

I.

ON THE ANCIENT STONE EDIFICES IN THE ALPS CALLED HEATHEN HUTS. BY DR FERDINAND KELLER, ZURICH, CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT. COMMUNICATED IN A LETTER TO DAVID LAING, ESQ.

You afforded me great pleasure in sending me Part I. of Vol. III. of your Proceedings, and I return you my best thanks for the same. This volume contains many excellent articles; but the notice of bee-hive houses in Harris and Lewis, by Commander Thomas, particularly interested me. They throw great light on the remains of similar stone edifices in the Alps, the age and use of which has been hitherto quite unknown to us. I make bold to send you a short description of the latter.

The canton of Glarus consists of two large valleys, the Linth and the Sernf Valley. In the latter is the narrow Uebli Valley, which is partly covered with rocks, but partly contains fine pasture-ground. On the Alps of the Uebli Valley are many so-called Heidenstafel (Heathenstafel, *paganorum stabula*), and on these again a number of remains of Heidenhütten or Heidenhäuser (heathen huts or heathen houses). I must here observe that not only the lofty mountains which separate Switzerland from Italy, but likewise the pasture-grounds on the higher mountains, are called Alps, and that the different mountain-flats are called Stafel, from the Latin word *stabula*. The heathen huts are only to be found on the upper Stafels, at an elevation of more than 4000 feet above the level of the sea, and about 2000 feet above the bottom of the valleys, and in sunny situations. The spot on which they stood is marked by heaps of stones which have been collected by human hand. At present only the foundation-walls of these huts exist, rising hardly one foot above the ground. The walls of the huts are constructed of flat stones, without the least trace of mortar. The form of the huts is in some cases a rectangle, in others an ellipsis or a circle. (See the annexed plans or sketches.) The former (fig. 2) seem to have been covered with a wooden roof; the latter (figs. 1 and 3), which have walls four feet thick, were, like the bee-hive houses, entirely built of slate. Sometimes the huts lean against a rock, which then forms one of the walls of the hut. Very

frequently two huts are connected together, one of which may have been used as a bed-room. In most of the huts the inside, which measures from 6 to 12 feet in diameter, is paved with stone. In the middle of a few are traces of a fire-place, consisting of heaped-up stones (see fig. 2).

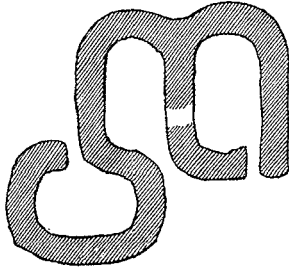


Fig. 1.

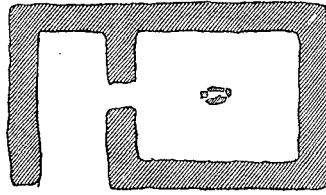


Fig. 2.

The huts invariably stand in groups of 12 to 20, and are built irregularly round a circle composed of stones, and measuring about 100 feet in diameter, somewhat as shown in fig. 3. Into this the cattle were doubt-

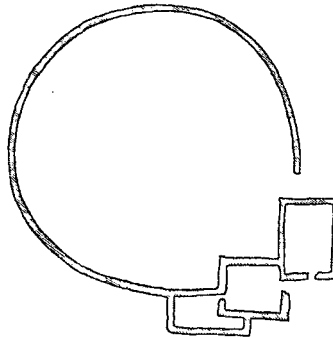


Fig. 3.

less driven at night. In and around the huts excellent earth and grass is found,—a proof that they were long inhabited. During the partial excavations which one of my friends undertook, in order to ascertain the form of the huts, unfortunately no remains of pots or utensils of

any kind were found. These huts, which are very numerous in the Lerufthal, are called the heathen huts, because they were certainly erected in heathen times. But by what particular people they were inhabited is quite unknown. History informs us that Celts, Raetians, Romans, and Allemani successively occupied the valleys of the canton of Glarus. The last mentioned, the forefathers of the present population, continued heathens about 200 years after their immigration. It is equally unknown whether the huts were inhabited by the shepherds only in summer or all the year round.

Mr Stuart expressed a hope that ere long we might obtain notices of the many similar remains which occur in Scotland, for comparison with those in Wales, Ireland, and elsewhere; and Professor Simpson adverted to their appearance not only on hills and lofty ground, but in many places in the low parts of Scotland, and he believed even within a few miles of Edinburgh, as at Comiston.