

IV.

REMARKS ON THE ANCIENT BARRIER CALLED "THE CATRAIL," WITH PLANS. BY WILLIAM NORMAN KENNEDY, Esq., Hawick.

The Catrail is the appellation of a ditch or fosse, with a mound on each side, formed of the earth excavated from the centre, extending from the neighbourhood of Galashiels southwards through the counties of Selkirk and Roxburgh, and is supposed to terminate at its opposite extremity on or near to Peelfell in Liddesdale, on the borders of Northumberland. It was first brought into notice by Gordon in the beginning of last century, and has since been frequently described by writers on antiquarian subjects; the account given by Chalmers, in his "Caledonia," being that generally adopted.

Considerable diversity of opinion exists as to the derivation of the term, it being variously stated by different authors. Chalmers calls it "the dividing fence," or "the partition of defence;" Jeffrey, "a war fence or partition—*Cat* signifying conflict or battle, and *Rhail* a fence;" others from *Cater* a camp, and *Rhail* a fence, a dividing fence among the camps; others, again, from *Cud* a ditch, and *Rhail* a fence, the ditch

fence or boundary; while another class call it "the Pictswork ditch," attributing the formation of it, and all other ancient artificial remains in the district through which it passes, to the Picts,—a race regarding whom very mythical traditions continue to float about and receive credence; but almost all writers concur in attributing its formation to the Britons, subsequent to the withdrawal of the Romans from this country.

From the time of Chalmers to the present, its dimensions and appearance have been described with considerable uniformity, and at the same time very inaccurately; while the way in which its use has been accounted for, especially by the most recent writers who treat of it, has a tendency to perpetuate those errors of description, and certainly reflects more credit on the imaginative ingenuity of the authors than on their discrimination. This can only be explained by supposing that these descriptions were given without any personal investigation of the work, which is still in many places sufficiently perfect to enable any one who sees it to judge of its original dimensions and probable use. The personal knowledge of Chalmers regarding the Catrail appears to have been very limited, as he seems to have employed the minister of Galashiels to survey it for his "Caledonia." There can be no doubt that the latter gentleman must often have been imposed upon while making inquiries at individuals resident in its neighbourhood, as it even yet continues to be imperfectly understood, and many isolated trenches running in a contrary direction are still pointed out as portions of that work, although unconnected with it; and as they are identical in appearance, his ignorance of the locality would prevent him detecting the unintentional mistake.

According to Chalmers, it originally consisted of a fosse or ditch 26 feet broad, with a rampart on each side, from 8 to 10 feet in height, formed of the earth thrown from the interior of the ditch. After minutely tracing its course, he adds, "There can hardly be a doubt whether the Catrail was once a dividing fence, between the Romanised Britons of the Cumbrian kingdom and their Saxon invaders on the east. It cannot, indeed, be fitly referred to any other historical period of the country which is dignified by the site of this interesting antiquity. The Britons and the Saxons were the only hostile people whose countries were separated by this warlike fence, which seems to have been

exactly calculated to overawe the encroaching spirit of the Saxon people." He also says that "Gordon absurdly supposes it to have been a *limes* or boundary which the Caledonians established after their peace with the Emperor Severus. He ought to have recollected that this work is in the country of the Romanised Britons of Valentia, and lies far from the land of the Maecatae and Caledonians. Maitland, with equal absurdity, has converted the Catrail into a Roman road. If he had only examined it, he would have seen that it is as different from a Roman road as a crooked is from a straight line, or as a concave work is from a convex. The able and disquisitive Whitaker was the first who applied the Catrail to its real purpose by referring it to its proper period."

Mr Jeffrey, in his "History and Antiquities of Roxburghshire," now in course of publication, gives the dimensions of the Catrail as being "26 feet wide, with a rampart on each side 7 feet thick and 10 feet high. This gigantic undertaking was carried through by the Ottadini and Gadeni people after the Romans left, to protect themselves and possessions from the Saxons who were advancing upon them from the north and east. It would also serve as a screen, under cover of which the tribes could pass from one place to another without being seen by the enemy. In the same way, their flocks and herds might be conveyed without being observed. These war-fences were constructed about 446, during the struggle which succeeded the landing of the Saxons between the Forth and Tweed, and the immensity of the work proves the desperate nature of the struggle. The Catrail does not go straight, but bends round any serious obstacle, or stops at a moss or naturally strong place, and resumes its way on the other side."

Mr Wilson, in his "Annals of Hawick" (1850), reiterates the statement of its dimensions as given by Chalmers; adding, "It is said that at equal distances appearances indicate the sites of separate towers, thus giving to the work the character of a regular fortification."

There are few if any of the works of art of early times in the country about which so much has been written to so little purpose, and regarding which so many inapplicable suppositions have been hazarded. Whatever its object may have been, it never was a continuous work, although it has always been treated as such, and regarded as a defensive barrier, which its occasional existence goes far to disprove. The opinion is fast

gaining ground, that it was a mere territorial boundary, and that it was made only where no natural boundary existed, such as cleuchs and water-courses, which it is invariably found to take when these occur in the line of its route. This view of its original use derives additional force from the fact that it is still in some places the only boundary between adjacent proprietors. Its dimensions, where most perfect, are at bottom of ditch from 4 to 5 feet wide, from inner edge of mounds at top 12 feet, with a depth from the bottom of ditch to the top of mounds of 4 to 5 feet.

That it never was intended as a protection or defence is apparent from its want of continuity, and from the mounds being the same on both sides, which would render them as much an obstacle in defence as in attack. Its shallowness precludes the idea being entertained that it was intended or could be made available as a screen, under cover of which men and cattle could travel unobserved; and it is still further condemned by the fact that a person standing on the heights on either side of the work commands a view of its course within and without for long distances. No traces on its margin or vicinity are visible as attestations of any desperate struggle between hostile races, though numerous British encampments are to be found in its immediate neighbourhood with some tumulary mounds still intact.

There is no foundation whatever for Mr Wilson's statement on oral authority, that appearances of towers are to be found at regular distances along the trench. In its immediate vicinity, but running in an opposite direction, several isolated ditches of a similar form are to be found; but the purpose for which they were intended is not apparent. They vary from four to six hundred yards in length, and their general appearance indicates that they belong to the same era as the Catrail.

The course of the Catrail through the county of Roxburgh is from Hoscoatshiel to Robertslinn, and is illustrated by a sketch-map presented to the Society. From Hoscoatshiel to where it falls into Hoscoat-burn, it is very perfect, the distance being about a mile and a half. For a considerable part of the distance here, the ditch is wider and the mound on the left side higher than in any other place shown. From the circumstance of a drove-road still in use running alongside of it, it is believed that it has been tampered with in order to form the mound on the left

side into a modern fence for the drove-road, and hence the difference in appearance. This has been done by throwing up the soil from the interior of the ditch, which has had the effect of widening it considerably. At Hoscoat-burn it follows the streamlet as a natural distinctive boundary to its junction with the Borthwick, descends the latter to the point where Muselee-burn enters on the opposite side, then ascends it to near its source, where the artificial work again commences and continues till Teindside-burn becomes available, then descends it to the Teviot, which it follows till Northhouse-burn enters on the opposite side, ascends it to Old Northhouse, where the artificial work again appears, and crosses the hill to Doecleuch, where it stops, descends that burn to Allan-water, follows it to where Dod-burn enters on the opposite side, ascends it to Whitehillbrae, where the work again makes its appearance, and continues visible till it disappears in Robertslinn-burn, on the confines of Liddesdale, and is again found further south.

It will be seen that a regular alternation of natural and artificial boundary lines occurs throughout the whole course of the work, which combined render it perfect and continuous. Preceding writers have erred from having regarded it as wholly an artificial line, and accounted for its disappearance and reappearance by attributing its destruction to the ravages of time and the obliteration consequent on tillage. If they had only exercised their own judgment after a personal inspection, neither they nor their readers would have been perplexed or mystified to such an extent as they have been.

The only rational conclusion which can be arrived at by an investigation of its remains, as at present to be seen, is that it must have been an innocent, peaceable boundary line, though when or by whom formed no evidence can be produced to show. So far as known, no relics have ever been discovered in connection with it, which might point out its authors and the age in which they flourished.

WEDNESDAY, 12th May 1858.

The Honourable LORD NEAVES, Vice-President, in the Chair.

The following Gentleman was balloted for and elected a Fellow of the Society:—

ROBERT PATERSON, M.D., Leith.

The following Donations presented to the Museum and Library were laid on the table:—

A rude Comb formed of Bone, spreading out at its extremity into eight distinct teeth, and with a perforation through its opposite and narrower extremity; a Knife and Pin of Bone; Fragment of a Pin of Bone; Fragment of Bone, resembling the Lid of a Small Box.—Found in a Circular Building in Uist. (See Communication, page 124.)

A small Oval Brooch of Bronze Wire. Found in Uist.

From C. GORDON, Esq., by Sir HENRY DRYDEN, Bart.

Circular Brooch of Copper, taken from the Breast of a Human Skeleton found in the Foundation of the Old Church, Dundee, 1841.

Two Silver Seals, a Brass one, and a three-sided Seal of Steel, displaying antique heads and armorial bearings.

Iron Head of a Halbert, found in a Field near Stockport, Lancashire.

By J. C. ROGER, F.S.A. Scot.

Memorials of Dundrennan Abbey in Galloway. 4to. Exeter, 1857.

By the Rev. Æneas Barkly Hutchison, B.D., St James's, Keyham, Devonport. From the AUTHOR.

Bulletin Archæologique de l'Association Bretonne. 4 vols. 8vo, and Parts 1 and 2 of Vol. V. Rennes, 1849-54. By the ASSOCIATION.

Sketch of the History and Antiquities of the Mearns. 12mo, pp. 24. Montrose, 1858. By Andrew Jervise, Esq., Cor. Mem. S.A. Scot. From the AUTHOR.

Description des Tombeaux de Bel-Air, pres Chesaux sur Lausanne. 4to, pp. 18. Lausanne, 1841.—Habitations Lacustres de la Suisse.

12mo, pp. 24. Bel-Air, 1857.—Ossements et Antiquites du lac de Moosseedorf dans le Canton de Berne. 8vo, pp. 14. Genève, 1857. By M. FRÉDÉRIC TRYON, Lausanne, the Author.

A Concise Account of Ancient Documents relating to the Honor, Forest, and Borough of Clun, in Shropshire; with copies of some of them; and Observations on the Custom of Amoby^r formerly existing there. Read to the Meeting of the Archæological Institute at Shrewsbury in August 1855. Privately printed, 1858. 4to, pp. 25. From the Author, THOMAS SALT, Esq., Shrewsbury.

The following Communications were read:—