

THE ANCIENT CROSS OF BANAGHER, KING'S COUNTY.

BY THOMAS L. COOKE, ESQ.

THE old church of Banagher, King's County, was heretofore known by the appellation Kill-Regnaighe, and the parish in which its ruins exist is still called Reynagh. This parish was situate in the diocese of Clonmacnoise. The names just mentioned were given to both the church and the parish in consequence of St. Regnach, *alias* Regnacia, sister of St. Finian who resided at Clonard, having founded a religious house here, over which she was abbess. St. Regnacia in all probability died about the same time as her brother Finian, who went to rest A.D. 563. The ruins of the church of Kill-Regnaighe stand nearly in the centre of the town of Banagher (celebrated for its fairs), and the walled-in space which encompasses them is used as the parish cemetery.

On a fine summer day, many years ago, loitering about the straggling, long, and unpicturesque street of Banagher, I happened to ramble into this church-yard, as well with a view to beguile time as for the purpose of examining any relics of antiquity which might there present themselves. The trouble of the visit was amply compensated; for I there found, prostrate on the earth, a stone, of which I send a sketch with this paper, showing it as *it then was*. In using the words "*it then was*" I do so emphatically, in order to contrast its *then* with its *present* condition; for the stone has since that time been sadly and wantonly damaged.

On first inspection it was evident to me that this remain of antiquity had served as the shaft of a once stately cross, of which the other component portions were no longer to be found. I made inquiry as to what had become of the remainder of this highly sculptured remain; but my inquiries proved unsuccessful. The only information I could glean was that the stone then and there lying humbly prostrate had, in former and more propitious days, stood erect beside a crystal spring, which once sent forth its limpid waters in the old market-square adjoining the church-yard, but whose abundant source was very many years stopped up. No person could be found to tell me the meaning of the carving on the stone, or why or on what occasion it had been carved at all.

I will now describe what remains of this very interesting antique. It is formed out of that description of greyish-brown sand-stone, which, when recently taken from the quarry, is so very soft as almost to cut beneath the pressure of an ordinary knife; but which becomes of adamantine hardness after being some time exposed to the atmosphere. The sketch, which accompanies this paper, presents a representation of the front or principal face of what is extant of this

cross-shaft, from the lower part of which a piece has been broken off, This stone is five feet long, by one foot two inches in breadth at top, and one foot four inches at bottom. The sculpture on it consists of three compartments. On the uppermost of these we find a lion passant, three-tailed or *gived*, as a herald would express it. A small hollow about the place of the lion's shoulder was abraded into the stone when I first saw it. This has since been greatly enlarged.

Beneath the lion I have mentioned, and on the same compartment with it, is the figure of a bishop on *horseback*, and bearing his pastoral staff as emblematical of his sacred office. The crosier is of that plain form which indicates antiquity.

In the second compartment is a beast of the deer kind, and which is proved by the character of its horns to be the red deer (*cervus elephas*); an animal now, I believe, nearly extinct in Ireland. The poor creature is portrayed as in great pain, its head being thrown up in an attitude of anguish and distress, whilst its off or right fore-leg is found to be entangled in something resembling a trap. When I first beheld this stone the deer was quite perfect; but it has been mutilated by reckless and savage hands since that day.

The lowest compartment consists of four naked and ill-proportioned male human figures arranged around the central point of the compartment after the manner of spokes in a wheel. Their legs are hooked together, and the left hand of each figure grasps the hair of the figure immediately preceding it. Their respective right hands hold the beard of the figure immediately in rere.

The sides of the stone are ornamented with an interlaced tracery, some of which resembles serpents. This tracery it would be difficult, if not wholly impossible, to describe in words. The character of it is that of similar ornaments found in various carvings on stone of the tenth, eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries.

The most remarkable object on the back of the stone is some sort of mythic combination shaped like an animal, with a nondescript head, but rudely resembling that of a hawk. The ears seem to be represented by the heads of two serpents, whose bodies are twined into trinodal and circular forms of curve. The serpent, I need scarcely observe, was at all times acknowledged an emblem in religious rites. I do not remember to have met with anything like to this, excepting the figure on the little brazen talisman from Hindostan which I forwarded for inspection of the members of our useful Society. A sketch of this compartment of the stone is at B on the plate.

The stone, the subject of this communication, appears to have been part of a sepulchral or commemorative cross, set up at the Banagher well to record the death of bishop William O'Duffy, who was killed by a fall from his horse A.D. 1297. I read in the original English edition of Ware's "Bishops," published at Dublin, 1704 (p. 29, Bishops of Meath and Clonmacnoise)—"William O'Duffy, a Minorite, after two years vacancy, succeeded and was restored to the

temporalities, October 6th, 1290. He was killed by a fall from his horse in 1297." Harris, in his edition of Ware's "Bishops," quotes the Patent Rolls of Edward I. to show that he was bishop of Clonmacnoise. But the Four Masters say that he was bishop of Clonfert in the following passage at the year 1297—*William o Dubtoigh eip Cluana Fearta do tritrim dia eac, i a ecc dia bictu*; i.e. "William O'Dubhtoigh (or O'Duffy) bishop of Cluain Fearta (*Clonfert*) fell from his horse and died in consequence of it." Perpetuated on the stone now being written of, is the record of that fatal event, for on it is to be seen a *bishop on horseback*. He is without (it is worthy of remark) either stirrups or saddle. Above his lordship is the lion, the hieroglyphic of strength and power, and being emblematic of the bishop's authority and character before the unfortunate accident befel him. Next to this we find the red deer taken in a trap and writhing in mortal agony and distress. This is plainly symbolical of O'Duffy's name and melancholy fate. The Irish word *daifceid*, pronounced nearly as if written *Davefeei*, or *Duffy*, signifies a red deer. A letter written to me by my learned friend, the excellent Irish scholar, professor Owen Connellan, the 4th of October, 1846, in answer to one from me suggesting that the cross, of which this stone was a portion, had been erected in memory of bishop O'Duffy's sudden death, runs as follows:—"Whether the O'Duffy family derived their name from a person called *Dubcaic*, or from some celebrated hunter, who might from that circumstance have obtained the epithet *daifceid*, is very difficult to determine;" and again, "the stone which you describe is very curious, and there is scarcely a doubt but that it refers to bishop O'Duffy, who fell from his horse as related in the Annals, and I have no hesitation in agreeing with you that the sculptor meant the deer, which appears on the stone, to have reference to the origin of the family name."

It is manifest that the trap in which the foot of the deer appears to be entangled is merely intended to record the accident which deprived O'Duffy of life. The words of the Four Masters do not lead us to believe that his death was instantaneous, for they only say that he died *in consequence* of the fall from his horse.

As to the carving on the lowest compartment, I own that I can form no certain conjecture respecting its meaning. I have met with the same sort of symbolic representation only once elsewhere, namely, on an exceedingly curious stone cover of a coffin in the ancient burial-ground at Kil-Corban, county of Galway. The four human figures are certainly typical, and may have been intended to remind the beholder of never-resting time, or of the succession of the four seasons of the year, ever going their mystic round in close communication, the one with the other,

Thus to remain
Amid the flux of many thousand years,
That oft have swept the toiling race of men
And all their laboured monuments away.

On this change of seasons the poet from whom I have just borrowed has also sublimely written—

These, as they change, Almighty Father, these
Are but the varied God.

It is very remarkable that Ware and the “Annals of the Four Masters” disagree as to the diocese of which this William O’Duffy was bishop, while both state that he died by a fall from a horse. The church of Kill-Regnaighe, near to which the cross now being written of stood, was in the ancient diocese of Clonmacnoise. The evidence of this interesting remain may prove of some value in deciding between these highly respectable antiquarian authorities.

After the lapse of some years from the time I first had the gratification to see the shaft of the Banagher cross, I discovered that it was going to destruction, owing to ill usage. I therefore obtained permission to have it removed from the reach of its brutal and Gothic foes. It is now once more standing erect and free from danger, in the enclosed gardens at the rear of my residence in Parsonstown. The true archæologist would of course prefer to have it preserved *in situ*. He, nevertheless, will probably join me in opinion that it is better it should be preserved anywhere rather than not be preserved at all.

NOTES MADE IN THE ARCHÆOLOGICAL COURT OF THE GREAT EXHIBITION OF 1853.

BY RICHARD HITCHCOCK.

THE collection of Irish antiquities brought together at Dublin in the Great Exhibition of 1853 was perhaps the finest ever presented to the view at one time; and such a collection will probably never again be exhibited in the same way.¹ The entire Museum of the

¹ In writing thus, we must not forget the highly important collection of Irish antiquities brought together towards the close of last year in the Belfast museum, on the occasion of the meeting of the British Association in that town. One permanent good, at least, has already resulted from this collection of antiquities into one place—I allude to the interesting and valuable “Ulster Journal of Archaeology”—a publication which has now reached its eighth number, nearly completing the second vo-

lume, and to which every archæologist cannot hesitate to bid success. The descriptive catalogue of the Belfast collection of antiquities, now before me, is one of the most welcome of recent archæological publications; and I would earnestly recommend every lover of antiquities to secure a copy for himself. It is, as stated in the preface, “a permanent record of the existence of these curious objects [the antiquities shown at Belfast], and of the names of their present possessors.”