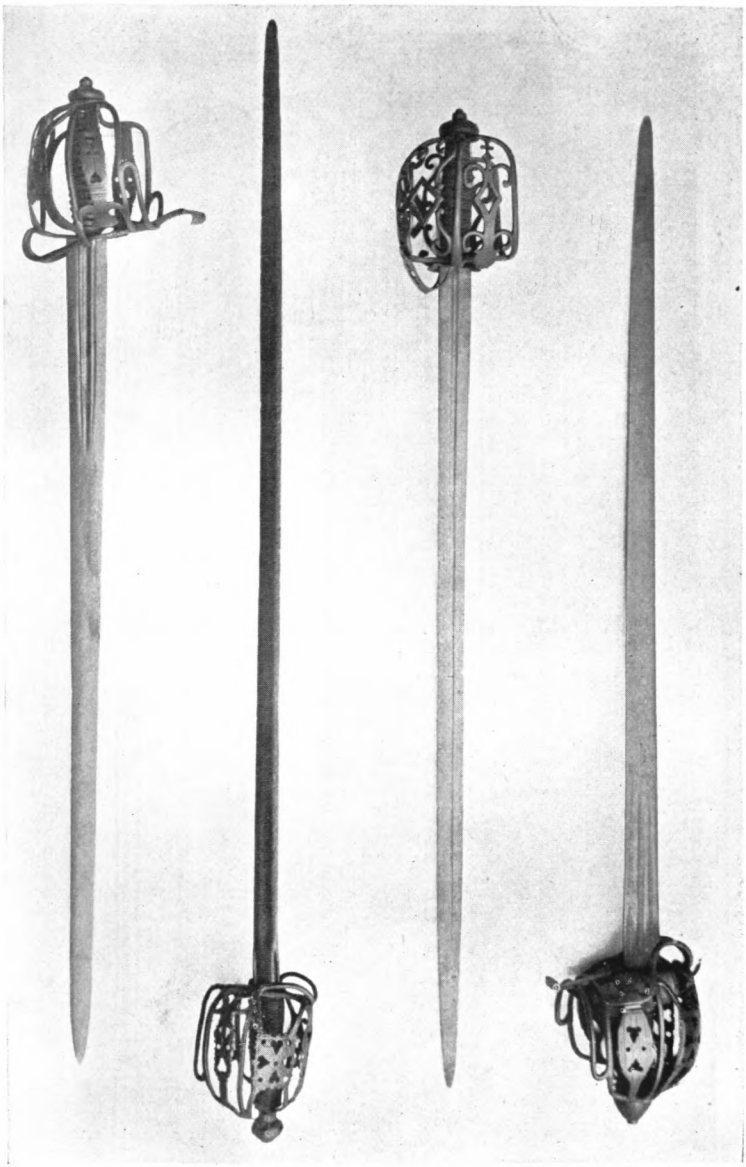

3. 1. 4. 2.

OLD SWORDS IN THE CASTLE OF NEWCASTLE, BELONGING TO THE SOCIETY.

ARCHAEOLOGIA AELIANA.

I.—NOTES ON FOUR BASKET-HILTED SWORDS BELONGING TO THE SOCIETY.

By Parker Brewis.

[Read on April 26th, 1899.]

This type of sword is commonly known as 'claymore,' which is the English phonetic of two Celtic words meaning 'great sword.' It was originally applied to the great two-handed sword of Scotland, but when the true claymore was gradually superseded by the basket-hilted weapon, the old name, as conveying the idea of a Highlander's sword, was retained, owing to long habit, notwithstanding that it is somewhat inappropriate. It was in Venice that the basket hilt came first into regular use in the sword named *schiavona* (see fig. 1), from its having been worn by the 'Schiavoni,' the Dalmatian body-guard of the doge of Venice. In this hilt the first finger is always passed over the quillon, and has a superadded guard to protect it, thus giving the hilt an elongated or flattened elliptical shape.

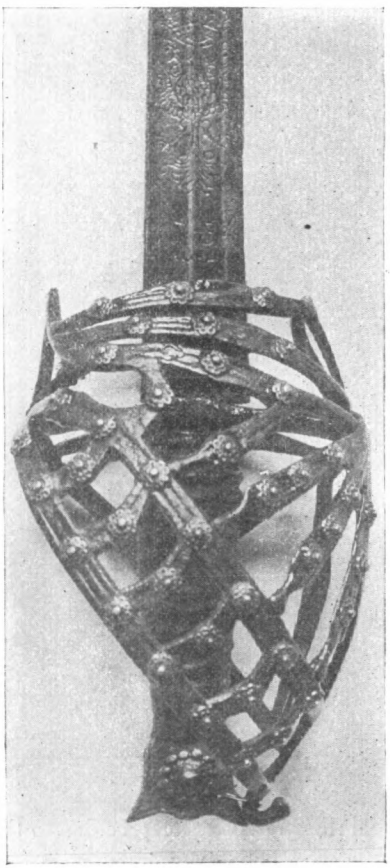

Fig. 1.

The Scotch, renowned before the middle of the sixteenth century for their excellent choice of weapons, took up this model, and in the course

of a generation or two had so amalgamated it with the mortuary hilt as to produce the well-known basket hilt, which has ever since passed as the national arm of Scotland, and is still used in our Highland regiments. The mortuary hilt was so called from a number of this type having been made in memory of Charles I.; they are frequently painted black and bear his likeness. This was the popular broadsword hilt in England during the Commonwealth, and consists of counter-curved quillon, expanded into a broad plate round the base of the blade, and connected with the pommel by a knuckle bow and on either side a similar bow, which in their turn are usually connected by one or more diagonal bars coalescing with the knuckle bow. (See fig. 2.) This triple bow is, I think, the origin of the triple termination in the Scottish basket hilt, for the *schiavona* invariably terminates in a single point at the pommel. The two earlike projections, so characteristic of the Scottish basket hilt, are frequently termed 'sword-breakers,' but are more probably a remnant of the *schiavona* origin representing the diminished *pas d'âne* diverted from their original purpose, which was that of guarding the first finger, and their retention may be due to the fact that they might prevent an adversary's blade slipping past the rounded surface of the hilt and catching the arm near the elbow; in fact, acting somewhat like a quillon, which they frequently resemble, but growing only out of the front

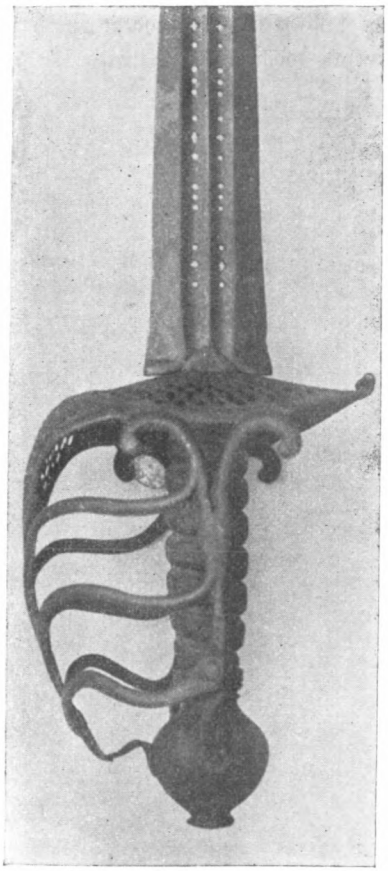

FIG. 2.

of the hilt in two branches turned upon themselves. (See figs. 3 and 4.) The island of Islay was famous for the manufacture of these hilts, and numbers were also made in Edinburgh—they were not made by the bladesmiths, but by the gairdmakers, a separate guild.

THE SWORDS.

No. 1.—This sword weighs 2 lbs. 9 oz., and is three feet seven and seven-eighths inches over all.

The blade is two-edged, and three feet one and seven-eighths inches in length, one and one-eighth inches broad at the base, tapering to three-quarters of an inch at three inches from the point. It is slightly fluted, having one shallow central groove on each side in which is barely legible FERARA, and beyond the groove, with feet to the same edge as the tops of the letters, is the running wolf mark. This mark (see fig. 5, p. 5) is of frequent occurrence on excellent Ferara blades, and is probably imitated from the more ancient wolf blades of Passau and Solingen, which came to be known in England during the sixteenth century as 'foxes.' These blades were largely imported into this country, where this mark was taken for a fox, and the use of this word in our Elizabethan literature shows that it was then so familiar that a sword was popularly known as a fox.

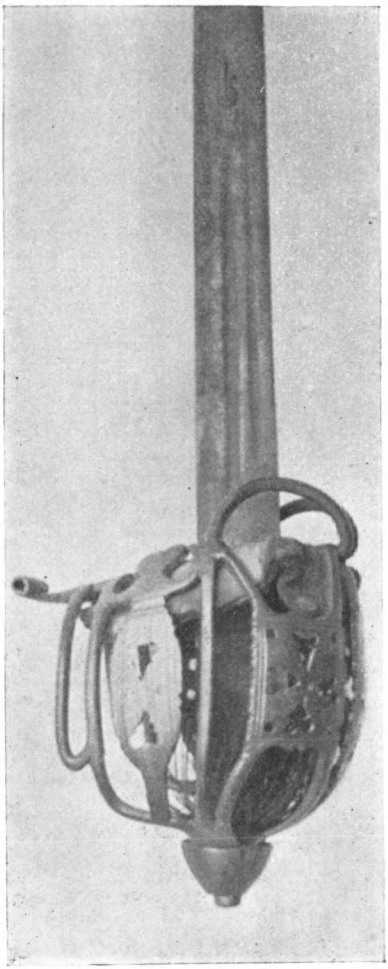

FIG. 3.

It is generally assumed that all wolf or fox blades were made in

Germany; but this is questionable, for in Webster's *White Devil* we have:—

O! what a blade is't?
A Toledo or an *English Fox?*

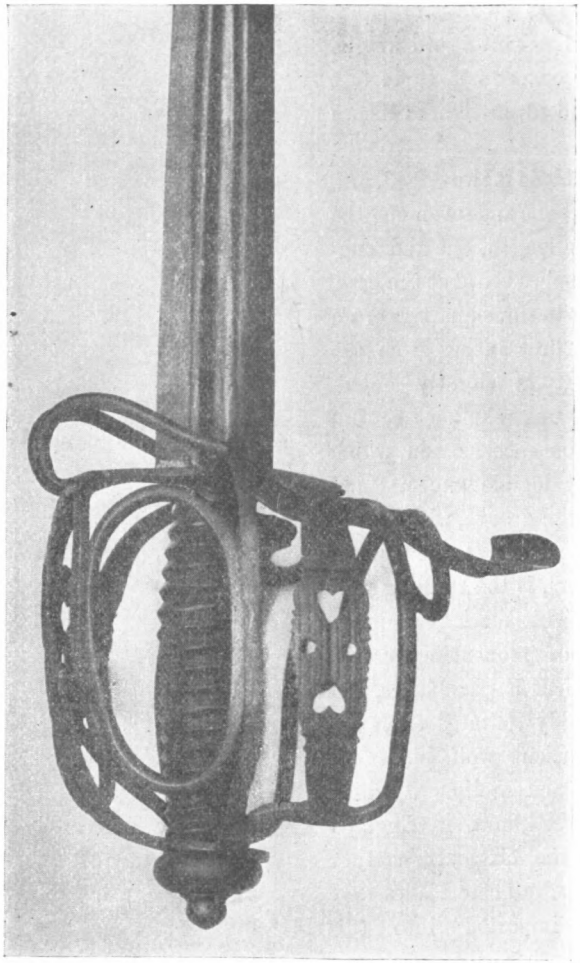

Fig. 4.

And this mark occurs on the Shotley Bridge sword now in the Black Gate museum (see fig. 6, p. 5), where you will observe that it is also beyond the name, has its feet to the same edge as the tops of the

letters, and that it has a rectangular turn at the end of the tail, which we find on many Solingen wolf blades. It may perhaps be accounted for in this case by the German origin of the Shotley Bridge sword makers. There is another type of this fox mark which conforms to the same rules as to position, etc., but is really more like a fox, for instead of this rectangular termination to the tail, it has a truly bushy one, as on a 'Puttà' or gauntlet-hilted Indian sword shown, of which the blade is European. There are also other types of this mark differing slightly in detail.

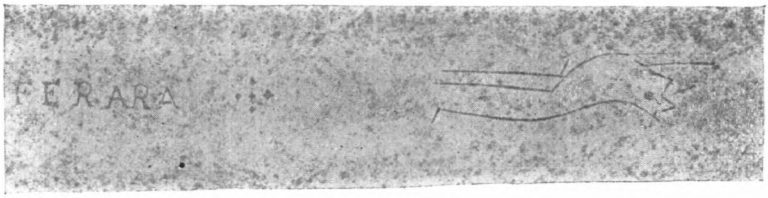

FIG. 5.

Inscriptions on sword blades usually read from hilt to point, when the hilt is held in the left hand, no matter on which side of the blade the inscription may be, but when so held the fox is always upside down. The reason may perhaps be that it was originally an assay

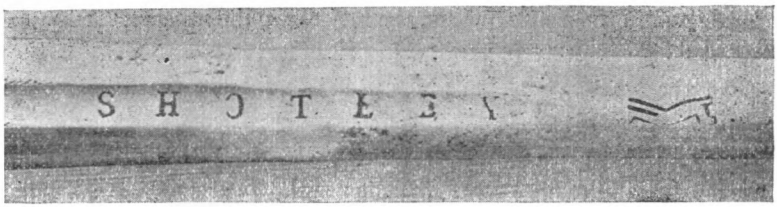

FIG. 6.

mark, which of course would not be put on by the sword-smith as were the inscriptions. This mark is believed to have been granted by the archduke Albert in 1349 to the armourers' guild at Passau, a Bavarian town on the Danube, but it was much used, from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth, on arms made at Solingen. The wolf or fox is usually engraved or scratched in, whereas the inscriptions are usually punched or struck with incised chisel-blow letters. Mr. C. J. Spence once kindly lent me a Ferara blade, on which what

should have been the top stroke of the F was at the bottom—which shows that not each letter but each stroke of the letters was struck by a separate punch.

The hilt probably dates about 1690, and is of distinctly Scottish type, formed partly of bar work and partly of plates pierced with the usual heart-shaped openings and terminates in three unconnected points at the pommel. This was found to be weak, so in later hilts the points are usually connected by a ring which encircles the pommel. The Highlander required great strength in this portion of the hilt, because his method of fighting was rushing into close quarters where frequently there was not room to wield his blade. When this was the case, he would deal his adversary a severe blow in the face with the hilt. This blow was taught by George Silver (1599), who may be considered the father of English broadsword play, and was in use till the end of the eighteenth century.

No. 2.—Weighs 2 lbs. 13 oz., and is three feet three and one-eighth inches long over all.

The blade is single edged, and two feet nine and a quarter inches in length, the breadth diminishing from one and a half inches at the base to thirteen-sixteenths of an inch at three inches from the point, and has a maximum thickness of one-eighth of an inch. Three shallow channels extend about seven inches along each side of the blade and in the centre one (on the inside) are the letters :—

A [N] D [REA] [F] A [RA] RA,

from the spacing, etc., of which I have no doubt that it was once ANDREA [or IA] FARARA, and on both sides beyond the channel is deeply engraved the orb and cross mark (see fig. 5), that on the inside being partly filled with some white material.

This orb and cross mark is probably the most frequently recurring of all marks on Ferara blades, but it is not an armourer's mark in the sense of being the mark of any particular armourer, nor was its use confined to any one country, century, or particular type of sword. It is on the blade found at Rothbury, and now in the Black Gate, orb to hilt and cross to point, as I believe is always the case. This mark appears to be a representation of the orb surmounted by a cross, which forms part of the regalia of emperors and kings. Just as the sword was, amongst other things, emblematic of secular jurisdiction,

so this orb and cross was emblematical of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and subsequently came to signify the triumph of christianity over the world. Its so frequent occurrence on sword blades is said to have originated from the Crusader having used the cross formed by the blade and guard of his sword, as a crucifix, from which it became customary to bring the hilt to the lips whenever the sword was drawn. Subsequently the blade became the special object of veneration, and was frequently inscribed with a representation of some special saint, this orb and cross mark, or some pious device—'cutlery poetry,' as Shakespeare calls it; thus, upon one of the castle rapiers there is EN TE DOMINE SPERAVI, and the orb and cross mark on the sword saved the carrying to war of a separate crucifix. This orb and cross was also a symbol of perpetuation of life in one aspect, and in another a potent amulet against the evil eye. This superstitious aspect may assist in explaining its frequent appearance.

The hilt (see fig. 3) is somewhat similar to no. 1, and is probably about the same date. It may be described as of conventional Scottish type, has an 'acorn shaped' pommel, also a tassel and small lining which consists of a piece of stout leather covered at one time with red silk, fragments of which remain where it was bound to the edge of the leather. Most of these hilts had originally a leather lining or guard, either of this type or the more complete, as in the sword given by Mr. Charlton. There is a depression on the upper surface of this hilt, as if it had originally held the shoulders of a much broader blade.

Unless there is evidence that the blade and hilt are contemporary, it is always well to consider that they may not be so, for good blades were handed down from generation to generation, and frequently rehilted in what was the then prevailing fashion. Occasionally too, if the blade was broken, another was put into the old hilt, so that there is at times a wide difference in their dates.

No. 3.—This sword weighs 2 lbs. 7 oz., and is three feet two and three-quarter inches long over all.

The blade is two-edged, and two feet nine inches long by one and nine-sixteenth inches broad at the base, tapering to seven-eighths of an inch at three inches from the point. On each side there are three grooves extending about eight inches up, the centre one being

much the broadest, and is inscribed (on the outside) FERARA, the tops of the letters being yet clear, but the lower portions worn away ; there is also a flaw at the final letter. About eleven inches up on this side there is an armourer's mark of a crescent with a face in it, and on the other side of the blade are three such crescents. This was a Toledo mark and subsequently that of a German smith.

Brett gives 'no. 123, a basket-hilted broadsword, signed Andrea Farara, of the seventeenth century,' as having an armourer's mark of three moons with a face in each.

The hilt (see fig. 4) measures five and five-eighth inches across the inside, which is exceptionally wide. It dates about 1700, but the grip seems to be of a later date, and is four and a half inches long, of wood, with a deep spiral groove ; a piece has also been riveted on, lengthening the quillon to the rear to the extent of three and a quarter inches from the false edge of the blade.

The termination of the pommel is a ring of which I spoke in no. 1, but the peculiarity of this hilt is the oval opening on the inside (left), and where there is a leather lining to this type of hilt it also has a corresponding opening. The two sides of a basket hilt are usually symmetrical, although frequently so fashioned as to have a little less projection on the inside, because less was required, and it also enabled the sword to lie more closely to the side of the wearer. But this oval opening was clearly for some other purpose. Mr. MacIntyre North, in his *Book of the Club of True Highlanders*, says 'it was to put the long barrel of a pistol through ;' but there is a tradition that it was for the left hand to grasp here when desiring to use both hands to deal a heavy blow ; in fact, making it a one or two-handed sword at will. I think this is the more likely use. Mr. T. Taylor kindly lent me a sword having this feature.

No. 4.—Weighs 2 lbs. 6 oz., and is three feet two and three-quarter inches over all.

The blade is two-edged and two feet nine inches long. It is one and five-sixteenth inches broad at the base and tapers to three-quarters of an inch at three inches from the point. There is a single central groove on each side which runs to within six inches of the point, and is inscribed ANDRIA XIIX FERARA, but there is no other mark.

The hilt (see fig. 7) is probably English and dates about 1720. It is all open bar work, and terminates with a ring at the pommel.

The pas d'âne is a separate plate fixed on with three screws, and the form it here takes is certainly not well adapted to gripping an opponent's blade.

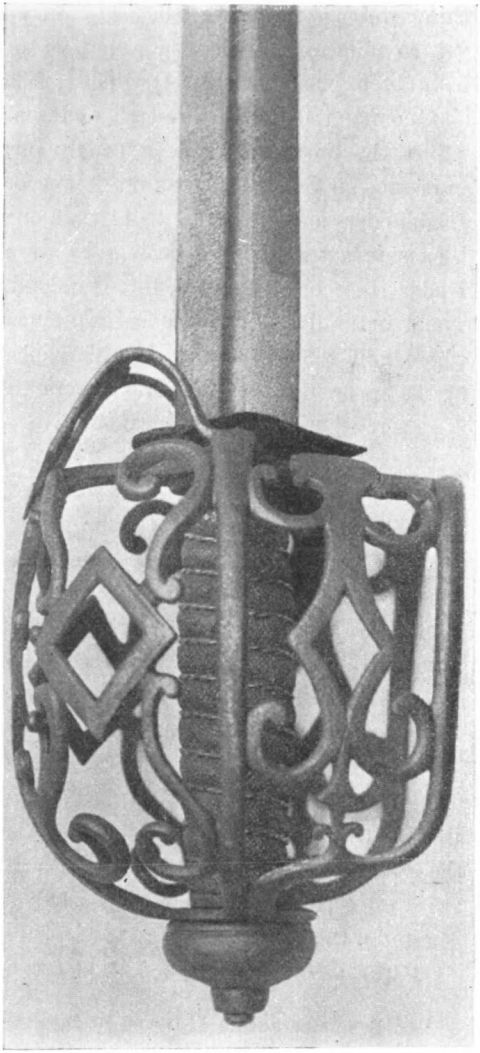

Fig. 7.

Andrea Ferara.

In *Trattato Militaire*, published in Venice in 1583, from which there is an extract with English translation and notes in the *Cornhill Magazine* for 1865, we learn that Andrea Ferara had then (1583) made a reputation for blades, and was working with his brother in the town of Belluno; that he came of a family of armourers which had existed in Italy at least two generations before his time, of whom the first derived his name from the place of his nativity, the ducal city of Ferara; and that he, Andrea, was the pupil of one styled the Barcelonian.

This is about all that we really know of him, the numerous legends of him having slain his son for the discovery of his secret

process of tempering blades, his flight to Scotland in consequence, etc., are all without foundation in facts, we must, therefore, look to weapons bearing his name for further information; and the first thing which strikes us is that they are rare in Italy where he lived, yet so numerous in Scotland, that, at one time, the number must have been phenomenal.[1] Originally, however, Ferara blades were also common in all the western and southern countries of Europe, whilst the broadsword was a popular arm, and only became more numerous in Scotland, because this weapon was retained amongst the Highlanders and Borderers more than one hundred years after it had been supplanted in other nations by the rapier and the small sword. Under these circumstances, the Highlander, a good judge of blades, would naturally acquire the best specimens considered obsolete elsewhere, and who knows but that his choice *may* have been influenced by the apparent rebus of Andrea Ferara and St. Andrew's iron.

There is, at any rate, one example:—

X ANDREWA X
X FARRERA X

with St. Andrew's cross at the beginning and end of each word,[2] certainly suggestive of having been made in Scotland or at least for Scotland.

Mr. G. V. Irving, F.S.A. Scot., in 1865,[3] gave an analysis of twenty-five Ferara blades, which contained fifteen types, including seven different spellings, as follows:—

ANDREA.	FERARA.	FARARA.	FERARE.
ANDRIA.	,,	,,	
ANDREIA.	,,	,,	

Besides the variations caused by the Andrea being sometimes above the Ferara, sometimes on a line with it, sometimes both repeated twice on each side, and sometimes only the Andrea on one side and Ferara on the other.

Baron de Cosson[4] says, 'It is certain that common as blades

[1] Large numbers were destroyed by the enforcement of the disarming Acts of 1716, 1725, 1746, and after Culloden a garden trellis was made of broadsword blades, many of them Feraras.

[2] See *Scottish National Memorials.*

[3] *Journal of Brit. Arch. Assoc.* for 1865.

[4] *Arsenals and Armouries in South Germany and Austria.*

bearing the signature Andrea Ferara are in this country, scarcely any of them are the work of Andrea Ferara who gained such great renown for the superb temper of the blades which he produced at his workshop at Belluno, in the second half of the sixteenth century.' Experts agree that the majority of blades commonly attributed to him date about the seventeenth century, being mostly made in Solingen or Spain, though perhaps a few in Scotland, and there are examples on which the name of the town of Solingen or that of Lisbon occurs in addition to his signature. There are also many bearing a crowned king's head at every second letter[5]—this was the mark of Johannes Wandes of Solingen, 1560-1610.

I think we may conclude from these facts that at Ferara's death, about 1584, his blades had made such a reputation and the demand for them was so great that subsequent makers adopted his name as a sort of A1 mark—not, perhaps, intending to pass them off as his work, or why should they have put on their own marks? but just as now the best household coal is sold in London as Wallsend, although it is well known that none of it comes from that colliery, but merely supplies a demand and trades on the name which Wallsend made.

[5] There is a fine specimen now in South Kensington museum lent by Seymour Lucas, R.A. See also Egerton Castle's *Schools and Master of the Fence* and Lord Archibald Campbell's pamphlet.