

I.

NOTES OF AN EXAMINATION OF "THE DEVIL'S DYKE IN DUMFRIES-
SHIRE." By GEORGE VERE IRVING, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

SOME years ago, I had an opportunity of inspecting a portion of "The Devil's Dyke" in Dumfriesshire, and while looking lately over my Archæological papers, I fell in with my notes of this examination.

¹ Order of the Elephant (Denmark), instituted by Christian I., in the year 1478.

I started from the Farmhouse of Gateslack, in the parish of Durrisdeer, and on ascending the hill above it, I soon met with the dyke clearly and distinctly marked running along the face of the slope, at an elevation which is best described by the common Scotch expression, "Mid-brae." I followed it to the northward, and a short distance from the point at which I struck it, I found that there rose from the valley a considerable spur, the top of which reached very nearly the precise level at which the earthwork was carried along the slope of the hills. The dyke, however, was not deflected from its course so as to follow the crest of the spur, but passed straight across its neck, as shown in the section exhibited. Some little way beyond this point the rampart was lost for a short distance on the sides of a rocky burn, but again appeared on the face of the hill which overlooks the village of Durrisdeer. This line it followed till it reached the mouth of the pass of the Wellpath leading into Lanarkshire, where it made a sharp turn to the left, and descended to the stream, which runs down that valley, crossing in its course a well-known Roman vicinal road. Near to this point of its course, there is between the road and the stream, on the upper side of the dyke, a small, nearly rectangular encampment, measuring 100 by 80 feet. This fortification may have been used in connection with the dyke. It was not, in my opinion, connected with its construction, but with that of the Roman road. In fact, it is one of those small *praesidia* or *castella* which that nation raised during the period when they had occupied the country, but had not entirely subdued the inhabitants, for the purpose of guarding their lines of communication. The range of hills which separates the pass of the Wellpath from that of Dalveen, up which the modern road from Dumfries by Thornhill to Edinburgh is carried, terminates in what I can best describe as a broad, bold bluff. Along the face of this the dyke is not carried as formerly, but, on the contrary, ascends from the Wellpath to the top of the hill, and again descends to the pass of Dalveen, where my examination terminated, thus leaving the whole face of the bluff on its western side.

Although the portion of the Devil's Dyke which I examined forms but a small portion of its whole extent, I think it presents certain features, which fully enable us to come to a pretty accurate conclusion as to its character, and the purposes for which it was formed; while,

from these, we can make a very safe conjecture as to the time when it was erected.

1st. From the manner in which it overhangs the valley in which it so much resembles the great earthwork known as Offa's Dyke, and other examples of similar earthworks in England, there can be no doubt that it was thrown up by the inhabitants of the country, on what may, generally speaking, be called its Eastern side, as a protection against the tribes located on its Western one.

2d. It is equally clear that the Devil's Dyke was not intended for a defensive military work in the strict sense of the term. Its very extent is conclusive against such an idea; for what amount of force would be necessary to guard an *enciente* of not less than sixty miles. Independent of this, the direction it takes across the neck of the spur I have referred to, would, in itself, be sufficient evidence that this could not have been the intention of its construction. A divergence of a few yards would have enabled the defenders of the rampart to command the approaches from the valley, while, as the earthwork is now carried, a strong force of assailants might approach within a few feet of it undiscovered and in perfect security.

3d. From the features presented by this and other similar earthworks, there can be no doubt that their purpose was not to frustrate an attempt to penetrate them, which could always have been easily accomplished by a light-armed body of invaders, but to impede their return with the booty they had collected. This booty, in early times, consisted entirely of cattle, horses, and sheep. The existence of such an earthwork as the Devil's Dyke was a great obstacle to the safe return of a body of foragers and their spoil. They must either have made for well-known passes and outlets, which could be easily guarded by a small force, or have spent much time, unprovided as they necessarily were with entrenching tools, in getting the cattle over the obstacle, which would give opportunity to their plundered owners to raise a force to overtake and recover their lost property. Looking at the purpose of the dyke in this light, the manner in which it crosses the spur, and that in which it abandons, after crossing the Wellpath, its former "Mid-brae" line, and ascends the hill, can easily be explained, as the course adopted would render it more difficult to force cattle across it—a fact which would be more apparent to any one who visited the ground.

4th. From this latter conclusion, we may deduce another—viz., that earthworks of this class were always constructed by the inhabitants of a more settled district as a protection against the predatory forays of their more restless and more uncivilized neighbours.

This last deduction again enables us to arrive at a near conjecture as to the date when the Devil's Dyke was erected, for the question resolves itself into this, "When were the population on the two sides of this dyke in that relative position to one another."

1st. We have no reason to suppose, that in the period which preceded the advent of Agricola, the Celtic tribes of the Damnii and the Selgovae and Novantes differed in the degree of civilization which prevailed among them.

2d. During the Roman occupation, the district on one side of the dyke appears to have been as much occupied by their forces as on the other. This is not only proved by such instances of their encampments as that between the town of Kirkcudbright and the river, but also by a fact more immediately connected with the dyke—viz., that the vicinal Roman road, which leaves the great north and south Iter, at the village of Crawford, descends the Wellpath, passes through the dyke, makes a sweep into the valley of the Nith on the western side of that earthwork, again passes through it, and rejoins the Iter at Dryffe Church.

3d. The withdrawing of the Roman legions made no difference in the relation of the Celtic tribes in the South of Scotland. The Strathclyde Britons, as the major part of the Damnii were then called, were the strict allies of the Selgovae during the great struggle between the Intramural tribes and the Saxons of Northumberland, in the sixth and seventh centuries. . . Of this we have abundant proof in the poems of Taliesin, Lywarch, and Aneurin. The latter belonged to the kingdom of Strathclyde, and not only does he launch out in terms of the most enthusiastic praise of the chieftain of the Selgovae; but informs us that when he was taken prisoner in the disastrous campaign of Kaltraez, he was ransomed by that valiant warrior. . .

SELLORIR REEN . . .
 NA BE KENHAVAL KENEILLOUENT. *
 PAM BUOST E KENNEVIN KLOD.

ENN AMOUEU TROUIS ENN GORTIROD.
 OS AZEOT ENN GELVER EDREC'H GONIR NOD,
 OEZ TRE TOR, DRIAC'HOROEZ TOR DIN TRE.

KEIT BE KAOUAOUR ENN UN TI,
 AZDOUEN GOVALON KENI,
 PENN È GOUIR TALBENIK A DELI.

Gododin St. xxxvi.

4th. The crushing defeat which the Celtic tribes of the South of Scotland sustained in the campaign of Kaltraez, had, however, a very different effect upon those who inhabited the two sides of the Devil's Dyke. The power of those on the East of it, or the Strathclyde Britons, gradually wasted away. The Celtic inhabitants emigrated to Wales, and the district became occupied by a mixed population, who adopted the Anglo-Saxon as their language. This change cannot be better described than in the words of an Inquisition, as to the possessions of the See of Glasgow, ordered in the year 1118 by King David, then only Prince of Cumbria—*diversæ seditiones circumquaque insurgentes, non solum ecclesiam, et ejus possessiones destruxerunt; verum etiam totam regionem vastantes, ejus, habitatores exilio tradiderunt. Sic ergo omnibus bonis exterminatis, magnis temporum intervallis transactis, diversæ tribus diversarum nationum; ex diversis partibus affluentibus, desertam regionem præfatam, habitaverunt.* On the other hand, the district to the west of the dyke, most probably from the fact of its greater distance from the tide of invasion, continued to be inhabited by its ancient possessors, who became known in our records as the Wallenses, and retained their Celtic speech and laws down to as late a period as the fourteenth century. In this period we first find the two sides of the Devil's Dyke inhabited by tribes of different races, language, and customs, while, from the accounts which Riccardus Hugastuladensis, Ælred, and Mathew of Paris, have given of the campaign which terminated in the battle of the Standard, we learn that the Wallenses were considered much more uncivilized than their eastern neighbours. Indeed, the former of these authors applies to them by implication the term *barbarous*, and contrasts them with King David *et baronibus suis cum gente eorum* (Twysden, pp. 77, 319, 322,

342). To it, therefore, I have no hesitation in referring the construction of the Devil's Dyke.

This state of matters existed during several centuries, but I think we are in possession of data which will enable us to fix even more definitely the time when this earthwork was erected. Were we to give its literal sense to the following passage in the Inquisition of Prince David, we would be forced to believe that the inhabitants of Lanarkshire had not attained that degree of quiet occupation which would be required before they could have thought of such a protection prior to the twelfth century. *Quos infelices damnatæ habitationis habitatores, more pecuduum, irrationabiliter degentes, dignatus est Dominus, qui neminem vult perire, propitiacione sua visitare ; tempore nemirum Henrici Regis Anglicæ, Alexandro Scotorum Rege in Scotia regnante, Misitiis Deus David prædicti, regis Scotiæ germanum, in Principem et Ducem, qui eorum impudica, et scelerata, contagia, corrigeret ; et animi nobilitate, et inflexibili severitate, contumeliosam eorum contumaciùm refrenaret.* We must, however, recollect that this document is an ecclesiastical one, where, of course, the power of the Church and Crown is the great point to be brought forward, and the effect of the passage, as bearing upon the present inquiry, is destroyed by the context, which states that the new inhabitants of Strathclyde, *Gentilitatem potius quam Fidei cultum tenuerunt.* This very *gentilitas*, or feeling of nationality, being the feature of which we are in search. In addition to this, we possess evidence that in the time of King David the Wallenses had lost possession of the valley of the Nith, and that the Devil's Dyke no longer formed their boundary; we must therefore seek an earlier date for its construction. Now we are told by Caradoc of Llancarvain and other Welsh historians, that the last King of Strathclyde went to Rome in the year 972; and although these writers are not the best of authorities, they certainly lead us to believe that the change in the inhabitants of Strathclyde occurred in the early part of the tenth century. Giving another fifty years for the settlement and consolidation of the new comers, I do not think we will be far wrong in placing the construction of the Devil's Dyke about the year 1000 of our era.

I may add in support of this view, that earthworks of this class were favourite defences among the tribes of Saxon origin, as witness the long

lines known as Wans or Woden Dyke, near Bath, and Offa's Dyke on the boundaries of Wales; while we know from a M.S. in Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, that Bun's Dyke, which surrounds the village of Attleborough, in Norfolk, was constructed about the same time as I have assigned to our Dumfriesshire example.

Mr JOHN STUART referred to the late Mr Joseph Train's account of this dyke, from which it appeared that he had examined its remains from its commencement at Lochryan, as it runs through Galloway and Nithsdale, from a distance of above fifty miles to Southmains. It is said that the dyke extended from thence in an easterly direction, and to have run into the Solway, nearly opposite Bowness, in Cumberland. The part of it examined by Mr Train is described as invariably 8 feet broad at the base, with a ditch on the north side. Mr Stuart alluded to the frequent occurrence of the term "Devil's Dyke" and "Devil's Causeway" in connexion with ancient remains like the present, and expressed a hope that we might get further details of this remarkable remain.