

III.

ON THE EARLIER ANTIQUITIES OF THE DISTRICT OF CROMAR,
IN ABERDEENSHIRE;

INCLUDING A NOTICE OF AN "EIRDE HOUSE," OR UNDERGROUND CHAMBER, RECENTLY DISCOVERED ON THE FARM OF CULSH, IN THE PARISH OF TARLAND, AND OF ANOTHER AT DRUMNAHOY, NEAR CASTLE FRASER.

BY JOHN STUART, Esq., F.S.A., Scot.

The district of Cromar, in Aberdeenshire, is a hollow basin, about eight miles in length from north to south, by four in breadth from east to west, surrounded on all sides by hills, which isolate it from the adjoining country. It lies about thirty-four miles westward from Aberdeen, and between the rivers Dee and Don, at an equal distance from each.

It will be seen from the sequel, that there are many remains which seem to attest the early settlement and abundant population of the locality, a result which probably may be traced to the rich alluvial soil which is found throughout the district.

In more modern times, when we come within the light reflected from written records, we have evidence of the continued cultivation and importance of the district. This little country contains the united parishes of Logy and Coldstane, Tarland and Migvie, and the parish of Coul. Of these the parishes of Tarland and Migvie had been gifted to the church of the Priory of St Andrews, and that of Coul to the Monastery of Arbroath, before the end of the twelfth century. In the grant of Tarland to the church of St Andrews, by Morgund Earl of Mar, made between the years 1163-1171, the Earl recounts the subjects of which the monks were to draw the tithes, including the rents paid to him in hides, corn, cheese, meal, malt, marts, sheep, swine, and game. He also confirms to the monks a piece of ground belonging to the church of Tarland, with the important addition of a mill upon it.

It would appear, from the alluvial deposits and other circumstances, that, in remote times, the bottom of the valley had been covered by water, which probably by some violent change had at last forced an egress to the south, and joined the river Dee. The hill which bounds the western side of Cromar is the lofty Morven, apostrophised by Lord Byron as "Morven of snows." On the south, the district is divided from Deeside by a range including the hills of Culbleen, Mulloch, and Gellan. A natural opening in this direction conducts the road to Cromar from the south through the moor of Culbleen, on which a skirmish was fought between David Earl of Athole and Sir Andrew Murray, in 1335, as related by Wyntoun. From the minute account of this affair pre-

served by the poet, as well as from existing remains, it is plain that the now barren moor was then covered with a forest of oaks. On the east side of the moor lies the loch of Canmore, in which are two islands, at least partially artificial, on the westmost of which stood a tower, attributed by tradition to Malcolm Keanmore as its founder. Some enormous rafters of black oak, originally used for girding together the fabric of the island, or for a drawbridge to connect it with the land, with the rude mortisings which had joined them, were to be seen during last summer at a cottage on the margin of the loch, where also is preserved a bronze vessel resembling a coffee-pot, which was fished out of the water. The tower afforded shelter to one of the fugitives from Kilblene, as Wyntoun says,—

“ Schyr Robert Meyhneis til Canmore
Went, quhare he wonnand wes before;
Thidder he went, and in a pele
He sawfyt hym and his menyhe wellle.”

On one of the frequent pilgrimages which James IV. made to the shrine of St Duthac, at Tain, this tower received the wandering monarch within its walls, and the treasurer's accounts preserve the expense of “trussing the king's dogs in the boat, when he went to Canmore,” and of a payment to the boatman for carrying them across. There is also entry of a payment to the man “quha prufit the Don before the King's grace,” on his rout northward, when the river probably had been in flood.

In the sixteenth century, the “mansion of Loch Cawnmoir” occurs in the investitures of the Huntly estates, and it was a house of defence in the time of the Great Rebellion.

Along the top and west side of Mullach, and eastward by the Scaur of Auchterfoul, is an almost continuous range of cairns, some of them of remarkable size. Tradition will have it, that, while Malcolm Keanmore resided at his keep in the loch, the Danes landed on the coast, being in league with certain traitors who formed members of his court. The king's doorkeeper revealed the plot, and with the king's troops met the enemy at Minnandauin. A protracted struggle took place on the Hill of Mullach, and many fell on both sides, over whom the cairns were raised. From thence the Danes fled to the Hill of Mortlich, where the fight was continued; and a streamlet, which is still called the Bleedyburn, is said to have derived its name from the blood which ran so plentifully into it on that day.

As a reward for his fidelity, the king is said to have rewarded his doorkeeper with a grant of lands in Coull. Apart from this legend, which is of no historical value, it is certain that the great family of Durward were in posses-

sion of the eastern division of Cromar at the dawning of our record history, while the western and lesser half formed part of the territory of the Earls of Mar. The family of the Durwards disappears from our history immediately before the days of Bruce; but its memory yet lingers in the country of their early settlement, in the proverbial saying, that the bell of the Kirk of Coull rings of its own accord when a Durward dies. The Durwards' Castle, on a mound close to the parish-kirk, now forms an unshapely mass of rubbish; but from what is recorded of its appearance in the end of last century, it would appear to have resembled in plan the castles of Kildrummy on the Don, and Caerlaverock on the Solway.

The "How of Cromar" is intersected by a ridge of no great height running east and west, called Drummy, connected on the west with a higher conical hill, called Knockargity, "on the top of which," says a writer in Sir James Balfour's MS. Collections, "is a stone, from which one may behold all the five parish churches of Cromar, and if he walk but his length from the place any way, he cannot see the same." A short way eastward from this mount there are four very large cairns, and numerous smaller ones. The eastern termination of the ridge is called Tomnaverie, on which are to be seen the remains of two circles of large erect stones.

On the slopes which run down from the bounding hills, formerly referred to, into the valley, several ancient remains have been found. On the farm of Knowhead, in the north-east corner of the district, another circle of upright stones formerly existed, which is now destroyed. About 400 yards farther down the slope, and on the farm of Culsh, the underground chamber, hereafter to be described, was found. Westward from Knowhead is another projecting spur running from the main ridge, rounded on the top, and called the Doune. Here were numerous cairns of various sizes, all surrounded by one, and sometimes two concentric circles of stones, which projected a little above the surface. In most of those which have been opened, a grave was found, composed of flagstones about 4 or $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet long by 2 in breadth. In only one of them was anything found, and there, only parts of an urn of burnt clay. On the west slope of the Doune there remained, till lately, the circle of stones which had surrounded a cairn after the stones of the latter had been removed, and the stone coffin which had been in its centre also remained, surmounted by a blue boulder of immense size. Descending from the Doune towards the village of Tarland, and on a rocky eminence, there stood, till lately, a circle of upright stones, and near to it were found a few well-preserved arrow-heads of flint, along with a stone celt. Another circle of upright stones stood about a quarter of a mile to the westward of this position.

In various parts of the district were found square-shaped hollows, of no great size, the earth scooped out of which formed a small bounding fence. They were paved in the bottom with stones, under which, in most cases, was a layer of ashes. These inclosures received the name of "Piets' Houses" from the country people, and appear to have occurred all over the country. "On the farm of Cairnmore of Bleack," says the minister of Logy Coldstane, in his Statistical Account, "has been discovered part of a paved road of considerable width. Near it is a hollow, which is known by the name of the Piets' Howe. In removing part of the stones which formed the pavement, numerous pieces of charred wood were found beneath them." On the south slope of Drummy occurs a very small circle of upright stones, and it appears that these were also frequent in the district. On the south slope of Knockargity is a large cairn among the cultivated land, and to the westward of this cairn occurred one of the square inclosures just referred to, which was trenched up some years ago. In the course of this operation were found two stone cups, or ladles, resembling those dug up from a paved way near a circle of stones at Tullynessle in Aberdeenshire, in 1838, now in the Society's Museum. One of the large cairns in Drummy was opened in the course of last summer, but no grave was found. This, however, may have arisen from the search not having been so thoroughly completed as to expose the centre of the cairn where deposits generally were found.

On the farm of Culsh there occurred another paved inclosure, and in it was found the small striped bead or button now exhibited. Near to this inclosure was found a grave formed of six flags brought from the Hill of Ledlick, at some distance. The grave must have been cut out of the rock, as the soil at the part of the field where it occurs is very shallow, and on a bed of rock. In the parish of Logy Coldstane, which forms the northern end of Cromar, are many cairns, some of them of very great size. Two farms in the parish have received their name of Cairnmore from the abundance of these remains upon them. There are likewise several circles of upright stones in the parish; and at the farm of Mill of Newton may be seen one of those upright stones with symbolic figures cut on its surface, which occur along the east coast of Scotland, but are rarely found so far inland as this one. In the adjoining parish of Aboyne, a canoe, formed of a single block of oak, was dug out of the peat-moss at Drumduan, on the south side of the loch of Auchlossan, about the year 1838, but it was soon destroyed.

An underground chamber was discovered on the farm of Culsh, about two miles distant from the church of Tarland, which was cleared out in my presence in the month of August last, and which I shall now endeavour to describe.

The cave occurs on a slope, the entry to it being so contrived as not to at-

tract notice. Its extreme length is about 47 feet, it is curved in shape, and closely resembles in form the chamber near Newstead, Roxburghshire, described and figured by Dr Smith, in the Proceedings of the Society, vol. i. p. 213. Its width at the entry is about 2 feet, increasing gradually as it recedes to an average width of about 6 feet. The extreme end is of a circular shape. The height from the floor, which is on solid rock, increases from 5 feet near the entry to an average height of about 6 feet towards the other end. The walls are formed of boulders of various sizes, and they converge as they rise upwards, the cave being about a foot narrower at the roof than at the base of the walls. On the top of the walls are placed large and heavy slabs of stone as a roof, the whole being covered over with earth, so as to harmonise with the surrounding surface. So well has this been done, that it was only from the protruding of one of the covering slabs, and its consequent removal, that the cave was discovered. When it was opened up, it was found to be filled nearly to the top with what appeared to be a rich unctuous earth, resembling that of a churchyard more than the ordinary soil of the country. Analysis of the earth did not lead to any marked result; but in one of the processes by Dr Clark, Professor of Chemistry at Marischal College, Aberdeen, it appeared that traces of adipocire were present. The earth was removed by the farmer to be used as manure, and there were about thirty cartloads of it. At a spot on the floor, about 18 feet from the entry, were found fragments of an urn, several pieces of bones, apparently those of an ox, a quantity of smooth pebbles, two querns, and a mass of ferruginous matter, which appeared to have undergone the action of fire. Portions of these are now exhibited, as well as a large bead, which was found among the earth when it was in the course of being spread on the field. A large quantity of charcoal was mixed with the earth from the entrance to the spot where the relics were found.

I have recently heard from Mr Ross, the intelligent factor for Lord Aberdeen in Cromar, that, on a farm adjoining to Culsh, a spot has been observed which, from its hollow sound when trode upon, seems to be the site of another cave.

Mr Douglas, the tenant of Culsh, who has taken a kind interest in making the discovery on his farm available, reports to me, that in going through the cairns on Mulloch, on the farm of Corsefold, parish of Coull, already referred to, he has discovered another cave resembling the one at Culsh in shape and general plan. It was in ruins; but on partially clearing it out, five querns were found in it. Around this cave was a circular inclosure, where cattle might have been kept.

Subterranean chambers, apparently of a similar character, have been opened in different parts of Scotland, for descriptions of which see *Caledonia*, vol. i.

p. 97; Martin's *Western Islands*, pp. 67, 87, 154, &c. A great many underground houses were discovered at Kildrummy, in the county of Aberdeen, and have been described by Professor Stuart, in the *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. ii. p. 53. It seems likely that the inclosures there described correspond with those paved inclosures in Cromar already adverted to.

The following account of another underground building, which was discovered at Drumnahoy, on the estate of Castle Fraser, in Aberdeenshire, was furnished to me by the proprietor, Colonel Fraser; and it will be observed, that its plan and size almost entirely correspond with the one at Culsh.

“The cavern, at its entrance, is about 3 feet high by 2 feet 2 inches wide, the sides formed of stone posts. The passage then slopes downwards by a sort of steps formed in the gravelly subsoil, gradually widening for about 9 feet; and at that distance there is a notch in the wall at each side for doorposts, width 3 feet, and height 5 feet 6 inches; and the floor then runs on a level the whole length of the cave about 51 feet, the width 4 feet, and height 6 feet. At the farther end it widens to 6 feet, and terminates circularly. The sides are rudely, but strongly built of rough stones, and the roof has been formed of long stones, or lintels, cemented with clay, as appeared by about 12 feet of the roof that remained entire. The whole is about 8 inches or a foot under the present surface of the ground, and a narrow sloping ditch or path leads down to the entrance. The situation is a rising ground, commanding an extensive view to the south-east and west, and forms the spur of more elevated ground to the north.” On a plan of the estate, made in 1789, a space round this cave is marked as “Pest Graves,” and was left uncultivated; and in this spot human bones have been turned up.

17th April 1854.

The REV. WILLIAM STEVENSON, D.D., Vice-President,
in the Chair.

The following Gentlemen were elected Fellows:—

JOHN STEWART, Esq. of Nateby Hall.

J. WARBURTON BEGBIE, M.D.

The Donations to the Museum and Library were—

Various Relics, consisting of several Stone Vessels, Bone Imple-

ments and Combs, Bronze Tweezers, Iron Weapons, &c. found in a Pict's House, at Kettleburn, in the county of Caithness: by A. HENRY RHIND, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Two Skulls from the precincts of the Ancient St Roque's, Canaan: by WILLIAM IVORY, Esq., W.S.

Smithsonian Contributions to Knowledge, Vol. 5; Sixth Annual Report of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution: by the SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION, Washington, N.S. America.

Archæologia, Vol. 35; Part I.: Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of London, Nos. 32 to 36; List of Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of London; Catalogue of Roman Coins collected by the late Rev. Thomas Kerrich: by the SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF LONDON.

The Communications were—