

ART. XVIII.—*The Dacre Stone*. By the REV. CANON MATHEWS.

Read at Dacre, July 5th, 1889.

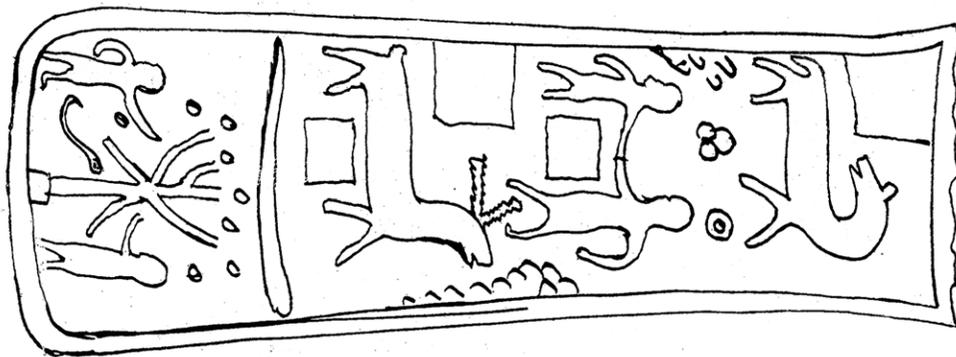
THE stone, of which the accompanying sketch is given, was found during the restoration of Dacre church in 1875, imbedded in the east end wall of the church, when that was being pulled down for the insertion of the new east window. It is a pink gray sandstone of a grit very similar to the local quarries. The length is 3 ft. 2 inches, greatest breadth at the bottom 14 inches, and least width near the top 11 inches. Its thickness is 4 inches; the back roughly chipped, the sides ornamented with a rope-work border. It has obviously formed a portion of a larger whole, from the broken edge at the top, just as it begins to spread out from its narrowest width; but the sculpture on the front appears complete, from the fact of the bordering line being returned across the top.

The carving on the front is both interesting and difficult to decipher. There is first a figure which Mr. Calverley says is a lamb, but I had taken to be a horse:—then a little foliage to the left, a trefoil, and circle with pellet. Then two figures, a larger and smaller seemingly striking hands over a rude altar,—the branches of a tree to the right with a stag reaching to nibble them, and below a curving line which I think is a serpent. Below is a tree with spreading branches, with pellets (perhaps fruit) all round it, two human figures reaching each a hand to the tree, and a small snake clearly marked curving under the lower branches.

Upon the symbolism I do not like to pronounce. The first general assumption was that it represented Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel, and that the stone was the lower limb of a rude cross, of which it does give a very strong impression.

The

Dacca Stone



Scale 1/2 Inch to 1 Foot

The objection to this is that there is not a single distinctly Christian emblem on the whole stone: while every one of the figures has a symbolic meaning in Norse paganism. If (*pace* Mr. Calverley) the upper figure is a horse, that is the sacred animal of Freya,—the three pellets represent Thor, Odin, and Frey,—the circle with pellet Freya. Then we have the sacred ash Yggdrasil, with the stag nibbling its shoots, and the serpent Nidhog at its roots. (The stag also a sacred animal to Frey). Below we have again a sacred tree and serpent, with (?) Thor gathering its fruit.

If, however, the upper figure is that of a lamb, it undoubtedly will represent Christ, and its position in the sculpture generally would shew the triumph of Christianity over Paganism. The central scene of the two figures and what seems to be a rude altar I cannot pronounce upon. Their attitude is that rather of amity than hostility,—which is against the theory of Cain and Abel. I should like to think that it could have been carved to represent the treaty made at the monastery which stood on this spot between Eugenius (Owain) the last independent king of the native Cumbrians, and Athelstan, in 926: when “the barbarians without delay coming to a place called Dacor surrendered themselves and their kingdoms to the sovereign of England. Out of regard to this treaty, the King himself stood for the son of Constantine,* who was ordered to be baptized at the sacred font.” (Wm. of Malmesbury.) The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says of this, that “they confirmed the peace by pledges and by oaths at the place which is called Eamot (the river Eamont which flows within a mile of Dacre) on the 4th before the Ides of July (this day 963 years ago), and they renounced all idolatry and submitted to him after that in peace.”

*King of Scotland, who accompanied Eugenius. The large hall at Dacre Castle adjoining is still called “the room of the Three Kings.”

If

If it is legitimate to think that this stone represents this treaty, and the triumph of Christianity over the Paganism which still lingered among the Cumbrians after so many conversions, it will be one of the most interesting memorials that we have in the country of Strathclyde. I can only submit it as a conjecture to this meeting, without any doubt that there will be "*quot homines tot sententiæ.*"

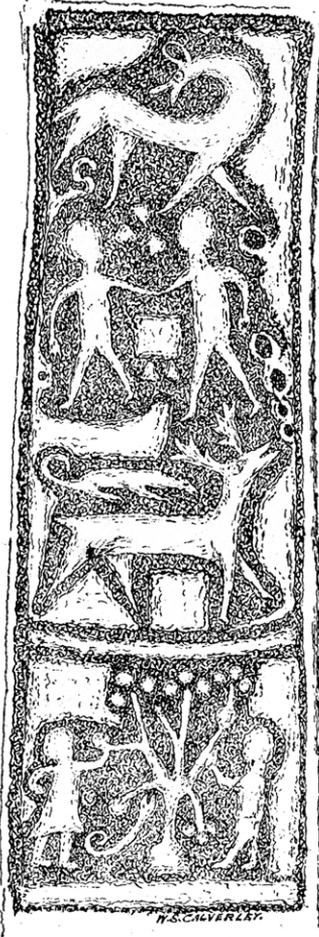
NOTE BY THE REV. W. S. CALVERLEY, F.S.A.

The Dacre Stone, of which I give a drawing, is the shaft of a cross almost complete. The head has been broken away. The sculpture of the whole face of the shaft is seen. The plaitwork of three strands on the edge terminates correctly. We may not say what form the head and arms took, but the upper figure, which is a lamb, corresponds in position and very closely also in form, with the upper figure on the much larger and very differently shaped cross at Penrith, the head of which is itself decorated with a raised cross having a central boss. The head, and it may be a few inches of plain stone at the bottom, is all that is wanting of this remarkable and most interesting piece of work, perfect in proportion, and of very great merit in conception and design.

The artist has divided the surface of the stone into four panels above each other. In the lower panel he has figured the temptation; in the centre stands the tree bearing fruit in groups of threes, a fruit bearing branch hanging down on either side; to the left Eve, draped, takes the fruit, whilst one apple falls, and the serpent raising itself with open mouth appears as the tempter; to the right Adam stretches out his hand to the tree. In the next panel, the stag is hunted by the hound, a fit picture of the life of effort in a fallen world. The hart has held its place in symbolism through all the ages. In the panel above, two men join hands in peaceful compact over a square stone* font standing on two short supports, and over them the sun sign, or a three limbed sign is seen (this part of the work is damaged). In the uppermost division the Lamb walks triumphant, for the world, the flesh, and the devil may not compass the abiding death of him who is alive through Christ.

* Such a square stone font may be seen in Gilcrux Church.

This



DACRE CROSS SHAFT

This, I think, is the reading of the picture writing—the regeneration of christian baptism is placed in apposition to the fall; the lamb once slain but ever living as our Blessed Lord, is placed in apposition to the hunted stag. Baptism and the resurrection of the dead is the teaching. Outside the real design there is no attempt at ornamentation, or very little indeed.

The workman whose skill may be seen in his treatment of the horns, shape, and movement of the stag, and in the general proportions of his figures, has not cut away the stone at the sides, between the legs of the animals, and in other places; but has left his work in simplicity, to tell its own story without adornment of any kind.

In searching for facts which might bear upon the history of the Penrith crosses, the circumstances of Athelstan's visit to Cumbria were forcibly brought to my notice, and about the same time Canon Mathews sent me his notes upon this Dacre cross shaft, which I had not seen. Now that I have seen the stone, I find no reason to alter my opinion, namely, that the whole thing is christian, that it commemorates the compact of the kings, and that the date 926 is not too early for its production.

