



ST. CONAN'S—THE CHANCEL.

St. Conan's Kirk, Loch Awe.

ON the northern shore of Loch Awe, hemmed in by the road and the railway, which for miles elbow and thrust each other aside in the competition for room between the steep slope of Ben Cruachan and the deep waters below, stands a church which in all respects is unique among the ecclesiastical edifices of Scotland. It has the aspect of a miniature cathedral. Its architecture presents many features which no official architect, bound by the orthodox requirements of his art, would ever have countenanced. It bears in a score of ways the stamp of a highly individual and adventurous mind, intent on evolving its own conceptions of beauty. Much of it is of no possible use for the simple requirements of Scottish worship; its affinities, indeed, are all with an order of things from which at the Reformation the Scottish Church turned away. Yet its name is St. Conan's *Kirk*, and it is for worship on the Presbyterian model that congregations gather within its walls.

The interior suggests that a long vista of history lies behind it; yet no part of it is much more than fifty years old. The question inevitably suggests itself: How comes it that a church so elaborately conceived and nobly wrought should stand in so remote and obscure a place? In all the long miles between Dalmally and Taynuilt the dwellings of men are few: along the loch-side, and down through the Pass of Brander, Nature has taken care that man should have a grudging footing and no more. The only cluster of houses gathers near the eastern extremity of the northern shore, where the Loch Awe Hotel is poised on its rocky vantage-point above the railway station, and the slope of the mountain permits a few picturesque residential dwellings and a group of workmen's houses and a solitary shop to find a place. The whole population is so small that a tiny church would have provided an adequate place of worship for them. Why, then, this stately fane which goes so far beyond their needs?

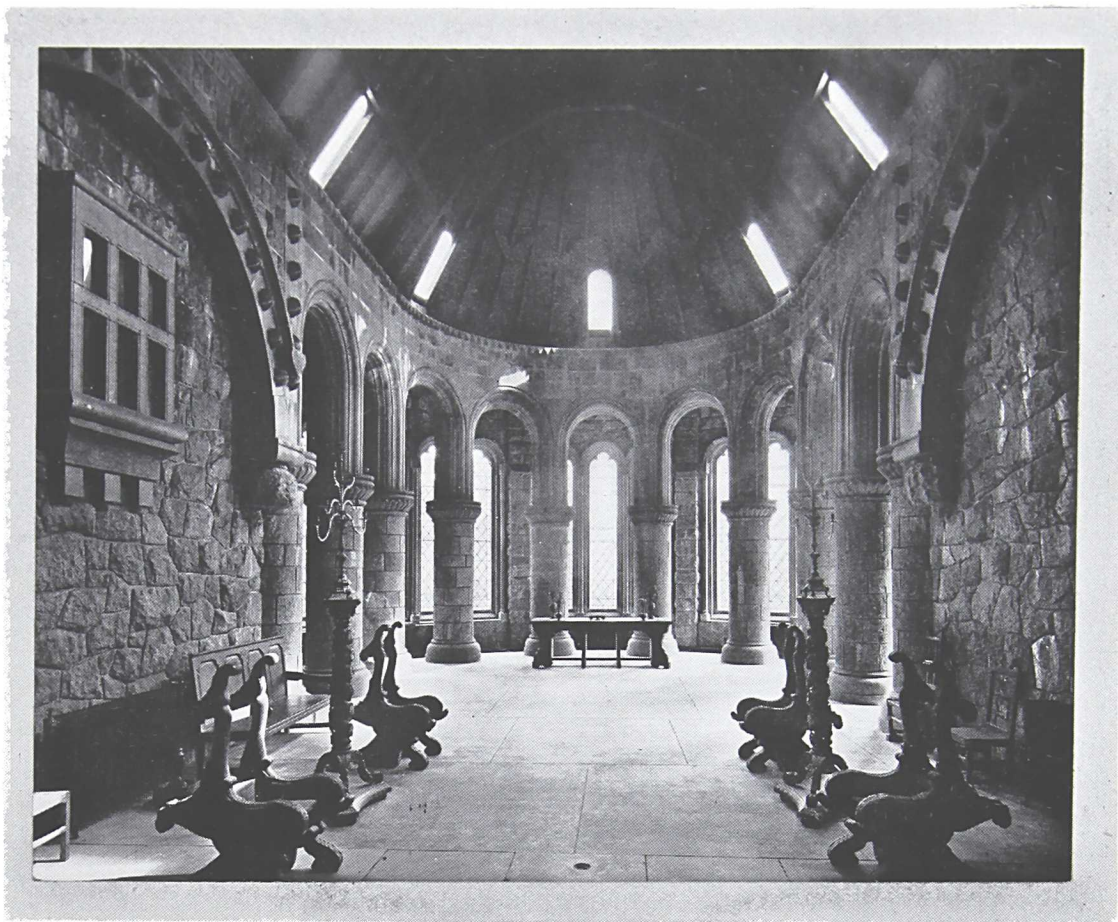
Between fifty and sixty years ago, the Island of Inis-chonain, which is separated from the shore only by a narrow strait, was purchased from the Marquis of Breadalbane

by Walter Douglas Campbell, brother of the first Lord Blythswood. His first act was to build on it a finely situated mansion, looking southward over the loch. In due time he brought to it his mother and sister. They were charmed with the spot. Presently, however, Mrs Campbell said—so at any rate the story goes—that beautiful though it was she could not endure it without a church. “Well, mother,” answered the devoted son, “we’ll soon give you a church.” Thus the idea of St. Conan’s was born.

The spot selected as site was not, in legend at any rate, without religious associations. The whole country is steeped in traditions from Scotland’s earliest Christian past. Saints’ names stud the map. Inishail—the Holy Island—with its burial-place of kings of ancient days, and its scanty remains of the primitive buildings where Celtic saints of the prime pursued their holy calling, is not far away. And legend has it that from the spot where the church now stands, or some other near it, Conan used to call the lake-dwellers to worship; one perfect crannog is still one of the most pleasing features of the landscape on the other side of the loch. It is a characteristic evidence of Mr Campbell’s thoughtfulness in preserving in the church every possible link with history or tradition, that high on an angle of the southern wall outside, in a niche prepared for the purpose, stands a large carved figure of St. Conan, gazing across the waters over which in ancient days the living saint watched the people come in their coracles to worship God.

The whole scene is of exquisite beauty. Wooded islands add loveliness to the broad expanse of waters. Eastward, in a perfect setting, stand the picturesque ruins of Kilchurn, and beyond them stretches the vista of Glen Orchy, with Ben Lui and its sister mountains, majestically grouped, closing in the horizon. This incomparable scene is partly visible to the worshippers as they look from the church through the windows at the far end of the chancel; and those who wish to see it in its full splendour have a standing-ground provided for the purpose if they pass through the door just visible on the right of the picture here given of the south aisle; they emerge upon a terraced platform with a sundial in the centre of the surrounding wall, and see spread before them a prospect of a beauty never to be forgotten.

When Mr Campbell began to build, what he envisaged was to be on a modest scale. He was his own architect; he drew the plans himself, and personally supervised the



ST. CONAN'S—THE APSE.

whole of the construction. The part of the building in which the congregation still assemble for worship, was first erected ; it was finished and dedicated in 1886. It was finely proportioned, dignified, and perfect for its purpose.

But the passion of the creator who had fashioned one beautiful thing was fanned into more ardent flame by the experience so acquired ; Mr Campbell fell to dreaming of a far nobler church which might be developed from that beginning. Mere utility was not in question ; all the utilities were amply provided for by the building already erected. Whatever else was to be added must be just the expression of the builder's own vision of a House Beautiful, worthy to be the scene of a people's worship, and fitted to exalt the minds of all who looked upon it with a sense of the strength and beauty that belong to God's Sanctuary.

From first to last the growth of the building covered a period of about fifty years. Progress was necessarily slow, for Mr Campbell resolved that only local labour should be employed upon it, and in so small a community the available workers were few. During the War, work ceased. Mr Campbell died in the year when that cataclysm broke out. As soon, however, as conditions became sufficiently settled to allow operations to begin again, his sister, Miss Helen Campbell, who all along had shared his dream and enthusiasm and in various ways had added to the beauty of the place by the skill of her own artistry, set herself to carry his purpose to fulfilment. It mattered not that costs had risen to three times what they had been before the War ; whatever means she could command were consecrated to the realisation of the dream. With inflexible tenacity of purpose she carried forward the work, until she too was called home to the house not made with hands. The final touches were then put to the building by the Trustees, and the dedication of the last portion of it took place in 1930.

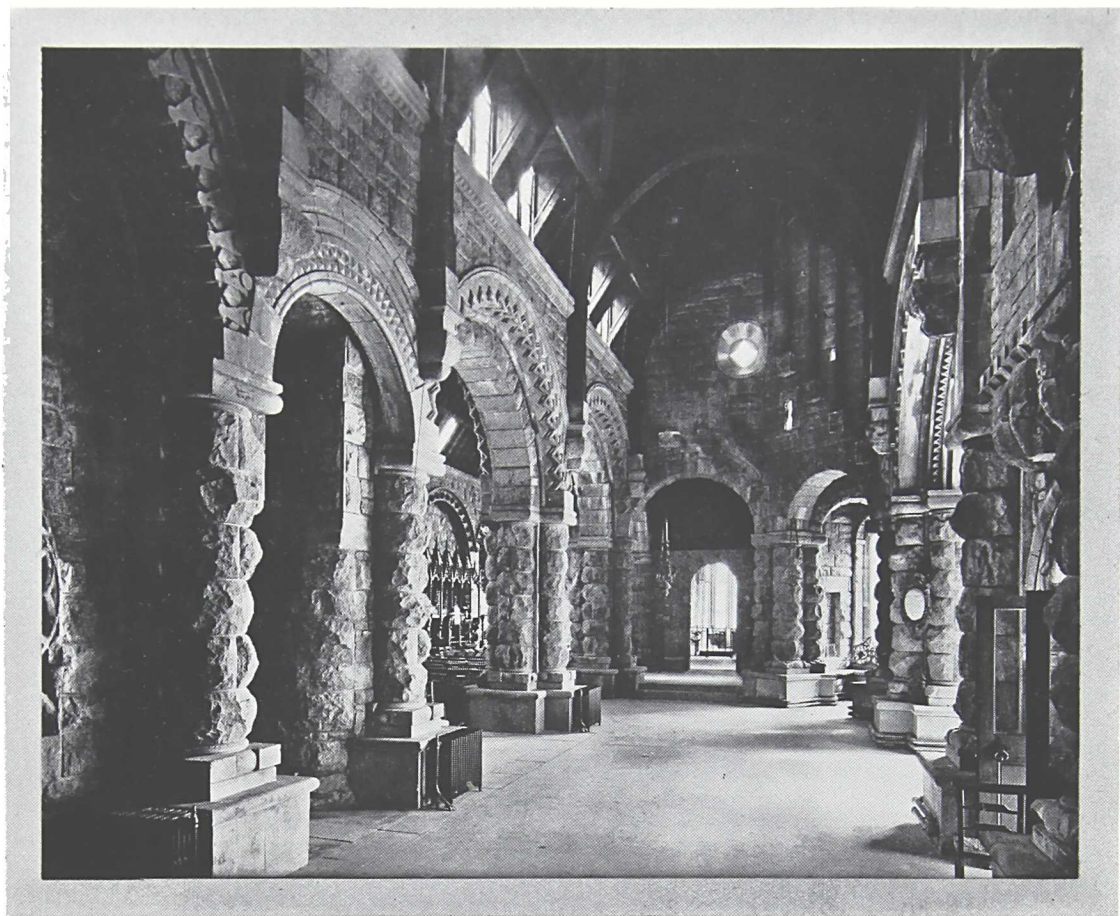
The style of architecture is in the main Norman, of various periods. But the builder did not hold himself bound by any canons of consistency. Like many older church builders, he did not hesitate to impose one style upon another, doubtless desiring to produce the interest of variety rather than that which is achieved by the strict harmony of all the parts in conformity with the requirements of a single school and period. Thus, for example, the tower on the loch side (shown in the frontispiece) is pure Saxon, modelled on the tower of Monkwearmouth ; the windows,

the traced stonework, and other features, all conform to that type.

The interior consists of a short nave ; a deep and spacious chancel, beyond the pillared arches of which runs a wide ambulatory, with windows at the extreme east end in clear glass that permits an uninterrupted view of the beauty of the scene outside ; and a south aisle which has special features to be referred to presently. There is a vestry, a room also intended for a library, and in the Saxon tower a tiny chamber, reached by a narrow circular stairway, from which as another vantage-point the scenery may be surveyed. An organ chamber at the west end was at first filled with an instrument of fine quality, faced by a richly carved oak screen. The design of the latter was in much detail, symbolic of the stages of spiritual development from pagan times to Christian, and indeed beyond terrestrial conditions to the heavenly. All this elaborate carving was the personal work of Mr Campbell. Unfortunately the moist climate proved deadly to the mechanism of the organ. It had to be taken down and has never been re-erected, and the outer pipes and the screen lie disused in the crypt. A small American organ now accompanies the praise.

The stalls in the chancel, in Spanish chestnut, on the carving of which also Mr Campbell spent a great deal of skilled and loving labour, are not intended for officiating clergy or ecclesiastical dignitaries, but for the chiefs of Argyllshire clans, with Argyll and Breadalbane at their head ; the arms of each chief, with his clan name, are carved on the back of his stall. A good deal of the chancel furnishing consists of what might be called museum pieces—for example, a long carved seat from Corstorphine Church, and movable candlesticks from Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. Elsewhere there are a collecting-table saved from the fire that destroyed Old Greyfriars Church, Edinburgh ; two portions of the carved reredos of Eton Chapel ; a font from the monastery of the Cortuja in Spain, now used for the receiving of donations from visitors. These are by no means “plunder.” Mr Campbell had a keen eye for things of interest which he could purchase for the enrichment of the church, and he spent liberally to acquire them. Thus, built into the wall of the south aisle there are reverently preserved portions of one of the traceried windows of Iona Cathedral which were derelict when he secured them.

The beautiful stone tracery of the large window in the Bruce Chapel belonged originally to St Mary's (the Parish)



ST. CONAN'S—THE SOUTH AISLE.

Church, South Leith ; its date is 1483. When the western wall of that church was rebuilt between 1836 and 1840, this tracery was discarded. An antiquary preserved it for many years in his garden, and Mr Campbell ultimately acquired it for the place which it now adorns.

The south aisle of the church, as may be seen from the illustration, is of remarkable beauty and impressiveness. The picture finely shows the Ben Cruachan granite of which the church is built. The stone is not quarried. Boulders are split through on the mountainside, brought down and squared or used in roughly-treated form, as seen in the rugged pillars which are a striking feature of this aisle. Opening from the aisle are three chapels. In one there is a huge recumbent figure of King Robert the Bruce in armour, the face and hands being of alabaster. Underneath, in a reliquary let into the stonework, there is a bone of the King from Dunfermline Abbey, left behind there when the remains of the King were transferred from one to another resting-place ; it was acquired by Sir Noel Paton, and by him given to Mr Campbell. Bruce had a historic connection with Loch Awe, for one of his early victories was won in the Pass of Brander over John o' Lorne.

The other two chapels are near each other at the west end of the aisle. In one the body of the first Lord Blythswood was buried. The other is the appropriate resting-place of Walter Campbell himself and his sister, to whose genius, liberality, and devotion the Church owes its existence. An effigy of Mr Campbell over the tomb will preserve a visual memory of him to successive generations.

Many other remarkable features of the building invite comment—the woodwork of the roof and of the doors, made out of the oaken timbers of the old battleships "Caledonia" and "Duke of Wellington" ; the finely-wrought copper sheathing of the roof, executed by a local artificer ; and the cloister garth, the arcading of which came from the pre-Reformation Church of Inchinnan, which derived it originally from the older Palace of Inchinnan built by an Earl of Lennox. Various parts of the building are associated with the names of the early Scottish saints—St. Columba's Aisle, St. Fillan's Aisle, St. Modan's Walk, St. Conval's Chapel, St. Bride's Chapel, St. Oran's Entry, St. Conan's Cell ; there are also a Gate of Thanksgiving, a Gate of Prayer, and a Gate of Praise.

These details give some idea of the wealth of imagination, historical knowledge, devout thought, and consecrated

labour, as well as of architectural genius and artistic and executive skill, expended upon the building. No one knows what it cost in coin of the realm ; the sums lavished upon it must have been very large. But these were the least part of what the donor gave. The building may at many points be open to criticism by purists in architecture ; the utilitarian will no doubt urge against it the old question, " To what purpose was this waste ? " The sufficient answer is that men endowed with means choose many ways of expending their substance, and that there could be few more satisfying than this one to the giver, or more likely to yield inspiration to later generations. This Church is the deliberately chosen embodiment of a good man's vision of a noble Sanctuary for a people's worship, and an oblation of his own faith, reverence, and devotion to the God Whom he loved and served.

MILLAR PATRICK.

NOTE.—The illustrations of the Chancel and the South Aisle are reproduced by the courtesy of Messrs J. B. White, Ltd., Dundee ; and that of the south front by the kindness of the Rev. and Mrs J. R. Burt, formerly of North Berwick.)