

II.

NOTES IN BALQUHIDDER: SAINT ANGUS, CURING WELLS, CUP-MARKED STONES, &c. By JAMES MACKINTOSH GOW, F.S.A. Scot.

Saint Angus, the patron saint of the district, is said to have come to the glen from the eastward, and to have been so much struck with its marvellous beauty that he blessed it. The remains of the stone on which he sat to rest are still visible in the gable of one of the farm buildings at Easter Auchleskine, and the turn of the road is yet called "Beannachadh Aonghais" (Angus's Blessing). At this spot it was the custom in the old days for people going westward to show their respect for the saint by repeating "Beannaich Aonghais ann san Aoraidh" (Bless Angus in the oratory or chapel), at the same time reverently taking off their bonnets. The saint, going west, had settled at a spot below the present kirk, and near to a stone circle, the remains of which, and of the oratory, persons now living remember to have seen.

A short distance east from the present parish church, in the haugh below the manse, there are seven stones remaining of a circle which appears to have been about 30 feet in diameter; only one stone is in its original upright position, but there are fragments of others lying about; as usual, they are known as "Clachan-Aoraidh," or worshipping stones, and are not likely to be disturbed during the lease of the present tenant.

This haugh is the stance of the old market of Balquhidder, long a popular one in the district. It was held on the saint's day in April, and named "Feill-Aonghais" after him.¹

¹ Once on a market day a large number of armed Buchanans came over from Leny and quarrelled with the Maclaurins, the result being such a terrible conflict that only two of the Leny men escaped from the spot. The slaughtered Buchanans were thrown into a pool of the Balvaig River adjoining, and that part of the river is to this day called "Linn na Seichachan" (the Linn of the Hides), where the corpses of the slain for a time stopped the course of the stream. The two men who fled had only a short respite. They swam the river and made for home, but were

Overlooking this haugh and the stone circle there is a knoll named "Tom Aonghais" (Angus's Hillock). Further east, and on the same side of the road, overlooking the strath, there is another knoll, which in later times was the gallows hill of the district, and is still known as "Tom na Croich." On the level ground below this knoll there is a prominent monolith, standing about $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet above ground, quite flat on the top. It is shaped like a wedge, with the edge to the east, and is famous in Balquhider as the place where trials of strength took place. A large round water-worn boulder, named, after the district, "Puderag," and weighing between two and three hundredweight, was the testing stone, which had to be lifted and placed on the top of the standing stone. There used to be a step about 18 inches from the top, on the east side of the stone, on which the lifting stone rested in its progress to the top. This step or ledge was broken off about thirty years ago, as told to me by the person who actually did it, and the breadth of the stone was thereby reduced about 8 inches. This particular mode of developing and testing the strength of the young men of the district has now fallen into disuse, and the lifting-stone game is a thing of the past. A former minister of the parish pronounced it a dangerous pastime. Many persons were permanently injured by their efforts to raise the stone, and it is said that he caused it to be thrown into the river, but others said it was built into the manse dyke, where it still remains. There were similar stones at Monachyle, at Strathyre, and at Callander, and no doubt in every district round about, but the man who could lift "Puderag" was a strong man and a champion.

Regaining the high road, and still going east, about 40 yards from the cottage of Mr Maediarmid, there lies just inside the road dyke a large five-sided stone, about 8 feet long by 5 feet broad at the broadest part, and about 2 feet above ground. It is called "Basan an Sagairt" (the Priest's Basin). When the present road and dyke were made, its

pursued, one being overtaken and killed on the hillside about a mile from the market. A cairn marks the spot where he fell. The other, making for Strathyre, met his fate a little farther on, the spot being still known as "Stron-lenac," the Leny Man's Point).

name must have saved it. The hollow or basin is 18 inches in diameter and 6 inches deep, and is unmistakably artificial. The stone is the mica slate of the district, hard and granitic.

Going still further east to the first turning of the road beyond the farmhouse of Wester Auchleskine, and on the left-hand side, there used to be a large boulder with a natural cavity in its side, famous as a curing well for sore eyes.¹

This stone was called "Clach nan sul" (the Stone of the Eyes). In 1878 the road trustees caused it to be blasted, as it was supposed to be a danger in the dark to passing vehicles. Its fragments were broken up, and used as road metal.

Another curing well, "Fuaran n' druibh chasad," for hooping-cough, is situated at the side of the burn "Alt cean dhroma," and in the grounds of Edinchip, at the west side of the garden wall, but on the opposite side of the stream. It is formed of a water-worn pot hole in the limestone rock which forms the bed of the burn, and is 10 or 12 inches in diameter at the top and 6 inches deep. There must be a spring running into the hollow through a fissure, as no sooner is it emptied than it immediately refills, and contains about two quarts of water.²

The well can easily be distinguished by the large moss-covered boulder, round and flat, like a crushed ball, and about 7 feet in diameter, which overshadows it, and a young ash tree of several stems growing by its side.

¹It is said that money used to be left in the cavity by the patients, and my informant stated that people when going to church, having forgotten their small change, used in passing to put their hands in the well and find a coin; indeed, he had himself done so more than once.

²The gardener at Edinchip, a young man, stated that he had seen as many as twelve children brought to drink the water, and a spoon made from the horn of a living cow was used for the purpose. People who could not conveniently bring their children to the well used to send for a bottleful of the water; and, to make the cure certain, it was the custom to enjoin the messenger to speak to no one on the way. This was a necessary precaution, as many cases were known where the messenger never reached the well, but, meeting a friend, adjourned to the nearest public-house and spent his fee, filling the bottle at the next burn, the water of which might perhaps serve the purpose just as well as the genuine article.

CUP-MARKED STONES.

I examined nearly every prominent stone from King's House to the top of Loch Voil, and although great havoc has been made among the old stones during the last fifty years in clearing the land, I was rewarded by finding four with cup-marks—three on the farm of Wester Auchleskine, and one, nearly exactly opposite, on the south side of the River Balvaig, at the farm of Gart-na-fuaran. As usual there is no tradition extant regarding these marks. "The oldest inhabitant" knows nothing about them, and never heard them referred to in any way, one exception being that one of the stones here was known in my informant's youth as "the Stone of the Pots." This stone is a large half-buried boulder of mica-schist, flat in shape, above 8 feet long and nearly the same breadth, about 30 inches above ground, slanting upwards from the north, and on the upper slanting side there are 15 undoubted original cup-marks. But as it had been used by the children of many generations as a slide, the marks are a good deal defaced. The cups are from $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and the smaller ones are shallow, the larger in some cases being about 1 inch deep, and some of them were deepened by men now living, when they were boys, by working on them with nails; they had also tried to make cups with the nails, but these are easily distinguished. Some years ago the stone was bored for blasting, but fear of the consequences to the adjoining house prevented this being done, and it is now likely to remain uninjured and in its present position for many years to come. It is situated at the east side of the garden wall, which at one time had been the gable of the old house of Auchleskine.

About 400 yards directly east from the farm-house there is a group of three large water-worn boulders of coarse mica-schist, with veins of quartz, the largest of which is about 15 feet long, 7 feet broad, and nearly 5 feet above ground. On the top of this stone there are seven cup-marks of various sizes. The largest are 5 inches in diameter and 2 inches deep; the smaller ones are shallower and from $1\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. There may have been more marks on this stone, as a portion of the top near the marks has been broken off, and there are

several other faint hollows, but, in my opinion, not sufficiently pronounced to indicate that they ever were cups.

West from the same farm-house, in the field behind the byre, there is a buried boulder nearly level with the ground. It measures about 4 feet long, the same breadth, and in the centre of the top there is a large cup about 5 inches diameter and 1 inch deep.

On the opposite or south side of the River Balvaig, on the farm of Gart-na-fuaran, there is a great number of huge water-worn boulders, which appear to have been brought down from the adjoining Glenbuckie in the Glacial period. They are of the coarse rock of the district, many of them with large veins and masses of quartz. About fifty yards east from the farm-house there is an immense boulder, 26 feet long, 18 feet broad, and about 12 feet high. It is on the roadside leading to Strathyre, and on the top, which slants slightly to the south, there are five cup-marks, and, as usual, of various sizes, the largest being $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter; and, as on the stone at Auchleskine, there are other shallow hollows, but these are not marked enough to be identified as cup-marks. The two end cups of the group are 30 inches apart from centre to centre and point due north and south.

OLD EARTHWORKS AT KIRKTON GLEN.

I was informed by Mr Patrick Ferguson, the tenant of Auchleskine Farm, that there were curious embankments up in the Kirkton Glen, known as "The Trenches." On referring to the Ordnance Map, there was nothing of the kind noticed, and "the oldest inhabitant" only knew that there were trenches on the hill, which were made by the Picts, and that a great clan battle once took place near them. I made a pilgrimage to the spot, and after a fatiguing climb of about a mile and a half up the glen from Balquhidder Kirk, and nearly 2000 feet above the sea, I came on a stretch of precipitous crags about 100 yards long. On going to the top of this ridge of crags I was surprised to find it had apparently been utilised as a fortification, that earthworks had been erected on it, and that the openings in the rocks, here and there along its course, formed, as it were, natural embrasures. It

enclosed a deep trench, where many hundreds of men might be sheltered and hid from the view of any one coming up the hill. About 40 yards higher up the steep hill, but more to the north, another wall appeared, which had apparently been built of earth and stones, with here and there the natural rock taken in as part of the work. This, too, is about 100 yards long, and encloses a deep trench similar to the first. Going still further up the hill, and about the same distance apart, another important rampart appeared. It is nearly 200 yards long, from 8 to 15 or 20 feet high on the inside, and broad enough on the top to allow a carriage and pair to be driven on it. It is quite level and straight along its whole length, and looked like an unused railway embankment. A deep trench, as in those below, was here also enclosed.

Another climb of about 40 or 50 yards over ground strewn with stones of a size which could easily be lifted, and quite unlike the natural hillside, brought us to the fourth enclosure. The wall in this case was not so long, but of the same nature as the second and third ones, and, with the ends or flanks slightly inclined inwards, enclosed a considerable piece of ground, on which were visible the marks of the foundations of several dwellings. The highest point of the hill (Meall nan Sealladh : The Prospect Hill) is upwards of 2700 feet above the sea, and appeared to be half a mile or so to the north, and 600 or 700 feet higher than the trenches.

Without offering any opinion as to what these extraordinary embankments are or were, I have thought it desirable to draw the attention of the Society to them, in the hope that they may be examined and reported on by some one more able to give an opinion than myself.