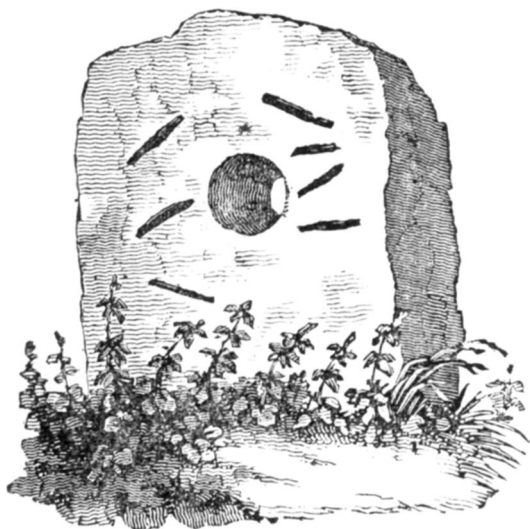


Stones perforated in this manner are to be found in most parts of Ireland, and particularly in the burial grounds attached to very ancient churches. The annexed wood-cut represents one of them remaining in the church-yard of Castle Dermot, and which is inscribed with some ancient Ogham characters or letters, in use in Ireland previous to the introduction of Christianity.



There is also a remarkable perforated stone of this description, inscribed also with Ogham characters, near the church of Killmelcheder, one mile from Smerwick harbour in the county of Kerry. They have, probably, an Eastern origin, for Mr. Wilford informs us, in the Asiatic Researches, vol. vi. p. 502, that perforated stones are not uncommon in India; and devout people pass through them, when the opening will admit, in order to be regenerated. If the hole be too small, they put the hand or foot through it, and with a sufficient degree of faith, it answers nearly the same purpose. P.

WITCHCRAFT IN KILKENNY.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DUBLIN PENNY JOURNAL.

SIR—I take the liberty of acquainting you with the satisfaction I derive from the perusal of the Dublin Penny Journal, feeling that the expression of approbation (however humble the individual it may come from), must be cheering to an editor. That much good may be done to Ireland by your work if conducted in the spirit which it has hitherto exhibited, no one can hesitate to believe, and that it will receive the encouragement, it appears to me to merit, I sincerely trust.

Among other articles in number 10, now before me, I observe an account of the witchcraft practised at Kilkenny, in 1325, by Dame Alice Kettle or Kettell, (not Kelter, as you have spelled the name, no doubt by a printer's mistake), and upon which you will, perhaps, indulgently receive from me a few observations.

The sketch of witchcraft by Sir Walter Scott, recently published in Mr. Murray's family library, is, indeed, to use his own expressive phrase—"the history of a dark chapter in human nature." Cervantes says, "That witches do nothing which lead to any object," yet it appears evident that that which the tortured imagination of these unhappy persons can confess, leads through so troubled a stream to the fountain of fairy legends.

The persecution of the Lady Alice Kettell, at Kilkenny, for witchcraft, is, perhaps, one of the earliest upon record.—The Bishop of Ossory, is stated to have been her accuser, and to have charged her and two companions with various diabolical acts; among others, that of holding a conference, every night, with a spirit called Robin Artisson, to whom, as you have related, they were said to sacrifice nine red Cocks, and nine Peacock's eyes.

In this ecclesiastical persecution, the object of which appears to have been to extort money to cover the roof

of St. Mark's Church, in Kilkenny, the connexion with the fairy creed is obvious from the name of the evil spirit. The appellation of Artisson, any Irish scholar will at once perceive has had its origin in the sacrifice said to be nightly offered up, as the translation of it is chicken flesh, ($\alpha\rho\tau$ art flesh, and $\gamma\rho\epsilon\alpha\eta$ isean, a chicken or young bird), and with respect to the name of Robin, I cannot help thinking when Sir Walter Scott tells us, that "by some inversion and alteration of pronunciation" the English word goblin and the Scottish bogle, come from the same root as the German Kobold, he may as well have added poor Robin, if only for the sake of good-fellowship as Robin's punning namesake, Thomas Hood, would have said.

That Robin, however, was the popular name for a fairy of much repute, is sufficiently well-known; but since the mention of his name has accidentally occurred with that of Hood, I may be allowed to observe that the title assumed by, or applied to the famous outlaw, was no other than one which had been appropriated to a denizen of fairy land.—Hudikin or Hodekin, that is little hood, or cowl, being a Dutch or German spirit, so called from the most remarkable part of his dress, in which also the Norwegian Nis and Spanish Duende were believed to appear—

"Un cucurucho tamano,"

to use the words of Calderon. There is in Oxford-street a well-known Coach office, distinguished by the sign of "the green man and still," but why so called I have never had satisfactorily explained by the curious in such matters. The derivation of the Bull and Mouth, the Belle Savage, the Talbot, (old Chaucer's Tabart), and many other signs, which may be quoted in proof of the mutability of things, are familiar to all, yet the origin of the aforesaid Green Man and Still, remains involved in the most mysterious obscurity. I have, however, always been inclined to consider it as remotely derived from Robin Hood; and leaving fancy to fill up the chasm, have found myself willing to translate it as "the forrester and fairy," or the green or woodman, and the still folk or silent people, as the supernatural beings which we call fairies, were not unusually termed—"Das still Volk" being the common German expression.

This long digression, like the treacherous Friar Rush, might readily lead me on from "the merry green wood," until I became bewildered in the mazes of conjecture.—Allow me, therefore, to return to Kilkenny, the scene of Alice Kettell's conjurations.—That town appears to have been peculiarly fatal to witches. Sir Richard Cox, in his history of Ireland, mentions the visit of Sir William Drury, the Lord Deputy, to it, in October, 1578, who caused thirty-six criminals to be executed there, "one of which was a black-a-moor, and two others were witches, and were condemned by the law of nature, for there was no positive law against witchcraft in these days." From that it would appear that the Statute of the 33rd of Henry VIII. against witchcraft had either become a dead letter, or had not been enacted in Ireland.

Ireland has been, in my opinion, unjustly stigmatised as a barbarous and superstitious country.—It is certain that the cruel persecution carried on against poor and ignorant old women was as nothing in Ireland when compared with other countries. In addition to the three executions at Kilkenny, a town, the inhabitants of which were almost entirely either English settlers or of English descent, I only remember to have met with an account of one other execution for the crime of witchcraft. This latter took place at Antrim, in 1699, and it is, I believe the last on record.—The particulars of this silly tragedy were printed in a pamphlet, entitled "The bewitching of a child in Ireland," and from thence copied by Professor Sinclair, in his work entitled "Satan's Invisible world discovered," which is frequently referred to by Sir Walter Scott in his letters on Demonology.

I have to apologise for the length to which my letter has extended, and beg to subscribe myself,

your very humble servant,

Admiralty—London.

T. CROFTON CROKER.