

Atholl
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SKETCHES
OF THE
EARLY HISTORY, LEGENDS, AND TRADITIONS
OF
STRATHARDLE
AND ITS GLENS.

Paper Read by CHARLES FERGUSSON, The Gardens, Cally, Gatehouse
at a Meeting of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, on 1st May, 1889.

AT a meeting of the Gaelic Society, about a dozen years ago, when I was a resident member in Inverness, the subject of collecting the early history, legends, traditions, folk-lore, &c., &c., of the Highlands, was brought forward, and, after discussion, it was agreed that every member then present should collect, in their respective native districts, whatever old lore they could find for the Society; and as I was the only Perthshire man present, I was specially asked to do what I could for my native Athole, to which I readily agreed, as I had been for many years previously engaged in collecting material for a proposed history of my native Strathardle, a work in which I am now well advanced, and from which I now give some short sketches.

I am very glad to see that other two members who were present at that meeting have already redeemed their promise—Mr Colin Chisholm and Mr William Mackay, who are doing such good work for their native Glens of Strathglass and Urquhart; and I hope the other members will be to the front next session with what they have collected in their several districts.

The writing of the history of many districts of the Highlands, such as Athole, Breadalbane, Braemar, or Strathspey, is comparatively easy, as, in general, it is simply the history of the great families who ruled there, and whose deeds and doings are part of Scotland's history, and, as such, are preserved in public and private records. But in Strathardle, as in some other districts, it is more difficult, not from want of material, as I do not think there is another district of the same extent in the Highlands where so many historic scenes can be pointed out; but from the fact that no great historic family ever ruled there as lords supreme, for

though most of the district is in the ancient Earldom of Athole, and the Duke of Athole bears the title of Earl of Strathardle, yet the native clans—the Robertsons, Fergussons, Rattrays, Smalls, Spaldings, and McThomas or McCombes—always followed their different chiefs, who generally took opposite sides. Owing also to its position on the Lowland border, and as one of the great passes into the Highlands, it was generally in a state of war and turmoil, from that famous day in 84, when the defeated Caledonians fled for shelter to the woods of Strathardle from the conquering Romans, after the battle of Mons Grampius, till 1746, when Lord Nairne and other defeated Jacobites sought shelter in its caves and woods after Culloden. So most of its lands very often changed owners, and many of the old families are extinct, and their histories mostly forgotten and their records lost, so that its history has to be collected from many scattered sources.

The M'Leans of Mull, claim to have been so far advanced at the time of the flood, as to have started opposition to Noah, in "having each a boat of their own." I will, however, be more modest for Strathardle, and only go back to the year 1, when we find it inhabited by the great tribe of the Vagomogi, as we are told by that old geographer Ptolemy. In the year 84 was fought the great battle of Mons Grampius, between the Caledonians and the Romans, the site of which has caused so much controversy amongst various writers, some placing it near Ardoch, in south Perthshire, and others as far east as Stonehaven; but when all the evidence has been duly weighed, I think most of our authorities now agree that it was fought about midway between those places, in the Stormont, at the lower end of Strathardle. That site in every way agrees better with the account given by Tacitus than any other, and from the vast number of very large tumuli and sepulchral cairns found in that district, it must have been the scene of great slaughter and carnage at some very early date, and I think the number of Roman weapons, spurs, coins, &c., found there place the matter beyond doubt. In the old statistical account of the parish of Bendochy we read—"The battle of Mons Grampius happened in the heart of the Stormont, upon ascending ground in the parishes of Kinloch, Cluny, and Blairgowrie, at the places called Cairns, Upper Balcairn, Nether Balcairn, Cairnbutts, and Craig Roman, on the side of the Grampian ridge. The Haer or Here Cairns of Gornack, below and immediately contiguous lying close together, about 80 in number, and about 15 ft. each by 5 ft. high, mark the contest that followed. The flight is still to be traced by numerous tumuli through Mause, in the parish of Blairgowrie, along the track that lies between the River Ericht and the Moss of Cochrige."

The great Cairn of Mause lies in the tract not far from the wooded banks of the Ericht; it is 81 ft. wide and 4 ft. high. It was opened in the centre by the writer hereof, and found to contain human teeth, sound, and a great quantity of human bones.

The Rev. Dr Marshall, in his "Historic Scenes in Perthshire," says—"Cairns and Druid Circles abound in the Parish of Kirkmichael more than in any other of which we have written. It has also a Rocking Stone, which was, no doubt, used for the purposes of priestcraft." In the Old Statistical Account of the Parish of Kirkmichael, by the Rev. Allan Stewart (the famous Maighister Allain), we read—"In the middle of a pretty extensive and heathy moor stands a large heap of stones or cairn, 270 feet in circumference, and about 25 feet in height. The stones of which it is composed are of various sizes, but none of them, as far as they are visible, large, and appear to have been thrown together without order. They are in a good measure covered with moss, and in some parts overgrown with weeds. Round this cairn are scattered, at different distances, a great number of smaller cairns. They are generally formed in groups of eight or ten together. About a furlong to the west of the great cairn are found vestiges, quite distinct, of two concentric circular fences of stones, the outer circle being about 50 feet, the inner 32 feet in diameter. There are also the vestiges of six, perhaps more, single circular inclosures of stone, from 32 to 36 feet in diameter, lying at different distances in the neighbourhood of the cairn. Two parallel stone fences extend from the east end of the cairn, nearly in a straight line, to the southward, upwards of 100 yards. These fences are bounded at both extremities by small cairns, and seem to form an avenue or approach to the great cairn of 32 feet in breadth. There can be but little doubt that all these cairns are reliques of Druidism; that the great cairn is one of these at which they celebrated their solemn festivals in the beginning of summer and the beginning of winter, when they offered sacrifice, administered justice, &c., and that these circles and lesser cairns must have been the scenes of some other religious rites, of which the memory and knowledge are now lost. Similar cairns are to be seen in the neighbouring parishes, but this parish has to boast of a more uncommon and remarkable monument of Druidical superstition. About a mile north-east from the above-mentioned great cairn, on a flat topped eminence, surrounded at some distance with rocky hills of considerable height, and rocky ascent, stands one of these Rocking Stones which the Druids are said to have employed as a kind of ordeal for detecting guilt in doubtful cases. This stone is placed on the plain surface of a rock level with the ground. Its shape is

quadrangular, approaching to the figure of a rhombus, of which the greater diagonal is 7 feet, and the lesser 5 feet. Its mean thickness is about 2½ feet. Its weight will be about three tons. It touches the rock on which it rests only on one line, which is in the same line with its lesser diagonal, and its lower surface is convex toward the extremities of the greater diagonal. By pressing down either of the extreme corners, and withdrawing the pressure alternately, a rocking motion is produced, which may be increased so much that the distance between their lowest depression and highest elevation is a full foot. When the pressure is wholly withdrawn the stone will continue to rock till it has made 26, or more vibrations from one side to the other before it settles in its natural position. Both the lower side of the stone and the surface of the rock on which it rests appear to be worn and roughed by mutual friction. There is every reason to suppose from the form and relative situation of the surrounding grounds, that this stone must have been placed in its present position by the labour of man. It will hardly be thought, therefore, an extravagant degree of credulity to refer its origin to the same period with those other tribunals of a similar construction mentioned by writers who have treated of the customs of the ancient Celts.

"This opinion is, however, the more confirmed from finding in the neighbourhood of this stone a considerable number of other Druidical relics. On the north side of the stone, at a distance of 60 yards, on a small eminence, are two concentric circles, similar to that already described, and a single circle adjoining to them on the east side. Beyond these, at 45 yards' distance, is a third pair of concentric circles, with their adjacent circle on the east side. Further on, to the north-east, at a distance of 90 yards, is a single circle, and beside it, on the west side, two rectangular enclosures of 37 feet by 12 feet. Also a cairn 23 or 24 yards in circumference, and about 12 feet high in the centre. Several smaller cairns are scattered in the neighbourhood. One hundred and twenty yards west from the Rocking Stone is a pair of concentric circles, with a small single circle beside them of 7 feet in diameter. All the pairs of concentric circles are of the same dimensions, the inner one being about 32 feet, and the outer about 45 or 46 feet in diameter, and all of them having a breach or doorway 4 or 5 feet wide on the south side. The single circles are, in general, from 32 to 36 feet in diameter, and have no breach. The vestiges of all these structures are perfectly distinct, and many of the stones still retain the erect posture in which all of them had probably been placed at first.

"Cairns and circles similar to these described are to be found on other hills in this parish, particularly between Strathardle and Glen Derby. There are likewise several tall, erect stones, called here in Gaelic, *Cronn-teaca* or *Clack-sheuchla*, stones of worship. Some of them are five or six feet above ground, and may be sunk a considerable way below the surface from their remaining so long in the same position, for a superstitious regard is paid them by

much reduced, which were mixed with charcoal and lodged amongst loose earth, and having undergone the fire which contributes to preserve the bones. This is the grave of the 340 Romans who fell. In the New Statistical Account we are told that a Roman spear was found in the Moss of Cochrige, and another near the bed of the River Ericht; also a bronze Roman coin close to one of the Cairns.

In the Old Statistical Account of the parish of Cluny we read—"The scene of the engagement at Heer Cairns is at no great distance from the mouth of the Tay, where the Roman army in case of defeat would have easy access to their ships. On the west it is defended by the steep banks of the Tay, and on the south-east and north-east by the banks of the Isla and Lunman.

"It commands a distinct view of the upper grounds of the Stormont, and looks directly westwards on the entrance into the Highlands by Dunkeld, which was then the capital of the Caledonians, and in the vicinity of which it would be natural for them on this occasion to hold a general rendezvous. In several parts of this neighbourhood the surface of the ground exhibits a singular appearance of long hilly ridges or drums, answering very well to the "colles" of Tacitus, running parallel from west to east, and rising above one another like the seats of a theatre. This appearance is remarkably exemplified at the Guard Drums, which are partly enclosed by the Buzzard Dyke or Vallum, which is still in many places 8 or 10 ft. high. If the line of battle was formed at Balcairn, then Agricola's right wing might extend to the hill still called Craig Roman, where several Roman urns and spears were dug up by the proprietor of the ground about 1750; and Tacitus informs us that the wings of the army consisted of 3000 cavalry.

"The Caledonians in their retreat northwards over the Guard Drums, seemed to have faced about on the summit of each Drum, and there to have made a resolute and bloody stand against their pursuers. This appears presumable from the number and position of the tumuli on each of these Drums. It likewise appears from the disposition of the tumuli along the neighbouring hills that the flight of the Caledonians, previous to their final dispersion, was principally by two distinct routes, one north-west to the woods of Strathardle, and the other north-east to those of Mause, where there is also a number of cairns in which Mr Playfair has lately dug up cinders and some bits of human bones, and where some have thought it probable that Aulus Atticus and some of the thirty-three Romans who fell with him were burnt together in one funeral pile at the Great Cairn, which is about 80 to 90 yards in circumference, and in the centre of which we had occasion to see cinders turned up last summer" (1792).

Much more could be said on this very interesting subject, but as space is limited, I must now pass on from Roman to Druidical Cairns and Relics, which are even more interesting, and for which Strathardle stands pre-eminent over all other districts in Britain

quadrangular, approaching to the figure of a rhombus, of which the greater diagonal is 7 feet, and the lesser 5 feet. Its mean thickness is about 2½ feet. Its weight will be about three tons. It touches the rock on which it rests only on one line, which is in the same line with its lesser diagonal, and its lower surface is convex toward the extremities of the greater diagonal. By pressing down either of the extreme corners, and withdrawing the pressure alternately, a rocking motion is produced, which may be increased so much that the distance between their lowest depression and highest elevation is a full foot. When the pressure is wholly withdrawn the stone will continue to rock till it has made 26, or more vibrations from one side to the other before it settles in its natural position. Both the lower side of the stone and the surface of the rock on which it rests appear to be worn and roughed by mutual friction. There is every reason to suppose from the form and relative situation of the surrounding grounds, that this stone must have been placed in its present position by the labour of man. It will hardly be thought, therefore, an extravagant degree of credulity to refer its origin to the same period with those other tribunals of a similar construction mentioned by writers who have treated of the customs of the ancient Celts.

"This opinion is, however, the more confirmed from finding in the neighbourhood of this stone a considerable number of other Druidical relics. On the north side of the stone, at a distance of 60 yards, on a small eminence, are two concentric circles, similar to that already described, and a single circle adjoining to them on the east side. Beyond these, at 45 yards' distance, is a third pair of concentric circles, with their adjacent circle on the east side. Further on, to the north-east, at a distance of 90 yards, is a single circle, and beside it, on the west side, two rectangular enclosures of 37 feet by 12 feet. Also a cairn 23 or 24 yards in circumference, and about 12 feet high in the centre. Several smaller cairns are scattered in the neighbourhood. One hundred and twenty yards west from the Rocking Stone is a pair of concentric circles, with a small single circle beside them of 7 feet in diameter. All the pairs of concentric circles are of the same dimensions, the inner one being about 32 feet, and the outer about 45 or 46 feet in diameter, and all of them having a breach or doorway 4 or 5 feet wide on the south side. The single circles are, in general, from 32 to 36 feet in diameter, and have no breach. The vestiges of all these structures are perfectly distinct, and many of the stones still retain the erect posture in which all of them had probably been placed at first.

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the people, none venturing to remove them, though some of them are situated in the middle of corn fields."

There are also many Druidical cairns and circles on the south side of the river Arde, especially one very large cairn at the foot of Benchally, and a little to the south of that large cairn there are a great many smaller ones. There are also two immense cairns, one at the north-east and another at the south-west extremity of the parish of Cluny, which are said to mark the ancient boundary between the Caledonian and the Pictish Kingdoms. So numerous and extensive are the Druidical remains in Strathardle, that they would require an entire paper to do them full justice, so I will now leave them and move on to another class of historic stones—the monoliths, or single standing stones, of which there are many in Strathardle. Of these Dr. Marshall says in his "Historic Scenes, Parish of Kirkmichael"—"There are also in this parish several monoliths, or single standing stones. The inhabitants call them in Gaelic *Crom-leasa*, or *Clach-stenacha*, that is being interpreted, stones of worship. This name shows that they have been connected in the popular mind with the observance of the Druid worship; and in treating of the religion of the Druids in his 'History of the Religious Rites, Ceremonies, and Customs of the whole world,' Dr. Hurd says—'Sometimes stones were set up to perpetuate the memory of the deceased, but more commonly a hillock of earth was raised over the grave.' That stones were sometimes set up for this purpose is undoubted, but monoliths were more commonly memorial as distinguished from sepulchral stones. They were set up to perpetuate the memory of certain events which men wished to preserve from falling into oblivion. This, however, they failed to do, principally from the want of inscriptions on them. In the lapse of time the stones and the events they were to hand down to the latest generations became dissociated, so that, as Chalmers in his 'Caledonia' has observed, 'they do not answer the end either of personal vanity or of national gratitude.' That is quite true, but it was a fact well known to those who raised these stones, as we find it beautifully alluded to in the poem of 'Dan na Du-thuinn,' in Dr. Smith's *Sean Dana*, page 85:—

'Ach a nis cha chluinnear mo dhàn,
Cha 'n aithnich an t-anrach m' uigh;
Chi e leac ghlas, is cuiseag ga odach',
Feorichidh co d' an uigh i.
Cha 'n aithne dhuinne, their claim a ghlinne,
Cha d'innis an dan a chlu dhuinn.'

'Now, there wot be heard the song of my fame,
The stranger will not know my grave;
He will see a grey stone with ragweed o'ergrown,
And he will ask—whose grave is this?
We know not, the children of the glen will say,
The song has not carried down his fame to our day.'

There are three very fine monoliths in the upper part of the glen, in the parish of Moulis, one on the farm of Cottartoun of Straloch, another at Tulloch, and one at Ennochdhu, besides the one at Arde's grave. The stones at Tulloch and Ennochdhu are memorials of the great battle of Ennochdhu, fought between the Strathardle men and the Danes at a very early date. I have never yet been able to ascertain the exact date of this battle or to find any distinct notice of it in any of our old historical records. Many incursions by the Danes into the districts of Angus and Gowrie are recorded, but as the sites of the battles are not always mentioned, it is difficult to find out on which occasion this battle took place; but, though it must have been at a very remote period, the tradition of the district about it is still very distinct. The hero Arde is always said to have been the eldest of three brothers, each of which gave his name to the district over which he ruled—Ard-fhuil, high or noble blood, to Strathardle; Ath-fhuil, next or second blood, to Athole; and Teth-fhuil, hot blood, to Strath Tummel. The latter's hot blood was the cause of his death, for wishing to cross the river Tummel on some hot-blooded expedition with a band of followers in winter, they found the river in very high flood, with great quantities of large blocks of ice floating down, and they all saw it was impossible to cross except Teth-fhuil, whose hot blood neither ice nor water could cool, so he dashed in to swim across, but the ice knocked him under, and he was drowned, so the river and the Strath took their name from him. If Arde was really Athole's brother, then they must have lived at a very early age, as Athole is the earliest district mentioned in Scottish history. In fact, if we are to believe the old Irish annals, as given in the ancient books of Ballymore and Lecain, Athole was only tenth in direct descent from Noah! He was one of the sons of Cruithne, the first king of the Piets. Skene, in his *Chronicles of the Piets and Scots*, page 24, gives the following account of the origin of the Piets from these ancient records. (The Book of Ballymore was written in 1391, and is a copy of the works of Gillacemhain, who died in 1072):—

"De Bunadh Cruithneach andseo.

Cruithne mac Cinge, mic Luchtai, mic Partalan, mic Agnoim,
mic Buain, mic Ma's, mic Fathecht, mic Iafeth, Mic Noc. Ise
athair Cruithneach, agus cet bliadhna do irrighe.

Secht meic Cruithneach amso i.

Fib, Fidach, FODLA, Fortrend cathach, Cait, Ce, Cirigh. Et secht
randaibh ro roindset in fearand, ut dixit Columcille.

Mhoirsheiser do Cruithne claim,
Rainsdset Albain i secht rairid
Cait, Ce, Cirig, cethach clann
Fib, Fidach FODLA, Fortrem.

Ocus is e ainm gach fir dib fil for a fearand ut est, Fib, agus Ce, agus Cait, agus reliqua."

Of the Origin of the Cruithneach here.

Cruithne, son of Cinge, son of Luchtai, son of Partalan, son of Agnoim, son of Buain, son of Ma's, son of Fathecht, son of Jafeth, son of Noc. He was the father of the Cruithneach, and reigned a hundred years.

These are the seven sons of Cruithne, viz. :—

Fib, Fidach, FODLA, Fortrend, warlike, Ceit, Ce, Cirig; and they divided the land into seven divisions, as Columcille says:—

Seven children of Cruithne
Divided Alban into seven divisions,
Cait, Ce, Cirig, a warlike clan,
Fib, Fidach, FODLA, Fortren.

And the name of each man is given to their territories, as Fib, Ce, Cait, and the rest.

Fodla and Fotla are the spellings given here; in the Annals of Tighernac, in the year 739, it is *Athfoithle*, and in the Annals of Ulster for the same year it is *Atfoithle*. If the tradition that Arde and Tummel were brothers of Athole's (or Fotla) be correct, then, no doubt, if they had not come to an untimely death before "the great divide," they would have each received a large slice of Scotland as well as their brothers.

Previous to the death of Arde, the strath was called *Strath Mor na Muice Brice*—the Great Strath of the Spotted or Brindled Sow. This famous sow, like Diarmad's wild boar in Glenshee, had ravaged the district for a long time, and had her den at Sron-nuic, the Sow's Rock. In the old Statistical Account of Kirkmichael we read:—"According to tradition, Strath Arde was anciently called in Gaelic *Strath-na-muice-brice*, the strath of the spotted wild sow, which name it is said to have retained till the time of the Danish invasions, when, in a battle fought between the Danes and the Caledonians, at the head of the country, a chief named Ard-fhuil, (High or Noble Blood) was killed, whose grave is shown to this day. From him the country got the name of *Strath Ard-fhuil*, Strathardle." Arde's grave is at the back of the village of Ennochdhu, close to the entrance lodge of Dirmanean. It is sixteen feet long, as both Arde and his faithful henchman, who fell with him, are buried in it, with their feet towards each other. There is a large stone at Arde's head, and a lesser one at the henchman's. According to tradition, when the Danes marched up the strath, Arde and his men posted themselves on the round hill of Tulloch, and awaited their approach. As soon as the Danes reached the foot of the hill, the Highlanders rushed down on them, and a fierce battle began at the Standing Stone of Tulloch. After a time, the Danes were driven back to the Stand-

ing Stone of Ennochdhu, the Black Moor, where the fight raged hottest, and the issue seemed doubtful, till Arde led a fierce charge on one wing of the enemy, and drove all before him; and, as they turned and fled eastward, he pursued them too eagerly, as he left all his men behind him, and, supported only by his faithful henchman, rushed in amongst his foes, who, seeing only two men, suddenly turned, and surrounding them, cut them to pieces, at the spot where they are buried, before his men could come to their assistance. The slain Scots were buried at the Standing Stone of Ennochdhu, and the dead Danes were thrown into the Lag-ghlas, the Grey Hollow, a round hollow in the wood at the back of Ennochdhu; and my uncle has told me that when the wood there was planted, the workmen, in making pits for the trees, turned up quantities of very much decayed bones and pieces of old metal, which were supposed to be the remains of the slain Danes, and their arms.

I must now pass on from these ancient memorial cairns and stones to other historic stones and cairns, of which there are many in the district; and I may begin at the head of Glen Brierachan, with the famous "Gled Stone"—*Clach-a-chlanhain*, so called from its being a favourite perching place for the glod or kite hawk. Its legend is given in the following note from the *People's Journal* of Feb. 28th, 1885:—"Pitlochry. Singular Legend of a Boulder.—At a meeting of the Edinburgh Geological Society, held on Thursday, the Chairman read a notice of the 'Gled Stone' and other boulders near Pitlochry, Perthshire. The 'Gled Stone,' he said, was a large boulder of mica-schist, situated about a quarter of a mile to the west of the road between Pitlochry and Straloch, at a height of 1100 feet above the sea, on a moor near Dalnacarn farmhouse. A singular legend was attached to this boulder, viz., that it gave its name to the Gladstone family, an infant having, it was said, been found there by a shepherd, who took it to his wife to be nursed." So that Strathardle has a claim on the Grand Old Man himself.

The farm of Dal-nan-carn, field of cairns, here mentioned, is also an historic spot, and took its name from the cairns raised over the slain in the great clan battle fought there in 1391 between the Clan Donnachaidh, or Robertsons, and the Lindsays of Glensck, after the famous raid of Angus, which will be noticed when we come to that date.

We next cross the hills to Glenloch to Cumming's Cairn, and the famous Leac-na-diollaid, or Saddle Stone, both of which I will afterwards notice in connection with the Cummings at the proper date, but I may here mention the very curious tradition connected with the Saddle Stone, viz., that if any lady who was not blessed with children made a pilgrimage to Glenloch, and sat on the Saddle Stone, she would in due time become the happy mother of a large family! So firmly was this believed, that well on in the present century pilgrims from all parts of Scotland visited the famous Leac-na-diollaid.

Coming down Glen Fernate, we come at the bottom of that glen to another famous stone, the Clach Mor, or Big Stone, an immense boulder, which tradition also connects with the Cummings. Some years ago, a very learned and worthy clergyman gave me a long account of how the huge boulder, which is of a different kind of stone from any of the rocks found in the neighbourhood, must have been floated here, in the early glacial ages of the world, from distant lands, embedded in immense icebergs, and got stranded here. When he was done I rather shocked him by giving my version of how it came there, which, as it is the old tradition of the country, no doubt the Gaelic Society will prefer to the learned divine's scientific theory. Well, as the story goes, when the Cummings were lords of Badenoch, and ruled there with a rod of iron, centuries ago, the great Conyn proposed to build a castle there so strong that no human power could take it, so instead of employing masons to build it, he engaged a famous Badenoch witch, who, for a great reward, agreed to carry the stones in her apron, and to build an impregnable castle. Her first proceeding was to hunt up two enormous boulders of equal size and shape for door posts for the outer gate, but after searching all Scotland, no two such stones could be got, equal matches, and she was in despair till on her midnight rambles she met a sister witch from the Isle of Man, that famous stronghold of witchcraft, and all sorts of "dealings wif the deil," who told her of two such stones on the hills of Man. Next night she started for the Isle of Man, and having got one of the stones in her apron, she started northwards for Badenoch on a clear moonlight night. As she was passing where the stone now lies, a famous hunter who lived there was coming home from the Athole Forest with a deer on his back, and seeing such a great black mass flying through the air, he uttered the exclamation—*Dhia gleidh mis*—God preserve me. The moment he uttered the Holy Name it broke the witch's power, and her apron string at the same time, so down the stone fell, and there it lies to this day, as she could never get another apron string strong enough to carry it, or even lighter stones. So the Conyns' Castle never went further, and ever since, on the anniversary of that night, the witch returns, and spends the night trying to move the Clach Mhor, so that the good folks of the glen used to give such an uneasy spot a wide berth after dark. This stone stands 20 feet above ground, and is 74 feet in circumference, and calculated to weigh nearly 1000 tons.

The next notable stone is another *Clach Mor*, or big stone, and I think it well deserves the name, as it is 22 feet high, 25 feet wide, and 51 feet long, quite flat on the top and covered with long heather. It lies at the foot of Kindrogan Rock, or, as it was anciently called, *Craig Chiocha*—the Pap Rock—from the rounded form of its western shoulder. In olden times, when wolves were common in Strathardle, and when they had their dens and reared

their young in the great cairn there, this stone was a famous place for killing wolves, on the clear moonlight winter nights, when the young men of the district lay in ambush in perfect security amongst the long heather on its top, and shot the wolves with their bows and arrows, as they ran past on the scent of some carcase which the hunters trailed along the ground past the stone during the day.

There is another place, a few hundred yards further up, on the west shoulder of Kindrogan Rock, which was another famous place for killing wolves, where a ravine, or gully, runs down the face of the hill to the foot of the rock. On the ridge on the low side of this ravine, there is still seen a circular pit, now partly fallen in, and covered with moss, which was dug and used for a pass in the morning, making for the hills, after prowling all night in the district. The Laird of Kindrogan had got a very valuable mare as part of his wife's tocher, and as fodder was scarce in spring, the mare was turned out to feed on the hill-side, where she was killed and partly devoured by wolves in this ravine. Before next night the carcase was drawn within shot of the pit, and two renowned hunters lay in wait, and shot the two wolves when they returned to feed, in memory of which the place is still called "Clais-chapull"—the Mare's Ravine. The wolves' cubs were afterwards found in the deep cairn on "Creag Mhadaidh"—the Wolf's Rock—near Loch Curran, which got its name from being a famous breeding-place for wolves, as it still is for foxes.

So numerous and destructive were the wolves in Strathardle, Glenshee, and Glenisla, that all tenants were bound by their leases to keep a pair of hounds for hunting the wolf and fox. In a lease granted in 1552 by Abbot Donald Campbell, of Cupar-Angus Abbey, to Donald Ogilvie, of the "hull town and lands of Newton of Bellie, half of Frenchy and one quarter of Glenmerky," he was bound to have a pair of good hounds and a pair of sleuth-hounds, "and sail nwrice ane leiche of gud houndis, with ane cuppill of rachs, for tod and wolf, and salbe redly at all times qhene we charge them to pas with us or our bailies to the hountis." Many other leases with similar conditions could be given.

The wolves of Ben Bhuirich, at the head of Glen Fernate, were reckoned the largest and most ferocious of all, and Colonel Robertson, in his "Historical Proofs of the Highlanders," says that that mountain took its name from the roaring of its wolves. This is also mentioned in "Oran nam Beann," one of the most ancient poems known in Athole:—

"Chith mi Beinn Ghlo nan eag,
Beinn Bheag, 's Argiòd Bheann,
Beinn Bhuirich nam Mhadadh Mor,
'S All-a-nid-an-eum ri taobh."

I see Ben Ghlo of the pointed tops,
Ben Bheag and Argiòd Bheann,
Ben Bhuirich of the great wolves,
And the Brook of the Bird's Nest by its side.

But to return to our historic stones. The next is the "Clach nam Barain"—the Baron's Stone—at Balvarron, the home for several generations of that famous old Strathardle family, the "Barons Ruadh"—the Barons Reid or Robertson—of Straloch and Inverchroskie, four generations of whom were born at Balvarron, and each young Baron was baptised with water out of a circular hole or basin hewn out of this stone, a new hole being made for each Baron. There are four such basins cut in it, and there would have been many more, tradition informs us, if the parents of the last Baron had not, in their pride, despised the rude baptismal font of the family, and got their heir baptised out of a silver basin. "And there were no more Barons," as he had an only daughter. This last Baron was the famous General Reid or Robertson, one of Strathardle's most illustrious sons, the composer of "The Garb of Old Gaul," and founder of a Chair of Music in Edinburgh University. He died in 1803. The Baron's Stone is a great block of granite, and it is situated on the rising ground a little above the stables at Balvarron House. Some years ago it had a very narrow escape from being blown to pieces, through the ignorance of a local worthy, who was employed blasting stones for building purposes. "A stone was just a stone to him, and it was nothing more," so thinking this huge boulder a grand prize, he bored a hole in it, and had begun filling in the powder, when the late proprietor happened to come that way, and at once put a stop to such an act of vandalism.

The next notable stone is the great boulder in the river Ardle, in the pool formed by the croy that sends the water to the Black Mill. According to tradition, this stone makes three distinct jumps up the stream every time the cock crows in the morning. So firmly was this believed, that old people have assured me that they remember it much further down the stream than it now is. I have never been able to learn anything about the origin of this very curious belief of the supernatural movement up the stream of this huge boulder, or of its connection with the crowing of the cock. The top of this stone was also a famous haunt of the water kelpie, especially when the water was in high flood. I have known old people who would not upon any account pass this stone after dark, for fear of the kelpie. It was altogether a place of evil repute, and as such the whole of its surroundings got the name of dubh—black—attached to them. The water itself here was called Dour-Dubh, or Black-Water; the hill on the north side Dunie-Dubh, the Black Hillock; and the mill on the south side, the Moulin-Dubh, or Black Mill. I have noticed in the topography of Strathardle, that in all cases, and there are many,

where the adjective dubh—black—is added to place-names, there has always some bloody deed been done there—a battle, or murder, or a lot of slain buried there—which gave the place an evil repute in these superstitious times. This will be noticed as we go along.

We have already seen that Dal-nan-carn, at the head of Glen Brierachan, got its name from the cairns raised over the slain in the great clan battle of 1391. We now come to another Dal-nan-carn, at Kirkmichael, which got its name from cairns of a different nature. I may give the story as told by Dr Marshall in his "Historic Scenes in Perthshire":—"A large cairn called Carn-na-baoibh, used to stand a little to the north of the village of Kirkmichael. It was the sepulchre of a fairy lady. She was one of the bad class of that order of beings, and did much mischief in the strath. At length a great mortality took place among the cattle in it. This was universally imputed to her malignant influence; and with one voice the Strathardlites passed judgment on her—she must die. We have not fallen in with any authentic account of how they managed to catch and kill her; but they must have managed to do so somehow, for she was buried at the spot to which we are now pointing, and Carn-na-baoibh was raised over her. At a comparatively recent date, the laird of the ground on which the cairn stood was in want of stones for drains which he had cut in it. It was suggested to him by a gentleman of the cloth, who must have had very little reverence for the traditions of the fathers in the strath, that he need not be in a strait for stones as long as such a mass of them was at hand. He ventured to make free with the cairn, and ere his draining operations were completed not one stone was left. No remains of the fairy were found; and we are rather surprised that we have never heard of her race taking some marked revenge on the laird for demolishing her tomb."

The tradition, as I have always heard it, of how they managed to discover and kill her was as follows:—One of her favourite amusements was to attend all social gatherings, funerals, and places of worship in an invisible state, and when everything was going on quietly, she gave a smart slap on the cheek to one here, and a dig with a large needle to another there, and as they could not see her, they very naturally concluded that it was their nearest neighbours who had done it, and at once struck them in return, so that every meeting ended in a free fight. Things went on this way for a long time, getting worse and worse, till an old tailor at last discovered by accident the cause of all the disturbance. Having to wait rather long one morning for the coming of the clergyman, the tailor amused himself with his shears, which he had brought in his pocket; and happening to catch them by the blades, and holding up the handles, and looking through the finger-holes, like spectacles, he to his great astonishment at once saw the Baobh going about her usual wicked pranks. However, he had the shrewdness to keep to himself what he saw, till after the

service, when he informed the priest, who told him to tell no one, but to come back next Sunday, and take his shears with him. The tailor promised to do so; but alas! it was just the old, old story—woman's wiles beguiled him; for he was so excited when he went home that his wife at once saw that something unusual had happened him. So in a very short time she had fished it all out of him, and in a shorter time had told all her gossips; and it became so public that the Baibh herself came to get an inkling that she was discovered, and, in revenge, killed nearly all the cattle in the country that week. Next Sunday, the priest put a bottle of holy water in one pocket, and the tailor's shears in the other, and began the service. After a little, he took a sly peep through the finger holes of the shears, and saw the Baibh present. He at once stopped the service, and telling the people to follow him, he pursued her. She took to the hill for a little, and then sat down on a stone, to let them pass, as she thought she was still invisible. However, the priest, looking through the shears, saw her on the stone, and pulling out his holy water, he made a circle round the stone and her, out of which it was impossible for her to get. He then set the people to gather stones, and pile them over her, which they did with right good will. She pleaded hard for mercy, and even after the stones were high over her head, she offered the priest to turn all the stones in the cairn into gold, if he would only release her; but, to the honour of the clergy of Kirkmichael, he refused this very tempting addition to his stipend, and only answered her by calling to the people—"Cuiribh oirre, cuiribh oirre, clach air son gach mairt." (Put on her, put on her, a stone for every cow she killed.)

Having got the Baibh in safe keeping under her great cairn, we will now go some miles down the Strath, to another similar cairn, also built over the grave of another wicked female being, but of a different class—a mermaid. Strathardle seems in olden times to have been a favourite haunt of all kinds of these supernatural beings, belonging to both land and water. I will quote this story from a series of articles which appeared some years ago in "The Bargaovrie News," from the pen of a worthy laird in the Strath, who knows, perhaps, more of the old legendary lore of Strathardle than any other individual now living—"On Bal-nabruich hill stands a cairn of immense magnitude called Carn-liadh, the Grey Cairn, the origin of which, according to tradition, was thus:—A loch on the contiguous estate of Dalruizion, belonging to the same proprietor, was the haunt of a mermaid, which occasionally visited the lower part of the Strath, but never without committing damage. Her depredations became insupportable, and the inhabitants being in terror of her visits, various fruitless attempts were made to capture and conquer her, with a view of putting a stop to her ravages. Ultimately, a famous dog named Bran, belonging to the Fingalians, was let loose on her at the

village of Kirkmichael, and, after an exciting chase and a fierce encounter, overpowered and killed her where the cairn lies. In olden times many curious and incredible stories were current amongst the people of the Strath regarding the doings of this fabulous being. The loch said to have been her abode was by no means of a lovely appearance, and its banks were very unsafe for people walking on them, being liable to give way. It is about a mile distant from Dalruizion House, and is now a handsome loch, its surroundings having been greatly improved by the proprietor. Its Gaelic name is Loch-Mhairich, the Mermaid's Loch. According to the traditional explanation, the cairn referred to was obviously reared to mark the spot of the mermaid's grave, with the object of preventing the return of sea monsters to the district. The accumulation of such an enormous pile of stones—principally large boulders—must have been the work of many men and horses. The cairn has recently been considerably diminished in size by the removal of stones for the building of fences, &c. On Tuesday, 26th September, 1865, it was visited by Mr Stewart, the secretary of the Antiquarian Society of Edinburgh, accompanied by the Lairds of Woodhill, Blackeraig, and Ballintuin, and many other gentlemen, and about a score workmen were engaged to turn over the old cairn. Mr Stewart superintended the work for two days, and all were eager to find some relics of the ancient Druidical worship, which, it was anticipated, would be brought to light. The result, however, was not very gratifying, the relics found consisting chiefly of stones used for weights and for grinding meal in those days. The circumstances above stated regarding the pursuit and conquest of the mermaid by the dog Bran gave the name Pitruan—Gaelic, *Pitruan*—to the whole face of the hill from Kirkmichael to the Cally boundaries, and the memorial gave name to the loch alluded to."

We will now cross the hills to Glenshee, to a stone connected with still another kind of female spirit—the Clach-na-narriche, or Serpent Stone of Inveredrie, of which Dr Marshall says—"On the lands of Inveredrie, on the north side of Loch Baine, is a wonderful stone called *Clach-na-narriche*, or the Serpents Stone. The explanation of the name is this: One of the Lairds of Inveredrie had a familiar spirit, through whose favour and influence he prospered remarkably in everything to which he put his hand. His prosperity was the admiration and envy of the whole neighbourhood. In process of time a misunderstanding took place between him and his familiar. The laird had a child that died, and he blamed the familiar for its death. She (the familiar was of the female sex) took the imputation very much amiss, but he persisted in it, denounced her, and forbade her to appear in his presence. One day they met by the side of Loch Baine, at the above stone, and renewed the contention between them as to the death of the child, and it waxed very violent. The laird's Highland blood rose to the boiling point, and he drew his sword to run it through

his familiar. In an instant she transformed herself into a serpent and darted into the heart of the stone by a hole which no instrument could have made—such were the turns and curves in it! The laird in his towering passion, hacked at the stone with his sword, and left marks on it which, it is said, may be traced to this day. When he was going away his familiar spoke out of the hole she had made in the stone, saying—"As long as you look at your cradle, and I look at my stone, we may speak and crack, but we will never be friends."

Now that we have gone over the principal historic stones in the district, and landed in lone Glenshee, we will leave these graves of supernatural beings and turn to the grave of a famous lady of the human race who, along with her husband, made Glenshee a noted spot from the earliest ages. This was the beautiful Grainne and her beloved Diarmid Donn, who lost his life hunting the bear on Ben Ghulbhuinn, at the head of Glenshee. Dr Marshall's version is as follows—"As far back as the days of Fingal there was a great hunt on Ben Ghulbhuinn at the head of the Glen. It was the wild boar that was hunted. It had long abounded in these wilds and disputed the sovereignty of them with man. The hunt to which we refer is specially memorable, because it was in connection with it that Diarmid, one of Fingal's heroes, lost his life. He fell the victim of a stratagem of his master, at the impulse of one of the basest of passions. Grainne, Diarmid's wife, was a very beautiful woman, and Fingal loved her too well. Diarmid stood between him and his wishes, but might he not be got out of the way? Fingal thought that he might. His dispositions for the great boar hunt he made accordingly. He set Diarmid, with his two dogs, in the most dangerous place, in the hope that the infuriated creature, as the hunters closed on it, would set upon him and tear him to pieces. It did attack him; he hurled his spear at it, which stuck in its body. Seizing the weapon and putting forth all his strength to wrench it out, it broke. He then drew his sword, cleaved the boar's head with it, and killed it.

Fingal was bitterly disappointed. Uriah still stood between him and Bathsheba. He next set Diarmid to measure the carcass of the boar. He did so from the head to the rump, but that was not enough. He must do it again, and from the rump to the head, in the hope that the bristles of the animal might pierce his foot and poison and destroy him. In this the murderer succeeded. Diarmid was wounded by the bristles in the foot, and the wound festered and proved mortal. Still Fingal was baffled of his purpose. Diarmid's wife must have been as loving as she was beautiful. She could not survive him. She died forthwith of a broken heart. This was the end of Diarmid, and the story, as we have told it, must have been known and accepted in Glenshee at a very early period. It gave to several places the names which they bear to this day, and which they have borne from time immemorial. Such is the spring called *Tobar-na-Fiann*, that is,

the fountain of the Fingalians—the well from which they drank at the hunt, and it may be, on other occasions. Such is the spot on Ben Ghulbhuinn, called the Boar's Bed, that is, the place which it made its lair. Such is the loch called *Loch-an-Tairc*, that is, the Boar's Loch. The boar was killed near this loch, and its body was dragged and cast into it. So likewise was a magic cup belonging to Fingal. That cup possessed such virtue that whoever got a draught from it was cured of whatever disease he had. And least Diarmid should, after his wound, get a draught from it and recover, the cup was thrown into the loch. Such, moreover, is Diarmid's grave, to which his comrades committed his dust, laying his loving and beloved wife beside him, and his two dogs, which likewise died of their wounds."

There are none of our ancient poems of which there are so many different versions as of this of Diarmid; however, they all agree that the hunt took place on Ben Ghulbhuinn.

James Grant in his "Thoughts on the Origin and Descent of the Gael," says—"A poem called "Bas Dharmid," or the death of Dermid, was till late well known in the Highlands. As handed down it is extremely fabulous and inconsistent, and can lay no claim to poetical merit. However corrupted in all the editions we have heard repeated, it is expressed that both Dermid and Grainne died in the hunting ground where the boar of Ben Ghulbhuinn was killed by Dermid, and that both were buried hard by one another. It bears genuine intrinsic marks of remote antiquity. It makes mention of the Druids, and intimates their presence of future events; and it mentions the elk, an animal not known in Britain for many ages:—

Glenn Sith, an glenn seo tha ri n' thaobh,
Far 'n bu bionnhoir guth feidh's loin,
Glenn an tric an robh an Fhiam,
An ear's iar an deigh nan eon.

An glenn sin fos Beinn Ghulbhuinn ghruinn
'S aileadh tulaich tha fo'n ghreinn,
Is tric bha na sruthan dearg
An deigh na Fiann bhi sealg an theidh.

Glen Shee, that glen by my side,
Where oft is heard the voice of deer and elk,
That glen where oft the Fiann have roved,
East and west after their dogs.

That glen below Ben Gulbin green
Of the most beautiful hillocks under the sun,
Often were thy streams dyed red
After the Fiann hunted the deer.

We will now leave the dim mythical ages of remote antiquity, and come down to events recorded in history, which will be arranged in chronological order.

729. In this year the great Angus M'Fergus, King of the Southern Piets, advanced against the Northern Piets of Athole, and a great battle was fought between them on the hill of Blathvalg, between Strathardle and Athole, at the back of Loch Broom. The battle took place on the height called Drum Dearg—Red Ridge—or as it is sometimes called the Lamh Dearg—Red Hand. The Athole men were defeated with great slaughter, and Drust, their King, slain. The dead were all gathered and thrown into the small loch there called the Lochan Dubh—Black Loch—which took its name from that event, and to this day it is supposed to be haunted by the ghosts of these ancient dead. It is a place of such evil repute that nobody cares to pass that way, and I well remember when a boy how carefully I kept away from it even in daylight when alone. The only one of consequence who fell on Angus M'Fergus' side was his favourite bard, who had ventured too far amongst the enemy when pouring forth his *Bronnacha-otha*, or Song of War, to encourage on his clan to battle, which was the duty of bards in those days. His body was not thrown into the Lochan Dubh, but was buried on a round heathy hillock in the great corrie which runs down from Blathvalg into Glenderby, and which to this day is called *Coire-a-bhaird*—the Bards' Corrie. This battle is recorded in the Annals of Tighernac: "729. Cath Droma Derg Blathnig etir Picardaibh i Druist agus Aengus Ri Picardaich agus ro marbhadh Drust andsin la dara la deo do mi Aughris." The Battle of the Red Ridge of Blathnig between the Picardach, that is Drust and Angus, King of the Picardach, and Drust was slain there, on the twelfth day of the month of August.

In the Annals of Ulster it is recorded in Latin instead of Gaelic:—"729. Bellum Dromaderggblathnig in regionibus Pietorum inter Oengus et Drust regem Pietorum et cecidit Drust." Though victorious in this great battle, Angus did not finally subdue Athole for other ten years, when he overthrew and drowned another King of Athole, as recorded in the Annals of Tighernac:—

"739 Talorean mac Drostan Rex Athfolta a bathadh le h-Aengus."

Talorean, the son of Drostan, King of Athole, drowned by Angus.

This Angus M'Fergus was the greatest of all the Pietish kings, and subdued all opponents, and united the Northern and Southern Piets. He reigned for 30 years, and died in 761.

806. In this year Constantine M'Fergus, the grandson of Angus M'Fergus, founded Dunkeld as the seat of the primacy of the Scottish Church. In the Pietish Chronicle we read—

"Constantin Fitz Fergusa xl. ann. Cesti fist edifer Dunkeldyn."

Constantin M'Fergus reigned forty years. He caused Dunkeld to be built.

Col. Robertson, in his "Historical Proofs," says:—"The Register of St. Andrews even, admits the foundation of Dunkeld by King Constantine, which, coming from a quarter that was jealous of all other churches, is strong confirmation of its truth; and as the district of Athole and country near Dunkeld was then in the Crown, by the conquest of its provincial rulers by Angus M'Fergus, King Constantine had it in his power largely to endow his church, and place it also where it must have been considered safe from the heathen plunderers."

Amongst the lands with which Constantine endowed Dunkeld were the whole barony of Cally, the lands of Fersie and Ashmore, and the whole stretch of country from there to Dunkeld, which continued to be the property of the Bishops of Dunkeld till the Reformation.

In later times there was a monastery and a nunnery at Bridge of Cally in connection with Dunkeld. This connection with the church gave their names to many of the places in Strathardle. Cally itself is derived from *Caillach*, a nun, and the full name of it is *Lagan-dubh-chaillich*, the Hollow of the Black Nuns; Rochallie comes from *Ruith chaillich*, the Nuns' Shelling; Ben-chaille and Loch Benchaille are *Bronn Chaillich* and *Loch Bronn Chaillich*, the Nuns Mountain and Loch; Blackersig, in full, is *Craig dubh-chaillich*, the Rock of the Black Nuns. There was also the Monks' Mill near Bridge of Cally.

In 903, the Pietish Chronicle tells us, the Danes laid waste Dunkeld and all Alban. Possibly it was then the battle of Ennochdhu was fought.

About 1005, in the reign of King Malcolm II., Kirkmichael gave the title of Abthane to Crinan, Abbot of Dunkeld, who had married the King's daughter, Bethoc or Beatrice. This title of Abthane is peculiar to Scotland, as no trace of it is found in any other country, and only three in Scotland. In the article on Malcolm II. in the "Scottish Nation," we read:—"Malcolm's daughter Bethoc married Crinan, Abbot of Dunkeld, and this marriage gave a long line of Kings to Scotland, ending with Alexander III. Their son Duncan succeeded his maternal grandfather on the throne, and was the 'gracious Duncan' murdered by Macbeth."

Crinan is styled by Fordun *Abthanas de Dull ac Seneschallus Insularum*. The title of Abthane seems to have belonged to an abbot who possessed a thanedom. It was peculiar to Scotland, and only three Abthaneries are named in ancient records, viz. those of Dull in Athole, Kirkmichael in Strathardle, and Madderty in Strathern. The three thanedoms mentioned seem to have been vested in the Crown, and were conferred by King Edgar on his younger brother Ethelred, who was Abbot of Dunkeld. On Ethelred's death they reverted to the Crown.

Dr M'Lauchlan says in his "Early History of the Scottish Church":—"Malcolm II. had a peculiar interest in Dunkeld, his

daughter Bethoc having married Crinan the Abbot. This Crinan was head of the Athole family, this including in his own person both the civil and the ecclesiastical authority of the Athole district. Crinan engaged in war, raising troops, as we find, on behalf of his grandchildren, and was slain on the battlefield."

Crinan was Abthane of Kirkmichael, and as both spiritual and temporal leader, was followed by the Strathardle men in this, his dire hour of need, when he fought and fell fighting against the "Bloody Macbeth" to win back the kingdom for his grandson, the famous Malcolm Canmore. How well and bravely Crinan-Crinan's, Athole, and Strathardle men fought on that day is proved by the fact that their fame spread beyond even the limits of their own kingdom to the remote parts of Ireland, as we find recorded in the old annals of Tighernac:—

"1045.—Cath etir Albancho aranrian cur marbhadh andsin Crinan Ab. Duinecalland agus sochaighe maillle fris. i. nae XX. laoch."

Battle between the Albanich, on both sides, in which Crinan, Abbot of Dunkeld, was slain there and many with him, viz., nine times twenty heroes.

The fall of Crinan enabled Macbeth to reign another dozen years, till Malcolm, again assisted by the Strathardle men, marched from the wood of Birnam to the Hill of Dunsinane, and defeated Macbeth, as told by Shakespeare; and three months after slew his son Lulach in Strathbeggie, and so firmly seated himself on the throne in 1057.

After being secretly seated on the throne, Malcolm Canmore kept up a close connection with the Abthane of Kirkmichael, where he built the old Castle of Whitefield as a hunting seat, from where he followed the chase in the surrounding royal forests of Athole, Mar, Alyth, Blean, Cluny, &c.

Whitefield is a modern name, the old name and that still used in Gaelic being *Morchoisich*—the Castle of the Big Stone—from a large boulder on an eminence in the vicinity. This castle afterwards passed into the possession of a branch of the Clan Spalding of Ashintully. It is now a fine old ruin.

In 1033, when Thorfinn, the Danish Earl of Caithness, defeated and slew King Malcolm, and subdued and overran the whole north of Scotland as far south as Fife; the only districts north of the Forth which he did not conquer were Athole and Strathardle.

As we have now followed the History of Strathardle for a thousand years, and are now entering on modern history, I will leave the remainder for another paper.