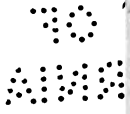


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# THE ISLAND OF TORY; ITS HISTORY AND ANTIQUITIES.

By EDMUND GETTY, M.R.I.A.

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"Usque Columbinam insulam quæ THORACH dicitur."  
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## PART I.



DR. JOHNSON, by a few eloquent words, created an interest in Iona that still attracts to its shores pilgrims of every class; and awakens a lively curiosity regarding the history of the personage who founded its remarkable ecclesiastical buildings,—our own Columba. It is not, however, any disparagement to that sacred territory to affirm, that the Island which forms the subject of the present article (and which was also one of the seats of the Royal Saint) has an interest not possessed by the Hebridean; inasmuch as we find in it, at this hour, remains of the very buildings erected by the early Christian monks, who had there devoted themselves to a life of holy seclusion. It will be found that this interest will not be diminished by a careful examination of the remains themselves; nor will the poetic fervour of the visitor be cooled down by the "ipse dixit" of some member of a Church-architectural Society, informing the enthusiast that "none of these ruins date earlier than the thirteenth century."

Saint Columba was one of the most remarkable Christian missionaries of the post-apostolic ages, not only on account of the number of churches which he founded, but for the purity of his life and doctrine. He was born at Gartain, in the county of Donegall, about the year 521; and, although his descent from King Niall of the Nine Hostages gave him a high civil rank among his countrymen, he, from a very early age, devoted himself to the service of religion. According to Jocelyn and Usher, he founded one hundred monasteries: and, in one of the lives published by Colgan, his entire ecclesiastical foundations, including monasteries and churches, are estimated at three hundred. A well-

defined tradition still existing in Donegall, and likewise the records of the period immediately succeeding his death, have handed down numerous interesting details of his private life, and of his teaching. It is not to be denied that, in the course of ages, many fictitious particulars have been added by his admirers; but, as the lichen on an ancient monument does not conceal its form, so the judicious inquirer has no difficulty in perceiving that this holy man was indefatigable in his exertions to spread over the land the pure Christianity of the Apostolic ages; that he was earnest in prayer; that he devoted much time to the study and transcription of the Holy Scriptures; and that in his own person, he gave an illustrious example of practical virtue.

It is difficult to conjecture why, at a time when the Irish had already been converted to Christianity, he should have determined on establishing a monastery in Tory,\* an island so completely cut off, as it must always have been, from communication with other parts of the country. In Iona, which is a secluded spot of about the same extent, he and his disciples found a comparatively safe retreat in troubled times, whence they could extend their missionary labours, and to which, as a harbour of refuge, they could return, when civil strife prevented their progress on the main land. In like manner, we may presume that, dreading some civil convulsion in Ireland which might prove fatal to the cause of religion, he intended that this almost inaccessible spot should be the means of preserving the sacred deposit until better times should arrive.

The island further deserves attention as having been (even before the ecclesiastical epoch already mentioned,) one of the strongholds of that extraordinary people, who, under the general name of Scandinavians, ravaged and partially settled the coasts of the British islands;—the same people who afterwards as Normans, played an important part in the history of this country:—for the invasion in the time of Henry II. was only a return of the ancient foe, civilized by the restraints of a settled government, and inclined to colonize, rather than to plunder, the land they had so often stooped on from their impregnable rock-fortresses. This is not the fitting place to pursue such an inquiry, further than suggesting that many of the early invasions, supposed to have been direct from Denmark or Norway, may have been made from settlements in some of the numerous islands along the coasts of Great Britain and Ireland:—for we have, as yet, no proof that the people spoken of by the Bards as “Africans,” really came from the south.

The present communication originated in a visit paid to the island in August 1845, by the writer, accompanied by Mr. Hyndman and Mr. Grattan of Belfast, with the view of making some excavations at the round tower, by permission of the proprietor, Mr. Woodhouse.

The nearest point, at which a vessel can lie in safety, is Sheephaven; and here the yacht took the party on board opposite to the little town of Dunfanaghy. From this the sail to Tory is very beautiful, passing under Horn Head, a bold promontory<sup>b</sup> descending abruptly into the sea, from a height

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\* This name is always pronounced as if written in English TORRY.

<sup>b</sup> It is composed of mica-slate and quartzose and sandstone.

nearly seven hundred feet. Large flocks of water-fowl breed in its caverns and continually encircle its rugged sides, while the sea-eagle soars aloft with its young. The peculiar appearance which gives name to the head-land is very discernible; two projecting peaks at the summit assuming the resemblance of the short thick horns of an ox.



Another promontory, to the west, presents the appearance of a human bust, the profile of which is very perfect, much more so than the one so often pointed out on the Cave-Hill at Belfast. It bears some likeness to the portraits of the Duke of Wellington, and the form of features is well developed. As the island is approached, the sea assumes the beautiful ultra-marine blue which we look for in vain in shallow water. When Tor-more on the east is reached, the cliffs of the island form a beautiful prospect; while, on the opposite side, the coasts of Donegall and Derry, with their receding headlands and mountains, and Innistrahull on the verge of the horizon, altogether form a picture equal to any on the Irish coast.

Under the most favourable circumstances there is always some difficulty in effecting a landing on Tory, even with the kind assistance of the inhabitants. On this occasion, they sent off a "curragh" and a large boat to receive the "new master," (as the landlord was called among them,) and the shore and head-land were covered with people, as if to welcome the arrival of the visitors. The landing-place is in a small "cove" romantically situated in the shelter of the cliffs, and partially defended from the waves of the Atlantic by a high pinnacle of rock called Tor-a-hauv, having a narrow passage between it and the land. This landing-place is called Port-Doon from its proximity to an ancient Dun or strong-hold. There is, however, no safe anchorage where a vessel can lie; and therefore, it was necessary to send back the yacht to the main land, or, as it is termed in the phraseology of the islanders, "the country." The present party, after remaining in the island a sufficient time to effect their objects, returned to Dunfanaghy; and it may be mentioned, as showing the uncertainty of the communication with Tory, (even in summer,) that it was not till a considerable time after their departure that any vessel or boat could approach its shore. Even in Sheephaven the sea was running fearfully on the bar; and a smack which passed the yacht, beating up to the island to load kelp, was wrecked, a few hours after, on Innisbofinn.

From Ballyness Bay, a boat occasionally goes out to Tory with letters; passing in its direct course the three smaller islands of Innisbofinn, Innisdoeey, (on which is a cemetery,) and Innisbeg. The principal intercourse with Tory is from this quarter; the people being under the spiritual direction of the priest of "Cross roads" for the time being. It is not necessary at present to make any further allusion to these smaller islands. Near Horn Head is a place called Marafagh, where it is the custom to inter *pro tempore* the bodies which are a-bearing to Tory, but detained by stress of weather.

Tory lies about nine miles from the nearest part of the coast of Donegal, and is included territorially in the parish of Tullaghobegly, barony of Kilmacrenan. Its length is about three miles, its breadth one. Its superficial contents are 1200 acres; 200 of which are considered arable or pasture land. It contains three lakes, two of them, Lough Ayes and Lough Ahoey of considerable size; the other is named Lough A-her. The Commissioners of Irish lights erected a light-house here in 1832, which is of great service to mariners, and has greatly diminished the number of shipwrecks, caused by the position of the island in the direct course, vessels entering or departing by the North Channel. It is visible in clear weather at the distance of 17 nautical miles, the lantern standing 122 feet above the level of the sea at high-water. Numerous birds are killed by striking against the plate-glass windows, being attracted by the light. A very interesting collection of these was made by Mrs. Baillie, an English lady who resided here for some years, while her husband was in charge. The specimens were all preserved and set up by herself, and exhibited a proof, if such were required, that a person of intelligence can never be at a loss for useful employment.

Before the erection of the light-house the inhabitants derived considerable profit from acting as pilots, and also from the timber thrown on shore.—In one place a deep hollow is shewn on the cliffs communicating with the sea, through which whole logs of timber are occasionally shot up by the violence of the waves. A gun fired into it produced a very loud report. It resembles the famous cavern near Horn Head, called MacSwine's gun, through which the water rushes with such violence as to produce a loud report. It is not uninteresting to add that Mr. Graham, in his account of Iona, describes a cavern of the same nature there.

The only place on the island where a few shrubs flourish is a hollow formed by the subsidence of the surface into a cavern beneath.—This was named by the party "Hyndman's garden," but its Celtic designation is Lagrehy or the "ram's-hollow."

There are two "towns" on the island, ("villages" perhaps is a more correct expression,) East Town and West Town; the latter being the principal, and containing the Round Tower and the Ecclesiastical ruins. The building materials are fragments of red granite, and the covering of the houses is straw, kept down by ropes of the same material and by stones. As limestone is not found on the island, the mortar, both ancient and modern, has been obtained by burning sea shells, chiefly those of the limpet; the animal of which is used in large quantities as food and as bait. To a cursory observer, the present dwellings have as much appearance of antiquity as the older buildings; and it is difficult to distinguish ancient from modern walls. In one place artificial caves are shown, said to have been formed during the war "to conceal the people from the French;" but more probably from English press-gangs. The most likely suggestion, however, is their use by smugglers before an Excise steamer put an end to their traffic. At one time, large quantities of whiskey were illicitly distilled on the island,—the trade is now at an end, and every inhabitant a "teetotaler."

The land is generally held by the old "rundale" tenure, by virtue of which, each individual tenant has a proportion of every kind of land, and no one a permanent possession of a separate part.

Improved agriculture, or fencing and ditching, are of course, almost unknown; the land is badly tilled, and affords scanty crops of oats and potatoes;—and it is, perhaps, a result of the perfect simplicity of the modes of culture, that the potato disease did not reach this distant island.<sup>c</sup> The most profitable business seems the manufacture of kelp from sea-weed; and at the time of the present visit, the “market” was as much agitated, on its small scale, by the arrival of a few purchasers, as some of the great marts where the wealth of nations is exchanged. The prosperity of this trade arises from the large proportion of *iodine* this kelp produces, which gives it a comparatively high value. Every one was alive to exertion. Persons of every age and sex were employed collecting the sea-weed, or carrying it off the beach on the small island horses, in panniers having a moveable bottom which drops down on removing a pin. Lord Brougham would have been delighted with the “schoolmaster,” for even he was “abroad.”<sup>d</sup>

Mr. Hyndman introduced a new trade, by offering a reward for the eggs and young of the “Mother Carey’s chickens,” which he understood bred on the Island. Demand, as usual, in such cases, produced supply; and the market which opened at 6d. per egg, soon fell to a very small fractional part. This gentleman records a story that fully confirms the opinion of Avienus regarding the Irish, “negociandi cura jugis omnibus;” for wishing to ascertain if the “fork-tailed Petrel” was also found, he offered a reward for a specimen. A boy, 10 or 12 years of age, soon brought him one, which he had ingeniously manufactured on the instant to agree with his description, by extracting the middle feathers of the tail of the Mother Carey’s chicken, and so claimed the reward!!

Few quadrupeds are found, except the rabbit, which is plentiful: and it is positively stated, that rats,—the universal plague of man,—will not live here. There is no doubt, that the frequency of wrecks, formerly gave them every facility for making the experiment;—but this, with other questions, is better reserved for discussion in notices of natural history. (*See Appendix communicated by Mr. Hyndman.*)

<sup>c</sup> Since the above was written, the proprietor has induced a considerable number of the inhabitants to leave the island, and abolished “Rundale” entirely; and the land is now divided into farms, as in other parts of the country.

<sup>d</sup> The following notice of chemicals produced from Irish Sea-weed, appeared in the Dublin Freeman’s Journal, under date 27th Sept. 1851.—

Irish Produce.—I observed in the Great Exhibition a case of chemical stuffs produced from Irish sea-weed—viz. iodine, chloride of potassium, sulphate of potash, and alkaline, or kelp salt—manufactured in the Ramelton Chemical Works, by the exhibitor, Mr. John Ward. These works, the first of the kind started in Ireland, were established by Mr. Ward, in March 1845, in Ramelton, a small town on an arm of Lough Swilly, Co. Donegal. Previous to their establishment the people of the north-west coast of Ireland had comparatively no home market for the produce of their industry, in so far as regarded the manufacture of kelp from sea-weed, consequently

but little was produced; but since the opening of the works in Ramelton by the enterprising exhibitor, (who was generally considered at the time to be making a rather bold experiment,) a large annual consumption of kelp at the works has caused it to be made in much greater abundance, and the prices raised to a considerable extent; causing thereby not only a large circulation of money in that part of Ireland, but conferring great benefits on the neighbouring coasts by the extensive employment it affords to the poorer classes round the districts; who, but for this field of commerce having been opened up almost at their own doors, would, in many cases, be unemployed, and in destitute circumstances. To the town of Ramelton the chemical works have been of the greatest benefit, by the number of workmen and labourers employed in and around it, and the very considerable shipping trade, in vessels ranging from 50 to 120 tons, which the importation of manufactured stuffs has been the means of bringing to Lough Swilly.

There is no flax grown on the island ; but there is pasture for a limited number of sheep. There is neither resident magistrate nor clergyman, doctor nor lawyer, and it is only very recently that a schoolmaster made his way thither under the auspices of the National Board. Irish is the universal language ; and, with the exception of a dwarf called Halliday, and the officials connected with the light-house, the people belong exclusively to the Roman Catholic Church. A clergyman from Cross-roads, on the opposite coast of Donegall, visits them periodically ; or, in a case of urgency, a "curragh" is sent over to bring him. In his absence, prayers are read on Sundays by one of the islanders, at what is called "St. John the Baptist's altar," near the Round Tower ; and baptism is administered in case of necessity, the water used being contained in an ancient stone vessel, which will be afterwards more particularly noticed.

It is said that, when occasion requires more than usual deliberation on the part of the people, they elect a "king." The last occasion when this august ceremony took place was for the purpose of considering whether geese should be allowed to be kept on the island ; as complaints had been made that they injured the crops. A legislative decree was the result, banishing all geese for the future !

A general notice such as the present would be incomplete without some account of the "Curragh," the principal means of communication possessed by the islanders with the main land. The Curragh is one of the most primitive, and certainly, with parties accustomed to its management, is, from its buoyancy, one of the safest of boats. The canoe formed from the hollow trunk of a tree may have preceded its use ; but the raw hide of a newly slain animal, properly extended, presented a readier means of constructing a boat, and became, to the early inhabitants of the British islands, what the birch-tree bark is to the American Indian. In the sculptures from Nineveh, a similar use of the hide is observed as a means of crossing rivers, but the application is less ingenious ; being merely a skin inflated by air, like what is called on some parts of the Irish coast a "stookey." Cæsar, Pliny, Claudian, Festus Avienus, Sidonius, Gildas, all refer to the Curragh ; and Dr. O'Connor in his first Prolegomenon (*Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores*) has collected numerous references with regard to it—"They are still used," he says "and are called in Irish *Nimhog* and *Curragh*." In these boats, according to Gildas, the Irish made their irruptions into Britain about the year 431, during the Reign of the Emperor Theodosius. The term Curragh (*Corrocha* in Latin) is possibly derived from the same root with the Latin word *Corium*. The frame-work consists of a gunwale and a quantity of branches for ribs, which are kept in their places by smaller twigs interwoven. According to the original fashion, a fresh hide with the hair inside was drawn over this skeleton, and, being laced with thongs to the gunwale, became rigid as it contracted in drying. At present, a cheaper material is found in tarred canvass, manufactured from flax or hemp spun by the women, and which is considered of superior strength to what is purchased at a warehouse. The same opinion exists respecting fishing-gear ; for the fishermen consider nets, formed from twine made in their own houses, much more valuable than any other. To render the canvass secure it is made double, and tarred ; a layer of brown paper being generally inserted between the two portions of canvass. On the coast of the opposite main land, the curraghs have generally sharp bows

and square sterns; but those of a moderate size, intended to pass with safety through the long swell of the Atlantic, are square, or nearly so, at both extremities. An old cutter's-man stated that, off the Shannon, they often pull six oars, and that few boats can come up with them. He agreed in considering them the safest of all boats in the hands of men accustomed to their management; during all his experience in the Sound of Tory, he never knew or heard of one being lost, though they venture out in all weathers. They are rowed with short oars or paddles, the smaller ones having two pair, one man pulling a pair: they are what fishermen call "club-oars." In crossing through a heavy sea the islanders were observed to impel them in the manner of the Indians; that is, in place of oars, each man used a paddle without any rest on the gunwale. When two men so circumstanced are in one boat, one kneels in the bow, while his partner sits about the centre, both paddling in the manner described.

Cattle are transported across the Sound in these boats; and they are so light that a man easily carries one on his back. They then present a rather curious appearance, not unlike a huge beetle; and this led to a standing joke against an Entomologist of the present party, who was charged with attempting to stick a pin into one of them and transfer it to his cabinet!

In one of the numerous legends connected with the history of the Irish Saint Brendan or Brandan, who flourished in the eleventh century, he and his companions are represented as constructing vessels on the west coast of Ireland, precisely similar to the Curragh of the present day, "in accordance with the established custom of the country." His, however, had the addition of a mast and sail. Saint Brendan is the Sinbad of clerical romance; and so firm a hold on men's minds had the exploits of this christian Ulysses acquired at one time, that islands, supposed to be discovered by him, became subjects of treaty; and it is even not improbable that at a later period they may have stimulated a higher class of navigators to attempt discoveries across the western ocean.