

11. A UNIQUE MEDIEVAL TOMB AT INCHMAHOME: A CULTURAL LINK.

Where the lands of the Gael and Lowland Scot merge at the Lake of Menteith, there lies on a lake-isle a tomb which seems to be unique in Christendom. Its recumbent figures of man and wife were carved by a sculptor manifestly trained in his craft during that great ascending phase of Christian art, the later thirteenth century; and he embodied in stone the traditional attitude of embrace consecrated by Gaelic prayers for rest—rest in life and death, in divine salvation as in human love.

The tomb is not unknown, but its singular character seems to have passed almost unnoticed. It is that of Mary, Countess of Menteith, and of her husband, Walter, the first Stewart Earl of Menteith. The latter died in the year 1294, predeceased by his wife some four or five years earlier. The lord wears armour of the late thirteenth century. On his head, over chain mail, he wears a helm without a visor, a bassinet with its strings knotted behind, and a surcoat covering his mailed body. His hands are gloved, and he wears short spurs. His pointed "heater" shield is carved with the chequer of the Stewarts, the fesse chequy, with

a label of five points. His sword belt meets the leathern sheath in two places. The face is of the long type commonly associated in Scotland with lordship, rather than the broad type prevalent among Neolithic remains and seen in the working folk of the west; he wears a moustache. The lady wears a flat-topped head-dress, with an enrichment above the right ear, and the ends of the head-dress fall to below the shoulder with string attachments. Her long flowing mantle is gathered at the waist. The feet of each figure rest upon a creature, possibly intended to resemble a lion, or simply a dog—his feet upon a larger, hers upon a smaller one.

As the illustrations show (Pl. XXVIII), the pair are sculptured side by side, each with "an arm under the head" of the other; and the husband's left arm (under its Stewart shield) reaches over to hold his wife's right hand in his own. Although in detail the technique may be imperfect compared to the best of contemporary continental sculpture, the sculptural *motif* is original, bold, and conceived "in the round." Mutilated though it be, deprived of its canopy, worn by the elements, and with all trace of colour gone from its grey freestone, the work retains rhythmic line and sculptural unity.

It is this attitude of calm embrace which is consecrated by an ancient native tradition of prayer. The four citations which follow were gathered orally in the Hebrides by Alexander Carmichael and recorded, with his translations, in his *Carmina Gadelica*, vols. i-iv. (1900, 1928-41):—

1. "Be Thy right hand, O God, under my head . . ."
2. "Be Thy light, O Spirit, over me,
My soul on Thine own arm, O Christ . . ."
3. "I am now going into the sleep,
Be it that I in health shall waken;
If death be to me in the death-sleep
Be it on Thine own arm,
O God of Grace, I shall waken . . .
Be it on Thine own beloved arm . . .
My soul is on Thy right hand, O God . . .
Encompass me . . ."
4. "I lie in my bed, as I would lie in the grave,
Thine arm beneath my neck, Thou Son of Mary, victorious.
Angels shall watch me, and I lying in slumber,
And Angels shall guard me in the sleep of the grave. . . ."

For their poetic form, one should hear the Gaelic—sonorous, vowel-rhymed and rhythmic. Here are the opening lines from the first and second:

1. "Biodh do lamh dheas, a Dhe, fo mo cheann,
Biodh do shoills, a Spioraid, os mo chionn . . ."
2. "M'anam air do laimh, a 'Chriosda . . ."

The Rev. Fr. Allan Macdonald of Eriskay also gave several in his Gaelic book of prayers (privately printed in 1895). A similar prayer used nightly by an Islander was recited to me by his daughter-in-law. The Rev. Kenneth MacLeod records a "Pilgrim's Rune of Eigg" (*Celtic Review*, 1911) which closes with the petition:

"May our Mother be there, may her arm be under my head."

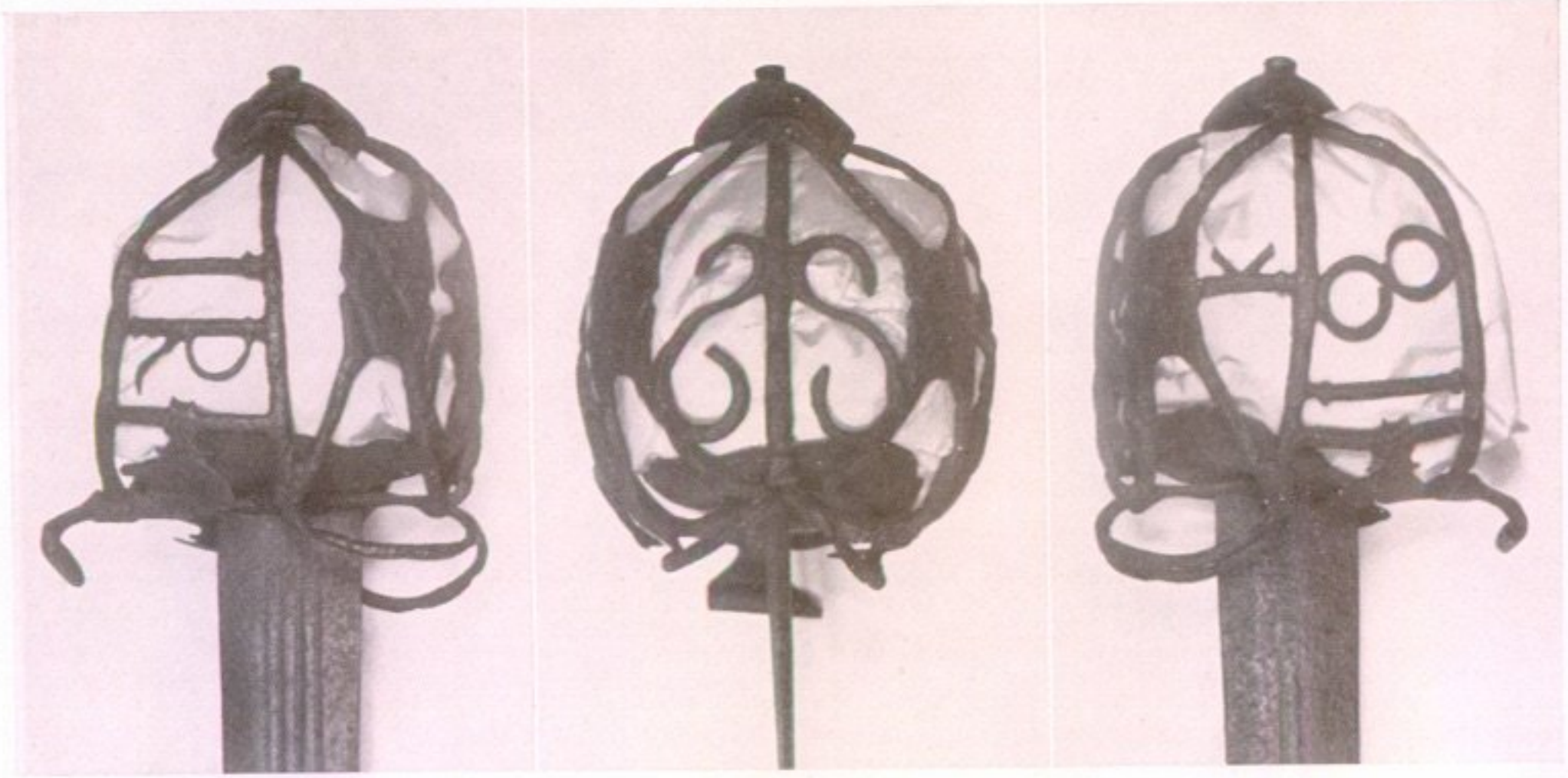


1. Mote in Glen Devon, from north-east. (See Note 9.)

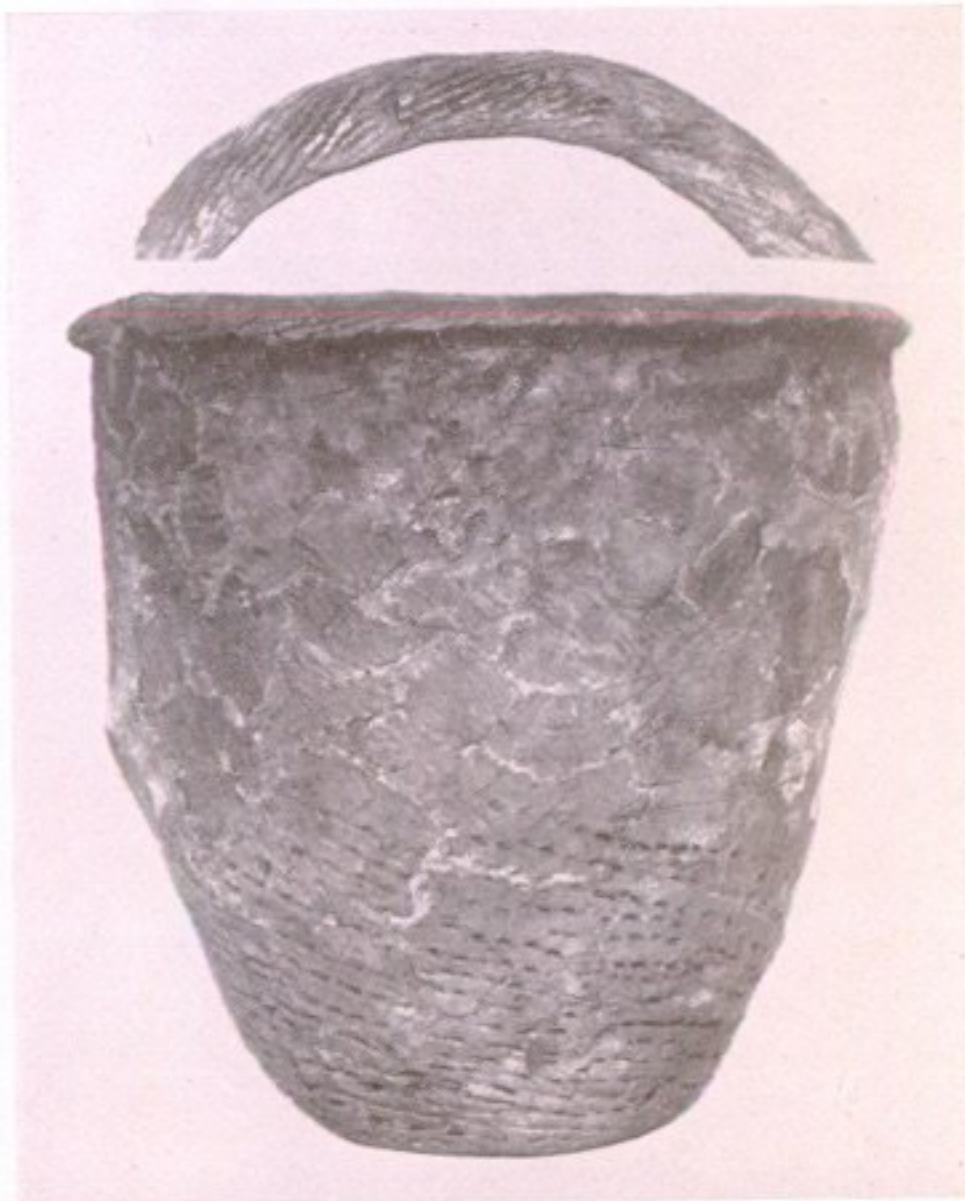


2. Ecclesiastical Effigy from Newbattle Abbey. ($\frac{1}{8}$.)

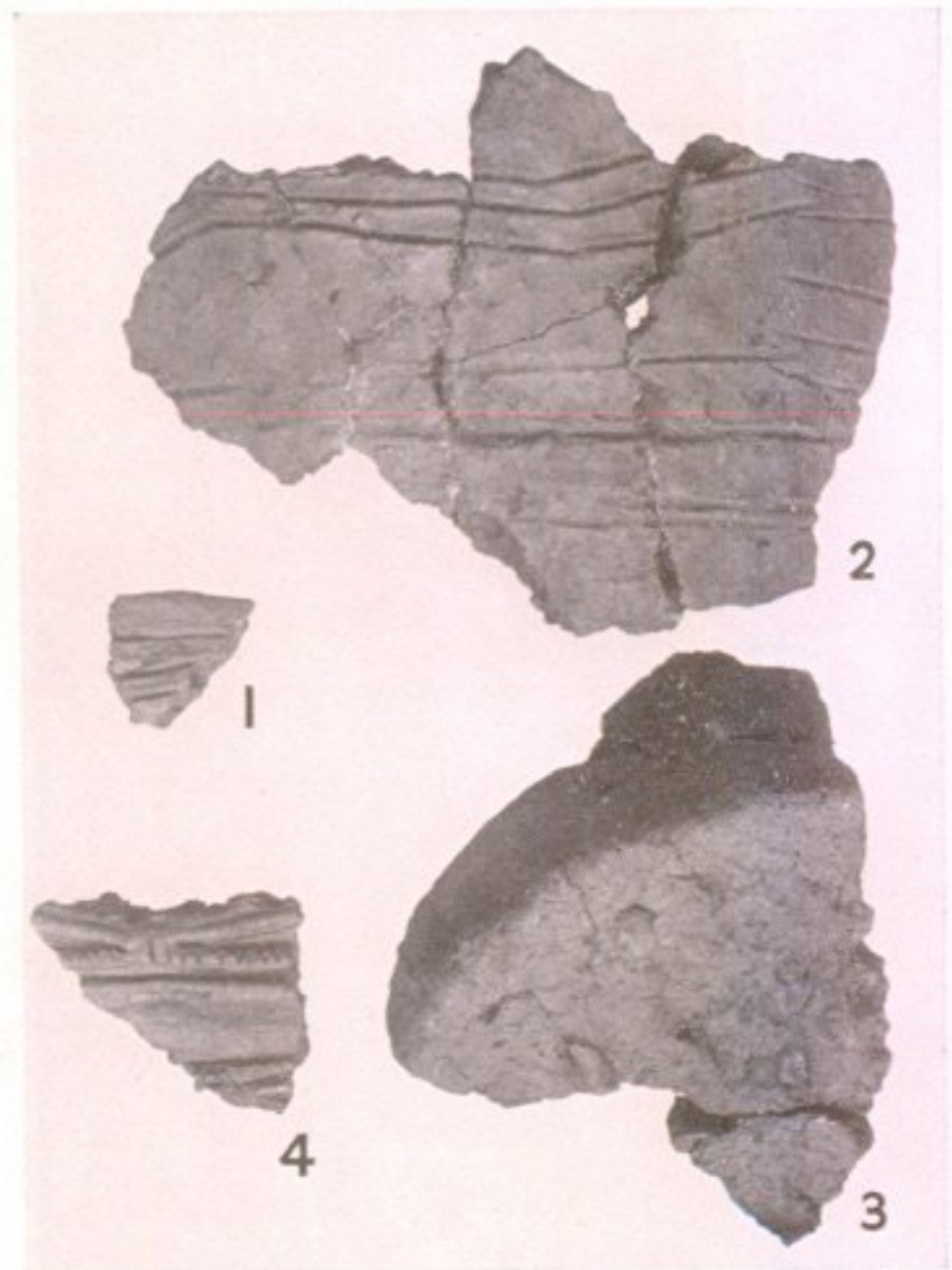
(Lent to Museum by the Marquis of Lothian's Trustees, through the Ministry of Works.)



1. Hilt of Highland broadsword, showing three positions. (See Note 10.)



2. Late Neolithic B pot, from Glenluce Sands. (1.)
(See Donations, No. 9.)



3. Pottery Sherds from Knappers Farm,
near Glasgow. (See p. 180.)

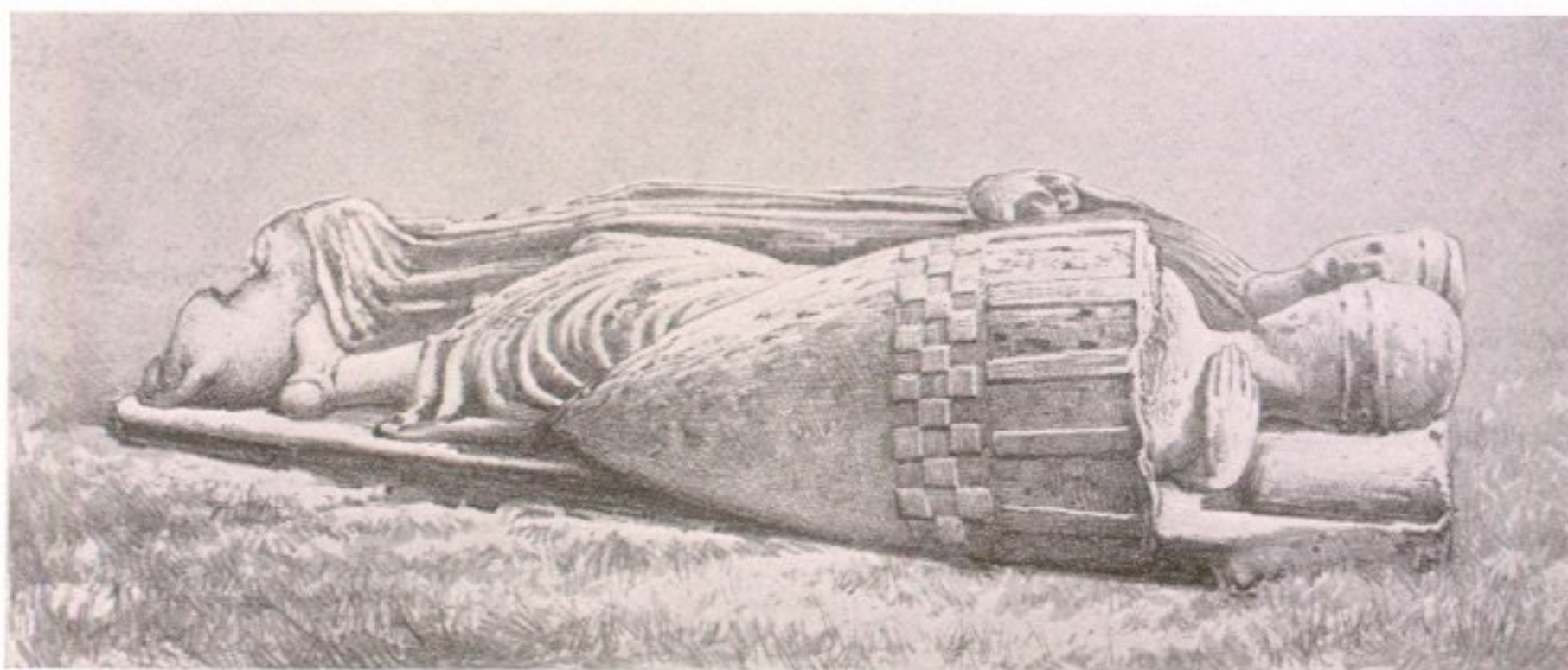
R. L. HUNTER.

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[Photo by Mr S. Cruden.]

1. Tomb of Walter Stewart, Earl of Menteith, and his Countess, at Inchmahome Priory.



2. Illustration from Fraser's *Red Book of Menteith*, Vol. I, plate 32 (p. 75).

ARTHUR GEDDES.

[To face p. 224.]

The simple gesture of embrace at rest is universal to mankind, and among the Gael it is a recurring theme (Geddes, 1951). It leads naturally from human love and care to the image of divine, all-embracing love. Yet allusion to it seems strangely rare outside the realm of the Gael.

As to the uniqueness of the monument there seems little doubt, from scrutiny of the standard works of F. H. Crossley, Arthur Gardner and Louis Réau, and from correspondence received. Mr Crossley writes: "The position of the effigies at Inchmahome . . . was never adopted in England. In Scotland, according to McGibbon and Ross, many unusual figures were sculptured. . . . In England a local style is found in remote places as in Devon and Cornwall, and also in Wales, but nothing as drastically different as this tomb at Inchmahome." Monsieur Réau, after careful inquiry among his colleagues, informs me that he knows of no such effigies. Professor D. Talbot Rice knows of none in Byzantine art, of which I had inquired in view of the links of Celtic doctrine with Grecian sources.

In French and English church effigies of husband and wife, it is usual for them to be carved side by side, the hands of each pressed together in prayer. More rarely the man's right hand takes his wife's left hand. The man's left hand rests on sword or gauntlet, the wife's on her breast. Several examples are illustrated by Crossley and Gardner. Even in these cases the bodies lie straight out, as if alone, except for the hand-clasp. The robes are carved as if they hung straight down from a figure standing in an attitude of prayer: if the photograph is placed erect, the pose is that of a standing saint.

The attitude for soldiers after 1140 suggests either brief rest as on the eve of battle, or else a curious mixture of rest and action, the right hand over the sword hilt, and the legs crossed with some suggestion of movement. This martial attitude is found, even when the warrior's wife lies at his side, on the monuments of England from before 1200 until 1350. A similar attitude, hand on sword and legs sideways, though not crossed, characterised Highland and Island monuments until the Reformation. No lady was ever shown, it seems, except at Inchmahome; in Lewis, in the Church of Eye, a lady's tomb bears ornament only.

To a sculptor, the treatment of the theme is significant. Archaic types of sculpture, the world over, are characterised by a frontal pose and limited action with a lack of pelvic movement. With the thirteenth century, the body is infused with life, the figure turns from the head and shoulders through trunk and lower limbs (Miller, 1949). Even then, the memorial statues—whether of a single figure or a wedded pair—were still carved as "upright statues laid horizontally." Their drapery falls as if the figure stood, as in the tombs of William de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, and of Henry II in Westminster Abbey, and in contemporary tombs in Gloucester and other English cathedrals. In monuments made after 1250 there may be a slight forward movement, the drapery following; but the figure is still erect.

What is so fascinating and so rare, if not indeed unique, in the tomb of the Menteiths is that this turn of the head and arms, this freedom of movement and flow of drapery, is carved on a tomb. The wife is stated to have died first; in her, the movement is perceptible; in the husband, reunited to her, it is clear. The two are one. Can it be that the tomb of these two quiet dead on Inchmahome embodies a union of two of the supreme inspirations of mankind? The first was the inspiration of primitive Christianity which reached Celtic Britain along the Roman roads in the third or fourth century, and led to the great Celtic movement of missions broken by the Nordic invasions, Saxon and Viking. The second was the inspiration which took birth in France in the thirteenth century, and flowered

in the coloured and glowing sculpture found from Chartres or Rheims to Strasbourg and Bamberg, Canterbury and Westminster, Elgin and Inchmahome. The union of these two, nascent in Scotland during the thirty years after the Scottish victory at Largs in 1263, was interrupted and in a sense destroyed for ever by the wars of independence. Inchmahome's fragment of inspiration was preserved from destruction by three things: by distance on a tiny islet, respect for the bodies of the dead, and forgetfulness.

The writer's thanks are due to Mr S. Cruden, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, for the photograph (Pl. XXVIII, 1), and to Mr Steer, custodian at the Priory, for loan of a book by Mr A. FitzAllan.

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Proceedings of Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, vol. xxix. p. 353 (in article by Robert Brydall, F.S.A., on "Monumental Effigies of Scotland, from the Thirteenth to the Fifteenth Century").