

I.

THE KILMICHAEL-GLASSRIE BELL-SHRINE. BY DANIEL
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Among the valuable ecclesiastical relics which enrich the collections of the Society, the beautiful bell-case or shrine, with its enclosed iron bell, from Kilmichael-Glassrie, Argyllshire, claims special attention, not only as a choice specimen of mediæval art, but as an illustration of the fashion of enshrining bells of primitive Celtic saints, which appears to have been one of the characteristic practices peculiar to the Celtic branch of the early Christian Church, alike in Scotland and Ireland. It was accidentally discovered about the year 1814, by workmen gathering stones for the construction of a dyke, on Torrebhlaurn farm, in the parish of Kilmichael-Glassrie; and was presented to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1826, by John Macneill, Esq. of Oakfield, on one of whose farms it had been found.

The place where this interesting discovery was made, about a mile and a half from the parish church, is described as situated on the acclivity of a mountain, about thirty feet from the base, on a spot covered with large blocks of stone, and too steep to have been the site of any building. Near this spot, and about the same time, was also found the chain, with a Maltese cross attached to it, which was presented to the Society along with the bell-shrine, and has ever since been appended to it. It has accordingly been reasonably conjectured that the objects thus accidentally brought to light were deposited in the narrow and sequestered valley where they were found, at some period of danger, for the purpose of concealment.

The bell itself is an unusually small specimen of the primitive square clagan, or iron bell, so intimately associated with early Celtic hagiology, measuring only $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches high. It is no doubt of a much earlier date than the elaborately decorated reliquary or shrine in which it is enclosed. When found, the bottom of the shrine was covered by a thin plate of brass, perforated with a hole large enough to admit the finger, and firmly secured to it by pins of the same metal. On the

removal of this the iron bell was disclosed within, with the greatly decayed remains of a piece of woollen cloth in which it had been wrapped.

Since the presentation of this beautiful relic to the Society, upwards of half a century ago, its collections have been enriched with many examples of the primitive Scottish and Irish hand-bells; including the singularly interesting bell of St Fillan, restored to Scotland, and placed under the Society's charge, in 1870, after an absence of upwards of seventy years. But none of them at all equals in beauty the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell encased in its remarkable shrine.

The discovery of this interesting relic within an important Celtic area, rich in ancient monumental remains, naturally suggests the idea of its workmanship being assignable to the same ingenious artificers to whom we owe so many fine examples of early Irish and Scottish art; and Dr Joseph Anderson has suggested the possibility of identifying it as the bell of St Moluag of Lismore, a contemporary of St Columba, the legend of the making of which for the use of the saint is narrated in the Aberdeen Breviary.¹ The *Bachuill More*, or crosier of St Moluag, after remaining for centuries in charge of its hereditary custodiers, who were popularly designated the Barons of Bachuill, and possessed a small freehold estate by right of its tenure, was given up by the last of the race to the present Duke of Argyll, in return for new titles to enable him to dispose of the freehold. The venerable relic is in a sorely dilapidated condition, despoiled of its costly ornaments, and retaining little trace of the art bestowed on its construction; but, with the recovery of St Fillan's bell, and the restoration to Scotland of his pastoral staff, it is a pleasant fancy to indulge the belief that here also is not only the ancient crozier, but the highly prized bell of St Moluag of Lismore.

The legend of the making of St Moluag's bell tells of the saint's application to a neighbouring smith to fashion a bell for the services of his church. The smith pleaded the want of coals as a reason for his inability to comply with the demand; whereupon the saint gathered a bundle of rushes, and so the bell was fabricated, which continued to be

¹ *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, p. 208.

a prized relic in the church of Lismore in the sixteenth century, when the Aberdeen Breviary was compiled. But this legend refers to the primitive iron bell, of rudest fashion ; the *quadrata ferream campanam*, of which the one still enclosed in the Kilmichael-Glassrie shrine is a sample of unusually diminutive proportions and primitive rudeness, whether it be the actual bell of St Moluag, or the relic of some other local saint. The beautiful bell-case, or shrine, in which it is enclosed, is the product of a much later period ; and its workmanship is so transitional in character, that it is difficult to determine for it a specific date or school of art. The enclosed iron bell is a genuine Celtic ecclesiastical relic, fully according with the place of its discovery ; and the native origin which we would willingly ascribe to the shrine receives partial confirmation from the occurrence on its sides of the familiar interlaced ribbon-pattern, and also an interlaced cross, both highly characteristic of Celtic art, though by no means limited to it.

Interlaced ribbon-patterns occur on Saxon and other MSS. of a much earlier date ; as on the beautifully illuminated St Denis Bible, a MS. of the ninth century, in the Paris Library, formerly the *Bibliothèque Royale* ; and on another fine MS. of the tenth century at Rheims : both reproduced in Sylvester's *Palæography*. The same style of ornamentation is also very familiar to us on the Scottish sculptured stones, with the frequent transformation of the ribbons into intertwined snakes and other zoomorphic forms ; but no very definite date can be deduced from a style of ornamentation which continued to be employed in Scottish Celtic art down to the eighteenth century. Other portions of the decoration of the bell-shrine, though devoid of local character, are more suggestive as to date ; and when taken into consideration along with the prevailing style of workmanship, confirm the idea of its being the product of an artificer of the twelfth century, a period when unusual activity prevailed in ecclesiastical art-work. But the predominant characteristics of its ornamentation are not such as would suggest native Celtic art if the place of its discovery were unknown. There is, indeed, so much diversity of character in the various devices of ribbon-pattern, or runic knot-work,—as it was long the fashion to call it,—interlaced cross, scroll, and lozenge patterns, that I must leave it to some more experienced

student of ecclesiastical antiquities, aided by the valuable collections formed in recent years, to determine both its school and precise date. These, however, are now problems of much easier solution than they were at the period when this beautiful relic was first brought under the Society's notice.

The collections now forming at the South Kensington Museum are already rich in specimens of mediæval art; and the attention latterly given to the study of sacred iconography, and to ecclesiastical art generally, have no doubt led to such a familiarity with the details of the various schools and periods, that a reference of the interesting relic in question to some among those who have specially devoted themselves to this branch of archæology would no doubt lead to more reliable conclusions than could be hoped for at the period of its discovery. Then, indeed, Dr Hibbert had no hesitation in pronouncing both the ornamentation on the bell-case, and the crown worn by the Saviour, to be "decidedly Norwegian."¹ The Rev. J. S. Howson also, comparing them at a later date with the abundant remains of native Celtic art, and finding, or rather assuming, that "the scroll-work on the bell-case, and the figure of our Saviour, are closely similar to the corresponding representations on the Argyllshire crosses,"² instead of being led thereby to ascribe both to native artists, assigned them to the Scandinavian invaders, who were chiefly instrumental in the destruction of early Christian art, alike in Iona and on the neighbouring mainland.

In reality, the scroll-work on the ground plate behind the figure of the Crucifixion, and on the back of the case, has equally little of a Scandinavian or a Celtic character, except in so far as any Scandinavian element may be looked for in Norman art. This portion of the ornamentation is very like good Norman work, such as is seen on the mitre of St Thomas à Becket. Again, in the peculiar alternating pattern of the side borders, it is interesting to note the recurrence of an ornament which occurs as a marginal one in Arundel MS. No. 60, on an Anglo-Saxon staff, and which Professor J. A. Westwood has ascribed to the latter part of the eleventh century. It is really a lozenge pattern along the

¹ *Archeol. Scot.*, vol. iv. p. 119.

² *Transactions of Cambridge Camden Soc.*, vol. i. p. 177.

edges, only half of which shows on either front, except at the bottom, where it is complete. But the curious admixture of such square and lozenge patterns, with the flowing arabesque on the front, and the cross and interlaced ribbon-patterns on the side, add to the difficulty of assigning a specific date to the work as a whole.

Again, the figure of the crucified Saviour is peculiar; and so far from presenting any close similarity to the representations which occur on the Argyllshire crosses, as asserted by the Rev. J. S. Howson; it differs alike in design and execution from any Celtic work known to me. It is greatly superior to the Christ, in bronze gilt, on the front of the Guthrie bell.¹ The actual bell, in that case, also is one of the primitive square bells of hammered iron; but its elaborate encasings and decorations, in bronze and silver, with niello-work and gilding, are of various dates and styles of workmanship. Externally the bell is now chiefly of silver, and inscribed in characters of the fourteenth century, with the name of the owner, or artificer, JOHANNES ALEXANDRI, by whom its latest transformation was effected. But the central figure, representing the Crucifixion, differs essentially from the surrounding ones, and is manifestly of earlier date. Another figure in bronze, attached to the right side of the bell, is an ecclesiastic in a plain sleeveless gown, holding a book to his breast with the left hand. This is more distinctly Celtic in character, and still more archaic in its style of art. Those bronze figures probably represent the ornamentation of an earlier bell-shrine. Instead of the crown of thorns, the crucified Saviour is represented wearing a curious head-dress more nearly resembling a Scottish bonnet; and if it be accepted as a characteristic specimen of native art, it bears no resemblance to the Christ crowned with a regal diadem on the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell. A comparison of the latter figure with any of the analogous examples of early Celtic art in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy will, I think, in like manner, show an essential diversity of style. The most characteristic features of the bell in the Society's collection are indeed more suggestive of comparison with some of the beautiful Limoges enamel work. The figure of Christ is, at any rate, far too good to be put in comparison with well authen-

¹ *Proceedings of S. A. Scot.*, vol. i. pl. iii.

ticated examples of early Celtic art representing the Crucifixion. Of these a very quaint example, in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, elaborately decorated with the interlaced ribbon and the true Celtic scroll patterns, is figured by Dr Stuart, on plate x. of the second volume of *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland*. It is in bronze, and from Clonmacnoise, the central seat of native Irish art; and was assigned by Dr Reeves to the ninth century.¹

On the Kilmichael Glassrie bell the crucified Saviour is represented wearing a diadem, as King of kings. The open crown, short beard, long flowing locks, strongly marked ribs, and the punctured ornamental border of the napkin round the loins, all accord with the date assigned to the bell-shrine as of twelfth century workmanship. But examples of much earlier date represent the regal diadem, either worn by the crucified Redeemer, or in direct association with him, while still on the cross. In the Tongres ivory introduced by Mrs Jameson among the illustrations of her *History of Our Lord*, and ascribed by her to the ninth century, the crown is held over the head of Christ by two angels. This beautiful carving is on the cover of a copy of the Gospels in the Cathedral of Tongres, used as the pax, kissed by the canons after reading the Gospel, with the words "*Ecce lex sacra.*" This also has the additional feature of the Divine Fatherhood, symbolised above the head of the Saviour by a hand descending from a cloud.² On another ivory plaque of the eleventh or twelfth century, in the Museum at Rouen, which represents the Deposition from the Cross, the crown is held over the head of the Saviour by the symbolic Dove, resting on the upper limb of the cross.³ The South Kensington Museum also includes casts of two leaves of a Diptych of the sixteenth century, of French renaissance workmanship, which, among various other sacred scenes, includes one of the Crucifixion in which the Saviour is crowned, and wears a dress reaching to his feet. The representation of the crucified Redeemer wearing the royal diadem is not, therefore, peculiar to any specific school or age; and indeed the familiar crown of thorns is rarely met with, except in com-

¹ *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. lxxii.

² *History of Our Lord*, vol. ii. p. 144.

³ *Fictile Ivories*, in the Kensington Museum, p. 417.

paratively modern work. The more usual mode of representing the Crucifixion exhibits the Saviour's head adorned with a cruciform nimbus.

Upwards of forty representations of the Crucifixion are described in Professor J. O. Westwood's Catalogue of the beautiful collection of fictile ivories, originals and casts, in the South Kensington Museum, in addition to other examples in continental collections. A careful analysis yields the following results:—Of those, twenty-three represent the Saviour with the cruciform nimbus; three with the plain nimbus; seven without the nimbus or other adornment or covering of the head; and only one, a beautifully executed ivory plaque of seventeenth century German workmanship, with the crown of thorns. It is described by Professor Westwood as "The Crucifixion treated in a highly realistic and admirable manner. The Saviour crowned with thorns hangs dead on the cross, with his head lying on his left shoulder. The body is but little bent, and the legs nearly straight, the feet crossed, and pierced with one nail."¹ The two feet crossed in this manner appear to be another late characteristic. This occurs in ten examples, dating from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century; while in every one of those ranging from the ninth to the thirteenth century the feet are apart. To this, however, the archaic figure of the crucified Saviour on the Guthrie bell is an exception, if it is correctly assigned to an earlier date than the fourteenth century.

As to local examples of native Celtic art furnished by the Argyllshire crosses, and to which Mr Howson appeals, the beautiful volume since reproduced from the late Mr James Drummond's careful studies of the sculptured stones of Iona and Argyllshire, furnishes ample evidence in confutation of the loose statement that the figure of our Saviour on the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell-shrine is "closely similar to the corresponding representations on the Argyllshire crosses." Representations of the Crucifixion in any style are rare upon them; and no single example exhibits any correspondence to that on the bell-shrine in the special characteristics referred to. I have in my possession photographs of two interesting examples of sculptured crosses in St Clement's Church,

¹ *Fictile Ivories*, in the Kensington Museum, p. 328.

Rodil, Harris, taken by my friend Captain Thomas, R.N., whose valuable Hebridean and other archæological researches are well known to the Society. On both of the crosses the Crucifixion is sculptured in an effective style of art; but long exposure in the roofless, ruined church has greatly obliterated the details of the features and the accompanying ornamentation, including a device over the head of the Saviour, the original significance of which can now only be guessed at. But there is no resemblance between either of those and the figure on the Kilmichael-Glassrie shrine, except in so far as all representations of the Crucifixion must necessarily resemble each other. The crowned head, the peculiar character and disposition of the waist-cloth, and the feet apart, are the special features which now admit of comparison; as the beard, hair, and other details, can no longer be confidently appealed to on the Harris sculptures. On both of them there is no trace of a diadem or nimbus, the style and arrangement of the waist-cloth are essentially different; and the limbs, not the feet, are crossed, somewhat in the style of recumbent figures of mailed Crusaders, as in those in the Temple Church, London.

I have thus far noted some of the general characteristics of the beautiful relic in question; but the object which I have in view in now recalling attention to it, is to bring under the notice of the Society a curious and exceptional feature in its ornamentation. Though this beautiful relic has been repeatedly engraved, and has been the subject of more than one communication to the Society, and so has been subjected to minute study by draughtsmen and skilled archæologists, the special feature now referred to has not, so far as I am aware, attracted notice. It is now upwards of thirty years since, in making the drawing from which an engraving of the bell-shrine was executed for the first edition of my *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, my attention was called to



this peculiar device, which occurs immediately above the Hand, the symbol of God the Father in benediction over the Prince of peace, already crowned as "King of kings and Lord of lords." I think when

attention is called to it, it can scarcely fail to strike others, as it did myself, that amid the very noticeable diversity of patterns on the bell-case,¹ this device differs essentially from all the others. With this exception, the ornamentation is symmetrical in design and arrangement; and notwithstanding great variation, harmonises as a whole. Owing to the position of the device on the top of the bell-case, only the outer edge appears in the engravings, suggesting the idea of the familiar egg and spear pattern of a very different age and school of art. Were it indeed that familiar classical pattern it would be a strange anachronism on an ecclesiastical shrine of the twelfth century; but when viewed directly from above, it will be seen to consist of a succession of irregular, unequal curves, with the upward lines sloping to one side, somewhat in the style of a piece of cursive script. The first idea accordingly suggested to my mind was the possibility of its being a monogrammic inscription, which from its position might prove to be a version of Pilate's superscription rendered in some unfamiliar cypher. Its position at any rate, detached from all the other ornamental patterns, and directly over the symbolic representation of the Divine Fatherhood, seemed to lend some countenance to the idea which its unique character suggested, that it is no mere portion of the general ornamentation, but has some peculiar and distinctive significance. There is, at the first glance, a superficial resemblance to Arabic, which has sufficed to suggest to more than one Oriental scholar, a possible rendering of it, as an Arabic cypher. I submitted it to the late Professor David Liston, who then occupied the chair of Oriental Languages in the University of Edinburgh, and who entertained no doubt of its being some form of cursive inscription. His letter, of date November 27, 1851, is now before me, in which he says—"I think the inscription may not improbably be the Arabic invocation *ya allah*, but in some modified character. The character is not like any form of the Arabic characters which I know, though approaching modern Arabic writing. The last letter is such as one might suppose the Kufic corresponding letter to become if taking the aspect of a writing hand; the others not unlike the

¹ See the full size engravings of the bell and its case in the *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iv. plate ix.; and *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, vol. ii. plate xxi.

yawd a all of the everyday Arabic. The three dots I regard as ornamental."

The idea thus thrown out on such authority, naturally led me to consult other Oriental scholars; notwithstanding the manifest improbability, if not indeed absurdity, of finding a familiar Mohammedan invocation on a Christian shrine of the twelfth century. So far, however, the idea of a possible solution of the enigma as an inscription in some cursive form of Arabic received more or less countenance from several of those to whom I submitted copies of the device. One distinguished linguist writes thus—"The inscription at first sight has an Arabic character; but if it is part of the original design, how could an Arabic inscription have come on a Christian reliquary? Besides, it does not yield to any analysis." Another Oriental scholar remarked of it—"The only thing I can liken it to is the Arabic *Elif* followed by a string of *Lam's*; and then it might read *allah il allahu*; but I fear the position of the inscription will not warrant this." With natural hesitation, another investigator said—"If they are Arabic, I can make out of them only the Moslem formula لا اله الا الله: There is no God but God; but this is not at all clear." Another writes—"If the third character from the left were a little different, the group might be read in Arabic: *bismilleh*: In the name of God." Finally, a more courageous Professor, familiar with Oriental languages, confidently returned to me this rendering:—

(بِسْمِ) اَللّٰهُ اَلرَّحْمٰنِ اَلرَّحِيْمِ

"[Bismil] lahi 'r rahmani 'r rahimi: In the name of God, the merciful, the gracious."

It did not require any profound knowledge of Arabic to perceive that here was, at the most, a mere grain of fact to a bushel of fancy. The solution was not to be hoped for in this direction. The idea of a familiar Mohammedan religious formula, or text of the Koran, being graven on any Christian reliquary was manifestly not to be entertained for a moment; and the apparently Scottish origin of the reliquary added, if possible, to its improbability. Nevertheless, there was a certain fascination in the idea of the relic being inscribed with some

occult Eastern monogram, and then recovered from its old hiding-place among the mountains of Argyllshire. The occurrence of any undoubted Oriental inscription upon it would have furnished a tempting substructure on which to rebuild in fancy some lost romance of olden times, founded on the probability of its fabrication by an Eastern Christian workman,—it might be of Byzantium or Alexandria,—and its subsequent acquisition by some long-forgotten Scottish pilgrim or crusader. Legend and romance have sported sufficiently with David, Earl of Huntingdon, the prince of Scottish pilgrims and crusaders, to show what fancy might weave out of even such slender materials. The attempt, however, to find a solution of the mysterious device on the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell-shrine that would commend itself to my sober judgment, on the assumption of its being a piece of monogrammic writing in any Oriental character, proved illusory; and in the absence of any more satisfactory explanation, I left it unnoticed in the first edition of my *Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*. When I had to prepare a second edition, I was beyond the Atlantic, and out of reach of all means for following out such inquiries. Nevertheless, I still felt assured that the peculiar device was no part of the regular ornamentation of the bell-shrine.

This subject of curiosity in earlier years had long passed out of mind, when my attention was anew recalled to it during a recent visit to Europe, by some characteristic illustrations of contemporary art, in the very curious collection of ecclesiastical antiquities preserved in the Chapter House of the venerable Münster of Basel. I accordingly renewed inquiry into the meaning of the unique device on the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell-shrine. Among others to whom I had submitted a copy of it was Mr Hyde Clarke, who was struck with its resemblance to cabalistic formulæ, such as he had seen in the *Talisman Bazar*; but I had ceased to look for any Oriental solution of the enigma. It has to be borne in remembrance, however, in noticing the various attempts at its solution, that, though I was careful in all cases to accompany a copy of the device with a description of the Christian relic on which it occurs, yet its students necessarily laboured under a disadvantage in having before them a detached copy of the device, apart from the highly characteristic features on which the real solution depended.

In the original account of the relic, printed in vol. iv. of the Society's *Transactions*, the place of its discovery is specially described as "situate about a mile and a half from the parish Church of Kilmichael, and about five miles from Carnasary, in the parish of Kilmartin, one of the ancient episcopal seats of the Bishops of Argyll." There was a bell of St Moluag, at Kilmaluig, with a hereditary dewar, or keeper, in the latter part of the sixteenth century. But the miraculously fashioned bell referred to in Bishop Elphinston's Breviary was preserved, and held in great estimation, at the Church of Lismore in the early part of the same century; and Dr Anderson has expressed the opinion that if the bell now in the Society's possession is not the bell of St Moluag of Lismore, "there is no other Argyllshire bell now known to exist which answers this description."

Here, then, in the vicinity, of an ancient Christian site, in an old Celtic area rich in legend, tradition, and in monumental evidence of its occupation by the first Christian missionaries to Celtic Scotland, this highly characteristic relic was found. Church bells are not, indeed, peculiar to any branch of the Christian Church; but the little square iron hand-bell seems to be specially characteristic of the early Church of Scotland and Ireland; and there alone do we find the custom prevailing of enshrining these rude bells in elaborately wrought reliquaries. The beautiful shrine now under review bears as its most striking features the First and Second Persons of the Trinity; and this suggested an ingenious conjecture, communicated to me in a letter from a learned palæographer to whom I had submitted a copy of the device. He thus writes—"In a twelfth century representation of the Crucifixion, containing the arm in benediction as a representation of the First Person of the Trinity, it is quite certain that we ought to look for, and find a symbol of the Third Person also. Without seeing the shrine, or a good photograph of it, it is impossible to speak positively; but there does not seem to be much difficulty in explaining the symbol you copy in this sense. It can hardly be the tail feathers of the Dove; as the frame by which you surround the symbol would leave no room for the body of the bird. Hence, it must be either the Cloven Tongues, or the Fire of the Spirit, the symbolic representation, though in an

unwonted form, of the Third Person of the Trinity." This ingenious conjecture was favoured by another English archæologist of high authority on questions of ecclesiastical symbolism and all mediæval ornamentation. He remarked—"It is most probably the Holy Spirit represented as a flame of fire." And he added—"I think that the addition of the three dots declares the Trinity, and emphasises the Filioque. Since we have the Saviour's head bearing the diadem, and thus representing him as reigning from the Cross, together with the representation of the Everlasting Arm, there must be a symbol of the Spirit, otherwise the shrine would be absolutely heretical in doctrine."

This suggestion offered an ingenious solution of the enigma ; but however consistent such a theory may appear in its accordance with the creed of Western Christendom in the twelfth century, it finds no confirmation from the numerous examples of mediæval art already referred to, ranging over successive periods from the ninth to the seventeenth century, and belonging to different countries, and very diverse schools of art. In consistency with the sacred narrative, the artistic representations of the Crucifixion repeatedly exhibit the presence of the Divine Fatherhood, sometimes fully embodied as the Ancient of Days, as on the beautiful Guthrie bell, the only other example of a Scottish enshrined bell now known to exist ; but more frequently the First Person of the Trinity is indicated symbolically as the Hand in benediction over the crucified Redeemer. But, except in purposed representations of the Trinity, there is no accompanying symbolism of the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, when the scene is that of the Baptism of Christ, it constantly includes the symbolic Dove, but without the representation of the First Person of the Trinity.

In the Guthrie bell—an engraving of which from a careful drawing by myself is given in vol. i. of the Society's *Proceedings*,—God the Father is represented as a half-length figure, bearded, and with a head-dress, now mutilated, but which probably represented a crown. The right arm is also wanting. The figure is in silver, and in a style characteristic of such representations of God the Father on works of the fourteenth century. But there is no representation of the Divine Spirit ;

the presence of which would indeed have been exceptional, rather than in accordance with mediæval art.

The interpretation of the device over the symbolic hand, as I now think, is very simple. The obscurity is mainly due to the conventional aspect which a familiar feature of detail usually accompanying the symbolical representation of the First Person of the Trinity gradually tended to assume. In the Basel collection there is a carved panel with the head of Christ; and over it the symbolic Hand is extended, issuing from a cloud. Among the beautiful ivories in the Hotel de Cluny, at Paris, is a plaque containing a Carolingian representation of the Crucifixion; the scroll over the head of the Saviour is inscribed *IHS. NAZARENVS. RX.*, and above this is the Almighty Hand issuing from a cloud, and holding a wreath. Another beautiful ivory carving, of the ninth century, already referred to, which forms the cover of a copy of the Gospels in the Cathedral of Tongres, and has on it the scene of the Crucifixion, with two angels holding a crown over the dying Saviour's head, has also the symbolic Divine Hand descending from a cloud in benediction over the Christ on the Cross. Another scene in the history of our Lord is introduced on a curious specimen of early sacred art in the Bavarian National Museum at Munich, where Christ is represented in the scene immediately preceding his Crucifixion ascending a hill, supported by the hand of the Divine Father extended out of a cloud. Underneath are two of the disciples lying asleep, and so helping to indicate the scene of Gethsemane. In those, and similar examples, the clouds are represented in relief in the usual fashion; but the conventional mode to which their figuring tended is seen repeatedly in MS. illuminations. I am indebted to the Rev. Dr Isaac Taylor for tracings from the *Cædmon Codex*, a MS. of the tenth century, in the Bodleian Library, in which the Divine Creator is represented seated under a canopy, and beneath His feet the clouds are represented in irregular outline, only a little less stiff and formal than in the graven device on the bell-case. Again, in another scriptural scene, Enoch disappears in clouds indicated in similar conventional outline. This, however, must be noted that the fashion in which the flames are outlined in the fire of hell in one scene, and the waters of the deluge in another scene in the same Codex, still more closely re-

semble the curved and pointed lines on the bell-case. But there is also a scene in which the Spirit of Evil tempts and deceives Eve, where he is represented standing on a cloud figured in irregular outline in somewhat the same style.¹ This therefore, I believe, furnishes the true solution of the novel device, or ornamentation, over the symbolic representation of God the Father, on the Kilmichael-Glassrie bell-shrine, with possibly an allusion to the Trinity in the triple dots. That, however, I doubt; and am inclined to regard them as more probably only a conventional representation of the rounded cloud, in relief, within each the larger curves representing its outline.

It may be that this minor feature in the ornamentation of the beautiful ancient bell-shrine may seem scarcely to justify the length to which my remarks have extended. As the record of a devious and long mis-directed chase after an antiquarian trifle, the account of early misleading suggestions, and more confident misinterpretations, may even have a touch of humour in it, recalling to the profane the feats of the Antiquary, *par excellence*, in the clearing up of like obscurities. But if the device itself be of very secondary significance, the bell-shrine of which it forms a minor feature, well merits greater attention than it has yet received. The study of sacred iconography and the whole range of mediæval ecclesiastical art, has received so much attention in the intervening years since I first noted the puzzling feature of which I now offer an explanation; and the collections that have been formed in illustration of this department of archæology have been enriched from so many sources: that I shall be gratified if this communication recall attention to the beautiful old Scottish relic, and so lead to a report from some skilled expert, illustrating its special characteristics from other examples, and determining more precisely its date, and the school of art to which it should be assigned.

¹ Vide *Archæologia*, vol. xxiv. plates lii., lviii., lxiv., lxv., lxxxv., &c., where the entire series of illustrations of this interesting MS. are engraved.