

II.

NOTES ON NORTH MULL (SECOND COMMUNICATION). BY PROFESSOR DUNS,
D.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

SCULPTURED STONES.

In many of the old graveyards of most parts of the West Highlands one or more examples occur of memorial slabs, popularly known as "Iona Stones." To the inquiry, "Why are they so named?" the ready answer is, "Because they were brought from Iona." All are agreed on this point; but, on pushing inquiry further, great difference of opinion comes out. Some hold they were carried away from the sacred isle without leave asked, at a time when "might was right"; others that they were originally sent to the several districts by the Iona brethren to mark their high sense of the worth, zeal, and devotion to duty of those on whose graves they rest; while others hold that they were simply marketable articles which, with their quaint devices, elaborate tracery, symbolic representation, and varying degree of art-feeling, had been prepared by a section of the Iona brotherhood, who by this craft had their living. This last view was well put by an intelligent man who seemed greatly interested in my rubbings. "They were brought from Iona," he said, "just as we bring big (*i.e.*, worked monumental) stones from Glasgow." As guessing is quite legitimate here and may be useful, I venture another—they may be no more than the fruit of local art. The type is widespread, but the modifications of the type are so many and of such a kind that it is little likely the specimens came from the hands of men limited to one narrow locality. I have examined a great many more stones than those of which rubbings are shown, but I have never found, either in Mull or on the mainland, two precisely alike. If these were local products, not only must the comparatively advanced art-feeling have been very general, but the power also to express it must have been well educated. No doubt each pattern must, as a whole, have been both

present to the artist and also put on the stone before the work of carving began.

I do not intend at present to do much more than show to the Society several rubbings and drawings from some of these, made by me in Mull graveyards. I am indebted to a Fellow of the Society, Mr Thornton Shiells, architect, for the admirable rendering of the latter, now on the wall. The references to the characteristic ornament of these stones by the Rhind Lecturer in 1880, and the publication of Mr Drummond's *Sculptured Monuments in Iona and the West Highlands*, 1881, as a supplementary volume of the *Archæologia Scotica*, could not fail to direct more attention to this kind of art than had been given formerly in Scotland. Dr Anderson's lectures led me to think that North Mull, of whose antiquities we had almost no record, might furnish examples of interest in connection with several questions suggested to me while listening to them. For example, assuming it to have been demonstrated that the broad, yet sharply defined, difference between the Celticism of the monumental art on the east of Scotland, shown chiefly in band interlacements and spirals, sometimes simple, often wondrously intricate, but always not ungraceful, and the chief feature of the monumental art of the West Highlands, namely, its foliaceous scroll-work—work in which even the interspaces formed by the twisting stems are often leaf-shaped—might not this area, from its proximity to Iona, supply differences in other particulars? Or, perhaps, might it not furnish instances suggestive of a development, however unlikely this at first may appear, of the foliaceous scroll-work, with its softer feeling, out of the purely Celtic ornament, as the expression of growth in the direction of the appreciation of the warmth of natural beauty, as distinguished from the cold, though chaste, effects of variedly intertwining lines? On this supposition a new significance might be assigned to the ornamentation of the numerous slabs on which both styles occur. For example, the spaces between the recumbent effigy of Maclean of Coll at Iona (Drummond's *Sculptured Monuments*, plate xli.) and the sides of the slab are filled in with specimens of interlacement, zoomorphic ornament, and also with foliaceous work. Again,

on a Kilmory slab figured by Drummond (plate lxvii.), highly expressed zoomorphic, interlaced, and phyllomorphic ornamentation occur together. Many more instances might be given whose significance, from this point of view, is increased by the fact that there are contemporary slabs on which only one type is given, as on that at Iona, bearing the effigy of Maclean of Lochbuy (plate xlii.), and in that at Kilmory with the effigy of a man in armour (plate lxiv.) Again, does the sunk panel on the edge of the St Vigean's Stone, which in all other respects well illustrates the Eastern type, with its "running scroll of foliaceous ornaments with lanceolate leaves, and a triplet of fruit repeated on each side of the wavy stem" (Dr Anderson), warrant this query?¹ Do the insular specimens differ much from those on the mainland; and if so, have we material by which to trace the modifications from the islands to the mainland, or from the latter to the former? For example, if the eastern part of Scotland was the area within which the leading characteristics of Celtic art had their highest and purest expression, can we trace its extension westward, and point to anything that seems to imply variation of type in proportion to distance from the chief area of expression? Moreover, were not the great land-lines along which pilgrims in early times moved from the east, south-east, and north-east, to Iona, in the main identical with those in use till very recently—lines which converged at the old Ferry to Kerrera, and thence by Auchnacraig along the south side of Loch Scriden to the sacred isle? Have these routes been searched with sufficient care for instances of early decorative stonework? Two years ago I looked at the south-western land-end of one route, which, gathering up many subordinate lines, ultimately passes by Kingussie and Loch Laggan to the

¹ To compare small things with great, the truth I wish to indicate here as suggested by this kind of work is strikingly put by Ruskin with reference to the noted west window of Dunblane Abbey—"I know not anything so perfect in its simplicity, and so beautiful, as far as it reaches, in all the Gothic with which I am acquainted. And just in proportion to his power of mind, that man was content to work under Nature's teaching; and instead of putting a merely formal dogtooth, as everybody else did at the time, he went down to the woody bank of the sweet river beneath the rocks on which he was building, and he took up a few of the leaves that lay by it, and he set them on his arch, side by side, for ever."

head of Loch Linnhe, and in this I found both slabs covered with

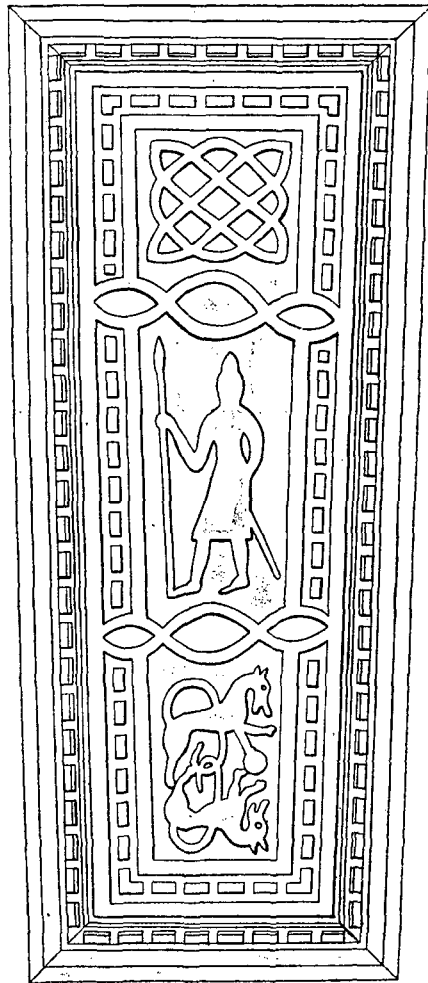


Fig. 1. Recumbent Slab at Dalmally.

foliaceous ornament, and slabs also on which forms associated with purest Celticism are highly expressed. The same remark may be made as to another great route — that, namely, in which the lines converge in the neighbourhood of Dalmally, where the copies of sculptured slabs now shown (figs. 1 and 2) were obtained. But, to resume my queries, Was this foliaceous scroll-work only a foreign introduction, and in no sense a native growth? Is it the fruit of southern influence on northern (in this case, Scandinavian) art? And did these meet when the latter was still rude compared with the Celtic ornamentation of eastern Scotland, though characterised by much that must have marked its earliest stages? (Drawings of early Scandinavian art, pagan and Christian, were exhibited.)

I have found this "Socratic mode" of dealing with these topics per-

sonally profitable and stimulating. It keeps one free from dogmatism. It indicates hesitancy as regards the acceptance of the present *status questionis* as to the origin of the difference between the early decorative stone-work of the east and west of Scotland, and as to their connection or total want of connection. And it concentrates one's own attention on aspects and elements which both call for further illustration, and suggest that we have not yet nearly exhausted the materials, a fuller if not a perfect knowledge of which seems necessary in order to a satisfactory integration. Moreover, there are features in the drawings and rubbings now shown to the Society which fully warrant the more important of these queries:—

1. *Tobermory*.—(1) A slab, 7 feet by 1 foot 10 inches, surrounded by a 3-inch moulding, consisting of three plain bands, lying outside of an inch wide space near the ornamentation, from which it is separated by a narrow plain band. This space is, on the lower part of the slab, ornamented at regular intervals with triple circles, lozenges, and squares. At the bottom of the slab is a panel, 2 feet 2 inches broad, filled with foliageous work, consisting of four inter-twisting stems with recurved clasping leaves, a pattern not uncommon on the stones in Iona. Above this a

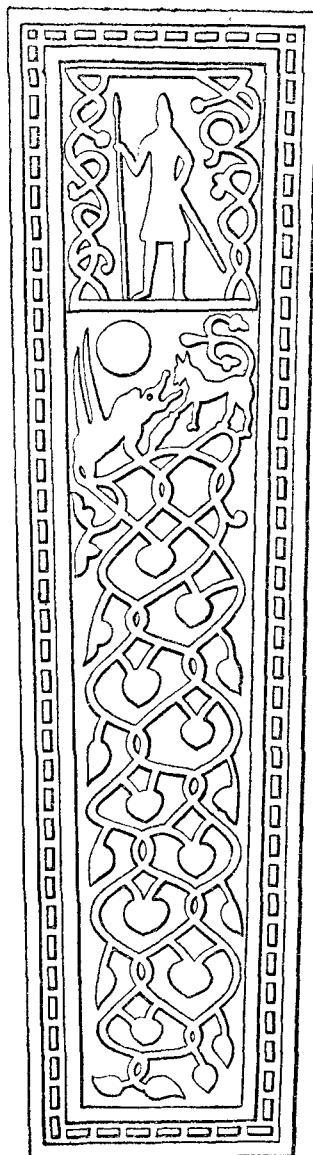


Fig. 2. Recumbent Slab at Dalmally.

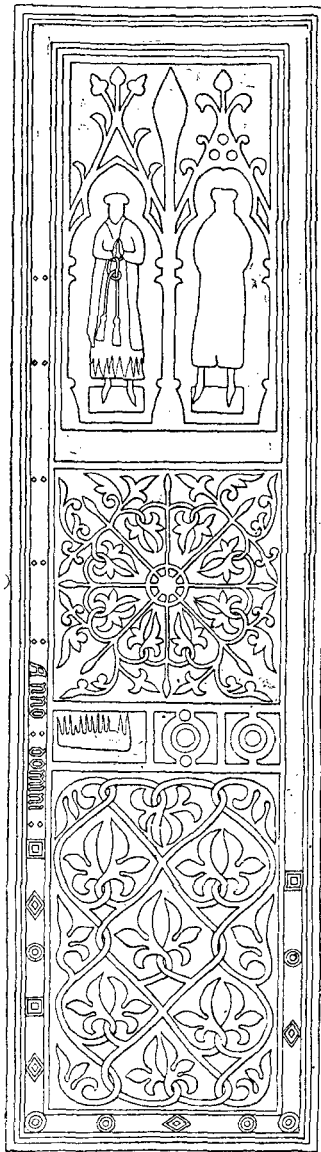


Fig. 3. Recumbent Slab at Tobermory.

4-inch wide panel runs across the stone, bearing the figure of a single-edged comb, and of two circular objects, which, if intended for mirrors, are unlike any I have seen. Higher up is another panel, $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 17, filled also with foliaceous work, arranged so as to produce a very graceful effect. In the centre are two concentric circles, the diameter of the outer being $3\frac{1}{8}$ inches, and that of the inner 2 inches. Towards these eight floriated rods, with sub-spatulate points, proceed from near the edge of the panel, at regular intervals, and pass through the circumference of both circles, but do not proceed to the centre, which is left free. These rods are united by the intertwisting of a single leaf of one with a single leaf of another throughout the eight, these leaves presenting to each other a concave edge, while the rest are left free. The uppermost panel is 2 feet 3 inches by 1 foot 4 inches, and consists of a double Gothic canopy, the niches containing two figures in the attitude of prayer (fig. 3). The centre pillar bears a pear-shaped finial, and the pointed arches of the niches are terminated by the *fleur de lis*. This slab has had an inscription in old English characters, which, however, is so much defaced that only the words ANNO DOMINI can

be made distinctly out. (2) In the same churchyard there is a fragment of a slab, bearing a square pattern of floriated work. In the middle of this square are two concentric circles, the diameter of the outer being $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches, that of the inner 1 inch. These are surrounded by eight floriated rods placed at equal distances, and arranged around the edge of the outer circle in such a manner that, by a series of single twists, all the rods are united. The effect is pretty, though simple.

2. *Kilmore*.—This beautiful stone is a little more than 5 feet 4 inches long by $11\frac{1}{2}$ inches at the bottom and 10 inches at the top. The graceful head-piece is 13 inches at its widest part. The ornamentation occurs on both sides, showing that the slab was originally an upright. Its socket was sought for in vain. Taking the side on which there is a representation of the crucifixion as the *obverse*, after copying it I managed with a strong stick to turn the stone and found the *reverse*, prettily sculptured also. Above it was covered with moss, and below it rested on fine loam. The ornamentation, with the exception of the cross, had thus been well protected, and is in a high state of preservation, the lines being sharp and definite. The foliageous work on the obverse consists of one stem, the ends of which are free at the figures,¹ held to represent Mary and John, on each side of the cross (fig. 4). The two parts then pass down the stone, throwing off branching tendrils outside, and filling the interspaces with twisted branches, terminating in small recurved leaves. At the bottom they end in a knot, resembling the figure eight, in a horizontal position. Below this knot is the shears ornament lying in the same way, having on each side the representation of an article, 7 inches long, with scissor-like blade at the end, and below the blade a loop. Having been asked to address the Tobermory Young Men's Improvement Association, it occurred to me that I might get some information, if not specimens, of interest, by speaking to them of the antiquities of the district. This I did,² and when showing some rubbings from sculptured slabs, I asked if any one could explain these looped figures? A day or

¹ Not shown in the cut.

² Alexander Allan, Esq. of Aros, in the Chair.

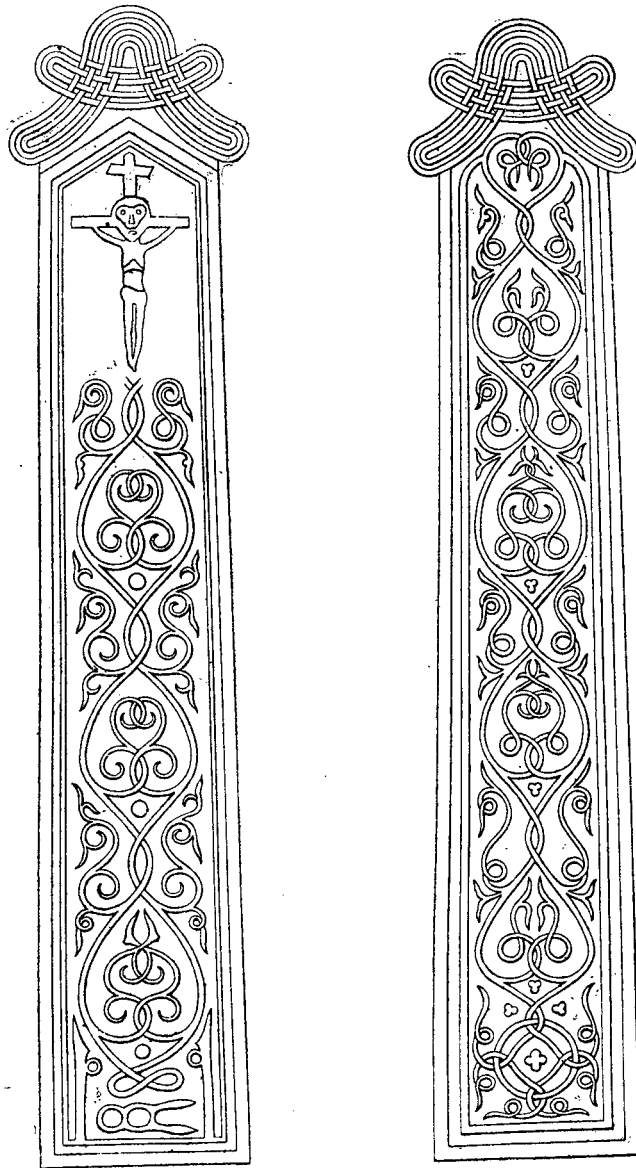


Fig. 4. Cross at Kilmore, Mull.

two after a friend who was present received the following note from an intelligent Celt:—"You spoke of the figure to the right and near the bottom of the impression, which the doctor did not understand. I think I have discovered what it represents, viz., the cuigeal used for spinning thread of this shape [a figure is given of one he had seen]. The lint or wool is fastened to the top, and the bottom is fastened by the waist belt. The left hand is brought across outside the staff, when the right propelled the twister." Other friends were careful to explain to me the old *cuigeal is fearsid*—distaff and spindle—and promised to get me examples, but do not seem to have succeeded. At the top of the slab a small Latin cross is represented springing from the middle of the transome of the large cross.

The ends of the winding stem on the reverse start from a 5-inch diameter circle, to which they are fastened by two short unattached tendrils. A small quatrefoil is in the centre of this circle, and a trefoil at each side of the median line of the stone, just a little above the circle. Others occur in this line in interspaces formed by the twisting of the stem, whose ends are free at the top, where they curve gracefully over each other. The ornamentation on both sides might have been suggested by vetches with branching tendrils, examples of which are at present met with in the neighbourhood. The head-piece of this stone is unlike anything I have seen before. It is formed by two protracted ovals of unequal length, one being 20 inches by 2 inches, the other 10 inches by 2½ inches. The centre of the former rises from the middle of the stone, near the leaf work, into a device, 6 inches by 4 inches at its widest part, assumes after a little a curve, the convex being distal to the stone, and passes to the edges where it presents a blunted oval, projecting 2 inches at the sides. The shortest lies across this, curved upwards. Each of the ovals consists of two free endless bands, those of the one oval interlacing with those of the other at the places where they touch, and producing an exceedingly simple yet pleasing effect.

3. *Kilminian*.—(1) A slab, 6 feet by 16 inches. At the top a panel with a large circular cross of interlaced work surrounded with four smaller

crosses of the same, from which the running pattern of four intertwined stems rises, which nearly fills the rest of the slab. The interspaces formed by the intertwisting are filled with a conventional leaf pattern, while on the outside of the stem, at the place of twisting, are leaves curving towards the edge of the stone. At the bottom is the so-called tallet, and at right angles to it the shears. (2) In the same churchyard is another slab ornamented with four intertwined stems, each sending off near the junction tendrils which intertwist, and four spaces filled with foliage. Both have a strong resemblance to an Iona slab figured by Drummond (plate xvi.), though the foliaceous work of both present considerable differences in detail. This slab is much defaced at the bottom, but near it a well-marked small Latin cross can be made out.

4. *Kilmailean*.—This old graveyard is situated on the northern slope of Glen Aros, about half a mile from the highway between Tobermory and Salen, and a little less from the River Aros. The spot is wild and lonely, and the view from it exceedingly grand. Indeed, this grandeur and extent of view is characteristic of all the burial-places to which I have referred. (1) Slab, 6 feet by $1\frac{1}{2}$ foot. Four intertwined running stems, which rise from animal forms too much defaced to be made out. In the lower part, branchlets lie both inside and outside of the ovals formed by the intertwisting. This foliaceous work fills the stone, with the exception of a panel 1 foot square at the top, which is filled with five circular crosses of interlaced work, a large one in the centre, and a small one at each corner. The main stems of the lower part of the ornament rise and form this square, throwing off leafy branchlets at the spaces between the small circles. The pattern is rare and pretty. The slab is surrounded with a double roll moulding, a row of the nail-head ornament lying between. The figure of a sword lies in the median line of the foliaceous work. (2) Fragment of a slab, 23 inches by 11 inches. Ornament, a pretty undulating stem with semicircular branchlets, which terminate in a distinctly marked trefoil. Part of the blade of a sword in the median line of the stone, not touched by the ornament. I have been struck with the absence of the sword from the great majority of the

North Mull slabs. They contrast strongly in this respect with those on the mainland. Kilinailean is the only churchyard in which I found them. (3) A small monumental slab, with the figure of a child's skull exceedingly well outlined.

5. *Pennygown*, near the Sound of Mull, at the opening of Glen Forsa. (1) An upright slab, 3 feet 2 inches by 1 foot 2 inches at bottom and 1 foot at the top, surrounded with flat moulding, running pattern of foliageous work on one stem, which is so bent as to form subcircular spaces, inside of which are three trifoliate branchlets, the form of the centre leaf being pointed oblong, that of the other two rounded. The ends of the twigs outside the circle vary, being either like those inside or having one or two oblong leaves. The stem proceeds from the tail of a griffin at the bottom of the slab. This has a strong resemblance to the Iona stone figured by Drummond (plate xxxvi.), and bearing the date 1489 A.D. There is, however, the usual variations in the ornament. On the other side of this slab there is a figure of the Virgin and Child, standing in a niche-like space formed by the naked stem, which runs into a subcircular space above the figure, having branchlets so disposed inside as to suggest the St Catherine's wheel. The stone terminates in blunted ovals at each side, with a slight rise between them. (2) A slab 5 feet by 13½ inches, surrounded by a raised band of nail-head moulding. The foliageous work is much defaced, but enough can be seen to show that it had been unusually elaborate. The shears ornament lies across the stone at the bottom.

6. *Claodh Mhuire, Calgary*.—A slab, 16 inches by 5½ inches, with a cross of different shape and size on each side—modifications of the Latin cross.

Looking, then, at the sculpturing of the slabs to which the attention of the Society has been called, one or two brief remarks may be made in conclusion. (1) Apart altogether from the quality of the art which they illustrate, the fact of its prevalence for a considerable number of years in the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland suggests the presence in these districts throughout those years of an art-feeling not perhaps suffi-

ciently appreciated. If, as is the case, the style has long passed away, can we assign any reason for this? Or has a style of popular monumental decoration come in such as to warrant the conclusion that an artistic taste of equal merit has taken the place of the lost style? It seems to me that the answers to both queries must be negative. (2) The occurrence in the same area of the characteristic elements of the pure alongside of the so-called debased type may, perhaps, be accounted for in two ways—(a) Two original growths, of home or of foreign origin, may have met in the area, and of purpose been associated by the workmen in order to one definite effect. Or (b) an early native product might gradually assume forms of expression so widely divergent from the original as to retain only slight hints of the root from which it had sprung. To be able to point to the occurrence of the same forms in other areas near or remote has, of course, little force, because identical tendencies may work in countries widely remote, and general resemblances will result. In either case, however, the question of improvement or of degradation would remain to be argued. If so, and supposing there were no broken links in the chain, the weight of the inference would depend on the quality of the last link. Would it be outside the limits of all likelihood even to suppose that such ornamentation as that of the Kilmore slab might, at least, suggest a progress from certain Celtic elements up to the foliaceous ornament of the early Gothic? But be this as it may, I am sure it falls in with Ruskin's *dictum*—"All good art has the capacity of pleasing, if people will attend to it." (3) Another feature of the art on these slabs has greatly interested me. I refer to the very frequent divergence from symmetrical pattern which they exhibit, not only without offence to the eye, but evidently with the view of satisfying it, and suggesting what scope there is, even in work of this kind, for free and unconventional treatment. "Nature abhors equality and similitude, just as much as foolish men love them" (Ruskin). And there can be no doubt, the artist who worked with diverging spirals practised the same liberty in order to a corresponding result (Anderson's *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, 2nd series, p. 116, the "Shandwick Stone"). (4) It seems to me that we have on the

whole, not absolutely, a safe guide for inferences touching degradation when we find types and instances burdened with an element which outrages taste. As, for example, when the tails of nondescript animals lengthen into stems 4 or 5 feet long, or expand into leaves from whose apex stems proceed. But while this is so, I think a good plea might be urged in favour of advance, even in connection with some subdued instances of this, just as the same might be in connection with the treatment of diverging spirals, by making a leaf supersede the characteristic "trumpet." I hazard the remark, feeling, however, the uncertainty of the ground!

In the foregoing notes it has not been forgotten that one would have to go much farther afield, than the very limited area now before us, for facts to warrant trustworthy generalisations touching the points now referred to. Besides, only a very small part of a very large subject has been before us, and even that in fragments. Perhaps it should not even have been touched from a *quasi* speculative point of view. My apology is, that having made the notes of facts in which I have long taken much interest, it seemed expedient to try to indicate the thoughts which, to me, seem to underly them.

CHAPELS.

In all the churchyards where rubbings were made, the remains of small chapels occur. That of Pennygown is in the best state of preservation. The walls are still standing, and present an exceedingly rude appearance. Though both lime and "worked" stones have been employed in the building, the walls show far less art than do those of some of the forts in which neither is found. Inside measurement, 39 feet $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches by 18 feet. The arched doorway, which is in the north-west side, is 6 feet 5 inches in height, with simple roll moulding. At the spring of the arch outside it is 4 feet 5 inches, with a splay inside of 1 foot 3 inches. The door itself seems to have been fastened on the inside, where three holes occur in one side. There are, however, no traces of corresponding holes on the other. The three windows are round-headed lancet, com-

paratively small and rude, but so set as to present an effective appearance outside. The chapels in the other churchyards have been about the same size.

CRANNOG.

The discovery of a crannog on the occasion of draining *Loch na Meal* (Loch of the Deer) for agricultural purposes is described by G. F. Campbell, Esq., in a letter to the late Dr John Stuart, printed in the eighth volume of the Society's *Proceedings*. In addition to the information communicated by Mr Campbell, I was told by an intelligent man that pieces of iron slag occurred near the burn that now drains the former site of the lake. But on visiting the place I found that fragments of heavy, compact, dark-blue trap, with irregularly disseminated large patches of felspar, had been mistaken for slag. The carbonic acid in the atmosphere acting on and removing the lime in the felspar, gave to the trap the slaggy appearance seen in the specimens now shown. I was anxious also to trace the fine canoe formed from the solid, to which reference is made by Mr Campbell, and of which I heard a good deal in the district, but the search was in vain. Its last appearance was on the pier at Tobermory, near which it was sunk in the water to keep it from the decay which had set in when exposed. It is believed by some to have drifted seaward, and by others to be still near at hand. Any how, it is as much lost to us as the Spanish gold in the lockers of the "Florida," sunk in the same bay. Not unlikely they may be found by some after generation lying side by side, and the Armada men be credited with the latest use of this sort of vessel!