

REMARKS
ON THE
WELL-HOUSE TOWER,
SITUATED AT THE FOOT OF THE
CASTLE ROCK OF EDINBURGH.

Communicated by James Skene, Esq.

HAVING had occasion to take some charge of the operations at present in progress towards the conversion of the North Loch into pleasure grounds, I thought it extremely probable, that in clearing away the rubbish from the ruins of the Well-House Tower, some object of antiquity, or some elucidation of its early history, might be brought to light, worthy of being communicated to this Society. In this expectation, however, I have been somewhat disappointed; and regret that I have only a few coins to offer to the Society, accompanied with some notices regarding the structure of the building itself. The coins are so far curious, in being of a date considerably anterior to what is understood to have been the era of the foundation of the Tower, although, by

reason of the fountain, this spot is likely to have been constantly resorted to, as early as the rock became the site of a castle, or of habitations of any kind.

There seems to have been a twofold object in the erection of the Well-House Tower, partly to secure access to the well, but principally to defend the termination of the city wall, at a point where, from the shelter afforded by the overhanging cliff, it must have been peculiarly exposed to assault. It was not till the reign of James II. that Edinburgh seems to have attained sufficient importance to become a walled city, as appears from a charter, granted in the year 1450 by that king, authorising the inhabitants to inclose the town with a fosse, wall, and towers; which being done forthwith was, according to Maitland, the date of the erection of the Well-House Tower. Maitland mentions the only access to the Tower being from within the walls, by two doors communicating with the different stories of the building; but he was not aware of a very material feature, which the late excavation has brought to light, shewing the offensive as well as defensive nature of this little fort.

There is a small building which appears on the projecting summit of the cliff, overhanging the Tower at the height of 70 feet at least. From the position of this structure, I was led to suppose its purpose to have been the raising up of the water from the fountain below, for the supply of the garrison, to which, from this upper building, there could be little difficulty of access. I conceived, from this supposition, that the removal of a bank of earth, which covered up the lower part of the ruins, immediately underneath this upper building, would most probably bring the ancient fountain to light, which, I presumed, would be found at this spot, *within* the inclosure of the Tower; as it seem-

ed somewhat preposterous to imagine the present apparent fountain head *withoutside* the walls of the Tower, ostensibly raised for its protection, to have been its original position. The removal of the rubbish, however, instead of what was expected, brought a covered way to light, leading along the southern wall of the Tower to a strongly fortified door-way, opening to the outside, of the purpose of which, as a sally-port or postern gate, there could be little doubt, from the defences of the Tower being principally directed to this point. The walls are here of very great strength, penetrated, in the middle of the solid mass, by a square cavity for the reception of the slip beam which slid across the inside of the door, for its protection; and, in case of the door being driven in, the remains of various defences appear in the inside, to protect the covered way. The port opens out to a chasm in the rock about 20 feet in width, over which, when occasion required, a gang-way or draw-bridge was most likely thrust; and here the purpose of the building, placed on the ledge of rock above, becomes exceedingly obvious, occupying an admirable position for the defence of this assailable point.

In constructing a path within these few days, which required the removal of a considerable bank from the foot of the rock, some very obvious indications have been uncovered of the communication betwixt the under and upper Tower, by means of a scrambling stair, constructed in such tortuous direction as the projections of the rock would admit of; and directed towards a natural fissure in the cliff, where a ladder-way might have been conveniently enough accomplished, to give access to the building above. The remains of this stair were covered with earth and rubbish, to the depth of eight or ten feet; and, what is a curious circumstance, upon the steps immediately underneath the ladder-

way alluded to, and where an object falling from thence would naturally alight, a human skull was found, obviously shattered by the concussion on the step, besides a good many human bones lying near it, and mingled with the rubbish below. From the thickness of the bones of the skull, the proprietor seems to have had a pretty substantial head; but the vehemence with which it appears to have come in contact with the step had shivered it into many pieces.

The coins which I beg to present to the Society were found chiefly near the Sally-port; they are (besides a few foreign coins) chiefly of Oliver Cromwell and Edward III. of England; these latter are very good specimens. There is one of them which may be an Edward I. but I have not yet compared it with others. Silver pennies of the Edwards are the most frequent of the ancient English coins found in Scotland, from the great quantity sent to pay the English troops engaged in the long struggle which took place at that period for the mastery of Scotland, when Edinburgh Castle was garrisoned alternately by Scotch and English troops.

Many fragments of bomb shells were dug up around the ruin; and a 48-pound shot was found bedded in a breach of the tower, which it had doubtless occasioned, and so situated as not to admit the supposition that the ball could have fallen or rebounded from the rock above; besides that it is doubtful if the castle contained guns of that calibre, except Mons Meg, the bore of which was 20 inches, and, though tapering inwards, would have required a larger shot than 48 pounds. The situation of the ball indicated its having been thrown from the ridge of West Princes Street; and as that was exactly the position of one of the five batteries erected by Regent Morton in the year 1572, when the

castle, under the command of Kirkaldie of Grange, who held it for the Queen's party, underwent the sharpest siege it had ever sustained, nor yielded till battered to ruins, after a siege of thirty-three days; it is fair to infer, that this ball is most probably a witness of the weighty arguments used by Morton upon that occasion. Indeed, the practice of later warfare has been to use a lighter weight in battering, as the repeated blows of a 24-pound shot proves more effectual than the crushing impetus of a much more weighty ball; but, at the period alluded to, a 24-pounder was called a *Demi-cannon*, which seems to imply that the 48-pounder was the regular battering gun of those days.

While digging a trench a little way to the east of the Tower in Spring 1820, the workmen discovered a large coffin of thick fir deals, in which there were three skeletons. This occurred before I took any charge of the operations, which prevented my having an opportunity to examine the skeletons. The men informed me that, as the coffin went to pieces, they collected all the bones, and re-buried them on the brink of the bog where they were found. I was anxious to ascertain the sex of the skeletons, as, by the ancient practice of our criminal law, females convicted of certain crimes suffered the death of drowning in the North Loch, instead of being hanged; and, as the bodies would probably obtain sepulture on the margin of the lake where they were executed, the circumstance of three females, if so it was, in one grave, and in such a situation, would afford a very fair inference as to the cause and manner of their death. The workmen had made very satisfactory observations on the subject, as they informed me that the body which lay in the middle was obviously the skeleton of a tall man, and the two others which lay on each side of him women, which they inferred from their being much shorter, and

very broad about the flanks, to use their own expression. Now, this circumstance, if we take it for granted to be the bodies of a man and two women in one coffin, deposited in unhallowed ground, and on the margin of the usual place of such executions, corresponds singularly with the fact of a man of the name of Sinclair, and two sisters, with both of whom he was convicted of having committed incest, being drowned in the North Loch in the year 1628.

Hard by, and within the probable margin of the water, were found the uncoffined bones of an infant, where doubtless many such victims have terminated their guiltless existence. There was a period of our history, when the frequency of child-murder was quite appalling, and the facility afforded for its concealment by the miry state of the North Loch, sequestered, and at the same time adjacent to the city, rendered it the usual scene of these atrocities.

I had some expectation that the number of drains, which it became necessary to dig, might perhaps bring to light the more imperishable remains of another victim, who, from the summit of distinction, was destined to find a sudden and ignoble grave in this filthy puddle—no less a person than St Giles himself, the tutelary of our ancient city. In order to disappoint the imprudent display projected by the priests for the festival of St Giles, in the year 1556, some crafty reformers found means, on the eve of that day, to steal away the saint himself, (or *idol* as they called him,) which they threw into the North Loch; and where the furious mob, on the day of the festival, seemed abundantly willing to have sent her Majesty and the whole priesthood to worship him. It was upon this occasion that the fracas took place, of which Knox gives so amusing an account, where the priests,

upon discovering the elopement, had substituted a small image of St Giles belonging to the Greyfriars, which the mob derided by the appellation of Young St Giles, and were proceeding with all the pageantry of their procession, accompanied by the Queen, when the jesting, as usual, took a more serious turn, and ended in the total rout of the whole hierarchy, in which Young St Giles came to as untimely an end as his sire.

Certain ablutions in the North Loch were much in vogue at this period, for which purpose a pillar was erected within the water, where fornicators and adulterers were made to expiate their transgressions by ducking; and, being generally classed in their enactments along with the crime of *popery*, it is very obvious that the Reformers had a strong desire to wash off the stain of idolatry in the same impure bath. This implied identity of crime accounts for the uncommon zeal displayed at this period against the transgression of the seventh commandment. In most parts of Europe at this era, ducking was the favourite punishment in cases of offences against morality; and it is amusing to observe the dramatic cast given to these executions by the French, which their more phlegmatic neighbours were content to exhibit by the simple sousing in a dirty puddle. In France, however, a stage was erected, to which was attached a long beam on a moveable pivot; to one end of this beam a large wire cage emblematically decorated was fixed, into which the principal actress was enclosed, as slenderly attired as decency would permit; cords, attached to the other extremity of the beam, enabled the assistants to plunge her up and down, to the great entertainment of the assembled multitude. It must have been particularly so in the cases of inveterate scolds, when this correction was occasionally applied, as the effect might be expected to call forth an exceedingly amusing

display of that talent. I have not seen any remains of the pillar mentioned to have been erected in the North Loch, to which, most likely, a bucket had been attached, in imitation of the Saxon mode, from whom so many of the early customs have been derived to Britain. The Saxons generally inflicted the punishment of ducking on common scolds, presenting a comedy with which the rabble must have been highly delighted.

From the gradual and uninterrupted declivity of the ground situated to the eastward of the North Loch, it is obvious that any accumulation of water there must have been produced by artificial means. Accordingly, there is reason to believe that the vale of the North Loch existed originally as meadow grounds, through which the rill of water, proceeding from the Castle rocks and other sources, flowed, and where tournaments were occasionally exhibited. The loch appears to have originated at the same time with the first fortifying of the town in the reign of James II. and to have formed a part of that fortification; as the wall, commencing at the Well-House Tower, after a short stretch eastward, turned sharply up the Castle Bank to near the present Reservoir, where the old castle-gate stood: and, after encircling the then very limited extent of the city, stopped short at the foot of Halkerstone's wynd, leaving the space intervening betwixt that point and a little eastward of the Well-House Tower, to the protection of the water, which, by means of a buttress across the hollow at that lower point, was made to cover the meadows above. It is remarkable that no trace or mention appears of any out-work or additional defence at this point, as it seems to offer to assailants so very simple an expedient of laying open that quarter of the town; unless, to be sure, that building called Dingwall

Castle, which stood near the site of the present Orphan Hospital, was intended for that purpose.

As to the Royal Garden which was supposed to occupy the upper part of the valley, from the allusion made to it in the foundation charter of the Abbey of Holyrood by David II. in the year 1128, where, in mentioning the fountain at the Well-House Tower, it is designed, "a fonte qui oritur juxta angulum gardini mei," I am inclined to doubt its having been very royal in any of its qualities, except that of belonging to the king. That part of the ground has been trenched to a considerable depth, and intersected by deep drains, without any appearances having been discovered of terraces, drains, or ornamental work of any kind; no traces of regular distribution or arrangement of the ground, or any thing whatever indicative of its former state, except the stems of a few prostrate trees, such as are generally found in these situations when left to the embellishment of nature alone.

The water was occasionally let off, as appears by an order of the Town Council, during the rebellion of the year 1715, desiring the sluice to be shut in order to put the town into a state of defence; it was finally opened in the year 1743, and afterwards partially drained in 1763. The upper division above the mound has now undergone a complete drainage, at a very great expence, and is likely soon to add another beautiful feature to the grandeur of our ancient Acropolis.

As connected with the subject of these remarks, I may be permitted to add an amusing enough elegy which was pointed out to me in a volume of collections of that description in the Library of the Faculty of Advocates, although I have not been able to discover the place of interment, or any circumstances connected with the subject of the elegy.

AN ELEGIE

On the Great and Famous BLEW STONE which lay on the Castle-Hill of Edinburgh, and was buried therein.

What place is this I 've fix'd my feet upon?
 It 's like the *Castlehill*, yet I miss a stone
 Whereon I leaned me oft for recreation;
 Sure here 's the place where was his situation.
 None e'er was yet so strong to have it carried,
 So that it 's surely sunk, or else been buried;
 For which there ought to be great lamentation,
 Since that it's equal scarce was in a nation.
 Oh! let 's lament the loss that 's sent
 From castle to the town;
 Would we withstood this blue stone's good
 That 's now beneath the ground?
 Rise up and stand, and grace our land,
 Let them thy motto see;
 Our old blue stone, that 's dead and gone,
 His marrow cannot be.
 Large twenty foot of length he was,
 His bulk none e'er did ken,
 Dour and deaf, and riven with grief,
 When he preserved men.
 Behind his back a batt'rie was,
 Contriv'd with packs of woo';
 Let 's now think on, since he is gone,
 We 're in the castle's view.
 O! burgesses and men of wit
 That lives into the town,
 What do you mean, or have you seen,
 To let him so plump down?

Since all is past, and he lies fast,
 His memory shall stand
 To thousand generations
 In this our ancient land.
 O, graver good, will ye but do't,
 Put this upon a stone,
 Near to his nest, see that it rest,
 Since he is dead and gone.

EPITAPH.

Whoe'er this grave does look upon,
 And ask who does it fill,
 It is the famous great Blue Stone
 Lay on the Castlehill.
 Roar'd at he was with shots like thunder,
 Because that men he serv'd,
 Until his body rent asunder,
 Because he them preserved
 From death that night.