

III.

NOTICE OF THE ANTIQUITIES OF THE PARISH OF CABRACH, BANFFSHIRE. BY REV. ALEXANDER GORDON, M.A., LL.D., LONDON.

Having spent the most part of several summers in a remote parish in the upper part of Aberdeen and Banffshires, the parish of Cabrach, and having devoted a good deal of my time to antiquarian pursuits in that locality, I take this opportunity of giving the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland some account of the results of my investigations. So far as the antiquary is concerned, the ground may be regarded as virgin soil.

The parish of Cabrach is divided into two parts, the upper and the lower—the one in Aberdeen, the other in Banffshire. In both there are numerous remains of antiquity. There is abundant evidence in the peat mosses, that the district, especially the upper part, was once covered with wood. I made a diligent search for animal remains in the clay underneath the moss, but without success.

There is, however, abundant evidence of the presence in this district of man in a primitive and uncultured condition. First, we have the remains of their dwellings. At a place called the Three Burn-heads, on the way from Rhynie to Cabrach, there are about ten circular pits or huts almost in a straight line. There are many others of similar character among the hills and uncultivated parts of the country. I examined some of them, but found nothing in them except cinders and burnt ashes.

There are in other places remains of what may be called hut circles. They usually present the form of a circle of about 12 feet in diameter. There are two of them on the hill of the Bank farm, about a quarter of a mile above the farm of Dalriach. One of these is very perfect. I

examined the middle of it, and found an accumulation of burnt ashes. On the estate of Lesmurdie, in the Lower Cabrach, such dwellings are very numerous. There is one of special interest within a few hundred yards of the little farm of Mr James Watt. It has a small round pavement where a fire must have been kept, and one may easily gather quantities of burnt cinders all around.

Flint implements are found in considerable numbers on almost every farm throughout the parish. Scrapers of all forms are exceedingly abundant, as also are the flakes, which were doubtless used as knives, &c. Of these I have collected a very large number. In some places one lights on the refuse of a manufactory of flint implements. Arrow-heads are also found in considerable numbers. I have a good many in my possession obtained from the farm labourers, who were in the habit of using them for striking fire with a steel for their pipes. In this way great numbers of them were destroyed before lucifer matches came into fashion. Many of the arrow-heads obtained in the Cabrach are of exceedingly fine workmanship, so fine that one wonders how it was possible for men to make such delicate and beautiful articles with the implements then in use.

I was once of the opinion that there had been no celts found in the parish, but I have been fortunate enough to obtain a very small one of flint. There is one in the possession of Mr John Taylor, farmer, Boghead of Lesmurdie; Mr John Cran of Kirkton of Bunchrew, F.S.A. Scot., has another; and there are two in the possession of Hugh Gordon Lumsden, Esq. of Clova, F.S.A. Scot. One of these, which is of bronze, was found on the farm of Howbog, Cabrach. It is of the ordinary flat triangular form. Mr Lumsden also has an uncommonly fine spear-head, found on some newly improved land on the farm of Blackhills. A penannular ring of bronze in my possession was found on the farm of Bodibae, at a spot where there was an accumulation of burnt ashes indicative of human habitation. These are the only articles in bronze I have heard of as having been found in this parish. Spindle-whorls are not uncommon, some of them of stone, others of clay, and occasionally of lead. A few are distinguished by a rude ornamentation, but most of them are quite plain.

A great many querns have been found in various localities, and hollowed stones, which have been used either for crushing grain and malt, or for husking barley.

A very fine specimen of the round ornamented stone ball was found some time ago on the farm of Hillock, Lower Cabrach, and is now in my possession. It is covered with a great many very small knobs. Such examples are, I believe, exceedingly rare.

Let me now say something of the sepulchral remains of the Cabrach. There are in the Museum urns of very perfect form, found many years ago, on the farm of Forteith in the Lower Cabrach, by a gentleman who made excavations there. I am of opinion that more may yet be found. A few years ago another grave was accidentally discovered while workmen were digging in a sand pit. An urn of the same form as those formerly discovered was found with a skeleton in a contracted position. A small piece of flint was found with the urn, but nothing more. Both these objects are now in my possession. On a portion of the uncultivated land on a part of the farm of Bank, I found some fragments of an ancient urn. About a hundred yards from the spot where these fragments were found, we came upon the site of an ancient manufactory of flints, where I picked up a great number of broken flint flakes, and some very perfect ones which might have been used as knives. Near the same spot I found one perfect arrow-head. Several of these sites of flint factories have been discovered in different parts of the parish, and many flakes and scrapers may be picked up in almost every field after being ploughed and the surface exposed to a shower of rain.

There are also many small cairns to be found throughout the district, although they have rarely yielded any results when excavated, except small quantities of ashes and cinders. There are a few large cairns which have never been opened, and probably some ancient relics might be obtained from them. One of these is situated on the top of the hill of the Bank, Coomb's Cairn. I made an attempt at its excavation, but did not proceed far enough to obtain results. It seems to me that the large cairns may be the burial places of the chiefs, and that the smaller ones have marked the sites of the burial places of the common people.

The farm of Greenloan is particularly rich in flint flakes, &c., and

here a discovery of great interest was made a few years ago. Information which I had received from the country people led me to examine a stone which had been found with a number of cups in it, and had been built into a stone dike. It was about a foot and a half long and one foot broad, with about eighteen or twenty of the most perfect cups that have ever come under my observation. A good many more were discovered in the same locality. I sent one to the Society of Antiquaries in London, which was finally deposited in the British Museum; and another was sent to Edinburgh, and is now in our National Museum.

Thus I have given a very brief and imperfect sketch of what I have observed in the parish of Cabrach. Perhaps, if I have done nothing more, it may stimulate some more accomplished antiquary to make the same ground the scene of his holiday, and if so I shall feel that I have not laboured in vain.