

II.

NOTES ON NORTH MULL. BY PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., F.S.A. SCOT.

Were a line drawn from Pennygown on the Sound of Mull to the deep indentation on the west coast formed by Loch na Keal, the district lying to the north of this line is that in which the following notes were made. I have visited North Mull thrice, on the last occasion having spent eight weeks in it, with the view of examining its geology, and at the same time jotting down any archæological facts that might be met with. Conditions of the surface were expected of interest from the point of view of geologico-archæology. It was soon found that the locality affords very full scope for hypothesis, in connection with so-called scientific data; but I have tried to limit myself as much as possible to facts. The geology of this part of the island might almost be said to be without a literature, if we except the excellent papers of Professor Judd, published in 1878. It has fared even worse as regards the literature of its archæology. In 1818 Macculloch wrote,—“Uninteresting and inconspicuous as are in general the antiquities which occur in the islands hitherto described, those to be seen in Mull are still more rare and less deserving of notice. The enumeration of cairns, barrows, or gravestones is indeed fruitless and scarcely capable of furnishing amusement to the mere antiquary. Nor does any monument of this nature seem here to exist worthy of investigation or research.” (*Western Isles*, vol. i. p. 535.)

The field has in a great measure been left untouched, and to one entering it for the first time it presents the freshness and interest, if not novelty, which we associate with an unexplored territory. The relations of its different lavas both among themselves and to the more recent traps; the influence of these volcanic masses on the edges of the coal measures, which they meet at some points, and on the liassic beds which they break at others, leaving them as fragments of a fringe around the coast; the proofs of remarkable denudation which everywhere meet the eye; the innumerable marks of glacial action, on the low ground, in elevated valleys, on the hill

slopes, even to the summit of Speenie More, 1455 feet above the level of the sea; and the lie, depth, and characteristic contents of peat deposits, are all of greatest interest to the geologist. And I venture to affirm, in view of Maculloch's statement, that the archaeologist will find it not less interesting. The antiquarian notices in the new statistical account are very meagre and unsatisfactory. And the only other references to the antiquities of North Mull with which I am acquainted occur in a short paper by Professor Judd, entitled "Notices of some Ancient Chapels and other remains in the Island of Mull."

In conversation with good Celtic scholars, I learned that in the names of natural objects and of places there are traces of what might be called tribal layers of population—Pictish, Cymric, Norse. And I am persuaded that rich rewards await competent students who shall enter this field, and work in the lines followed by the author of *Celtic Scotland*, by Captain Thomas, in his contributions to our *Proceedings*, and by Dr Maclauchlan, our late Vice-President. It lies outside of my studies. I propose to ask the attention of the Society to the present notes in the following order:—Standing Stones, Stone Circles, and Forts, reserving Sculptured Tombstones, and some general notices, for another meeting.

1. *Standing Stones and Circles*.—In the district the term standing stones is applied both to stone circles and monumental monoliths. But as it is well to distinguish between them, I begin with the latter.

(a) The Ardnacroiss stone, about 4 miles south of Tobermory, is situated on a cultivated slope nearly 600 feet above the sea, on the farm of the same name. It consists of compact bluish trap, common in the neighbourhood, and measures 9 feet 4 inches in height, 3 feet 10 inches in breadth at the surface of the slope, 1 foot 4 inches in thickness at the same, is a little broader and thicker two feet up, and then gradually tapers to a blunt top. Its position is unusually grand. That these stones, however, were not always placed in such outstanding situations is shown by reference to (b) another, which stands near the foot of the steepest part of the Torloisk road about a mile to the west of Kilninian Church. Compared with the Ardnacroiss stone, this one is small, the height being 5 feet 6 inches, the

breadth 2 feet, and the thickness only half a foot. At present well-wooded slopes lie around it shutting out the view, but even were the spot treeless the view would not be wide.

(c) Not far from Ardnacroiss, to the north and higher up the slope of Tom Perock (808 feet), is a stone 5 feet long, 3 feet 6 inches broad, and nearly as thick, lying near the edge of a well-marked circle, 30 feet in diameter; several large stones occur near. It lies with its broad end up the slope, and gives one the impression that it may have been a capstone, and the other stones the uprights on which it rested. But as the association of these stones has considerable resemblance to a heap observed in 1881 on one of the outlines of Ben Nevis, which I have no doubt was to be ascribed to glacier action, it is not improbable that the Tom Perock stones may be traceable to the same force.

(d) In a low valley bordering on the sound of Mull, about 300 yards from the farm house of Ardnacroiss, I met with a circle 15 feet in diameter, whose features were new to me. The rim has consisted of upright stones placed close to each other, much like the flagstone fences in the neighbourhood of Wick and Thurso. Five of the uprights, which seem to stand deeply in the ground, are 3 feet 6 inches high from the surface. Three are a little lower, and widely separated from each other by still lower stones which intervene and which look as if they had been broken over. The centre consists of a heap of comparatively small stones, the largest being about the size of the human head. These have been gathered in the neighbourhood, some of them being rounded lumps of travelled gneiss and granites, which do not occur here *in situ*. This circle is not half a mile from the Ardnacroiss standing stone, which cannot, however, be observed from it. But the scene is almost as wide and grand. I turned over a good many of the stones in the centre, and picked up several which seem, to me at least, to suggest that they had been worked for some rude purpose (specimens exhibited). Had these occurred at a distance from each other on the surface I do not think they would have attracted notice, but lying together at least 2 feet deep they caught the eye.

(e) The standing stones of Baliscate are situated about half a mile to the south of Tobermory, on one of those broken terraces which form a marked feature of Mull scenery, and look as if some giant force had cut a huge slice horizontally from a hill top, thereby turning the peaked crest into a broad plain. They occur at different levels, from 200 feet, as at Balliscate, to 1455 feet, as in the case of the flat top of Speenic More close at hand. The Baliscate stones are three in number, two upright and one prostrate. The larger upright is 8 feet high, 10 feet in girth at the surface of the ground, and 10 feet 4 inches half way up the stone, where it begins to lessen gradually till it becomes about a foot across the top. In shape it is an irregular pentagon, the natural prismatic form which may be seen in any of the neighbouring whinstone quarries. The smaller upright is quadrangular in shape, a form which is also common in natural blocks, 5 feet 4 inches high, and 2 feet 4 inches thick. The prostrate stone, which is also of blue trap, is 8 feet 9 inches long, and is at present nearly covered by turf. The distance between the uprights is 14 feet 6 inches. There can be no doubt that these stones are the remains of a regular stone circle. On the largest a number of hatched grooves occur, exceedingly like glacial markings, but these may only be freaks of weathering, of which there are many on the rocks of the district, some cup-like, some like human foot-prints, others presenting dendritic tracery almost a match for the foliaceous work on the so-called "Iona stones."

(f) In an upland valley above and to the east of the village of Dervaig, are the standing stones of Kilmore. They occur in a hollow surrounded by a number of trap bosses, and have formed part of a circle with a diameter of 50 feet. They are five in number. Approached from the highway, the first, which is prostrate, is 7 feet 6 inches long and 2 feet 5 inches thick; the second, an upright, is 8 feet 3 inches high and 2 feet thick; the third, prostrate, 7 feet 9 inches long and 2 feet thick; the fourth, upright, 8 feet high and 2 feet thick; and the fifth, prostrate, is 11 feet long and 3 thick. The distance between 1 and 2 is 22 feet; between 2 and 3, 8 feet 8 inches; between 3 and 4, 5 feet 8 inches; and between 4 and 5, 8 feet 4 inches. Eight feet may be taken as the original

distance between the stones, two of which may have intervened between 1 and 2. Though placed in a mountain valley, the view from this circle is very wide, varied, and grand.

(g) Of the three stones at Sorn on the extreme north of Mull only one is in an upright position. Its measurement is, height, 7 feet; thickness, 1 foot 4 inches; girth, 8 feet. One of the prostrate stones is 8 feet 10 inches long, 2 feet 10 inches broad, and 10 inches thick; the other is 8 feet 8 inches long, 1 foot 9 inches broad, and 1 foot 2 inches thick. They are all of trap. Near them is a circular heap of considerable size, made up of comparatively large stones. The remains of the Sorn circle lie on the seaward edge of a fine natural amphitheatre about a quarter of a mile across. Sorn Cottage—*Lag a chlamhain*, the Kite's Hollow—stands on the landward edge, with Glengoram House at a short distance. From the top of a little hill close by the circle a magnificent view opens up. To the north, the point of Ardnamurchan, Muck, Eigg, Rum, and, on such a day as I visited it, the Cuchcullins of Skye; to the north-west, South Uist and Barra; to the west, Coll and Tyree; and far away to the north-east, the mountain ranges in Morar and Knoydart.

Looking at these circles in this part of Mull, it will be seen that they all occur in positions commanding a wide and varied view, and can be observed over a very extensive area. In several instances a standing stone is met with in the neighbourhood of the circle, but where this is the case the stone cannot be seen from the circle itself. It is hardly possible to be alone in the presence of these rude monuments in their solitary situations without asking, "What mean these stones?" Can we piece them into the historic mosaic and surround them with the conditions of the social and industrial life of defined periods? Can we relegate them with the habits of certain great human families—as Pictish, Gaelic, Cymric, Scandinavian, and the like—and with limited historic ages? I believe the answer to these questions must be negative, and that, as yet, accompanying remains do not warrant inferences that go much farther than the recognition of use. Here, indeed, we have the light of true history—light on times, it may be, anterior to the peopling of the British Isles—to show

us that standing stones were set up by individuals to commemorate periods of mental conflict or of deep satisfaction (Gen. xxviii. 16-22); by chiefs to testify to household or tribal compacts (Gen. xxxi. 45-52), in this case the standing stone is associated with the cairn—"gather stones, and they took stones and made an heap"; by individuals for purposes of worship (Gen. xxxv. 13-15); to commemorate the dead (Gen. xxxv. 20); to commemorate national deliverances (Exod. xxiv. 4), where we have the altar and twelve standing stones (Josh. iv. 5, 9); as boundary marks (Josh. xviii. 17; Isa. xix. 19); to mark some great historical event (Josh. xxix. 26, 27; 1 Sam. vi. 18); to commemorate a victory (1 Sam. vii. 11, 12); to mark the spot where kings were anointed (Judg. ix. 6; 2 Kings xi. 14; 2 Chron. xxiii. 13); and as a personal memorial (2 Sam. xviii. 18). It is to be noticed that all these uses existed among a comparatively highly civilised people. Here the rudeness of the monuments tells nothing of the culture of those who raised them, and is of no service in attempts to indicate time. But the variety of uses they were made to serve, should be remembered by all observers.

I made earnest and special quest after stone implements and urns in localities where the standing stones occur, but with small success. Almost all to whom I spoke had seen such things, but they could not now be traced. Mr M'Lean of Gometra asked me to look at some in his possession, said to be "of stone like flint," but I was unable to visit that island. Mistakes occur as to these articles. For example, I was told that, during my visit, the point of a round stone spear had been picked up in the course of drainage operations, and in what seemed to be an impossible position. Getting hold of it, I found it to be an excellent fragment of a belemnite (*Belemnites elongatus*) which I had more than once obtained from the liassic strata, near the harbour. (Specimen shown).

In taking out soil for the foundation of a new Free Church at Salen recently, the men came upon several half-length stone coffins formed very rudely of loose stones, in one of which I was informed by one of the workmen, a small urn was found, which was broken by accident. The

architect of the church, John C. Hay, Esq., took possession of the fragments and the articles found along with the urn. In kindly sending them to me, Mr Hay says the urn was "found while digging the foundation of the Salen church, at about 22 feet from the surface, in a sharp gravelly soil. It was unfortunately broken to pieces by falling into the trench along with some other loose gravel. I also send you the flint and two small pieces of metal found beside it." Much of the urn crumbled into dust. (Specimen shown). I regret that the fragments are not sufficient for building up the urn, though they present one or two features worthy of notice, especially when associated with the bits of bronze. The vessel has been of small size. The fragments are all more or less well marked by the string ornament, which, from the deep and sharp indentations made by it, may have been of twisted grass. The indentations are not all of one size, and are just such as a double strand of rough brome grass (*Bromus asper*), abundant where the urn was found, makes when pressed on not over wet clay. The cord has been carried round the vessel at nearly equal distances of about two eighths of an inch, the string markings being all horizontal. The fragments of metal do not seem to have formed part of a blade. On the partially crescent-shaped bit a straight rounded line with longitudinal furrows is seen slanting across, while on the thickest part of the other piece there are hints of further ornamentation.

2. *Forts.*—(a) Dhun Ghirgeadail is situated on a slight eminence to the west of Tobermory, on the left of the new road to Sorn. It is circular and occupies the greater part of the top of the low hill. The enclosed space is 37 feet in diameter, and the thickness of the walls is 11 feet. A portion of the wall, nearly 5 feet high, still stands and supplies a good example of the mode of building. The outer and inner faces are composed of well built stones of a large size, the irregular spaces where the unequal ends of the large stones meet are neatly filled in with flat-edged small stones, while the centre consists of stones which had been thrown in without regard to regularity. Within the building close to the east wall is a square hollow, roughly built on three sides, containing a

great number of shells of whelks (*Littorinæ*) and limpets (*Patellidæ*), some of the latter being unusally large. No other kinds of shells occur. I dug down into this hollow about 3 feet, and found only shells and stones, lying, however, in such a way as to suggest alternate layers. In a moorland track about two miles from the sea, I met with a similar deposit of shells and small stones, more than a foot deep, in peat recently cut, whose position was at first a puzzle. But I subsequently learned that so recently as ten or twelve years ago, if not even now, it was common for the young people who were sent to tend the cattle on the hills to take bags of shell-fish with them for food—partially roasting them on heated stones. This may account for the numbers of broken shells which occur both at the fort and in such heaps. In one of these heaps I found a bit of pottery having an old-like look about it, but on showing it to a Mull man he remarked, "It is a bit of smuggler's can."

(b) Two interesting examples of circular forts, or burgs, occur on the shore at Torloisk,—one, Dhun a Goil, at Ballygown, opposite the Sound of Ulva, the other Dhun Eiskean on the farm of Burg. I notice the latter, which is about three miles from Lord Northampton's place, Torloisk lodge, and stands on a rugged eminence opposite Gometra. It is $34\frac{1}{2}$ feet in diameter, and the walls are 6 feet thick, the thickness decreasing as they rise. Their present height is 7 feet, at which height traces of loopholes appear. The doorway is in the north-west wall, and is neatly built with stones which at first sight might lead to the belief that they had been in the hands of a workman. But this is accounted for by the fact that the trap rocks in the neighbourhood break up, when quarried, in blocks with a comparatively square surface. It is clear at present to a depth of 3 feet, the rest being filled with large stones which prevent measurement. The lintel is an oblong slab of trap 5 feet $11\frac{1}{2}$ long and one foot thick. The corresponding stone inside is 5 feet 6 inches long. The passage itself is 3 feet 10 inches broad. In the wall opposite the door there is a narrow opening into the centre, where passages occur to the right and left, very narrow at first, but widening as they extend. I was able to trace them six feet either way. All the wall at the same height

from the ground seems to be chambered. The view from the walls takes in the Benmore range of mountains, the opening of Loch na Keal the sound of Ulva, Ulva itself, and Gometra. The popular belief is that this fort is connected by long passages with a distant part of the coast, and also with two caves on the shore near by—Uamh Fhada, the long cave, and Uamh Slochd a Cleusaiche, the actor's cave. The entrance to the former from the shore is between two perpendicular cliffs of trap, between 70 and 80 feet high, interesting in themselves as striking lenticularly into the mottled, chocolate-coloured lavas which accompany them. At about 30 feet from the mouth a strong wall has been built across the cave, leaving room for one man only to creep over the top. Beyond this wall the cave widens and increases in height. The floor is covered with water-worn pebbles and dove's dung, both of the caves being favourite resorts of the rock dove (*Columba livia*), many of which flew out as we entered. The mouth of the actor's cave is exceedingly picturesque. The water from the surface forms a veil for it as it flows over in crowded heavy drops, while a deep frill of luxuriant hart's tongue ferns pass round the top, most of them beyond the reach of visitors. These caves are said to have been much frequented in former days by smugglers. But so far as I could make out, man has not left his mark either on their walls or on their floor.

(c) Caisteal Cnoc na Sreainga; the remains of this magnificent fort occur on a hill a short way above Glen Aros House, near Salen. The shape, which follows the hill, is sub-oval. The measurement in the longer axis is 88 feet, and in the shorter 53 feet; thickness of walls $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet; highest part of the walls still standing $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The whole has been exceedingly massive and strong. The stones which form the face of the walls both inside and outside are, for the most part, large, and imply the forthputting of much skilled labour in placing them in position. The mode in which they have been built in would do credit to a workman with all the resources of present art at his disposal. The body of the walls, as in the case of Dhun Ghirgeadail, consists of much smaller stones thrown in loosely. They must, moreover, have been gathered from the

surface in the neighbourhood of the fort, because they are for the most part rounded stones of different sorts, as trap, quartz, gneiss, granite, and, in one instance I noticed clay slate, the trap alone being met with *in situ*, the others having been brought from a distance by glacial forces, of which there are many traces all around. I was informed that several years ago a shepherd found a fine brooch among the ruins, which, after passing through several hands, was taken to London. A finer position for a stronghold can scarcely be imagined.

(d) Dhunara stands on a precipitous rock close to the sea and about 400 yards from the Sorn standing stones. The fort proper is 40 feet long by 19 feet broad, inside measurement. The wall is 3 feet 6 inches broad, and at several points it is still 3 to 4 feet high. The stones which face the walls outside and inside, have flat equal surfaces, and have been placed with much care. They are bedded in what might be called natural mortar. That is, shore sandy debris, consisting mainly of finely comminuted shells, has been formed into a paste by the use of sea water and used for building. This when dry makes a strong hard cement. Thus what remains of the walls is exceedingly well compacted, and almost refuses to yield to the hammer. The foundations of two smaller buildings, 19 feet by 10 feet severally, on other parts of the hill are well marked. There is also a large artificial hollow but without any traces of building connected with it. That the buildings on the top of the rock had been used to supply stones for cottages whose remains occur at the fort is beyond doubt, because some of them have bits of the natural lime still clinging to them. The workmanship of these cottages contrasts most unfavourably with that of the fort. It is coarse, unsymmetrical, slovenly, and rude. The whole area of the top of the rock, which, however, is very irregular in outline, is 109 feet at the largest part and 69 at its broadest. Access to the summit is by a deep narrow way in the rock, wide enough for one man only.

The ruined forts of that part of Mull to which the present notes are limited are found on or near the coast. Three of them are circular, one follows the shape of the hill, and another is oblong, occupying a free

space on the top of the hill. I record the facts; but while admitting that, as in the case of the circular forts, it is not unlikely we have examples of the building style of one tribe and traces of their presence in the district, we are not forced to infer that the same tribe always built in the same style. This may have been the case, but really we have no better warrant for the inference than we have for the assertion, often made, that the stone circles and the standing stones of Britain are memorials of a time when the inhabitants of Britain were of one so-called race, and presumably of one religion. In matters of this kind we weaken the value of our inferences by forgetting, on the one hand, the overlapping of tribes essentially different in habits and manners, to such an extent as to plant the monuments of one tribe in the heart of the history of another characterised by widely different forms of art and of customs; and, on the other hand, by leaving out of view the fact that there are few tribes so low as to have lost that peculiarly human quality which ever seeks to give expression to individuality in variations of modes of building, and in finding new channels for old modes of thought and old customs. There is ever danger in being too sharply dogmatical on such questions, and thus losing their full significance as data for generalisations relative to pre-historic time.