

Tales of Inchcolm.

ISLANDS are always interesting. They possess a charm of which great masses of land, because of their magnitude, are devoid. Some, like the Bass Rock, are encircled with a Patmos-like halo of fascination—*islands* where the lonely prisoners of the Covenant saw visions and heard music in the silent watches of the night. Some again, like Iona and Inchcolm, contain the ruins of what were once huge monastic piles—the thankfulness of monarchs—where monks did penance, and where, ages before, Druids offered up in wicker cages human sacrifices to their idols. What a story, too, many of them could tell!—how war had laid its devastating fingers on the surrounding land; how, in the dim antepast of time, barbaric sea-rovers have ravaged their shores with hard-hearted mercilessness; how gallant barques have been swept upon their rocks, and their crews gone down to a watery grave unhonoured and unknelled.

Inchcolm is an island fascinating to the tourist and the archæologist alike—one of those “*emeralds chased in gold*,” round whose shores the billows of the Forth play their never-ending swish-wash game, and over which the billows of Time have swept gloomily and fathomlessly. *Aemona* was the name it once bore; and if anything be in a name we can readily conjure up a picture of what Inchcolm would be in the times long passed away. *Anglesea* or *Mona*, and *Aemona*!—such is the darksome copartnership. The name is suggestive of Druidism, signifies, in fact, the Island of the Druids, and

carries our minds back to the ages when old Grandfather Pict was an idolater.

Screams round the Arch-druid's brow the seamew—white
 As Mona's foam ; and toward the mystic ring
 Where Augurs stand, the Future questioning,
 Slowly the cormorant aims her heavy flight,
 Portending ruin to each baleful rite,
 That, in the lapse of ages, hath crept o'er
 Diluvian truths. And still the primal truth
 Glimmers through many a superstitious form
 That fills the Soul with unavailing ruth.

That was the Pagan night-time, when superstition made thralls of rich and poor, of chieftain and bondsman ; when minstrels stirred the warlike ire of their princes, or chanted their funeral dirge ; when conquerors, sweating with gore, dragged home their vanquished foes at the chariot's tail, and made thanksgiving offerings of them to their idols. Then Urien, the high-priest, led his heathen host to battle, and twitched his bow, sending a poisoned dart to find repose in the heart of an enemy ; then bards, nurtured amid silent retreats, laid down their harps and snatched up the avenging sword to wed it to deeds that would never die.

A change came. The dark and mysterious Paganism which had inspired our ancestors with trembling awe, paled before the approach of Christianity. Columba arrived with his gladsome tidings of salvation, won the hearts of the tattooed and beast-adorned savagelings of Pictland, and despatched his disciples over the whole country

Ere yet an island of the sea
 By foot of Saxon monk was trod.

The Word spread and fructified. Then the Saxon came, and Thor fell, and Odin too, afflicted and dismayed before the spear of the liberator ; and the messengers of the new tidings found homes for themselves in "some dry nooks scooped out of living rock."

Eight centuries ago Aemona had its hermit, and on the island may still be seen the remains of his single-windowed oratory, with its stone roof. Here he dwelt his anchoritish life, wearied of the world and its toil, finding food at morn and noon, at dewy eve and the silent hour of midnight, on penitential tears, which strangled the worldly pride in his decaying frame, and sapped away the strength of his existence. A strict Columban Culdee this anchorite seems to have been, and for one whom the world has ceased to charm it would be difficult indeed to find a more fitting retreat. Regarding this recluse, a wonderful story, something like eight hundred years old, comes down to us, and, though shrouded in the mists of antiquity, is in substance so perfectly natural and life-like, that there appears no reason whatever to doubt its veracity.

Bower or Bowmaker of Haddington, the old monastic historian, tells the tale in the *Scotichronicon*.

When Alexander I., nicknamed the Fierce, was crossing the Forth at Queensferry, a terrific storm arose, and drove the vessels seawards, casting the King and his attendants on the island of Aemona. Here they were deferentially received by the pious anchoret we have already referred to, and made sharers, for the time, of the shelter of his home and the benefit of his prayers. Thanks to the enthusiastic antiquarianism of Sir James Simpson, the hermit's chapel—presumably the oldest stone-roofed building in Scotland—has almost been restored to its original worthiness. "It is a single, vaulted chamber, bearing a striking resemblance to the oldest and smallest Irish churches and oratories, and, like them, stands east and west. The interior is about sixteen feet in length, with an average breadth of five, and a maximum height of eight feet. A window of very small dimensions in the eastern gable sheds a dim light throughout the chamber, and a recess in the wall underneath is supposed to mark the site of the altar."

In this humble abode of pain and want, of veneration and simplicity, the storm-stayed monarch found protection, and

learned, moreover, "the luxury of doing good." A solitary cow that grazed on the luxuriant herbage of the island and a few shell-fish which the sea yielded supplied the wants of the hermit, and on such meagre hospitality the Sovereign and his retainers fared gladly, if not sumptuously, for three days, during which time the storm raged unceasingly, and lashed the sea to fury. On the abatement of the tempest the King was rowed safely over to the mainland, having previously made a vow that he would erect, to the memory of the pioneer of Culdeeism in Scotland, an asylum for those who might be in peril on the deep. And the warlike monarch was as good as his word. From that day onwards the name Aemona has grown dim before the surname Inchcolm or Columba's Isle; and to-day, in the picturesque, weather-beaten, but still stately ruins of the monastery which makes Inchcolm so invitingly and ravishingly interesting, we behold in very bodily shape indeed Fierce Alexander's reverential offering of gratitude.

M, C, ter I, bis et X, literis a tempore Christi,
Emon, tunc, ab Alexandro fundata fuisti,
Scotorum primo, structorem Canonicorum,
Transferat ex imo Deus hunc ad astra polorum.

Such is the "jingling rhyme" which the old chroniclers have, in their goodness of heart, bequeathed to what would otherwise be an unenlightened world, and which the author of *Aberdour* thus fittingly interprets:—

An M, a C, three I's, and X's two,
These letters keep the year of Christ in view,
When Alexander First gave Emon's Isle,
His kingly gift—a rich monastic pile.
May God translate the noble Founder's soul
To regions high above the starry pole!

These lines give us a pretty liberal, if rude, idea of the foundation of the Monastery which is, therefore, 776 years old. Here, however, we have no intention of giving a lengthened

treatise on the sacred edifice, and so haste on to some of the miraculous stories related about its patron-saint.

In 1335 an English squadron of seventy ships appeared in the Firth of Forth, and laid in ashes the towns and villages on both sides of the river. The Monastery of Inchcolm became a cynosure to the eyes of the devastators, and one crew, more headstrong than its fellows, forcibly entered the sacred edifice, which was dedicated to the memory of St Columba, and plundered it of its most rare and costly ornaments and relics—even impoverished the shrine by carrying away the sacred image of the patron-saint himself. Thus laden they set sail for home. But Heaven took immediate steps to vindicate her own rights, and a speedy retribution pursued the crime of the sacrilegious mariners. Without a moment's warning, *Aeolus*, the storm-fiend, let loose his angriest blast which, driving the ships from their moorings, dispersed and shattered the whole fleet. All at once the rock-bound shores of *Inchkeith* loomed close in front of them like avenging demons, threatening them with instant destruction. Then did their consciences smite them. Struck with terror and remorse, they fell on their knees before the sacred idol, confessed their crimes, and solemnly promised to make abundant restitution if they were allowed to go scot-free.

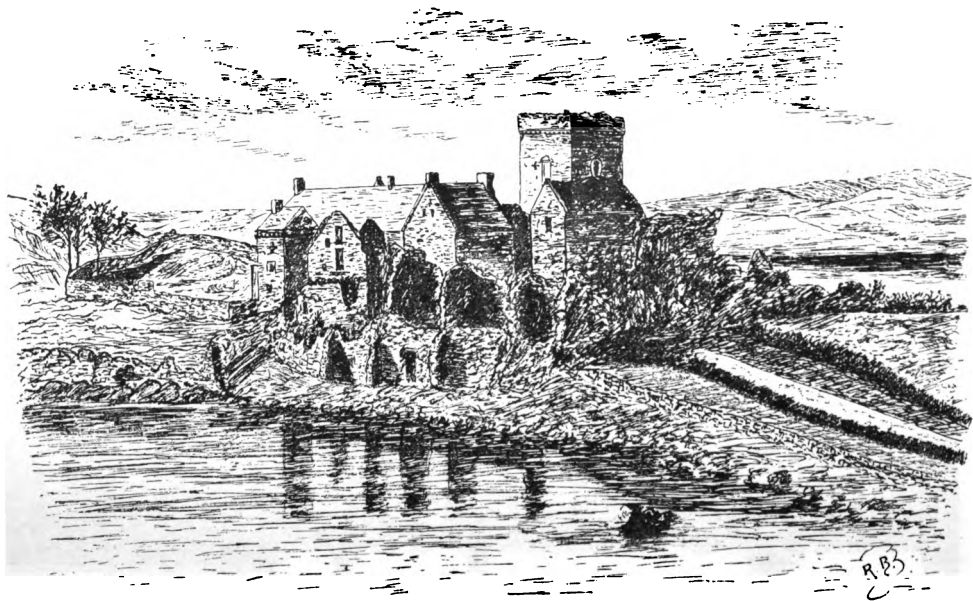
And the Saint heard them. The raging winds abated, stilled were the angry waves, and the tempest-tossed vessels were carried on the bosom of a gentle breeze to the tranquil haven of *Kinghorn*. There atonement was made. The spoils of war were landed, and returned, along with a handsome present, to the brethren of *St Colme's Isle*. And, as a token that the recompense was propitiatory enough in the eyes of the injured saint, fair winds sprang up from the west and wafted the repentant mariners homewards.

The lesson, however, was inefficacious and soon forgotten, for, ere another year had run its course, the Southrons were back at their old tricks again. This time the puissant King

Edward himself invaded Scotland, and marched as far north as Inverness. And while Windsor stormed through the country, the English navy, numbering over one hundred men of war, anchored in the Forth, while their crews carried their ravages far and wide. The whole seaboard of Fife, from Culross to Kinghorn-ness—that is, the Green Cape—bore evidences of their pillaging and ruthless fingers. The Church of Dollar was despoiled of its beautifully-carved wainscot, a present from the Abbot of Inchcolm, which the marauders took to pieces and placed on board one of their vessels. Flushed with success, they started for home in high glee—dancing and laughing and singing over their good fortune, as their water-steeds bounded joyously on the top of the waves.

But alas! how short-lived was to be their hilarity. Columba's saintly shade had been a witness of all their manœuvres, and was on the lookout for them; and, just as the fleet was steering past Inchcolm, his wrath burst forth like a torrent, and the sacrilegiously-loaded vessel, with its ill-starred crew and ill-gotten gear, dropped like a ball of lead to the bottom of the ocean. Affrighted and dismayed, the other seamen vowed they would never again molest or interfere with the vengeful saint and his possessions.

Yet another scene, a tragic one, too, was to be enacted on that old romantic isle. Great ills need great cures; so, when the Southron depredators come back thirty years afterwards to rehearse their evil games, the patron-saint rises in all his majesty and might to avenge the cause of his disciples. On this occasion they are evidently bent on the utter annihilation of the monastery, for an outhouse has already been fired, and the wind is driving the long-tongued flames Abbeywards. On the sea-beach crowds of apprehensive men and women are gathered together, fearful for the safety of the building and its inmates, with whose lives their own are so closely knit; some are on their knees beseeching Columba to avert the impending doom, when all at once the Saint appears and drives back the



INCHCOLM MONASTERY.

devouring flames from the church, which thus miraculously escapes destruction.

Another tale of the famed Arch-Culdee is told by Abbot Bower. The monks had spent the summer and autumn on the mainland for fear of invasion. On the approach of winter they returned to their island home. Next day the Abbot despatched Alick Made, the cellarer, to shore to bring the provisions and some barrels of beer. In the afternoon they set out on the return journey, but before leaving had imbibed rather freely of the inebriating liquor. Ere they were half-way over, the cellarer and the two rowers would, in spite of fate, hoist the sail, which was no sooner done than the steersman lost control of the boat which rapidly filled and sank, the three of them being drowned. The others, who had that day attended the celebration of Mass in the Church of Dalgety, were saved, Columba appearing in bodily form and rescuing the Canon by means of a rope, while the other two clung to a wisp of straw till they were snatched from the jaws of death by some fishermen.

Needless to say, the monks of St Colme's Isle were held in the greatest veneration by their superstitious contemporaries, and the miraculous powers they possessed were stared at with open-mouthed wonder and awe. The legend of Sir Alan Mortimer, or Alan de Mortuo Mari, which Vedder has wedded to Parnassian language, shows how far our forefathers believed the inhabitants of the Abbey to be supernaturally endowed.

The morning's e'e saw mirth and glee
 In the hoary feudal tower
 Of bauld Sir Alan Mortimer,
 The Lord of Aberdour.
 But dool was there, and mickle care,
 When the moon began to gleam ;
 For Elf and Fay held jubilee
 Beneath her siller beam.

Sir Alan's peerless daughter was
 His darling frae infancie ;

She bloomed, in her bower, like a lily flower,
 Beneath the light o' his e'e.
 Her eyes were gems, her brow was bright,
 Her tresses black as jet,
 And her thoughts as pure as the dews of even
 On the virgin violet.

The woodbine and the jessamine
 Their tendrils had entwined ;
 A bower was formed, and Emma oft
 At twilight there reclined.
 She thought of her knight in Palestine,
 And sometimes would she sigh,
 For love was a guest in her spotless breast,
 In heavenly purity.

The evening sun had sunk beneath the Ochil Hills, the ever-restive waters of the glassy Forth had ceased to mirror back the mystic flooding of the golden west, Vesper had ascended the starry vault of the heavens to keep her nightly vigils, and the moon began to flash her radiant beams on holm and sea ere Emma left her bower. On the daisy-decorated lea the fairy court was holding its nocturnal revels, and anon the air vibrated with the soft and mysterious melody as the fairies touched the gossamer strings of their elfin virginals. And while the weird, unearthly music rose and fell on the air, now soft and trembling, now gay and triumphant, while the lovely fairies danced and the little goblins careered around them to guard them from intrusion, while the king of fairyland looked anxiously about the enamelled sward for some one to be his Titania, he espied a form that outrivalled all the beauties of his graceful court. 'Twas Emma Mortimer !

Quick as the vivid lightning gleams
 Amidst the thunder storm,
 As rapidly the elf assumed
 Lord Bethune's manly form.
 As flies the cushat to her mate,
 To meet his embrace she flew ;

Like a feathered shaft frae a yeoman's bow,
She vanished frae human view.

The Abbey bell, on the sacred isle,
Had told the vesper's hour ;
No footsteps are heard—no Emma appears—
Sir Alan rushed from his tower.
The warders they hae left their posts,
And ta'en them to the bent,
The porters they hae left their yetts,
The sleuth-hounds are on the scent.

Porters and warders and vassals have all vacated the posts, and are now searching hill and dale and wood for the unfortunate maiden. Sir Alan follows in the wake of the hounds, when all at once they stand stock still, trembling like aspen leaves, and refuse to proceed. With an aching, breaking heart the Knight laments his daughter's fate, and bids his men haste to the holy Abbot that lives on St Columba's sacred shores, and tell him that a son of the Holy Kirk implores his ghostly aid. Across the two-mile channel that separates the island from the coast they dash, urged on by the untardy oars, and reach the chapel door just as the Abbot is chanting his midnight hymn before the shrine of Columba.

His saintlike mien, his radiant een,
An' his tresses o' siller grey,
Might hae driven to flight the demon o' night,
But rood or rosarie.

The messenger dropt upon his knees,
And humbly thus he said—
“ My master, a faithfu' son o' the kirk,
Implores your ghostlie aid.”

“ And ye're bidden to put sic armour on
As is proof against glamourie,
Lest the fiends o' nicht hae power to prevail
Against baith him and thee.”
The Abbot leaped lightly into the boat,
And pushed her frae the strand,
An' pantin' for breath, 'tween life and death,
The vassals rowed to land.

No sooner does the boat touch the beach than the Saint leaps ashore, and, grasping the Baron by the hand, bids him have patience. "Fear not, my son," he says, "all the fiends of hell I shall drive from your castle and barony." But the Knight can brook no delay. "Restore my daughter," he cries, "and the half of my gold this very night shall be laid on St Columba's shrine, and the half of my lands ere morning's prime be given to thy Abbey."

The Abbot replied, with priestly pride,
 "Hae patience under your loss,
 There never was fiend withstood me yet
 When I brandished the Holy Cross.
 Forego your fear and be of good cheer,
 I hereby pledge my word
 That by Mary's might, ere I sleep this night,
 Your daughter shall be restored."

Well might the holy man speak thus. As a barefooted friar he had made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, had slept in the Holy Sepulchre, and seen visions there. In "cool Siloam's shady rill" his girdle had been seven times laved; the crucifix which was suspended from his neck was a gift he had received from St Bride himself while in a dream; on his rosary was a miracle-working bead which had already "cured three men bewitched"; and his pastoral staff contained nothing less than a relic of the cross that stood on Calvary.

He carried a chalice in his hand,
 Brimfu' o' water clear,
 For his ain behoof, that had oozed frae the roof
 O' the Holy Selpulchre.
 He sprinkled bauld Sir Alan's lands
 Wi' draps o' the heavenly dew,
 An' the fiends o' nicht, wi' gruesome yell,
 To their midnight darkness flew.

Anon he shook his rosarie,
 And invoked St Mary's name,

Until sweet Emma's voice was heard
 Chantin' the virgin hymn ;
 But when he brandished the Holy Rood
 And raised it to the sky,
 Like a beam o' light she burst on their sight
 In vestal purity.

Apropos of the Mortimers we give another story which is related by Sibbald, the native historian. Sir Alan, it would appear, was to receive for half his lands a family burial-place in the church of the monastery, but for some inexplicable reason was denied the privilege for himself just at the last moment, for, while his corpse was being carried "in a coffin of lead, by barge, in the night-time, to be interred within the church, some wicked monks did throw the same in a great deep betwixt the land and the monastery, which to this day is called "Mortimer's Deep."

While still called Aemona, the island was the scene of a memorable event in Scottish history which the greatest of English dramatists has woven and immortalised in his tragedy of "Macbeth." In the year 1033 the Danish sea-rovers landed upon the coast of Fife, and, after being vanquished by Macbeth and Banco, were allowed to bury their fallen comrades on Aemona's Isle. Shakespeare pictures Rosse, the Thane of Fife's cousin, as hastening to Forres to acquaint King Duncan of the issue of the fight, and telling him that he has come

From Fife,

Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky
 And fan our people cold ;
 Norway himself, with terrible numbers,
 Assisted by that most disloyal traitor,
 The Thane of Cawdor, 'gan a dismal conflict ;
 Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof,
 Confronted him with self-comparisons,
 Point against point rebellious, arm 'gainst arm,
 Curbing his lavish spirit. And, to conclude,
 The victory fell on us.

Now

Sweno, the Norways' King, craves composition ;
Nor would we deign him burial of his men,
Till he disbursed, at St Colme's Inch,
Ten thousand dollars to our general use.

A rude, coffin-shaped monument marks the place of interment. Once, the old chroniclers assure us—and they saw it in its better days—it was ornamented with sculptured faces, but now, embedded in the soil on the western side of the monastery, is so dilapidated and defaced as to be quite undiscernible. On one side was a warrior holding a spear in his hand, on the other the figure of a cross—thus showing that, in the pictorial representations on the tomb at least, monk as well as knight had probably had a hand.

And, you ask, have no prisoners made the associations of the island more attractive? Ay, truly ; and hallowed them with the touch of holy feet.

Of the tales of imprisonment the latest belongs to the reign of that pitiless monster of humanity, Cardinal Beaton. His victim was the gentle but unbendingly faithful martyr, Dean Thomas Forret, Vicar of Dollar, who belonged to the Forret family, in the parish of Logie, in North Fife. A sterling honest man he was, who, while the impious bishops gloried and thanked their stars (such was the case) that they never knew the Old or New Testaments, went straight to the Word and taught therefrom. For this, and this alone, for keeping his heresy in his sleeve—it was there he kept his Bible—was he burned as a heresiarch on the Castlehill of Edinburgh in 1538.

A century before we find on that small enchanted isle a prisoner of a different stamp altogether. The crime this time is a political one, and the criminal a lady, Euphemia, Countess of Ross, who has been accused of aiding and abetting her son, the Lord of the Isles, in rebelling against their lawful Sovereign, James the First.

The midway scene refers to that excellent and God-fearing man of princely blood, Patrick Graham, Archbishop of St Andrews, who, because he aimed at the reformation of the licentious faction of which he was the head, "was condemned to perpetual imprisonment."

Woe to you, Prelates ! rioting in ease
And cumbrous wealth—the shame of your estate ;
Pastors who neither take nor point the way
To Heaven.

Inchcolm's sea-girtness and a quartette of warders were deemed insufficient guard for this virtuous man. From Columba's Isle—would that the saint had helped such men !—he was dragged to Dunfermline, thence to Lochleven, where, on the holy isle of St Serf, rest his weary bones until the judgment trumpet sounds for them a joyful awakening.

