

IV.

NOTE OF THE RECENT EXCAVATION OF A CAIRN ON THE HIGH
LAW, AND OF OTHER ANTIQUITIES IN THE PARISH OF CRUDEN,
ABERDEENSHIRE; BY THE REV. J. B. PRATT. WITH ADDITIONAL
NOTES; BY JOHN STUART, Esq., Sec. S.A. Scot.

Major-General Moore, while recently on a visit at Slains Castle, superintended, with the able assistance of Mr Alex. Murray, Nethermill, the opening of a mound in the parish, which, at first sight, the General, hav-

ing had large experience in antiquarian researches, pronounced to be in all probability a sepulchral cairn. It is situated on the top of the High Law, a small hill near the southern boundary of the parish.

On removing the superincumbent earth, of some two feet in thickness, they came to the stones of the cairn. On removing these, to the depth of other nine or ten feet, they came to a large flat stone, under which was found a regularly-formed cist. The dimensions were 4 feet in length, 22 inches in width, and 2 feet in depth. It was entirely empty. There can be no doubt but that the cairn had been previously examined, and the contents of the cist abstracted. One evidence of this, in the opinion of General Moore, was the comparative looseness with which the stones of the cairn were piled up—a portion, during the progress of the excavation, actually falling in, and considerably retarding the operations.

The cist was formed of thin flagstones, set edgewise, specimens of which are still plentiful in the neighbouring parish of Slains. The direction of the grave was due north and south.

The High Law is calculated to be about 200 feet above the level of the sea, and, according to tradition, was formerly used for beacon-fires; its summit being visible from the lower range of the Grampians. The ground level of the hill formed the bottom of the grave; the superstructure being of a conical form, and rising to the height of twelve or fourteen feet. It had formerly been surrounded by an embankment or low stone fence, of which very little now remains.

The business of excavating¹ excited considerable interest, and the disappointment was proportionate on the grave being found untenanted.

The site of the old chapel dedicated to St Olaus, and erected soon after the battle of Cruden in 1006, is still traceable. It stood on a knoll on the south bank of the Water of Cruden, about 150 yards westward of "the New Bridge," and within fifty yards of the stream. So late as 1837, a portion of the east wall and the substructure of the other walls remained, when the whole was sacrilegiously used as material for making a new line of road in the neighbourhood. Considerable space around the church was consecrated as a burial-ground, and within a hundred yards westward of the spot a few stones still mark the site of a grave, which for centuries

¹ The investigation took place on Oct. 29, 1857.

was distinguished by a large blue marble slab, still to be seen in the parish churchyard. It bears the impress of brass plates, which have been abstracted. According to popular belief, the Crown Prince of Denmark was killed in the battle, and buried here.

On the 28th of October (1857) Major-General Moore superintended the opening of several graves. In several places, skulls and other human remains were found. In the centre of what had been the nave of the church, about four feet of sand was removed, when what is presumed to have been the floor of the chapel was discovered; it consisted of a mixture of clay and lime about four inches in thickness.

Two feet below this, and imbedded in sand, considerable quantities of human remains, consisting of thigh, arm, and collar bones, and of vertebrae, were discovered, all in a more or less decayed state. Among these, three skulls, lying side by side, each supported at the sides by stones of about the size of a man's head, were exposed to view. One of these was remarkable for its great size and thickness, measuring nearly seven inches across the crown, or transverse diameter of the skull. Another was equally remarkable for an opposite development. It was observed that the teeth adhering to a jawbone had no cavities, but were perfectly smooth and flat.

A portion of a lamp, of burnt clay, was also brought to light.

These relics are in the possession of Mr Alexander Murray, the Nethermill, Cruden.

Mr John Stuart stated, as an addition to Mr Pratt's communication, that the dedication of this church to St Olaus is thus spoken of by Boece, in the translation by Bellenden:—

“King Malcolme havand his realm in sicker peace, thocht nathing sa gud as to keip the promes maid to Danes; and thairfore he biggit ane kirk at Buchquhane dedicat in honour of Olavus patron of Norrway and Denmark to be ane memoriall that sindry noblis of Danis wer sumtyme buryit in the said kirk. In memory heirof, the landis that ar gevin to this kirk are callit yit Crowdan; quhilk signifies als meikle as the slauchter of Danis.”

The promise here referred to is said to have formed part of a treaty, and to have been, that the field of a battle between the Scots and Danes

at Cruden should be consecrated for a burial-ground, in which both the Danes and Scotch should be interred. Malcolm, the Scottish king, is said not only to have done this, but to have founded a church, which ultimately became the church of the parish of Cruden.

The circumstance of this dedication to a Norwegian saint suggests a subject for inquiry, viz., What was the result of the Scandinavian settlements in Scotland? and it is one which would repay the labour of such of our members as could work it out.

At first sight, it does not seem probable that the Scots should have chosen to dedicate their church to the patron saint of their cruel enemies, any more than that the Danes should have erected such crosses as that called "Sueno's Stone" near Forres, to commemorate their own defeat.

The popular date of the battle of Cruden is 1006; but Olave did not meet his fate on the field of Stichstadt till the year 1030, and Malcolm died in the year 1033. According to Torfaeus, innumerable churches were dedicated to Olave in all parts of Europe. He instances one in Constantinople, another in Spain, and that at Drontheim in Norway. A church at Exeter was dedicated to him, and one at St Ola in Orkney.

But if we may not accept the account which Boece gives of the dedication of the church at Cruden, there can be no doubt that the dedication was an old one. It is probable that St Olave was looked on more as one of the body of canonised martyrs than as king of Norway; and accordingly his memory as a martyr is preserved by a collect and legend in the Breviary of Aberdeen. In the month of March his fair is still held at Cruden, and is called "St Olaus' Fair."

By some, the influence of the Northmen in moulding Scottish policy into the shape in which we find it in our early history has been greatly magnified. According to Worsaae, no small portion of the present population of Scotland, both in the Lowlands and in the remotest coasts and isles of the Highlands, is undoubtedly descended from the Northmen, and particularly from the Norwegians. He thinks that both the Norwegians and Danes, wherever they established themselves, introduced their Scandinavian customs, and preserved in all circumstances the fundamental traits of their national character, and therefore that it is probable that the Norwegian settlers in Scotland must, in certain districts at least, have exercised a vast influence on the development

of the more modern life of the Scotch people, and on their national character.

The same writer has, however, abandoned all claims to the monuments in Scotland generally ascribed to the Northmen. The "Danish" stones or pillars he pronounces to be Celtic, and he gives up to the same race those stronger Duns in the North, which are also so frequently called Scandinavian. While, however, he admits that the whole eastern coast of Scotland, from the Cheviot Hills to the Moray Firth, is entirely destitute of characteristic and undoubted Scandinavian monuments, he adds, that it must be remembered that the actual Scandinavian immigrations into the Lowlands certainly took place after the Norman Conquest of England, or, at all events, at so late a period that the Northmen could not remould the Scotch names of places into Scandinavian forms. ("The Danes and Northmen," p. 217.)

I must confess to some scepticism as to any great permanent results having accrued from any of the Scandinavian invasions of the Lowlands of Scotland. The most important of these is that of Earl Thorfinn, who is said to have ruled from Fife northwards from the year 1034 to 1064; and the Sagas relate that he burnt every hamlet and farm, so that not a cot remained. Every man that they found they slew; "but the old men and women fled to the deserts and woods, and filled the country with lamentations." (Skene's "Highlanders," vol. i. 112.) This vapouring language of the Sagas must however, I think, be taken with great limitations; and it seems, on the whole, likely that the conqueror did little more than overrun the country with his horde of robber sailors, and overawe it for a considerable period. But such occupation could leave little seed of improvement. Rather on its withdrawal the natives would have receded in civilisation, from the attitude of resistance which military occupation of their country would provoke.

It is plain, at all events, that the institutions and language of the Northmen were not impressed on the lowland country of Scotland, as they were in districts where they were able to effect permanent settlements; and it can be shown that in Buchan, which is believed to have been the seat of early Teutonic influences, there existed, about the very time of the supposed battle of Cruden and the settlement of Thorfinn, a Celtic people, with Celtic officers and a Celtic polity.

I fear that we must deny the roving Northmen any great influence in forming the language or institutions of Scotland; but yet I think the history of the gradual introduction of a Teutonic language among a Celtic people is one which requires, and may yet receive, much valuable illustration.

Mr Pratt's paper having suggested the consideration of the nature of early Scandinavian influence, I think the quotation from Boece naturally leads to another subject, which I can merely refer to, but which might well engage the attention of some of the members—viz., What are the materials on which Boece founded his history? His stories of marvels in natural history, which he personally corroborates, predispose us to receive his general statements with great suspicion; and where his history is so minute in matters of a remote date, it may safely be passed over. But yet it seems possible that there existed in his day some written authorities which have not come down to our own time. In his account of these Danish battles there seems a mixture of fact with traditionary fable; and the light which the Sagas throw upon them tends to show that there is a confusion and misplacing of facts rather than falsification or invention. But a critical examination of his work, with a view to trace out his materials, would be a curious and not altogether a barren subject.

Mr John Stuart exhibited drawings made by Mr Tate of Alnwick, of figures sculptured on rocks near the site of two hill forts in Northumberland. He considered these figures bore a marked resemblance to some of those engraved in the "Sculptured Stones of Scotland," and in the last Part of the Society's Proceedings.

At the suggestion of Lord Neaves, a small committee was named for the purpose of collecting information respecting the history and structure of our Scottish language.

A vote of thanks was then given to the Office-bearers, and the Society adjourned to the commencement of the next Winter Session—30th November 1858 (St Andrew's Day).