THE SOLDIERSHIPS AND SUPERSTITIONS OF ANCIENT SCOTLAND.

The ancient inhabitants of Scotland were brave, strong, and active, and combined fierceness with courage, and pride with generosity. They shared the general character of the Gothic races; and long retained vestiges of their barbarous customs, in social observances and national displays. The men of Scotland were heroic on essentially the same principles as the men of the northern parts of Continental Europe; and the latter owed their bravery to the contempt of death,—and their contempt of death to the pleasure they anticipated in

the hall of Odin,—for they believed, like the Mahommedans, that they would rise from the field of martial glory to a region of high and rapturous enjoyment.

The women of ancient Scotland were nearly as strong as the men, and sometimes did not scruple to share in their severest labours and most hazardous exploits. "Al rank," says Boece, "madynis and wyffis, gif they war nocht with child, geid als weile to battel as the men;" and though that historian is very miserable authority on most subjects, he probably was correct in this. The females of many nations, both in the East and in the West, have been militant; and those of most rude tribes, in perturbed or perilous conditions of society, are often more or less driven by sheer necessity to take some part in the toils of military defence or strife. Some instances of ancient, oriental, fighting queens, such as those of Semiramis, Artemisia, and Zenobia, are familiar to every tyro in history; and many instances of martial heroines, instigating battle, leading on to conflict, or turning the scale of victory, figure on the records of almost all great nations. Some ancient armies are fabled to have consisted wholly of women; and the armies of the Sacæ, the Ethiopians, and the Triballi are said, on less doubtful authority, to have comprised four ranks,—one of which consisted of women, whose duty was to recal the fugitives. The women of ancient Germany went to battle, to supply food and muniments; the women of the Gothic tribes followed the camp, to inspirit the warriors; and the women of the English and Welsh Britons marched out with expeditions to witness the valour of their husbands. Why then should Boece be doubted when he asserts that the women of Caledonia, both maidens and matrons, went to battle along with the men? Yet his statement must probably be understood with considerable limitations, and very likely refers only to the most ancient times and to occasional rather than general practice.

The warriors of Scotland, not only in the Caledonian period but down to at least the twelfth century, are accused by some writers of the horrible crime of cannibalism. Ailred, who lived at the time of the battle of the Standard, directly affirms that the Gallovidians were cannibals; and Walter L'Espec, in an extant speech which he is said to have delivered at the arraying of that battle, expressly declares that they fed on human flesh and drank a mixture of water and human blood. And though this charge of cannibalism may only be an exaggeration or a slander, yet not a few usages and habits of our remote ancestors were no doubt sufficiently savage to lend it some countenance.

The Scotish infantry, so late as the time of Bruce, and occasionally at even a much later period, bore a very disproportionate bulk to the cavalry, and were so poorly equipped as, by a very short and easy poetical licence, to be declared quite naked; and even the cavalry, on some occasions, were miserably ill mounted, and had very beggarly appointments of both arms and provisions. The ancient Scotish armies, as a whole, had little armour, and a very scanty commissariat; and are said at one time to have had no provisions except a little oatmeal,—and at another to have had neither bread, salt, nor wine, but plenty of cattle; and they often or even usually performed no higher culinary operations than to bake oaten bread upon a griddle, or to cook animal food by distending a piece of unskinned carcase upon four stakes, and applying to it water above and fire below.

The early inhabitants of Scotland, particularly those in the northern and central parts of the country, constructed many great military works for defending themselves from the attacks of foreign or domestic foes; and not a few of these are still known to antiquaries under the general name of hill-forts,—while some of the largest or most remarkable, such as the Catherthun and Dun-Dornadil, are objects of interest to the whole surrounding modern population, and have bequeathed

their particular ancient names to the hills or other localities on which they exist. The Caledonians also, like most other ancient warlike nations, had hiding places for retreat and concealment at seasons of special peril; and these were either artificial structures formed by excavation and by rude subterraneous masonry, or natural caves in rocks rendered more commodious by art. Some remarkable subterranean apartments, belonging to the former of these two classes, occur in the parish of Tealing in Forfarshire; several, of a smaller size, and somewhat different construction, occur in the Hebrides; some, of various sizes and forms, occur in Kildrummie Moor in Aberdeenshire, in the district of Applecross in Ross-shire, and in the parish of Kildonan in Sutherlandshire; and a singular one, 60 feet in length, and consisting of masonry, has been discovered on the estate of Raits in Inverness-shire. Several large caves, so altered or marked as distinctly to indicate their having been anciently used as hiding-places, occur in the district of Applecross; some of very large extent—one of them capacious enough to contain 500 persons—occur in the parish of Portree, on the coast of Skye; and several large ones occur also on the Island of Arran.

The navy of Scotland was always more or less neglected; and seems seldom to have been evoked into any considerable size by the demands of either commerce or naval warfare. Yet fleets of canoes and currachs sometimes occurred in very remote times; and fleets of larger vessels in the middle ages. The savage Caledonians both made migrations on the sea and performed excursions on bays and lakes, in such large numbers that their little vessels are poetically celebrated by the hundred and even by the thousand. Somerled, thane of Argyle, had one fleet of 53 ships in the year 1158, and another of 160 ships in the year 1164; and when Alexander III. fought against the Manks in 1275, he conveyed his troops in a fleet. Robert the Bruce had vessels of from 18 to 40 oars; and Barbour gives a curious account of this king's navigation

among the Western Isles. The Scotish monarchs of later periods sometimes subsidized the ships of Flanders, and generally employed Flemings as their chief engineers.

The canoes of the ancient Caledonians were formed by hollowing the stems of trees with fire; and were put in motion by means of small paddles in the same way as the canoes of the South Sea Islanders; and many of them have been discovered in modern times embedded in bogs and in the bottoms of drained lakes and marshes. The currachs are contended by some writers to have been at least as ancient as the canoes; and by others to have succeeded them; and if understood in merely their simplest form, they certainly were very ancient, while, if understood in their comparatively large and improved sense, they no doubt must be viewed as proportionately modern. Cæsar describes the currachs of South Britain as being accommodated with keels and masts of the lightest wood, while their hulls consisted of wicker covered over with leather. Lucan calls them little ships, in which he says the Britons were wont to navigate the ocean. Solinus says that it was common to pass between Britain and Ireland in these 'little ships.' And Adamnan, in his Life of St. Columba, says that St. Cormac sailed into the North sea in one of these currachs, and that he remained in it fourteen days in perfect safety. Now the vessel of Adamnan must have been one very different from the currachs of Cæsar, for it had all the parts of a ship with sails and oars, and was capacious enough to contain passengers; and even the vessels of Cæsar must have been considerably longer and better than the currachs of the ancient Caledonians. A writer who flourished about the year 410 describes a Caledonian currach as "of such magnitude, that it sufficed to hold three men sitting close to one another." Barbour speaking of a boat, says,

> " Bot it so littel was, that it
> Myght owr the water bot thrie flit,"

Maitland says that, in his time, the curachs on the river Spey, were five feet long, and three feet wide. And Boece, in his usual rhodomontade style, exclaims, "How may there be ane greter ingyne than to make ane bait of ane bull hyd bound with na thing bot wands! This bait is callit ane currok, with the quhilk they fysche salmond, and sum tyme passis ouir gret riuers thairwith; and quhen thay haue done thair fysching, thay beir it to ony place on their back quhair thay pleis."

Some of the old historians say that the ancient inhabitants of Scotland went naked; Paulus Jovius, who wrote in the sixteenth century, says that the Orcadians went half naked; and even some of the modern narrators of a poetical temperament, from Buchanan downward, indulge in similar representations. Now though Scotland is not colder than some parts of America where the savages of quite recent periods lived in a state of almost entire nudity, yet the utmost which can be fairly inferred from the statements of its credulous and romancing historians is, that its early population were not at all nice as to the quality of their clothing, and had such hardy habits as at times to be not very much caring about even its quantity.

The ancient Scots had but rude notions of the rights of property; and very many of them were systematic or professed thieves; and even some of their heroes gloried in peculation and robbery and rapine. Almost all savage nations, indeed, and even some half-civilized ones, are powerfully addicted to thieving. "There was a singular law with the Egyptians: to be entitled to steal, it was necessary to be entered in a particular list of thieves, and engage to bring all stolen goods to the chief. Their neighbours, the Ethiopians, had different ideas: they had no locked places; and things left in the highways were never stolen. Thieving was in esteem; it was not viewed as a crime, but as a point of address. The Spartan youth underwent a regular education in

it. Nestor asks Telemachus and Mentor, after entertaining them, whether they are pirates. When Cæsar was in Gaul, '*Latrocinia nullam habent infamiam, quæ extra fines cujusque civitatis fiunt.*' The Danes, Norwegians, and Icelanders, delighted in piracy. A common vaunt was, that the hero had never slept under an immoveable roof. The Northern pirates added cruelty to plunder. An ordinary amusement was, tossing children from one, and receiving them upon the lance of another. Of the Borderers, Leslie affirms, '*Non multum interesse putant, sive a Scotis sive ab Anglis furentur.*'—And theft by 'landed men,' is by the Legislature declared treason. But the genius of our English neighbours seems to have soared in a peculiar style of thieving. And the last Henry enjoins his attendants, 'not to steal any locks or keys, tables, forms, cupboards, or other furniture, out of the noblemen's and gentlemen's houses where he goes to visit.'

The Scots, particularly the Border tribes and the Highland clans, down to so recent a period as the union of the Crowns, made constant incursions for the sake of plunder, in much the same style as modern savage nations who live near the confines of a civilized country. The heroes of the Clans, in fact, were simply reivers or wholesale robbers; and the raids and forays of the Border, in a vast multitude of instances, were simply the exploits and consequences of freebooting. Scotland could not learn any of the arts of honesty and fair dealing from trade or commerce; it suffered frequent and prolonged release from all governmental restraint by interregnums, minorities, and contentions on the part of its kings; it was long and extensively rocked in the very cradle of rapine by the system of feudalism, and by the continual play of clannish strifes and retaliations; and it was hundreds of times provoked to long and fierce courses of revenge and spoliation by the animosities, invasions, and oppressions of its proud and domineering neighbours of England. "Scot-

land," remarks Dalzell, "had no occasion to bear affection to England. The treachery of Edward, who, under the mask of friendship, tried to wrest away their sceptre,—the wiles of the fourth and seventh Henries, who, in peace, detained their King a captive, and sowed dissension in their national assemblies,—and the deceit of Elizabeth, who, in cold blood, inhumanly murdered their Queen, planted an insuperable barrier to amity, and formed a wound, which the revolution of near two centuries has not completely healed. How this nation could exist, when opposed to the arms of England, is wonderful; and we need search for no other proof of the valour of our ancestors. The feudal law had an early introduction here. It is recognised in our most ancient authentic documents, and then not in its original state. The King was the fountain of honour and property. By the feudal system, every man was a soldier. Lands were granted and transmitted, for personal service only; and the whole centered in the King. This continued long; and the extensive period required to effect a change, shows how very ancient its establishment must have been. Lands were granted for various acknowledgments,—a quota of the fruits they produced; and, when the exchange of goods for money began, a return was made in specie. At first, the royal mint might be very portable; perhaps it always attended the King; and probably, a hammer, an anvil, and the die, constituted the whole. Agriculture was neglected, from the frequent use the nation had for its soldiers. Continual wars,—wars which sometimes lasted near a century without intermission,—engaged the whole attention of the natives and induced them to live by plunder. Refinements that might be collecting for ages, were annihilated in the distractions of Baliol, Bruce, and Edward; and instilled a savage ferocity in the minds of the people, that would have required ages of peace to quiet."

Magic, fortune-telling, and similar abominations seem to have crept into Scotland through the medium of the saint-

worship and demonology of the middle ages. Robert the Bruce had his fortune predicted by a woman; and Barbour gives a dissertation on astrology. The first time capital punishment was inflicted for witchcraft in Scotland was in 1479, and the last in 1722; and between these periods many poor creatures, particularly old haggard women, were persecuted and tortured and burned, with ingenious and relentless cruelty, for this imaginary crime; while not a few great public disasters, at once military, political, and social, were gravely ascribed to its reputed influence. James VI. wrote a book upon it; and maintained that no age, sex, or rank guilty of it should be exempted from punishment; and lamented that witches were never so rife as at the very time when he wrote. And even Sir George Mackenzie,—a man of great learning, at a later period, who defended the antiquity of the Scotish royal line,—declared that witchcraft was the greatest of crimes, and that the lawyers of Scotland could not doubt of the existenee of witches, since the law ordained them to be punished. The witches were popularly believed to be in the Devil's service, and to converse with him, and to possess from him a vast and varied power of evil; and they were supposed to appear to their victims in the form of hares, cats, and other creatures; and wicked gentry and nobles, ladies of rank and officers of state, who concocted schemes of assassination or treason, secretly and earnestly consulted them as the fittest possible auxiliaries in their nefarious plots. Any reader who is curious to know the expense of burning a witch will find an account of it in Arnot's Criminal Trials, or who wishes to learn the tortures to which reputed witches were subjected, and the extraordinary confessions which they were sometimes induced to make, will find ample accounts of them in Sir Walter Scott's Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft, and in Pitcairn's Criminal Trials.

Whatever superstitions arose in the course of ages found a ready retreat among the fastnesses of the Highland moun-

tains, and have in a great measure been retained till quite recent times, or even till the present day, by a large proportion of the Highland population. The peculiar aspect of the Highlands, in which nature appears in its wildest and most romantic features, exhibiting at a glance sharp and rugged mountains, with dreary wastes—wide-stretched lakes, and rapid torrents, over which the thunders and lightnings, and tempests, and rains, of heaven, exhaust their terrific rage, wrought upon the creative powers of the imagination; and from these appearances, the Highlanders "were naturally led to ascribe every disaster to the influence of superior powers, in whose character the predominating feature necessarily was malignity towards the human race." The most dangerous and the most malignant creature was the *kelpie*, or water-horse, which was supposed to allure women and children to his subaqueous haunts, and there devour them. Sometimes he would swell the lake or torrent beyond its usual limits, and overwhelm the unguarded traveller in the flood. The shepherd, as he sat upon the brow of a rock in a summer's evening, often fancied he saw this animal dashing along the surface of the lake, or browsing on the pasture-ground upon its verge. The *urisks*, who were supposed to be of a condition somewhat intermediate between that of mortal men and spirits, "were a sort of *lubberly* supernaturals, who, like the *brownies* of England, could be gained over by kind attentions to perform the drudgery of the farm; and it was believed that many families in the Highlands had one of the order attached to it." The urisks were supposed to live dispersed over the Highlands, each having his own wild recess; but they were said to hold stated assemblies in the celebrated cave called Coire-nan-Uriskin, situated near the base of Ben-Venue, in Aberfoyle, on its northern shoulder. It overhangs Loch-Katrine "in solemn grandeur," and is beautifully and faithfully described by Sir Walter Scott.

"It was a wild and strange retreat,
As e'er was trod by outlaw's feet.
The dell, upon the mountain's crest,
Yawned like a gash on warrior's breast;
Its trench had staid full many a rock,
Hurl'd by primeval earthquake shock
From Ben-Venue's grey summit wild,
And here, in random ruin piled,
They frown'd incumbent o'er the spot,
And formed the rugged sylvan grot.
The oak and birch, with mingled shade,
At noontide there a twilight made,
Unless where short and sudden shone
From struggling beam on cliff or stone,
With such a glimpse as prophet's eye
Gains on thy depth, Futurity.
No murmur waked the solemn still,
Save tinkling of a fountain rill;
But when the wind chafed with the lake,
A sullen sound would upward break,
With dashing hollow voice, that spoke
The incessant war of wave and rock.
Suspended cliffs, with hideous sway,
Seem'd nodding o'er the cavern grey.
From such a den the wolf had sprung,
In such a wild cat leaves her young;
Yet Douglas and his daughter fair
Sought for a space their safety there.
Grey Superstition's whisper dread,
Debarred the spot to vulgar tread;
For there, she said, did fays resort,
And satyrs hold their sylvan court,
By moon-light tread their mystic maze,
And blast the rash beholder's gaze."

The *urisks*, though generally inclined to mischief, were supposed to relax in this propensity, if kindly treated by the families which they haunted. They were even serviceable in some instances, and in this point of view were often considered an acquisition. Each family regularly set down a bowl of cream for its urisk, and even clothes were sometimes added. The urisk resented any omission or want of attention on the part of the family; and tradition says, that the urisk of Glaschoil—a small farm about a mile to the west of Ben-Venue—having been disappointed one night of his bowl of cream, after performing the task allotted him, took his departure about day-break, uttering a horrible shriek, and never again returned.

The *Daoine Shith*, or *Shi'*, 'men of peace,' or as they are sometimes called, *Daoine matha*, 'good men,' are considered by Dr. P. Graham, as "the most beautiful and perfect branch of Highland mythology." Although these have been generally supposed the same as the fairies of England, as portrayed by Shakspeare, in the 'Midsummer Night's Dream,' and perhaps, too, of the Orientals, they differ essentially in many important points. The Daoine Shi', or men of peace, who are the *fairies* of the Highlanders, "though not absolutely malevolent, are believed to be a peevish repining race of beings, who, possessing themselves but a scanty portion of happiness, are supposed to envy mankind their more complete and substantial enjoyments. They are supposed to enjoy, in their subterraneous recesses, a sort of shadowy happiness, a tinsel grandeur, which, however, they would willingly exchange for the more solid joys of mortals." Green was the colour of the dress which these men of peace always wore, and they were supposed to take offence when any of the mortal race presumed to wear their favourite colour. The Highlanders ascribe the disastrous result of the battle of Killiecrankie to the circumstance of Viscount Dundee having been dressed in green on that ill-fated day. This colour

is even yet considered ominous to those of his name who assume it. The abodes of the Daoine Shi' are supposed to be below grassy eminences or knolls, where, during the night, they celebrate their festivities by the light of the moon, and dance to notes of the softest music. Tradition reports that they have often allured some of the human race into their subterraneous retreats, consisting of gorgeous apartments, and that they have been regaled with the most sumptuous banquets and delicious wines. Their females far exceed the daughters of men in beauty. If any mortal shall be tempted to partake of their repast, or join in their pleasures, he at once forfeits the society of his fellow-men, and is bound down irrevocably to the condition of a Shi'ich, or man of peace. The Shi'ichs, or men of peace, are supposed to have a design against new-born children, and women in childbed, whom it is still universally believed, they sometimes carry off into their secret recesses. To prevent this abduction, women in childbed are closely watched, and are not left alone, even for a single moment, till the child is baptized, when the Shi'ichs are supposed to have no more power over them.