

### III.

OBSERVATIONS RESPECTING ARTICLES COLLECTED IN THE OUTER  
HEBRIDES, AND NOW PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM. BY CAPTAIN  
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No. 1. Cross-stone, Paib-le Taransay, Harris.—This stone, which is of syenite, is 16 inches long,  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad, and about 3 inches thick. On one face is an incised Latin cross; the shaft is 10 inches and the arms 6 inches in length. Both arms and the head of the cross are terminated by concave semi-spherical depressions or cups, about one inch in diameter; and in each of the angles of the cross is a like cup, forming a square of about 3 inches.

This cross-stone had been used in building the tacksman's house at Paib-le, and was taken out and preserved when some alterations were made in the house. The tradition is, that the house was built out of the ruins of St Taran's Chapel, the site of which is still very distinct within a few yards of the house; it is therefore probable that the cross-stone formed part of the furniture of the chapel. Concerning St Taran,

I know no more than that he is said, on the authority of Usher, to have been a bishop of Lismore, which place may be either in Scotland or Ireland; it is to be noted that the island is named after the saint.

A suspicion has, however, arisen in my mind that Saint Taran was a lady; for, separated only by a trifling rivulet at Paib-le, are the ruins of another chapel dedicated to a saint, who, in the first impressions of Martin's book, is called St Ché, but in subsequent editions St Keith. I am able to record, on the authority of Mr Macdonald, tacksman of Taransay, that the proper name is Ché (pronounced very like *cghay*); and a competent Gaelic scholar is of opinion that Ché and Keith are not synonymous.

The singular legend recorded by Martin must be familiar to many; it is to the effect that no man should be buried in the ground consecrated to St Taran, nor a woman in that consecrated to St Ché, or the corpse would be found above ground on the day after it was interred.

Now, in an interesting little book called "Legends of Mount Leinster," by Kennedy, I find an almost similar tradition related of a place called Temple-shambo, near Newton-Barry, in the county of Wexford. The hero, Cathal, out of gratitude for his victory over an Uile-bhiastor, monster, "intended to build a church at the old Rath of Cromoge; but getting up one morning, after a dream he had had the night before, he followed a duck and mollard<sup>1</sup> that flew before him, till they lit, one on each side of the mountain stream that flows through what was then a rocky and bushy glen, but is ever since that time the churchyard of Temple-shambo. So he built a house for monks where the drake alighted, and for the nuns on the other side. This passed about eight hundred years ago; and of course the nuns' burying-place was on one side of the stream, and the monks kept to the side of the rising of the sun. Well and good; after both buildings went to decay, or were destroyed, still the country people kept laying their dead in the old way, and no womankind ever attempted to bury herself on the men's side."

From this example we may be at liberty to suppose, that the origin of having distinct places of sepulture for the different sexes was the

<sup>1</sup> In another part of the book he is said to have followed a duck and a drake.

same at Taransay as at Temple-shambo, and that a community of holy men dwelt on that side of the burn dedicated to St Ché, and of holy women on that to St Taran.

Nos. 2 and 3 are fragments of stone dishes from a ruin at the Sands of Rath, Taransay.

A bare sand-hill, having its sides covered with loose stones, was dug into in the expectation of finding a Pict's house; it proved, however, to be only a sand-heap that a small ruin on the surface had kept from blowing, while the soil (sand) surrounding it had been excavated by the wind to a depth of 20 feet. The broken dishes were lying about.

These stone-dishes are common among the ruins of old settled places, and are usually constant in character,—an undressed slab, generally less than 2 feet square, in which is a concavity of the size and shape of an ordinary soup plate. We found a broken one when excavating a Pict's house at Paib-le, Taransay, but it was too heavy for easy transport; and I saw another at Mealista in Uig, Lewis.

What was the use of these stone-dishes is not very apparent; they are too heavy to be lifted without trouble, and the concavity is too small to be usefully employed for holding liquids. I do not think they were the fonts of the early churches; and the only plausible purpose I have heard assigned to them was for shelling barley.

It is to be observed that similar stones, which my late respected friend, Mr R. Heddle, called corn-crushers, were sepultured in a remarkable manner in a Pict's castle in South Ronaldshay, Orkneys. (See *Archæologia*, vol. xxxiv. p. 124.) But it is difficult to imagine that so bad a substitute for a mill would be in use, when a quern (parts of which are almost always turned up from the oldest dwellings) would have answered the purpose so much better.

No. 4 is the lower stone of a snuff-mill; it was brought from Valtos in Uig, Lewis; and similar instruments are still, or were very lately, in use, about 9 inches in diameter.

No. 5 is a double-pointed bone pin, found at the same place as the stone-dishes (Nos. 2 and 3), 3 inches long.

No. 6 is another bone pin, with an eye at one end. It is from Paib-le, Taransay, and has been probably used at interment;  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches long.

No. 7 is a small bronze buckle, of a rather unusual form, from Paib-le, Taransay, and, like Nos. 6 and 8, has formed part of the funeral trappings of some early Christian. It may not be out of place to observe, that it was remarked to me by an intelligent man at Paib-le, that in the earliest graves the bodies seem to have been interred in simple stone graves (*kirt-vaens*), and without any coffins.

No. 8 is a circular bronze brooch, 3 inches in diameter, found at Uidh, Taransay; though there is no tradition of a church having stood there, I have no doubt that there was one there formerly. A Latin cross, 22 inches long and 14 inches wide, the breadth of the shaft and arms being 6 inches, is incised to the depth of a quarter of an inch on a rude block of gneiss, which is 10 feet long, 2 broad above, and averages a foot in thickness. A burying-ground most usually points out the site of an ancient church, even though the ruins, as is very frequently the fact, have been entirely removed to build dikes or houses; but a circumstance has come to my knowledge which might interfere with this conclusion. In the Highlands a coffin has frequently to be carried long distances, and often over a pathless moor. It is with good reason that those who attend the funeral expect refreshment, for I have myself seen a deceased laird borne sixteen miles by relays of men. But a pauper who has outlived all his friends need expect no such attention; no one will be at the trouble of carrying him a mile, and he may be interred at some accidental spot with as little ceremony as with a dog. In some such manner a new burying-ground has been commenced behind the inn at Tarbert, Harris.

Another circumstance against which the archæologist must be on his guard is, that the remains found in a tomb or grave may belong to a very different person than the one for whom the place was made. I have been told some amusing instances of poaching on this species of property; but the most impudent is that of a boat's crew from Harris, who robbed the grave of a knight in Barra of the stone that bore his effigy—which stone now dignifies an ignoble grave in the burying-ground at the parish church of Harris!

No. 9. *Clach-nathrach*, or snake-stone, 1 inch in diameter, Lewis.—This stone is said to be formed by the association of twelve snakes, and the hole is where the snake or snakes have passed through. I am not sure whether the stone is made from the slime agglutinating the sand and earth, or whether the stone exudes from the reptiles. When the cattle are bitten by the snakes, the snake-stone is put into water, with which the affected part is washed, and it is cured forthwith. So much for the legend; and I believe one of these charms has been used quite lately; but not the least curious circumstance connected with this superstition, is the fact that there are no venomous snakes in Lewis. The blind-worm is not uncommon, but it is quite innocuous. However, there is a full belief that if a sheep, for instance, were to lie down upon one of them, the wool and skin would both peel off; and the man is probably alive who trod upon a *righinn*,—the local name for the blind-worm (from a tradition that it is a princess metamorphosed),—and in consequence the skin came off the sole of his foot.

Since my return to Edinburgh, I learn that these snake-stones are a part of the gear of the distaff; and it is strange that their original use should be quite unknown in Harris and Lewis, although the distaff is there in common use.

No. 10. Ditto.