

## I.

### NOTICE OF THE GALLOW HILL, AUCHTERLESS, AND OF CIRCULAR FOUNDATIONS AND TUMULI, AND VARIOUS RELICS DISCOVERED THERE. BY MR JAMES FORREST, SCHOOLMASTER, AUCHTERLESS, ABERDEENSHIRE.

The Gallow Hill lies about two miles to the north-west of the Kirk-town of Auchterless, and nearly four miles, as the crow flies, north of the Roman camp on the Ythan. A tracing of it, kindly sent me by Lieutenant Nixon, of the Ordnance Survey, accompanies this notice.

How the hill received its name I do not pretend to say. The country people affirm that on it, in old times, criminals were executed; but it is questionable if they have any other ground for this beyond the suggestiveness of the name. There is a moat hill in the parish, just beside the parish church, but the distance between this and the Gallow Hill affords strong presumption against their connection with one another; and further, there is another hill, about a fifth of a mile from the moat, which tradition mentions as the place of execution.

Did it receive its name from the "stone circles?" There is one upon it, and another quite close to it, which bears to this day an ugly reputation. It is said that any one who dares to take away a stone from it will be haunted, and have no peace nor luck until he restores it to its place. The grandfather of the late laird of Hatton took away two of the standing stones to form pillars for a gate, but tradition goes that so many accidents occurred in consequence of this sacrilege, that he was obliged to take the stones back again, and they now lie beside their neighbours, with the iron staples still fixed in them. But it may be very safely concluded that their unshapeliness had as much to do with their being returned as their reputed power of bringing ill-luck.

The Gallow Hill long bore the character of a haunted place, especially on its southern side, where it slopes into the howe of the Auld Yoch (Alt Heugh?) Many a time, it is said, has some belated wight had to encounter the ghosts of murdered men whose bones lay bleaching on the hillside; and often, too, has the passer-by heard the wailing of some infant crying "Nameless," "Nameless." But these superstitious fears, and even the traditions themselves, are fast disappearing. So much has the encroachment of human habitations upon, and the cultivation of, the hill destroyed all the ancient regard for it, that it would soon have been covered with cultivated fields, and all its antiquities would have passed away unnoticed, had it not been for the casual remark of a farmer who rents a portion of it. About a year ago, he remarked in the course of conversation, that he had found several urns and "bone heaps" while engaged in trenching his land on the hill. He also remarked that there were a number of curious circles along the face of the hill, and that he had found great numbers of "darts" made of flint.

In consequence of his remarks I visited the hill several times alone, and once along with the Rev. Messrs Sutherland, of Tillymorgan, and Brebner, of Ythan Wells. We made several excavations, and came upon an urn containing bones and bone-earth. Having taken specimens of these to Colonel Forbes-Leslie, he advised me to write to the Society of Antiquaries, and give an account of the various things that had been found.

I now subjoin, in detail, a description of the antiquities discovered.

*Circular Houses.*—More than thirty circular houses are said to have been

once discernible on the hill, on its east, south, and west sides; but now, owing to the extension of cultivation, not more than twelve can be accurately traced, and only six of these remain almost untouched. They consist of a rim of earth, averaging 6 feet in breadth, and a hollow cavity in the centre, and measure, from the middle of the rim, on an average 30 feet in diameter, much larger, apparently, than the generality of such houses. In one that was partially examined there was found a hole very nearly in the centre, measuring about 1 foot in diameter, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  feet in depth, in which nothing was discovered but some decayed wood, which seemed to be the remains of a large pole that had been driven about two feet into the hole, and was possibly intended to support the other poles that formed the roof of the wigwam. At the north-east and south-west points of the house remains of fires were discernible by quantities of ashes and charred wood, apparently oak (?), birch, and hazel. In each of the circles a depression, corresponding to a door, can be very distinctly traced, and all these doors invariably point to the rising sun.

*Tumuli.*—The remains of nine tumuli are still discernible, but only two small ones are now in a state of preservation. The others have been turned up without examination during the last few years in the reclamation of the waste land. All we know of them is that they contained urns and bones, which the cultivators seem to have considered not worth the trouble of preserving.

These tumuli are composed of slaty stones (the district being of the clay-slate formation) and water-worn pebbles. The slate-stones were carefully laid on edge, in courses apparently round the urns, and sloping towards them. This appeared, at least in the case of two of the tumuli that were partially examined; for on following the slope of the stones we came upon an urn in each. The pebbles appear to have been cast on merely to increase the size of the heap. All the cairns were covered with mossy earth to the depth of an inch or two.

Of these tumuli five large ones were situated about thirty yards apart from one another, almost in a straight line east and west at the commencement of the Auld Yoch Howe. Above these, in about the space of three acres of land, was found the greatest number of arrow-heads imbedded an inch or two below the surface of the soil. Great numbers are said to have been found by persons engaged in "casting divots" to cover the roofs of

their houses, as well as potato pits, &c. May we not infer from this that a battle was one day fought on the spot between two hostile tribes? or are we to suppose that these numerous arrow-heads afford evidence of funeral games in honour of the dead?

The sizes of the tumuli vary, some being 24 feet in diameter, and others only 12 feet. By far the largest were those five already mentioned. In what *appears* only to have been a tumulus a hole was found, about 2 feet in diameter and 4 feet in depth, carefully lined on sides and bottom with clay. This tumulus had been interfered with, apparently a good while ago; and if anything had been in the hole it had then been removed. The question suggests itself, Was this a tumulus or a dwelling-house? Certainly an urn was found in the cairn raised on it, but may it not have been used as a house first, with its store-hole for weapons, &c., and afterwards had the cairn with the urns raised over it?

Each tumulus appears to have contained several urns containing bones and bone-earth. From the whitened and shrunken appearance of the bones we may infer that they were calcined. The bone-earth, again, is composed of small fragments of these bones imbedded in the moss, which has split and completely filled up the urns. Unfortunately, all the urns have thus given way in the taking out; but the portions of three nearly complete, with a quantity of the calcined bones and bone-earth, have been preserved, and are now at Knockleith House (Major Duff's), while the fragments of a fourth lately was preserved at Hatton Castle; but whether it is there still I do not know.

Of the best preserved two at Knockleith, the one measures 26 inches round the middle, and the other 20 inches, both being about 7 inches high, and resembling in shape a common earthenware jar, with an edging of crossed lines round the top.

These urns were formed of red clay, once to be found in the neighbourhood, and seem to have been formed with the hand and baked in the fire. For rests and covers rough slate-stones were used, rounded in shape, the covers being smaller and thinner than those on which the urns rested.

*Relics.*—These are not many in number, nor of much importance. So far as has yet been discovered, they consist of arrow-heads, stone whorls, celts, sling-stones, and plate-stones.

The arrow-heads were once found, as has been previously stated, in

great abundance, spread over a few acres to the north of the five tumuli before referred to, and more sparingly along the brow of the hill in the immediate neighbourhood of the circular houses. A great many have been lost or ignorantly destroyed by the finders, who commonly used them as flints "to strike fire" with. The usual forms are the triangular with barbs and stems, without barbs, serrated, and leaf-shaped.

The stone whorls are made of clay-slate. Only two have as yet been met with, and one of these is lost. The remaining one was found lately in trenching out one of the circular houses, and measures 4 inches in diameter. It is rather rough-looking, but apparently has seen a good deal of service. [This seems not to be a whorl, but one of the larger pierced stones, the use of which has not been well determined.]

Two celts have been found, the larger of gritty stone, measuring  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in breadth; while the smaller is of a darker colour and closer grain, and measures about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch in breadth.

A small round stone, resembling in shape and size a partridge's egg, is supposed to have been a sling-stone. If not, it may probably have been one of those used for the purpose of heating water. Another, somewhat larger, but similar in shape, had some marks upon it, which, if we can depend on the description of them given by the finder, seem to have resembled Greek characters. It has most unfortunately been lost.

Several circular slaty stones, more carefully dressed and polished than those used for rests and covers to the urns, have been found in the circular houses. One, at least, from its size, shape, and polish, would lead to the inference that it had been used as a stone-plate.

These are the leading facts I have been able to gather about the antiquities on the Gallow Hill of Auchterless, and I shall only be too happy to make a more vigorous search, as soon as the season permits, for more information about this once large and important settlement.