

IV.

NOTICE OF A LEAF-SHAPED BRONZE SWORD, FOUND AT LEANNAN BUIDHIE (YELLOW HOLLOW) FARM OF LOWER COILABUS, OA, ISLAY. BY MRS RAMSAY, KILDALTON, LADY ASSOCIATE.

Having previously received the sword from Mr Sinclair, tenant of Coilabus, I went to the farm on the 2nd of January 1886, when he kindly pointed out the spot where he had found it about a fortnight before. He informed me that, when cutting a drain in the moss, his spade came upon the handle of the sword projecting from the side of the drain, about 2 feet 9 inches below the surface of the moss; it was easily drawn out, as clean as it is at present, except the parts which are seen to have been slightly scratched or scraped with a knife. When found, there was a rivet in one of the holes at the angle of the handle and the blade, described as "a clinch nail of bright copper, about an inch long." Unfortunately, this rivet was thrown away, being considered of no importance.

The sword (fig. 1), which is of the usual leaf-shaped form, measures $23\frac{1}{4}$ inches in extreme length, by $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches in greatest breadth, at about one-third of its length from the point, narrowing to $1\frac{3}{8}$ inches, at about one-third of its length from the butt end of the hilt. The extreme thickness of the blade along the median line of its convexity from edge to edge decreases from $\frac{5}{16}$ inch at the junction with the hilt to $\frac{4}{16}$ at two-thirds of its length, and $\frac{2}{16}$ within an inch of the point. A marginal strip about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch in breadth hammered down to about the thinness of stout writing paper forms the cutting edge of the blade, and is continued on both sides from the point backwards to within half an inch from the extremity of the wings of the hilt-plate, where it stops short. There are two rivet holes $\frac{3}{16}$ inch in diameter in the wings, and two in the central portion of the handle-plate, the butt of which has a fish-tail ending.

As it was thought desirable that further search should be made at the spot, I returned on the 16th of January, accompanied by Mr Reid and Mr Osborne, and had the place examined as follows:—

A hole measuring fully 6 feet by 5 feet and 5 feet deep was dug parallel to the drain, and at the side from which the sword was drawn. The line of the top of the hole was about six inches from the edge of the drain. The first layer of moss was firm and dark in colour; while that further down was very soft with a few small stones in it, had a most disagreeable odour, and was light coloured, but on being exposed to the atmosphere immediately became dark.

The layer in which the sword was found appeared to consist of decomposed roots, branches, &c., easily distinguished, either by cutting the moss with a spade, or by breaking it with the hand; by the latter process, it was curious to see each stick and twig in its position entire, with bark, &c., apparently fresh and hard; on being pressed, however, it proved to be rotten and soft.

When digging in the hole at a lower level than that at which the handle of the sword projected into the drain, we came upon the mark of the blade in the moss, and found the impression left by the point exactly as if it had been in a mould. The mark was dark, rather slimy, and with slight metallic sheen upon it; on tracing it into the drain we observed that the blade had pointed downwards at a considerable angle.

The finding of this distinct impression of the sword, I think, proves that no metal sheath or point of a sheath was on it when it first found a resting place in the moss.

A second large hole was dug on the opposite side of the drain, but nothing of any interest was found, further than the decayed trunk of a tree.

From the foregoing it appears evident that the sword was a single weapon lost in the moss, not one of a hoard.

The piece of ground known as "Leannan Buidhie"



Fig. 1. Bronze Sword, Islay (23½ inches in length).

lies at the foot of a ridge of high hard ground on the margin of a peat bog; and within the memory of some of the old people in the neighbourhood, a bank of peat at least 4 feet high was removed from its surface, and it was drained and cultivated; it is now being redrained at a greater depth than formerly, as it had become very wet.

About 50 yards from the spot where the sword was found the peat bank rises fully 4 feet above the present surface of the part which has been cultivated. This would indicate that the sword, prior to the removal of the 4 feet of moss, to which I have referred, had been lying at a depth not less than 7 feet below the original surface. Judging from the aspect of the place, it is impossible to say to what depth the moss may extend. We could test it only to a very limited degree with the handle of a pitchfork, which was easily pressed down 5 feet into the moss, from the bottom of one of the holes before mentioned.
