



IONA CATHEDRAL AND ST. MARTIN'S CROSS.

A REVERENT PILGRIMAGE.

PART VI.

Re-embarking, let us turn westward now ; double Cape Wrath, with its sullen, surging waters, and take our southward way between the main-land and the Hebrides—the very path which the Romans took when, in Agricola's last campaign, they sailed, on a voyage of discovery rather than of conquest, around the entire island of Great Britain. The wonders of that voyage—the discovery of the Orcades and of Thule, and of a sea “never agitated by winds and storms,” are they not yet to be found in the pages of Tacitus ? proving, either that the sea has sadly changed since those days, or that historians had as brilliant imaginations then as now. It is a journey which, if you are not to the manner born, may give you opportunity to try that famous remedy for *mal-de-mer*, which begins grandly but unnecessarily, “Assume at once a horizontal position.”

There is many a ruined chapel, many a quaintly sculptured stone among the hills we see in the distance, but we must not stay to search for them now. We are bound for that little lonely island off the coast of Argyllshire, to which, for centuries, kings, warriors and scholars from all parts of Europe repaired in pious pilgrimage. As at Lindisfarne, England's holy isle, they meet you with “St. Cuthbert's beads,” so, as we step ashore at Iona, Scotland's holy isle, little children flock about us with what might well be named the beads of St. Columba—beautiful creamy-white pebbles, circled with the most delicate green. The pebbles, however, are not perforated ; and, if they were, beads and rosaries have long been forbidden words in Iona. So the stones are sold for “charms,” on the principle that a pagan superstition *may* be winked at, but a Roman Catholic devotion never !

Are you thinking, as you look around you, fellow-

pilgrim, that there is not much to be seen ? With the bodily vision, there is not, certainly. It is a very little island—only three miles long and one mile wide—and, where we stand, there is little to break the monotony of its grey shore, but a mass of ruins and a great sculptured cross. Not so much as this met the eye of Columba, when he stepped ashore here, thirteen hundred years ago—unless, as some suppose, the island was then wooded. Huge monoliths of grey stone he found by the hundred, sculptured with circles and serpents, and other symbols of the worship of the sun—that cruel and powerful form of paganism, which was to fall before the cross, borne by a few humble monks.

Everyone knows the story of St. Columba. Born in Donegal, of royal blood on both sides, he seems by nature to have had more of the warrior than the dove about him. A quarrel with St. Finian about the ownership of a manuscript* led, fortunately for Scotland, to his exile ; and setting out from Ireland with a few brother monks, he sailed until he could no longer see its shores ; and then, settling himself upon this island, became a veritable apostle, winning to Christianity his adopted land, and sending missionaries out far beyond it. Iona was then known simply as I, or Hy, the Island. In succeeding

* St. Finian, as the story runs, had a book of Psalms which Columba so admired that he copied it secretly by night—a supernatural brightness, which emanated from his hand, supplying the necessary light. This light led to the discovery of his labour ; but St. Finian prudently waited till the MS. was completed, and then claimed it as his own. The matter was referred to King Diarmid, who decided, “To every cow her own calf ;” *ergo*, to every book its copy. The injustice of the decision, together with the murder of his friend, the Prince of Connaught, at a later period, led Columba to take such an active part in the wars of that day, that he was condemned to exile.

days it was called Ithona, the Isle of the Waves ; Ishona, the Isle of the Blessed ; and I-colm-kill, the Isle of Malcolm of the Cells or Churches.

Columba, having obtained a grant of the land from King Connell, set about building a church and monastery—a simple matter in those days when “wattle and daub” (twigs and mud) were the materials, and the monks the builders. The original buildings were but a group of huts forming a quadrangle : on one side, the chapel ; on another, the monastery ; on a third, the hospice for strangers ; on the fourth, the kitchen and refectory. Tradition relates that in laying the foundation of the chapel no progress could be made until Columba agreed to offer one human sacrifice to the powers of evil which he was about to overcome—thus laying the foundation in blood, as the Druids were in the habit of doing. Oran, one of the monks, generously offered himself for the sacrifice, and was accordingly buried alive, after which the work went prosperously on. Tradition further states that Columba, eager for a last look at his friend, had him disinterred after three days burial, but that Oran gave utterance to such unorthodox statements as to the other world, that Columba had him hastily covered up again. A more pleasing tradition is that which represents the walls of the unfriendly Pictish king, falling down before Columba and the cross. And perhaps the most curious legend in regard to the Saint, is that which associates him with the Stone of Destiny—that wonderful stone which served as a pillow for Jacob at Luz, and which is now the chief point of interest in the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey.*

* The story is not nearly such a round-about one as some that receive greater credence. The stone is said to have been carried to Egypt by the Israelites ; from Egypt to Spain by a young Prince of Athens, who married Pharaoh's daughter ; from Spain to Ireland by descendants of this royal couple ; and from Ireland to Scotland by a colony of Scots. About A.D. 530, Fergus I, on going to Iona to be crowned, took it with him ; afterwards leaving it with the saint, who, like Jacob, used it as a pillow. Another journey or two brought it to Scone, whence, as we all know, it was removed by Edward I.