

Some Storied Stones.

EVERY country has its landmarks. Very often these are ancient castles or keeps, sometimes only rugged and clumsy stones which the defacing fingers of time and tempest have shorn of all ornaments or inscriptions they may once have borne. Yet round "these dumb historians," though to the commonalty they are nothing else than mere stones which, some time or other, will be broken for man's usury, cluster legends of bygone ages and stories of old-forgotten things and battles long ago. Ask the people who live at the door of these monuments of history, often—alas! too often—they can tell you nothing at all about them. Daily proximity and daily perception enervate all interest in what should rather be fascinating and touching relics.

Foreigners, however, are different. They seem never tired of studying these insignificant stones. Nay, they would even depauperate us of them if that were possible. Witness, for instance, the Lia Fail or the Black Stone of Dunstaffnage. Jacob laid his wearied head on it on the plain of Luz. By stages it was carried to Scone. And Edward I. of England, when he ravaged Scotland six hundred years ago, broke either the eighth or tenth commandment over the top of it—perhaps both—and took it away with him. Nowadays one may see it in Westminster Abbey, enclosed in the framework of the Coronation Chair. And Scotsmen keep their eyes on that famous stone, for there is a prediction that,

Unless old prophecies and words are vain,
Where'er this stone is found the Scots shall reign.

A good story is told of a Scottish pilgrim who, some years ago, was seeing the sights of the great metropolis. The precious heir-loom of the Scots-Gathelic race was pointed out to him. For a while he stood regarding the famous relic in deep meditation, then turned to an Englishman who was standing near, and abruptly exclaimed—"Ye've nae richt tae that stane!"

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the astonished Southron.

"Jist what I say," thundered forth the angry Scot; "ye've nae richt tae that stane!"

"My dear sir, I cannot understand you," replied the English man, still more astonished.

"Aweel, sir, gin ye dinna ken, I'll tell ye. Ane o' your theevish kings, Neddy Something, tuik that stane awa' frae Scone, an' ye've never haen sae muckle honesty as return't," saying which the irate Scot turned on his heel and walked off, leaving the bewildered Londoner to solve the problem to the best of his ability.



It is quite probable that the Fateful Stone, on its southward journey in 1296, passed through the Kingdom, in which there are many remarkable and interesting "footprints on the sands of time." Midway between Leven and Largo may be seen the Standing Stones of Lundin.

There are three of them, set triangularly. There appears, however, to have been at one time a fourth, coequal in magnitude with the others. They call to mind Druidical times, and must consequently be at least two thousand years old. Round these rude obelisks the Picts of Ross, as Fife was wont to be called, used to congregate, not to cultivate their religion though the Druids, their priests, attended. The Druids, the ancient writers tell us—and them we have no choice but to believe—had no temples; they worshipped in groves of oak, and in almost every case where these ungainly circles of uncut stones appear “the spreading and majestic oak tree” would never thrive. No! this was the judgment-hall, so to speak—the mercy-seat, if you will, though mercy was doled out in meagre quantities—the judiciary circle of the Druids who united to their priestly office also those of educators and lawgivers. They were the civil and criminal judges, ruling the laity by superstitious awe and extreme penalties of excommunication and outlawry.

There was the altar—the tallest stone, facing the south. Some heinous crime has been committed, and now the criminal is about to undergo his trial. It is short, dreadfully short, almost farcical. But the execution is no farce: the gory stream bemoistens the stony altar, and the gods rub their hands with glee and laugh.

But hearken! Sounds of battle float upon the air, and, waxing more and more wrathful as the conflict deepens, strike upon the ears of the eager listeners in the groves. Presently the shibboleths of the natives rise and fall in triumphant clamour as they hurry their captives on towards the judgment-seat. A monstrous sacrifice assuredly is this! And while the altar overflows with copious libations and the air reeks with the warm blood of the victims, the bards strike their rude harps, and the painted men of the woods mingle their rough and savage voices in wild war-songs.

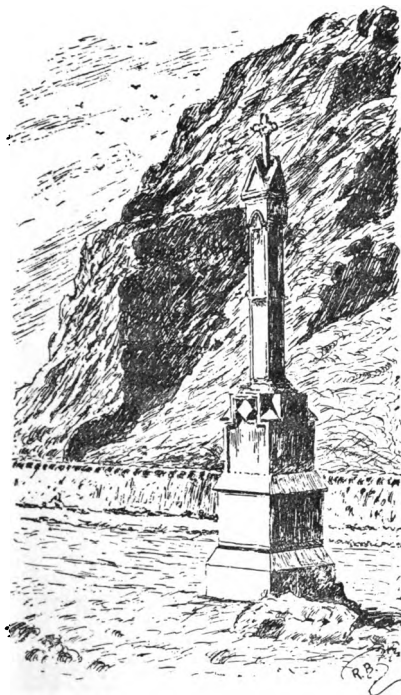
Another historic relic, similarly renowned, is the Standing Stone of Sauchope, in the vicinity of the East Neuk. It was the scene of a famous duel which was fought in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The owner of Balcomie, a mansion-house in the neighbourhood, was Sir William Hope, an accomplished swordsman, whose fame as a fencer had spread over the whole of Europe. An envious foreigner, anxious to denude the Scotsman of his laurels, appeared one day at Balcomie and challenged Sir William to combat. The duel took place on horseback, and the jealous cavalier soon found to his cost that in the Knight of Fifeness he had met his match, for he fell in the fray.

Not far from Sauchope Stone are the crumbs of another interesting memento of antiquity. In the long-ago ages the Norsemen played terrible havoc with the coast of Fife. Men of gigantic stature were these northern warriors, possessing incredible herculean strength, and performing wonders in a single night which ordinary mortals could only accomplish in weeks and months. So our forefathers esteemed them. In 874 A.D. Constantine II, the Scottish King, defeated the marauders and forced them into a corner at the East Neuk. But much can be done at "the corner." Here they securely entrenched themselves by building a wall of drystones right across the angle from shore to shore. The fabric was afterwards known as the Danes' Dyke. Tradition says it was raised in one night. And the Round Tower of Abernethy which the Picts erected, it also asserts, occupied a similar space of time. What marvellous strength, what supernatural vigour, what rock-moving brawny arms they must have possessed! They ought to be living now, or some of us should have been living then for our edification.

At the southern extremity of the Dyke is the Longman's Grave, where some Danish giant awaits the blast of the trumpet. Mayhap he is fighting his battles over again, or hunting on the plains of Valhalla all day long, or quaffing in its halls endless

draughts of mead, his well-earned meed, from the skulls of his fallen foes.

Visitors to the good old town of Kinghorn, as it is termed in



THE ALEXANDER III. MEMORIAL.

the early charters, must have noticed on the way to Burntisland a lofty monument surmounted by a Celtic cross. One dark night long ago—the 16th of March 1285—a solitary horseman was careering homewards along the cliffs, when his steed went over the rocks. Thomas of Ercildoun had predicted on that day such a storm would burst over Scotland as mortals had never before witnessed. And it was. Bright and beautiful had been the morning, and at eventide the courtiers weretwitting the Rhymer as a false prophet.

“ A storm shall roar this very hour
From Ross’s hills to Solway sea.”
“ Ye lied, ye lied, ye warlock hoar,
For the sun shines sweet on fauld and lea.”

He put his hand on the Erlic’s head,
And showed him a rock beside the sea,
Where a king lay stiff beneath his steed,
And steeldight nobles wiped their e’e.

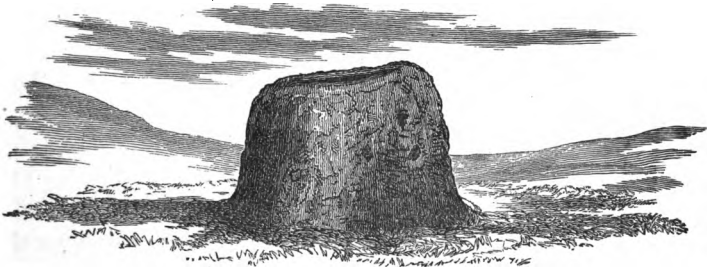
That one false step, a horse's, too, almost disfigured Scotland. Much ill it brought to this country—hundreds of years of intrigues, and warfare, and calamity. Huge mountains it created—mountains of murdered patriots and rivers of blood, and lakes of widows' and orphans' tears. Surely it was from the bottom of his heart that the ancient minstrel wrote—

When Alysander, owre kyng, was dede,
Our gold was changèd into lede !

A good and brave prince was Alexander III. He had clipped the wings of the Norse ravens, had made a name for Scotland, and proved himself a strict and careful administrator of justice. Unhappily for the nation, however, he was cut off in the midst of his days, and the long period of national misfortune which succeeded his death stamped the impression of his loss indelibly on Scottish hearts. This, at least, is undoubtedly the testimony of the splendid pillar which commemorates the sex-centenary of his death. The King's Rock or Crag is still pointed out, though six hundred years have rolled by. But do not be surprised if you hear it called the Black Stone ; from the inky direfulness of the event connected with it, it richly merits such an appropriate appellation.

In the north-west of the county, among the Ochil Hills, stands the freestone pedestal of Macduff's Cross, which was to the great family of the Duffs what Kedesh-Naphtali was to the children of Israel—an asylum or place of refuge. In earliest times the shedding of blood was requited only by the death of the slayer, the result being the commencement of long-raging family feuds. Premeditated murder met with no compassion—death was the inevitable penalty, the murderer being hounded hither and thither until the avenger of blood, generally the next of kin, smote him to the ground, not out of enmity, but because the duty of avenging blood devolved upon the relatives of the slain person. For unintentional killing the Mosaic Law estab-

lished in Canaan cities of refuge to which the homicide might fly, and the loyal Macduff, little else than a prince, for Fife, when Malcolm Caenmohr had got his own back again, was constituted a principality in all but name, created the Cross into a sanctuary, not to abolish the avenging of manslaughter, but to mitigate the evils which attended it.



The Cross, of course, had an inscription—to wit, a monkish, macaronic jumbling of languages, all distorted into antiquated Latin. Here it is:—

Ara, urget lex quos, lare egentes atria lis, quos,
 Hoc qui laboras, haec fit tibi pactio portus ;
 Mille reum drachmas multam de largior agris,
 Spes tantum pacis cum nex fit a nepote natis.
 Propter Macgridum et hoc oblatum accipe semel
 Haeredum, super lymphato lapide labem.

And this, being very liberally interpreted, means:—

For those by law compelled to flee, by strife pursued,
 And houseless made, an altar here is raised—
 A sanctuary where he who blood has shed, may find
 A refuge from th' avenging next of kin.
 One thousand drachms must pay for his remission,
 Or else his kine and lands shall be distrained :
 But only such as are within the ninth degree
 Of kinship (to Macduff) may hope for peace.
 For St Magridin's sake and by this offering,
 His crime's atoned for by washing at this stone.

Years, generations, centuries passed by. The Reformation era came round, and John Knox who feared neither prelate nor queen, came too, and began to vent his terrific rage against Romanism. He but spoke, and then

Great gangs of bodies, thick and rife,
 Gaed bickerin' through the towns of Fife,
 And wi' John Calvin in their heads,
 And hammers i' their hands, and spades,
 Enrag'd at idols, mass, and beads,

proceeded to demolish everything that was popish or had the semblance of popishness about them. St Margaret, King Malcolm's gentle queen, was a devoted Papist, and the Macduff sanctuary was therefore symbolic of her religion. Erected in the morning of Saxon monkism, ere the afternoon had died away it was destroyed, and the pedestal is all that remains to show us where it stood.

King Malcolm has brocht a bonnie ship,
 And seamen o' high degree ;
 And his fair young Queen has stepped on board
 To cross the narrow sea.

So says the old ballad. The first time that that fair young Queen—Saxon Margaret—crossed that narrow sea, the Firth of Forth, was when she fled with her brother and sister from William the Conqueror. Fate drove their vessel up the Forth. They found refuge in a sheltered haven near Queensferry which since then has been called St Margaret's Hope. Then the Royal party footed their way to Dunfermline in the woods, where the Scottish monarch lived. And as the fugitives journeyed thither a huge boulder by the roadside seemed to invite them to linger awhile. There the wearied Princess sat and rested, and loving, patriotic hearts have revered her saintly memory by naming it St Margaret's Stone. This stone is believed to possess more ancient historical

associations, and to have formed part of a Druidical circle. Apropos of such memorials of the pagan antepast we notice incidentally the Standing Stones of Orwell.

Quite a different relic altogether is the Bull Stone, which is to found on Leslie Green, near the gateway of the old place of sepulture. A fighting place Leslie seems to have been in the olden times. It was the Fife Olympia. On the green were held bull fights which rivalled all the horrors of the arena of "tawny Spain." Here the poor animals, after being tethered to the stone to which they bequeathed their name, were fought and slain amid the barbaric acclamations of the populace—"butchered to make a *Leslian* holiday." Here was the Barrace Yett, or Gate of Combats, where the cock fights took place. Then followed games of strength and skill—wrestling, tossing the caber, putting the stone, and shinty—the proceedings, as a rule, terminating in a wholesale fisting-match among the matadors and gladiators, when all were invited, free of charge, and few stayed away; for, you know, "when the wine is in, the wit is out."

Come once again to the angle-town of Fife—to Crail. At the corner of the Kirk Lane lies a large weather-worn boulder known as the Blue Stane o' Crail. One day in the reign of David I., the legend runs, while the Old Kirk was being erected, an old-fashioned little mannikin arrived upon the scene and proffered his services. These were accepted, and the newcomer worked laboriously, doing quite as much as, if not more than, any of the other workmen. But after his arrival a strange thing happened, not unlike the mysterious web of Penelope which was woven by day and unravelled by night. Each morning all the previous day's work was found to be undone. The builders were at their wits' end—a holy father was called—the matter was inquired into—and the transgression traced to the little mannikin who turned out to be no other than Satan

himself. He was immediately expelled, and startled the beholders by flying away with a mighty howl.

Landing on the Isle of May, just opposite Crail, Auld Hornie tore off a huge piece of rock and hurled it across the intervening waters, with the intention of demolishing the sacred edifice. The devil seems to have had a great partiality for such escapades. Strange, isn't it, that he so often forgot that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones? In this case, however, the shot was a ricochet which rolled towards but did not reach its mark. There it stands, a terror, as it were, to Sabbatarians, with a deep hollow in it—the mark of the devil's thumb.

The Louping-on or Toad Stone! These, by the way, are not synonymous terms, though toads are louping creatures. Herein, however, lies the connection. At the entrances to mansion-houses miniature stairs were wont to be built for the purpose of assisting ladies to mount on horseback. The flat broad stone forming the coping was therefore called "the louping-on stone."

Sir Robert Sibbald chronicles the incident which happened at Dunbog in his own days. Three gentlemen—two doctors and a divine—had gone out for a walk one day, and, on their return, stopped at the ladies' stair, when a croaking noise was heard coming from under the topstone. They examined it thoroughly, but no fissure or chink could be found—it was all so very closely built. The servants were called to loosen and turn it off, when—lo! there were displayed to the gaze of the wondering philosophers three toads, one of them very large, the others ordinarily sized, and all as full of life as toads could be, though they had been encuffed for more than a dozen years.

Another remarkable monument was the Rocking Stone of Balvaird in the parish of Strathmiglo. A slight touch of the hand made it rock to and fro, but to a great force it was quite

immobile. Curious, the perversity of things! Some of Cromwell's soldiers laid destructive fingers on it during their sojourn in the Kingdom, and the mystery was then unfolded. There were two stones. In the surface of the under boulder was a cavity into which fitted, like a pivot, "an extuberant yolk" or excrescence which, were we to believe all we hear, had grown during the lapse of ages in the middle of the under surface of the upper stone.

Not half of the storied stones of the Kingdom have been touched upon. There are a host of others, all conjuring up some legend of the past, some story of a gloomy and mysterious pagan age, some reminiscence of sanguinary conflicts in which our forefathers fought like demigods, or betraying some secret which helps to illuminate the enigmas of a wonderful Nature.

