

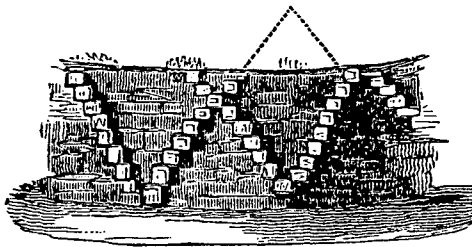
XIII.—*Extract of a Letter to the Secretary, from Lieutenant JAMES EDWARD ALEXANDER, of the 16th Light Dragoons (Lancers) &c. giving an Account of an Ancient Building in the County of Kerry, called Staigh Fort.*

[Read to the Society, 31st March 1828.]

IN a retired part of the county of Kerry, Ireland, and in the barony of Iveragh, at a short distance from the river Kenmare, where its accumulated waters become a wide estuary, stands a building of great antiquity called Staigh Fort. This interesting remain is situated on elevated ground; is surrounded on three sides by lofty and precipitous mountains, and on the fourth is open to, and commands an extensive view of, the Frith of Kenmare, and the ocean in the distance. Lofty forest trees formerly clothed the hill on which Staigh Fort stands; but now there are only coppice and rank grass. The building is *circular*; and is constructed of stones of different sizes; and neither mortar nor

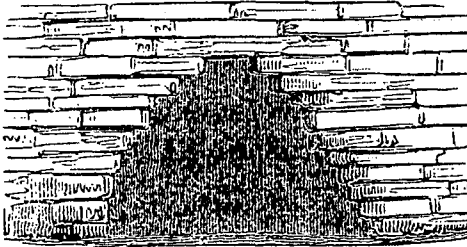
cement of any kind has been used in the erection. The character of the stones is slaty ; and they have not been quarried. Some of them are six and seven feet in length. What remains of the building is twenty-four feet in height, and the base of the masonry is upwards of twenty feet thick. There is only one entrance into the interior of the building, and that is a door-way seven feet in height, and four feet wide, on the south side, looking towards the sea.

On entering the building, a singular appearance presents itself. Twelve triangular stairs are carried from an arena of thirty yards in diameter to the top of the building. The steps of the stairs are formed by stones of eighteen inches in breadth projecting from the general surface of the masonry, and resemble the serrated coping stones of the gables of old houses.



all round. With the exception of the door-way before mentioned, there is no external opening or window of any kind.

On the left hand side of the entrance, and with the threshold on a level with the arena, is a small opening in the thickness of the wall, four feet high by two broad. By this a den or vault is entered, upwards of six feet in height, eight feet long, and six or seven feet deep. There is no light but that afforded by the door. The roof presents the appearance of an inverted stair-case, consisting of large and long stones resting on one another, as in the



adjacent section. Besides the den or vault described, there were indications of five more round the interior of the building ;—which having thus briefly described, it only remains to state its probable use. There is a tradition in the county, that a colony of Spaniards, at the time of the Moorish invasion of their own country, fled from their conquerors, and settled in this neighbourhood ; and this amphitheatre was probably constructed by them for combats between wild beasts, &c. The dens in the thickness of the wall render this probable ; and between the triangular stairs beams might have been laid to form seats for the spectators. The form of the roof of the dens evidently demonstrates great antiquity. In later times this building was the haunt of pirates, when the hill on which it stands, and surrounding country, were covered with forest. I may remark, that round the outside there are traces of a moat.

In some parts of the wall there are indications of a second tier of stairs, represented by the dotted lines. Parts of the wall having fallen down in former times, there are evident traces of its having been built up again to the general height. The top of the wall is very broad ; and there is a walk

all round. With the exception of the door-way before mentioned, there is no external opening or window of any kind.

A few years ago, the peasants, while digging for turf near Staigh Fort (*query*, derivation of Staigh?) discovered, under twenty feet of peat-moss, a flat surface of rock, on which was an inscription which no one could decypher; but the country people describe one letter of a triangular shape resembling the Greek Δ .

I have thus, My Dear Sir, given you the outline of this remarkable building. You will perhaps be able to decide on its use and date of erection. I am sorry my description is not more full.