

IV.

NOTICES OF THE EARLY ECCLESIASTICAL SETTLEMENT OF THE COUNTRY ON THE DEVERON, AND OF RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT THE HA' HILL OF MONTBLAIRY, ON THE BANKS OF THAT RIVER. BY JOHN STUART, Esq., Sec. S.A. Scot.

The water of Deveron takes its rise in the hills of the Cabrach, and, on its course to the sea, into which it falls at Banff, forms, for the most part, the boundary between the counties of Aberdeen and Banff. The valley through which the river finds its way is generally rich but narrow, and the country on either side is frequently hilly and barren.

It need not be doubted that the fertile banks of the stream attracted a nu-

merous population of the early inhabitants ; and although the steady cultivation of ages has obliterated many of the remains and traces of their settlement, there are yet to be found occasional vestiges of their graves and other monuments, which show that their customs were similar to those practised in other parts of the country.

It would seem that when the beneficent light of Christianity first dawned on our heathen forefathers, the banks of the Deveron had attracted many of the pious missionaries who, from the fifth to the eighth or ninth centuries, were sent forth from the monastic establishments of Ireland to hand on the torch, which had at no distant time been confided to themselves.

Many of our primitive churches were raised on the margins of rivers, or on the sea-side, where doubtless the population was most numerous ; but almost every one of the parishes, from the source to the issue of the Deveron, is dedicated to some of the Irish missionaries, and thereby has preserved to us the memory of their pious labours.

The Church of Mortlach, dedicated to St Moloch, lies a few miles west from the Deveron. It was the seat of one of the primitive monasteries, and had its five dependent churches.¹ About an equal distance from the river on the other side was another monastery,² at Clova, or Cloveth, as the place is called in ancient charters.

The ancient church of Dumeth, dedicated to St Wollok (who is recorded to have been an active missionary in the north part), is in the parish of Glass, on the margin of the river. Here the memory of this saint was held in great veneration, and it continued to be held in repute till very recent times.³ In the year 1648 all superstition at Wallak Kirk was censured by the reigning ecclesiastical authority. The Saint's Well was till recent times much resorted to by diseased persons. Two pools, formed among precipitous rocks by the reflux of the Deveron, are called St Wallak's Baths, and sick people, especially children, were bathed in them. Both these monasteries and the church of Dumeth formed part of the original possessions of the See of Aberdeen, and were confirmed to it by a bull of Pope Adrian IV. in 1157.

Farther down the stream is the parish of Kinore, now added to Huntly, and dedicated to St Mungo, where St Mungo's Hill and Well still keep up the memory of the saint. The ancient church here was on the bank of the stream ; and in the same way at Aberchirder, a few miles lower down the river, the church was on the green bank of the stream. This church was dedicated to St Marnan, who was buried here about the middle of the seventh century ; and

¹ Register, Aberdeen, vol. i., p. 85.

² Register, Aberdeen, vol. i., p. 85.

³ Presbytery Book of Strathbogie, p. 89.

here his relics were preserved, and were the object of pilgrimages till the sixteenth century.¹ According to some authorities, his head was kept with singular devotion in Moravia, and was carried in processions, attended by the whole clan of the Innes's,² which, from the earliest times, was devoted to this saint. It is stated in the Breviary of Aberdeen, that it was customary on every Sunday to wash the head of the saint, amid the prayers of the clergy, and the blazing of lights, and that those who were troubled with any disease drank of the water in which the head had been washed, to their great profit. Just beneath the church is Saint Marnan's Ford, and on a hill hard by is, or was, a stone called Saint Marnan's Chair.³

A few miles lower down the stream is the parish of Forglen, where, on the margin of the stream, is a ruined chapel, dedicated to Saint Adamnan, here called St Eunan. King William the Lion gave to the monks of Arbroath the custody of the Bracbenach, and therewith the lands of Forglen, given to God and St Columba and the Bracbenach.

The adjoining parish of Turriff has for its patron Saint Congan Abbot, who is called the brother of Saint Kentigern.⁴

The parish of Alvah, next lower on the river, is dedicated to St Columba, whose memory is preserved in St Colm's Well.

The parish of Banff, where the river enters the sea, is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; and the adjoining parish of Inverboyndie, to which that of Banff was formerly united, was dedicated to Saint Brandan Abbot.

There were three of the old divisions of land called Thanages along the river, that of Glendouachie, Conveth, and Aberchirder; and it seems probable that these, in their origin, had some connection with religious establishments of which the history has perished; and which, when the light of charters dawns on them, are frequently found to have been divided into shares, and appropriated to different classes of owners.

In the parish of Alvah, a few miles above the mouth of the river, are several remains of the old inhabitants. A tumulus, opened on the farm of Sandlaw, contained several urns rudely ornamented; and in another, on the farm of Boghead, were found several urns containing ashes. Near this tumulus is a large stone called "Carlin Kist." On the eastern brow of the hill of Alvah is a large cairn, and two smaller ones are to be seen on the hill of Tipperty, and on the farm of Itlaw. On the farm of Burreldales there remain four large stones of a stone circle; and on the farm of Newton of Montblairry, one large stone marks the site where, a few years ago, stood another circle of much larger di-

¹ De Scotor. Fortitudine, pp. 108-9.

² Butler's Lives of Saints, vol. i., p. 290.

³ Collections on Shires, vol. ii., p. 189.

⁴ Collections on Shires, vol. ii., pp. 337-8.

mensions. Sometime ago a "druidical" circle was found under ground in digging deep into an old garden on the farm of Wardend.

On the farm of Mains of Auchinbady, in this parish, is a mound called the "Ha' Hill." It is situated on the margin of a field overhanging the burn of Stoneyley, before it joins the Deveron, a short way below. It is now a good deal dilapidated, but may still measure about 240 feet in length from east to west, and probably about 60 feet from north to south. Originally there had been a round swelling knoll on the spot, upon which had been heaped up sand and gravel to the height of ten or twelve feet, so as to form an oval-shaped barrow of considerable extent. A section cut down on the east side showed a dark-coloured streak at the level of the old surface running along a great part of the barrow from north to south. This streak, on examination, was found to be about a foot thick, and to consist in part of a rich unctuous blackish earth, interspersed in parts with a white substance (like fat), sometimes mixed with portions of wood, small twigs with the bark remaining being seen, and in one case a hazel nut. In other parts of the streak, and above it, were seen gravel and small stones which had been under the action of fire; and occasionally minute pieces of charred wood were interspersed through the earth. At one part of the streak was found some earth tinged with bright blue, and a small piece of leather. About the old centre of the mound were found two bones, one of which is supposed to be that of a horse, and towards the centre of the mound were found three mill-stones of red sandstone, about two feet in diameter or less; and on other occasions portions of bone, with bits of sandstone and charred wood, have been dug out of the mound.

In the field adjoining the mound a bronze armlet was found some years ago, precisely similar to that found at Belhelvie, and now in the Society's Museum.

In digging the foundations of a new building in the orchard park of Montblairy, and about three feet beneath the surface, were found two hammers made of hard clay, one of which is now presented to the Museum by Mr Morison (and is figured at page 347); and near the same spot various graves have recently been found, paved in the bottom with boulders, and containing charred bones and earth.

On the Gallowhill, in a cist, a very fine urn was found, and on the farm of Newton of Montblairy, a larger urn was found in or near a stone circle. This urn is now also presented to the Museum by Mr Morison (and is also figured at page 346).

While these remains correspond with those found throughout the north-eastern districts of Scotland, it may be remarked that no stone pillar having

the symbols so frequently found on stones in Aberdeenshire occurs in the country on the banks of the Deveron. The stone at Mortlach has none of the symbols, and one of the Standing Stones of Strathbogie, which has a circle incised on its surface, is hardly an exception. Indeed, it is worth noticing, as bearing somewhat on the history of our primitive tribes, that, in the range of country eastward of a line drawn from the Ythan at its mouth to the Spey at Arndilly, there are only two sculptured pillars—one at Deer, and one at Tyrie—while that at Deer only has the peculiar symbols referred to.¹ In the country on the Don again, these stones are very numerous, while on the Dee there is only one at Park having the symbols.