

CHAPTER XVII.

IRELAND.

Ethnology of Ireland—Irish Druidism—Irish Barrows and ritual of Burial—Sepulchral origin of Irish ‘Fairs’—The Eight Royal Cemeteries—Similarity of Pagan and Early Christian Grave-Monuments—Ring-Barrows, Dolmens, and Pillar-Stones—Continuity of Christian with Pagan customs—‘Lis,’ ‘Rath,’ ‘Dun,’ ‘Cashel,’ and Grave, all Circular—Christian Burial-Grounds still Circular—St. Patrick a Brython—Story of his ‘Easter-Fires’—St. Bridgit of Kildare—The Burial of Ethne and Feidelm—St. Patrick’s Monastic Norm—The first monasteries circular—And established on Graves—Churches within ‘Raths’—Monasteries within ‘cashels’—Killeens—Keeills of the Isle of Man.

The exaggerated importance attached by the Irish to death and burial is familiar to every one. This would suggest that in earlier times the feeling was even stronger, and archaeology amply corroborates this view: the sepulchral remains of Ireland are more numerous and more varied than are those of any portion of Britain; they are better preserved, not so much because of the backwardness of agriculture as because of the persistence of the feeling that such remains are sacred and inviolable; and there survives a mass of documentary evidence connected with them, much of it preserving the traditions, beliefs and practices of pre-Christian times.

There is still a very large Iberian element in the Irish race. Upon this were imposed successive Celtic strata immigrant from the Continent and Britain. The Celtic inflow began long before the appearance of the Romans in the west; the Brythonic inflow, if not actually caused, was greatly stimulated by that event, and probably went on long after it. In Ptolemy’s time (c. 250) the Brythonic Manapii were settled in or near Wicklow. Later immigrants, landing at the mouth of the Boyne, passed up the valley of that river and made their capital at Tara, whence they extended their power over most of the island (fourth

century). Tara remained thereafter the traditional seat of the kings of All Ireland, the older kingdoms continuing or disappearing, coalescing or dividing, as fate might have it. Emain Macha, the earlier capital of Ulster, was superseded by Crinan Ailech in co. Derry; that of Connaught was fixed at Cruachan in Roscommon. Cashel (*Castell*) was the newer capital of Munster, the earlier capital being altogether forgotten. In Tara did Niall of the Nine Hostages, possibly the captor of the young St. Patrick, keep his throne (358-366), and after him continuously others of his house down to 1002. To this Brythonic royal line belonged St. Columba.

These invading Brythons were the Milesians and Firbolgs of Irish tradition. The name of the Firbolgs explicitly declares them Belgae.¹ Whence did they come into Ireland? From the mention of Irish Brigantes it has been surmised that they came from Britain; but there was a Brigantium in Spain, which lends colour to the Irish tradition that the Milesians came thence. On the other hand the name of the Firbolgs points directly to Belgica or its vicinity, for a tribe which came thence to Ireland by way of Spain or of Britain would scarcely retain the name of its original home. As classical literature has nothing to suggest any considerable emigration from Gaul, Spain, or Britain, between the second and fifth centuries A.D. or the passage through Belgica Romana of any further swarms from beyond the Rhine, the probability is that they came direct from the vicinity of the Cimbric Chersonese and Frisia, avoiding both Belgica and southern Britain because these were too strongly held by the Romans. This view is supported by the archaeological evidence of the distribution of the *lunulae*, the similarity between the flint implements of Ireland and of Denmark, the distribution of the stone circles, and other facts.

The Brythonic Milesians are said to have been attacked by the Tuatha Dé Danann, mighty wizards who all but overcame the Milesians by their spells, withdrawing after

¹ Intermediate forms of the name are provided by (a) that of Bolgius, who led the Tectosages into Greece in 280 B.C. and (b) that of Blatum Bulgium, in Annan-

dale, the northernmost Roman station in the *Antonine Itinerary* (Iter ii). With Fir-bolg cf. Fir-domnann, another Irish tribal name (= Damnonii?).

their ultimate defeat to the mounds of the good people (fairies), where Irish belief has it that they still abide. It is not unlikely that the Tuatha Dé Danann were merely another swarm of invaders from the same quarter, and even of the same blood.¹ The story of their occult powers seems to mean that they belonged to the number of those with whom Druidism was a force. But amongst the Irish Druidism was never the force into which it had been moulded by the Cimbric tribes in Gaul and in Britain.

Irish Druidism, little concerned with politics, was free to give the more attention to other forms of activity, to divination and magic and the cultivation of poetry. It still boasted itself immune from taxation, and its leaders still prided themselves upon their large trains of disciples,² who moved about the country with their master, or dwelt in *clochauns* clustered about his *dun*.³ But morally and intellectually the system continued to decline, so that the diviner sank to be a mere vulgar juggler,⁴ and the poet used his gifts chiefly as a means of extorting money by abuse or by the threat of it. Cursing was Druidism's last prerogative.⁵ But it held stubbornly by forms and ceremonies. The Druid was distinguished by a special tonsure. Irish kings maintained each his own company of court Druids, and as the king of Tara was overlord of all other kings, so the Druids of Tara were paramount amongst all Druids of Ireland.

Some allowance must be made for the animosity of Christian writers, who remembered Druidism chiefly

¹ Above, ch. xiv.

² The law prescribed the number of pupils or disciples which each Druid or Bard might take with him from place to place. In the reign of Conor MacNess, king of Ulster, the number of those who frequented the schools of Bards and Druids, and so avoided taxation, was one third of the whole population, and led to violent outbreaks against the system. There were similar movements of protest both before and after. One is reminded immediately of later revolts against clerical privileges and exemptions, mortmain, etc. in England. See Baring Gould in *Arch. Cambr.* 5th ser. xvii (1900).

³ Below, p. 25.

⁴ There is a curiously close analogy in the

story of the decline of the troubadour to the mountebank (*joglar*, *jongleur*, juggler).

⁵ Gildas (*Praefat.*) speaks of Balaam as the 'tiared magician (i.e. druid) who was going to curse God's people.' This 'cursing' was a decadent survival of the 'excommunication' of which Caesar speaks (*B.G.* vi, 13). Ceremonial cursing is not yet altogether dead in Ireland. It was associated with the practice of passing round and round a *locus consecratus*—altar or holy stone or burial-place—in the fashion called 'widdershins,' i.e. in the direction contrary to the sun's movement, registering each circuit with a pebble laid upon the central spot. For such *bulláns* in Inismurray, see Wakeman, *Survey of Inismurray*, pp. 59-68, and for a unique example in south Wales see G. G. T. Treherne in *Arch. Cambr.* 6th ser. vii (1907), pp. 268-276.

as the most stubborn opponent of the new faith ; but with a handsome discount on this score, it is plain that the Druidism of Ireland in the fifth century was an entirely different thing from that which Caesar had seen in Gaul. The very word *druí* had come to be merely the equivalent of *magus*, ' wizard,' and the Arch-Druid of Tara ' prides himself mostly upon his talent as a juggler.'

Irish barrows show most of the various forms described in an earlier chapter. The circular form prevailed here as completely as in Britain : there is in Irish barrows a very pronounced tendency towards the oval plan, but long barrows are singularly scarce, whereas of circular sepulchral works of various kinds the country has uncounted thousands. In Irish mythology circles and barrows of every form are closely identified with god-names : the great chambered bowl-barrow at Newgrange was sacred to the god Aengus, that of Knowth to Boadan. ' There is little doubt that in the three rings of Dunainy, on the Knockainey Hill, the triad of gods Eogabal, Feri and Aine were supposed to dwell ; and they had also their cairns. . . . A disc-barrow at Tara, a flat ring with small central mound, was aptly known as the Shield of Cuchulain.'¹

Amongst the more remarkable groups of Irish megalithic monuments are those of North Moytura or Carrowmore, co. Mayo, and of South Moytura, near Cong on Lough Corrib. Petrie estimated those at Carrowmore as upwards of two hundred. They lie—or lay—within an area of about half a square mile, and amongst them ' are stone cairns with dolmens in their interiors ; dolmens standing alone, but which have been evidently always exposed ; dolmens with single circles, others with two or three circles of stones around them ; and circles without dolmens or anything else in the centre.'² They appear almost without exception to have been sepulchral monuments. The group at South Moytura also included a number of simple cromlechs without visible trace of any central dolmen. One of these had a diameter of 54 feet, and there used to be at least one that was even larger.

The theory that the introduction of cremation led to

¹ T. J. Westropp, in *Proc. R. I. Academy*, vol. xxiv (1917).

² Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 181.

See also Wood-Martin, *Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland* (1888), who gives particulars of sixty-three monuments at Carrowmore.

the building of smaller and still smaller barrows, until at last no barrow at all was thought needful, may find some support from the facts in Ireland : cremation seems to have made small progress there,¹ whereas the making of sepulchral mounds, rings, and cromlechs went on with unimpaired vigour to the last days of paganism. The immense mounds of Newgrange and Dowth are amongst the largest of their kind.

Two passages are here quoted from O'Curry which give details of the sepulture of two heroes, viz. the Irish Fiachra and the Greek Patroclus.

' Fiachra then brought fifty hostages with him from Munster, and he brought a great *cain* [i.e. booty levied as a legal fine], and he went forth then on his way to Temar. When however he reached Forud in Ui Mac Uais in Meath, Fiachra died of his wounds there. His *leacht* was made and his *fert* was raised, and his *cluiche cainte* was ignited, and his ogam-name was written, and the [fifty] hostages which he brought from the south were buried alive around the *fert* of Fiachra, that it might be a reproach to the Momonians for ever, and that it might be a trophy over them.'²

' Aicil (Achilles) buried Petrocul (Patroclus), and he made his *fert* and he planted his *lic*, and he wrote his name, and he proclaimed him at his burial-place, and he made his *cluiche cainte*, and after this the *cuitech fuait*. The reason they used to make the *cuitech fuait* was for the good of the souls of their friends, for it was a tradition among the gentiles (i.e. pagans) that the soul for which the *cuitech fuait* was not made should spend one hundred years in hell.'³

In the one case we have an Irish chief buried by his own people according to their national customs ; in the other case we have an Irish bard interpreting in the light of the customs of his own people the details of the burial of the Greek Patroclus ; and as we are able to check the latter by the text of Homer, it becomes certain that the bard was no slavish translator,⁴ but accurately reflects the Irish way.

The essential features in the two accounts are

1. The *fert*, or circular fosse.
2. The gravestone or monument (*lic*, *leacht*).
3. The funeral fire (*cluiche cainte*).

¹ Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, p. 505 ; O'Curry, *Manners and Customs of the Irish*, vol. i, cccxix, cccxxv.

² *ibid.* i, cccxxi, translating from the *Book of Ballymote*.

³ O'Curry, *op. cit.* vol. i, p. cccxxv, note, from *Book of Ballymote* (R.I.A.), fol. 241 aa.

⁴ He does not, for example, mention the sacrifice of twelve Trojans at Patroclus' grave (parallel with the sacrifice of the fifty hostages of Fiachra). On the other hand he inserts into the Homeric account of the burial of Patroclus the detail that the mourners ' wrote his name.'

4. The panegyric.
5. The ogamic inscription.
6. The sacrifice and burial of victims.
7. The celebration of the funeral games (*cuitech fuait*).

The word *fert* (*feurt*, pl. *ferta*) seems to denote a circular fosse surrounding a place of burial¹; but as the digging of a fosse entails the upcast of the soil, it was naturally extended to include the suggestion of a vallum also. O'Curry's editor² quotes from Dr. Keating without understanding what was meant, yet the meaning is clear enough; 'small *raths*' he calls them, and a *rath* was a circular enclosure surrounded by fosse and wall. Moreover Dr. Keating goes on to speak of *ferts* 'with one or two doors,' and others with no doors at all. The 'doors' in question are the breaks in the circular ring; and if the *Book of Lecan* is to be believed (fol. 258 *a, b*) the immature of either sex were buried in *ferts* which were not penannular, while the burial-place of a 'man of science' should have one door, and that of a woman two. A *fert* surrounded also the spots where fairs were held, for these were invariably sepulchral spots; and the word might, says O'Curry, be used of the circular defences of a camp, a house, or a church. This is certainly true of churches, simply because those were invariably built on spots hallowed by burial, and therefore commonly showing the circular *limes* which was the mark of hallowed ground.

The 'stone' set up over the pagan hero's grave survives in the tombstone of to-day, and the legend upon the headstone perpetuates 'the writing of his name.' The funeral fire—used it would seem even at inhumations symbolically, or possibly as the vehicle for sending the dead man's belongings after him—is represented by the candles which burn around the corpse when 'lying in state'; and of the old-time victims,³ themselves parcel of the general grave-furniture of paganism, we retain

¹ *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*: 'Fossam rotundam in similitudine fertae.' The use of *rotundus* for *circularis* is common.

² *Manners and Customs*, vol. i, cccxxix, cccxxx.

³ It is to be noticed that the fifty victims sacrificed at Fiachra's grave were buried outside the *limes*. Their fate was to be 'a reproach to the Momonians for ever,'

inasmuch as they were sent out of this world without the proper passports to the next one. Buried outside the *fert* they had no share in its sanctity to safeguard their bones from desecration, and not having passed through the fire their spirits could not reach the place whither went that of Fiachra himself. See Ridgeway, *Early Age of Greece*, i, p. 505.

to-day little but the symbolical wreaths of flowers. The panegyric—the modern funeral sermon and press-notice combined—has left a greater mark; in Ireland it keeps a more immediate and personal form in the 'keening' at the wake. Most important of all in regard to its later developments was the *cuitech fuait*, the funeral 'games' so-called, a term not nearly comprehensive enough, although it happily emphasises the original feature upon which so many and so varied growths were later grafted.

Dolmens and cairns and circles, says Borlase,¹ 'were not mere sepulchres of the dead, but places set apart for the *sacrificia mortuorum*, for pilgrimages, for the periodical assembling of the tribe or tribes for religious or social purposes, for the holding of fairs, for the contracting of marriages, and for unrestricted feasting and revel.' At certain of these *loca sacra* more notable than the rest, gathered and grew the heterogeneous happenings known as *aenachs*, 'fairs.' 'Fairs² appear to have originated in funeral games celebrated in honour of some distinguished chief or warrior, and in pagan, *even in early Christian times*, were always celebrated in cemeteries. The chieftain's judges and notables sat upon or beside the mounds raised over the renowned dead.'³ But though in the course of time, as the name 'fair' now implies, buying and selling became the principal items in the programme, such matters were originally no part of it at all. The *aenach* was in the first instance a memorial service to the dead, celebrated at intervals of time varying in the particular case: it might be annual, or triennial as in the case of the famous fair of Carman. In the second place the gathering was utilised as a convenient occasion for a good deal of legal and administrative business. 'In addition to the promulgation of new laws, and the proclamation of peace, the old laws were rehearsed. . . . An ancient fair performed three functions: in the first place it was the great school where the people learned to know their rights and duties, the special laws under which they lived, the history of the country, the warlike deeds performed by the illustrious

¹ *Dolmens of Ireland*, p. 476.

² The derivation of 'fair' is from Latin *feriae*, 'holiday,' and a 'holiday' is literally a 'holy day.'

³ O'Curry, *Manners and Customs*, i, p. cclv; cf. pp. cccxvii, cccxxviii.

dead, and the genealogies of the families entitled to rule them. In the second place a fair was the occasion of enjoyment to the people—dancing, music, recitation of poetry, feats of arms, athletic sports, horse-racing and juggling formed part of the essential business of it. And lastly it was a great market for all kinds of wares and produce.¹ Such fairs were ‘organised assemblies regulated by strict bye-laws, a breach of which was punished by death’;² each was a general assembly of the entire people of the province, or even of the nation, and its president was the king of the province or the king of All Ireland.

There were³ eight chief royal cemeteries of the Irish kings ‘before the (Christian) faith,’ viz. Cruachan⁴ in Roscommon, the burial-place of the kings of Connaught; Brough on Boyne, where were laid the notables of the Tuatha Dé Danann; Tailten (Teltown) for Ulster; Luachair Ailbe for Leinster; Aenach Culé, Aenach Colman, and Aenach Ailbe, all in Munster; and for the supreme sovereignty of All Ireland, Temhair Erann or Tara.⁵

It will be noticed that so intimate, and indeed essential, was the connexion between the fair and the grave, that three out of the eight cemeteries are actually called by the name of Aenach. Sir William Ridgeway⁶ gives a striking example of the abiding reality of the bond between the two; ‘In a lonely spot in county Cork there is a little ancient *liss* or fort with a single circular rampart in perfect preservation; just outside the entrance stands a barrow known through endless generations as the “hillock of the fair.” Here until some forty years ago there was an annual gathering of the country folk for a fair, and foot-races were run alongside of the mound. Then the landlord had the fair transferred to a village some four miles distant, but,

¹ O’Curry, op. cit. p. ccv.

² *ibid.* p. cclvi; cp. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, pp. 67-68.

³ *Commentary on the Poem on the Cemeteries.*

⁴ Above, ch. x, *fin.* ‘There are fifty hills (i.e. barrows) at Cruachan.’

⁵ The chief portions of the Irish literature bearing on this matter are printed by Petrie in his *Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture* (Dublin, 1845) and in Borlase (*Dolmens of Ireland*), viz. the *Senchas na Relic* (*History of the Cemeteries*) of the *Leabhar na*

b’Uidbre; the *Dinsenchus* of the *Book of Ballymote*; and the *Poem on the Cemeteries* and its *Commentary*. For the topographical importance of Tara, whence radiated five great roads throughout the island, see Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, pp. 80, 191-197.

⁶ *The Origin of Tragedy* (Cambridge, 1910), p. 35. In his *Early Age of Greece*, p. 545, he adds that the spot was Cnocan near Mallow, the ‘thriving village’ being Ballyclough. *Cnoc* (a mutated form of *cruc*, *cruach*) is the usual Irish term for a bowl-barrow.

though the fair was moved from a desolate spot to a thriving village, it has practically died out. Then came a road-contractor who thought that the barrow, which was made of pieces of the local limestone, would supply good cheap material for the roads. He laid ruthless hands upon the ancient mound, and soon brought to light a fine cromlech [i.e. dolmen] of four upright stones, supporting as usual a great flat capstone. In the cist thus formed were found a bronze sword, human bones and other objects. Now it is clear why the foot-races had been held there year by year from the Bronze Age down to our own time. The old chief delighted in manhood when in life, so in death his spirit was honoured by the enactment of manly sports as the seasons revolved.’

So long as the fair maintained its original association with the grave of the nameless subject of veneration, so long did it thrive. Separated therefrom, it faded and failed. The fact is typical of all Celtic religion ancient and modern alike.

The fair of Tailten was continuously celebrated down to the middle of the tenth century or even later, while as to its beginnings, the *Annals of the Four Masters* modestly place it in the year 3370 (*anno mundi*).¹ The fair of Carman, held at the Curragh of Kildare,² ceased only in 1033. Christianity, hopeless of abolishing out of hand institutions so deeply rooted in pagan ancestor-worship, was fain to tolerate them for centuries, and to incorporate these *fêtes*, like so many other pagan festivals, in the Christian calendar.

In their character as national or tribal assemblies, their recurrence at various yet regular periods, the presence of the king as president, the peculiar character of much of the business transacted, and their special sanctity (which was guaranteed by a formal and forceful ‘truce of God’), these fairs correspond exactly with all that we know of the grand assize of Gallic Druidism and of ancient *gorseddau* in general. Their analogy with the great periodical games of ancient Greece—Olympic, Delphic, Isthmian, Nemean—

¹ O’Curry, op. cit. p. cccxxvii. John Donovan, writing in *Nineteenth Cent. and After*, could say ‘the traditions of it are still so vivid, that Teltown was till recently

resorted to by the men of Meath for hurling, wrestling, and manly sports.’

² So W. M. Hennessy. O’Curry put it at Wexford.

is also most striking, and suggests that the latter owed at least some part of their scheme and their importance to the influence of the Celtic Acheans.¹

The great 300-foot burial-ring—Reilig na Riogh ('Cemetery of the kings')—of Cruachan, was, with few exceptions, the burial-place of the pagan kings of All Ireland of the race of Heremon, i.e. the Milesians, 'until the coming of the Firbolgs,' who preferred to be buried at Tara or at Brough. One of the exceptions was Cormac MacAirt (218-254), who, whatever his real creed, was an apostate from the faith of his times.² The monument³ of the last pagan king of All Ireland, Dathi, still stands at Cruachan, where he was buried in 428. The Milesians were Brythons; so too the Firbolgs, the 'Belgic men.' As Milesians and Firbolgs would seem both to have made their way to Tara along the Boyne, their choice of Brough as a burial-place was natural. St. Patrick likewise worked up the Boyne, and began his missionary work by displaying his qualities at Brough, thence proceeding to the Belgic headquarters at Tara. The position of Brough and Tara in relation to the Boyne would seem to have a close analogy with that of Stonehenge in relation to the landing-places upon the south coast of Britain, the Solent, Poole harbour and Weymouth.

Petrie remarked⁴ upon the similarity of the grave-monuments of the earliest Christian period to those of paganism. The graves of the first converts, he observed, are in fact the connecting link between the old faith and the new. 'The tombs of the early saints present a variety of forms, as in those of Aran, which are often rude sarcophagi somewhat similar to pagan cromlechs [i.e. dolmens] and kistvaens, while at other times they are small cairns enclosed by a circular or quadrangular wall.' The similarity goes vastly further than he remarked, but his notices of Christian graves beneath cairns, beneath 'sarcophagi like dolmens,' and within circular enclosures, are all very pertinent.

The most characteristic forms of pagan sepulchral

¹ cf. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, p. 62, who compares the great meetings of the Celtic Galatians at Ancyra.

² He was therefore buried apart from others, at Ross-na-Righ, on the Boyne,

but on the side of the river opposite to Brough.

³ A pillar-stone, the 'Red Pillar.'

⁴ *Irish Eccles. Arch.* p. 450; cf. Wood-Martin, *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 127.

monuments in Ireland are the cromlech or other form of ring-barrow, the dolmen, and the pillar-stone; and it can be shown that every one of these forms was used to mark Christian graves also.

Of dolmens Ireland has hundreds. Borlase enumerates a total of 898 examples, of which 780 are beyond dispute. They are most abundant in Sligo, which has 163. But it is by no means certain that any individual dolmen is pre-Christian. At Ardnaree, Ballina, co. Mayo, is a considerable example, the capstone measuring 9 by 7 feet, which there is reason to believe was erected over the bodies of the four Maols who were executed for the murder of bishop Ceallach. Ceallach was a great-grandson of Dathi, and died not earlier than 537. The monument therefore cannot be earlier than that date.¹ Nevertheless, as Christianity tried to enforce earth-to-earth burial, the building of dolmens probably died out very speedily.²

Commoner than the dolmen is the pillar-stone. The Red Pillar of the pagan king Dathi at Cruachan has been mentioned. Within one grave-yard at Inismore, Isle of Aran, stands a group of four such pillars marking the graves of the 'four beautiful saints,' Brendan, Fursey, Conall and Berchan. Wrote Wakeman,³ 'That pillar-stones, in character not to be distinguished from those of an undoubtedly pagan age, were occasionally erected over the graves of a number of our earliest ecclesiastics, is a fact which cannot be denied.'

When such a pillar-stone bears a Christian symbol, it

¹ Fergusson, *Rude Stone Monuments*, p. 233; Wakeman, *Handbook of Irish Antiquities*, p. 59. It is argued in reply that the dolmen may have been already standing there when the Maols were executed. To this it may be retorted that, if it was used as their monument, the fact proves that to the Irish of that date dolmens were places of burial.

² In a few cases (e.g. at Kilcornan, co. Clare) Christian symbols are carved upon the stones of the dolmen, which lends support to the view that even dolmens were constructed over Christian graves. 'Ryland in his *History of Waterford*, mentions a cromleac [i.e. dolmen] which stands in the churchyard near the sugar-loaf hill in the barony of Gualteir. W. F. Wakeman has recently discovered a cromleac [dolmen]-

like grave in a Christian burying-place in county Wicklow' (W. G. Wood-Martin, *Rude Stone Monuments of Ireland*, p. 27). Borlase (*Dolmens of Ireland*, pp. 196-197) describes and figures two cases in which it is difficult to decide whether the monument is a true dolmen or an altar tomb. Both are in Roscommon, one in Churchacres, parish of Kilonan, the other in the townland and parish of Tumna. The former is marked 'altar' on the ordnance map; the latter is known as 'St. Eidin's grave. Both are certainly regarded as altars by the peasantry, and are covered with the round pebbles used by votaries in recording their prayers (cf. the 'cursing stones,' p. 15 above). The one is 'near the church,' the other 'close to the church.'

³ *Survey of Inismurray*, p. 75.

is probably the monument of a Christian, though even this is dubious if, as commonly assumed, the early missionaries were in the habit of cutting the Christian symbol upon pagan stones.¹ But there is no ground for the sweeping statement, repeated or implied by many who mention the subject, that a pillar-stone without ogam or symbol is necessarily a pagan monument. There are scores of such stones of the rudest type standing in the churchyards of Ireland, Wales, Scotland, and even England, and it is a common argument that these at any rate must be Christian because they stand beside a church, i.e. it is assumed that the 'church' was there before the monolith. The precise reverse is the truth: these stones were there before any 'church' was thought of, and just as they had been used to mark pagan graves, so they continued to be used to mark Christian burial-places for long years before any church was built. There is nothing whatever in a pillar-stone as such to declare whether it be Christian or pagan.² W. C. Borlase³ saw an example of 'a pillar-stone with an encircled cross of most primitive form 'at Cahirbarool, co. Cork. It stood a quarter-mile north of a dolmen (Lackparknalicka) and close to another dolmen-like grave'; and he remarks that there seemed to be in the locality many such monuments transitional between paganism and Christianity.

'At a little distance to the east' of the site of the church of Kilcoo, Fermanagh, is a sepulchral monument which W. F. Wakeman calls one of the most singular he

¹ In the *Life of St. Sampson* (seventh cent.) the writer asserts that he had personally seen the cross carved by the saint upon a menhir in Wales, around which he had found dancing a number of British heathens.

² Examples of such stones marking Christian places of burial in Wales will be cited in due course. Tradition declares that a pillar-stone—the saint's pillow-stone—was set up over St. Columba's grave in Iona. St. Cadoc set up another over the grave of his murdered architect Liugwri (*Vita S. Cadoci*, c. 17). Under the tower of the church at Constantine was a massive megalith; are we to believe that it was brought and set there after the church was built? So with that which once carried the pulpit at Llandyssilio Gogo (p. 124). For a number of other examples, see Johnson, *Byways*, pp. 38-42. Three enormous

megaliths (respectively 29, 18 and 14 feet in height, and covering a space of ground measuring 110 (Span.) feet in circumference, are actually included within the nave of the church of the hermitage of St. Miguel de Arrechinaga, in Basque-land, 25 miles from Bilbao (see Borlase, *Dolmens of Ireland*, p. 648). There is no particular reason why even the 29-foot menhir at Rudstone, Yorks, should not have been erected by Christians over another Christian. It may have been a pagan 'idol,' but the presence of the church close beside it is, so far as it goes, evidence that the stone marked (a) a place of sepulture and (b) a Christian grave.

³ *Dolmens of Ireland*, p. 33. J. P. Condon, writing in 1916 (*Journ. R.A.S.I.* vol. xlvii, pt. 2, p. 159), says that he could not find it.

had seen in Ireland. 'It seems indeed in a most remarkable degree to combine the pagan idea of a monumental *leacht* with that by which our earliest Christians were moved. . . It is a mound composed of earth and small boulders, with a circle of ten stones enclosing a space four yards in diameter, in the centre of which stand the relics of what has been a well-fashioned cross.'¹ It is, in fact, a combination of the simplest form of bowl-barrow with the cromlech, and in the centre, in lieu of the unhewn 'pagan' pillar-stone, is an elaborately carved cross. Were the latter absent, or but a little more mutilated than it is, few probably would hesitate to pronounce the whole a purely pagan monument.

Nor is the cist more reliable as a proof of pre-Christian sepulture. 'Stone-lined graves would probably be found in every ancient cemetery in the diocese of Down,' wrote Rev. Jas. O'Laverty in 1879, who mentions fifteen Christian cemeteries in which he knew that they had been found, and adds that such graves had been found also at nearly all the ancient churches in the diocese.² Even the rounded pebbles or *echini* which the pagan laid in the graves of his dead have their counterpart in Christian Ireland, where a white pebble not seldom accompanies each burial, even within unquestioned Christian graveyards.³

There was thus continuity between paganism and Christianity in every single one of the points thus far considered. The one point remaining is the *fert* or precinct, and least of all was there any lack of continuity here. The pagan burial-place was circular; circular was the Christian graveyard also.

In pagan Ireland indeed, and for a thousand years longer, the circular figure was universal, alike where men lived and where they were buried. *Lis* and *rath*, *dun* and *cashel* and *cathair*⁴ were all invariably of this plan, and of

¹ *Journ. R.S.A. (Ireland)* 1879, p. 32, where is a woodcut.

² *Journ. R.S.A. Ireland* (1879), p. 105. In Ireland, it will be understood, cemeteries are much more numerous than churches.

³ *ibid.* p. 107.

⁴ *Rath* is the generic term including all the rest, and it seems impossible to establish any hard and fast line between one and another of these terms. The Celtic *dun*

is the A.-S. *tun*, Germ. *zaun*, 'a fenced enclosure.' It is usual to apply *cathair* and *cashel* to the larger stone-built defensive enclosures, *lis* and *rath* to the smaller. According to Whitley Stokes the radical meaning of *rath* is simply 'earth-rampart' or 'earth-bank.' It appears in Wales as *rbath*, in Scotland as *rath*, in Roman Britain as *Ratae* (Leicester; cf. Ratumagus, Rouen), in modern England in the name of

this plan only, by law: the chief's residence¹ and the commoner's hut were round; graves and cemeteries were round; so were places of assembly and courts of law; and so we may suppose were all other *loca consecrata* of paganism.

When the Irish became Christians, their burial-places—'churchyards'—were still round; and as the circle had been the symbol of sanctity in pagan times, so the symbol of the new faith became in Ireland less the cross than the circle charged with the cross. With the pagan Irish as with the Celts of Britain and Gaul, the presence of the circle in some form or other, actual or symbolical, was essential to the peace of the dead. Christianity could not shake that prejudice. Christianity did not even try to shake it.

St. Patrick was a Brython.² He had therefore the more reason to address his first efforts to the Brythonic Irish, to those of the Wicklow coast³ first of all, and next to the Brython chief-paramount Leoghaire⁴ in Tara. Being a Brython, he had too intimate a knowledge of Brythonic burial-customs to make unnecessary and tactless difficulties. His policy was that of compromise.

The Life of St. Patrick tells how the saint, on his way to Tara, came on Easter eve to the vicinity of the great Brython cemetery at Brough, and proceeded to prepare for the Pasch by 'lighting a sacred and blessed fire, as the custom was.' Now it was the druidical custom at this

Ratby. In modern Ireland it forms the first element in more than 700 names of town-lands (Joyce), and reduced to *-ra* is the final element in such names as Moira (= Moyrath). See McClure, *British Place-names*, p. 265, n. The origin of the word is unknown: the *N.E.D.* offers no derivation. It was Latinised by monastic writers as *atrium*. For these works in general see Dunraven, *Notes on Irish Architecture*; Westropp, *Early Forts of Ireland*; Stokes, *Life of George Petrie*, p. 235; Anderson, *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, p. 77, note. *Raths, duns*, etc. continued to be built through the middle ages; for examples as late as middle of thirteenth cent. see Champneys, *Irish Eccles. Arch.* p. 6; *ibid.* p. 12, 'the type is ancient though examples may be modern.'

¹ By the Brehon laws the proper residence of a king was the *dun* with a triple *enceinte*. Mrs. Armitage points out (*Engl. Hist. Review*, xix, p. 451) that this is identical with the *Castellatio trium scannorum* [*scannorum*] which is declared by the *Leges Henrici Primi* (x, § 1) to be the right of a king. This is yet another example of the tacit adoption of ancient Celtic usage by a later age and race.

² His native name was Succath or Sucat, said to be identical with the modern Welsh *bygad* 'warlike.' Patricius, his Latin (monastic) name, became, on the lips of the Goidelic Irish, Cothrige.

³ The territory of Ptolemy's Manapii.

⁴ He was brother of Niall of the Nine Hostages.

period of the year to order the formal extinction of all fires, which were presently rekindled from a ritual flame lit by the Arch-Druid in Tara; and any one failing to conform to the custom was liable to excommunication. The saint's fire naturally attracted instant attention, and Leoghaire forthwith set off to find and punish the offender. 'The magicians (i.e. Druids) advised the king not to enter the circle of St. Patrick's fires, lest their magic influence should overcome him, but to remain outside the circle.' From this one may perhaps infer that the sacred fire, druidical or otherwise, was conceived of as lit within a circular *limes*: had it been literally a ring of fire the king would not have needed his magicians to warn him against passing through it. The tale at any rate shows that the circle had a religious significance. Further it plainly suggests that the Irish custom previously referred to,¹ of rekindling all domestic fires from that of the parish priest on 1st May,² is itself an inheritance from paganism. St. Patrick's Easter-fire, it seems, coincided with the May-fire of the Druids, and one may guess that one reason for subsequent efforts to enforce upon the Celtic Church the Roman date of Easter, was the wish to dissociate wholly the Christian from the pagan act of ritual.

¹ Above, ch. viii.

² The Beltane fire; *Beltine* was an Irish name for the month of May, and 1st May was called *La-Beltine*, Beltane day (Polwhele, *Hist. Corn.* i, p. 49).

In Wakeman's *Survey of Inismurray*, pp. 54-56, is described the *leac-na-teinidh* ('stone of fire'), a quadrangular cist with sides of 3 ft. 3 ins. orientated exactly east and west, and therefore not coincident with the *teampull-na-teinidh* ('church of fire'), the Christian oratory enclosing the cist. The tradition of the island is, that upon a certain day of the year, from the fire burning in this cist used to be rekindled all other fires in the island. This looks like a survival from paganism, and suggests that the *casbel* of Inismurray was once a druidical settlement; see below, p. 60. The sacred fire played a particularly prominent part in connexion with a divinity called Brigit. She was goddess of poetry, healing and mechanical skill, but also the Gaelic Vesta. Her great sanctuary was at Kildare, 'the *kil* of the oak-tree,' and here the sacred fire was kept perpetually burning

by her nineteen priestesses. Christianity usurped the *kil* and adopted Brigit as a saint, the favourite companion of St. Patrick; but it dared not quench the fire; so her *kil* became the site of a Christian monastery, wherein the sacred flame still burned without intermission until the days of the Reformation. She is the St. Bride of England; see Macbain, *Celtic Mythology and Religion*, pp. 128-130. Willis Bund (*Celtic Church of Wales*, p. 442) suggests a more prosaic explanation for the perpetual fire of Kildare.

A similar story about a perpetual Easter-fire, from which others must be kindled, is told of St. Kieran (Piran). It may be added that the sanctuary at Kildare was of a circular plan ('Sepe virgeo et orbiculari. Girald. Cambr. *Topog. Hibern.* ii, 34).

This transformation of the Celtic fire-goddess into a Christian saint scarcely distinguishable from the Mother of God—she is actually so spoken of in old Irish writings—is a vivid example of the way in which paganism and Christianity passed one into the other; see Herbert, *Cyclops Christianus*, pp. 110, sqq.

The saint came to Rathcroghan,¹ the royal residence on the plain of Roscommon. Here at the well of Clebach he baptised the two daughters, Ethne and Feidelm, of king Leoghaire, and administered the Eucharist; and the princesses dying very shortly after, were buried together in one grave near the well. Their relatives, after the customary mourning, 'buried them near the well and made a circular ditch in the fashion of a *fert*, because this was the manner of the Scoti and (other) heathen. With us it is called *relic*² or *fert*. It was dedicated, together with the bones of the holy women, to God and St. Patrick and his heirs for ever; and on that spot he built a church of sods.'³

These daughters of the Brython king of Tara were buried, therefore, in the fashion of their race and faith before them, within a ring-barrow.⁴ This, as has been shown, was the final form of the pagan Celtic barrow; and the story implies that the details of the burial were left to the princesses' people, the Druids of Cruachan and others.⁵ All that Patrick could do was to claim this particular barrow for the God of that faith in which the princesses had died, in token whereof he built there a church of sods. This, if historically true, was an unmistakable distinction; but of this alleged 'church' more anon. Meantime it is clear that in every other external feature, this, the first of all Christian graves in Ireland to be described, was exactly like a pagan barrow, in fact was a pagan barrow with a Christian interment. And we are further

¹ It was an ancient fort of the Gamanradii, a tribe of the Firbolgs or Belgae (Todd, *St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland*, p. 451). It was also a famous druidical establishment, and the king had sent his daughters there for education (Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, p. 86).

² i.e. *Reliquiae*. The word occurs frequently on the map of Ireland meaning 'cemetery,' e.g. Relickmurray near Cashel. It followed the Celtic missionaries to Man, to Scotland, and even to Steepholm in the Severn sea.

³ *Tripartite Life* (ed. Stokes, ii, 317).

⁴ Todd (*St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland*, p. 456) notices this point, but fails to see its value. Leoghaire himself long withstood St. Patrick's efforts, and although ostensibly converted at last, died a pagan still. He

caused himself to be buried 'after the manner of his forefathers,' looking towards the land of his hereditary enemies, the men of Leinster. Stokes, *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, pp. 77-78; Willis Bund, *Celtic Church of Wales*, p. 130.

⁵ The narrative implies that the conversion of the two princesses was fiercely resented by their people, for there was 'great wrath' against St. Patrick 'because the girls had received the faith and gone to Heaven.' Their two guardian-Druids, Mael and Caplit, both became converts to Christianity, which possibly means that they forthwith put themselves under the protection of St. Patrick, in a natural fear of the manner in which king Leoghaire might avenge the death of his daughters, their charges.

told why: these things were of the *mos gentilium*, and as such Patrick had to accept them. He could not do away with them, so he compromised, and 'built a church.'

Here is documentary evidence, such as it is, that Christian churches in Ireland were built upon barrows. 'Under the floor of the little church in Monasterboice in Louth, a cist was discovered containing fragments of pottery of the usual sepulchral type, together with a celt of polished stone.'¹ This also was a church on a barrow. Other examples will be forthcoming later from Wales and Cornwall, Scotland and England. It would seem then that an original 'church' might be merely a burial-place.

Again the *Life*, in reference to the foundation of a monastery, tells us that 'In this wise did St. Patrick measure out the *fert*, viz. seven score feet in the *lis*² (enclosure), twenty-seven feet in the great house,³ seventeen feet in the kitchen, and seven feet in the oratory. So it was ever his usage to found a monastery.'⁴ According to the Brehon laws seven score feet was also the standard diameter of a royal *dun*, i.e. it must not be less, though it might be very much larger; and according to the same laws the 'great house' of a *brughfer*—the highest grade in the social scale—likewise measured twenty-seven feet, his kitchen seventeen feet. St. Patrick's monasteries therefore were planned and built upon a scale to bring them within the measure of settlements of the first rank. The extreme exiguity of the oratory is noteworthy.

The *fert* was something circular, girt by a fosse and vallum. So were *cashel* and *dun* and *lis*. This may be the reason why St. Patrick is said to have 'measured out the *fert*' for a monastery. But as the *fert* was primarily a place of burial, there is reason to suspect that the use of this word for the monastic enclosure points to the essential

¹ Borlase, *Dolmens of Ireland*, p. 789. It is usually laid down that Christian burials may be distinguished from pagan by the absence of all grave-furniture, excepting such insignia of rank as belonged to bishops, kings and such. This is undoubtedly true of later periods; it is not likely that it was true of the earlier time, and some years would elapse before the new Christian rule could supersede the pagan tradition. The king's daughters at Clebach would be buried with the insignia of their

rank, and the unknown person beneath the church at Monasterboice, the celt notwithstanding, was probably a Christian and a 'saint.'

² This term is possibly used as expressive of the simplest form of defensive enclosure, with one fosse and one vallum only.

³ Usually explained as the refectory.

⁴ *Tripartite Life*, i, 237. Baldwin Brown, *Arts in Saxon England*, i, 197; Romilly Allen, *Monumental Hist. Brit. Church*, p. 47.

presence of a burial within it, i.e. a consecration grave; and that just as the *fert* as barrow was made a *locus consecratus* by the grave within it, so the *fert* as monastery was consecrated by a burial. Baring Gould has concluded that a burial was an essential preliminary for the foundation of a monastery.¹ The term *fert* however, being a direct loan from paganism, was distasteful to Christians of a later time, who did their best to replace it by some other word. Dr. Reeves cites nineteen place-names still in use which embody the term, but of these three only attach to Christian sites.²

The primitive monastery in Ireland was circular because it was a settlement, and all settlements were circular. The circular form was further, as in the *fert*, the mark of sacred ground. But it did not *make* the ground sacred. This required a burial. If the burial was that of a *gentilis* the spot was thereby consecrated to paganism; but if the burial was that of a baptised Christian, the spot became then—and not till then—consecrated to Christianity. The graves of the king's daughters at Clebach were in fact the consecration-graves of a new *locus consecratus*.

There are in Ireland numbers of circular churchyards and burial-grounds. Very many of these are within actual *raths*, with one or two or three lines of defence. Many others have neither fosse nor vallum, yet are still circular.

¹ 'In order to secure a site for a monastery some one must be buried in it'; Baring Gould, *Arch. Camb.* 5th ser. xvii (1900), p. 256. Compare Columba's procedure at Hy, ch. xxii. In Whitley Stokes, *Three Middle Irish Homilies*, are passages about Columba's church-building activities which seem to be covert allusions to the same grim truth, as when (p. 113) the saint 'shewed Boite's grave and marked out his church'; cf. *ibid.* p. 35—'Daire gave a site for a high church (*ardeclaise*) to St. Patrick in the stead where the *ferta* is to-day, when the building of the close [i.e. the surrounding *casbel*] was finished.' Both passages support the view that barrow and church were the same thing.

² See the list in *Churches of Armagh*.

The modern forms vary considerably, e.g. Ardfer and Clonfert, side by side with Farta, Fartagh and Fertagh. In the middle ages the word *fert* came to have the meaning of *miracula*. Near Ardmachae (Armagh), says *The Book of Armagh*, was a spot named *Fertae Martyrum*, where for a time St. Patrick dwelt with his followers. *Fertae Martyrum* means simply 'graves of the holy men,' the word *Martyr* having lost all connotation of martyrdom, as happened also with Welsh *Mertbyr* ('place of demise'). See also Plummer, *Vitae SS. Hibern.* The same word reappears in the same sense in the French Montmartre and Martres-les-Veyre, a spot near Clermont Ferrand in Auvergne, famous for the finds made in a Gallo-Roman cemetery there.

Writers of various degrees of credibility furnish many examples of kings giving such and such enclosures to this or that saint, and this explains some at any rate of the large number of ancient Irish churches planted within *raths*. The *rath*, although built as a domestic enclosure only, was uniformly circular. It was therefore already a *locus consecratus*, although not in the same sense as was the barrow.¹ All that was needed was the burial of a *fidelis* within its circular *enceinte*, and therewith the erstwhile *rath* became a Christian burial-place, in no respect different from a barrow save in the larger proportions and perhaps greater complexity of its enclosing earthworks.

The church of Donaghpatrick was built within the royal *rath*, quadruply ramparted and ditched, of Conall MacNeill, brother of Leoghaire, king of Meath, close to Tailten, the royal cemetery and scene of the famous fair of Teltown. Within another *rath* stood St. Patrick's church of Armagh, though the earthwork has wholly vanished. St. Bennan's church of Kilbannon was set within the *dun* of Leoghaidh, the local chief; and Aodh Finn, chieftain of Breifny, made over his *caithair* to St. Caillen for a monastery.² The church of Dundesert, co. Antrim, stood within a *dun*: 'the outer ditch was of the breadth of a moderate roadway, and the earth excavated from it had been heaped up inside to form a rampart carrying up the slope to about the height of sixteen or twenty feet from the bottom. The whole face of the slope was covered with large stones embedded in the earth. Concentric with this enclosure, and about seven yards within it, was another ditch with a rampart on the inner side similarly constructed, and in the space enclosed by this stood the church. The ditches and ramparts were nearly circular, and there were two level entrances paved with stones, one at the north-west and the other at the south-east side.'³ The monastery of Nendrum, founded in the fifth century by St. Machaoi, a convert of St. Patrick, stands within the inmost ring (diam. 70 yds.) of a fort

¹ It is more than possible that every *rath* of pagan date had its own consecration grave. It would seem that the Irish dwelling-place, no less than the Roman, was in a special sense a sacred place.

² Romilly Allen, *Mont. Hist.* pp. 47-48, where see references.

³ Anderson, *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, p. 79; Reeves, *Antiqs. of Down, Connor and Dromore*, pp. 181-196.

covered by two outer circumvallations with an interval of thirty yards.¹

In the Ireland of those days every dwelling-place was of necessity fortified, as it was for centuries afterwards; and when no longer needed for defence, the same vallum was naturally retained for the sake of seclusion as well as from conservative sentiment. 'A.D. 1162. The separation of the houses from the church of Derry was made by the *comharba* of Columcille . . . they removed eighty houses, and Caiseal an Urlair was erected by the *comharba* of Columcille; and he pronounced a curse upon the person who should come over it.'² Even as late as 1266 a broad and deep trench was cut round the church of the Franciscan monastery founded in that year at Armagh.³

Unquestionably many of the earliest Irish monasteries had their origin in the grant of pre-existing earthworks, but as time went on and the new faith attained greater security, the monks built similar enclosures, earthen *raths* and stone *cashels*, for themselves. A stone found at Termonfeckin, co. Louth, bears the legend 'Pray for Ultan and Dubthach, who made this *cashel*.'⁴ T. J. Westropp cites further the cases of Skellig on Caher island, of Magharees on Glendalough, and of Sier Kieran; while as examples of *cashels* taken over by the monks from secular owners he cites Cashel in Cork, Temple-na-Raha near Ruan in Clare, the Rock of Cashel, Inismurray, and possibly Rath-Michael in Dublin.⁵ According to Wakeman the secular enclosure may be distinguished from the ecclesiastical by its greater strength, and he very pertinently asks how any Irish saint of the sixth century could undertake the construction of such a work as the *cashel* of Inismurray: 'How many masons and other artificers, and what time, would it take to collect the necessary material and complete such a structure? What would be the use of a fortress to men untrained to martial exercises, even if their number was sufficient to watch and guard the gates and defend the wall?'⁶ One may remark that they had the greater

need for elaborate defences if they were indeed 'untrained to martial exercises,' which is perhaps by no means true.

To the saint Aed MacBric there came a professional 'builder of raths,' offering to construct one for him. The saint sent him on to a friend who required one. The builder 'dug deep moats and threw up banks forming three concentric rings, and this was called Rath Balbh. The payment was as many sheep as the builder could drive away.'¹ So there were professional builders of such works, and the requirements of a saint in this kind were understood to be very much those of a chief or other great layman.

There is no doubt that the success of Patrick's mission in Ireland was largely due to policy. He brought his first efforts to bear on kings and chieftains, confident that, if these were converted, the masses would quickly follow their lead. In no other way could he have hoped to combat so powerful a combination as was offered by the organisation of Druidism and the superstition of the people; whereas a converted king was in a position not only to protect the new faith, but also to endow it generously from the number of his many fortresses. When the missionaries entered into possession of such a fortress it became a monastic settlement²; and as has been seen it was invariably circular. So also was the burial-place pagan or Christian, barrow or churchyard. The circular figure was the outward and visible sign of Celtic religion whether pagan or Christian, and Celtic missionaries carried that sign abroad wherever they travelled. As time went on the defences of the monastery might sometimes become less formidable; a time might come when they would be formal only. But always, so long as Celtic Christianity went its own way as distinct from that of Rome, the circle was there; and the least formidable settlement, demarcated perhaps by the shallowest of fosses and ramparts, or by a mere retaining wall of stone, brought one back again to the primitive barrow and the *fert*.

¹ See Lawlor, *The Monastery of Saint Mochaoi of Nendrum* (1925).

² *Annals of the Four Masters*.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Westropp, *Stone Forts of Ireland*, p. 59.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *Survey of Inismurray*, p. 25.

¹ Cited by Baring Gould in *Arch. Cambr.* 5th ser. xvii (1900), from *Vitae SS. Hibern.* p. 340.

² All early Christian settlements in Ireland were monastic, i.e. some one lived there apart from the world without, whether alone or with companions.

Cannon Island abbey, co. Clare, was built about 1190 and on the Roman plan. It occupies the centre of a circular *cashel* of which about one-third remains. The rest was pulled down, it would seem, to provide building material for the abbey. But the circular precinct remains unaltered.¹

Bishop Mochulla and seven converted soldiers built (c. 620) a church at Tulla in Clare. It stands within an oval ring. When it was desired to enlarge the precinct (before 1087), a second ring was constructed concentric with the first, but with double the diameter.²

The Irish *kil* or *killeen*³ provides the connecting-link between the pagan and the Christian place of burial. This is commonly a flat platform of earth, always circular or oval, rising some four feet or so above the surrounding ground and generally girt by a revetment of dry stone, or by a low earthen rampart with or without revetment. Some examples have or have had also a peristalith.⁴ They have one entrance only. They are in fact nothing but barrows, some of the simplest 'bowl' type very greatly spread by time, others of the 'ring' type, and some few again shewing traces of the fosse which characterises the 'bell' barrow. A typical example near Bunratty Upper at Kylebay has traces of a possible outer fosse, 'but otherwise it is a ring-mound 9 to 12 feet thick and usually 5 ft. high,' enclosing an area 75 ft. in diameter.⁵

The number of these *killeens* is very great, in Kerry especially, where the ordnance map marks 217 or more. In the northern counties they are fewer, because many have

¹ Information of the late T. J. Westropp.

² *Idem.* Father Smiddy cites (*Essay on the Druids*, p. 174) an old description of Clonagh, co. Kildare: In it was a piece of ground surrounded by a ditch, and in the centre of the circle was a stone cross, a church, and two yew trees, from one of which hung a bell.' So here again the enclosure was a circle.

³ Otherwise *keel*, *killena*, *kealuragh*, *cilura*, *caltragh*. These are described by Rolt Brash, *Oghamic Inscribed Monuments of the Gaedhil* (1879). See also Romilly Allen, *Mont. Hist.* pp. 77-79; and R. Macalister in *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* xxxvii.

⁴ 'I cannot decide whether this was an original feature, or built in between the

blocks of an older circle,' writes T. J. Westropp of the dry-stone wall of a *kil* at Caugher, Bunratty Upper, co. Clare (*Journal R.S.A.I.* xlvii, pt. i, p. 8). And again of a *killeen* near Kilquane, co. Clare, the same writer says it lies 'on a rising ground near a marsh. . . The enclosure is a low mound with a few blocks set in it.' cf. on Yspytty Cynfin, below, p. 125. Rolt Brash (p. 88) cites examples at Killacloyne, Caskan, and Mitchelstown, in co. Cork; and at Derrygurrane, co. Kerry, and explains as signifying 'Cemetery of the pillar-stones' the names of Killgullane and Kealagowlane (co. Cork) and Gullaun-na-Killeen (co. Kerry).

⁵ Westropp, loc. cit.

been destroyed by an intrusive population which was and is regardless of the sanctity in which the native Irish still hold them. To the true Irish they are *loca consecrata* still, and no one ventures to disturb them unless it be for the burial of suicides or of unbaptised children. The names by which they are known are indifferently Christian and pagan, they are mostly remote from any church, and excepting a few instances where there has arisen a Christian chapel on the spot,¹ there is no discoverable trace of any building. Excavation shews that some of them contain cremated burials,² which apparently means that such *killeens* are pre-Christian; yet their sanctity has never been forgotten, and Christian burials are still made in such of them as have been re-consecrated by the erection of chapels within them. W. G. Wood-Martin describes³ such a *caltragh* standing amongst the multitude of pagan burial monuments of all types at Carrowmore as 'a bare circular enclosure 92 paces in diameter, originally surrounded by a circle of large stones, most of which have been cleared.' Rolt Brash unhesitatingly pronounces them pagan, and Wood-Martin suggests that this example at Carrowmore was 'probably the burying-ground of the commonalty of the district,' as distinguished from the individual sepulchres within stone circles covering the soil in the vicinity, 'which would appear to be those of a family or a chief.'⁴

Killeen Cormaic, co. Kildare, reputed to be the burial-place of a king Cormac of Munster, is of oval shape, about 230 paces in circumference, 'It is enclosed by a boundary wall about 5 ft. in height, and the level of the ground within the precinct is flush with the top of the wall. It contains no trace of any buildings.'⁵

This description applies *verbatim* to any one of a multitude of Christian churchyards in Wales, Cornwall, and elsewhere in England, save that usually there is a

¹ Whence such names as Temple-na-Killa, co. Kerry, and Kil-templa, co. Limerick. So perhaps also Kealkill and Kilkilleen (co. Cork), 'where we have *keal* and *killeen* applied to the cemetery, *kill* to the church' (Rolt Brash, p. 90).

² Rolt Brash, p. 90. He cites the name of Tinnekill, co. Limerick, 'the cemetery

of the Fire,' as 'evidently indicative of cremation having been practised there.' Possibly it has reference rather to a sacred fire like that of St. Brigit at Kildare (p. 170, n.).

³ *Rude Stone Monts. of Ireland.*

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ R. Macalister in *Proc. Camb. Antiq. Soc.* xxxvii (1896), p. 140.

church within these. On the other hand the description of the *caltragh* at Carrowmore is precisely that of scores of anhistoric circles in these islands. It is not straining probability to suggest that while some of these *killeens* are pre-Christian, others belong to the period of transition, and others actually to Christian times, the peasantry adhering stubbornly to the *mos gentilium*, as happened at the well of Clebach, while accepting a new consecration. A large proportion of the Irish ogams have come from these *killeens*.¹

The practice of using them as burial-grounds for suicides and the unbaptised is itself an admission that, though *loca consecrata*, they are not all of exactly Christian consecration. Such victims of mortality must be buried somewhere, yet the feeling that they do not altogether deserve Christian sepulture is as old as the faith itself. The Englishman buried his suicide

at four cross-roads,
With a stake in his inside ;²

the kindlier Irishman gave to such persons what, to use his favourite epithet, he would call 'qualified' burial.

But be they wholly pagan, or wholly Christian, or indifferently either, their plan is invariable. They are without exception circular or oval,³ and they bear generically the same name (*kil*) as do hundreds of similar circular precincts which we know to have been consecrated by or named after the early Irish saints.

A close parallel to these *kils* of Ireland is offered by the *keeills*⁴ of the Isle of Man with their surrounding enclosures. Of these there are still some scores

¹ Forty-nine out of 120; see Romilly Allen, *Mont. Hist. Brit. Church*, pp. 79 sqq. 'I find it,' he says, 'harder to believe that they are Christian and that their sanctity has been forgotten, than to believe with Rolt Brash that they are pagan and that their sanctity has never been forgotten.'

² The stake was to pin the ghost securely down and prevent its 'walking.' The cross-roads were chosen so that, if nevertheless it should walk, it might have the less chance of finding the right road home again.

³ The old churchyards in some parts of the country, e.g. in the Aran isles, are generally oval, as are a very large number of pagan Irish barrows.

⁴ Frequently miscalled 'Treen churches.' The native Manx term is *skeelley*; e.g. Skeelley Vraadan, now Kirk Braddan, 'Braddan's church.' Of the whole number of parishes in the island (17), all but one used to be called Kirk-, and at a still earlier date *Skeelley*- or *Keeill*-; which is proof that the latter term antedates the Norse settlement in the ninth century. Modern archaeologists appear to confine the name *keeill* to the building. Older archaeologists used it of the enclosure, and this is certainly the more correct use. Of its identity with the Irish *kil* there can be no doubt at all. A frequent modern name for the field containing a *keeill* is 'chapel field.'

remaining in various stages of decay, there being some fourteen still recognisable in the parish of German alone, although not one of the whole number is now used either as a place of burial or as a place of worship. Yet so strong is the local feeling of respect for them that as late as 1910 some tenants refused on any consideration to allow the sites of *keeills* situated upon their farms to be explored.

The *keeills* are places of burial, the enclosures sometimes demarcated by an earthen vallum, the inner area artificially raised. Some of them have been revetted with a rude dry-wall, the garth flush with the revetment and from 3 to 8 ft. above the ground without. Some are constructed upon knolls and others upon the level. There is commonly a well or spring in the immediate vicinity. The so-called 'church' was a mere rectangular cell, usually twice as long as broad, built up of sods, earth and stone, or occasionally of stone only. The average inner measurements are about 16 ft. by 8 ft. Others are larger, in one instance as much as 60 ft. long, but these are obviously later in date, for the stones are rudely dressed and laid with mortar. They seem commonly to have had an eastern light of the rudest and smallest type, and a door in the south wall, and many show the remains of an altar at the east end.¹ Commonly, but not invariably, there is one such 'church' in each enclosure, and it is to be noticed that it is rarely or never in the centre of the enclosure, but the 'church' of a *keeill* in Lezayre 'had been raised about the middle of a circle of large stones' such as is seen in some of the Irish *kils*.

In the last-named instance at any rate there can be no question that the original plan was circular, but in most cases the site has been much altered, by cultivation or otherwise, so that it is rarely possible to recover with certainty the original form. P. M. C. Kermodé, who has made the *keeills* his peculiar study, and to whom are due many of the details here given, recalls only three instances.

¹ Frequently it is not in the centre of the east wall. In a building at Ballahimmin it is in the south-east corner; it is 4 ft. 6 ins. long, and covers just half of the wall. Its front is formed of one great slab of stone which the investigators believe to have been

in situ when the altar was made, possibly part of a cist which has been utilised as an altar. They are at any rate clear that the stone was there before the building, which is proof that the latter, rude as it is, is still relatively late.

One of these, in the parish of Patrick, is a pronounced oval (99 by 81 ft.), and yielded cross-slabs of sixth-ninth centuries. The second, on Ballaqueenie in Marown, is likewise oval (160 by 130 ft.), 'surrounded by an embankment with an outer ditch.' The third example, Keeill-Woirrey (*i.e.* 'Mary Church') in the parish of Kirk Maughold, he describes as 'practically rectangular (126 by 90 ft.) with rounded corners'; but as this was in use as a burial-ground little more than a century ago, it is quite possible that its plan has been tampered with. The frequent discovery of graves under and outside the present boundaries of the garths is proof that these have frequently been altered.

The whole of the enclosure is usually filled with burials, and burials in 'lintel-graves' of precisely the same character are also found within the buildings. In some cases the walls overlies such burials, shewing that the building is a later addition. The graves are mostly orientated east and west. There is, as a rule, no grave-furniture of any kind, but in some few cases there have been found pottery and flint-flakes, and round white pebbles are constantly associated with the interments. In more than one instance also there have been found traces of cremated burials. The pottery the investigators write down as of Bronze age, although they admit it has no ornamentation such as is the only clue to the date of such pottery. The flints they take to indicate neolithic interments. There is not sufficient reason for either attribution.¹ The evidence goes to show only that the enclosures were built to serve as burial-places—that they were barrows—and that they were used as Christian places of burial. The shards and flints are not proof of the antiquity attributed to them, but are merely survivals from the ritual of pre-Christian times.

¹ In the account of the *keeill* on Ballahimmin (*Second Report, Manx Arch. Survey*, 1910, p. 16) they write that 'it is quite clear' that there had been here 'a large artificial mound [barrow], which had in the course of centuries settled down to about 4 feet, in which were burials of the Bronze age.' They do not adduce the needful evidence for its being of that date. Some 'broken fragments of thin pottery'

were found within the building, but they are not further particularised. Two piles of calcined bones were 'minutely examined for any article of bronze or flint, but nothing was found.' Some two or three worked flint-flakes were found subsequently, but these do not prove the site to be either of the Bronze age or of neolithic date. The mound was 6-8 ft. in height, its area about 50 by 30 ft. only.

In some of the buildings have been found ashes and other traces of fire. In one case¹ a heap of burnt bones lay beneath the floor of the altar. These are probably the remains of the household fires lit by the devotees who made their homes here, and belong to the early time when the cell was as much *habitaculum* as *oratorium*. So with a quern-stone found within the 'church' of a *keeill* on Ballacarnana-beg in the parish of St. Michael.

Nothing has been found which can strictly be called architectural. In rare instances have been found slabs showing rude sculpturings of the cross in some form or other. A curious feature is the frequent occurrence of blocks of white quartz built into the walls. The 'church' at Ballahimmin in German parish had its western end constructed in the form of two semicircular bastions with the doorway between them. 'Glittering white quartz' was freely used in their construction, and 'would be conspicuous from a distance.' One is reminded of the familiar 'white monastery' or 'white church' of tradition and of place-nomenclature.

In very many cases the burials extend for a long distance from the enclosure as it now is, showing that either the boundaries of it have been altered, or that its use as a place of Christian burial continued over long centuries of time. A grave-stone at Keeill-Woirrey shows that an interment was made there as late as 1802.² Not seldom it is thought that the parish church stands upon the site of an original *keeill*, e.g. at Kirk Michael and at Ballaugh.

The parallelism between these *keeills* and the Irish *kils* cannot be the result of accident. Manxland received its Christianity from Ireland in the fifth century, its first bishop being St. Maccaldus of Down. The *keeills*, enclosures and buildings alike, preserve the features of the primitive Christianity of the Celtic West. That some of them actually overlies pagan barrows is what one would expect, though it has not yet been proved. The enclosures and the mounds are probably in many cases coeval with St. Maccaldus, but the buildings are most certainly later;

¹ Keeill Pherick-a-Dromma, in German parish.

² For the facts about the *keeills*, see the various *Reports of the Manx Archaeological*

Survey (1909). Earlier material may be found in Train's *History of Isle of Man*; *Arch. Cambr.* (1866); and A. W. Moores' *Sodor and Man* (1893), pp. 27-28.

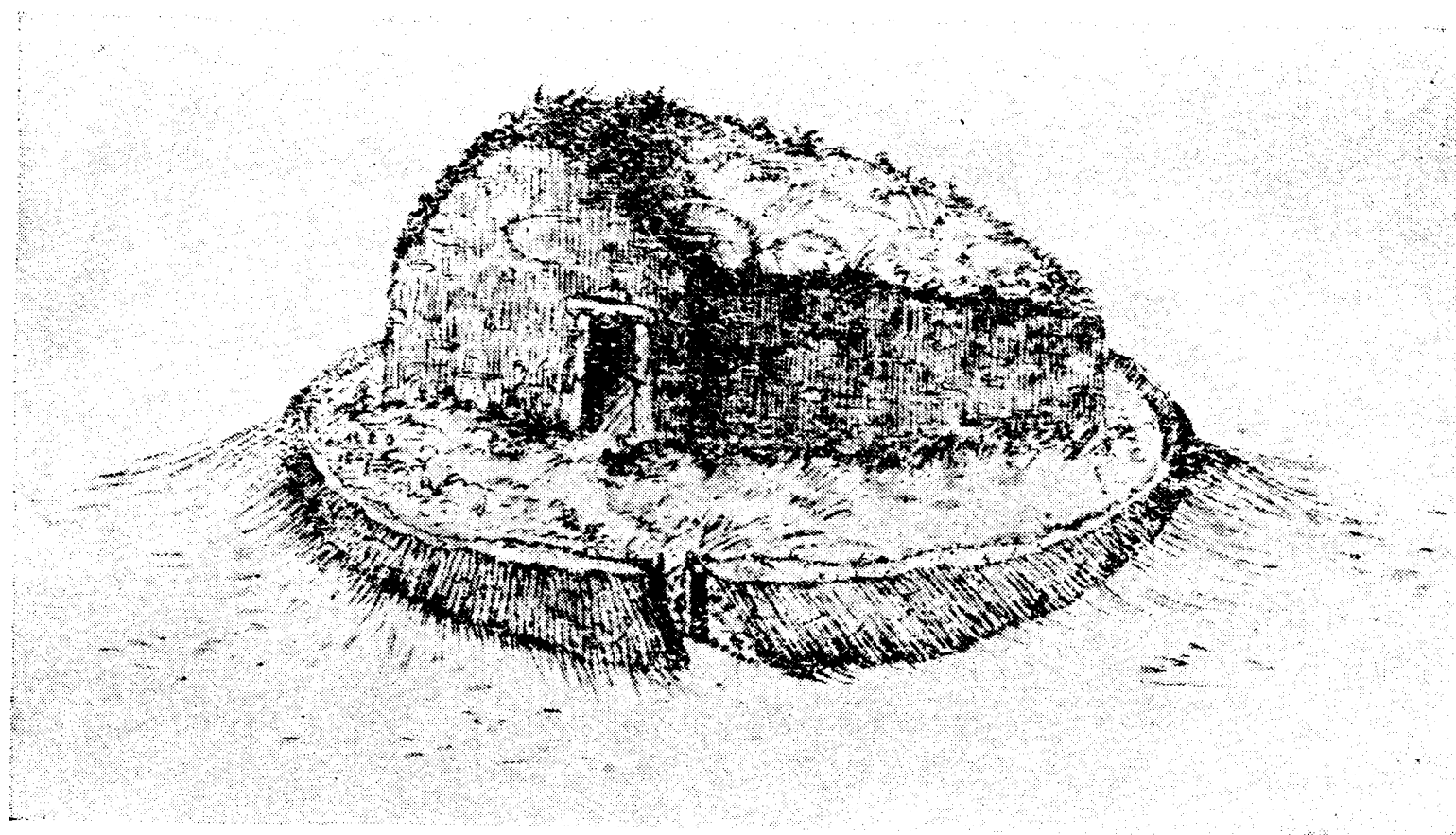


FIG. 1. THE MANX CABBAL (CHAPEL) OF THE FIFTH CENTURY.

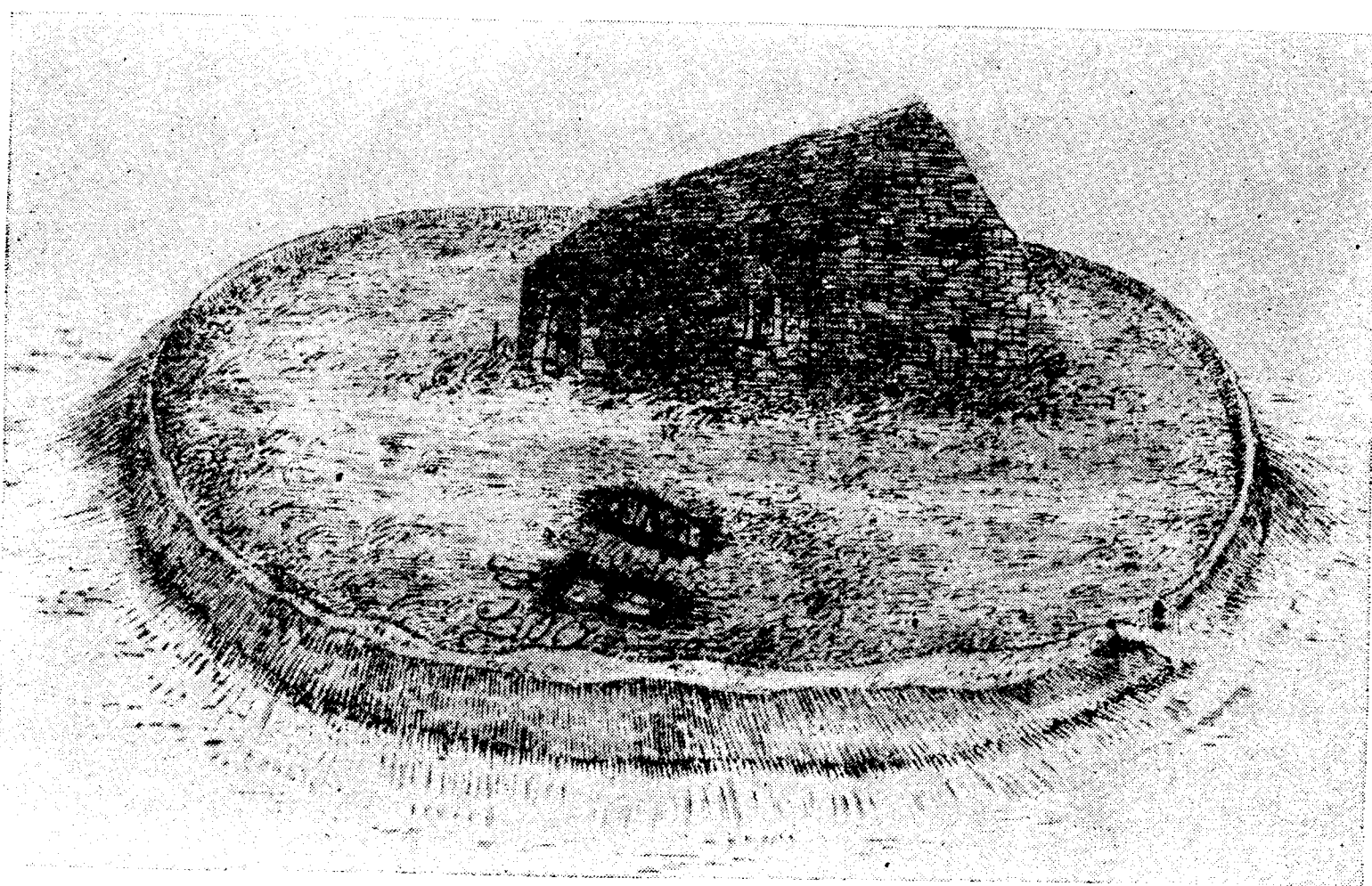


FIG. 2. A MANX KEEILL OF THE SIXTH CENTURY.

The drawings here reproduced were published in the *Proceedings* of the Manx Society, vol. xv (1868), in an article by Dr. J. R. Oliver. They were made therefore sixty years ago. Apart from the plans and photographs to be found in the *Reports of the Archaeological Survey* (I.O.M. Nat. Hist. and Antiquarian Soc.) there seem to be no other known attempts to portray the *keeills*. P. M. C. Kermode declares that the drawings 'are not to be relied upon for architectural details,' but they make it quite clear that the artist understood the typical *keeill* to be circular.

they must obviously be later than the mounds they stand upon.¹ Very possibly none of them is older than the tenth century, for if one thing is more certain than another it is that the Celtic way was to build its earliest 'churches' of wood and not of stone.

In present-day speech not merely has the native *keeill* been supplanted by 'church' wherever a structural church is concerned, but the intrusive word is commonly applied 'to any remnant of a pagan burial-place and to old stones which are held in superstitious regard. . . . On a hill-ridge not half a mile from where I am writing (Dalby, *I. of M.*) are the remains of what I take to be a very small stone circle, which the local people assure me is an 'old church'; and the field in which it lies is called by the farmer 'The Church Field.'²

According to one view Patrick was not so much a missionary as an organiser, and found Christianity already to some extent a fact in Ireland, in the south especially. If so, it must have been a very formless thing, and Patrick's first concern would be to reduce it to something like a system under a formal *regula*; as for example when he introduced monasticism—he may have learnt this at Lérins, where it is said there were numbers of Egyptian monks—and laid down a fixed formula for the size and requirements of a monastery. To him also is attributed the building of the first church at Sabhall. At Clebach he builds an *ecclesia terrena*. The admission that it was of earth only is strongly suggestive that the story is true; irresponsible imagination would have asked us to believe that it was at least a *dombnach*, if not actually a *basilica*. It is possible that Irish Christianity had hitherto had no buildings at all, and that the saint was thus tactfully introducing the Latin way, in which the structure was the first essential; and it will be seen presently that such was actually the development wherever Celtic Christianity was introduced. It is more probable that the *ecclesia terrena* was nothing but the barrow itself, 'a Christian place of meeting built of earth.'

¹ In the case of the building at Keeill Pherick-a-Dromma (Pherick is Patrick), the foundations of the building were sunk into the mound to the level of the original

surface; but this does not in the least go to prove that the mound was raised after the 'church' was built.

² Private letter, dated 6th June, 1923.