

## CHAP. IX.

KILKERRAN, AND THE FIRST MISSIONARY IN THE  
HIGHLANDS.

Kilkerran. — St. Kiaran. — His History. — The Apostle of Cantire. — Palladius. — St. Patrick. — St. Kiaran's Pupil Columba. — Chronological Difficulties. — St. Kiaran's Home in Cantire. — His begging Horse. — An unfair Compact. — The Burial-ground. — Three Views of it. — Aidan's Tomb. — A pugilistic Apparition. — Mr. Boes and his Second-sight. — "Well done, John!" — The Sleeper. — Mr. Boes and his Combats with Satan. — Kilkerran Castle. — Small Profits and quick Returns.



OF those spots in the immediate neighbourhood of Campbelton, Kilkerran is the most interesting. It is one mile east of Campbelton, and pleasantly situated on the shore of the Loch, with the Glenramskill hills rising behind it, and the picturesque island of Davar close at hand to the right. There are a few cottages and a farm-house or two, snugly embosomed in trees, and there are the ruins of the old castle, and the

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site of the old church, with its large burial-ground, which is still used as a cemetery for the use of Campbelton. Altogether Kilkerran forms a very lovely bit of scenery, and the view from its hills is most pleasing and varied. But it is the past history of the place that gives it its crowning interest; for here lived St. Kieran, the Apostle of Cantire, the tutor of St. Columba, and the first person (in all probability) who preached in the Highlands the Gospel of Christ.

The saint gave his name to this spot; Kilkerran, or as it is in Gaelic *Kil-Ciaran*, signifying "the Cell of Kieran;" and Campbelton harbour was sometimes called "The Loch of Kilkerran," and Campbelton itself was occasionally spoken of as "Kilkerran." I have already referred to the tradition of St. Kieran being accompanied by his pupil, St. Columba, to the Mull of Cantire; but it is also stated that St. Columba did not proceed to Iona until fifteen years after the death of St. Kieran\*; and, if there is any shadow of truth in this statement, it would appear that St. Kieran preached Christ in the Highlands many years before St. Columba's visit, and that to this "Apostle of Cantire" (as he is generally called), must be ascribed the honour of being the first missionary to the western coast of Scotland. It would, perhaps, be impossible to

\* On the authority of the Rev. W. L. Alexander, D.D., and "The Annals of Innishfallen, Ireland."



Guthbert Bede, del<sup>t</sup>

Hanhart, Chromo lith

WESTERN CAMP FOR TRADING AND GREAT OXEN MARKET  
ON THE RIVER AND GREAT OXEN MARKET

fix with any precision the date of St. Kiaran's preaching. He is said to have died when St. Columba was only twenty-seven years of age; and this would bring his preaching into the first half of the sixth century, and his death somewhere about the year 550,—Sept. 9, 548, has been given as the date, but other dates have also been assigned to that event. The Romanists, I am aware, assert that Palladius, after he had preached to the Scots in Ireland, crossed over to the west coast of Scotland, in consequence of the opposition he had encountered in Ireland, from the heathen king Dathi; and that after preaching the Gospel for a short time in the Highlands, he died in 432\*, and was succeeded by

\* It is stated that he took refuge at Abernethy, on the borders of Perthshire, with the Pictish King Nethan (or Nectan) I. He, however, did not come to the throne till 455, and it does not seem clear whether Abernethy was founded by Nethan I., or (according to the register of St. Andrews) by Nethan II., about the year 600. (See Dr. Jamieson.) It is also stated that Palladius preached to the Picts for twenty years, and died at Fordun in 450, and was buried there: in confirmation of which there is a house in the churchyard still called Palladius's chapel, where there was an image of the saint, and whither pilgrimages used to be performed. There is also a well there called Paldy Well; and an annual fair called Paldy Fair. (See the Rev. Alexander Leslie's "Statistical Account of Fordun.") But all this might be without Palladius having any personal connection with the place. The phrase that he was sent by Cœlestine to preach "in Scotiam," is variously interpreted. It is true that the Breviary of Aberdeen mentions his dying at Fordun "full of years" ("annorum plenus apud Long-forgund in Mernis in pace requiescit beata"); and many historians have adopted this statement; but, says

St. Patrick, who had been consecrated at Rome by Pope Cœlestine, as the successor of Palladius, and “Archbishop of the Scots.” But this story may have been framed to meet the difficulties of the position; and although from the close connection subsisting between Ireland and Cantire, the light of Christianity *may* have shone upon the Dalruadhian kingdom long before St. Kieran, in 536, became the Apostle of Cantire, yet he is the first preacher of whom we have any authentic accounts, and to him therefore (in the absence of more reliable authority) we may fairly assign the honour of having been the forerunner of Columba, and the first person who preached the Gospel in the Highlands.

St. Kieran’s history, however, is connected with that Mr. Chambers, “It is now the general opinion of the more rigorous antiquaries, that Palladius never was in Scotland, and that the claims of Fordoun to have been his resting-place arose at first from a misapprehension, either wilful or through ignorance, on the part of the monks. Palladius, according to the only proper authority, was sent ‘in Scotiam,’ that is, to Ireland; for such was the designation of the sister isle at that period.” The truth of this remark may be confirmed by a reference to Adamnan’s “Life of St. Columba,” wherein “Scotia” is invariably applied to Ireland, although this is a point on which the usually careful Romish historian, Dr. Lingard, has fallen into error. A similar mistake has arisen from the word Hibernia being applied to Cantire and the Isles. The Western Highlanders were frequently called *Hibernii*, or “the Irish” (even up to 1547), to distinguish them from the Scots of the mainland. (See Paterson “On the Origin of the Scots.”) But whether Palladius was at Fordun or not, he does not appear to have had any connection with Cantire.

of St. Patrick. This saint, it may be remembered, whose real name was Calphurnius, surnamed "the Patrician" (whence *Patrick*), was born at that Roman city in Dumbartonshire, now called Kilpatrick, or "the Cell of Patrick," and, at the age of sixteen, was taken prisoner, and carried off to Ireland, by Nial of the Nine Hostages, King of Ireland, from whom St. Columba was fourth in descent. After nine years of a shepherd's life, he escaped to his native country, and from thence went to Tours, where he received his education. When he returned to Ireland, as the successor of Palladius, he baptized several persons of great consequence, and among them St. Kiaran, and Fergus, who was afterwards King of Cantire. According to Bede, St. Patrick died fifty-seven years before the birth of Columba, *i. e.* somewhere about the year 463, or 465; for it is as difficult to calculate these confused chronologies as it would be to arrive at the hour of the day by consulting Captain Cuttle's famous watch. But there do not appear to have been two St. Patricks, who were nearly contemporaneous, although such a thing is by no means improbable; for when any one was distinguished for an unusual odour of sanctity, he or she had many admirers and imitators, who, by assuming the name of the saint, have greatly confounded posterity, if they did not deceive their contemporaries. Thus, within the same century, there were twenty-two Co-

lumbas, and there were fifteen rival Bridgets before St. Bridget of Kildare ended her useful life.

If St. Kiaran, therefore, died about the year 550, it would follow that he was nearly as old as his tutor St. Patrick, by whom he must have been baptized in early youth. St. Patrick gave him a copy of the Gospels, the genuineness of which was authenticated in the year 1682, and which is now preserved in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. St. Kiaran was the founder of the church of Duleek, one of the oldest in Ireland, also of the monastery of Clon (or Clonmacnoise) on the Shannon, six miles south of Athlone\*, where one of his pupils was St. Columba, who ever retained the greatest respect and affection for him, and on St. Kiaran's death, wrote an ode to his memory, commencing thus:—

“Quantum Christe! Apostolum  
Mundo misisti hominum?  
Lucerna hujus insulæ,” &c.

Perhaps, from the expression “*hujus insulæ*,” this ode was written after St. Columba's arrival at Cantire, which may have been ten or a dozen years after his old tutor's death. Cantire, we may remember, was ac-

\* When the Easter controversy arose in the Irish Church (at the close of the seventh century), St. Kiaran of Clonmacnoise was cited as one of its primitive fathers, — “*Nostrorum patrum priorum*,” in St. Cummin's epistle.

counted an island; and, indeed, the Mull of Cantire must, at one time, literally have been so.

When King Arthur was yet but young, and ere that glorious company of his Knights of the Round Table, could

“Serve as model for the mighty world,  
And be the fair beginning of a time,”

Fergus, the son of Erc (who, together with St. Kiaran, had been baptized by St. Patrick) quarrelled with the King of Ireland, and, with his brothers Lorn and Angus, made a descent upon Cantire, and made themselves masters of the peninsula. This was in the year 503; and it is said that St. Kiaran accompanied them; which, if this statement be correct, and, supposing him not to have returned to Ireland, would quite overthrow the idea that he was tutor to St. Columba. Other accounts, however, date his arrival in Cantire to a much later period, viz. to 536, which date certainly harmonises better with the story of his tutorship. At this time, St. Kiaran must have been nearly, if not quite, eighty years of age.

But, whether or no we must date his arrival in Cantire to 503, or to 536, St. Kiaran, from the very first, would seem to have made his abode in a cave on the sea coast, near to Kilkerran, and about four miles and a half from Campbelton. It is where the eastern coast of Cantire rounds off from Campbelton harbour

towards the Mull. The spot is known as Achanhoan or Achanatonn, signifying "The Field of the Waves," a name denoting the extensive sea view visible from this place. Here, where the waters keep an everlasting murmur to the precipices and crags that overhang them, is a wild and dreary cavern, hollowed from the seaward rock. This was the home for the saint for many years; and it is called Cove-a-Chiaran, "the Cave of Kiaran." It is difficult of access, and is only approachable at half tide, and the road to it is covered with large stones, round and slippery. Other caves adjoin it. Pennant thus describes them:—"Turn to the south, and visit some caves in the rocks that face the frith. These are very magnificent, and very various; the tops are lofty, and resemble Gothic arches. One has on all sides a range of natural seats; another is in the form of a cross with three fine Gothic porticoes for entrances. This had been the residence of St. Kerran; had formerly a wall at the entrance, a second about the middle, and a third far up, forming different apartments. On the floor is the capital of a cross, and a round bason, cut out of the rock, full of fine water, the beverage of the saint in old times, and of sailors in the present, who often land to dress their victuals beneath this shelter." The water in the bason is supplied by the continual dropping from the roof of the cave. There is also a rudely sculptured cross on a

stone, upon which the saint is said to have sat and prayed. The spot is not without its personal legends of the Apostle of Cantire. It is said that St. Kieran employed an old horse to go out and beg for him, and bring back to his cave whatever the charitable had stowed away in his panniers. One day, a wicked fellow put out the poor horse's eyes; and, in consequence of its loss of sight, it fell over a cliff and perished. Shortly after, the wretch who had perpetrated the cruelty, was stung by a serpent, and his life was despaired of. St. Kieran was called in, and prayed over him, and doctored his wounds; but though the man recovered his health, he lost his eyesight.

Between Achanatonn and Kilkerran is Kildalvig House, beautifully situated, and girdled by fine old timber.

There was once a church at Kilkerran, which was well endowed by the Macdonalds. In the year 1261, Lawrence, Bishop of Argyle, annexed it to the Abbey of Paisley\*, of course with the consent of the Macdonalds, though why or wherefore is not known, as they had recently established their monastery at Saddell. The revenues derived from the church of Kilkerran by the Abbey of Paisley are not known; but, however large, they could scarcely have formed an ade-

\* Keith's "Catalogue of Bishops."

quate recompense for the strenuous exertions of the good monks of Paisley, who, for the trifling consideration of the revenues, undertook to secure to the Macdonalds “their own salvation, and that of their heirs for ever;” and, as we have had an insight into the characters of a few of the members of this family, we may easily imagine, that, to a conscientious monk, the terms of this compact must frequently have brought many qualms. The Lords of the Isles were in the habit of making gifts to the Abbey of Paisley. One of the grants is entitled “Gift by Reginald, son of Somerled, Lord of Incheval, King of the Isles, and Lord of Argyle, of one penny from every house in his dominions from which smoke issues.”

The burial-ground of Kilkerran is very interesting. The ruins of the church have now totally disappeared; the inclosure, therefore, presents nothing more than a diversity of tombstones, thickly scattered over an irregular plot of ground; but, from the character of a small portion of these monumental memorials\*, and from the picturesque situation of this retired cemetery, its effect, as a whole, is particularly impressive. Its effect upon different visitors, however, will naturally be directed by their various idiosyncrasies. Thus, one visitor has written of it thus:—“A walk through this

\* See Appendix, “Ecclesiology of Cantire.”

churchyard, would be well calculated to raise ideas like the following: —

“Here all do meet, the high, the low,  
 The young, the old, the friend, the foe;  
 The priest, the monk, the presbyter,  
 The hoary head, the gay and fair;  
 The haughty chief, the timid slave,  
 In others arms sleep in the grave.”

Pennant looks at it with different eyes. “Take a ride along the west side of the bay. See in Kilkerran churchyard, several tombs of artificers with the instruments of their trades engraven; amongst others appear a goose and shears, to denote that a tailor lay beneath.” Macculloch views it in still another light: — “The burying-ground of Kilkerran, named after St. Kieran, is a very pleasing and not an unpicturesque spot; while it is also rendered a very lively scene by the concourse of the fair sex employed in washing; the public laundry being on the banks of the small stream which runs past it, and displaying all the well-known variety which results from blazing fires, huge black kettles, smoke, linen, tubs, bare legs and arms, and merriment. This would be an admirable scene for Wilkie; the landscape adding charms to the fair, and the fair reflecting them back on the landscape.”

How Wordsworth would have written of this burial-ground of Kilkerran, we may judge from one of his

sonnets on a similar spot; and, as the lines may be aptly quoted here, I may be excused for recalling them to the reader's recollection:—

“Part fenced by man, part by a rugged steep,  
That curbs a foaming brook, a graveyard lies;  
The hare's best couching-place for fearless sleep;  
Which moonlit elves, far seen by credulous eyes,  
Enter in dance. Of church, or sabbath ties,  
No vestige now remains; yet thither creep  
Bereft ones, and in lowly anguish weep  
Their prayers out to the wind and naked skies.  
Proud tomb is none; but rudely sculptured knights,  
By humble choice of plain old times, are seen  
Level with earth, among the hillocks green;  
Union not sad, when sunny daybreak smites  
The spangled turf, and neighbouring thickets ring  
With *jubilate* from the choirs of spring.” \*

Lord Teignmouth does not describe Kilkerran; and Pennant and Macculloch say no more than has been quoted. In this churchyard, however, according to the testimony of Fordun, was buried, in the year 605, Aidan, the most renowned of the Dalruadh kings. He had fought for the crown with his cousin Doncha, and had prevailed over him; and he wished to be anointed as king by St. Columba. Now the saint had more favour for his brother Eoghan, and therefore delayed for a considerable time the ceremony of unction, till at length, a supernatural agent appeared to him for two

\* Wordsworth's "Tour in Scotland, 1831," vol. iii.

or three successive nights, and charged him to perform his office. The saint still delaying, the visionary being again appeared to him, and gave him such a Sayers-like blow on his right side, that he never lost the mark of it; and as the pugilistic apparition threatened him with a repetition of the dose if he postponed the business any longer, the saint thought it prudent to anoint Aidan as king. Ever afterwards he zealously supported Aidan's cause; and, when he went to fight a battle, the monks of Iona were convened to pray for success on his arms. One of the tombstones bears the following inscription:—“Here lies the body of Mr. James Boes, one of the ministers of Campbeltown, who was born 1667, and died 14th February, 1749; was an extraordinary pious man, much beloved by his flock, whom he loved as a faithful pastor fifty-seven years, and by many whose piety endeared him to them.” It is said that he had the national gift of second-sight; and that when on a certain Sabbath day his congregation had assembled as usual, the minister continued his walk upon the green after the time for commencing the service had expired. The elders were unwilling to disturb him, as he appeared absorbed in meditation. At length he clapped his hands, and exclaimed, “Well done, John!” and then came into the meeting, and proceeded as usual with the service. Now, it happened, that John, Duke of Argyle, was at that time at

the head of the army in Flanders, and gained a battle on the very day and at about the very hour, when Mr. Boes exclaimed, "Well done, John!" So, when the people (after the event) ascribed to him the gift of second-sight, and made out that in his "mind's eye" he had seen the Duke's victory, Mr. Boes did not deny the soft impeachment. Other circumstances also occurred to deepen the popular impression of his prophetic gift.

Once, when he was preaching, a man fell asleep, as has happened to the best preachers, from the days of Eutychus to the present time. Mr. Boes spied him, and called out to him to awake. This personal address revived the sleeper for a time; but the soporific nature of the sermon again overpowered him, and a second time he succumbed to its influence, and a second time Mr. Boes called out to him to awake, and to listen to the sermon. He awoke, but, for the third time, fell asleep. Then cried Mr. Boes with a loud voice, "Awake, and hear this sermon! for it will be the last that you will ever hear in this life!" It was even so: before the next Sabbath the man was dead. On another Sabbath, when the Communion was to be administered, and there would be a larger congregation than usual, Mr. Boes got up very early, convinced that something was wrong about the church. He found, on examination, that the beams of the gallery were

almost sawn through, so that the weight of the congregation would have brought it to the ground. He at once set carpenters and smiths to work, and had the church put in a safe condition to enable him to go through the solemn services of the day. So, in this case, Mr. Boes "second-sight" was of great value.

He ascribed the sawing of the gallery beams to the agency of Satan, with whom he had many imaginary combats, being sorely tried with his temptations. At such times as these, Mr. Boes was not in the best of tempers, and would not allow any one to come near him. On one of these occasions he shut himself up in his room for three days. His wife being fearful that he would die from hunger, sent to him food by a servant man; but the minister scattered it on the floor. "The devil's in the man!" cried the servant. "You are quite right;" replied the minister, who at once became calm, partook of the food, and returned to his former habits. One time, when he had been at the Assembly, and was returning home on the Saturday, a storm drove his vessel into Rothesay, and compelled him to stay there over the Sunday, on which day he preached in the Rothesay church. Its roof was very much out of order, and, in the middle of his sermon, sharp-sighted Mr. Boes spied his old enemy peering at him through a hole in the tiles. So he at once cried out, "Aye, ye're there, Satan! Ye kept me from preaching to my ain congregation, but

ye canna keep me from preaching for a' that ;” and he then went on with his sermon, as though this little interruption to it had been nothing more than a gloss or marginal reference. Near to Dunaverty is a cave called Boes' Cave, where he was accustomed to retire for meditation and prayer.

Between the burial-ground of Kilkerran and the sea, are the remains of that old castle of Kilkerran, which was repaired and garrisoned by James V. in 1536, to overawe the Macdonalds, and which was captured by that bold chieftain, and its governor hung from its walls, before the King had sailed from the harbour, an instance of unusually “quick returns” for the “small profits” anticipated by the monarch. This castle of Kilkerran, it is thought, was not “built by James V.,” as stated in Smith's “Campbelton and its Neighbourhood,” but had existed for some centuries, and had been captured by Haco of Norway, in that expedition to enforce his claims on the sovereignty of the Hebrides, which ended in the battle of Largs, October 2nd, 1263. Having fallen into a ruinous state, James V. caused it to be repaired for the purpose above mentioned.

Just above Kilkerran, in the face of the hill of Bengullion, and near to its summit, is a narrow and deep crevasse, which is popularly believed to be the entrance to a subterranean passage, leading to Southend, on the

Mull, a distance of ten miles. These legends of long subterranean passages and caves are very common in Cantire. The reader may remember that we met with a cave (six miles long) at Keill, near to Dunaverty and Southend. Perhaps the two legends are but variations of the same tale. Near this place is a curious well called "the Watchman's Well."