

II.

NOTES OF VARIOUS OBJECTS OF ANTIQUITY IN STRATHNAVER.

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(PLATES XXIII. AND XXIV.)

My excursion to Strathnaver being for purposes other than archæological, will account for the brevity of the following notices. Even during my stay of several days at Syre, I was unable to set about any excavations, all hands being then busy sorting lambs.

Crossing the Kyle of Sutherland or Dornoch Firth at Bonar Bridge, the road leads by the Kyle side to Inveran, three miles. Near this, on the left, is a rude monolith, similar to those at Ospisdale and Eddertoun, but with no artificial markings. At Achany, two miles up the north side of the river Shin, and near the road, there are two circles, composed of stone and earth, and about 40 feet in diameter. Close to one of them is a tumulus. Leaving Lairg, we keep by Loch Shin side for a short distance, and then strike through Strath Tirrie. At Dalchoirc, three and a-half miles from Lairg, there is, on the left, a large cairn raised on an artificial platform; and near this, on the right, two large circles and several tumuli. To Aultnaharra Inn (? Allt-na-fhaire, Burn or stream of the Watch-tower), twenty-one miles from Lairg, the country is open

and barren. On the south side of Loch Naver, at A in map, there is a tower thus noticed in "Oliver and Boyd's Tourist," 1860:—"On a little island near the shore, under Ben Clibbrich, is a circular tower, built of large stones without cement." I saw this only from the opposite side of the loch, through a glass. It seemed in much the same condition as others subsequently noticed. At B, near the road, there are two large earth-covered circles, and a great many tumuli. Close by the loch, at C, there is a fair specimen of the double-walled round tower. Access is to be had to the passage between the walls by a small flag-roofed entrance opening from the interior of the tower (fig. 2). The walls are still about 12 feet high, at which height they measure across from the inside of the inner wall to the outside of the outer 15 feet. The interior passage, which is at this height about 18 inches wide, is open to the top in only a few places, on account of the debris with which it has been filled up. The number of stones piled against the outside wall, and lying in the interior, would account for a much higher building. At a height of about 8 feet there is a projecting ledge all round the inner wall, which may perhaps have served to support the roof of some sort of wattled shed placed against the wall, the entire inside diameter of 34 feet being probably too great to be spanned by any wooden roof of possible construction in those days. From the tower, and stretching into the lake till lost in deep water, there is a regularly flagged way, about 12 feet broad. This we should not have noticed, but that the loch was much lower than usual.

About a mile beyond the north end of Loch Naver, and on the east side of the river, at D, two upright flags, one of which is $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, stand about 25 feet apart. They are known as King Harrald's pillars, and are said to mark the place where a gigantic Danish invader fought and fell, as also to indicate the necessary length of his grave. Crossing the stream, here not very deep, I found that the slabs bore no artificial markings, and that they were but part of what had been a circle of standing stones, four more of which lay close to their original positions, while the beds of two others were plainly marked (fig. 3). Near this was a circular heather-covered enclosure with an opening to the south, and diameter of about 30 feet. A tumulus, of about 12 feet diameter, stood a few yards off.

On the hill side above Syre, at E, about half a mile from the house, are two similar circles, about 20 yards apart, and 10 yards in diameter, with openings towards the south. Close to these there lie from twenty to thirty tumuli. In the centre of one of these, which had been opened for building-stones, I found two rude slabs on edge forming a right angle, the corner, doubtless, of a cist, of which the other stones had been removed.

At F, on a terrace overlooking the Langdale river, and commanding a most extensive view, there stands a ruined round tower, the double wall of which, at 8 feet high, measures 14 feet 6 inches across. A number of cottages near were built from this tower.

Near the Naver, below Langdale, there is an old grave-yard, but all its covering slabs are, so far as I could discover, unsculptured.

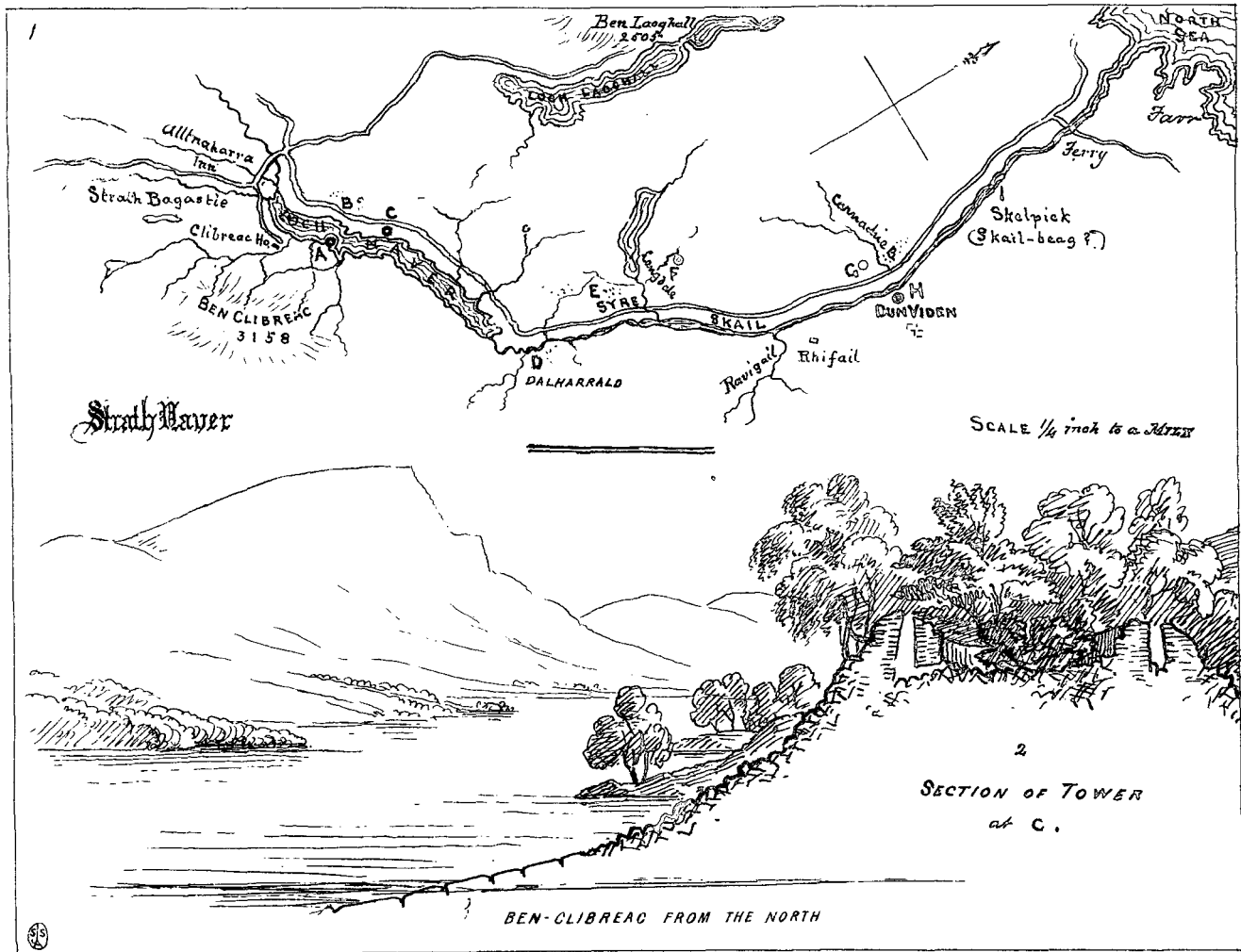
About a mile down the strath, at Skail, and between the road and the river, another old burying-ground occurs; its slabs are, like those at Langdale, from the river bed, and composed of the gneissose rock of the district. An appearance of highly relieved tracery, like twining serpents, caused by the occurrence of raised quartz veins, was characteristic of most of them, and had probably induced their selection. They were all without other sculpture than that of the river, except one short granite pillar, 14 inches in breadth and width, and 28 inches high, bearing a rudely incised cross (fig. 4). This marks the grave of the "Red Priest," who is said to have prophesied that the *men* of Strathnaver would, for their sins, be banished from the glen without hope of return, till the Naver carried his bones into the North Sea. Whether at his own request, or at the instance of those who desired to shorten, as much as consistent with decency, the period of their exile, his grave was placed at the outside of the burying-ground, next the river, from which it is now not twenty yards distant. A few years more, and, if the Naver encroaches as steadily upon its western bank as it has done since 1860, the priest's bones may well begin their northward voyage, though it is to be feared that in so short a time no sufficient change for the better will have taken place in the climate to make the strath a comfortable home for half as many men as left their little holdings there some fifty years ago.

At G there is another round tower. This I could only examine through a telescope from H. Near G there are a great many tumuli,

associated with a tradition of a clan battle, which may, however, have been a modern discovery to suit the locality, like the Red Priest's prophecy, perhaps. The round tower at H, Dun Viden, has been much destroyed for the building of neighbouring cottages. Like those already noticed, it is double-walled, and about 30 feet interior diameter. It occupies the top of an eminence very steep on all sides save one, where there is a deep ditch and breastwork. On a knoll near, several large granite slabs are placed on edge, as shown in accompanying ground-plan (fig. 5), while the marks of others which have been removed are distinctly visible.

From this point, the limit of my excursion, I could see a large heap of stones at I, which I was informed was a chambered cairn, fast being demolished for fence building.

Two more round towers are said to occur between Skelpick and the sea. These I had no time to visit. I have only to add, that the locality seems to be one which would repay scientific investigation.



Strath Moy

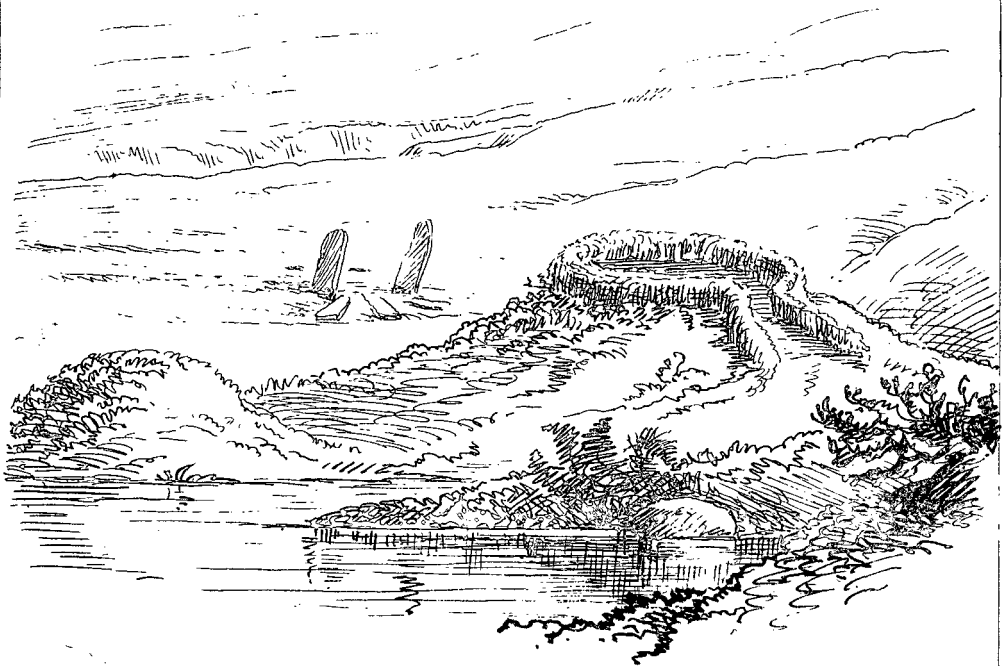
SCALE 1/4 inch to a fathom

2
SECTION OF TOWER
at C.

BEN-CLIBREAC FROM THE NORTH

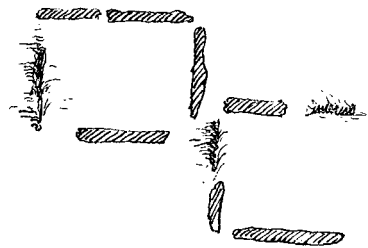
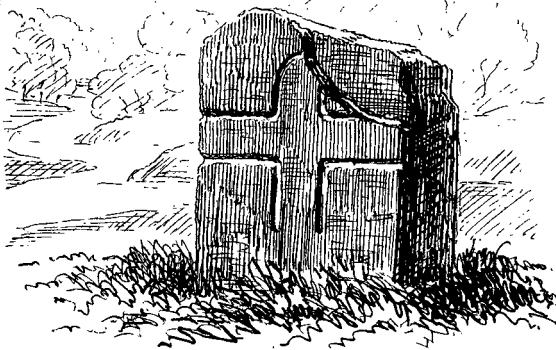


DALHARRALD 3. STRATHNAVER
SUTHERLAND.



4.

5.



10 Feet.

STONE OF THE RED PRIEST AT
SKAIL.

GROUND PLAN OF ENCLOSURES WITH SLABS AT

DIUN VIDEN

STRATHNAVER

