

III.—RUNIC INSCRIPTION ON HAZEL-GILL CRAGS, NEAR BEWCASTLE.

BY W. L. CHARLTON.

[Read on the 28th November, 1894.]

SOME three years ago the writer had occasion to ride over the fells from the Tyne into Bewcastle. The road, for the greater part of the way, is mostly a mere track, hardly to be distinguished from a sheep-track. At most seasons of the year it is characterised in the language of the country as being 'saft.' Nevertheless there are many things to see and note upon on the way, not the least of them the hospitality invariably extended 'outbye,' and the pressure with which one is bidden 'in' at the few houses to be met with. On this occasion we accepted the hospitality of Mr. Dodd, the tenant of Paddaburn, a farm formerly part of the Hesleyside estate, and situated on the banks of the Irthing. Our host, a man of advanced years, and, we regret to say, since deceased, kindly acted as guide the next morning, and rode with us into Bewcastle. Our errand took the nature of a foray, for we both intended to 'lift' some cattle ere our return; but times have altered, and in these degenerate days such commodities have, alas! to be paid for in base cash.

Mr. Dodd enlivened the journey by many a tale of past days and people, chief amongst which, we may mention, was the account of his own wedding at Gretna Green many years before. He had given the worthy who officiated on that occasion to understand that he was but a tinker, lest he should be charged a fee on a higher scale as a farmer. Happening to mention the visit of the late Dr. Charlton, in 1865, to Baranspike, to inspect the Runic inscription there, he remarked that he had 'set' the doctor over into Bewcastle on that occasion. As time would not allow of our going out of our way to visit that place, Mr. Dodd suggested we should turn off a few hundred yards and see the inscription at Hazel-Gill Crag. These crags, by no means bold or extensive, lie about three miles to the north-east of Bewcastle church, and are on the High Grains farm, the property of

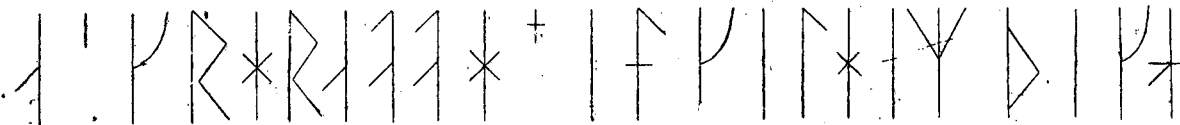
the earl of Carlisle. We made a rough sketch of the letters on the rock and journeyed on. No thought existed in our mind but that we should find an account, probably in the *Archæologia*, of these Runes. The matter remained forgotten until some months ago, when, in sorting some papers, the sketch we have mentioned turned up. An enquiry to the rev. Wm. Greenwell elicited the fact that the Hazel-Gill inscription was unknown to other antiquaries. This was confirmed by a letter from professor Stephens of Copenhagen. It is, therefore, with great pleasure, not unalloyed with a shade of fear at the presumption of one who is but a very young student in this particular cult, that we lay before you a measured drawing of the Runes, and an attempt to grasp their meaning.

Our second visit to the crags was made quite recently. It had been our intention to procure a squeeze, or even a rubbing, but a gale of wind and a cold driving mist made such an utter impracticability. We were fain to content ourselves with a critical inspection and measurement of the lettering. The inscription, which is very much shorter than that on Baranspike, and with fewer compound letters, is cut on the upright face of a rock some eight feet long by two feet high, and about fifteen feet above the surface of the ground below, and at a corresponding slope with the upper surface of the stone. It is not at first very easy to find, on account of there being but a distance of about two feet between it and the next rock, making, therefore, a sort of defile.

There are altogether twenty-three letters: their height about two and a half inches, the depth still about one-eighth of an inch in the deepest part, the breadth but a line, and the total length two feet one and a half inches. The reading of the whole appears to be:—
 ASKR HRADD HESIELKIL HIMTHIKÆ (see illustration on opposite page). The Runes are of the later order, and in old Norse and purely Scandinavian.

The first word *askr*, asg or ash, a common enough Scando-Anglia man's name, and still retained in Askerton castle, a fortified farmhouse of some interest not above five or six miles off, represents, doubtless, the name of the writer or carver of the Runes. *Hradd* we take to be a local variation of *hrodd*—bold, quick; the interchanges of a and o, we are told, being very common, as in hand, hond, land,

HAZEL-GILL CRAG
RUNIC INSCRIPTION



A S K R H R A D D H E S I L E K I L N I M T H I K E

W. L. CHARLTON, *del.*

lond, etc. In the next word we have, curiously enough, the very name by which the rocks are known to this day, *Hesielkil*—Hazel-Gill. In Dr. Charlton's notes on Baranspike, he remarks upon the singularity of that crag bearing the name of the writer, 'Baranr.' The last word, *HIMTHIKÆ*, we think, must be a form of *heimthigi*, a house carl, lodger, home taker, as given in Cleasby's *Great Icelandic-English Lexicon*, page 252. Thus we have the whole reading: Asker, the bold, at Hazel-Gill to his house carl. Professor Stephens suggests as a probable date the period between 950 and 1000 A.D. This makes the inscription younger, by some three or four hundred years, than the beautiful monument in St. Cuthbert's churchyard in Bewcastle, but slightly older than its neighbour Baranspike.

We can offer no conjecture as to the reasons which influenced the carver to execute his work in such a spot, remote from human habitation. There this simple record of a man's work remains, after numerous centuries, defying sunshine and snowstorm, another small monument to remind us of the past history and inhabitants of the country around.

Briton, Roman, Saxon, Dane, and Norman, have left traces behind them, less perishable than themselves, in the neighbourhood, of their works and the times in which they lived. We trust that it may be our luck in time to come to find other inscriptions, if such exist as yet undiscovered, and to submit them to the members of this society.

NOTE.

Since the reading of the above paper it has been brought to our notice that an article on the Hazel-Gill inscription appears in vol. i. *Cumberland and Westmorland Transactions* (p. 318), written by the Rev. John Maughan, then (1873) rector of Bewcastle.

