

## V.

NOTES OF SCULPTURED MONUMENTAL SLABS, AN UNDESCRIBED SYMBOL STONE, STANDING STONES, BROCHS, AND OTHER ANTIQUITIES IN SKYE. BY FRED. T. MACLEOD, F.S.A. Scot.

In the spring of the present year, while on a visit to the Isle of Skye, I took the opportunity of inspecting four burial-grounds within a radius of 16 miles of Dunvegan Castle—at Skeabost, Kilmuir (Dunvegan), Trumpan, and Glendale. In each case my search was rewarded by the discovery of several stones of considerable interest, and further, in the cases of Glendale, Trumpan, and Skeabost, by the discovery of an ancient *copan-baistidh*, or baptismal font.

In general characteristics the Skye burial-grounds do not differ from those in other Highland parishes. Unkempt and neglected places, situated in the midst of barren moorland, or upon some rocky headland, they form a striking contrast to our city cemeteries.

## SKEABOST BURIAL-GROUND.

Skeabost burial-ground is situated within a stone's-throw of Skeabost Bridge post office, about 6 miles from Portree. Adjacent to it there are ruins which indicate the existence in early times of a church of considerable size and importance. The site of the burial-ground itself is upon land which, under normal conditions, is a small peninsula, but which in times of heavy floods and severe weather is quickly converted into an island. The absence of access in times of flood involves great self-sacrifice, when the coffins have, of necessity, to be borne by the followers through water many feet deep.

The first stone of interest I found here was a monumental slab with a full-length effigy in relief, resting in a recumbent position in a little square building, which at one time, obviously, formed part of the church. The stone was of such a size and the effigy stood out in such strong relief that it was impossible to procure a rubbing of it; and

the building was so confined and dark that a satisfactory photograph could not be obtained. The sculptured figure is that of a man in armour, both hands grasping a sword of considerable size.

Just outside this little building was another monumental slab, so much broken that it was impossible to recognise anything except that it contained a similar figure of a warrior grasping a sword.

About twenty yards to the south-west was a third monument of similar design, by far the best specimen of the three. The stone was in a



Fig. 1. Slab with Effigy at Skeabost.

recumbent position, but I had it lifted on end and photographed (fig. 1).

The figure of the man in armour is enclosed in a Gothic niche, and is excellently carved in the usual style of the West Highland effigies. This monument (as doubtless also the other two) was doing duty to mark a not very ancient burial, and on it there were comparatively modern initials, which, I was informed, refer to a family of MacSweens.

There is also another stone carved in a primitive and curious manner, to which an interesting tradition is attached. It is a recumbent monument in memory of a woman who was killed by a bull. The carved figure is that of the skeleton of a woman, the sex being indicated by the

presence of what appears to be a "mutch" round the skull. On either side of the skeleton two hoof-marks are carved to indicate the manner of death.

Having been informed that an ancient *copan-baistidh* or baptismal font had been seen in this burial-ground, I made inquiries, and located the place where it lay. Until comparatively recently it was entire, but now, owing to the effect of the weather and neglect, it is gradually breaking up. It is simply a rough-hewn hollowed-out stone, with no ornamentation.

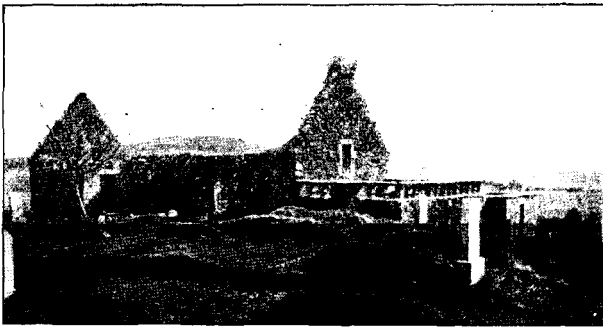


Fig. 2. Kilmuir Burying-ground.

#### KILMUIR BURIAL-GROUND.

This burial-ground is situated on rising land overlooking Dunvegan Loch, about three hundred yards from the hotel, on the left-hand side of the road leading to Portree. Here there are also the roofless ruins of an old church (fig. 2). Above one of the entrances is the date 1694, but, judging from the obvious age of some of the monumental stones in close proximity, there can be little doubt that there was a burial-ground long anterior to that date. Local tradition indicates that the present ruined church is not the original church erected upon the site, and that the burial-ground is much earlier in date. One portion of the old

building has been enclosed with railings, and now forms the burial-ground of the MacLeods of Dunvegan. One portion of this enclosed building bears the date 1836, at which time evidently this portion of the old church was reserved as the burial-place of the MacLeod family.

In the adjacent churchyard there is the well-known monument (fig. 3) erected by Simon Fraser of Lovat in memory of his father, who died



Fig. 3. The Lovat Monument at Kilmuir.

in Dunvegan Castle in 1699, when on a visit to the chief of that day. The inscription (which is an interesting one) is carved on a marble slab, which unfortunately, some years ago, was broken across. The monument generally was becoming ruinous, but the present chief has renovated it and replaced the inscription. The monument, it is believed, was erected in or about 1699.

There are three interesting recumbent slabs in this churchyard. One is to the memory of the Rev. Norman Macleod, who was minister of

Durinish about 150 years ago. Another (fig. 4) is to the memory of a member of the MacLeod family, on which the various emblems are well indicated. The third is a recumbent stone, of which I took a rubbing (fig. 5, p. 379). It is finely sculptured in relief, having a long sword with lobated pommel and reversed quillons in the centre, surrounded by foliage ornament, designed more naturalistically than usual, for the stem, from one side of which the branches proceed, goes up the left-hand side of the slab, quite close to the margin, bends sharply across the top, and

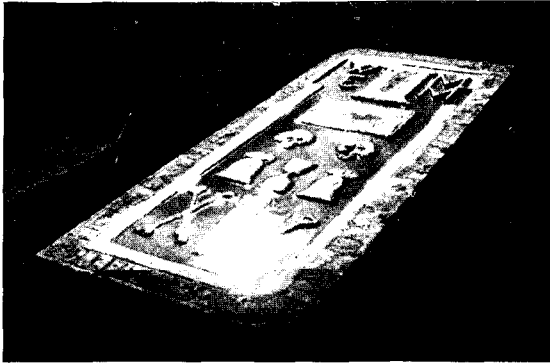


Fig. 4. Recumbent Slab with Emblems at Kilmuir.

proceeds reversely down the right-hand side, as shown by the angle at which the branches on that side meet the stem.

There are one or two other old stones of interest which I had not time to examine, one in particular being, I am informed, the oldest in the churchyard, and representing, among other things, an angel holding an open book. In examining the old stones, I was surprised to find that a good many of the ornamental portions of the church have been utilised to form the bases upon which rest many of the recumbent stones.

Burials from the surrounding districts, embracing a radius of ten or twelve miles, are still common in this churchyard. A somewhat

striking feature in connection with burials in this place, as also in connection with burials in other churchyards in Skye, is the fact that there are no recognised gravediggers, nor is a grave prepared prior to the arrival of the funeral party. The custom to this day is for members of the deceased's family and friends themselves to dig the grave after the arrival of the body at the churchyard, and to do all the necessary offices which are performed by recognised officials in districts on the mainland. It may be mentioned that Boswell records the fact that during the visit of Dr Johnson and himself to Dunvegan in 1773 he was a witness to the identical practice to which I have just referred. Upwards of 100 years prior thereto, the kirk-session of Rothesay recognised the inconvenience of such a proceeding, and passed a minute ordaining the "hocking" of graves prior to the arrival of the corpse for burial. It is a somewhat striking circumstance that a practice which was condemned as far back as 1660 in one district of the Western Islands should remain the recognised method of procedure in the year 1910.

#### TRUMPAN BURIAL-GROUND.

This burial-ground, still used for interments, is situated about 13 or 14 miles north-west of Dunvegan, the nearest village to it being Stein, in the district of Waternish. In this case also there are ruins of an old church (fig. 6, p. 380). It is difficult to conceive a situation more remote and more exposed, commanding, as it does, a magnificent sea-view and a considerable portion of the coast of Skye. There are here two recumbent stones of considerable interest, of which I took rubbings.

One (fig. 7) has in the centre a two-handed sword with straight quillons, terminating in rosettes. The top of the stone above the sword has a square design of foliage, with eight branches radiating from a common centre. On either side of the sword-hilt are nondescript animals, whose tails are prolonged into a wavy scroll of foliage, with large leafage proceeding down each side of the blade to the bottom of the stone.

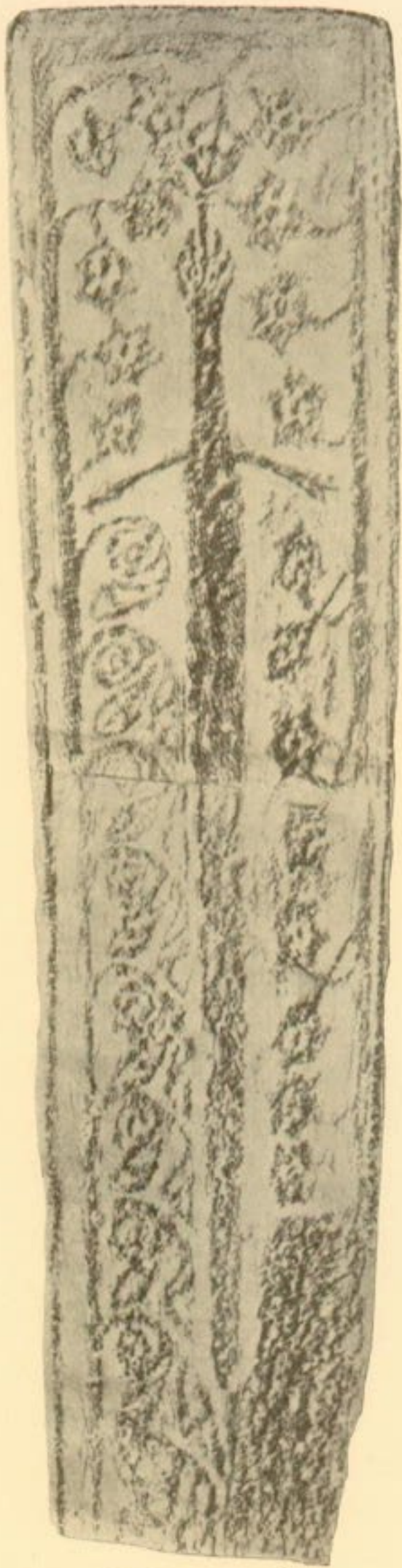


Fig. 5. Recumbent Slab at Kilmuir.



Fig. 7. Recumbent Slab at Trumpan.

The other stone (fig. 8) is a more elaborate monument, evidently commemorating an ecclesiastic, who is shown fully vested, and with

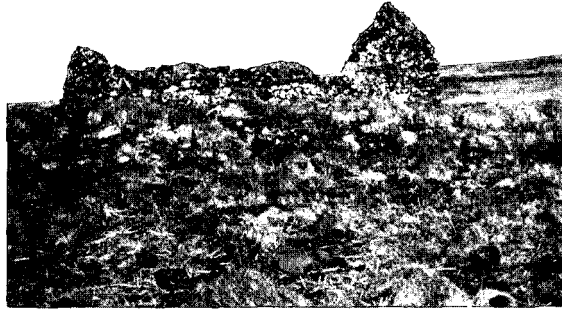


Fig. 6. Trumpan Church.



Fig. 9. "Baptismal Font" at Trumpan.

hands joined in the attitude of prayer, standing in a Gothic niche, which is surmounted by a circle of foliage ornament.

I also observed an undressed boulder or standing stone, with a hole in it, to which a certain interest attaches. The tradition of the





Fig. 8. Recumbent Slab with Figure of an Ecclesiastic at Trumpan.

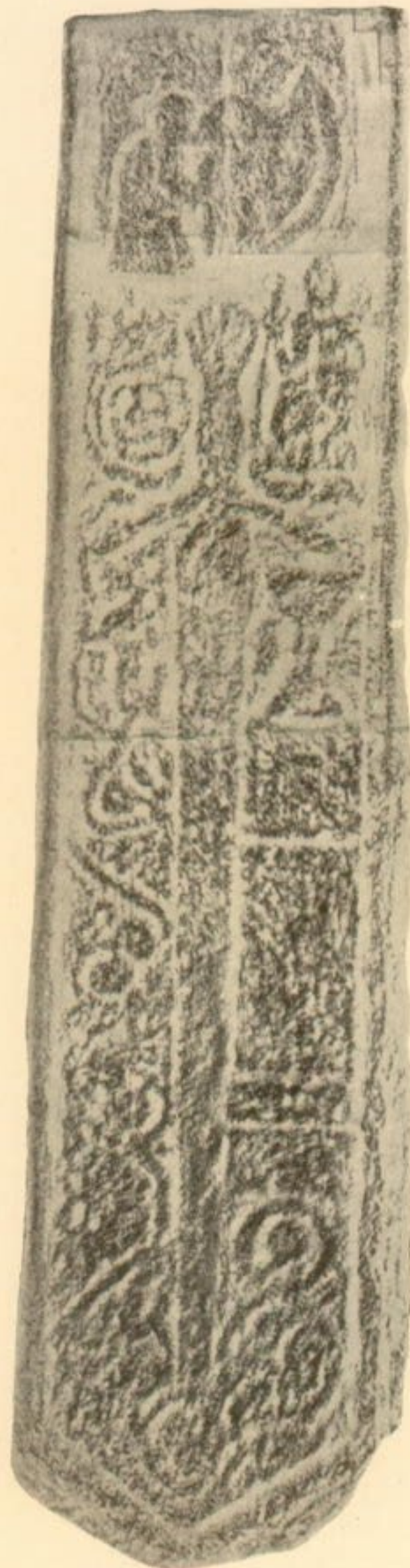


Fig. 10. Recumbent Slab at Kilchoan, Skye.

country is that those people who were desirous of knowing whether or not their souls were to be saved in the future shut their eyes and advanced with outstretched finger from a distance of several feet towards this hole. If they succeeded in finding the hole with their finger, that was taken to be a sure indication of salvation. It was also used as a "swearing" stone. After searching for a considerable time I found a *copan-baistidh* or baptismal font in excellent preservation (fig. 9, p. 380), and of similar construction to that found in Skeabost.

This burial-ground possesses considerable interest because of one of the most persistent and widely known traditions current in the Island of Skye in connection with the burning of Trumpan church. The tradition is that a party of worshipping Macleods were surprised by a party of invading Macdonalds. The latter secured the building, confined the worshippers, and thereafter set fire to the building, with the result, tradition says, that only one person escaped, namely, a woman, who succeeded in forcing her way through one of the windows. It is said that she managed to crawl a certain distance, when she expired on the moor. To this day the spot where she expired bears the name of Margaret's Bog. The tradition further states that the Macdonalds, ere they had returned to their boats, were surprised by a party of Macleods, with the result that the Macdonalds were defeated with great slaughter. The successful Macleods arranged the bodies of the vanquished underneath a turf dyke, and, as a simple means of effecting burial, overturned the dyke upon the corpses. The site where the Macdonalds lie buried bears the name to this day of "Milleadh Garaidh," which means the destruction of the wall. Quite recently I was informed by a native of the district that on one occasion when he was digging about the locality of this dyke he came across a human skull. Trumpan churchyard is also of interest because of the fact that it is the reputed burial-place of the unfortunate Lady Grange. While her body was buried by stealth in this lonely churchyard, a coffin filled with stones and sods was ostentatiously buried in Dunvegan churchyard.

## KILCHOAN BURIAL-GROUND, GLENDALE.

This burial-ground is situated in Glendale, about 9 miles by road from Dunvegan. There are two items of interest here: first, an ancient font, similar to those already described; and second, an erect stone over a modern grave, which is quite evidently a recumbent monumental slab of some consequence. The slab itself (fig. 10, p. 381) is peculiar in shape, having a triangular termination at the bottom. It is bordered by a roll moulding all round, which is imperfectly shown by the rubbing. The principal figure on the slab is that of a sword in the centre, having a lobated pommel and reversed quillons. Over the hilt of the sword, in the space between it and the top of the stone, is the figure of a man seated and playing the harp. In the space above the quillon on the right-hand side of the hilt is the figure of a man, apparently in ecclesiastical vestments, and holding in his right hand what seems to be a crosier, the crook of which is faintly indicated in the rubbing. Below the quillon, on the same side, is a chalice, and below that three panels, one of square and the others of oblong shape. The space on the left-hand side of the sword is occupied by a running scroll of foliage.

There are no indications, beyond a slight accumulation of stones in the centre of the churchyard, of there having been a church, but I was informed that the stones which at present form the boundary-wall of the churchyard were taken from the churchyard itself, which, and the fact of the presence for many generations of the ancient baptismal font, point to the former existence of a church. According to the *Origines Parochiales* and Bishop Forbes' *Calendar of Scottish Saints*, Kilchoan in Glendale was dedicated to St Congan, brother of St Kentigerna, the mother of St Fillan, as was also Kilchoan in Strath, and the two Kilchoans in Ardnamurchan and Knoydart.

The local tradition as to the origin of the name is that Choan, a prince of Danish blood, while engaged upon a raid to the Western Isles, perished in Mainish Bay, on the fringe of which Kilchoan churchyard is situated. An ancient tree still remains, which, according to tradition,

marks the spot where Choan was buried. Choan is still an object of superstitious fear among the people of Glendale. The story goes that on one occasion an old man who lived close to the churchyard, being anxious to prevent his hens from doing damage to his newly-planted seed, went to the churchyard and removed some of the branches of the tree upon the site of Choan's grave. In the dead of night the poor man was awakened by the sudden entrance of a mysterious spectre, who, with uplifted hand and menacing gesture, demanded to



Fig. 11. Standing Stone near Skeabost Bridge.

know the reason why his resting-place had been so disturbed. In fear the old man explained the reason, and the story goes that he was forced to return with the spirit of Choan and replace the branches which he had removed, under the threat of dire catastrophe.

#### STANDING STONE WITH INCISED SYMBOLS.

Having been informed when at Skeabost that there was a standing stone known as *Clach Ard* in the moor not far distant, upon which there were traces of circles, I went and examined the stone (fig. 11). It is situated about 2 miles north-east of Skeabost Bridge, and stands on slightly rising ground, entirely by itself. It is a rough, undressed boulder stone, bearing upon one face distinct indications of what appeared to me to be

the symbol known as the double-disc and zigzag floriated rod of the sculptured stones of the east coast of Scotland. The rubbing, however, showed, what was not at first apparent on the stone, that there were two symbols incised upon it (fig. 12)—the crescent, with the V-shaped



Fig. 12. Symbols on the Stone near Skeabost Bridge.

floriated rod towards the upper part of the stone, and underneath it the symbol with the two discs and zigzag floriated rod. Unfortunately the left-hand lower portion has been completely broken off, thus rendering the lower of the two discs incomplete. I understand that this is the first occasion on which these symbols have been noticed in the Isle of Skye. I could gather no local history attached to this stone.

## PLAIN STANDING STONES.

I took photographs of two standing stones (figs. 13-14) a mile or two distant, each situated within a few yards of the other, facing the sea. There is no ornamentation upon either stone. The land is cultivated on all sides except between the stones and the sea, where there are distinct remains of a rampart, now turfed over.

## CIST.

Having been informed that a few years ago workmen had come across a stone chamber containing bones, in the midst of a fair-sized cairn known as *Carn Glasse*, a mile or two away, I visited the spot and located the cist. Roughly taken, the measurements were 3 feet by 2 feet by 2 feet. The cist was formed of flat stones on end, with a covering-stone, which was broken by the workmen at the time of the discovery. I conversed with one of the workmen, who informed me that no implements or pottery of any kind were found.

## THE BROCH AT DUNOSDALE.

This is one of many similar brochs scattered over the western mainland of Scotland and the Western Islands. So far as I have been able to ascertain, the brochs in Skye, of which there are several, have not been particularly noted. Speaking generally, those I have examined all possess similar features, being placed on rising land, more or less precipitous on three sides, and, so far as can be gathered from their present ruinous condition, all of them (or with an occasional exception) more or less of the same circumference. The broch at Dunosdale is situated on a knoll on the left-hand side of the road leading from Dunvegan to Glendale, about 3 miles from Dunvegan village. It overlooks Dunvegan Loch. I was informed by a person who had visited the broch some years ago, when in a less ruinous condition, that the entrance was at the portion of the circle at the back (treating the front as that portion facing Dunvegan Loch). The portion at the back

is the only portion which, assuming the configuration of the ground to be the same to-day as it was in the days when the broch was occupied, required protective defences, and there are distinct indications of ramparts



Fig. 13. Standing Stone.



Fig. 14. Standing Stone.

at this place. I have not taken any measurements, owing to the fact that I was without assistance, but, speaking generally, the circular wall is in some places at least 6 or 7 feet high, and of considerable thickness. In what was originally the central courtyard, and also round the base of

the external wall, there are considerable numbers of tumbled-down stones. When one takes these facts into consideration, and the further fact that it has been the practice for generations past for the crofting community to construct their houses and their marches out of the material of which these brochs were built, one may fairly assume that this broch was of considerable height. There is at least one chamber which can be distinctly traced, indicative of a guard-chamber, complete in itself, and not forming a portion of a gallery. There are also certain flat stones which indicate the existence of a gallery running through the thickness of the walls. I have been more than once informed that, within the recollection of men now living, this and others of the Skye brochs were in a much better state of preservation, and that there were well-formed galleries, which the schoolboys used to delight to penetrate.

It may be of interest to note that Mr Mackenzie, factor for MacLeod of MacLeod, informed me of a broch near Struan, which he said was in excellent condition, because of the fact that there are few crofters' dwellings in the vicinity, and therefore not the same opportunity for its demolition. He further mentioned the existence of two ancient tumuli, near Roag which have not yet been investigated. Mr Mackenzie's belief is that if a proper and systematic investigation were made of these tumuli, and also of the brochs, many interesting relics would be found.

#### DUN HALLAN.

This broch (fig. 15) is different from others in the island, in respect of it being the smallest in diameter of any I have seen. It is situated in Waternish, and is easily recognised from the road between Dunvegan and Trumpan. I had no opportunity to take any measurements. There is one distinct chamber on the right-hand side of the entrance, and indications of one corresponding on the left-hand side. The entrance to the broch, as in the case of the broch at Dunosdale, is on the side furthest from the road. The broch occupies the top of a knoll, which is pretty steep on three sides. Another difference is that, so far as I could gather, there was but one single wall, 8 or 9 feet in thickness.



As in the case of the other brochs, the internal courtyard is filled with a great mass of debris. The masonry of this broch, as will be seen from the photograph, is at least 14 feet in height, and the stones are symmetrically placed one on the top of each other, without any cementing substance. One is at once struck by the size and weight of individual stones.



Fig. 15. Broch of Dun Hallan, Skye.

While on the subject of brochs, I may mention that I also visited Dun Borreraig, situated about 3 miles due west from Dunvegan Castle, and Dun Colbost, about 4 miles from Dunosdale, on the same side of the same road, but further from the road, which possess characteristics closely resembling those brochs I have noted. I also saw in the distance Dun Skirinish, in the district of Borve, about 5 or 6 miles west of Portree, and heard of others in the island.