

II.

TRACES OF THE CULTUS OF ST FILLAN AT KILLALLAN, RENFREWSHIRE. By J. M. MACKINLAY, M.A., F.S.A. Scot.

Houston and Killallan now form one parish, but were separate till 1760, when they were formally united by a decree of the Court of Teinds.¹ Their real union, however, did not take place till eleven years later, when the Rev. John Menteith, minister of Killallan, became incumbent of both parishes on the death of the Rev. John Carrick, minister of Houston.

One of the most interesting traces of the cultus of St Fillan at Killallan is in the name of the parish itself. This name means the church of Fillan. It is derived from the Gaelic *cill*, a cell or church, and *Faolan*, better known as Fillan, the F having been lost through aspiration, according to a familiar rule in Gaelic. Of the three forms of the name, *Killillan*, *Killellan*, and *Killallan*,² the first has now disappeared. The second is still in use in the district. The third is the one best known beyond the parish.

There must have been a place of worship at Killallan at a very early date, but concerning it we have no information. The date 1635 is inscribed on the lintel of the ancient parish church. After the church of Houston became the church of the united parishes, Killallan Kirk was allowed to go to decay. From the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* we learn that, though no longer used as a place of worship in 1791, it had still its roof on. The structure is now an ivy-clad ruin, and forms the burying-place of the Barochan family.

I am informed by the Rev. D. Kirkwood, minister of Houston and

¹ *Origines Parochiales Scotiæ*, i. 81.

² The name has sometimes only one *l* in the first syllable.

Killallan, that when Killallan Kirk was unroofed, the bell was removed to Barochan House. Wishing to get further information, I wrote to Mr C. B. Renshaw, M.P., of Barochan. Mr Renshaw was from home at the time, but Mrs Renshaw courteously supplied the following facts :—“The bell of Killallan, about which you write, now hangs in a tree in the gardens here, and is in daily use. It has been recast. The original inscription was no doubt copied, and runs in a plain band round the upper part of the bell. It reads thus :—“*Carolvs-Hog-Me-Fecit-1618*—.” Then, on the opposite side,—“*Killallan-Bell-David Burges, Founder, Glasgow, 1844.*” The bell is an ordinarily shaped one, and no doubt was cracked at the time that Mr Fleming had it recast.” There is still a difficulty requiring to be met. Chalmers, in the third volume of his *Caledonia*,¹ says, “The inscription on the church bell records the name of the saint to whom the church was dedicated, and who was regarded as the tutelary saint of the parish.” The saint’s name is not now on the bell. The most likely explanation is that the bell of 1618 was itself recast, like the one of 1844, and that the original one bore St Fillan’s name. The stone font belonging to the church stood, for long after the Reformation, outside the door, but was, at a later date, built into the wall of the surrounding graveyard.² In the neighbourhood of the church, and deriving their name from it, are the farms of High and Low Kirktown.

The question arises, who was the saint to whom Killallan church was dedicated? In reference to St Fillan,³ Bishop Forbes, in his *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, remarks, “the Scottish saint of this name must be either the saint whose commemoration is found both in the Scottish and Irish Kalendars on the 9th of January, or a saint whose day is on the 20th of June.”⁴ The second of these is commonly known as Faolan, the Stammerer or the Leper. He was a disciple of St Ailbe in the 6th century, and, along with several others, was despatched by his master on a missionary tour. He settled at Ratherran, *i.e.*, the

¹ Page 837, note.

² *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. i. p. 316.

³ This name is spelt in a variety of ways.

⁴ Page 343.

Fort of the Earn, now Dundurn, in Comrie parish, Perthshire, and gave his name to the village of St Fillans, at the lower end of Loch Earn. That this is not the saint who gave name to Killallan is proved by the fact that St Fillan's festival was celebrated here not on the 20th of June, but on the 9th of January. In 1824, Chalmers, when describing Killallan, says, "Saint Fillan's Fair is still held annually at this place in January."¹ This fair has long been discontinued, but its former existence is of value in settling the point in dispute. We have therefore to turn to the other St Fillan in our search for the patron saint of Killallan. This saint is still remembered in the name of Strathfillan, forming the upper part of Strathdochart, and in the river Fillan flowing through Strathfillan into Loch Dochart. The dates of his death and his birth are not known, but he is believed to have flourished in the early 8th century. According to the *Aberdeen Breviary*, quoted by Bishop Forbes, the saint came of a noble family of the Scoti in Ireland, and had for father, Feriach, otherwise Ferodach, and for mother, Kentigerna, who afterwards betook herself to a solitary life on Inch Cailleach in Loch Lomond. The saint's legend states that he was born with a stone in his mouth, and was thrown by his father into a lake, where he was ministered to by angels for a year. He was then found by Bishop Ybarus, who brought him up and instructed him in the Christian faith. The saint received the monastic habit from Abbot Mundus, who is still remembered in the name of Kilmun, on the Holy Loch, in Argyllshire. On the death of Mundus, Fillan was appointed his successor. It is not certain where this monastery was. At a later date, Fillan is said to have gone to Lochalsh, where he built a church in honour of his uncle St Congan, founder of the monastery of Turriff in Aberdeenshire. In fact, as Bishop Forbes remarks, "at the present day Kilkoan and Killellan, the churches of Congan and Fillan, bear testimony to the truth of the legend."²

The chief scene of St Fillan's work was in Strathfillan and its neighbourhood, probably in the district extending from Tyndrum to Killin,

¹ *Caledonia*, vol. iii. p. 837, note. Vide also *Origines Parochiales Scotiæ*, vol. i. p. 81.

² *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, p. 344.

where the church was dedicated to him, and where he was held in such reverence that the mill was left idle on his festival till well on in the present century. The saint built a church somewhere in Strathfillan, on a spot miraculously indicated to him. The site is not now known, but the ruins of St Fillan's Priory, founded by King Robert the Bruce, are still to be seen about half-way between Tyndrum and Crianlarich. Not far from the ruins, in the river Fillan, is the Holy Pool, resorted to for the cure of insanity, from a very early date till within quite recent times. St Fillan's bell and crozier, now in the Society's Museum, require only to be named to recall much familiar antiquarian lore.

There is a spring sacred to St Fillan at Killallan. It is situated in a field close to the church. Though now neglected, it was once regarded with considerable reverence. The writer of the article in the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland*¹ observes:—"There is a spring-well called Fillan's Well, issuing from under a rock, shaded with bushes hanging over it, to which it is reported that the country-women used to bring their weak and ricketty children and bathe them in the water, leaving some pieces of cloth as a present or offering to the saint on the bushes. This custom continued till about the end of the last (*i.e.*, the 17th) century, when one Mr Hutcheson, who was then minister, caused the well to be filled with stones."

The water used at baptisms in the church is believed to have been drawn from this well. There are now no bushes hanging over it, but some 20 feet higher up the field is a hawthorn bush, crowning another small rocky height.

In the same field is an earth-fast boulder, known as St Fillan's Seat. On the top is a circular hollow about 14 inches across, forming quite a comfortable resting-place. To the right, as one sits, and near enough to be within reach of the hand, is another hollow, irregularly oval in shape, 9 inches long by about $3\frac{1}{4}$ broad. According to a local tradition, St Fillan sat in the seat and performed the rite of baptism with water out of this cavity. St Fillan seems to have had a liking for stone seats. He had one that long stood beside the mill at Killin, but unfortunately it was cast into the river Dochart, flowing

¹ Vol. i. p. 316.

hard by, and was thus lost. His namesake, the other Fillan, already referred to, is said to have sat in a rocky seat on the top of Dunfillan, near Comrie. The stone received the name of St Fillan's Chair,¹ and till the end of last century was associated with a superstitious remedy for rheumatism in the back. The person to be cured sat in the chair, and was then dragged down the hill by the legs, the saint's influence guaranteeing recovery. To sum up the traces of St Fillan's cultus at Killallan, we have his church, his bell, his spring, his seat, and the name of the parish, in which is embedded the name of the saint himself.