

III.

NOTES ON CAIRNS, A STONE CIRCLE, AND AN INCISED STONE IN
 CARSPHAIRN, KIRKCUDBRIGHTSHIRE. By W. R. M'DIARMID, Esq.,
 F.S.A. Scot.

The parish of Carsphairn is the most northerly in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, running like a wedge into Ayrshire and Dumfriesshire. Its most prominent features are Cairnsmore, and Loch Doon, from which issues the classic river of the same name. Cairnsmore is a huge mass of Silurian rock, its sides seamed with the grinding of glaciers, rising to the height of 2696 feet above the level of the sea. There is an old Galloway verse regarding this hill :—

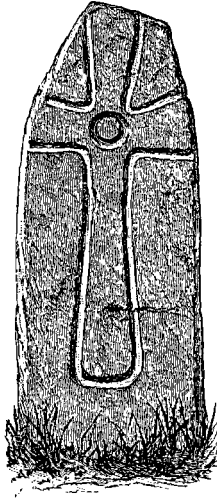
“ There’s Cairnsmore of Fleet,
 And there’s Cairnsmore of Cree ;
 But Cairnsmore of Carsphairn
 Is the highest of all the three.”

The parish is drained by two streams, Carsphairn burn and the river Deuch, which join each other near the parish church. The land is chiefly hilly, but almost in the centre of the parish there is an extensive plain, commencing near the junction of the streams already mentioned and extending northward for a distance of two miles, which is called the Holm of Daltallachan. That this has been the bed of an ancient lake is almost self-evident, and equally so that the barrier which cooped up the waters of Carsphairn and Deuch was a moraine which had crept down from Cairnsmore during the Ice Age, the remains of which are still visible on both sides of the stream at the point where it now flows past what was once its prison.

Some event or events of considerable importance appear to have occurred on the northern portion of this holm. On the holm itself there is a stone circle, and on the banks of the ancient lake, within a mile on the east, is the Cairn of Lagwine ; within half a mile on the north the remains of the Cairn of Daltallachan, and within a mile and a half on the south-west the Cairn of Avel.

No mention is made of these cairns or of the stone circle in the first Statistical Account of Scotland. In the second, dated 1844; the following passage is to be found:—"There are scarcely any traces of antiquities in this parish except some very large cairns. It is said that in removing some of these, stones in the form of coffins have been found containing human bones. One of the largest is not far from the church near the road leading to Dalmellington on the farm of Holm of Daltallachan. On the same farm and at no great distance are found large stones forming a circle."

This stone circle stands upon the northern end of the Holm of Daltallachan. It consists of thirteen stones, all of which now, whatever they may



Stone with Incised Cross.

have been originally, are in a horizontal position. They are all of the Silurian rock of the district; two of them contain pebbles and crystals of quartz. The circle is not now regular; it measures 67 feet 6 inches in length by 54 feet in breadth. On the north the stones lie in pretty regular order, and are distant from each other 4 and 5 yards; on the south side two of the stones now lie close together; the two largest stones lie on the east and west sides; the stone on the former is 6 feet in length, that on the latter 7 feet. On several of the stones there are holes which may be cup markings, but were more probably formed by the dropping out of pebbles.

The cairn of Daltallachan stood on the bank above the Holm, and was, according to the Statistical Account, one of the largest. It has now almost entirely disappeared, there being only a few stones left, which serve to mark its former site. The stones of this cairn were gradually removed for the purpose of building dry stone dykes and sheepfolds. When the lower strata were taken away, about 1850, there was found at the bottom of the cairn an incised stone which was

removed to Daltallachau farm-house, and on the tenant leaving the district about five years ago, the stone was taken to the adjoining farm of Garryhorn, and it now stands in the shrubbery in front of the house. In 1877 I examined this stone and made a rubbing of it; and I revisited it recently in company with Mr G. H. Park, who made the drawing of the stone from which the foregoing woodcut has been engraved.

The Lagwine cairn stands eastward of the remains of the old mansion-house of Lagwine, the only house in the parish of Carsphairn with any claim to antiquity. The situation is charming, and the house is approached by a fine avenue of trees. It is interesting as being the reputed birth-place of Sir Loudon Macadam, the celebrated road engineer. According to the statistical account already quoted, "he was said to have narrowly escaped in infancy when the family mansion of Lagwine was consumed by fire. The body of Sir Loudon is interred at Moffat, but the family tomb is in the churchyard of Carsphairn."

The Lagwine cairn is formed of small stones unrounded by water, such as may be gathered at the foot of any rocky hillside. The form of the cairn is circular and can yet be made out without difficulty, but a large portion of the material of which it was composed has been removed for building purposes; there is a large sheepfold in the vicinity of the cairn. In circumference the cairn measures 363 feet; and its height is now about 20 feet.

The situation of Cairn Avel is more retired than that of either of the others, although it is the nearest to the village of Carsphairn, and this cairn is nearly intact. The stones which have been removed had lain on the north-west portion of the circle, and the height of the cairn appears not to have been lowered. The form is a somewhat irregular circle, 236 feet in circumference, and the height is fully 20 feet; although rude and simple in construction the effect of this piled up mass of stones rising on a lonely hillside is singularly impressive. It may be mentioned that while the cairns of Daltallachan and Lagwine take their names from the farms on which they stand, the cairn of Avel gives its name to the farm which is called Cairn Avel.