

## IV.

NOTICE OF THE CLACH-A-CHARRA, A STONE OF MEMORIAL AT ONICH, IN LOCHABER. BY JAMES DRUMMOND, Esq., R.S.A., F.S.A. Scot. (PLATE XIX.)

At a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in February 1863, an interesting paper was read by the Rev. Mr M'Lauchlan on certain standing stones in the island of Mull, traditionally said to have been erected, not as memorial stones, but as direction posts to the ferry for Iona. This has been so far confirmed by the fact, that some of them having been thrown down, nothing was found to indicate a place of burial. A tradition of the same sort seems at one time to have existed in East Lothian, in reference to a series of standing-stones, a few of which only now remain. These, from their position, were supposed to show the way to Edinburgh: unfortunately for the tradition in this instance, there seems no doubt that originally they were memorial, whatever use they may latterly have been applied to. The first of these is one between Dunbar and the village of Spott. Towards the end of last century, during farm operations the workmen came upon a perfect cemetery of rude stone-coffins, so many that a number of the farm-yards in the neighbourhood were paved with the large flags of which they were made; but whether urns or other relics were found in the graves I could not ascertain, although many urns have since been found in this neighbourhood. In the middle of this field of the dead stood the monolith alluded to. A few miles further west, under the shadow of Dunpender, an ancient British fort, stand two more of those stones, near which graves have been found; the opening of one of these will be in the recollection of some of the members of the Society who were present on the occasion. Then there stands another in a field at Athelstaneford, having its tradition; and no doubt many more have been destroyed. In our own immediate neighbourhood we have many such standing-stones, the largest and most important of these being the Caiy-Stane; and near this, at one time, stood the Camus-Stane, which was ruthlessly broken up some years ago for road-metal. There

is one in the grounds at Morton Hall and another near Craigmillar Castle. In passing, I may mention a carved stone built into the wall of a farm-house near this, representing a castle, and between the towers two shields of arms very much defaced; it is said to have been taken from a hunting seat of one of the Jameses in this neighbourhood. The Buck-Stane is built into a wall by the roadside near Morton Hall, which, on a close examination, is evidently the remaining portion of a wayside cross. And there is the well-known Bore-Stane, now preserved on the top of a wall at Morningside; this, I need scarcely mention, is the stone on which was planted the banner of James IV. as the rallying point for his army, on the Borough-Moor, previous to the disastrous battle of Flodden. Wherever one goes such stones are found, some with traditions, but the greater majority without.

In the parish of Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire, is a very interesting stone, or rather rock; here it is said Macbeth, when mortally wounded, rested, previous to taking refuge in the Peel Bog, where he died; his cairn is not far from this. Near Finzean House is one called Dardanus' Stone, and in a field close by is an immense cairn raised to the same. Some of these early monoliths, however, have a tradition attached to them of a comparatively modern date. A striking instance of this is the "Tombh Clavers," at Killiecrankie, now so called from being near the spot where Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee, was killed in 1689. But all stones of this class are not consequently of prehistoric times, so to speak; for had we not only the other day, a stone erected by "The Men," to commemorate the miraculous parting of the waters of the Spey, that the body of "a certain woman" might be carried across to her last resting-place?

But the stone to which I wish particularly to call attention is the "Clach-a-Charra," at Onich, in Lochaber. About the meaning of this word there are differences of opinion. The Rev. Mr Stewart, minister of the parish, writes me: "It is difficult to translate literally into English, but which means, as nearly as possible, The Stone or Pillar of the cunningly-carried-out-reprisal." Others again say that it means the "Stone of Retribution or Vengeance;" while some one, who seems to know his Gaelic well, writing a notice of it in the "Inverness Courier," says the word simply means "the Stone Pillar, Obelisk, or

Monolith." In connection with this stone there is a very remarkable tradition—so remarkable, in fact, that although first told me by the Rev. Mr Stewart, I made inquiry in various quarters to ascertain whether it was known *away* from its own immediate locality. On asking Dr MacIntyre of Fort-William if there was any tradition in connection with this stone, he related the same story, and moreover stated, that from his earliest years he had heard no other. On applying to the Rev. Mr Clark of Kilmalie, who is deeply versed in such matters, he gave the same tradition "as all he had ever been able to gather about it." As his version is shorter than the others, I give it. Comyn, the last Lord of Badenoch, and his two sons, having been present on the occasion of the marriage of the three daughters of one of his clansmen, wished to enforce the savage privilege of the *mercheta mulierum*, handing over the others to his sons. The clansmen very naturally rose in arms against this monstrous oppression. Comyn and his sons fled. The young men were overtaken and killed; but the father escaped, and wandered as far as Strath-Erick, where, after ascending the long slopes above the River Dee, he seems to have died of exhaustion, the name of the place being since "Sindhe Chuimein," or Comyn's Seat. He was buried at Fort-Augustus, the Gaelic name of which is "Cill-a-Chuimein," or "burial-place of the Comyn." I should mention that Mr Clark thinks the Comyns had nothing to do with it. A tradition such as this is valuable only when it accords with other known historical facts; in the present instance, as far as the *Comyn and his two sons* are concerned, it must fall to the ground, the genealogy of the Lords of Badenoch of this name being well known. The first was Walter, who, marrying the Countess of Menteth in 1231, became Lord of Badenoch, and dying without issue in 1258, was succeeded by his nephew John, called the Black; he was succeeded by his only son John, called the Red Comyn, who was stabbed by Bruce in the convent of the Minorite Friars at Dumfries in 1305; he again was succeeded by his only son John, who died without issue in 1325-6. The name of the place where he is said to have died, and the name of the church or burial-place—Killie Cumine, or Church of St Comghan of Ardnamurchan, of the Scottish and Irish Calendars—being somewhat similar in sound, no doubt, suggested the Comyns in connection with the tradition, that family having at one time been the lords superior of the dis-

trict.<sup>1</sup> In this opinion the Rev. Dr Mc'Lauchlan and other authorities quite concur. Many objections, no doubt, will be started to this strange tradition, which I have given as related to me; yet, with all the objections which may be stated against it, the very existence of such a tradition in such a locality is extraordinary. It is not my intention to enter into any discussion upon this vexed question, as to whether this law was ever enforced in its more barbarous form, or was a mere tax payable on the marriage of a daughter; if the former, it would appear, even at this early time, to have been in disuse, as the very proposal was considered so offensive, that nothing less than blood could efface the insult. Moreover, if the tradition is founded on fact, it would require no great stretch of imagination to suppose that the usual tax, whatever that may have been, not being forthcoming, the chief made the proposal which ended so tragically. There is also a superstitious tradition in connection with this stone, of a class common in many countries. I was told in all seriousness by a brother of the farmer, that on one occasion it was taken up to form a bridge over a small stream in the neighbourhood; the workmen in the morning found it gone, having of its own accord wandered back and taken up its own position,—putting one in mind of the Santo Bambino, which was sacrilegiously stolen from one of the sidechapels in the Church of Ara Coeli, but was found in the morning in its own blessed niche, having miraculously walked back through the night for the edification of the faithful and the benefit of its priestly guardians. The height of the stone is 6 feet 8 inches, its greatest breadth 3 feet 10 inches. I am sorry to see that my friend Dr

<sup>1</sup> When the tradition was first mentioned to me, I suggested, in connection with the name "Killie Cumine," the possibility of a church and a saint, but my informant scouted the idea, never having heard of such a saint. Afterwards, when writing him, I mentioned St Comghan or Cumine, and other early ecclesiastics of the name, who might either have built the church, or after whom it might have been called, and also told him of the genealogy of the Comyns of Badenoch; but to no effect: he, like the *Inverness Courier* correspondent, standing up for the Clach-a-charra and its tradition,<sup>1</sup> in defiance of facts, "as a monument erected to perpetuate the memory of a deed that at once hurled a petty tyrant from his usurped lordship of Lochaber and Badenoch!"

<sup>1</sup> "Probably," he writes me, "about the time of the Red Comyn."

Wilson has ranked this among the class of perforated standing-stones, having traditions connecting them with Pagan rites and superstitions, from there being two small weather or water-worn holes through it, of about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches diameter, which, when the stone was first erected, must have been much smaller if there at all; however, I am certain that had Dr Wilson described the stone from personal observation he would not have expressed such an opinion.<sup>1</sup>

I would allude to another standing-stone in this part of the country—at the head of Loch Sunart—which having been used for a practical purpose, had its name changed to “Clach Brangais,” or Stone of the Branks or Jougs, the staple and part of them still remaining, as we find on the pillars of all our market-crosses.

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MONDAY, 12th February 1866.

DAVID LAING, Esq., LL.D., Vice-President, in the Chair.

The Right Hon. Lord Lovat, having been duly proposed and admitted, the following Gentlemen were at the same time balloted for, and elected Fellows of the Society:—

BRUCE A. BREMNER, M.D., Edinburgh.

JAMES T. IRVINE, Esq., Architect, London.

JOHN LINDSAY, Esq., Woodend, Almond Bank, Perth.

WILLIAM REID, Esq., W.S., Edinburgh.

ALEXANDER WHYTE, Esq., Accountant, South Queensferry.

The following Donations to the Museum and Library were announced, and thanks voted to the Donors:—

(1.) By the Rev. GEORGE MURRAY, Manse, Balmaclellan.

Large Stone Hammer, 3 inches in thickness, broken across at the perforation for handle. It was found in the parish of Balmaclellan, Galloway.

Winged Celt or Palstave,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, of yellowish coloured bronze, found in the parish of Dalry, Kirkcudbrightshire.

<sup>1</sup> Prehistoric Annals of Scotland. By Daniel Wilson, LL.D. 1863.

- (2.) By Sir DAVID BREWSTER, K.H., F.R.S., Principal of the University of Edinburgh.

Iron oblong-shaped Padlock, 3 inches in greatest length, with hasp, much corroded. It was found in an artificial cave or "Eirde-house," in the parish of Alvey, Inverness-shire. A note respecting the discovery of the cave was communicated to the Society by Sir David Brewster, in February 1863. (See *Proceedings*, vol. v. page 119.)

- (3.) By A. CAMPBELL SWINTON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Admission Ticket to "Shakespears Jubilee, the 6th and 7th of September, at Stratford-upon-Avon. This ticket admits one on the 6th to the Oratorio. The Dedication Ode. The Ball. And to the great Booth at the Fireworks. One Guinea. (Signed) Geo. Garrick. No. 182."

The ticket shows on the left side a figure of Shakespear leaning on a pedestal. In his left hand he holds a scroll, and with the right points to the inscription thereon—"The man that hath no music in himself is fit for treasons," &c. Encircling the head is, "We ne'er shall look upon his like again."

Silver Medal of the Shakespear Jubilee. Ob. Bust of Shakespear looking to right, "WE SHALL NOT LOOK UPON HIS LIKE AGAIN." Rev. "JUBILEE AT STRATFORD IN HONOUR AND TO THE MEMORY OF SHAKESPEARE. Sept. 1769. D. G., Steward." The ticket and medal were used at the Jubilee by the grandfather of the donor.

Men of the Merse; a Lecture. By A. Campbell Swinton. 12mo. Privately printed. Edin., 1858.

- (4.) By Mr D. MACPHERSON, Thistle Street.

Steel Watch-Seal, with ornamental open cut handle, and shark's skin Case. On the face of the seal is incised the armorial bearings, crest, and supporters of the Baronets of Ross of Balnagowan, Ross-shire.

- (5.) By Mr W. T. M'CULLOCH, Keeper of the Museum.

Silver Watch-Seal with open worked handle. On the face is displayed the armorial bearings and crest, apparently of a family of Carletons, an old family in Cumberland carrying these charges, except the helmet, which has probably been assumed by some cadet as a difference. Another branch of the family settled in Ireland, and a descendant was created

Lord Dorchester in 1786. The seal was said to have been found some years ago in digging near the harbour at Leith. From the style of art it may have been made towards the end of last century.

(6.) By KENMURE MAITLAND, Esq., Sheriff-Clerk of Mid-Lothian.

Arrow Heads of Obsidian, varying from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length; and three core-like portions of Obsidian, varying in length from  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches to 5 inches—they are chipped all round; irregularly-shaped portion of Obsidian,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length, bearing a rude resemblance to the upper part of a human figure, probably an idol.

Stone semi-globular Button or Tableman,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch in diameter, ornamented with a regular incised pattern, and pierced with a hole through its centre.

(7.) By ADAM DAWSON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Two iron Spear-heads, with sockets for attaching them to the handles. One is leaf-shaped, and measures  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length; the other is 11 inches in length, the blade is broadest below, and tapers to a point above. The spear-heads were found in digging a drain in the native forest on a coffee plantation in Ceylon.

(8.) By D. H. ROBERTSON, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

Two Human Skulls, found in digging at the Citadel, Leith.

(9.) By MISS SOPHIA J. HOPE VERE of Craigie Hall, through Professor Sir J. Y. Simpson, Bart., V.P.S.A. Scot.

Four portions of Plaster, showing traces of red and green colour, from the walls of a Roman villa excavated at Seavington, Somersetshire, and collected by the donor; also two portions of Mosaic Pavement, one composed of red brick tesserae, the other of small white and black stones; a separate Tessera; an Oyster Shell; portions of Red Brick Tile, marked with crossing lines; small Brick or Tessera; portion of Clay Pipe or Spout, and portion of a Bone found in the same excavation. Miss Vere accompanied the donation with the following notice:—

*“The Remains of the Roman Villa at Seavington, Somersetshire.”*

“The locality has long been known to antiquaries as one exceeding rich in the buried treasures of the past. The site of these newly discovered ruins commands a view of Ham Hill (the great local Roman sta-

tion), and is placed directly upon the line of the Fosseway, which was the great ancient road from Bath and Ilchester to Petherton Bridge, Dinnington, and Windwhistle to Axminster, where it joined the Skened Way, which came from Norfolk through Dorchester and Bridport. Roman coins appear to have been scattered almost broadcast about the neighbourhood.

“The field in which the villa was found forms part of a farm belonging to Earl Poulett.

“As regards the remains already disclosed, they reveal, at the distance of about two feet below the surface of the soil, a space measuring about 30 feet by 20, which is evidently the remains of a portion of an extensive residence inhabited some fifteen centuries ago by a Roman gentleman who had brought with him to conquered Britain the luxurious habits of his countrymen. The by no means careful excavators have revealed the ground-floor of at least one large room and a passage, or an ante-room, covered with mosaic pavement composed of the usual tesserae, of regular design, and formed of about 12-inch squares of red, white, and blue, with flues underneath, as usual (a hypocaust), for the Romans heated their living rooms from below. The tesserae are coarse and rather large, but smaller and more elaborate ones have been found in fragments, as if to indicate that the remains of the principal apartments are still buried beneath the soil. Portions of the walls are visible, and the stucco with which they were ornamented still shows the pattern and colours almost as fresh as when first laid on. Fragments of roofing tiles are also in profusion. These tiles were evidently formed of blue clay resembling that found in the neighbourhood of Westport, for the fire with which they were burnt has reddened the surfaces only. Large quantities of ashes have been carted away—the contents, perhaps, of the ash-pit, with oyster-shells and other culinary tokens. There were also fragments of crockery, an iron chisel, an ivory pin, and a great number of bones, apparently those of human beings, including the almost perfect skeleton of an infant.”

(10.) By D. H. ROBERTSON, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

Great Britain's Coasting Pilot, being a new and exact Survey of the Sea-Coast of England and Scotland, the Scilly Islands, and Orkney and Shetland. By Captain Greenville Collins. Large folio. Lond. 1776.



(11.) By GEORGE CORSANE CUNINGHAME, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Blazons of the Ensignes of Britain and Armorial Bearings of the Nobilitie of England, Scotland, and Ireland, MS., with coloured Plates, supposed to be in the handwriting of Alex. Nesbit, the author of "A System of Heraldry," first published in 1721. 12mo. Circa 1700.

A MS. "List of Persons concerned in the Rebellion, either as Principals or as aiding and assisting the Rebels, within the various ports of Scotland, copied from the papers furnished by the officers of the Ports, and delivered agreeable to the Lord Justice-Clerk's directions." MS. folio. May to July 1746.

The volume contains reports from the ports of Leith, Dundee, Montrose, Glasgow, Port-Glasgow, Ayr, Irvine, Greenock, Aberdeen, Anstruther, Stranraer, Kirkcaldy, Banff, Peterhead, Fraserburgh, Stonehaven, Dumfries, Borrowstounness, Prestonpans, Wigtown, Campbelton, Orkney, Perth, Inverness, Lochbroom, Thurso, and Kirkcudbright.

(12.) By the Right Hon. the LORD PROVOST, MAGISTRATES, and COUNCIL of the City of Edinburgh.

Report on the Sanitary Condition of the City of Edinburgh, with relative Appendices, &c. By Henry D. Littlejohn, M.D. 8vo. Edin. 1865.

(13.) By JAMES STUART, Esq., the Author.

Historical Sketches of the Church and Parish of Fowlis Easter. 12mo. Dundee, 1865.

(14.) By J. R. APPLETON, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Notices of the Family of Evans. 4to (pp. 24). Newcastle, 1864.

The following Communications were read :—



Photographed by Messrs Nelson.

THE CLACH-A-CHARRA, A MEMORIAL STONE AT ONICH, LOCHABER.