets, as is clearly verified by a chronicle extant at this day, by the sea dividing Scotland and Orkney, which sea to this day is called the Petland Sea

<sup>1</sup> It may be presumed that in Shetland, before the devastation by the Northmen, the Culdees (*Céli-Dé*) were established at Papal in Unst, Papal in Yell, Papi in Burra; and at Papa Stour (Big), Papa Little, and Papa in the Bay of Scalloway. (See *Orkneyinga Saga*, p. xx.; and also paper by Captain Thomas, R.N., in the Proceedings, vol. xi. part ii.)

(*quod usque ad hodiernum diem mare Petlandicum appellatur*), as distinctly follows in these chronicles. King Harold the Hairy first landed in Shetland with his fleet, and thereafter in Orkney, and conferred the said Orkney and Shetland upon the before-named Prince Rognald the Stout, by whose followers the foresaid two nations were overthrown and destroyed, as our chronicles clearly show."<sup>1</sup>

The *Pets* referred to in the foregoing are obviously the Picts. If there should be any doubt as to who the *Pape* were, it is set at rest by the Icelandic chroniclers. The *Landnámabók*, the colonization register of Iceland, states that—

“Before Iceland was colonised from Norway, men were living there whom the Northmen called *Papas*; they were Christians, and it is thought they came over the sea from the west.”

Ari the Wise repeats the same story, and adds, “It was clear that they were Irishmen.”<sup>2</sup>

This is affirmed further in an ancient document, the *Chronicon Norvegiæ* (evidently the “Chronicle” referred to in the Diploma), which contains a remarkable account of both the *Papas* and the Picts.<sup>3</sup>

Apart, however, from a vague reference to Shetland by the Irish monk Dicuil (A.D. 825), we have only one recorded visit by these Christian missionaries, related by Adamnan, the biographer of St Columba. About

<sup>1</sup> Wallace’s “Account of the Islands of Orkney,” &c., 1700, p. 121.

<sup>2</sup> Orkneyinga Saga. Introduction, pp. xii. xiii.

<sup>3</sup> The *Chronicon Norvegiæ* (of which the only known transcript, bearing to have been the property, in 1554, of Robert Reid, Bishop of Orkney and Zetland, is preserved at Panmure House, in a hand apparently of the 15th century) is almost unknown in this country; but was printed by Professor Munch of Christiania, in his *Symbolæ ad Historiam Antiquiorum Rerum Norvegorum*, 1850. The following passage occurs in it, p. 6 :—

*De Orcadibus Insulis.*

Istas insulas primitus *Peti* et *Pape* inhabitabant. Horum alteri scilicet *Peti* parvo superantes *pigmeos* statura in structuris urbium vespere et mane mira operantes meredie vero cunctis viribus prorsus destituti in subterraneis domunculis prætimore latuerunt. Sed eo tempore non *Orchades* ymmo terra *Petorum* dicebantur, unde adhuc *Petlandicum Mare* ab incolis appellatur quod sejungit insulas a *Scocia*. . . . Qui populus unde illuc adventasset penitus ignoramus. *Pape* vero propter albas vestas quibus ut clerici induebantur vocati sunt, unde in theutonica lingua omnes clerici *Pape* dicuntur. Adhuc quedam insula *Papey* ab illis denominatur.

the year 580, Cormac, one of the followers of the saint, proceeds to the islands, protected by the influence of Columba with Bruidhe Mac Meilkon, King of the Northern Picts, at whose court at the castle on the Ness, a native chief or king (*regulus*) was present at the time of Columba's visit.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the account given of St Cormac's mission is very meagre. What he saw, what he did, and the results, are left unrecorded.

But the Ogham monuments which have been found lately in the islands, coupled with the local traditions, the historical indications referred to, and the early dedications still remaining to saints more Celtic than Scandinavian, while all other Celtic traces have been swept away, leave no doubt as to a Christianity existing in pre-Scandinavian times.

Oghams are, as we know, an occult form of monumental writing practised by the Celtic ecclesiastics of the early Middle Ages. We have seen that the Irish missionaries were no strangers to the Northern Isles in those early ages; and the conclusion is irresistible, both on philological and historic grounds, that these Orkney and Shetland stones are Celtic,—that is to say, the work either of the Irish missionary monks (the *Pape* before referred to), or of native Picts instructed by them. Such being the case, these monuments are necessarily Christian, as is attested further, in the cases where sculpturings occur, by their style of art, and the symbols which they bear. If, therefore, Celtic and Christian, we cannot suppose them to be earlier than the visit of the Celtic missionary Cormac, the contemporary of St Columba, about the year 580 A.D.; nor, unless a Christian remnant can have survived amid the exterminating paganism of the Norsemen, can they be assigned to a later date than the invasion of the latter in the year 872. Their age is thus, presumably, from one thousand to thirteen hundred years.

These Ogham monuments speak to us, therefore, with no uncertain sound, across a wide chasm of time. They are monuments of Celtic Shetland in that early period between the termination of the Roman occupation of Britain and the ascendancy of the Norsemen in Northern Europe; when Anglo-Saxons ruled in England, and Picts and Scots possessed divided sovereignties in Scotland, ere fused into one united nation by the powerful arm of Kenneth Macalpin. These stones also remind us forcibly of that long night of ignorance in which Europe lay, when Iona

<sup>1</sup> Adamnan, *Vita Sancti Columbæ*, Lib. II. cap. xliii.

pierced the gloom by a light which, radiating from it, illumined far and near; when, as so eloquently told by the Count de Montalembert, the Monks of the West penetrated into the remotest regions of the barbarous north, preaching a higher life and a nobler faith.

In all the circumstances, there can be little doubt that this St Ninian's Isle in Shetland was a seat of those Christian heroes a thousand years ago, an isle of saints, a second Iona or Lindisfarn, a centre of light for the adjacent mainland and isles. But all is now gone, without a vestige except this Ogham monument, and the imperishable name of St Ninian, to tell us of their lives, their labours, and their deaths—

“ In Paradiso Ecclesie  
Virtutum ex dulcedine  
Spiramen dat aromatum  
Ninianus cœlestium.”