

III.

AN ACCOUNT OF "THE DANE'S DYKE," AN ANCIENT CAMP AT
FIFE-NESS. BY JOHN MACKINLAY, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

In the year 881, according to Chalmers's "Caledonia" (which appears to be the correct date), the Danes invaded the East Coast of Scotland, and King Constantine II., who opposed their progress, was taken prisoner by them in a battle between Crail and Fife-ness, and being carried to their camp, was there put to death in a cave, which is still traditionally pointed out as "Constantine's Cave."

Wyntoun, book vi. cap. viii., says,—

"Quhen dede wes Donald, Constantyne
Nest efter hym Kyng wes syne
Fyftene wynter in Scotland.
And wyth the Norwayes than fychtand
Wes slayne intil Verdofatha.
In Ykolmkil he lyeis alsua :
Oure hys Graive yhit to rehers
Wryttene men may fynd thir Wers ;
' Jam Constantinus fuerat rex quinque ter armis :
Regis Kynedi filius ille fuit.
In bello pugnans Dacorum corruit armis :
Nomine Nigra specus est, ubi pugna fuit.' "

Fordun, liber iv. cap. xvj., says, "Loco, cui nomen est Nigra Specus, rex bellum cum eis iniens, cum multis suorum occubuit." He adds, that the king having been separated a considerable space from the main body of his troops, was surrounded by the enemy, and slain ; and they, after their victory, having retired to their ships, the king's body was found on the field by his own people, and he was honourably buried at Iona with his fathers.

It is worthy of notice, that in both accounts "Nigra Specus" appears to have been the name of the field of battle, and that the king seems to have been slain in the battle ; and no mention is made of his being murdered in a cave after the conflict was over, as stated by Hector Boece.

Bellenden's Boece, book x. cap. xvii., after describing the skirmishing

before the battle as minutely as if the author had been present, says, "Incontinent bayth the armyes junit & faucht w^t incredibill fury quhill at last the Scottis wer put to fly^t. on quhom followit the Danis w^t lang slauchter & chace. In this unhappie battel wer slane 10,000 Scottish; amang mony uy^r prisoneris, King Constantine was tane, and brot to ane cove besyd the see, q^r he wes heidit, the 13 zeir of his reigne, fra the Incarnatioun 874 zeires. The place q^r he was slane, is zit callit the Black Cove, to be ane memorie of that wickit deid."

Macpherson, the editor of "Wyntoun's Chronicle," in his excellent "Geographical Illustrations of Scottish History," says, "Werdo fatha, Verdo fatha [Wynt.], Nigra specus [Chr. El], a cave at Fifis-nes, wherein K.-Constantine, son of Kenneth, was slain by the Norwegians. The true reading seems Wem-du-fada, meaning in Gaelic, a cave black and long, as the author of Chr. El. has understood it."

Now, if tradition is correct in pointing out the spot (and there are no other caves near it at all likely), however black it may have been actually or metaphorically, it is certainly not long, as will appear by the plans and sketch annexed (Plate XXIV.) Weem, or rather "Uaimhdhu," is a correct translation of Nigra specus, but the last syllable, "fatha," seems inexplicable.

The Danes' Dyke is a fortified inclosure or camp, occupying the point of Fife-ness. It is of a triangular figure, 933 yards in length from north to south, and 450 yards in its greatest breadth. The walls, about ten or twelve feet in thickness, were formed of flat stones, without cement. A considerable portion, about four feet in height, still remains; another part, somewhat lower, serves as the foundation of a farm-road; and the rest can be traced. The wall extended across the point of Fife-ness, and at each end advanced along a ridge projecting from the abrupt bank, and ends close to the sea. The north end of the wall terminated at a rock, in the north face of which is Constantine's Cave. The mouth of it was once closed with masonry, some of the mortar of which still adheres to the face of the rock (or at least did so at the date of the survey), but the wall is removed. The cave now resembles an open alcove; it is fifteen feet wide, and the same in depth from front to back. The annexed survey of the camp and sketch of the cave were taken in 1846. (Plate XXIV.)

From the size and strength of this fortification, it is evident that it was no hasty erection, but had probably been the headquarters of the Danes and Norwegians on the east coast for a considerable time before the battle in which Constantine was slain. Their victory, however, seems to have cost them dear, for Fordun says that they retired to their ships, and left the king's body on the field, where it was recognised and honourably interred by his own people.

ALEXANDER CHRISTIE, Esq., A.R.S.A., exhibited the original MS. of an address by the Poet Burns to Robert Graham of Fintry. Mr J. T. GIBSON CRAIG exhibited a similar (and unpublished) address by the poet to the same gentleman; also Burns's copy of Ferguson's Poems. The volume has the poet's initials stamped on the outside of the boards; his name is written on the title-page, and on the fly-leaf is a poetical paraphrase, in the poet's handwriting, on a verse of the Prophet Jeremiah.

WEDNESDAY, 16th March 1859.

J. WHITEFOORD MACKENZIE, Esq., W.S., in the Chair.

Mr MACKENZIE made some remarks regarding the series of Chronicles and Calendars now in the course of being printed by the Master of the Rolls in England, and expressed an opinion that it would be of great consequence to Scottish history, if it should come within the scope of the design, to print an abridgment of the Register of the Privy Council of Scotland. On his suggestion a committee was named for the purpose of communicating with the proper authorities on behalf of the Society, and endeavouring to get the desired object accomplished.

The following Donations were laid on the table, and thanks were as usual voted to the Donors:—

Casts of apparently "Incised" Marks on one of a Circle of Standing Stones in the Island of Lewis. By Sir JAMES MATHESON, of the Lewis, Bart.

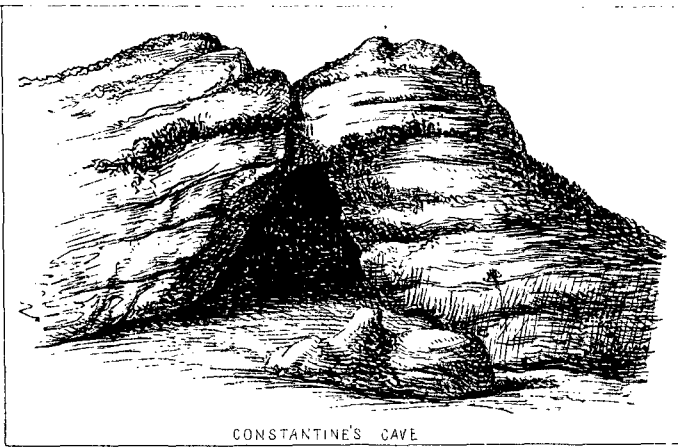
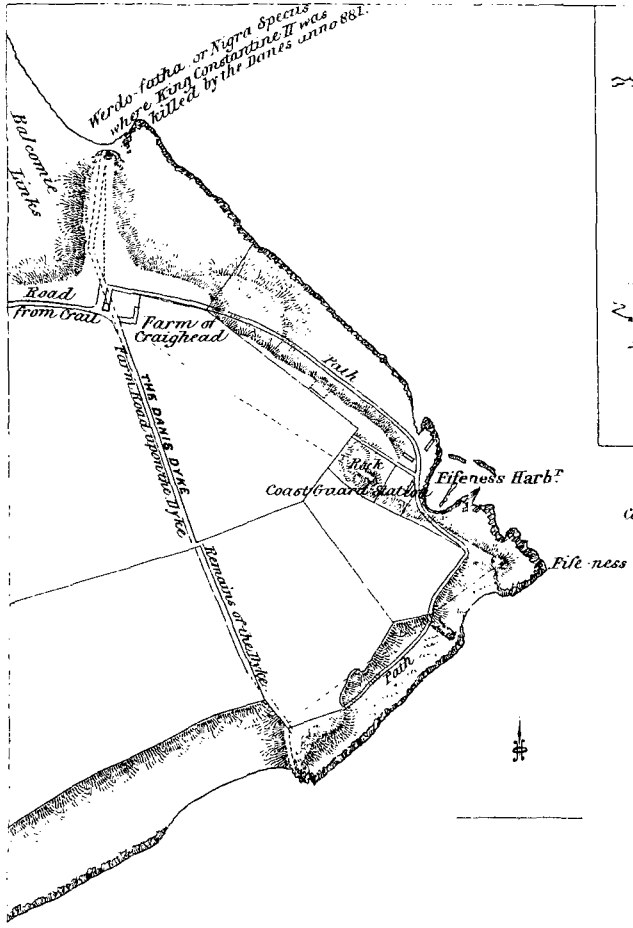
Two Rounded Implements or Ornaments of Stone, probably "Touchstones," found in a circular building in the Island of St Kilda. By T. S. MUIR, Esq.

Archæologia Æliana, or Miscellaneous Tracts relating to Antiquity. Published by the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Vol. iii. part 3; Vol. iv. Newcastle, 1844-55. 4to.

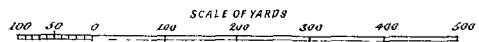
The same, New Series, Nos. 1 to 10 Newcastle, 1856-8. 8vo. By the SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

On the Banners of the Bayeux Tapestry, and of some of the earliest Heraldic charges. London, 1857. Pp. 22, 8vo. By GILBERT J. FRENCH, Esq., Bolton, the author.

The following Communications were read :—



PLAN OF THE
"DANIS DYKE"
AT
FIFE-NESS.



Surveyed June 1846 by John Mackinlay