tion ; and a long period of obscurity succeeds, in which little : more is distinguishable, except the fact that a series of : Scoto-Irish kings, or reguli, are found in Scotland, from the commencement of the fifth century, (503), when Fergus held the throne, till the accession of Kenneth, the son of 4lpin, who reigned from the year 836 to 843, under whom the ascendancy of the Scoto-Irish or Scotch, appears to have been established. Upon this portion of our history we are tempted to transcribe the following observations of Chal­mers.

“ In the records of time, there scarcely occurs a period of history so perplexed and obscure, as the annals of the Scoto- Irish kings and their tribes. The original cause of this ob­scurity is the want of contemporaneous writing. An ample field was thus left open for the contests of national emula­tion. Ignorance and ingenuity, sophistry and system, have all contributed to make what was dark still more obscure. The series and genealogy of the kings have been involved in peculiar perplexity by the contests of the Irish and Scot­tish antiquaries, for pre-eminence in antiquity, as well as in fame. And Cimmerian darkness has overspread the annals of a people too restless for the repose of study ; too rude for the elaboration of writing.”@@1 After such an acknowledg­ment, it would be idle labour to follow this indefatigable inquirer into the twilight-history of these times ; but this period is distinguished by one great event which shines brightly amidst the surrounding gloom, namely, the con­version of northern Britain to Christianity.

Already the Romanized Britons of the South had re­ceived the true faith, and the Scoto-Irish appear to have been converted to Christianity by St. Patrick, previously to their establishment in Kentire. St. Ninian, himself a Briton, though educated as a monk at Rome, had, in the commencement of the fourth century, founded a monastery in Galloway; and in the sixth century, St. Kentigern signa­lized himself by his pious labours among the Britons of Strath­clyde ; but the conversion of the northern Picts was reserved for St. Columba. This great and good man was born in Ire­land, in the year 521. His descent was royal, and his educa­tion was at first carefully conducted under the best masters which his native island, long before this converted to Christi­anity, could supply. Of these the most noted was St. Ciaran, the apostle of the Scoto-Irish of Kentire ; and from him, in all probability, Columba imbibed his first desire to introduce the gospel into the desolate and barbarous dominions of the northern Picts. It was in the year 568, that embarking with twelve of his friends, in a boat of wicker work which was covered with hides, he set out upon his benevolent mission, and landed in the Island of Hy, or Iona, which was situated near the confines of the Scottish and Pictish terri­tories. The difficulties which he had to encounter on his first arrival, were of the most formidable kind. He found a peo­ple so barbarous that his life was attempted ; the king, when the holy man first approached his residence, ordered its gates to be shut against him ; the priests, who were druids, and possessed much influence, employed all their eloquence to counteract his efforts ; and the nature of the country, woody, mountainous, and infested with wild beasts, rendered travelling most dangerous and painful.@@2 It is also said that at first the saint required an interpreter to make himself intelligible, although after a short residence he appears to have found little difficulty in conversing with the barbarians. But none of these obstacles was sufficient to baffle the zeal and courage of Columba ; and so blest were his labours, so rapid the effects produced by the example of his virtues, that in a few years the greater portion of the Pictish dominions was converted to the Christian faith ; churches were erect­ed, monasteries established, in various places, and Columba,

as primate, became an object of the utmost love and vene­ration among the barbarous tribes, and fierce and warlike princes whom he had called from darkness into light. At that time his monastery was perhaps the chief seminary of learning in Europe. It was from this nursery, that not only all the monasteries, and above three hundred churches which he himself had established, were supplied with learned pas­tors, but which also gave divines to many of the religious establishments among the neighbouring nations.@@3 Columba died in the year 597, in the seventy-seventh year of his age ; a man not less distinguished by his zeal and labour in the dissemination of the gospel, than by the simplicity of his manners, the sweetness of his temper, and the holiness of his life.

We have already observed, that it would be foreign to the object of this historical sketch, to involve our readers in the dark and wholly uninteresting annals of the Pictish kings. But one remarkable event must not escape our notice, we mean the disappearance of the Pictish people after the middle of the ninth century. There seems every reason to believe, that the story of the total extermination of the Picts by the sword of the victorious Kenneth Macalpin, is a fable invented at a later period, and certainly supported by nothing approaching to contemporary evidence. A more rational and intelligible account ascribes this event, not to the destruction, but to what may more correctly be deno­minated the absorption of the Picts by the predominating nation of the Scots. Both were probably a people of the same race, speaking a similar language, and little different in their manners and civil government. Both were ani­mated by the emulation of outstripping each other in power and extent of territory ; and this led to protracted struggles, in which the Picts maintained their independence with dif­ficulty, and the Scots, gradually enlarging their dominions, acquired a predominating influence. Such being the re­lative condition of the two nations, an event took place which united in one person the claim to the Pictish and the Scottish throne.@@4

Achaius or Eocha, king of the Scots, who died in the year 826, had married Urgusia, a Pictish princess, the sister of Constantine and Ungus, successively kings of the Picts. His grandson was Kenneth Macalpin, a prince of great hardi­hood and ambition, who succeeded to his paternal throne in 836. On the death of Uven, the Pictish monarch, in 839, Kenneth asserted his claim to the Pictish throne, in right of his grandmother, Urgusia. The feeble state of the nation, and the incapacity of the true heir, combined to fa­vour his ambitious designs ; and after a struggle of three years, he succeeded in uniting the two crowns in his own person.@@5 The observations of Chalmers upon this event, and the important consequences which it drew after it, are well worthy of notice. “ During such confusions,” says this author, “ amidst a rude people, whose forms of government were little fixed, and whose laws were less regarded, the loss of a battle, or the death of a king, was an adequate cause of an important revolution. Of all these events, Ken­neth dexterously took advantage ; and finding a feeble com­petitor, he easily stept into the vacant throne. In his per­son a new dynasty began. The king was changed, but the government remained the same. The Picts and Scots, who were a congenial people, from a common origin, and spoke cognate tongues, the British and Gaelic, readily coalesced ; yet has it been asserted by ignorance, and believed by cre­dulity, that Kenneth made so bad a use of the power which he had adroitly acquired, as to destroy the whole Pictish people in the wantonness of his cruelty. To enforce the belief in an action which is in itself unknown, and so incon­sistent with the interest of a provident sovereign, requires

@@@1 Caledonia, vol. i. p. 276.

@@@\* Smith’s Life of St. Columba, pp. 6 to 17 inclusive.

@@@\* Smith's Life of St. Columba, pp. 18, 19.

@@@\* Caledonia, vol. i. pp. 299—302.

@@@4 Caledonia, vol. i. p. 304.