



IONA CATHEDRAL AND ST. ORAN'S CHAPEL.

The rule established by St. Columba was simple. The monks took the three vows, fasted on Wednesdays and Fridays, and said the Hours. The time not occupied by devotion was devoted to study, the copying of manuscripts, and field labour. The great monoliths of stone—raised for the bloody rites of the Druids, or perhaps of the Norsemen—were transformed into beautifully sculptured crosses. Three hundred and sixty of these were in existence in 1560, when the Presbyterian synod of Argyll declared them to be "monuments of idolatry" and decreed that they should be cast into the sea! Happily, some were rescued, and taken—as tomb-stones or market crosses—to other islands. Two only, MacLean's and St. Martin's, still stand here. They are covered with Runic sculpture.

Of the buildings now remaining,—cathedral, nunnery and chapel—the oldest is St. Oran's chapel, 40 by 60 feet in size, erected by Queen Margaret, on the site of Columba's original cell. It is of rude Norman architecture. Between it and the nunnery lies the Straid-a-Marbh—the Street of the Dead, the tombs of which were in a disgracefully neglected condition until the Iona Club took the matter up. The nunnery, dedicated to St. Mary, comes next in age, being of the close of the 12th century. The original settlement of the nuns was in a neighbouring island, called the Isle of Nuns, for Saint Columba shared the prejudices of some other noted Saints, and dreaded the presence of women next to that of the Evil One.* The nuns of Iona followed the rule of St. Augustine, and their community kept together till a considerable time after the Reformation. The tomb of the Prioress Anna, bearing date 1511, is within the Church.

The Cathedral of St. Mary is the most modern of the group, dating, probably, from the 13th to the 16th centuries, and showing in its different portions the architecture of those different periods

* Even in death women were not allowed to rest in Iona, so that while the proud Lords of the Isles—MacDonalds, MacLeods and MacLeans—were laid there, their wives and daughters were taken to the Island of Finlagan.

—First Pointed, Romanesque, and Second Pointed. Its venerable appearance, however, gives the impression of times much more remote. It is built of granite from the neighbouring isle of Mull. The nave and choir are alike in size—64x23 feet, with a transept 70x18; and a three-story bell tower, resting on four arches, supported by massive pillars, with sculptured capitals of grotesque figures. The sound of the bells could be heard when far out on the water—as by Bruce on his way from Skye to Arran:

"They paused not at Columba's Isle,
Though pealed the bell from the holy pile.
With long and measured toll."

The choir has a sacristy on the north and three chapels on the south. Three of the windows remaining are mullioned, with flamboyant tracery. The capitals of the pillars of the nave are sculptured to represent scripture subjects. The high altar slab—of Skye marble—has been carried away in bits to form amulets against fire and wreck. The ruins of a Norman cloister on the north side connect with a chapter-house with stalls and vaulting, over which was the once famous library.* A granite basin outside the west door was used for bathing the feet of pilgrims.

But it is in the memorials of the dead that we gain some slight idea of the fame of Columba and his island. The kings of three countries, and the principal highland families had their burying-grounds here. Forty-eight Scottish kings—among them Macbeth—four Irish, and eight Norwegian, rest in the consecrated dust, with chiefs and warriors without number. In addition to the sanctity of the place, persons were attracted to it by an Erse pro-

* It is said to have contained the *Liber Vitreus* of St. Columba, and many priceless MSS., given to Fergus II. by Alaric himself, after the sacking of Rome. Fragments of these were carried to Aberdeen in the 16th century; and the rest were probably committed to the flames, as the stone crosses to the water, by the numerous Alarics of Scotland. The *Catach*, or *Book of Battles*—the bone of contention between St. Finian and Columba is preserved in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. It is a Psalter in a rich silver casket.

phesy, which declared that, before the end of all things, the neighbouring isles—even Ireland—should be covered by the waters, but that the home of Columba should raise its head proudly above them. The saint himself gave utterance to a similar prophecy.

It is interesting to note the connection between St. Patrick and St. Columba. St. Patrick, born at Kilpatrick, in Scotland, was carried off by pirates and became the great apostle of Ireland. A century later, Columba, whose Christianity was the fruit of St. Patrick's labours, became the apostle of Scotland. The settlement at Iona is the beginning of the continuous history of the Scottish Church. Columban hermits were soon found in every highland valley; Columban skiffs carried the gospel as far as Iceland. St. Aidan, a disciple of St. Columba, founded the Abbey of Lindisfarne—the centre of learning and spiritual life in the eastern part of Britain, until the Bishop's chair was transferred to Durham. Melrose was one of the chief seats of Iona monks; St. Chadd, patron saint of Lichfield, and St. Cuthbert, the hermit of Holy Isle and the patron saint of Durham, were educated there. In the 13th century Iona passed to the Clugniacs of Paisley, and in 1617, after other changes, became a part of the see of Argyll and the Isles.

The glory of the Columban times is gone. Gone, too, is much of their spirit; or we should not hear of so many disputes between these poor islanders and their noble landlord. Let our last picture of the holy place be one of its earlier, better days: the venerable saint taking his parting journey from shore to shore, and from the Hill of Angels (where these celestial beings are said to have hovered about him) blessing his island and his people; returning to his monastery, and going on with his work of transcribing the Psalter, till his nerveless finger refused the task; and then, in the dawn of a Lord's day morning, making his way to the little chapel, falling prone before the altar, and with outstretched arms and radiant countenance, passing from faith to sight, from hope to fruition, and from love's labour to love's reward.

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