

## II.

### NOTES ON SOME CUP-MARKED STONES AND ROCKS NEAR KENMORE, AND THEIR FOLK-LORE. BY REV. J. B. MACKENZIE, F.S.A. Scot., KENMORE.

In the *Proceedings* (vol. xxix. p. 94), I have described a remarkable cup- and ring-marked boulder discovered in 1894, on the slope of the hill-side of the Braes of Balloch, a little more than 1000 feet above sea-level, and about a quarter of a mile to the east of the house at Tombuie. Its precise situation is about 100 yards to the south of the fence which separates the arable land from that portion which was partly arable, but mostly moorland pasture, and within a few yards of the old road from the arable land to the hill. The boulder, which is about 4 feet in length, and the same in breadth, is of a hard, coarse schist, presenting a fairly level surface, which is almost completely covered with boldly marked sculpturings of concentric circles surrounding small central cups. The manner in which they have been pecked out by a pointed instrument is clearly visible even in the small-sized photograph, of which a reproduction is here given (fig. 1) from the previous volume of the *Proceedings*.

Since then I have frequently visited the site of the boulder, and examined its neighbourhood, because I felt sure that it must be associated with something older if I could but light upon it; but it was only this summer that I found at least a portion of what I expected. Not far from the boulder, on the top of a knoll, the rock comes to the surface, and here I found two rows of cups of the ordinary plain pattern (fig. 2), deep, large, and well marked, but without enclosing circles. It was only by peeling off the turf which had almost covered the flat rock surface



Fig. 1. Boulder with cup- and ring-markings, on Braes of Balloch.  
From a photograph by Rev. J. B. Mackenzie.



Fig. 2. Two rows of cups in a rock-surface on Braes of Balloch.  
From a photograph by Rev. J. B. Mackenzie.

that I came upon them. In the one row there are four cups, and in the other five. From these cups the sculptured boulder is distant 80 feet to the south-west, and the ruin of a beehive-shaped building 300 feet south. The latter is not nearly so perfect as when I first saw it. The rabbits have taken up their abode among the rubbish, and in digging them out many of the stones have been displaced from their former and apparently original position.

These rock cups appear decidedly more ancient than anything on the boulder which I have previously described. The sculpture on its upper portion seems more archaic in character than those further down, while lowest of all, and apparently unconnected with what is above, there is a symbol which is often introduced among sculptures of the Christian period. The work done on the lower half of the stone is almost as fresh as when newly executed, and shows quite distinctly the marks of the tool used. A tool like the modern granite pick would leave marks of a similar kind. This portion is thus distinct, because soon after it was finished it got covered up by the soil as it is now. One cannot look at it without asking oneself: How came it about that this laborious work is no sooner finished than it is abandoned? War or some such catastrophe dispersing the tribe may have been the cause; but I rather incline to the opinion that it was the advent of Christianity which led to the abandonment of the old high place, and to the building, in its stead, of a Christian church on Sybilla's Isle in the lake below. The old high place is now lonely enough on the edge of the heathery moor, but it was not so in even comparatively modern times. On all sides you see the ruins of hamlets and wide traces of former cultivation. Then, also, till quite recent times, the main road from Crieff to the far highlands passed it closely by.<sup>1</sup> After this the old road went on past the circles of upright stones at Croftmorag,<sup>2</sup> and at that point entered what is

<sup>1</sup> It is from this spot that Sir Walter Scott, in *The Fair Maid of Perth*, makes the Glover get his first view of Loch Tay.

<sup>2</sup> These are figured at p. 356 of vol. xxiii. of the *Proceedings*. Most likely they are monumental, but no one can say, till the spade is freely used in its exploration. The name means the Croft of the little princess, and points that way.

now the park of Taymouth Castle, and crossed the Tay at the ferry of Muttonhole, a little above the present New Hall Bridge. Further on, it passed another group of standing stones, five of which are still erect, before it crossed the Lyon and merged into the present highway.

But to return to our high place, not only is it central among the mountains of the district, but it was the centre round which the native spirits of the old mythology grouped. The only one of the seven chief ones whose place of abode is not in full view is "Kelpidh," called "Kelpidh an sput" (Kelpie of the waterfall), and it is just round the corner. Kelpidh was the spirit of the raging flood, and when things were going quietly abode among the waterfalls of the Moness Burn, issuing forth in gleeful triumph when the floods were high, and sweeping away flocks and crops and the abodes of men—if themselves, so much the better. She was not truly malevolent, only glad when her work was prospering.

The next spirit was "Brounaidh an eilan" (Brownie of the Island). In some parts of the country he is more commonly known as "Ourisk." His passion was for work, and it was always much easier to set him agoing than to stop him. Any work which seemed of human origin, yet which appeared altogether too stupendous for mere human labour to effect, was ascribed to him. Here he is located on Sybilla's Isle.<sup>1</sup>

The next spirit was "Lorg luath na Leitir" (swift footprint of the Leitir). Leitir is the name of the wind-swept slope of Drummond

<sup>1</sup> This island, on which there are the ruins of the well-known monastery, is about 100 yards from the shore of the lake. When the lake is at its lowest this channel is not more than about a foot deep. The island is on the outer edge of a sandbank, and about an acre in extent. About fifteen years ago, a large portion of the island was levelled and cleared of rubbish. The workmen having slightly miscalculated their level, opened up two or three pits down to the level of the lake, filling them up with stones and using the soil for surfacing. I was often on the spot and saw that they nowhere came to any natural layer of gravel or sand: all was artificial. From this I felt satisfied that the whole island was artificial, probably at first only a lake-dwelling of the ordinary type, but extended from time to time as it grew in importance and more space was required. In locating "Brounaidh" here there seems to be preserved a tradition of its artificial character.

facing the island and the lake. Here was the special home of the wind.

The next spirit was "Trusdar Fhartingall" (the rascal of Fortingall). This spirit is our modern devil, and why he is located at Fortingall I have never heard.<sup>1</sup>

The next spirit is "Paterlan na Fhearnan" (Paterlan of Fearnan). His special abode was Alt Phaderlidh, a wild mountain stream a little to the west of Fearnan. I have never been able to ascertain what were his characteristics beyond having some connection with rain and snow. Neither can I make out his identity with any of the ordinary spirits of mythology.

The next spirit was "Sligeachan a Bhlarraich" (Scales of Blairmore). His abode was among the waterfalls (near the lake on the farm of Blairmore), on a stream which issues full grown from a rock half-way up Ben Lawers, and rushes straight and foaming to the lake beneath. He was undoubtedly the Dragon of mythology and exercised the usual functions of a dragon.<sup>2</sup>

The seventh and last was Fuadh Corry nan ghaimhne (hatred of the corry of the deer storks). He was the spirit of cold (fuachd), and was much feared. In Gaelic there is a play upon the words for hatred and cold, so that at times one hears him called Fuachd Corry nan ghaimhne. The former is, however, his correct designation. I have not been able

<sup>1</sup> I have, however, sometimes heard him called "Truis du" (black trousers). It may be but another way of referring to the same gentleman in black, but more likely a mere accidental corruption. It surely cannot have been with any intention of getting rid of the old gentleman, for a district which prides itself on being the birthplace of Pontius Pilate would certainly conserve its interest in black Donald.

<sup>2</sup> Although the dragon had his lair among the waterfalls of this stream, they were not his work, as those on the Moness Burn, where she abode, were the work of Kelpie. These are in Gaelic called "Obair phealidh" (Aberfeldy), *the work of Kelpie*. Neither had he anything to do with the remarkable spring whence it issues. It was under the guardianship of "Cailleach bhèr" (the old lady of the thunderbolt)—a very subordinate spirit with no initiative power as the seven had. She had merely the delegated duty of covering up the spring at sunset. On one occasion she failed to do so (being tired with hunting she fell asleep), when it burst out, and before it could be checked by the returning sun it had dug out and formed Loch Tay.

to ascertain the exact position of the Corry which was his chosen home. The whole of this district was anciently a royal deer forest, and it must have been some specially cold and dismal glen to which the young deer were driven by the older and stronger.

Many ages must have elapsed since the ideas represented by these popular myths were real here in the lives of men and women like ourselves.

But to return to the spot from which I have been looking at the cup marks at my feet, I am struck with the extreme scarcity of any real tradition regarding them. Only once do I remember hearing anything genuine. There had been a good deal of illness in some miserable old houses where I was visiting, and in speaking to an old man about it, I expressed my wonder that the people did not remove some boulders which obstructed the light of the small windows, and the drainage about the doors; and added, that it could easily be done and would make the houses more healthy. No doubt it would, he agreed, but then it would not do to destroy these old worship stones (clachain Aoraidh). He said that there had been one near his own door which was very much in the way, but that he had, with great labour, dug a hole into which he had let it drop and covered it up, for it would never do to incur the anger of the spiritual beings by breaking it up. This was more than thirty years ago. The boulders seemed to me natural and of no significance; but my attention being thus called to them I found similar stones at almost every old house or site—many of them, undoubtedly, placed there of intention. Some of them had cup marks, but on many I could find none. I also found that any sort of hollow in a stone, even when it seemed to me natural, was sufficient to give it a sacred character; and that some of these stones were undoubtedly ancient boundary marks, while others had been used in the preparation of food stuffs. All have a certain mystery about them, and several still preserve around them traditions of the possession of supernatural powers.

So far as I have examined them, these stones seem to fall into three groups:—

The first group consists of the rock cut cups, often single, but more generally in groups, with at times quite an elaborate arrangement of circles and connecting channels. The meaning of these is very obscure. Nothing which I have ever heard seemed authentic or simple enough—very simple the ideas must have been, or they would never have been so common or wide-spread.

In the second group, the stones present a natural hollow, smoothed and shaped a little by art. This form may have been used, among other purposes, for the pounding and rubbing down of grains before the invention of the quern.

The third group, which is almost certainly of later date, comprises the entirely artificial stone cups (small ones are often called elf cups) and the stone basins used for the manufacture of pot barley.

The last two groups have generally some tradition associated with them. Many of these have been collected. They most frequently relate to the power of curing different kinds of diseases possessed by them. This, however, was not by any means their only power. There is one belonging to the second group, in a rock near Scallasaig in Colonsay, and the tradition with regard to it is, that by means of it the chief of the M'Phees could get south wind when he chose. Hence it is called "Tobar na gaoith deas" (the well of the south wind). One of the third group is at Riskbuie, also in Colonsay, near the ruins of an ancient ecclesiastical building. Nothing now remains but a heap of rubbish with no history, yet at one time it must have been of considerable importance. Over a well quite close to it I found more than thirty years ago as a roofing slab, a stone with a well-cut sculptured figure, which some have supposed to be of Christian origin, and others to be a representation of Thor and his hammer. It is figured at p. 121 of vol. xv. of the *Proceedings*. I was also told of another sculptured stone which had been taken from this ruin, and built into one of the old cottages in the vicinity. It was known as "iomhaigh na leasg" (the image of laziness). There was a well-known stone called by this same name in the Castle of Carnassary near Kilmartin. I once hunted it up and found it in a rockery, in the

neglected grounds of the old mansion-house of Largie. It had apparently been a gargoyle, and probably the one at Riskbuie may have once served the same useful purpose.

Among the ruins at Riskbuie, and lying on the surface, I found, in 1869, a fine stone celt (fig. 3), which I have now presented to the National

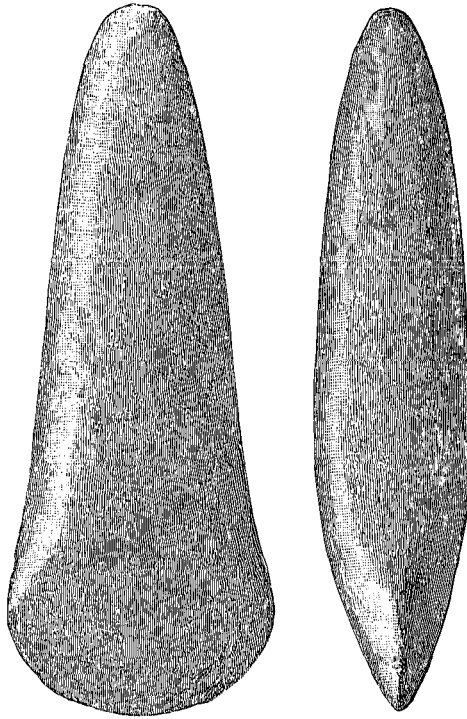


Fig. 3. Stone Axe from Riskbuie, Colonsay. ( $\frac{1}{3}$ .)

Museum as an exceedingly interesting example, both on account of its size and its peculiar shape. It is of greenstone,  $11\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches across the cutting face, the edge of which is rounded, and slightly expanded beyond the width of the body of the implement,



which is almost circular in section in the middle of its length, tapering to a conically-pointed butt. The surface is not polished, but bears the marks of picking all over it, as if it had been reduced to shape by this process.

Another of this third group is at Kilehattan, also in Colonsay. Like the one at Riskbuie it is of the pot barley type, and cut out of the solid rock. It is near the ruins of the Church of St Chattan, and of the house of the chief of M'Mhurich (Currie), who owned this portion of the island. His house was called "Tigh an tom dreis" (Bramble Knoll House), and according to highland custom he himself was generally known as "fear an tom dreis." As chief of the more fertile moiety of the island, M'Mhurich was, of course, a much greater man than M'Phee at Scallasaig. If M'Phee could get south wind, M'Mhurich could by means of his rock-basin get any wind he liked. The basin was called "Cuidh Chattain." It is quite a mistake to say, as I have heard at times said, that any Currie could operate the well. It was only "fear an tom dreis" himself who could do it. He could get the wind to blow from any quarter he wished, by the simple expedient of clearing out any rubbish which it might contain on to the side from which the wind was desired. It was sure to come and blow it back again into the basin.<sup>1</sup>

According to Adamnan, St Columba did not even need to change the wind, but showed his superior power by sailing rapidly in his boat on Loch Ness, against the strong adverse wind which the Druid Broichan had raised.

Before passing from the subject of rock basins and cups, I may mention as bearing on the subject a tradition which I heard from my friend, Rev. J. M'Lean of Grantully. We were about half-way up Glenlyon, when he pointed out to me some isolated patches of rock by the road side, remarking that they indicated the limit to which the plague had reached

<sup>1</sup> Originally I am persuaded it was not any accidental rubbish which was cleared out, but (with undoubtedly certain appropriate ceremonies) the offering of food to the supernatural powers, which had been left in the basin when last used for its primary purpose of making pot barley.

in the glen ; St Adamnan, it seems, stayed its further progress by boring a hole in one of these rocks—catching the plague and stopping it up in the hole. In the time at my disposal I could not find on any of the rocks any artificial markings which might have started this tradition.

A short time ago, Mr Dunn, factor to the Marquis of Breadalbane, showed me a small stone cup (fig. 4), a regular elf cup in the popular estimation, which was recently found by a shepherd close to a sheep-path near the top of Schihallion. It is of very hard stone, with a simple orna-

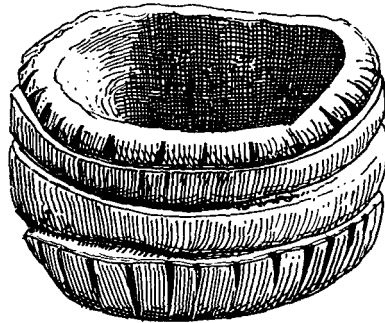


Fig. 4. Stone Cup found on Schihallion.

mental pattern running round the outside. At one point there is a projection which looks like the remains of a handle. There is no possible natural use, of which I can think, which could induce any one to carry such a vessel to near the top of a very high hill. It must surely have been in connection with the ideas which they entertained of the supernatural, that our remote ancestors were impelled to cut out these cups in the rocks, place them in their graves, and carry them up to the high places of the earth. What were these ideas?