

II.

NOTICE OF ST QUERAN'S WELL AT CARGEN, AND OFFERINGS
RECENTLY MADE TO IT. By PATRICK DUDGEON, OF CARGEN,
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A few weeks ago I was much surprised by one of my workmen, who had been engaged cleaning out the Saint's Well (St Queran's) on this property, bringing me a number of pennies, halfpennies, and farthings of the present bronze coinage, which had been dropped into the well as offerings; there were also found one or two medals of the Virgin, very commonly worn by the Roman Catholics in this district, and a counterfeit guinea and half guinea of Geo. III. I mentioned the circumstance to one or two Roman Catholic gentlemen and clergyman in the neighbourhood, and they appeared as much surprised as I had been to know these offerings were still made at this well.

About twenty years since I had the well cleaned out and thoroughly put in order, and at that time many hundreds of coins were found in it. They consisted mainly of Irish (Elizabeth) pennies and halfpennies, James VI. twopenny pieces and hardheads or bodles, and the same of Charles I., Charles II. turners and half turners, William and Mary bodles, Louis XIII. double tournois, some Fresian (Holland) copper coins, and George II. and III. pennies and halfpennies and farthings. No later coins than George III. reached my hands; if any were got, as I have no doubt they were, they were doubtless pocketed by the labourers, and exchanged for some liquid refreshment stronger than the well water. I did not get nearly all the coins found at the time, as I learned sometime afterwards that men had been offering for sale in Dumfries many coins of an exactly similar kind, no doubt from the well. The oldest really *English* coins found were of William and Mary's time; all the older ones, not Scottish, were exclusively Irish and French, showing how much more intimate the relations were, in this part of the country, with Ireland and France than with England, although comparatively so near the border.

In a short note on the well I communicated to our local Natural History

and Antiquarian Society, I remarked that the name St Jergon or St Querdon, as it is popularly known by in the district, is no doubt a corruption of St Kieran or St Queran, an Irish saint having many dedications in Scotland, who, according to Butler, flourished in the ninth century (A.D. 876). His festival is celebrated on the 9th September. Forty or fifty years since it was the custom for devotees visiting the well to hang ribbons and pieces of cloth on the adjacent bushes as offerings to the tutelary saint; this practice has been quite discontinued.

This well is one of the numerous Saint's or Holy Wells scattered all over the country, and was for long held in great repute for the cure of diseases, particularly those of women and children; from the number of people who still visit the well, particularly on a fine Sunday afternoon, I am inclined to think that the curative powers of the water are, by a few, not yet altogether disbelieved in. There is apparently nothing particular about the water; it is not at all chalybeate, as most of the springs are in the district; it contains a considerable amount of marsh gas (light carburetted hydrogen), and when the bottom of the well is stirred large quantities of this gas are disengaged. The source of the spring must be at a considerable depth; the flow, which is considerable (8 to 10 gallons a minute), is not appreciably affected by wet or dry seasons; the water is bright and sparkling, perfectly colourless, and has a uniform temperature of 48°. The water, however, acts as a solvent on the copper, although very slowly; all the oldest coins are exceedingly thin, many not much thicker than a sheet of paper, some were so thin as hardly to bear handling; the legends on them, however, were quite distinct, as the solvent properties of the water had acted uniformly over the surface. When first got they were as bright as possible, so much so that when I first saw them I thought there were gold coins amongst them. Although the oldest coins obtained date somewhere about A.D. 1560, there can be little doubt that offerings at the well were made long antecedent to this date; but the older coins, from the action of the water, have entirely disappeared.

In the Presbytery books of Dumfries about 1630-1640 several entries are to be seen denouncing persons who resorted to "the Idolatrous Well at Cairgan, called St Jargon's Well."

About 50 or 60 yards from the well, under a "beildy" bank facing

the south, are the remains of a small building. Only the foundation stones are now to be seen; the stones used for the walls have long since disappeared, and, after the manner of the country, have been used for dykes, &c.; these foundation stones consist of tolerably large boulders, with no attempt at dressing. The building must have been about twelve feet square. I have little doubt it was the cell of some "solitary hermit," to whom the vicinity of the well proved an attraction.