

BURKE OLIVER JOSEPH

THE SOUTH ISLES OF
ARAN (COUNTY GALWAY)

Oliver Burke
The South Isles of
Aran (County Galway)

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The South Isles of Aran (County Galway)

TO

THE HON. MR. JUSTICE O'HAGAN,

**ONE OF THE JUSTICES OF THE
SUPREME COURT IN IRELAND**

My dear Judge O'Hagan,

During the vacation of last autumn I applied myself to collecting as much information as possible concerning the South Isles of Aran, which I had visited in connection with the Land Commission in the previous month of July. Pressure of business and a severe illness compelled me to defer until recently the arranging of my notes, which, in the hope that they may direct the attention of those in power to the long neglected Islands, I have resolved to publish, and I look on it as a good omen of the

success of my efforts that you have kindly allowed me to dedicate my work to you, who have won so high a place in law and in literature.

Believe me to remain

Sincerely yours,

OLIVER J. BURKE.

Ower, Headford,

Co. Galway,

August 8, 1887.

CHAPTER I

*"Oh, Aranmore! loved Aranmore,
How oft I dream of thee,
And of those days when by thy shore
I wandered young and free;
Full many a path I've tried since then,
Through pleasure's flowery maze,
But ne'er could find the bliss again
I felt in those sweet days."*

Thomas Moore.

POPE GREGORY THE GREAT

The south isles of Aran, which shelter the Galway bay from the heavy swell of the Atlantic, are Inishmore, the large island, nine miles in length; Inishmaan, the middle island, two and a half miles in length; Inisheer, the lesser, two miles in length; Straw Island, upon which the lighthouse stands, and the Brannock Rocks or islands, all forming that group which to the west bounds the Galway bay, and the ancient jurisdiction of the Admiral of Galway. They lie in a line drawn from the north-west to the south-east from Iar Connaught to the county of Clare. Iar Connaught is separated from Inishmore, the largest and most westerly island, by the North Sound, five and a half miles wide, called by the natives *Bealagh-a-Lurgan*, "Lough Lurgan way." Lough Lurgan

was the ancient name of a lake that formerly lay west of Galway, and the tradition is that in the old times before us – 213 years from the Flood – the waters of the Atlantic, sweeping in the full fury of their force across the Aran barriers, united with the waters of the lake and formed the Bay of Galway, leaving the islands of Aran the towering remnants of the barriers which were too strong even for the Atlantic billows to carry away. Between Inishmore and Inishmaan is Gregory's Sound, a mile and a half wide, called by the natives *Bealagh-ne-Hayte*, "Hayte's way." The present name was given to it by the monks, who called the sound "Gregory," in honour of Pope Gregory the Great, after he had converted or aided in converting the Anglo-Saxons to the Christian faith. Between the middle island, Inishmaan, and Inisheer, the eastern and smallest island, is the "foul sound," four miles wide; and between Inisheer and the county of Clare is the "south sound," four miles wide. This is the great waterway between "the old sea," as the natives call the Atlantic, and the Bay of Galway.

MANOR OF IAR CONNAUGHT.

The sum of the lengths of the three islands and of the two intervening sounds is eighteen miles. The area of the entire group is 11,288 acres; poor law valuation, £1576; rent, £2067; poor rate, a shilling in the pound; average poor rate for ten years, three shillings; population, 3118 Catholics, and 45 Protestants. Aran is in the Catholic archdiocese and in the Protestant diocese of Tuam. In the islands are three Catholic churches and one

Protestant, two priests, one parson, and one doctor, and there are schools, schoolmasters, schoolmistresses, and scholars, *et hoc genus omne*; and there is a petty sessions court, and there are three police-barracks and eighteen policemen. The fishing-boats or currachs of the third class, which are ribs covered with canvas, and worth £6 each, are 130 in number; of the second class there are 34 boats, and of the first class there are none. There are no paupers from the islands in the workhouse, which is in Galway, and there is no workhouse on the island; neither is there an auxiliary workhouse, nor an hospital, nor an infirmary, nor a midwife, nor a jail, nor grand jury works, though there is a grand jury cess of £34 12s. 2d.

THE ARAN MAIL-BOAT.

Of Inishmore, or the great island, Kilronan is the capital – a village with a good hotel. Killeany was the ancient capital, formerly the residence of the lords of the manor of Iar Connaught. The other places of note are Oghil, Onaght, Bungowla, Kilmurry, Dun Ængus, Dun Eochla, Dubh Chathair or the black fort. So also on that island are the ruins of the churches of Tempul Benin with its rectangular enclosures and group of cells, of Tempul Breacan and Cross, of Tempul Beg Mac Dara, of Tempul More Mac Dara, of Tempul Assurniadhe, of Tempul-an-cheathrair-Aluin, and of St. Enda and the ruins of the seven churches.

On the middle island of Inishmaan are the ruins of the fortresses of Dun Chona and Dunfarbagh, and the villages, five

in number. On the eastern island of Inisheer are St. Gobnet's chapel, Ballyhees, Largi, Furmina, Trawkera, near which there is a lake a quarter of a mile in circumference and of great depth, which might be converted into a useful harbour by cutting an entrance into it through the rocky shore.

The harbour of Kilronan is spacious, but not fitted for vessels of heavy tonnage. A pier of four or five hundred yards is built out into the sea, alongside of which was moored during the tempestuous days of the last week of July (1886) her Majesty's mail-boat – a large-sized sailing yacht, provided with a cabin and forecastle, and manned by a remarkably civil and obliging crew. But it is to be lamented that no steamer has as yet been placed on the line between Galway and Aran, in consequence of which, frequently for four or five days, communication with the mainland becomes impossible. Letters remained unanswered, and newspapers remained unread; so that nation might rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, but the islanders in happy repose, undisturbed by the postman or by the magnetic wire, would in their isles of peace have happily lived on in blissful ignorance of the painful turmoils that reigned around.

THE BLACK-EYED HEBÈ.

At the hotel the tourist will be served with a homely and wholesome fare – prime veal and sweet and tender mutton, for the Aran herbage is renowned for the tenderness of the meat that it produces. At dinner a bottle of the mountain-dew, with a smell as divine as it is illegal, may be by accident produced; and for all

this, when the guest requests that he might be informed of the charges, the reply ten to one will be, "Oh, anything your honour likes to give!" – at least, such was said by the black-eyed Hebe who ministered to the wants of the writer of these pages.

THE FLORA OF ARAN.

The Aran landscape as your vessel approaches from Galway is a peculiar one – peculiar to Aran. From the soft sea beach on the Galway side of the island, which varies in breadth from one to four miles across, slope fields of bare rocks terrace over terrace, sometimes nine in number, until they reach the topmost cliff on the south-west or ocean side hundreds of feet over the Atlantic. This terraced landscape has the appearance of being a barren and rocky wilderness; but on closer inspection threads of fresh green herbage can be traced in the cleavages and deeply cut fissures of the rocks, and it is in those cleavages that the richest profusion of botanical specimens are to be found. The cleft upon which we stood was teeming with purple heather, foxglove, scarlet geranium, and wild thyme, with the golden leaf of the variegated ivy; the crimson berries of the orchis and the red fruit of the wild strawberry forming a rich contrast to the delicate blue of the forget-me-not. Here, too, were the harebell and speedwell, fringed with the delicate frond of the maidenhair fern. In other clefts was the richness of the white and red clover, intermingled with a variety of medicinal herbs, amongst which were the wild garlic and the kenneen or fairy flax, much relied on for its medicinal qualities. In several of the localities in the

islands the tormentil root, which serves in place of bark for tanning, and another plant which gives a fine blue dye and which the islanders use in colouring woollen cloths manufactured by them for their own wear, are to be found. The Aran isles contain many rare plants; but, owing to the absence of turf bogs and scarcity of damp ground, there are neither marshy nor heathy plants, nor sedges, nor rushes. Even so, the flora of Aran is decidedly rich. On the hillsides are a great variety of flowering plants indigenous to the soil, which blossom at different times of the year. In the rocky dells there are several kinds of convolvulus of very rich florescence. The Madagascar periwinkle seems to be perfectly acclimatized and blossoms profusely, and we were happy to find an abundant growth of hops, the introduction of which is ascribed to the monks of the olden time.

ORNITHOLOGY OF ARAN.

The tillage of the islands comprises potatoes, mangold wurzel, vetches, rape, clover, oats, and barley. The potatoes almost exclusively planted are "the Protestants;" and a Protestant tourist unarmed felt somewhat alarmed at the startling intelligence that "dinner would be ready as soon as the Protestants that were on the gridiron would be roasted." The dinner brought up, need it be told that our Anglican friend enjoyed the joke of our witty waitress quite as much as we ourselves did?

TANKS WANTING IN ARAN.

The crops are greatly devastated by caterpillars and grubs. The

abundance of these pernicious insects is attributed to the great scarcity of sparrows and other small birds. Starlings are seldom seen; but never a swallow. Sea gulls are numerous, and amongst the sea birds the osprey or sea eagle is a conspicuous object. Neither the raven, rook, crow, nor jackdaw visits the islands, but there is a handsome bird which is very numerous, especially in the north island. The chough, which, in addition to plumage dark and glossy like that of the jackdaw, displays a beak and legs of bright scarlet. It is said that this bird was formerly to be seen in flocks on various parts of the English coasts, and that now it cannot be found in any part of the United Kingdom except in Aran. Plovers, gannets, pigeons, duck, teal, and divers breed abundantly on the rocky ledges. The cliffs are the resort of countless puffins (*Anas Leucopsis*); the popular belief being that they spring from the driftwood¹. Their flesh supplies a rich lamp oil, and their feathers fetch a high price in the London markets. The capture of these birds is a dangerous occupation for the cragsmen, who descend from the cliffs by means of a rope to the haunts of the puffin, and having spent the night in the dangerous occupation, ensnaring and killing them as they sleep on the rocky ledges, they are hauled up in the morning, having realized ten or twelve shillings during the night. In the summer of 1816, two unfortunate fellows engaged in this frightful occupation missed their footing, and falling, were dashed to pieces on the rocks below. The solitary bittern, called in Irish the *Boonaun-Laynagh*,

¹ Denis Florence McCarthy's Poems, p. 87 note.

frequents the low-lying ground on the Galway side of the island, and hares and rabbits are very plentiful also. On the barren sheets of rocks the peasants (denominated lazy and idle, by lazy and idle writers and speakers) have with tireless toil walled in and made numberless gardens in which potatoes mealy and dry are grown. The meteorological aspirations of the Aran peasant are for rain, diametrically the opposite of what their brethren on the mainland desire. A dry summer gives to Aran a parched and burnt-up hue, when the cattle faint and die if not removed to the mainland. Tanks, such as they have in Ceylon, are sadly wanting in those islands, and the expense of their construction must be a trifling matter indeed.

ICE-CUT FURROWS.

One of the most remarkable features in the conformation of Inishmore is, that between the overlapping strata or terraces of limestone, thirty-seven feet in thickness in some places and eighteen in others, are beds of shale. The highest of the terraces is 320 feet over high-water mark, on the perpendicular cliff overlooking the Atlantic. On the sixth lowest of these descending steps the village of Kilronan, the capital of the island, over against the Galway bay, is built, and under that terrace and over the seventh is a shale bed which contains the water supply for the glebe and upper village wells.

BOULDERS.

Those who delight in geological speculations will find in these

isles much to interest them. Here are deep furrows in the hard rocks, cut as they say by passing icebergs. One of these ice-cut furrows may be seen near the shore of Killeany Bay, about two hundred yards north-east of Lough Atalia, and a quarter of a mile from Kilronan. It is about seven yards long, nearly a yard wide, having a bearing of east by north. Though the icebergs have left their striæ, and though their passage is marked by the deep furrows cut by them as they moved, nevertheless the patches of boulder drift on the surface are few; but the bergs in their passage from the north district did drop some huge metamorphic rocks, not one of which is indigenous, so to speak, to the islands, but have been carried from a district such as that of Oughterard. Strange that some limestone boulders have also been dropped, carried from some far-off limestone district. These boulders have withstood the wreck of ages, but the weather-beaten rocks under them are so worn as here and there to present the appearance of pedestals bearing up the superincumbent masses. Whilst there is much to arrest the attention as you look from the hotel windows towards Galway over the Galway bay, bounded on the north by the grotesque desolation of the Connemara mountains, and on the south by the rocky mountains of the county of Clare, it is on the south-west side of the islands of Aran that the scene is awfully sublime, terrific, and impressive – rendered more awful by reason of the confusion of the waters and of the roaring of the waves of the sea. The heavy swell of the Atlantic there rolls in angry billows against the cliffs dark and perpendicular, hundreds

of feet in height – cliffs perforated by winding caverns worn by the violence of the waves, from one of which, having an aperture in the surface, was projected a column of water to the height of a ship's mast. Whilst many of these cliffs rise perpendicularly from the ocean, many of them have sea terraces or steps at foot below the high-water mark. At *Illaur-a-naur*, on the south-easterly side of the great island, are sea-terraced cliffs which are fendered by a rampart formed of enormous blocks of limestone upheaved from the depths of the ocean and hurled with violence on the rampart which now forms a foot barrier against the further encroachment of the Atlantic.

SEA WEEDS.

The seaweeds around the Aran islands are peculiarly fitted for the production and manufacture of kelp, of which there are two varieties, one made from the black weed, and the other from the red. The black usually grows above the low-water mark of the neap-tide, whilst all the red grows below it. The red weed kelp is the most valuable, as in general it gives salts containing iodine. Marine plants, such as the sea-anemones, the rock-grown samphire, and the sea-cabbage grow around the islands in great profusion.

Another remarkable feature in Aran is the enormous amount of fine quartzose – moving sands which, blown in thick clouds by the winds, fill the nooks and corners and crevices of the islands. These sands, which are said to possess the property of preserving bodies uncorrupted after death, might be fixed and utilized in

the same manner as the sands of Arcachon on the west coast of France have been fixed and utilized, by planting therein vast forests of the *Pinus maritima*, the interlacery of whose roots would do the twofold duty of fixing the sands and creating a soil enriched by the amount of nitrogen therein digested and deposited. At Trawmore, on the south of Killeany Bay, proofs have lately been discovered not only of the movement of the sand-hills, but also of the appearance of fields and buildings submerged on the sea-coast.

MOVING SANDS IN ARAN.

These islands in prehistoric times must have suffered much from the convulsions which then shook the world – in later times they appear to have suffered little, though Richard Kirwan the chemist relates that in his memory, in the year 1774, a fearful thunderstorm visited Inishmore, when a granite block of enormous dimensions, called the "Gregory," was struck by lightning, shattered to atoms, and flung into the sea.

CHAPTER II

*"Remnants of things that have passed away,
Fragments of stone reared by creatures of clay."*

Siege of Corinth.

THE DRUIDS.

The "remnants of things that have passed away" are many on these islands. In no other part of the United Kingdom are there confined in spaces so narrow so many monuments of Pagan times; here are evidences of two great ages of civilization – that of the Druids and that of the Christians; but, whether of the Druids or of the Christians, Aran had been the retreat in early times of the contemplative and the learned. Sequestered and undisturbed, the natives have even to this day preserved much of the moral and physical remains of the ancient world.

DRUIDISM.

The Aranites in their simplicity consider the remains of the Druids as inviolable, being as they fondly imagine the enchanted haunts and property of aerial beings, whose power of doing mischief they greatly dread and studiously propitiate. The natives believe that the "cairns" or circular mounds are the sepulchres of the mighty men of old, men of renown, whose acts and deeds

even now are celebrated in songs sung at the cottage firesides by minstrels to the strings of the wandering harper: on every lip are the exploits of Churcullen, of Gol, son of Morna, of Oscar, and of Ossian, and here are pointed out the places where they lived and died. We have also the immense "cromlechs" or altar flags, supported on perpendicular pillars, as we may venture to call the unhammered stones of about three feet in height, whilst under those "cromlechs" still rest the remains of heroes whose faithful dogs interred with them bear them company even in death. Here, too, no bad memory is retained of the sacred fires of Bal (another name for the sun), which were kept burning; for the sun, and the moon, and the stars were by them revered; but the sun of the Druids was supposed to be the most noble type of the Godhead – the most glorious object of the material creation. The mysterious stones, twelve in number, encircling the altars of sacrifice, sometimes said to be zodiacal rings, after the twelve signs of the zodiac, are here frequently to be found. The purifying ordeals the cattle were subject to at Aran until a very late period are yet there remembered. The sacred fires on the first day of each of the quarters blazed from cairn to cairn, amid prayers for the fruits of the earth, and even yet, on St. John's Eve in June, huge bonfires are lighted near every village through the island, for the holy flame was considered essential to the cattle as a preservative from contagious disorders. The Druids kindled after their manner two immense fires, with great incantations, close to each other, whilst between those fires the cattle were driven, and

if they escaped unharmed it was considered as auspicious as it would be inauspicious for man and beast to be therein harmed, and hence the saying, "Placed between the two fires of Baal." Concerning the mysteries of their religion, the Druids did not commit them to writing, and therefore it is that so little is known of their teachings or of what they taught, and what they did teach is said by some to have been taught in the Greek language, "to the end," writes Sir Edward Coke, "that their discipline might not be made so common amongst the vulgar, nay more, their very names and appellations may serve as a proof of their use of the Greek tongue, they being called Druids from [Greek: Drys], an oak, because, saith Pliny, they frequent the woods where oaks are, and in all their sacrifices they use the leaves of those trees."²

SIR EDWARD COKE ON DRUIDISM.

With Druidism departed the forests of the ilex and the quercus from Aran. May we venture to hope that, in the coming changes, Aran may once more be re-afforested, and that the islanders, who have now no coal, no timber, and no turf to burn, may have at least timber to burn in great abundance in the near future?

FORTRESSES OF ARAN.

The immense fortresses on the islands are said to be the finest specimens of barbaric military structures extant in Europe. Built by the pagan Firbolgs in the first century of the Christian era, these mortarless walls, Cyclopean as they are called, having

² II. Coke's Reports, part iii. Preface, p. viii.

braved the tempests of nineteen hundred years, still stand. On the large island, and within four miles of our hotel, is Dun Ængus, which, covering many acres, is on a precipice hundreds of feet in height. This fortress, in the form of a horse-shoe, is unapproachable on the sea side, where the Atlantic surges heavily against the solid rock, whose surfaces are seamed, and scarred, and torn by the violence of the billows driven against them by the winter tempests. Unapproachable by an enemy from the sea, it is equally unapproachable by an enemy from the land, the only entrance thereto being by a narrow avenue skirting the edge of the cliff. The fortress consists of three enclosures, the inner, the middle, and the outer. The inner measures 160 feet, on what may be called the axis major from north to south of the horse-shoe on the ground plan, whilst along the cliff it measures 144 feet. The mortarless wall which surrounds this inmost enclosure is about 1100 feet from end to end, by 18 feet in height, and 12 feet in thickness. Now this one wall is made up of three walls, each four feet thick, one against the other, like the coats of an onion, which arrangement occurs in the middle and outside enclosures, and which has this advantage, that if an enemy should succeed in breaking down the exterior envelope, he would find behind it a new face of masonry, instead of the easily disturbed loose interior of a dry stone wall. The space between this inner and the next outside, or middle enclosure, is perfectly clear, leaving ample scope for military manœuvres. The outside wall, which is almost an ellipse, encloses about eleven

acres, all studded over with an army of white pointed stones, set slope-wise into the earth, like almonds on a plum-pudding, save where a narrow avenue is left, so that no assailing force could possibly approach the second wall, without having its ranks broken by those intricate piles which answer the *chevaux-de-frise* of modern fortifications. The doorway with sloping jambs of Egyptian pattern through the outer wall admits only one or two assailants together.

DUN ÆNGUS.

Dun Conor, an oval fort on the middle island, is much larger than Dun Ængus, of which we have just been speaking, the axis major of Dun Conor measuring 227 feet. It also stands on a high cliff, and its dry and mortarless walls are built also on the coat of the onion principle.

Inisheer, the eastern island, contains a circular Dun called Creggan-keel. Furmena Castle, also on this island, was, in later times, the stronghold of the O'Briens – lords of the islands of Aran – and upon these islands are many more fortresses. There is, on the north side of Inishmore, Dun Onaght, a circular Firbolgic fort, measuring 92 feet across; and on the south-west side, *Dubh Cahn*, "the black fort," a Dun or fortress of very rude masonry, of enormous thickness, and overlooking the cliffs.

ST. ENDA.

The Christian remains of the islands are many, and many are the names of the saints still remembered who congregated here

in the early days of Irish Christianity. Amongst those remarkable heroes of the Cross, none appears to have been greater than St. Enda, who has left his name everywhere in the islands. To him, indeed, is due much of the success that followed the footsteps of those missionaries who won, in the course of centuries, for Aran the appellation of "Aran of the Saints." Enda was the only son of Conel, King of Oriel, whose territories included the modern counties of Louth, Armagh, and Fermanagh. This Enda had, however, several sisters, the elder being the wife of the King of Cashel, whose death is chronicled in the annals of the Four Masters as of the year 489; the younger was Fancha, the abbess of an abbey, or nunnery, wherein were educated ladies of the court, amongst whom was one remarkable for her great mental and personal attractions. Enda loved her, and hoped that she would one day share with him the glories, such as they were, of the throne of his fathers. His love for his affianced bride amounted to an idolatry, but his idolatry must end, and his idol must die an early death. The abbess brought him weeping into the chamber where the corpse of his loved one was laid. Fancha then reminded him of how favour is deceitful and how beauty is vain, and how the day, dim and remote, would still come when he would be as his affianced bride now was. "Love not the world, nor the things that are in the world!" exclaimed the abbess with a vehemence that her earnestness inspired. That world was then abjured, and straightway he entered a religious order, that of the Regular Canons of St. Augustine, and after years of study and

probation, was ordained priest in Rome. He thence returned to the kingdom of Oriel in Ireland, where he built several churches. Having visited his sister and her husband the King of Cashel, the latter was, after much hesitation, persuaded to confer upon God and upon Enda the islands of Aran. Possession of a place so retired and so suited to study and contemplation being thus obtained, Enda introduced there a multitude of holy men, monks to live like the Essenes of old, a contemplative life. He divided the islands into ten parts, and built ten monasteries, each under the rule of its proper superior; whilst he chose a place for his own residence on the eastern coast of the western island of Inishmore, and there erected a monastery, the name and site of which are preserved even to this day in the little village of Killeany (Kil-Enda), about a mile from Kilronan. Half the island was assigned to this monastery, and multitudes from afar flocked to Aran, which became the home of the learned and the pious.

ST. BRENDAN.

Amongst the remarkable men that there clustered, were St. Kieran, founder of Clonmacnoise, who died in 549, and St. Brendan. The history of the latter abounds with fable, but it is admitted that a thousand years before Christopher Columbus, he crossed the Atlantic and landed on the coast of Florida, where there is a strip of country which, according to Humboldt, in his *Cosmos*, bore the name of *Irland it Milka*, "Ireland of the white man." The visit of St. Brendan to Aran, previous to his departure to the great western continent, has been described by one of the

most musical of our poets – Denis Florence MacCarthy – as follows: —

"Hearing how blessed Enda lived apart,
Amid the sacred caves of Aran-mör,
And how beneath his eye, spread like a chart,
Lay all the isles of that remotest shore;
And how he had collected in his mind
All that was known to the man of the "old sea,"³
I left the hill of miracles behind,
And sailed from out the shallow sandy Leigh.

"Again I sailed and crossed the stormy sound,
That lies beneath Binn-Aite's rocky height,
And there upon the shore, the saint I found
Waiting my coming through the tardy night.
He led me to his home beside the wave,
Where with his monks the pious father dwelled,
And to my listening ear he freely gave
The sacred knowledge that his bosom held.

"When I proclaimed the project that I nursed,
How it was for this that I his blessing sought,
An irrepressible cry of joy outburst
From his pure lips, that blessed me for the thought.
He said that he, too, had in visions strayed,
O'er the untrack'd ocean's billowing foam;

³ The "Old Sea," the ancient name of the Atlantic in Irish.

Bid me have hope, that God would give me aid,
And bring me safe back to my native home.

"Thus having sought for knowledge and for strength,
For the unheard-of voyage that I planned,
I left those myriad isles, and turned at length
Southward my barque, and sought my native land.
There I made all things ready day by day;
The wicker boat with ox-skins covered o'er,
Chose the good monks, companions of my way,
And waited for the wind to leave the shore."

ST. FINNIAN.

Another of St. Enda's disciples was St. Finnian of Moville – and it was from Aran he set out on his pilgrimage to Rome. Soon after he returned to Ireland, bringing with him a copy of the Gospels, the Papal benediction, and the Canons of St. Finnian. Again departing for Italy, he was made Bishop of Lucca, in Italy, where he died in 588.

ST. COLUMBA.

St. Columba spent years in Aran, and deeply was he grieved at leaving it for Iona. His bitter lament in Irish verse has been translated into English metre by the late Sir Aubrey De Vere, Bart., in part as follows: —

1

"Farewell to Aran isle, farewell!
I steer for Hy; my heart is sore,
The breakers burst, the billows swell,
'Twixt Aran's isle and Alba's shore.

2

"Thus spake the son of God, 'Depart!'
Oh Aran isle, God's will be done!
By angels thronged this hour thou art:
I sit within my barque alone.

3

"Oh Modan, well for thee the while!
Fair falls thy lot and well art thou,
Thy seat is set in Aran isle,
Eastward to Alba turns my prow.

4

"Oh Aran, sun of all the west!
My heart is thine! as sweet to close
Our dying eyes in thee as rest
Where Peter and where Paul repose.

5

"Oh Aran, sun of all the west,
My heart its grave hath found;
He walks in regions of the blest,
The man that hears thy church bells sound.

6

"Oh Aran blest – oh Aran blest!
Accursed the man that loves not thee;
The dead man cradled in thy breast
No demon scares him – well is he."⁴

⁴ Sir Aubrey De Vere, "Irish Odes," p. 274.

ST. FURSA.

Amongst the other ecclesiastical notabilities that frequented Aran in the sixth century was St. Fursa, whose life has been written by scores of writers, as well by the Venerable Bede as by Archbishop Usher, the greatest ornament of the Protestant Church in Ireland. The visions of Fursa were, we are informed by the Rev. J. Carey, in his admirable translation of Dante, the groundwork of the *Inferno*. The beautiful imagery of Fursa's fancy, which threw a charm over every subject that he handled, may be well illustrated by his rhapsodies on seeing for the first time the city of Rome, as staff in hand he wended his way to the Eternal City. Falling on his knees, with outstretched arms, he exclaimed, "Rome! oh, Rome! I hail thee, admirable by apostolic triumphs. Rome, decorated by the roses of the martyrs, whitened by the lilies of the confessors, crowned by the palms of the virgins, thou that containest the bones and relics of the saints, may thy authority never fade!"⁵ Strange, is it not, that the first sight of the city of Rome should produce in the minds of men feelings which words almost fail to convey!

GIBBON.

It was eleven hundred years after Fursa's first salutation to the city of Rome that Edward Gibbon, when musing amid the ruins of the Capitol whilst the barefooted friars were singing

⁵ Colgani, Acta SS. Hiberniæ.

vespers in the temple of Jupiter, formed the idea of writing "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," and what his feelings were on seeing for the first time the holy city he thus in that immortal work informs us: "My temper is not very susceptible of enthusiasm, and the enthusiasm which I do not feel I have ever scorned to affect, but at the distance of twenty-five years, I can neither forget nor express the strong emotions which agitated my mind as I first approached and entered the Eternal City. After a sleepless night I trod with a lofty step the ruins of the Forum." St. Fursa, returning on foot through France, died at Peronne, and his body was conveyed to the island of Aran, where amongst his *quondam* brethren he now, awaiting the resurrection of the just, reposes.

Of the monuments, as well pre-Christian as Christian, in these islands, there are twenty-one, vested in the secretary of the Commissioners of Public Works in Ireland, to be preserved as national monuments. (See next page.)

RUINS.

Ruins everywhere meet the eye of the tourist in Aran – ruined abbeys, ruined monasteries, ruined nunneries, ruined cells, ruined churches, ruined schools, ruined forts, ruined forests, and ruined towers. With one exception the churches of Aran face the east. I heard somewhere, when on the islands, that that is not exactly true, but that they faced the point of the compass at which the sun rose on the day that the foundation stone was laid. Be that as it may, there is the Oratory of St. Banon,

which directly faces the north. It is fifteen feet long, by seventeen feet high to the summit of the gables, by eleven feet in breadth.

COUNTY OF GALWAY. BARONY OF ARAN.

Parish.	Townland.	Monuments.
Inisheer, or Lesser Island	Inisheer	Great Fort, with stone-roofed Cells, and O'Brien's Castle.
		Fort with Mound and Monument.
		Ruins of Church — Kill-Gobnet, etc.
		Ruins of Church — Burial-place of Seven Daughters, whose names are unknown.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Coemhan.
Inishmaan, or Middle Island	Carrowntemple Carrownlisheen	Fort Mothar Dún.
		Fort of Conor.
		Ruins of Church — Kill Canonagh.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Caireach Derquin.
Inishmore, or Great Island	Onaght Killeaney	Fort Dún Ængus.
		Fort Dún Eochla.
		Dubh Chathair or the Black Fort.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Benin, with rectangular enclosure and group of Cells.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Breacan and Cross.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú beg mac Dara.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú more mac Dara.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Assurniadhe.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú Ciara Monastir.
		Ruins of Church — Tempú á Phoill (the seven churches).
		Ruins of Church — Tempú an Cheathrair Abain.
Ruins of Church — Teglach Enda (St. Enda's Church).		

CLOGHAUNS.

Close by are the remains of the hermitage, partly sunk in the rock, and of some cloghauns, or stone-roofed dwellings.

How those solitaries, who for centuries held up the lamp of learning which shone across Europe during the long night which followed the breaking up of the Roman empire, could live in such comfortless cells, it is impossible to apprehend: circular chambers about twenty feet in exterior diameter, with a hole in the stone beehive roof for a chimney, and with an Egyptian-like doorway that a tall man could with difficulty enter. *Teampul-Chiarain* has a beautiful eastern window, with some crosses. Four miles from Kilronan are Kilmurvey and *Teampul McDuach*, a sixth-century church, consisting of nave and choir in beautiful preservation. There are windows there of remote antiquity, with lintels formed of two leaning stones; and there is a semicircular window of great beauty of a more recent date. There is a stone leaning against the eastern gable with a rudely cut opening which seems to have been the head of the more ancient window. The narrow doorway is like the entrance to an Egyptian tomb. Another small church, *Teampul-beg*, together with a holy well and monastic enclosure, is worthy of inspection. At the north-western side of the Inishmore island, and six miles from Kilronan, are the remains of the seven churches, one of which is called *Teampul Breacain*— the church of St. Braccan, who was the founder of the monastery of Ardbraccan, now the cathedral church of the diocese of Meath. The ruined church of *Teampul-saght-Machree* is an object of interest on the middle island. The eastern island in ancient times was called *Aran-Coemhan* in honour of *St. Coemhan* (St. Kevin), brother of St.

Kevin of Glendalough. He was one of the most renowned of the saints of Aran, and is believed to have not unfrequently abated storms after being piously invoked.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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