EARLY CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE OF IRELAND.

By P. J. LYNCH, M.R.I.A.I., F.R.S.A.

(Continued from page 33)

From having noticed the transition period at Kilelton, and Innismurray, we pass to the consideration of the oratory with upright walls of the full height, and built in lime mortar. A plain rectangle on plan, and generally about 15 feet long by 10 feet wide inside measurement, having a small window in the eastern end, and a doorway with square head, and converging jambs, in the western end. The Irish adhered for a long time to this type of door with a square head, and it is known as the entablature style. Subsequently the semi-circular arched head was introduced, and this style, up to the Norman invasion, has been described as *Hiberno Romanesque*. (1)

A good example of this type of oratory is the church of Saint Sinach MacDara, on Inis MacDara, near Roundstone, Connemara. It is 14 ft. 8 in. by 11 ft. 3 in. interior measurement, with a western doorway, and east window of the primitive types (see illustration). (2)

This may be the proper time to refer to the statements made by some writers, that all our early churches up to the twelfth century, were wood. This opinion seems to have been founded in most cases on a passage in St. Bernard's life of St. Malachy of Armagh, where it is related, that in the twelfth century Malachy built a stone church in Bangor "like those he had seen in other countries;" and St. Bernard mentions "that such buildings were never seen before in that country." This is not the only

(1) Examples were shewn on the screen of the development of the west entrance from the primitive type seen in the early oratories and churches and its prototype in the tombs of Mycenæ, through the various stages of ornament and mouldings introduced into the entablature style. Then the transition—semi-circular arch with solid stone tympanum—on to the perfection of the Romanesque, not with any reference to the age of the building, but in a series of architectural progression. The age of a building can only be settled by the historian, the type of architecture and its sequence constitute the work of the archæologist.

(2) In addition to the oratory of Saint Sinach MacDara which is illustrated, views of Tempúl Benén, Aran; Kilulta, Limerick; and Tempúl Chrónáin, Clare, were also shewn.

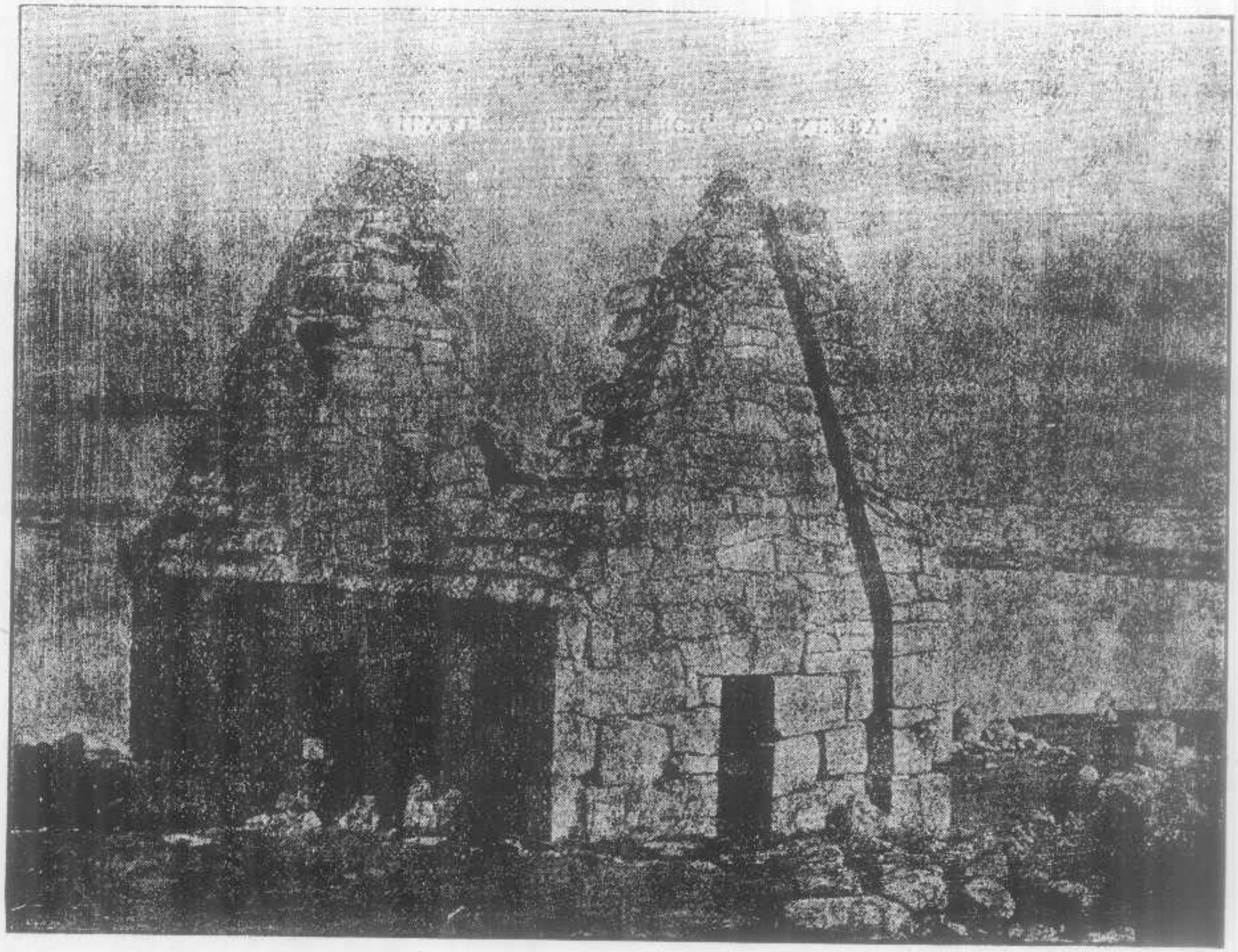
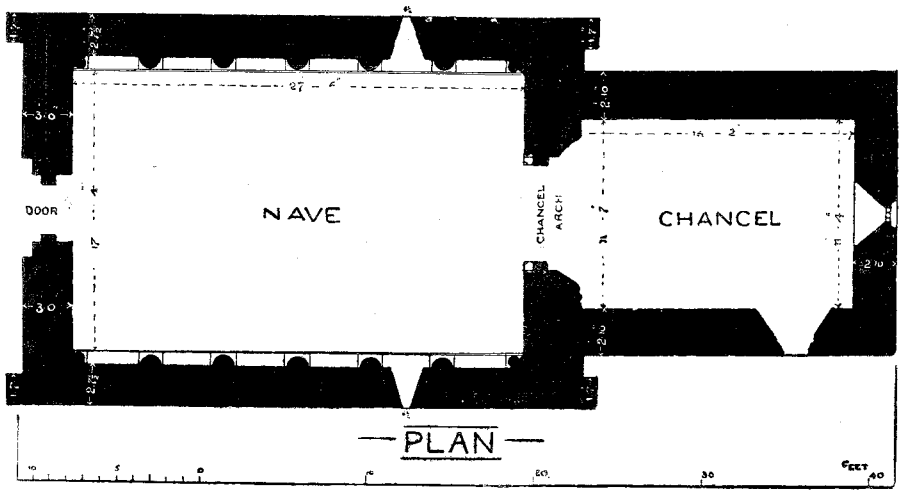


Photo by] [*R. Welch.*

THE ORATORY OF SAINT SINACH MACDARA.

View from North-West.



KILMALKEADER CHURCH, CO. KERRY.

case in which foreigners made mistakes in writing about Ireland. Probably many of our oratories and churches were of wood, but the evidence derived from native writers, and in our annals, and chronicles, relating to stone churches (or *daimhlaigs*) are so abundant that the statement may be dismissed without argument. So far back as the fourth century we read of Ninian, an Irish saint and apostle of the Picts, building the first stone church in Scotland, after the Roman manner (about A.D. 402). This same Ninian afterwards returned to Ireland and built a monastery at Cluain Connor. (3) In the household of St. Patrick the names of his three stone masons are given, stating that they were the first builders of stone churches in Ireland; and so on, in regular sequence, we have records of buildings in stone through the early ages of Christianity. This is only what should be expected, when we consider the intimate relations between the early Irish church and the remainder of Christendom. (4)

The next type of church is that with a chancel. Many of these chancels appear to have been additions—the original church forming the nave. Nothing marks that primitive type of monasticism, described by Montalambert as peculiar to Ireland, more strongly than the plan of our early churches, originally a small oblong quadrangle, subsequently enlarged by the addition of a chancel. The orientation is nearly always east for the sanctuary. On the continent before medieval times all churches were the reverse of this arrangement, and faced the east. Many of the continental churches at the present day have the entrance in the east end. Another peculiar feature of our early churches was the square termination of the chancel, while the plan of church almost universal in other Christian countries had an apsidal termination. (5) This square termination was also a feature in early British churches, and still prevails in English Gothic architecture. On this point Mr. G. Gilbert Scott, who believes it to be a tradition of the early British and Irish churches, in his work on the History of English Church Architecture, remarks: "A custom peculiar to these isles, older than the invasion of the Normans, of the Danes, and of the Saxons, is one, not lightly to be abandoned to an ignorant caprice, or a morbid

(3) Petrie, page 141.

(4) The gradual development of style in the east window so characteristic of early British and Irish architecture ("English Church Architecture," G. Gilbert Scott), was illustrated by views of several windows, from the rude opening of the oratory through its various forms and degrees of ornament, finishing with the effective triple lancet in the east end of Kilfenora church, Co. Clare.

(5) Views of plans Tempúl MacDuagh, Aran; and St. Maria of Grado, A.D. 571, were exhibited as types.

craving after novelties." In some of our churches the chancel arch was very small, probably at one time the celebrant was entirely screened off from the congregation during the sacred portions of the ceremony. In other cases we have a comparatively wide chancel arch, reviving the idea of the great triumphal arch of the ancient basilica. Of the chancel churches in our district I may mention Oughtmama, Co. Clare; the nave measures 27 ft. 4 ins. by 22 ft., and the chancel 21 ft. by 17 ft. The chancel is an addition—as can be seen,—the chancel arch an insertion. In Temple-na-hoe, Ardfert, the chancel has fallen away, but the arch remains; also Inniscaltra, Lough Derg, said to have been erected by Brian Boru. Petrie holds that some of St. Caman's Church of the seventh century may remain. It is probable the chancel and west doorway were erected in Brian's time—the doorway is certainly an insertion. Kilmalkeader (illustrated) is a church with a chancel added on—the present chancel arch, which is only 5 ft. 4 ins. wide, very probably formed the recess for a bishop's throne before the chancel was constructed—such an arrangement was very general in the early Church. (6)

Early Irish Ornament.

Most of the churches in the entablature style now remaining are devoid of ornament. The churches without ornament Petrie considers were all erected in the sixth and seventh centuries. Miss Stokes, who, together with Lord Dunraven, gave a great deal of consideration to early Irish Architecture, believing that Romanesque, or the ornamental style, could not properly be assigned to an earlier period than the eleventh or twelfth century, ascribed these buildings to the intermediate period, the eighth and ninth centuries, (7) but I think in refusing to admit of Romanesque ornament in Ireland before the eleventh century, Miss Stokes was not justified, and that, working from this standpoint, she was led to place too late a date on those early churches, and that in many cases Petrie's view, that these were some of the churches built—if not by St. Patrick—with certainty by his successors in the sixth and seventh centuries, would be more correct.

(6) In addition views of the following were shewn to illustrate the development of ornament on the chancel arch—Temple MacDuagh, Temple na Neave, Oughtmama, Inniscaltra, Kilmalkeader, Temple-na-hoe.

(7) "Early Christian Architecture in Ireland"—Stokes. Page 44.

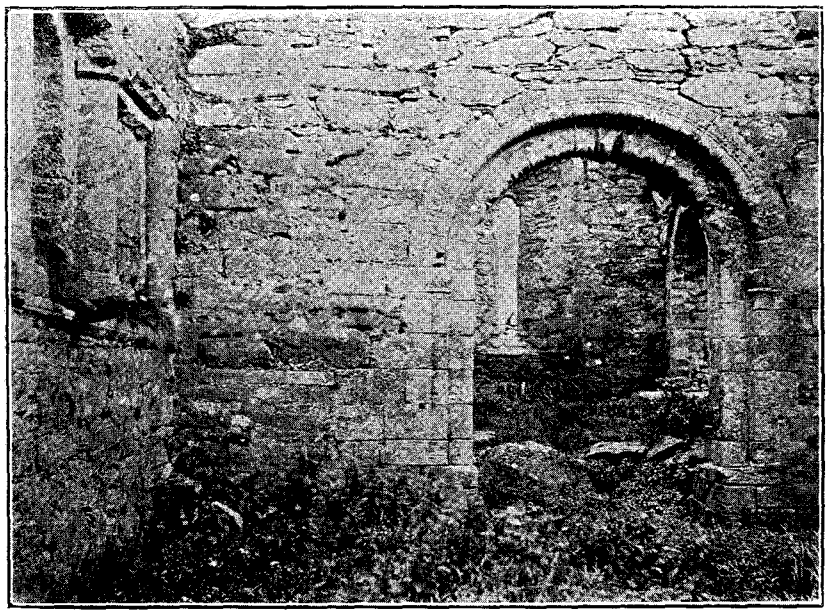


Photo. by] [*Dr. C. Fogerty.*

CHANCEL ARCH, KILMALKEADER CHURCH.

When Petrie had to treat of these early churches where ornament existed, he confessed to being unable to deal with it as satisfactorily as he could wish, because the historical evidence was generally wanting. The annals are very faulty and unsatisfactory before the tenth century. The erection of a church is seldom recorded, it is only its destruction the annalist thinks worthy of notice. In Petrie's time little was known of the history of medieval architecture, of which the earliest types are known as Anglo-Saxon, and Norman; and I may add very much has yet to be learned; to quote a recent reviewer (Mr. Waterhouse) (8)—"One might almost say, without irony, that the progress of science in matters Gothic has been for the past 100 years a continued advance from apparent certainty, which so often means ignorance, to that wholesome doubt which may well be the dawn of knowledge." In Petrie's time ornament of the kind found in early Irish architecture was generally considered as Anglo Norman; it was so with Anglo-Saxon architecture also, for while Carter, Rickman, and other antiquaries had assigned many specimens of ornamental work in England to pre-Norman times, the writers on architecture in the early portions of the last century, notably Mr. J. H. Parker, of Oxford, refused to admit that there was such a thing as Saxon stone-work at all in England.

Of late years, however, a great change has taken place, and even Mr. Parker considerably modified his views, as in his last work, published before his death (9) he states—"The Saxons appear to have been more advanced in the fine arts, such as sculpture, than the Normans;" and again "recent observations seem to shew that the Saxons were more advanced than the Normans at the time of the conquest—their work was more highly finished, had more ornament, and they used fine-jointed masonry, while the Normans used wide-jointed." These facts have an important bearing on this question, for there is no such thing as Saxon architecture, so called, no more than there is Irish architecture, in the sense, that either the Saxons or the Irish, invented a style peculiar to their nation. What we know as Irish, or Saxon, is the native version of the Italian art of the period, derived from the missionaries who at that time were constantly travelling to and fro, many of whom were masons as well as monks. The history of pre-Norman architecture in England should

(8) Monthly Review, Nov. 1900.

(9) "The A B C of Gothic Architecture," fourth edition.

therefore be considered in connection with the architecture of the same period in this country. The relations between the Saxon and Irish churches, particularly after the conference at Whitby, A.D. 664, were intimate and friendly. (10)

Petrie had evidence to prove that work with what were known as Norman characteristics had been executed in Ireland previous to the Norman invasion, and in his efforts to verify the description of the Romanesque doorway at the Kildare round tower (p. 197), written by Cogitosus, as Petrie believed in the ninth century (but which Dr. Healy proves to be earlier—probably the eighth century), he expends a vast amount of labour and research to support his theory that this doorway, and such ornamental work, was possible in Ireland in the ninth century, but he was unable to support this opinion by any reference to examples of a similar style of work with similar ornamentation having been executed in Europe at that time. In recent years Italian architecture, from the fall of the western empire to the tenth century, has received a great deal of attention, (11) and had the result of recent investigations been known to Petrie, it would have supplied the missing link in the chain of evidence collected from the annals and other ancient records, of the existence of ornamental architecture in Ireland at the period which he, with such remarkable perception, believed possible; and it would also have given Miss Stokes reason to modify her views as she foreshadows in the extract quoted early in this paper. Before proceeding further, it may be well to consider something of the history of this ornamental style known as the

ROMANESQUE.

Romanesque as defined by Ferguson is an attempt to adapt classical forms to Christian purposes. When Christianity was established, and had obtained imperial sanction, great churches became necessary. Eastern influences largely prevailed, and as art in Italy had almost died with the western empire, eastern artists were frequently employed, and eastern ornament adopted, and this had much to do in forming the characteristics of early Romanesque. In these days at Constantinople, Rome, and Ravenna—all cities of one great empire—different schools of art existed, hence the mixture, and uncertainty, of style in early ex-

(10) See Cardinal Moran's "Irish Saints in Great Britain."

(11) "Architecture in Italy, Sixth to Eleventh Centuries."—Raffaele Cattaneo.

amples. In time the development of the art assumed well-defined lines, and by the year 564 A.D., eastern Christian architecture had become purely Byzantine, while in the time of Gregory, or about 600 A.D., the Romanesque was the prevailing style in the west, with one exception—the city of Ravenna—here eastern influences continued to prevail, as Ravenna remained portion of the eastern empire until finally taken by the Lombards, A.D. 752, and Ravenna must be included in any history of the Byzantine style. Ravenna is one of the most ancient cities in Italy. Sir G. Gilbert Scott describes it as "an interval between the classic and the medieval periods which we rarely see much of elsewhere. A piece of history which begins when the Romans were leaving Britain, and terminates about the time when they were returning thither as missionaries." (12) It was here that St. Germanus, friend and counsellor of St. Patrick, after returning from Britain, lived and died; we read of St. Patrick visiting him there A.D. 418, and the connection of Irish monks with northern Italy is almost continuous up to the ninth century.

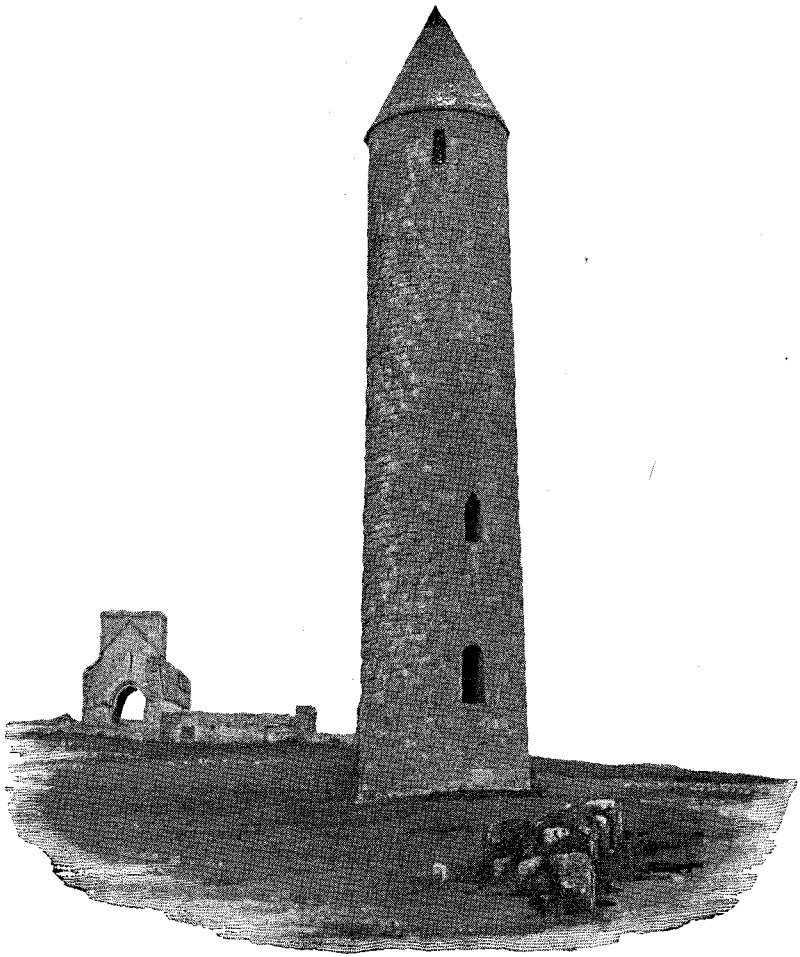
The same eastern influences which were at work at Ravenna are also apparent in early Irish Art, which has strongly marked Byzantine characteristics, so that Irish architecture is not pure Romanesque as we now understand it, and may only be called by that name for want of a better generic term. Why the eastern spirit should predominate in the early Christian art in Ireland has yet to be fully explained. In the past the learned historians (principally ecclesiastics, and full of the *odium theologicum*) engaged in examining our ancient records were apparently more concerned with the bearings the result of their inquiries would have on their respective creeds than their value to the antiquary, hence it is, that one side, in their efforts to connect the early church in Ireland almost entirely with the east, scarcely notice what had occurred in the west. While the other side, wishing to bring into prominence the western connection, lost sight of many interesting incidents in which eastern influence was evident. The archæologist, searching after truth, has therefore much yet to learn before arriving at a just conclusion. There is strong evidence of a very early Christianity in Ireland, even Palladius, who arrived before St. Patrick, was sent to preach to the "Scots believing in Christ." There is evidence of Eastern rites in Pagan times, and it is to the far east—Armenia and Syria—on the remains of

(12) Letter to his son, "English Church Architecture," p. 41

their ancient churches, we must look to-day for the most perfect specimens of those intricate sculptured interlacements such as exist in Ireland. They are small churches like our own, and grouped together as we find them here. The chevron, too, more general in Irish ornament than in the Norman, is eastern, or Egyptian to go further back, for Flinders Petrie has discovered it on Egyptian ornament 2000 B.C. Greek was a favoured language here, and some manuscripts have been found written in Latin with Greek characters. The eastern element was strong in Gaul about the time of St. Patrick, and there was much intercommunication between Gaul and Ireland. Salvianus describes the cities of Gaul in the fifth century as filled with crowds of Syrians: but I cannot do more than touch on this branch of the subject. It is clear that many strong reasons will be found without entering into theology, for the marked eastern characteristics to be found in Irish art. Let us hope that modern inquiry and research will rescue from the realms of legend and romance much that remains doubtful in the history of our early civilization. This may be a good time to refer shortly to a branch of the subject which has led to much controversy.

The Round Towers of Ireland.

Petrie's learned essay on the subject has now been written over 60 years; still there are some who are unwilling to class the present structures amongst the remains of Christian architecture. However, the numbers are very few, and growing less—they are generally amateurs—men fond of fanciful theories. Some have been to India, or learned that round towers there are associated with Bhuddist rites—a form of worship that was very general in pagan times—therefore the Irish towers must have been built for similar purposes. However, I will not travel over the ground made so familiar in Petrie's learned essay, and agreed to by all our learned antiquaries who have dealt with the subject since, beyond remarking that if our pagan ancestors could have built temples such as these, in dressed stone and cement, they would also have left us tombs like those domed tombs of Mycenæ, or some other monuments worthy of such great builders. Or, if these towers were sepulchral monuments of some early race, as some assert, similar remains would exist on the continent marking the passage of the race westwards, as is to be seen in the dolmen, or chambered tumulus; but this is not so, but we do find similar towers in different parts of the continent—in Hungary,



DEVENISH (LOUGH ERNE).

From "Devenish," by Rev. J. E. McKenna, M.R.I.A.

France, and Holland, but notably in Italy at Ravenna, in connection with churches, just as they were in Ireland, though in many cases here all trace of the church has disappeared. Giraldus Cambrensis, when he visited Ireland in the twelfth century, described them in his writings as ecclesiastical towers. This, considering the lapse of time, and the greater number of these towers that must have existed at that period in Ireland, is a more valuable opinion as to their nature than that of any theorist of the nineteenth or twentieth century.

Miss Stokes, in her essay on Irish architecture, enumerates and illustrates several examples of church towers on the continent similar to our Irish towers. Leader Scott also, in the work I have before referred to, illustrates two of the towers in Ravenna—St. Appolinaré in Classé, and St. Appolinaré Nuovo. Had Petrie been able to produce these illustrations they would have been arguments more eloquent than words, in favour of his theory of the ecclesiastical origin of our Irish round towers.

The round tower was doubtless the general form of tower erected on the continent up to the tenth century. There are some round towers in Italy to which a very early date is assigned, but most of the early churches and towers on the continent have been cleared away to prepare for the erection of the more pretentious structures which now mark the resting places of the early missionaries. The history of our country was not favourable to the development of church architecture. It is one continued tale of internecine strife, and frequently of church destruction. The towers mark our greatest efforts, and a few have survived, serving only to remind us of what might have been, had the fates proved more kind. (13)

Petrie was of opinion that some of the towers were of a very early date—sixth or seventh century. Such towers were no doubt erected in Italy at an early period, (14) but the earliest mention of a tower in our

---

(13) Miss Stokes divided the towers of Ireland into four periods, according to the class of masonry and details, but for arriving at the relative ages of the structures this should not be taken as an infallible guide. Of the first style views were shewn of Scattery, no doubt an early tower; second style—Inniscaltra, Cashel and Roscrea; third style—Dysert Ængus and Devenish; fourth style—St. Finghin's, Clonmacnoise. Views of Brechin, Abernethy and Egilsay round towers in Scotland, and St. Appolinaré in Classé, Ravenna, were also shewn.

(14) Ferguson, p. 315, vol. ii.

annals is the burning of Slane tower, A.D. 950; still this is no reason why the *foundation* of many would not be of a much earlier date.

Many of the towers are more or less ornamented in some of their details, either the doorways, as at Kildare, Timahoe, and Dysert; or cornices as in Devenish; (15) or bands as Dysert O'Dea and Ardmore; and in this connection I will resume the consideration of this question of

ORNAMENT IN THE EARLIER IRISH CHURCHES,

by referring to Tempúl Chrónáin in Co. Clare. This ruin is situated in a picturesque dell overshadowed by a clump of ash trees—an oasis in the stony desert of Burren. Lord Dunraven illustrates this church and describes it as the oldest and most interesting he has seen in this part of Ireland—massive stones, high-pitched roof, door and window of the primitive type, with very archaic decoration. The church measures 21 ft. by 12 ft. 6 in. internally. Some of the quoins have a cylindrical roll moulding on the angle. There are carved neckless heads, appearing on the exterior of the west gable, and north and south walls, as if built in at random, and the interior of the east window has one stone with a bowtell and pellet or lozenge moulding (see illustration). This stone was not moulded after being set, as no provision for such carving was made on any of the other stones—a natural provision, if subsequent carving of the original window was intended—but it is clear to any expert, that the carved stone was set in to form portion of the window, and that the present window and east gable were constructed at the same time as the remaining portions of the church. Now, seeing that the mouldings on the quoins are incomplete, the random manner in which the carved heads are inserted, and the introduction of this moulded stone in the construction of the original east window, I think it is reasonable to assume that these were portions of an ornamental structure which existed before the foundation of the present archaic church, and which were recovered from the debris. Without fixing on any date, this church would be evidence of an ornamental style of architecture in Ireland many centuries before the Norman invasion.

At Tomgraney church, Co. Clare, we find carved ornamental details equal to any of the Romanesque period, and we read in the *Chronicon*

(15) Devenish round tower (illustrated) is one of the most perfect of our towers. It is 81 ft. 6 ins. high, with a moulded cornice, having heads carved on the same. See "Devenish," by Rev. J. E. MacKenna, M.R.I.A.

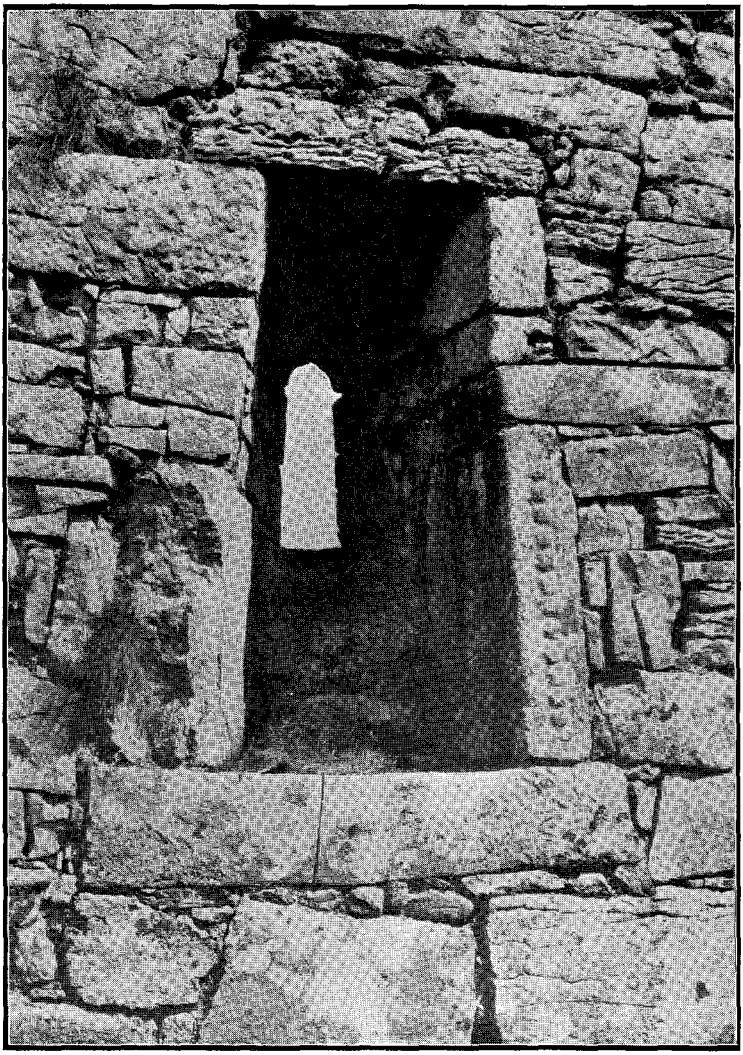
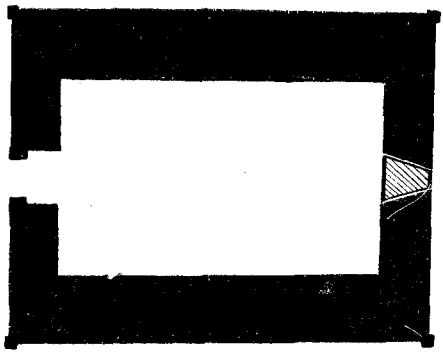


Photo. by] [*Dr. G. Fogerty.*

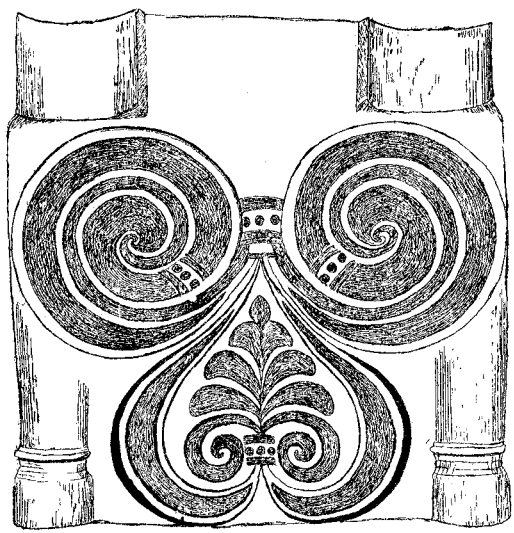
EAST WINDOW, TEMPUL CHRONAIN, CO. CLARE.

Interior View.

DEVENISH (LOUGH ERNE).



GROUND PLAN, MOLAISE'S HOUSE.



NORTH-WEST PILASTER, MOLAISE'S HOUSE.

From "Devenish," by Rev. J. E. McKenna, M.R.I.A.

Scotorum that "the great church of Tuaim Greine and its belfry were constructed in A.D. 964." Another example of very early ornament is found in the remains of the stone roofed oratory of St. Molaise, on Devenish island, which Petrie assigned to the sixth or seventh century. (16) It was a small stone roofed structure, with a door and windows of the early types, projecting pilasters and barge, like many of our earliest churches. The pilasters, however, are moulded, and at the base have sculptured ornament, one, which I illustrate, has two spirals and the Greek anthemion. This is the most characteristic ornament in Grecian art, and it is found in combination with the spiral, the earliest type of Irish ornament. These particulars are taken from an interesting description of Devenish by Rev. J. E. McKenna, M.R.I.A. (17) These stones, in the opinion of the author, form without any doubt portion of the original structure. Had Petrie seen these carved stones, he would, in my opinion, have availed of this example as fully as he made use of the ornament found on the sixth century church of St. Dairbhile, in Erris, Co. Mayo, (18) in support of his theory of an early ornamental style of architecture in Ireland.

The art of these early examples was poor, but for a proper appreciation of it we should consider the condition of architecture in the centuries following the fall of the western empire, 476 A.D., commonly known as the dark ages.

Lombardic Architecture.

At that time Art in Europe may be considered to have been dead. Towards the middle of the sixth century Byzantine or eastern influences helped to raise it from its state of general decay, particularly during the reign of Justiman, A.D. 527-565. There was a school of Greek artists in Rome in the sixth century, and the Roman work of that century bears evidence of Grecian influence. Then another stage of decadence set in, and in the seventh and towards the beginning of the eighth century,

(16) Petrie, p. 437.

(17) "Devenish," M. H. Gill & Son, Dublin, 1897.
I am indebted to the author for the use of the blocks of Devenish that illustrate this paper. The dark portions of the block are raised ornament, though shaded dark by the artist, in error. The ornament, I understand, is different on each pilaster.

(18) Petrie, p. 321.
The ornament on this church consisted of a stone on the impost of the door carved with *intreccio*, or interlaced work—the Solomon's knot of the Comacine masters. See "Cathedral Builders," p. 82.

art in Italy had sunk to its lowest depth. (19) Towards the end of the eighth century, and on through the ninth and tenth centuries, it revived, and gave evidence of that development which culminated in the renaissance of art in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. During these centuries of the art history of Italy the centre of activity would appear to have been the kingdom of Lombardy. These semi-barbarous tribes, who conquered Italy in 568 A.D., laying waste its fairest lands, and despoiling its sacred shrines, soon became zealous converts to Christianity and great builders of churches, in a style known as Lombardic architecture. That the style owes anything to the native genius of the Lombard conquerors no one imagines. The genesis of a style of Architecture is often very difficult to determine. In this case, considering that there were churches in this style existing in Italy when the Lombards arrived, it is more as patrons than as inventors of the style that their name deserves to be associated with it. A recent writer in that most fascinating work, "Cathedral Builders," has given the credit of the style to a society of artists then established at Como (sixth century), whom the Lombard kings took under their patronage. Laws were framed to regulate their powers, and papal bulls were issued for their protection. They were known as the Comacine masters; many of them were monks, and they travelled over Europe spreading the art of building and sculpture, and became known as *liberi muratori*, or freemasons. When Augustine came to England in 598 A.D., he brought with him several architects and builders, presumedly of this guild, to provide churches, and they no doubt gave to Anglo-Saxon architecture its Lombard characteristics, grafted on to the Roman remains and Anglo-Saxon architecture then existing; and when Nechtan, king of the Picts, wrote to Abbot Coelfried in 710 to send him architects to build him a church of stone like the Romans, no doubt it was one of a Lombardic type they erected. This same writer claims that the style known in latter days as Irish Romanesque, and which Petrie classed as of the Norman period, our round towers, and high crosses as well, were all the work of the guild of Comacine masters. The theory is very captivating, and the many strong points of resemblance in ornamental detail, recently discovered between the Lombardic architecture and that of Ireland, and other countries in Europe, afford strong arguments in favour of it. It

(19) "Architecture in Italy," Cattaneo, p. 76.

helps materially to remove the doubt and uncertainty with which archæologists up to this approached the question of ornament found in our early Irish churches, which Petrie believed in, but could not satisfactorily account for, and later writers, appreciating his difficulty, settled for themselves by transferring many of the examples on to the tenth and twelfth centuries. But though the existence of this itinerary school of architects at Como, in the early ages of Christianity, is sufficient to explain the similarities existing in the ornamental art prevailing in the Christian edifices of Europe at that time, still, while in other countries the presence of the master builders is recorded, we have nothing in our early annals yet discovered, connecting this school directly with Ireland.

If the early ornamental work of what are known as Lombardic, Norman, Saxon, or Irish architecture be examined, many points of resemblance will be met with, yet each will be found to possess a distinct national characteristic of its own. Irish art particularly, by the excellence of our manuscripts, metal work, and sculptured crosses, can claim the most striking individual characteristics, sufficient to disturb the theory that the artists were provided from any central European art school, or that it owes its development to other than native sources. As to Comacine influence on our early church architecture—Ireland offered but a poor field for the master builder. The monastic system of Ireland differed from all continental systems, and appeared not to favour the erection of large churches, nor did our social system require it, and there was an utter absence of that spirit which provided continental countries with churches that rivalled in grandeur and proportions the Pagan basilicas of ancient Rome, and this continued up to the twelfth century. At that time, when our church dicipline was changed and larger churches became necessary, the Comacine masters were in evidence, as can be seen by the memorial slab of the architect of Christ church cathedral, Dublin, in old Norman French, and which has been recently translated as "John, the master builder of the brotherhood of Parma and Dame Rame Perez of St. Salvador of Asturias. His wife and all his family who died in this land lie here."

The conclusions that may fairly be drawn from the information we have now before us is that the genesis of Irish art was eastern, and it is possible that much of the earlier ornament was derived directly from that source, as the Holy Land and Syria seem to have been great

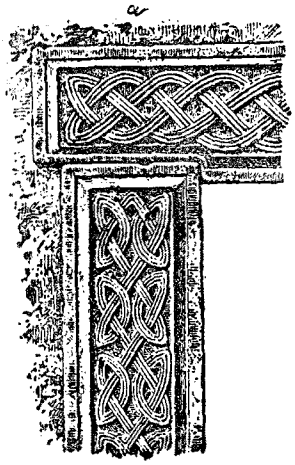
centres of activity in the early ages of Christianity, and Judea was a place of pilgrimage for many of our early Irish saints long before the conversion of the Lombards. At the time (sixth century) these barbarous tribes were devastating Italy, Ireland was the centre of civilization and culture. When the Lombai conquered Tuscany they found an Irishman, St. Finian of Moville, seated on the episcopal throne of Lucca, and to him is due their conversion; he died A.D. 590. He is said to have built 28 churches in Tuscany. After this time the continued communication between Ireland and Italy of these missionaries, who were generally church builders as well, must have given a Lombardic character to our architecture, but it retained and developed many striking original characteristics, such as the square end to the chancel, to which I referred before, the eastern window, the converging jambs to the openings, the character of its sculpture and interlacements, and the ensemble of its capitals—these and other details impart to the style a national character, which under happier circumstances, might have attained a higher place in the history of architecture.

At one time an idea was common that interlaced ornament was peculiar to Ireland. It largely prevails throughout all Irish art, and is the most important detail to be considered in connection with Irish architecture. It is found on the remains of Italian architecture from the fifth to the twelfth century (see illustrations), and is of eastern origin, and, as I mentioned before, is to be found very generally on the remains of the early Armenian churches; but in Ireland it developed into a style of ornament almost universal in its application, whether on metal work, leather, manuscripts, or sculpture; but even that this style of ornament was first introduced here by Lombard masters, and not directly from the east as is more natural to suppose—its development has been clearly on independent lines, and not the work of any organized guild working from a common art centre, for no other country has equalled the beautiful and marvellous intricacy of detail which characterises our Irish interlacements. (20)

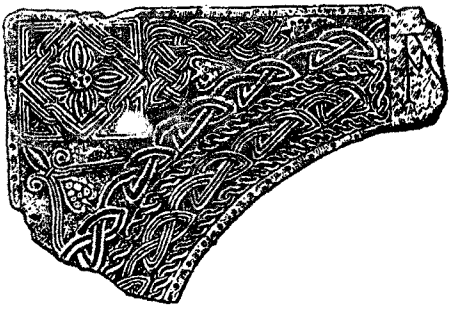
Treating of the relations between stone carved work in England and early manuscripts, Professor Westwood states:— (21)

(20) Views of initial letter, book of Kells; tomb, Cashel; cross, Monasterboice, shewn.

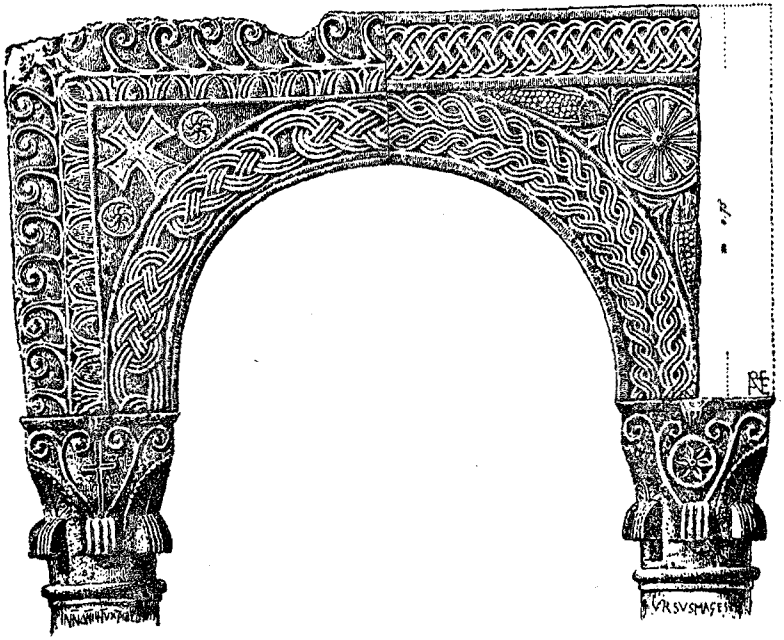
(21) "Fac-similes of Miniatures in Anglo-Saxon and Irish Manuscripts."



Details of the Door of
S. Clemente, Rome, A.D. 650.



Fragment of Baptismal Fountain
of Pola, ix Century.



Ciborium of S. Giorgio de Valpolicella, A.D. 712.

These Interlacings are from "Six Months in the Apennines," M. Stokes.
G. Bell & Sons, London.

"That on examination the carved work exhibits so complete an identity, both in general design and detail, with the miniatures and ornaments of the manuscripts themselves, as to lead to the conviction that the painters of the latter were the artists and designers of the former, and that consequently the different remains illustrate each other."

With the superexcellence of Irish manuscript work, universally admitted, it is not too much to claim an equal pre-eminence for our ornamental stone work of an early date.

In considering the question of architecture in Ireland anterior to the Norman invasion in connection with the architecture of other countries at the same period, in the light of more recent information, the opinions of Petrie are worth recalling. In his essay on Irish architecture (page 240) he states :—

"Impressed, as I am, with the conviction that the style of architecture variously denominated by antiquaries Romanesque, Tudesque, Lombardic, Saxon, Norman, and Anglo-Norman, belongs to no particular country, but, derived from the corrupted architecture of Greece and Rome, was introduced wherever Christianity had penetrated—assuming various modifications according to the taste, intelligence, and circumstances of different nations. I think it only natural to expect the earliest examples of this style should be found in a country supereminently distinguished, as Ireland was, for its learning, and as having been the cradle of Christianity to the north-western nations of Europe, in the sixth, seventh, eighth, and ninth centuries. Neither should it, I think, be a matter of wonder that more abundant examples of this style, though on a small scale,—such as might be expected in a kingdom composed of many petty, and nearly independent lordships,—should remain in Ireland, than in those more prosperous and wealthy countries, in which such humble structures would necessarily give place to edifices of greater size and grandeur."

And again he states :—

"That ornamented churches in the Romanesque, or, as it is usually called in England, the Norman style, were not uncommon anterior to the English invasion. I have also, with what success the reader must determine, endeavoured to sustain the conviction which has forced itself on my own mind, that much of this ornamental architecture remaining in Ireland, is of an age anterior to the Norman conquest of England, and probably, in some instances, even to the Danish irruptions of Ireland. I am aware, indeed, that in this latter opinion I run every risk of being considered rash or visionary."

At this time Petrie does not appear to have been aware that these interlacements, and other essentially eastern types of ornament, were generally applied to the architecture of Ravenna, and even in Rome in the sixth century, and were adopted by the Lombard masters in varying forms throughout Europe, up to the ninth and tenth centuries; very little of it remains except in Ireland. It is only recent researches that

has made this and a good deal of other facts in connection with Italian architecture generally known, and tends to confirm the opinion which had forced itself on Petrie's mind—that much of the early ornamental architecture remaining in Ireland may date from the seventh to tenth centuries, as our annals would appear to show, and in considering the ornamental architecture of the tenth century, there is no reason why a church such as Cormac's chapel at Cashel, which has all the characteristics of the Lombard architecture of that period, might not have been included by Petrie; but strangely—considering his views on early ornamental architecture in Ireland—he advanced it to the twelfth century. In this Petrie no doubt was influenced by those writers of authority in England who, at the time, disbelieved in the existence of the remains of any ornamental architecture in the British Isles of a date anterior to the Norman invasion. The comparatively perfect state of this structure, and the records in the annals connecting it with Cormac McCarthy, helped to support his theory.

Cormac's Chapel

Is rightly considered the most perfect specimen of purely Irish architecture existing in the country. Tradition, and history, had generally ascribed it to Cormac MacCullinen, who was king of Munster and Bishop of Cashel, and was killed in the year 908. Dr. Ledwich—no great authority on architecture—states "that it was erected prior to the introduction of the Norman and Gothic styles, for in every respect it is purely Saxon." Dr. Milner—a more reliable authority—states "the present cathedral bears intrinsic marks of the age assigned to its erection, namely, the twelfth, as does Cormac's church, now called Cormac's Hall, of the tenth century." Petrie describes it as "the most curious and perfect church of the Norman style in the British Empire." Petrie quotes exhaustively from all the annals which refer to the consecration of Cormac's chapel by Cormac McCarthy in 1134, and in some cases to the building, cuṁdaċ—but in fairness he adds:—

> "It may indeed be objected that the word cuṁdaċ, which is used by the annalists to express the erection or foundation of this church, does not literally bear that signification, but rather a restoration or covering of the building, as the word is employed in that sense to denote the covering or casing of a book, and, in fairness, I should confess that, in the translation of the annals of Inisfallen, preserved in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, the word cuṁdaċ is rendered doubtfully "built or restored," and I should also add that the verb cumdaigim is explained in O'Brien's dictionary as signifying "to keep or preserve, to maintain

or support, also to build, rather to roof and cover a building." But this latter part of the explanation is an inference of Dr. O'Brien's, and it is not warranted by any authority found in Irish manuscripts. In these documents the word cuṁdaċ is beyond question employed to denote the erection as well as the founding of a building, and sometimes the building itself."

After which, by some other arguments, he satisfies himself it means the "foundation" in this case. It is well to consider Petrie's condition of mind when making this correction of a generally accepted date. He had previously argued, and I believe quite correctly, that ornament existed in Irish architecture previous to the Norman conquest of England, and he added :—

"This latter conclusion will, I think, be greatly strengthened, if not satisfactorily established, when it is shown that those Irish churches exhibiting ornamental architecture, which we know from historical evidences to have been erected in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, are not only very different in their style of decoration from those presumed to be of earlier date, but have a remarkable agreement in their details with those of the known Norman structures in England and France. To prove such agreement it may be proper to adduce one or two examples of such churches in this place."

And he then introduces a description of Cormac's chapel. The historical notices connecting Cormac's chapel with Cormac McCarthy in 1134, and his refusal to adopt the previously generally accepted meaning of the word cuṁdaċ, were introduced to bring Cormac's chapel, which he believed to have strong Norman characteristics, closer to the Anglo-Norman period.

The prevailing opinion of the authorities upon early architecture in England at that period were very similar, and entirely opposed to the teaching of antiquaries of the preceding century, such as Dr. Milner, Carter, Rickman, and others. The first edition of Parker's glossary was published in 1836 ; of "Saxon architecture" he states :—"The character of the architecture of the Anglo-Saxons has not yet been fully ascertained, neither is it decided whether any specimens of these works still remain." (p. 321, vol. i.) And further on we find "the workmanship of the Saxons was undoubtedly rude." It was about this time—in 1845—that Petrie published his invaluable work on Irish Ecclesiastical Architecture; he had presumedly been smitten with the theories of the new school, who denied that the remains of any ornamental style of architecture of pre-Norman times existed in these islands. We can therefore understand his difficulty in accepting the well-established tradition that the Cormac

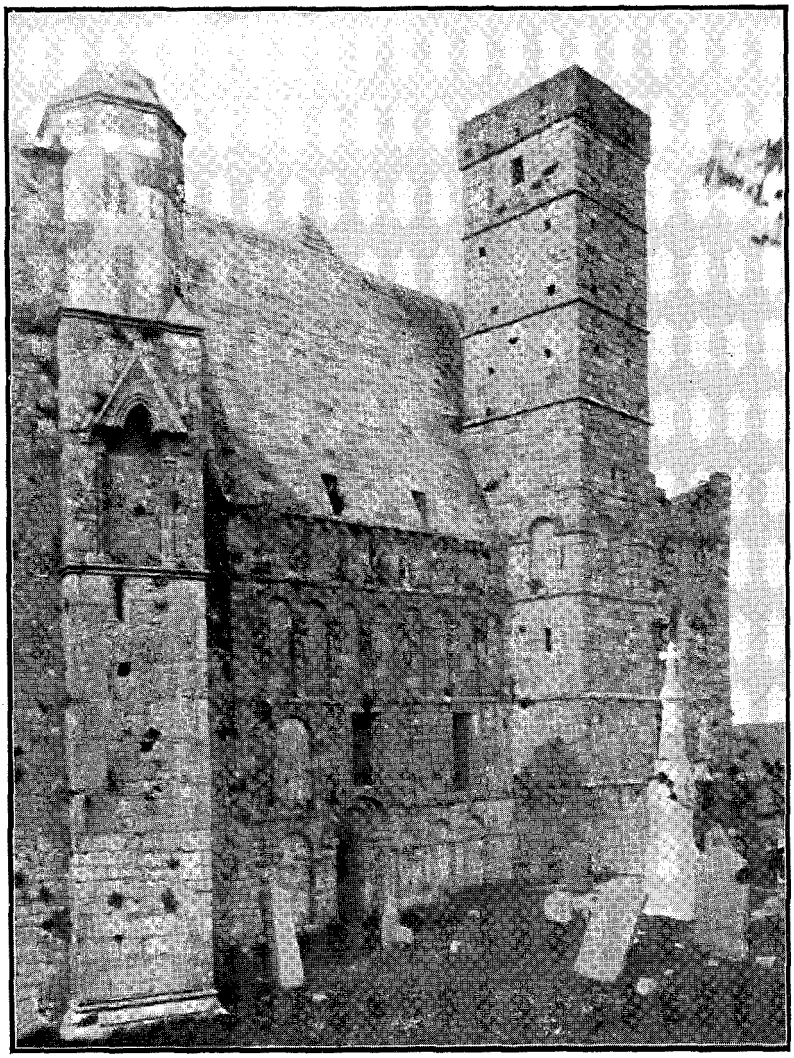


Photo. by] [*Rev. W. Bentley, M A.*

CORMAC'S CHAPEL, CASHEL.

View from South-West.

identified with Cormac's chapel was Cormac McCullinen, the bishop king of the tenth century; and how eagerly he lent the weight of his authority to prove it was founded by Cormac McCarthy in the twelfth century. Since then all writers on Irish architecture have adopted Petrie's views, though Brash, in support of his own theory regarding Brian Boru's connection with Tomgraney church in the Co. Clare, states—"The terms 'erect' and 'build' are frequently used in our annals for 'repair' and 're-edify.'" This is a very conclusive statement. Of a pre-Norman style of architecture Brash states—"It has been attempted to establish a Saxon style—see Rickman and others—but with dubious success." In Parker's later editions of Rickman he has expunged most of Rickman's remarks on Saxon remains. Since then, however, the study of architecture has been pursued on more scientific lines, and a great change has taken place in our ideas of Gothic architecture and the style that preceded it, and earlier in my paper I have called attention to the fact that before his death Mr. Parker had come to praise the Saxon stonework, and admitted that their work had more ornament than the Norman. (22) I have dwelt on this question of the Saxon style because of the direct bearing it has on Irish architecture. As I mentioned before, there is no such thing in the strict sense as Saxon architecture, or Irish

---

(22) The change of opinion in reference to medieval architecture is worth noting. In the early part of the last century doubts were thrown on the existence of any specimens of Anglo-Saxon work in England. In Britton's historical notes to Pugins "Architecture of Normandy," (1828) he states—"According to our most judicious antiquaries, no one structure—scarcely any one fragment—in Great Britain is now in existence that can be referred with certainty to the Saxon era;" and Mr. Parker considered the Abbaye aux Hommes as the starting point in the study of Anglo-Norman architecture. Later on Ferguson modified the previously accepted opinion by admitting that some fragments of Saxon work were to be found in England (vol. ii, p. 125). A more scientific examination of the churches of Caen was made by Mr. Parker and some French architects in 1862, and in a paper read before the Oxford Architectural Society (vol. i, 2nd series) he states:—

> "The great abbey churches at Caen had long been considered the starting point for the history of architecture in England, and the connecting link between the architectures; and, at the same time, it had been taken for granted that these churches, as they now stand, were fair examples of the style of building in use in Normandy at the time of the conquest. A careful examination, however, shewed that this was almost entirely a delusion, which had greatly misled the generality of English historians and amateurs. When he came to examine these churches in detail with the careful examination required by the system of Professor Willis, he found that in the church of St. Stephen (L'Abbaye aux Hommes) there was such a difference of construction in different parts as to mark the work of three distinct periods, all of the style we call Norman."

In time a reaction in favour of a pre-Norman style of architecture in England set in, as may be seen from the writings of Professor Freeman and others. Mr. G. Gilbert

architecture. In the same way we cannot be said to have any architecture invented by the Lombards. Our early architects were the monks who travelled as missionaries throughout Europe, and if they practised an ornamental style of architecture in England in the tenth century, it is sufficent reason for supposing it possible in Ireland.

In Cormac's chapel we have little of the Norman spirit of the twelfth century as we understand it now, but in its construction and details, namely, its small size and square chancel, with bishop's seat well suited to contain the throne of a bishop king, and the high-pitched stone roof, it maintains all the best traditions of early Irish architecture—its towers and decorative ornaments give to it the Lombardic character common to the many Christian edifices of the tenth century—while its resemblance to Anglo-Saxon work, points to the influence of that universal brotherhood in art which Christianity had established over Europe. Leader Scott, fearful, I presume, of entering on an Irish controversy, merely notes its peculiar tenth century features, and adds that Cormac was a bishop of Cashel who died 907 A.D. A somewhat similar difficulty has engaged the attention of the antiquaries of Scotland over the church of St. Regulus at St. Andrews (see illustration). In "Scotland, in early Christian times," Dr. Anderson (23) states :—

> "The chancelled churches on the mainland of Scotland are mostly Norman in style. This fact removes them from among those with which I have to deal. An exception may be made in the case of one which is unique in its features. This exception is the Church of St. Regulus, whose elegant tower is still the most striking feature in the city of St. Andrews. This beautiful ruin has been assigned to many and various dates. Sir Gilbert Scott, the latest, and certainly one of the

---

Scott ("History of English Church Architecture," p. 41), writing on this subject, states :—

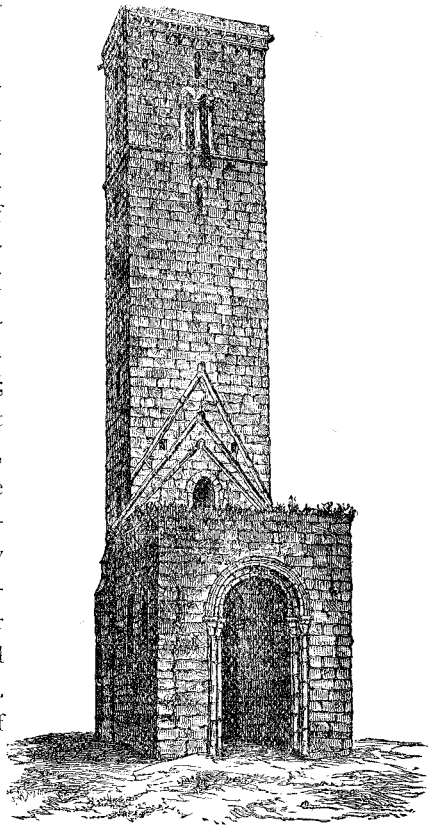
> "There is, nevertheless, a certain number of such buildings remaining to us greater than most persons are aware of, and I have myself found so many indications of Saxon work and Saxon design in our village churches, that I am convinced that the list might be very considerably increased by more careful observation."

I have before referred to Mr. Parker's entire change of opinion on Saxon architecture, and recently, in his own city of Oxford, Mr. James Park Harrison, M.A., Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, Mr. Drinkwater, F.R.I.B.A., and others, have been making a scientific examination of Christ church, with a view to proving that the choir, with its finely carved capitals, and other portions of the structure, date from pre-Norman times. On a visit to Oxford last year I had an opportunity of examining some of the Anglo-Saxon masonry from which the plaster has been removed, and in the Bodleian library Saxon manuscripts can be seen with ornament similar to the carvings on the choir. Truly the nineteenth century witnessed many changes of opinion for the student of architecture.

(23) "Scotland in Early Christian Times." J. Anderson, Edinburgh. David Douglas, 1881.

most competent authorities, states that he finds it difficult to conjecture its age, but he imagines it to be anterior to the introduction of Norman architecture into England. He remarks that it is of parallel character to Cormac's chapel at Cashel, (which is one of the latest of the old Irish churches) and also that the capitals of its shafts resemble those of St. Panteleon at Cologne, which are of the tenth century."

These facts would support the argument that Cormac's chapel, also, might be taken as a tenth century foundation.



ST. REGULUS, ST. ANDREWS.
From Dr. Anderson's
"Scotland in Early Christian Times."

To examine the construction and ornamental details of Cormac's chapel with a view to consider the evidences of a tenth century foundation, or the nature and extent of the undoubted restoration of the twelfth century, would be entirely outside the scope of this paper, nor have I had an opportunity of making such a careful examination of the ruin as would justify me in attempting such an analysis; but as a suggestion for inquiry, I might mention that the entire southern façade, with its tower, arcading, and entrance doorway, is strongly marked with Lombardic characteristics of the tenth century (see illustration). A study of the admirable monograph (prepared by Mr. Arthur Hill, B.E., Architect, published 1874), will afford matter for further consideration. The plan shows the chancel arch out of the centre, and close to the south side, suggesting that the width of the original church may have been increased northwards. The lower arcading on the interior of this north wall, as seen by the longitudinal section, is not regular, and looks as if the north door was not provided for in laying it out. The interior doorway into the north tower is much more ornate than the doorway opposite, into the south tower, as is the north entrance when compared with the south entrance to the church. But it is on the east elevation, the want of symmetry is most

striking, in the "patchiness" of the barge line of main roof; the dentil string course on this gable, south of the chancel roof, is not continued on the north side; this and many other details will strike the expert as suggestive of some changes in the north side of the original church. Without a careful examination of the structure, including the foundations, these conjectures can be of little practical value, beyond showing, that viewed in the light of recent information, our Irish remains afford an interesting field for inquiry. I hope some competent authority will take up the question of pre-Norman architecture in Ireland in the spirit in which some of the Anglo-Saxon remains in England have been recently examined, and enter into an analysis of the sculptured ornament in Italy and Gaul in pre-Norman times, with particular reference to the work of the Cormacine masters and compare it with the remains of early Irish architecture. Much similarity of detail would, no doubt, be revealed by such an examination.

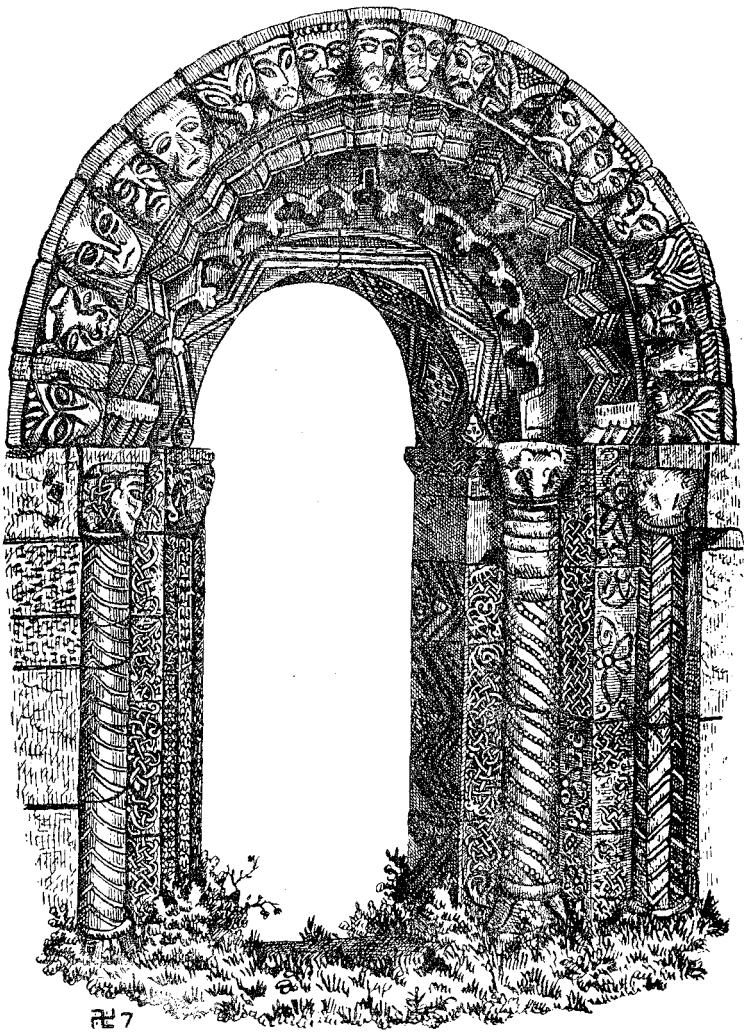
I think it may fairly be inferred that the introduction of the Romanesque into Ireland dates from a much earlier period than the building of Inniscaltra, 1008 A.D., as Miss Stokes supposed, and was general over Christian Europe at the same time (24). The Missionaries were the artists of those days, and it is to these messengers of the gospel we owe the beauty of our early art and architecture. They led the conquering princes into the paths of peace, where art alone can flourish. As a recent reviewer (25) referring to the development of styles in medieval architecture throughout Europe observes—

> "Search as one may for differences, the similarities are even more striking, and we have still to face the extraordinary fact that, in countries of variant race and variant language, there grew almost simultaneously and with strangely similar development a common art with a common motive. There were two forces in the world that could override the boundaries of tribe and tongue, and these forces, call them what you will—Papal supremacy, Monastic rule, Art brotherhood, or Mason craft—were, ultimately, no others than Christianity and her handmaid, Architecture."

We have in our district many specimens of Irish Romanesque in varying degrees of excellence. Some of the examples are the west entrance, St. Mary's, Limerick (now very much restored): Innisfallen Oratory, Killarney; Kilmalkeader Church, Co. Kerry; St. Flannan's,

(24) Miss Stokes' "Early Christian Architecture."—p. 113.

(25) Mr. Paul Waterhouse. Monthly Review, November, 1900.



South Doorway, Dysert O'Dea.

Killaloe; Chancel Arch, Inniscaltra; Clonkeen Church, near Limerick; Dysert O'Dea doorway, Co. Clare, (26) a drawing of which I reproduce by the favour of the R.S.A.I.

In concluding this sketch of the History of Early Irish Architecture, I should explain that the subject was one which I found it impossible to compress within the limits of an ordinary evening paper, hence, I have had to leave many points untouched, and to omit all descriptive particulars of the details of existing structures beyond exhibition on the screen. However, the works of Petrie, Brash, Miss Stokes and Lord Dunraven, and the Journal of the R.S.A.I., afford all the information necessary on these points for any student anxious to pursue the subject.

I have to to thank Messrs. George Bell and Sons, London, for kindly lending me the blocks from Miss Stokes' "Six Months in the Apennines;" Mr. David Douglas, Edinburgh, for the block of St. Andrews from Dr. Anderson's "Scotland in Early Christian Times;" the Rev. J. E. McKenna, for those of Devenish, and the Royal Society of Antiquaries, through Mr. Robert Cochrane, for the use of the blocks of Kilmalkeader, McDara's Church, and Dysert O'Dea.

(26) In addition to these I introduced views of the Saint's Church, Inchagoile, Tempul Finghin, Clonmacnoise, closing appropriately with a view of Dervorgillas' Church at Clonmacnoise, of the twelfth century, a name associated with one of the saddest incidents in our country's history, and as Miss Stokes truly remarks:—"The classic pillars and delicately-carved arches of Queen Dervorgillas' Church at Clonmacnoise left their mute forms in silent witness to the life as to the death of native art."