

THE BATTLE OF GAMRIE.

THE coast of the parish of Gamrie in Banffshire, as also that of part of the adjacent parish of Aberdour in Aberdeenshire, is one of the grandest and most picturesque stretches of sea-board in Scotland. A rocky rampart, in some places perpendicular and in all precipitous, rises sternly up from the sea, to the height of about 600 feet; and presents everywhere such features of strength and terror as make it a fit monument of the tremendous convulsions which in old times shook the world. Parts of it are inaccessible to the foot of man; and other parts bend just enough from the perpendicular to admit a carpeting of sward, and are here and there traversed by a winding footpath like a stair-case, which few strangers have sufficient daring of heart or steadiness of head and limb to ascend. The summits of the rampart are a few furlongs broad, and variously ascend or decline to the south, and then terminate in sudden declivities into glens and dells, which run parallel with the shore; and they command a sublime view of the ever-changeful ocean to the north, and of a far-spreading expansé of plains and woods, of tumulated surfaces and mountain tops to the south and west. Several great chasms cleave the rampart from top to bottom, and look like stupendous rents made by a stupendous earthquake; they yawn widely at the sea, and take the form of dells toward the interior; and they have zigzag projections, with protuberances on one face corresponding to depressions or hollows on the other. All these ravines are beautifully romantic; and the largest of them, called the Den of Afforsk, is both a gem of scenery, and a haunt of historical tradition. Here stands

the old church of Gamrie, alleged to have been built on occasion of a fierce fight with the invading Danes in the year 1004; and the following account of the place, and of the tradition respecting it, is from the pen of the parochial schoolmaster, Mr. Alexander Whyte, and appeared first in the Aberdeen Magazine in 1832, and afterwards in the New Statistical Account of Scotland.

“It is not alone by the natural beauties of the place that this scenery becomes a field peculiarly adapted for the fancy to sport in. These green hillocks, grotesque knolls, rugged rocks, and deep gulleys—these vales which have rested for centuries in peace, were once the scene of deadly conflict; for it was here that our far-off ancestors had to stem the torrent of invading Danes; and this brook, now meandering peacefully over the smooth pebbles, once flowed red with the blood of the slain. That green conical mound that tops the east bank of the den, is the castle hill of Finden. It was garrisoned with a part of the Scottish army stationed here to watch the landing of the Danes; a party of whom effected a lodgement on the opposite bank, in the place where the Old Church now stands. The alarm was immediately given, and communicated by means of fires on the mounds, (several of which mounds yet remain on the highest eminences of this and the neighbouring parishes,) which communicated the intelligence rapidly through the kingdom, and quickly brought up reinforcements. Still the Scottish chief, the Thane of Buchan, considered the issue of an attack rather dubious, and, in order to add the enthusiasm of religion to that of patriotism among his followers, made a solemn vow to St. John, in presence of the whole army, to build a church to him on the spot where the invaders were encamped on condition that the saint would lend his assistance in dislodging them. The superstitious soldiers, thinking this too good an offer for any saint to reject, made themselves sure of St. John's co operation, and entered with alacrity into the plans of their

leader; who being now sufficiently reinforced, sent a detachment round by the head of the den,—and these, fetching a compass by the south-west, succeeded in gaining possession of the top of the hill, directly over the Danish main camp, and by rolling down large stones upon the invaders, obliged them to abandon it, and to make their escape by the north-east brow of the hill which overhangs the sea, where many were killed in the flight; whence the place obtained the name of Ghaemrie, or the running battle.

“ After being dislodged from the east, the Danes formed a new camp, (where the entrenchments are still to be seen,) which still preserved their communication with the sea, and also with an extensive barren plain on the top of the hill. Meantime the whole Scottish army, in fulfilment of their leader’s vow, set to work and built the church on the spot where the Danes first settled, while both parties were waiting additional reinforcements. The Danes having been joined by a party of their countrymen who had landed at Old Haven of Cullen, about four miles westward, made a successful attack on the Scots, and drove them back to the castle-hill; and, in spite to St. John for assisting their enemies, they polluted his sanctuary by making it a stable for their horses. By this time, however, the alarm had spread far and wide, and the Scots, pouring in from all quarters, not only forced back the Danes to their old position on the brow of the hill, but, getting possession of the whole heights, and enclosing them on all sides except that overhanging the sea, they again commenced their murderous work of rolling down stones, while the helpless Danes could neither oppose nor escape, and then rushing down upon them, sword in hand, the Scots cut them to pieces to a man. The Bleedy pots (Bloody pits) is still the name of the place, which, being incapable of cultivation from its steepness and exposure to the north blast, remains to this day in *statu quo*. Besides the round, the crescent, and variously angled figures in the

ground, the graves of the Danes are yet to be seen, sunk and hollow, among the rank brown heather, green at the bottom, and surrounded at the borders with harebells and whortles berries, with fragments of rock and large detached stone-lying around, and covered with moss.

“Three of the sacrilegious chiefs were discovered amongst the slain, by whose orders the church had been polluted; and I have seen their skulls, grinning horrid and hollow, in the wall where they had been fixed, inside the church, directly east of the pulpit, and where they have remained in their prison-house 800 years! After the church became a neglected ruin, about twelve years ago, these relics of antiquity (skulls) were pilfered bit by bit, by some of the numerous visitors to the place, (one was subsequently recovered and placed, for greater security, in the Museum of Lit. Inst. Banff, where it is still to be seen,) and nothing of them now remains but the holes in the wall in which they were imbedded.”