

III.

NOTES ON TWO HIGHLAND TARGETS, FROM DUNOLLIE CASTLE, NEAR
OBAN, ARGYLESHIRE. By JOSEPH ANDERSON, LL.D., ASSISTANT-
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The two Highland Targets now exhibited by Colonel C. A. M'Dougall
of Dunollie have been preserved in Dunollie Castle for a considerable



Fig. 1. Highland Target from Dunollie Castle, 21 inches in diameter.

period, but nothing more definite is known of their history. They were

brought under my notice by Lord Archibald Campbell, and through the kindness of Mr Robert Glen, F.S.A. Scot., to whose care they were entrusted by Colonel M'Dougall, they are now exhibited to the Society along with *facsimile* reproductions by Mr Glen, which will help to explain the details of the originals.

The largest of the two targets (fig. 1) is 21 inches in diameter. It is made in the usual way of two layers of boards dowed together and placed crosswise, the covering of the front being of leather fastened with brass-headed nails, arranged so as to emphasise the outlines of the general pattern of the decoration. The back is covered with cloth much decayed, and supplied as usual with two arm-straps of leather.

The decoration consists entirely of designs left in relief by the ground being worked over, or tooled down in the leather. The patterns are disposed in a series of concentric circles outlined by slightly raised mouldings in the leather, and divided into sections by similar mouldings, emphasised by studs and nail-heads of brass. Round the central boss, which is of no great size, is a circle divided by six radii of nail-heads into spaces filled alternately with a trefoil and a quadruped, the bodies of the latter being pitted or spotted all over. Round this circle is a circular band divided into eighteen triangular spaces, nine of which impinge upon the inner circle, and with it form a star of nine points. Each of the triangles forming the points of the star is filled with a triquetra, and the triangular spaces between the points are filled alternately with a trefoil and a scroll of leafage. The second band is divided into six oblong compartments, two filled with patterns of leafy scrolls and one with interlaced work, the three patterns being repeated on the panels opposite each. The outermost band, which is broader than the others, is divided into twelve semicircular spaces, each of which is filled with a nondescript animal, the spaces between being occupied with a triplet of leafy scrolls. In this respect of the exterior margin of the leather-work being decorated with a series of animal forms in semicircular spaces, this target resembles one in the Museum which has been figured by Drummond,¹

¹ Drummond's *Ancient Highland Weapons*, plate iii. fig. 1, and *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. v. plate xxiv.; also *Illustrated Catalogue of the Scottish National Museum of Antiquities*, p. 315.

and also a still finer example formerly preserved at St Martins, and recently acquired for the Museum.

The second target (fig. 2), which is 20 inches in diameter, is less elaborate, but very effective in the character of its decoration. The



Fig. 2. Highland Target from Dunollie Castle, 20 inches in diameter.

general design, which is similar in character to the other, is carried out more boldly by rows of brass-headed nails outlining the spaces, which are filled alternately by scrolls and triquetras.

These Highland targets, apart altogether from their characteristics of

construction and use as an obsolete arm of defence, have a special interest as examples of a very characteristic style of art applied to decorative work in leather, which must have been at one time very common in the north and west of Scotland. Some of them, indeed, take rank as works of decorative art of no mean order, and there is visible in most of them the stamp of originality and individuality of design and execution. We owe to James Drummond the discovery of their artistic interest, and to him belongs the merit of preserving to future ages the few remaining examples that are remarkable not only for the beauty of their peculiar patterns, but also for their combinations of colour, so simply produced, by implanting on the darkened background of the tooled leather, pierced work of thin brass, with scraps of brightly-dyed cloth showing through the openings—the whole of the patterns, whether tooled or pierced, being combined harmoniously in the general design with the lines of nail-heads, and emphasising points appropriately marked by studs and bosses. It is a real triumph of art, this simple application of the elements of beauty and taste to the appropriate decoration of an object formed of materials so coarse and common. Any one who sets himself to study the carefully-drawn figures of the twenty and odd Highland targets given in Drummond's *Ancient Highland Weapons* must be convinced that whatever may be the case now, there was a time, not very long ago, when the decorative instinct, which in earlier ages had produced such masterpieces of metal-work as the Hunterston and Sutherland brooches, was still strong and widely diffused among the general population of the Highlands of Scotland. For it is clear that though the targets, powder-horns, and dirk-handles, and even the engraved brass brooches, may in some cases have been made by tradesmen in towns to order, or for general sale, the great bulk of them are home-made, and are, no doubt, on that very account superior in their artistic qualities to the shop-made ones.