

IV.

RECENT ANTIQUARIAN RESEARCH IN GLENSHEE. By W. M'COMBIE SMITH, F.S.A. Scot.

Gkenshee, in north-east Perthshire, on the borders of Aberdeen and Forfar, is one of the most interesting glens in the Highlands. It has magnificent scenery, was once thickly populated, and is rich in legendary and traditional lore.

Along with several other districts in Scotland and Ireland, it claims to be the scene of the boar hunt¹ that resulted in the death of Diarmid, the Fingalian hero. It has Diarmid's grave—two of them, in fact; the Boar's Bed, Boar's Loch, and a stone admirably adapted for chaining Finn's famous hound Bran to. The Boar's Bed is a narrow groove between two rocky ridges on the precipitous face of Ben Gulabein, at the lower end of Glenbeg, on its west side.

The reputed grave of Diarmid is on a knoll or mound, surmounted by four upright stones of irregular dimensions, being simply natural boulders taken from the adjacent hillside. The knoll is on the farm of Tomb, nearly half a mile east of the lower end of Glenbeg, at the foot of the range of mountains that bound Glenbeg on the east. Permission to open the mound was freely granted by A. H. Farquharson, Esq. of Invercauld, the proprietor, and Mr W. M'Kenzie, Glamis, the tenant of Tomb, and a beginning was made on 28th August 1894. The mound is of irregular oval shape, 112 yards in circumference, 39

¹ In the Dean of Lismore's book there is a poem, of no mean merit, by Allan M'Rory, describing the boar hunt, which Dr M'Lauchlan is of opinion refers to this Glenshee. The author of the poem describes Glenshee as—

“ The vale that close beside me lies,
Where sweetest sounds are heard of deer and elk,
And where the Feinn did oft pursue the chase,
Following their hounds along the lengthening vale.
Below the great Ben Gulbin's grassy height
Of fairest knolls that lie beneath the sun,
The valley winds.”

Diarmid, in the poem, when he went to rouse the boar, “went up to Ben Gulbin” and “roused from his cover on the mountain side the great old boar.”

yards over the top from east to west, and 29 yards over the top from north to south. It has a short steep slope of $14\frac{1}{2}$ yards towards the west, and a long easy slope of $24\frac{1}{2}$ yards towards the east. Apparent height of summit, above level of surrounding ground, from 15 to 20 feet. The dimensions of the stones above ground are: stone at south-east corner, height 1 foot 2 inches, circumference at base 6 feet. Stone at south-west corner, height 2 feet 3 inches, circumference 7 feet 5 inches. Stone at north-west corner, height 2 feet 2 inches, circumference 7 feet 6 inches. Stone at north-east corner, height 2 feet 3 inches, circumference 6 feet. A line drawn round the four stones, on the outside, at the base, measured 42 feet. Measured from centre to centre of each stone, the distances in the order given above were 8 feet 3 inches, 8 feet 6 inches, 9 feet 6 inches, and 8 feet 3 inches. The excavation was made in the irregular rectangular space inside the stones. The soil on the top was an excellent dark loam to the depth of about 20 inches. Below that, the soil was of a light yellow colour, singularly free from stones, and to the depth of 6 or 7 feet could be dug with ease by a spade, with little or no help from a pick. On the assumption that the mound was artificial, the grave was expected to be near the bottom. By the time that a depth of 10 feet was reached, the writer began to be of opinion that the mound was not artificial, but, in common with other similar, though not so regularly formed mounds along the base of the mountains at the lower end of Glenbeg, simply an isolated remnant of glacial detritus. From time to time small pockets of a black substance, so close in texture as to resemble graphite, but really consolidated peat, were met with, and pieces of rotten-like rock. But except these, and an occasional stone of from 6 to 8 pounds weight, nothing was met with but the light yellowish soil.

By Friday, 31st August, a depth of 17 feet was reached on the west side. Before that I had written to Dr Joseph Anderson, then residing at Blairgowrie, concerning the progress made, and had requested him to come and see the work, if at all convenient. From the very first, Dr J. C. Rattray, F.S.A.Scot., of Coral Bank, Blairgowrie, had taken the most lively interest in the excavation. On the 30th, while the writer was being assisted by Dr Rattray's son, the monotony of the work was broken

in upon by coming upon some earth of a darker hue than the rest, which emitted a powerful and most disagreeable odour. Dr Anderson was fortunately able to come up to Glenshee on the 31st. A short inspection of the excavation was enough to convince him that the mound was not artificial, but composed of glacial detritus *in situ*. From the appearance of the mound, with the stones on top, Dr Anderson said that he would have expected to have come upon evidence of its having been used as a burial-place, but at a depth of from 4 to 6 feet. As only a narrow vertical excavation had been made at one end, Dr Rattray, to remove all doubt, was at the expense of having the whole space within the stones excavated to a depth of 6 feet, and the narrow section at the west end to a depth of 22 feet; but no evidence of the soil having been previously disturbed, or of any foreign body having been deposited in it, was met with.

The Boar's Loch is a small lochlet or tarn, in the hollow of a small plateau, some 30 feet above the level of the Beg, and quite close to it on the east side, about 100 yards above the Old Spital. The narrow bank between it and the Beg has been cut through at one time, near the north-west end, and partially drained the lochlet, so that there is water only at the south end. It is said to contain the usual traditional gold cup. A few yards from its northern end, in a slight hollow, there used to be three boulders lying in a line, the distance from first to third being 30 feet. This also had the reputation of being Diarmid's grave. When the ground was trenched a good many years ago, the boulders were removed to the side of the loch. One of the men engaged in the work dug down some distance, but came upon nothing unusual. There is nothing in the shape or size of the boulders to indicate that they had been placed in their original position for any particular purpose, and precisely similar boulders are scattered over the base of the mountain in all directions. Small stones have been sunk in the ground to mark the extremities of the so-called grave, but being level with the ground are somewhat difficult to find.

On the face of a small knoll, just behind the kirk of Glenshee, is a rather thin upright stone, about 5 feet in height by less than 2 in breadth, having two small semicircular pieces, an inch or two deep, cut out of

each side, about 3 feet from the ground, as if to keep in position a rope or chain tied round the stone. Dr Anderson humorously suggested that this might be the stone to which Finn's famous hound Bran had been tied. An excavation made at the foot of this stone, on the east side, to the depth of over 3 feet, revealed nothing but that the knoll was composed of pure sand and gravel.

About $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles down the glen from the kirk is the farm of Broughdearg, at which there are two upright stones quite close to the farmstead. They are about 10 feet apart, the one 5 feet 6 inches in height by 8 feet 2 inches in circumference, the other 5 feet in height by 8 feet 6 inches in circumference. On one of them is a semicircular notch, like that on the stone behind the kirk, at about the same distance from the ground.

It will be seen that no "finds" were made in Glenshee. The writer, however, had the satisfaction of learning that Dr Joseph Anderson agreed with him in thinking that the form of the mound at Tomb, together with the four upright stones placed on the top by human agency, warranted the supposition that something of antiquarian interest was likely to be found in it. To have settled that the stones on the top are the sole objects of interest from an antiquarian point of view, is some consolation for labour expended and hopes disappointed.

In addition to Dr J. C. Rattray, the writer wishes to acknowledge the co-operation and interest taken in the work by the Rev. T. Crawford, B.D., the Manse, Glenshee, and Mr C. M'Kenzie of Borland, Blackwater.