

KILLASHEE CHURCH.

By REV. DENIS MURPHY, S. J., M. R. I. A.

THE church in which we are assembled is at present called Killashee, but its predecessors that occupied the same site in ancient times bore names somewhat different from the present one—Killossy, Killussy, Ceallusal, Killuassuille, Killaus-sille, all, like Killashee, derived from the Latin name slightly distorted, Cella Auxilii, the cell or dwelling of Auxilius.

Of course you will wish to know who this Auxilius was who has given his name to this church. Turn to the great work of the Franciscan Friar John Colgan, bearing the name of "Triadis Thaumaturgæ Acta"—the Acts of the Wonder-working Three, *i. e.* Patrick, Columba, and Bridget, the three patrons of Ireland, which was published at Louvain, in 1647, a very rare book now, but a fine copy of which can be seen in the library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin. In the first 315 pages of that book the author has printed seven Lives of St. Patrick, the first and oldest, in Irish verse, being that of St. Fiac, of Sletty, near Carlow, styled in that Life *adolescens poeta*, a young poet, whom St. Patrick consecrated bishop. The last of these Lives is most probably the work of St. Evin, the founder of the Monastery of Rossglas of the Munstermen, now known as Monasterevan, who wrote about the middle of the sixth century. This is called the "Tripartite Life," and has been lately translated by Mr. Whitley Stokes from an ancient Irish version. Or if we wish to save ourselves the trouble of going in search of various passages bearing on our subject, of picking them out, and piecing them together, we shall get all that we want summarised in Ussher's "*Ecclesiarum Britannicarum Antiquitates*," chaps. xvi. and xvii. of the original edition of 1639, or in vol. vi., p. 368, of the collected edition of his works published in 1847. In the 17th chapter of this work we shall find St. Patrick's descent and that of the several members of his family treated of in considerable detail. He tells us that St. Patrick had five sisters, one certainly, probably two, of whom had been brought captives to

Ireland when Patrick was brought here, and sold as slaves. One of the sisters, perhaps one of the two who had been slaves in Ireland, Liemania by name, after regaining her liberty, had for first husband a certain Corris; their children were Mel, later Bishop of Ardagh; Brioch, Abbot of Inisboffin in Lough Ree, *speciosus præ filiis hominum in illa (Tyrconnellia) degentium, and Nuna*. She had for second husband Restitutus, ex genere Longobardorum, says the "Tripartite Life," of the race of the Longobardi or Lombards. The children of this marriage were Seachnall (or Secundinus), from whom Dunshaughlin in Meath has its name, Nechtain, Dabonna, Magorna, Darioc, Auxilius, and Lugnath. So, too, the Book of Leinster: "Lupart, Patrick's sister, the sons of Hua Baird, Sechnall, Nechtain, Dabonna, Magornan, Darioc, Ausaille, Presbyter."

The "Tripartite Life" gives this account of the coming of Auxilius to Ireland: I quote from Mr. Whitley Stokes' version lately published in the Master of the Roll's Series:—"The High Priest (Pontifex, ardhindech), who was in Rome at that time, was Celestinus, the forty-second man from Peter. He sent Palladius, with twelve men, to preach to the Gael. When Palladius came to the territory of Leinster, namely to Inver Dea, Nathi, son of Garrechu, opposed him and expelled him. As then he was returning, sickness seized him in the land of the Picts, so that he died thereof. When Patrick heard that, knowing that unto him God had granted the Apostleship of Ireland, he went thereafter to Rome to have (ecclesiastical) orders given him; and Celestinus, Abbot of Rome—he it is that read orders over him—Germanus, and Amatho, King of the Romans, being present with them. On the same day Auxilius was ordained, and Isserninus, and others of Patrick's household. Then, too, the name Patricius was given unto him, a name of power, as the Romans think, to wit, one who looseth hostages." The "Vita Secunda," the author of which is said to be a disciple of St. Patrick, gives the following account of their coming:—"When the news of Palladius' death reached Britain most (probably Brittany)—for his disciples Augustine and Benedict and the others brought word to Eboria, of his death—Patrick and his companions turned out of their way to a certain wonderful man, a chief bishop named Amathorex, living near, and receiving from him episcopal orders, he learned all that was about to happen him. Auxilius, too, Serenus, *i. e.* Isserninus, and others of inferior rank, were ordained on the same day as Patrick. Then receiving permission and a blessing, and everything being ready, and the versicle of the Psalmist having been sung to suit Patrick specially, 'Thou art a priest for ever,' the venerable pastor embarked in the

name of the Holy Trinity on a ship that was ready, and reached Britain, and soon after, with all speed, and aided by a favourable wind, he came to Ireland."

Colgan is of opinion that Patrick alone received episcopal orders then, the others only priests' orders, or it may be only what are called minor orders, for in a passage, which I shall quote later from the "Book of Armagh," Auxilius is called an Exorcist. From the "Annals of Inisfallen" the inference has been drawn that Secundinus, Auxilius, and Isserninus did not come to Ireland with Patrick, but were sent later to aid him: "Mittuntur in auxilium Patricii." These words occur under the date 439, and we know that the date usually assigned for St. Patrick's first coming to Ireland is that given by St. Prosper in his Chronicle, 431.

After describing St. Patrick's journey through Hy Garchon (the district near the present town of Wicklow), and the success of his preaching in North Leinster—for the sons of Dunlaing who held rule there, and lived at Naas, accepted his teaching and were baptised in a fountain near the north side of the town—the author of the "Tripartite Life" continues: "Going on from that he came to a beauteous plain, the boundary of which the river Liffey flows by, and for this reason it is called Magh Lifé, *i. e.* the plain of the Liffey. In that district he laid the foundations of several churches, and marked out their termons. These churches he set his disciples over to complete and govern. He left St. Auxilius in the church commonly called Killuassuille, having got that name from him; he left SS. Isserninus and Macatalius in Kilcullen, and other holy men in others." And the "Book of Armagh": "He went into the plain of the Liffey and ordained Auxilius who, when a boy, had been the exorcist of Patrick, and Isserninus and Mactaleus in the little cell of Cuillinn, *i. e.* Kilcullen. Ussher thinks Auxilius was consecrated bishop in 448. In the list of those bishops consecrated by St. Patrick, given in the "Book of Armagh," *De Episcoporum numero quos ordinavit in Hibernia ccccl.*, the names of Auxilius and Secundinus are given. From this and other passages already quoted, the conclusion has been drawn, and fairly as it seems, that Auxilius was ordained by St. Patrick himself. A difficulty arises, however, from the passage in the "Annals of Inisfallen," under the date 439, "Secundinus, Auxilius, et Isserninus Episcopi mittuntur in auxilium Patricii:" from which it is inferred that they were bishops when they were sent to help him. "The most satisfactory mode," says Dr. Lanigan, "that I can discover for reconciling these authorities is, that St. Patrick finding himself in want of episcopal helpers,

had sent Isserninus and Secundinus to Great Britain or Gaul, that they might be consecrated bishops according to the established usage of the Church, which required the presence of at least three bishops for the consecration of another. It is true, indeed, that Auxilius and Isserninus seem to be spoken of as having been made bishops some years later by St. Patrick himself; but this can be very well understood, not of their episcopal consecration, but of their having been employed in various parts of the country affixed to particular sees. The arrival of these three as bishops and auxiliaries to St. Patrick about 439 was a circumstance worth recording, but it does not contradict their having been already in Ireland." Whether Lanigan's explanation will satisfy those who are curious about this matter, I am not quite sure.

In Spelman's "Concilia," published in 1619, we find the decrees of a synod held by St. Patrick which bears the title: Synodus Episcoporum, *i.e.* Patricii, Auxilii, et Issernini. From this title some have inferred that Auxilius must have had some special eminence or authority among the bishops, for the laws made there were for the whole Irish Church, and other bishops, as Ailbe of Emly, Kieran of Saiger, and Declan of Ardmore, would have been present as a matter of course. There is a passage in the "Chronicon Scotorum" that seems to refer to the dignity of Auxilius and his two companions; it is under the date 438, and runs thus: "Secundinus, Auxilius, and Isserninus are sent to the Irish, but they obtained not pre-eminence or authority ($\alpha\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\ \nu\alpha\ \upsilon\sigma\omicron\alpha\mu\mu\alpha\tau$) in the time of Patrick alone." The passage is certainly an obscure one. Time will not allow me to enter more fully on its meaning. Ware puts the date of this synod as "about ccccl." Ussher does not fix the date of it; he says it must have taken place after cccclviii., the year of St. Secundinus's death, for no mention is made in it of him, though the names of Auxilius and Isserninus are given. It could not have been later than 459, for the following year is the one usually set down as that after the death of St. Auxilius: for instance, in Ussher, vi. 385: "Auxilius after he had wrought many miracles ended his holy life in his city (civitas), which is called Cealusaille, in the plain of the Leinstermen." And again in his "Chronologia Sacra," under the date cccclx.: "Auxilius, bishop, nephew of St. Patrick, ended his days in the city of Ceallusailli, which has taken its name from him."

The Four Masters, on the authority of the "Annals of Clonmacnoise" and of "Inisfallen," give 458 as the date of his death. Others give it as 460. Colgan does no more than

give these different dates, without putting forward any opinion of his own. Nor are biographers agreed about the day of death. The "Martyrology of Tallaght" says his "natale" is on March 19th, and it mentions him again at July 30th. The Four Masters (on the authority of the "Annals of Clonmacnoise" and the "Martyrology of Donegal") give the 27th of August. Colgan gives his Life under the 19th of March.

Like all the notable sanctuaries of Ireland, Killashee suffered at the hands of the Danes.

We read in the "Wars of the Gaedhil with the Gaill," under the date 824: "Another fleet came to Hy Cennselaegh, and they plundered Taghmon, and Teach Moling. By them were demolished Castledermot and Desert Tiprait, and they devastated Lismore, and burnt Cillmolash and Clonard. They plundered, also, Sord Columkille, Duleck Cianan, Slane, Orllasaille, Glendaloch, Cloyne, Mungret, and the greater part of the churches of Erin." For Orllasaille, in the Brussels' manuscript of this work, other manuscripts have Cellusaille. So the "Book of Leinster," and Keating, too, in his "History." And in the "Annals of the Four Masters," under the date 1035, "Cill-uaille and Claonad (Clane) were plundered by the Danes, who were met by the son of Donough, son of Donnell, and defeated and slaughtered."

In the same "Annals" are given the names of two Abbots of Killashee—Maol Dobharchon, who died in 827, and Lomseach, son of Faocillan, who died in 870.

From the will of Cathaoir Mor, monarch of Ireland in the second century, it is clear that there were several families of the Ui Bairche seated at Cloncurry, Kilossy, and Cill. They must have migrated there from their original territory, Slieve Mairgie, in the Queen's County.

Coming somewhat nearer to our own time, we find a Commission dated 21st February, 1578, issued to certain persons, among them being Beling of Killossy. I find no mention of Killashee or its owner in the "Description of Ireland in 1598," a MS. in Clongowes College. Robert Graydon was living here in 1790. In the "Regal Visitation Book" of 1615 Killosoie is said to be an inappropriate rectory, the vicar of which was William Mann, who was a minister legens, its yearly value being £6. The chancel was then in good condition, and supplied with books. In Archdall's time—he published his "Monasticon" in 1778—it was a parish church.

An uncommon feature of the present church, a comparatively modern building, is its bell-tower, the lower part of which is square and the upper part round. The tower is much older

than the present church; it belonged to an earlier building, as may be seen by the drip-stones which mark the height and pitch of the former roof. But to determine the date of its erection with any sort of precision is not an easy task.

As might be expected, there is a holy well here. It is called St. Patrick's Well. Very probably the saint baptized with its waters some of the inhabitants of Magh Lifé, whom he had converted to the faith of Christ. The people of the country round often visit it to make "Stations." It is about three hundred yards to the east of the church.

A castle is said to have stood somewhere near; but there are no remains of it, nor is its site well known. It will have been, no doubt, one of the small castles which abound in Kildare, built by the first English settlers as a defence against their Irish neighbours, the O'Byrnes and O'Tooles.