

AN ACCOUNT

OF

SOME REMAINS OF ANTIQUITY IN FORFARSHIRE.

Communicated to the Society by Dr Jamieson.

THE etymology of the names of places, if not a necessary branch, is certainly an useful appendage, of history. While it relieves the mind of the reader, often fatigued by attending to a narrative that in general only exhibits the vices of man, and their fatal effects,—it may also throw light on circumstances which are greatly obscured by fable, or rendered uncertain by a variety of contradictory relations. The etymology of names, still in use, frequently proves at least a collateral evidence of the truth of historical facts to which they allude. Illustrations of this nature are, it must be acknowledged, often far-fetched, and the conclusions deduced from them merely conjectural. But though this branch of study should, in many cases, be rejected by the more fastidious historian, it is an ample field for amusement, and often a source of real information to the antiquary; especially when it regards scenes with which he is peculiarly conversant. Whence has a man so much pleasure in knowing even

the minutest circumstances which refer to his own country, or to the place of his nativity, but from that love that he bears to his native soil? The same principle which influences him in these more limited inquiries, will, when a little farther extended, produce the nobler effects of real patriotism. Influenced by this generous principle, individuals are often impelled to more gallant and glorious actions than could ever have proceeded from a regard to personal fame. The illiterate soldier or seaman, whose name is buried in oblivion, cheerfully consents to this sacrifice, if it be subservient to the honour of his beloved country.

It may be said, perhaps, that the study of etymology would be less of a conjectural nature, were it directed by some general rules. In every branch of literature there must be exceptions from these; but, in ordinary cases, they are by no means to be neglected. One thing that should be particularly attended to, in this study, is the existing, or the original, language of the country. In consequence of disregarding this rule, ingenious men have often bewildered themselves in seeking an obscure and uncertain etymon, while they rejected that which was most simple and obvious.

It may be occasionally necessary to trace the origin of some names of places to illustrious persons from whom they have been borrowed. But this mode would need to be managed with the greatest caution. It is an essential prerequisite, that we know from authentic records the real existence of such persons, before we make the names of places to originate from them. It may be asserted, with some degree of confidence, that personal or family designations are more generally borrowed from places, than local names from persons. Inattention to this fact has occasioned the perplexity of historians, in investigating the names, and in tracing the first inhabitants, of the countries they have described. Former

historians have derived the denominations of countries from persons celebrated as illustrious in fabulous legends. The compilers of these legends, being themselves at a loss for the origin of names, have either borrowed them from remote and uncertain tradition, or conjured up fictitious persons for their present necessity, that they might not seem at a loss to contribute to the honour of their country. Thus, characters, that never had an existence save in the imagination of bards, have been celebrated in the legends of succeeding ages, been adopted by credulous writers, and have obscured the path of the careful historian of more enlightened times.

For the origin of the names of particular places, it will be sometimes necessary to refer to historical facts. When we certainly know the reality of a fact related in history, the continuance of a name, descriptive of it, may determine the place where it has happened, which would be otherwise uncertain. Or, if we have not certain evidence of the reality of an event, a name transmitted through many generations, that had no idea of compiling the history of their country, and could have had no design to impose upon posterity,—will contribute no small degree of evidence to the reality of the event itself. The most of our early historians have derived the names of places from supposed illustrious persons; taking for granted, on bare tradition, the very questionable existence of such persons. We have an evidence of this in the ancient, and still most common, name, by which this county is known.

It is pretended that the ancient name of that territory, which included the shire of Forfar, was *Horestia*, or *Forestia*; and that Kenneth II., surnamed M'Alpin, “after the overthrow of the Picts, gave new names to every district, that the memory of the Pictish names might end together with the inhabitants; and that the country, anciently called *Horestia*, was given unto two

“brethren, Angusian and Mernan; by reason whereof, the one part of the same country was called *Angus*, and the other the *Mernes*.” This is the account borrowed by Hollinshed from Boece.* The same is materially given by Buchanan.† But it seems more natural to suppose that the name *Angus* is derived from Gaelic, and compounded of two words, *an* and *visg*, which signify “the water,” or “the Esk;” as great part of it is situated on two rivers, which still bear this designation. It is worthy of remark, that, even in our own time, these rivers are sometimes called by their original name of *Esk*; and often also distinguished, the Gaelic word being translated, by the appellation of “the south” and “the north water.” To this source the very name *Horestia* has been traced. By Tacitus, the inhabitants of this part of Scotland are called *Horesti*;‡ or, as many learned men apprehend it ought to be read, *Horesci*; which has been derived from the British *Gor uisc*,—signifying nothing more than the country “above the Esk,” or “the river.” The inhabitants of Angus are by Ptolemy called *Taxali*, which, according to the opinion of the learned Baxter, has a similar origin. “Quid enim *Taxali*, sive *Tiscali*, nisi *Tisc heli*, quod est aqua salsa? “De aqua igitur salsa, sive mari, *Taxali* appellati sunt. Flumen igitur *Tuæsis* sive *Isca* *συναντιστος*, etiam *Taxalis* sive *Tiscalis* appellatum videtur de salso æstuario et marina aqua. Novimus autem hodie geminam dici *Isca* in isto populo, Borealem scilicet et Australem.” Vid. Glossarium Antiquitatum Britannicarum, in verb. *Horesci* et *Taxali*.

The head town of the county is Forfar. An ingenious friend conjectures that this place may have derived its name from Gaelic *fuar*, cold, chilly, and *bar*, in its constructed state, *bhar*, or *var*,

* Hist. of Scotl. p. 177, Lond. Ed. 1577.

‡ In Vit. Agricola.

† Lib. i. c. 6.

a point, *qu.* "the cold point." By the inhabitants of the country it is invariably pronounced *Farfar*. It is certainly a place of great antiquity.* Hollinshed makes mention of the castle of Forfar as existing in the time of Agricola, who was sent into Britain in the reign of Vespasian. He informs us that Galde (the same who is called by Tacitus Galgacus), with Garnarde and Gildo, "went vnto the castle of Forfare, there to consulte with "the captaines and gouernours of theyr menne of war, how to "mayntaine themselues in their enterprise against the enemie."† But Hollinshed had no better evidence than that of Boece for the existence of Forfar in so early an age. Posterior to this event, this castle seems to have been a place of considerable consequence, as parliaments were often held here. It was indeed a royal residence; and never belonged to any private person. It would appear that it was one of the principal mansions of Malcolm Canmore. It was situated on the north side of what is now the town; but there are no remains of it. The place where it stood, which still bears the name of the Castlehill, is now occupied as garden ground. It is said to have been demolished by Wallace, lest the English should use it as a place of strength; and it is admitted that it was never since rebuilt. All the charters belonging to the town were either destroyed or carried off by Cromwell. The borough received a new charter from Charles II.

It was formerly surrounded by the Loch of Forfar. This was a fine body of water, before it was drained, which was about twelve years ago. The former circumference has not been less than four English miles, whereas it is now reduced to two. It has lost ten feet of its depth. It was given by one of the

* Guthrie's Hist. Scotl. v. i. p. 43.

† Hist. p. 53.

kings of Scotland to the Thanes of Glamis, now Earls of Strathmore. There were then three islands, or, as they are called, *Inches*. Besides that on which the castle stood, there was one, which still bears the name of *Queen Margaret's Inch*; another was called the *West Inch*. They seem all to have been in some degree fortified. Queen Margaret's still exhibits the foundations of a castle, or, according to others, of a kind of pleasure-house. A considerable part of the building was standing about twenty years ago, and also an oven, that was almost entire. Perhaps there is not a curiosity of the same kind in Britain, at least of its size, as it is wholly of an artificial nature. Vast piles of oak have been driven into the loch, which in this place, and in the neighbourhood of it, is very deep. These have been covered by prodigious quantities of stones, indiscriminately heaped upon each other, with a considerable stratum of earth above all. The stakes are still to be seen in many places of the island, not only on the verge of it, as if they had been meant merely to serve the purpose of a fence, but near the centre, where the earth has been washed away; so that it is an indisputable fact that it has been entirely forced. Its length is nearly about 450 feet, and its breadth 150. The formation of it must have required very great labour and expence.

In the vicinity there is a cavity in a rising ground, whence it is said the earth was taken for the formation of this island. The ditch, which has been cast between it and the main land, is still very distinct. Over this there has been a draw-bridge. The ditch has been designed to prevent any attack from the land, when the water might be low in the summer season. It has been said, that one of our old Scottish chronicles makes mention of the burial of one of the Kings of Scotland at the north-east end of this island.

But of this I have met with no evidence. The island, or rather peninsula, is now mostly overgrown with shrubbery; and as the greatest part of it is of the flowering kind, it not only presents the enchanting prospect of a garden rising out of the lake, with all the beautiful luxuriance of nature; but, when in blossom, perfumes the air with the most delightful fragrance. This island is situated at an equal distance from both extremities of the lake. It would appear that Bellenden, or rather Harrison, alludes to this place, and views it as the site of a castle, when he says, in his Description of Scotland; "This likewise is not to be passed over with silence, that whereas Forfair was in tyme past a notable citie, strengthened with *two* royall castelles, as the ruynes do yet declare, now it is brought vnto litle more than a countrey village, replenished with simple cotages."*

Since the loch was drained, for the purpose of digging marle, which is here found in great abundance, several vessels of different sizes have been found, some of which were conveyed into the castle of Glamis. They are said to be of a metal very different from that which is commonly used in our time, and, when rung, have the same sound with bell-metal. The little circles of horn, presented to the Society by Dr Ogilvie of Forfar, were found about St Margaret's Inch. They seem to have been ornaments of furniture. Some, that were found afterwards, were said to have brass nails in them. Uncommonly large deer's horns have also been found here. This island does not seem to have been inhabited much later than the time of Malcolm Canmore. We are informed, indeed, by Hollinshed, "that Alexander II., because the olde Queene his mother determined to remayne, during the residue

* Chap. 6.

of hir life in the place where that holye woman Queene Margaret sometye led hir lyfe, gaue vnto hir, towards the maintenaunce of hir estate, the castelles and townes of Forfare, with the landes and possessions to the same belonging."* The name of this queen mother was Ermengard. She was daughter of Richard Viscount Beaumont, grandson, by his mother, to William the Conqueror. The most probable opinion, perhaps, with regard to the structure on this island, is that it was designed as a place of retirement for Queen Margaret; where, at a distance from the noise of the court, she might devote herself to religion.† A tradition is still current, that, when this island was inhabited by a branch of the royal family, on some insurrection or invasion, they all fled from it, and cast their furniture into the lake.

In this lake the murderers of Malcolm II. were drowned. In the account given of this affair, Fordun, Hollinshed, and Buchanan, all agree; asserting, that after the assassination, they, attempting to escape, wandered from Glamis castle in the night, till they came to the Loch of Forfar. As this was covered with ice and snow, they endeavoured to cross it; but the ice giving way, they all perished. The Lochaber-axe, now presented to the Society, which, when the loch was drained, was found in the marle in the west end of it, nearest Glamis, might belong to one of these regicides. It evidently bears the marks of great antiquity. It could not, at any rate, have been left there, but in consequence of

* Hist. p. 281.

† As an illustration of the honours paid to the memory of this virtuous Queen, who was canonized after her death, and invested with the *female* patronage of Scotland, a medal is herewith transmitted to the Society, representing her in the characters of Saint and Patroness. It may perhaps with as much propriety be called an amulet, as it has been evidently designed for being suspended at a rosary.

some accident of a similar kind. Another was found much about the same place, but said to be more like a halberd. This, it is believed, is still in the possession of the family of Strathmore.

Many places, adjacent to Forfar, still bear names which are said to refer to the residence of the court there. A farm, about half a mile from Forfar, is called *Turf-big*; because, as tradition gives it, the peats or *turfs* used in the king's house were *bigged* or built there. This etymology may appear rather ludicrous; but it is confirmed by fact. Always when a new possessor serves himself heir to that part of the estate, he is obliged to promise that he will furnish peats and *turfs* for the use of the king's house when he resides in Forfar. This account is given from the information of a gentleman who was present at the last transaction of this kind. Another place, near this, retains the name of *Heather-stacks*; where, it is said, the heath used in the king's kitchen was cut down, and piled up.

The vulgar tradition in regard to *Balmishannar*, an estate about a mile south from Forfar, is quite ridiculous. It is pretended that it is properly designed *Bonie-shaper*, because his Majesty's tailor resided there. But it is evidently Gaelic. It is written in a charter of Robert II. *Balmoschenore*, qu. *Ball mo-seanoir*, "the place," or "town, of the field of the old man."* At the north end of the

* This deed contains a confirmation of the account given of *Turf-beg*, here called *Tyre-beg*. For his Majesty says, that "whereas John, the son of William, and Christian his spouse, with their heirs, are bound annually to furnish the kings of Scotland, at their manor of Forfar, with three hundred cart-loads of peats for the lands of Balmoschenore and Tyrebeg; as he did not reside so frequently there as his ancestors did, he grants, of his special grace, that in lieu of these three hundred loads, they shall merely be bound to supply him and his heirs, as often as they shall happen to come to Forfar, with as much fuel as they may find necessary during their stay there." *Vide* Robertson's Ind. Chart. p. 135.

town we have still the *Court-road*. Here we also find the names of *King's-burn*, *King's-seat*, *King's-muir*, and *Wolf-law*, where the nobles met for hunting the wolf. About half a mile south from Forfar is the foundation of an old chapel, called "the Chapel of Boniface;" who was a missionary from Rome to Scotland in the eighth century, for the purpose of establishing the papal supremacy. It has been a very small building, as the most of these were; measuring 36 feet by 15 within walls. The wall of the chapel-yard is still to be seen, with the appearance of graves.

About a mile east from the town, on the Brechin road, some remains of a Pictish camp are still visible. It is impossible to know the form of it, as only part of one fosse can be distinctly seen. Before the ground was planted with wood, for a considerable part of its course, it could have been easily traced nearly the length of a mile. Now it can be discerned in one place only, which is not covered with wood, and has never been ploughed up since the encampment. There the ditch in some places is still about five feet deep; and the breast-work, about six feet broad, is quite distinct. The ditch seems to have been nearly ten feet in breadth. This was the camp of that Pictish king who was defeated by Alpin, the father of Kenneth II. By some he is called *Wred*, by others *Ferat*,* and *Feredith*†. Hollinshed relates that "this battle, wherein he was slain, was fought near to the town of Restenneth." There is a field about a quarter of a mile from Forfar, which still retains the name of *Feridan-field*. There, it is said, he was killed. This is probable enough, as our historians inform us that he endeavoured, with some of his bravest troops, to cut his way through the Scots army; and he might have fled thus far.

* Innes's Critical Essay, Append. No. 2 and 5.

† Hollinshed.

Towards the east end of the camp is a place called *Pitscandlie*. Mr Pennant conjectures concerning this name, that it is equivalent to *Picts Cairn*. But this seems merely fanciful. Near the house, indeed, which bears this name, there is a very large cairn. Part of it has been removed, to give place to a corn-yard. Two very large rude stones, without any sculpture, are still standing, which point out the limits of the cairn,—one at the north, the other at the south end of it. The largest of these stones is $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet above ground, and 18 feet in circumference. About a furlong west from this cairn is another on the side of the high-way, which is also very large. The great body of Picts slain in battle were most probably buried in these cairns. A little to the south of Restennet, about a mile distant from the Picts' cairns, in a muir which has been lately planted, are to be seen a number of smaller cairns, and one of an uncommon size. Here, we apprehend, the Scots slain in this battle were interred. The loss of Alpin was very great, said to be one-third of his army,* which may account for the number of little cairns, besides the great one.

Restenneth, according to Spotswood, was a priory or cell annexed to the Abbey of Jedburgh.† Here, it is said, they deposited their most valuable records and treasures, because they were in perpetual danger from the incursions of the English, being so near the border. Thence, according to some, it is called *Res tenet*. The monks were of the order of St Augustine. The steeple is still standing, and the church, although unroofed; the font, and place for holding their images, are entire. The site of the cloister is marked out by the walls which formed the square. This enclosure, formerly occupied by the cells of the

* Guthrie's Hist. v. i. p. 143.

† Acc. Relig. Houses, chap. 2.

fraternity, is now planted with trees, and used as a fold for cattle. This was the parish church of Forfar before the reformation. There are several places in this neighbourhood that have the same initial syllable, as *Rescobie*, *Reswallie*. It has been fancied that these are of Latin origin, and that they were given them by the monks; *Res cupit*, *Res valet*, as *Restennet* has been viewed as the top of the climax, *Res tenet*. The opinion of others, that *Res* is from *Goth. risc*, or *hris*, denoting a place beset with twigs or shrubs, has far greater probability. Near this is a place still called "the *Prior-mire*," by corruption "the *Prayer-mire*."

About four miles south from Forfar, lies the small estate of Dunbarrow. It is so called from a hill of that name, on which, according to some accounts, stood the castle in which Guaynor, Arthur's Queen, was confined, after he was defeated and slain by the Scots and Picts, A. D. 542. She is called Vanora by Buchanan, and charged by him with infidelity to her lord.* Although † some imagine that we ought to pay little regard to this part of the history of Scotland, yet as it is related by our most ancient writers, and entirely agrees with the minute traditions of the country, it certainly deserves attention. The name and history of this Queen are familiar with thousands in this county, who never read any history of Scotland. The name by which she is still known among the vulgar, is not very different from either of these formerly mentioned. She is called *Queen Waners*; and is spoken of as infamous for her meretricious practices with the meanest of the people. Bellenden, after Boece, says,—“ She was brocht in [into] Angus to “ ane castell callit Dunbarre.” ‡ The foundations of this castle are

* Lib. v.

† Guth. Hist. vol. i. p. 107.

‡ Chron. B. ix. c. 12.

still to be seen ; and a great many stones have, within these few years, been taken out of them, for the purpose of building. It has been of considerable extent. Some indeed say that she was confined in Angus, in a place about two miles west from Glamis, called "the Castlehill of Castletown." That castle has been uncommonly large for ancient times ; and the moat surrounding it is still very discernible, on the margin of the highway between Meigle and Glamis. You may still discern the place where the draw-bridge has been, and the road which led up to the castle. But there is not the least reason to imagine that this is the castle meant by Boece ; and there are no traces of the name. For some reason or other, indeed, she might have been removed from Dunbarrow to this place, some time before her death ; as the general tradition entirely agrees with Boece's account, that she was buried in Meigle. That vitrified fort, now called the *Hill of Barry*, lying north from Meigle, also claims the honour of being the prison of Guaynor. It might in former times be called *Dunbarry* ; and it must be admitted that, from its vicinity to Meigle, where she is said to have been interred, it seems to have a preferable claim to Dunbarrow.* Two large stones are still to be seen there in the church-yard, which, according to the vulgar account, point out the burial-place of Queen Waners. The house of Dunbarrow, at a little distance from the hill, is now built on the place where a pleasure-house belonging to Cardinal Beaton stood. Here he kept a *female friend*. Part of the Cardinal's house is still standing.

There are several ancient castles in Angus, which are not mentioned by Mr Pennant in his Tour through Scotland. About two miles west from Kirriemuir, lies the Castle of Balfour, which also

* See a Description of this Hill of Barry, Stat. Account, i. 504, 506, 508.

belonged to Cardinal Beaton. There is another at Cortachy, situate on the banks of the Esk, belonging to the family of Airly, and still inhabited. It is built in the Gothic stile, with circular towers projecting. It contains some tolerable family paintings. The walls are hung with arras, exhibiting a great deal of ancient history. Here are still to be seen a helmet and coat of mail, a curious pair of old war boots and spurs, of a very large size, and singular construction, and the robes that were used in parliament. A mile below this lies the castle of Inverquharity, lately belonging to Sir John Ogilvy, Baronet. It is so called from its being situate at the confluence of Esk and Carity. This is a square tower, very entire, and all handsomely built of hewn stone. It is supposed to be five hundred years old ; yet it is still habitable. There is a square projection from the wall over the gate, which was designed for letting down a second iron gate, or portcullis, to imprison any foe who should succeed in getting within the first. The family of the Ogilvies, it is said, had their rise in the reign of William the Lion, from Bredus, brother to Gilchrist Thane of Angus, who was married to the king's sister, put her to death upon suspicion of adultery, was outlawed, and afterwards pardoned by the king.* A small tract of land, near Glamis, is still called "the Glen of Ogilvy," from which this family seems to have taken its name.

A mile below Inverquharity, and about five miles north from Forfar, hard by the bridge of Shealhill, was situate an ancient castle belonging to the family of Buchan. The situation has been truly romantic. The castle stood on the verge of a precipice ; at the foot of which, about forty feet below, runs the river Esk. On each side of the castle a torrent precipitates itself from the neigh-

* Holl. 276. Buchanan.

bouring hills into the river. There are no remains of its former grandeur, except part of the wall of the chapel, which seems to have been wholly of fine hewn work. It retains the name of *Quiach*; although there is nothing but a little hamlet where the castle stood. The vaults of the castle still remain entire. Dr Ogilvie, to whom the estate belongs, caused some of them to be opened, and found them cut out of the solid rock. There was nothing in them, however, but a heap of stones.

According to Boece, the ancient name of Montrose was *Celurca*. Its present name has been generally derived from two Latin words, *Mons Rosarum*. Camden, in his *Britannia*, gives the same account. His words are,—“*Montrose, id est Mons Rosarum* “*oppidum, quondam Celurca, ex occasu alterius ejusdem nominis* “*exortum, quod inter duas Escas intersedet,*” &c. But the etymon given by Baxter is certainly more natural,—“*Mant er osc,*” *i. e.* the mouth of the water,—as it is situate at the mouth of Esk. Nor is there any affinity between *Mons Rosarum* and *Manturum*, which is the name given it by Ravenna. A learned friend, however, suggests, that the true origin is Gaelic, *meadh* (pronounced as if *mu*), *an the*, and *ross*, a peninsula,—*i. e.* “the field or plain of the “peninsula.” It is invariably pronounced by the vulgar, as well as by those who speak Gaelic, *Munross*.

In this description I have avoided, as much as possible, the repetition of any thing particularly explained by Mr Pennant; and have therefore, perhaps, been rather too minute in the account of what he has overlooked. He has left nothing to be said of Glamis, Aberlemno, Aberbrothick, &c. I can scarcely presume to call this even a supplement to his elegant, and, in general, faithful description of this county.

He concludes, that what is called the Castlehill of Finhaven,* is the remains of a volcano. But, from a narrow inspection of it, I am fully satisfied that it is a vitrification. Forts of this description have been formed in very remote ages, perhaps before the Christian era. I have seen one of the same kind in the parish of Kingarth, isle of Bute. It is situate nearly about the most westerly point of the island, upon the top of a rock on the margin of the sea. These forts resemble each other in this circumstance, that they are not of a square, but of an oval form. That in Bute, however, is much less than this. The tradition with regard to it is, that the inhabitants fled thither with their cattle when the island was at any time invaded. There is another fort, of the same form, on the top of a hill on the north part of the island, which was used for the same purpose: only it presents no appearances of vitrification. Many circumstances prove that the ingenious Pennant was mistaken as to Finhaven. Except in that place called the Castlehill, there is nothing on any of the hills around that presents the slightest appearance of a volcanic eruption. Now, it is natural to suppose, that had there been an eruption in this part of the country, various traces of it would have remained. The regular form of this place indicates that it has been constructed by art. You see what has been the wall distinctly formed all around, considerably above the level of the inclosure. It extends, perhaps, about 300 yards in length, and near 200 in breadth. Now, it is only the wall that properly exhibits the appearances of fire. Pennant, indeed, takes notice of two pits or hollows, each of which he supposes to have been a crater; these are the places, at least, to which he seems

* This was more anciently written *Finelvin*,—also *Fothenevin*, Chart. Rob. I. Robertson, Indi p. 18-23,—also *Finevin*, Ibid. p. 52.

to refer. The one, which is about two or three feet below the level of the ground inclosed, contains no vitrified matter. The other is deeper, and has a quantity of stones in it; some of which are vitrified. But these have been hurled into it from the wall above. It would seem that these pits were either dug for wells, or for collecting rain water, when the men and cattle belonging to the adjacent country were pent up in this inclosure. There is a breach or gap in the wall, on the south-west part of it, which seems to have been the only entry, where there is no proof that the vitrification has ever extended. The wall, which appears to have been about two, and, in some places, three yards in depth, is both within and without thoroughly vitrified; but, in the heart of it, the stones exhibit no vestiges of the effects of fire. This clearly shews that the fire has been externally applied on each side of the wall, to cement the loose unconnected stones into a solid and durable mass.

At the time that I examined this fort, in company with several literary gentleman, there was the best opportunity of forming a proper idea of the mode of structure, as the farmer, on whose premises it lay, had made a perpendicular section in the ground facing the wall on the outer side, extending from twelve to sixteen feet, for the purpose of carrying off the stones. These had been regularly laid; as in a well built dry stone wall.