

NOTICE OF TWO BOULDERS HAVING RAIN-FILLED CAVITIES ON THE SHORES OF LOCH TAY, FORMERLY ASSOCIATED WITH THE CURE OF DISEASE. By REV. HUGH MACMILLAN, D.D., LL.D., F.S.A. Scot.

Holy Wells, with whose waters superstition has connected some miraculous power of healing, are numerous in Scotland. But there is another class of sacred objects of a kindred nature much less numerous, and therefore deserving the special notice of the antiquary; I mean boulders with deep cavities excavated in them, natural or artificial—principally the latter—which are nearly always filled with rain water, and which used to be resorted to by the people in the neighbourhood for the cure of some specific disease. Such spots of pilgrimage are often associated with some of the most interesting folk-lore of the district; and the healing virtue which they are said to possess is in all likelihood a survival of the old pagan sanctity of the place.

In the district of Breadalbane, Perthshire—which has in it the Pool of St Fillans, famous for its supposed power of curing mentally afflicted persons—there are two boulders with water-filled cavities, which have a local reputation for their healing virtues. One is at Fernan, situated on the north side of Loch Tay, about three miles from Kenmore. It is a large rough stone with an irregular outline, somewhat like a rude chair, in the middle of a field immediately below the farm house of Mr Campbell, Borland. The rest of the field is ploughed; but the spot on which it stands is carefully preserved as an oasis amid the furrows. The material of which it is composed is a coarse clay slate; and the stone has

evidently been a boulder transported to the spot from a considerable distance. In the centre on one side there is a deep square cavity capable of holding about two quarts of water. I found it nearly full, although the weather had been unusually dry for several weeks previously. There were some clods of earth around it, and a few small stones and a quantity of rubbish in the cavity itself, which defiled the water. This I carefully scooped out, and found the cavity showing unmistakable evidence of being artificial. On the upper surface of the stone I also discovered seven faint cup-marks, very much weather-worn; two of them associated together in a singular manner, and

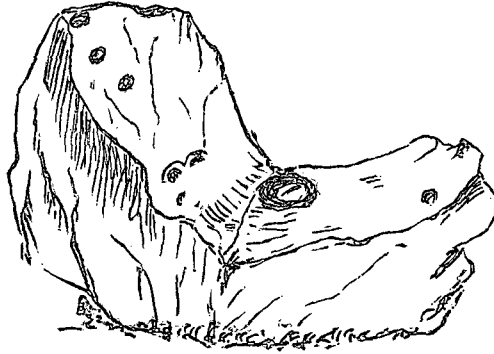


Fig. 1. The Stone of the Measles, or *Clach-na-Cruich*, Fernan, Loch Tay.

forming a figure like the eyes of a pair of spectacles. The boulder goes in the locality by the name of *Clach-na-Cruich*, or the Stone of the Measles; and the rain-water contained in its cavity, when drunk by the patient, was supposed to be a sovereign remedy for that disease. At one time it had a wide reputation, and persons afflicted with the disease came from all parts of the district to drink its water. Indeed, there are many persons still alive who were taken in their youth, when suffering from this infantile disease, to the stone at Fernan; and I have met a man not much past forty, who remembers distinctly having drunk the water in the cavity when suffering from measles.

It is only within the lifetime of the present generation that the *Clach-na-Cruich* has fallen into disuetude. I am not sure, indeed, whether any one has resorted to it within the last thirty years. Its neglected state would seem to indicate that all faith in it had for many years been abandoned. I may mention that, in the immediate neighbourhood, in a field called Cromraor, on the way to Fortingall, there are several tumuli and interesting cup-marked stones. I discovered some good cup-marks on a beautifully smoothed and polished boulder of hornblende that had been split into two to form a wall by the wayside near at hand. And not far off, under a sycamore tree on the top of the retaining wall of the bank by the roadside, is a square block of chlorite schist, with a shallow round basin scooped out in it, marked at the bottom with a rudely-sculptured cross, apparently the font of a primitive chapel, though there is no trace of any such chapel in the district, and tradition is silent as to where the stone came from.

From these signs there can be no doubt that there was a primitive settlement here in very ancient times ; and that the sacred associations of the locality have been carried forward from the Pagan to the Christian period. I am inclined to think, however, that while the *Clach-na-Cruich* belonged to the primitive settlement, it had nothing to do with the mysterious rites, of whatever nature-worship was then practised, but was simply used as a rude mortar by the inhabitants for grinding their corn. Examples of such primitive mortars are not infrequent in our own country ; there is one not far off, a little behind the village of Killin ; and they are very numerous in North America, where almost every native Indian village had one fixed in some central place, which was the property of all the inhabitants, and was in use not quite a hundred years ago. Few or any of them had been changed from the rough natural condition of boulders ; no labour had been expended in shaping them, except in the wearing away that had resulted in a basin-like depression. In this respect our native mortars resemble the Indian ones, and differ widely from the modern although now discarded "knockin' stones," which may be seen lying about in many an old farm-yard at the present day—which were carefully rounded and shaped for the purpose to which they were put. Primitive mortars have sometimes

cup-marks carved on their sides, as in the example near Killin; but the design of the association is involved in impenetrable mystery. By and by the prehistoric settlement passed away; the original domestic use of the mortar was forgotten by the race that succeeded, and in later ages it became invested with superstitious ideas, and was supposed to possess occult virtues, especially when the rain from heaven settled in its cavity.

The other stone of kindred nature to which I alluded is in the woods of Auchmore at Killin, twelve miles distant. This stone is called *Fuaran na Druidh Chasad*, or the Well of the Whooping-Cough. I heard of it incidentally last year in Paisley from a native of Killin, who remembered vividly when a boy having been taken to drink the water in the cavity of the stone, in order to cure the whooping-cough, from which he was suffering at the time. Happening to be in Killin lately, enjoying a few days' holiday, I made inquiries in the village; but though some of the older inhabitants remembered having heard of the stone, and the remarkable practice connected with it, I could not get any one to describe the exact locality of it to me, so completely has the superstition passed away from the mind of the present generation. I went twice in search of the stone; and though, as I afterwards found, I had been within a very short distance of it unawares on both occasions, I was unsuccessful in finding it. At last I met an old man, and after some search we found the stone, and he identified it.

I understood then what had puzzled me before, viz., why it should have been called *Fuaran* or Well, for I had supposed it had a cavity in a stone like that at Fernan. It was indeed a cavity; but it was in the projecting side of the stone, not on its top surface. It consisted of a deep basin penetrating through a dark cave-like arched recess into the heart of the stone. It was difficult to tell whether it was natural or artificial, for it might well have been either, and was possibly both; the original cavity having been a mere freak of nature—a weather-worn hole—afterwards perhaps enlarged by some superstitious hand, and adapted to the purpose for which it was used. Its sides were covered with green cushions of moss; and the quantity of water in the cavity was very considerable, amounting probably to three gallons or more. Indeed, so natural did it look, so like a fountain, that my guide asserted

that it *was* a well formed by the water of an underground spring bubbling up through the rock. I said to him, "Then why does it not flow over?" That circumstance he seemed to regard as a part of its miraculous character to be taken on trust. I put my hand into it, and felt all round the cavity where the water lay, and found, as was self-evident, that its source of supply was from above and not from below; that the basin was simply filled with rain water, which was prevented from being evaporated by the depth of the cavity, and the fact that a large part of it was within the arched recess in the stone, where the sun could not get access to it. I was told that it was never known to be

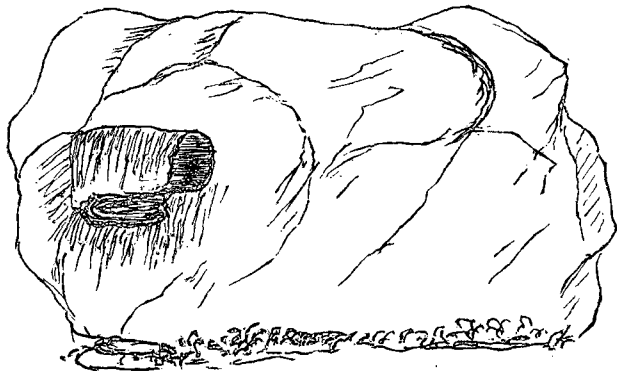


Fig. 2. The Well of the Whooping-Cough, or *Fuaran na Druidh Chasad*, Killin.

dry—a circumstance which I could well believe from its peculiar construction.

The stone, which was a rough irregular boulder, somewhat square shaped, of mica schist, with veins of quartz running through it, about 8 feet long and 5 feet high, was covered almost completely with luxuriant moss and lichen; and my time being limited, I did not examine it particularly for traces of cup-marks. There were several other stones of nearly the same size in the vicinity, but there was no evidence, so far as I could see, of any sepulchral or religious structure in the place. There is indeed a small, though well-formed and compact

so-called Druidical circle, consisting of some seven or eight tall massive stones, with a few faint cup-marks on one of them, all standing upright within a short distance on the meadow near Kinnell House, the ancestral seat of the Macnabs, and it is a reasonable supposition that the Fountain of the Whooping-Cough may have had some connection in ancient times with this prehistoric structure in its immediate neighbourhood; for, unlike the cavity in the stone at Fernan, the peculiar shape of the cavity in this stone precluded its ever having been used as a mortar, and apparently it has never been used for any other purpose than that which it has so long served. There can be no doubt that the fountain dates from a remote antiquity; and the superstition connected with it has survived in the locality for many ages. It has now passed away completely, and the old stone is utterly neglected. The path leading to it, which used to be constantly frequented, is now almost obliterated. This has come about within the last thirty years, and one of the principal causes of its being forgotten is that its site is now part of the private policies of Auchmore. The landlady of the house at Killin, where I resided, remembered distinctly having been brought to the stone to be cured of the whooping-cough; and, at the foot of it, there are still two flat stones that were used as steps to enable children to reach up to the level of the fountain, so as to drink its healing waters; but they are now almost hidden by the rank growth of grass and moss. There is more verisimilitude about the supposititious cures effected at this fountain than about those connected with the stone at Fernan; for one of the best remedies for the whooping-cough, it is well known, is change of air, and this the little patient would undoubtedly get, who was brought, it may be, a considerable distance to this spot. I am led to understand that, in connection with the cure, the ceremonial turn called "Deseul" was performed. The patient was required, before drinking the water, to go round the stone three times in a right-hand direction, which may be regarded as an act of solar adoration. This practice lingered long in this as in other parts of the Highlands, and the "deseul" was religiously performed round homesteads, newly-married couples, infants before baptism, patients to be cured, and persons to whom good success in some enterprise was wished; while the

“Tuathseul,” or the unhallowed turn to the left, was also performed in cases of the imprecation of evil.

Since my visit to Killin I have been told that there is another spot in the neighbourhood that has a local reputation for the cure of whooping-cough—a dripping well near Mornish, on the north side of Loch Tay, about two miles from Killin. I cannot describe this well more particularly, for I have not seen it, and have no account of it; but it seems to be associated, like the stones at Auchmore and at Fernan, with cup-marked sculptures in the vicinity, of which there are several very good examples, both on isolated boulders and on rock surfaces. This association is an interesting circumstance, and is worthy of being more thoroughly investigated.

I may mention another curious example of lingering superstitious belief in this district. In a solitary nettle-covered graveyard below Mornish, on the shore of Loch Tay, called Cladh Davi, where only members of the Macdiarmid family have been interred for the last two hundred years or more, there is one comparatively recent tombstone standing upright, indeed the only one in the enclosure. On the top of this tombstone there are two white quartz stones of a rough, roundish shape. One, the smaller of the two, has a single hole drilled on its upper surface, with polished and linear markings, which show that something has revolved in it; and the other has a hole of the same kind on both its upper and lower surfaces. These stones are said to cure pectoral inflammation when the water is applied to the nipples; and not long since a woman, who was thus afflicted, came a considerable distance, from the head of Glen Lochay, to make use of this remedy. A slight examination of the stones is sufficient to show that they were originally used as the sockets, in which the lower end of the spindles or vertical axles of millstones turned. When the hole was worn too deep, the same stone, for economic reasons, was turned upside down, and a new hole was worn into the new surface. This will account for the two holes in one of the stones. In all likelihood the stones belong to the series which is carefully preserved in the modern mill at Killin, as relics of St Fillan. These stones have the same holes in them, and though they are now black and begrimed with age and much handling, they were probably

originally white quartz or quartzite, like those in the Macdiarmid's graveyard. They have also the same miraculous powers of healing attached to them, being supposed to cure various diseases. It is said that some of the stones in the collection at the mill were lost. In all likelihood the stones in *Cladh Davi* are the missing ones, though how or why or when they were brought to the latter spot there is no record to tell. It is a curious circumstance that the objects of economic use of one age become thus the objects of superstitious worship in the next, when their utilitarian origin has been forgotten; another striking example of which, besides the stone at Fernan, we have in the case of stone axes or colts—the knowledge of which as ancient tools or weapons has been entirely lost, and which are now all over the world regarded by ignorant persons as thunderbolts, having a supernatural origin, and possessed of supernatural powers of keeping away misfortune and curing disease.