

*An Account of the Island of Icolumkill.**By the Right Hon. the Earl of Buchan.*

IONA, or Aemona, and in the Gaelic language, I Colm Kill, *i. e.* the burying place and isthmus of Columbus, is a small island about a mile's distance from the south west coast of the island of Mull, situated in $56^{\circ} 59'$ of north latitude. From south to north this little island extends scarce two miles, and only one in breadth. The soil on the east side is very rich, and produces corn and grass, but the west coast is rocky and barren. Saint Columbus, in his voyage from Ireland, landed first upon this Isle, and built there soon after two churches, and as many monasteries: One department for the males, and the other for the females. These were endowed by the kings of Scotland, and of the Isles, the revenue of which amounted to 4000 merks *per annum*.

Iona was the see of the Isles after the Scots lost the Isle of Man, in which King Crathelint erected a church to the honour of our Saviour, called Fanum Sodorense; and from hence the bishops of the Isles were styled *Episcopi Sodorensis*. The vicar of Iona was the parson of Soroby in Tyree, and dean of the Isles. This monastery produced bishops to several dioceses in England and Scotland; and, among others, Aidanus, who came from thence, and was bishop of Lindisfarne, now Holy Island. The life of Columbus is written in the Gaelic, and a copy of it was some years ago in the hands of M'Donald of Benbecula.

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There is a tradition among the inhabitants, that Saint Columbus suffered no women to remain upon the island but such as were devoted to religious celibacy; and that the tradesmen who worked there were obliged to keep their wives in an adjacent isle, called on that account the *women's island*.

Bede, in his Ecclesiastical History, gives the following account of him: In A. D. 565, at the time that Justin the younger succeeded Justinian in the government of the Roman empire, the famous Columbus, a presbyter and abbot, but in habit and manners a monk, came from Ireland to Britain to preach the gospel among the northern provinces of the Picts, that is, to those who, by high and rugged mountains, are separated from the southern provinces; for, on the southern side the Picts, as they affirm themselves, had renounced idolatry and embraced the Christian faith a long time before, and that by the preaching of Ninian, a British bishop, who had been regularly educated at Rome in the sacred mysteries.

In the ninth year of Meilochen, son of Pridius King of the Picts, a most powerful prince, Columbus converted that nation to the faith of Christ by his doctrine, discipline, and sanctity of life.

Upon this account the island of Iona was given him, which, by contraction, is called Hii, to erect a monastery in, which his successors possess at this day, and where he himself was buried in his 77th year, and 32d after his going to Britain to preach the gospel. He also founded monasteries in Ireland and Britain, but that of Iona had justly the preference. The island has a rector, who is always a presbyter abbot, to whose jurisdiction the whole province, and the bishops themselves, ought to be subject, though the thing be unusual, according to the example of that first doctor, who was not a bishop, but a presbyter and monk, and of whose life and doctrines some particu-

lars are said to have been written by his disciples. But, whatever he was, this is certain, that he left successors eminent for their great charity, divine love, and regular institution. Thus far Bede, in lib. iii. cap. iv. of his Ecclesiastical History.

The learned Dr. Henry Foulis, in his History of the Popish Usurpations, declares it his opinion, that Fergus II. about the year 212, did build a famous abbey or monastery at Iona, and a royal place of interment for himself and his successors, which continued the burying place of the kings of Scotland, till the reign of King Malcolm Canmore*; and that this island bore the name of Iona till about the year 600, when Saint Colm or Columbus being dead, King Aidan, who was his pupil, out of the great regard he bore him, interred him in the royal burying ground, repaired and beautified the monastery, which he dedicated to the Saint, and, in honour of his name, called the island I Columb Kill.

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* Our public records are said by Boetius, in his Preface to the Lives of the Bishops of Aberdeen, to have been removed from Icolmkill to the monastery of Restennot, in Forfarshire, by order of King Alexander I. His words are, "Inde (ex Iona insula) sed multos post annos, ut Restenothii munitus est in Angusia, ubi nunc Canonorum D. Augustini, coenobium quod ad Ionam difficilis admodum erat aditus, nostri annales, in de traducti reservantur Alexander I. Rex, eduxit." Hence Restennot is said to have derived its name, "Qua Rex tenebat."

This place of Restennot was remarkable afterwards for its library of manuscripts, which was carried off or destroyed by the army of Edward I. of England.—Spottiswood's History, page 50.

Pope Honorius III. directed a Bull to Gregory Bishop of Brechin, and Germanus Prior of Restennot; and another to the same Bishop, and John Prior of this House.—Chartulary of Dryburgh, in the Earl of Buchan's possession, No. 28 and 31.

The present remains upon the island, of buildings, appear to have been the work of succeeding ages, and to have received, from time to time, many additions. The church of St. Mary has a handsome choir and steeple in the middle, with two aisles adjoining, forming, in all, the exact figure of a cross. The steeple, three stories high, stands on four arches adorned with works in basso relievo. Two of these arches are 22 feet in length, the breadth, viz. of the church, within the walls; the other two are $16\frac{3}{4}$ feet; the breadth of the aisles adjoining, each of which is 30 feet in length; the church and choir, with the width of the arch supporting the steeple, are 140 feet in length. The steeple, which you ascend by a narrow winding stair of hewn stone, is almost entire, and some of the roof timbers are still remaining. In the uppermost storey is a circular window, lozenge-shaped by arches of polished stone meeting in the center, and forming an equal number of oblique spherical triangles, so artfully contrived, that they admit of abundance of light, yet exclude the wind and rain. The south wall of the church rises in very great pillars, wrought according to the different orders, in which are cast arches, each having at the top arched above, and the whole admits light to very near the top of the wall, which is mostly entire; and, where light fails, are seen on the outside of it, the remains of buildings once joined to the wall.

Adjoining to the north wall stands the building now called the College. The arch of the common hall is still entire, as is the area paved with hewn stone, and having galleries, and the remains of separate apartments for the students. To the north of these lie the ruins of the houses of the religious.

Within the church, in the north west corner, by the wall built across under the arch supporting the steeple, is shewn a large hole near as high as the side wall, into which they say St Columbus was

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went to retire to prayer at stated hours. By the wall at the east end stands a piece of white marble, five feet square, supposed to be the altar, or communion table; one corner is pretty much broke by the inhabitants, who, thinking it to be a relic of St Columbus, imagine it to be a preservative from diseases, either in man or beast. Near this, on the north side of the choir, is a grave stone of black marble, quite entire, on which, in a very fine basso relievo lies Abbot Macfingone in his sacred garb, with a crozier in his hand, elbowing two lions at one end, and spurning two at the other. This curious remain is supported by four props a foot in height, and round the edge of the stone is the following inscription:

+ HIC + JACET + JOHANNES MACFFINGON
 ABBAS DE Ij + Obiit Anno MD.
 Cujus Animo propicietur Altissimis. Amen.

Just opposite to this, on the other side, stands another of common free stone, done after the same manner, for Abbot M'Kenzie, but much defaced. Within a small building, close by the choir and joined to it on the south side, lies buried Lauchlan Macfingon, father of Abbot John, under a plain black stone, with this inscription in British characters.

Hæc est Crux Lauchlani Macfingon et ejus filij
 Johannis Abbatis de Ij facta Anno Dom.
 MCCCCLXXXIX.

West from this, at a small distance, lies a stone much impaired by time, with an inscription in the same character, but very ancient, and without a date, it not being customary ever to add a date, even to a charter,

charter, till the days of King Robert Bruce, but to ascertain the evidence by reputable witnesses. The inscription runs thus:

Hic jacet Angusius filius Angusii Maic Dom-
 linaab Dominii d Jla.

Within a little enclosure of stone, near the west end of the choir, on the north side, lies a grave stone very much broke, and sunk in ruins, where St Columbus's body is supposed to be interred. Not far from thence to the northward, before the entrance to a small vault, which they say runs a great way under the buildings, stands a statue of an abbot, called by the country people, who see nothing of the figure of the man, *Abbe Gamachbaffacta*. Near this is an inscription without a date, thus;

Hic jacet Johannes Betonius Maclenerum Familiae Me-
 dicus qui obiit.

Ecce cadit Jaculo victrici mortis inique
 Qui toties alios solvit ipse malis.

Fronting the body of the church, on the south side, is the burying place of the Chieftains, where are several grave stones, with men in armour in basso relievo, without any inscription visible, but supposed to be of the Macleods, Macguaries, and Macleans of Dowart, but I think more probably of the Scottish Kings, whose tombs extend to the westward in a row, without any monument or inscription remaining, except one on a large stone, which seems to have had a long inscription on it, but defaced. One of them appears above
 ground;

ground; and has on its edge the following antique inscription in the British character.

Cormac Ulfhadda hic est situs.

That is, Cormac Barbatus, or long bearded, lies here interred. Cormac Macaird, one of the kings of Ireland, who, according to Dr. Keating, in his *Notitia Hyberniæ*, was buried here in 213.

On the fourth side of the choir, a few paces west, stands a cross, of one solid stone, overgrown with moss, 14 feet 9 inches high, 6 feet broad, and 6 feet thick; fixed on a pedestal of one stone, 2 feet high above the ground, on which are hewn three slopes like steps of stairs quite round. A few paces north of the cross stand the walls of Rolie Oufan, or Oufan's Reliques or Chapel, 60 feet long and 20 broad. And east from this, at a small distance, lies a stone almost sunk in the ground, with an inscription, thus;

Hic jacet quatuor Priores una.

South from St. Mary's church to the nunnery, runs, to the distance of 300 paces or upwards, a causeway in pretty good repair, cut by another across to the shore. Betwixt the church and nunnery stands another cross 10 feet high, 14 inches broad, and 4 thick, without any inscription.

The nunnery appears good even in its decayed state; the walls standing are nearly of an equal height all round, with an area inclosed, and paved with hewn stones. In the eastern part is a spring arch, which covers the whole breadth of the main building, all entire.

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The South-East view of the
Cathedral in Icolmkill.
Taken from the Original Drawing which
was taken on the spot A.D. 1761
By the Right Honorable
Isabella Countess Dowager of Buchan

David Stewart Esq. de Candry's Seat Clonsilla in the County of Down.

fire. On the ground is a black marble stone, on which is an alto relievo of a prioress, with *Sancta Maria, ora Pro Me*, and round the figure, in old British characters, this inscription :

Hic jacet Domina Anna Donaldi Ferleti filia, quondam Priorissa de Iona, que obiit A. D. MDXI. cujus animam Abrahamo commendamus.

