

SOCKAUGH.

BY THE REV. GEORGE WILLIAMS.

A VALE OF ALFORD man once declared that Cushnie Hill (Sockaugh) was "ane o' the auldest an' maist respectable hills in the hale warl'". A native of the Garioch would affirm the same of Bennachie, and stand to it; but, while making due allowance for our Alford friend's prejudiced exaggeration or limited observation, it cannot be denied that the Hill of Cushnie is well worth a visit. It may be reached from Deeside by Lumphanan or Aboyne, or from Donside by Alford. Suppose we accomplish the journey to this pretty much *terra incognitu* by Lumphanan.

Arriving at Lumphanan Station, we take the road leading to Corse, with the Free Church on our right. After a walk of a few minutes, we see Macbeth's Cairn in a cultivated field about a quarter of a mile to the west, or on the left, for the terms east, west, north, and south are often somewhat perplexing to a stranger. In the Vale of Men-teith, between Ben Lomond and Bencleuch, the words east and west play a very important service in ordinary conversation. Thus, a man desired his tailor to move one of the buttons of his coat "a wee west", while another, whose wife had taken more than her due share of the bed, desired his offending partner to "shift east a bit". Macbeth's Cairn is some forty or fifty feet in circumference, and no doubt it was at one time much larger. Here it is supposed that the famous or infamous monarch of that name lost his life in conflict with Macduff, about the middle of the eleventh century.

Crossing Perkhill, we notice the hoary ruins of Corse Castle, with the Burn of Corse (the Leochel Burn farther down) flowing at its base. This castle was built by William Forbes, the father of Bishop Patrick Forbes of Corse and of William Forbes, the successful Dantzic merchant and founder of the Craigievar branch of the family. It is dated 1581. The lands of Corse, partly in Coull, partly in Lumphanan, belonged

to the Durwards, and became Crown property towards the close of the thirteenth century. In 1476 Corse was granted by James III. to his armour-bearer, Patrick Forbes, third son of the second Lord Forbes. George Forbes, son of Dr. John Forbes, Professor of Divinity, Aberdeen, and grandson of the Bishop, sold the estate partly to the Duguids of Kincaigie, but the greater portion of the property was secured by Sir John Forbes of Craigievar, and, since 1670, Corse has been an integral part of the lands of Craigievar. Corse is *quoad sacra* in the parish of Leochel-Cushnie, and *quoad civilia* in that of Coull.

It would be an unpardonable omission not to quote the venerable and popular rhyme, characterising several of the farms of this neighbourhood :

“ At Tillyorn grows the corn ;
 At Waster Corse, the straw ;
 At Blackbank, the blaewort blae ;
 At Cal'hame, naething ava ”.

In addition to its agricultural products, Tillyorn is famed as having reared the steed that carried the news to Her Majesty at Balmoral of the fall of Sebastopol, on 8th September, 1855.

Proceeding westwards, we have Leadhlich (1278) on the south, “ the hill of the flag-stones ”, where the surrounding districts obtain “ peasiewhins ” for building purposes. A veteran quarryman, looking at the hill from a distance, exclaimed, “ That’s Leadhlich—weel-a-wat, I’ve gart it sink a fit or twa, a’ owre, mysel’ ”. Nearing Oldmill (which presents no vestige of a mill), we may note on the roadside several specimens of the pretty *Corydalis claviculata* (the white climbing corydalis), a plant which preserves its beauty in house decoration for a much longer time than most of our wild flowers. A granite quarry was opened in this neighbourhood several years ago, but “ it wadna do ”. The rocks are very old, and belong to the Lower Silurian. No real fossils have been found hereabout. There is, however, what is popularly called “ fossil heather ”. It is found in feldstein rock, quarried for the roads, a few yards from the smithy of Cushnie. The markings are due to the

presence of manganese oxide, which has assumed the form of plants, hence called "dendritic markings".

After we have reached Tillylodge and turned northwards, climbing the steep Brae of Blackbalk, with Bogfern, famous in the annals of polled cattle breeding, on our left, we find in "the Howe o' the Holm", in one of the fields of Holmhead, a quarry of decomposed gneiss, which is often used for sand. The sand of this district is said to be abundant in irite, in the shape of small black grains. Irite gives us two rare metals, irittium and osmium, the former of which became important as an alloy with platinum for making international standards of weight and length. Pieces of coarse jasper have been found on the hill. In the quarry on the north shoulder of the hill are found large crystals of iron pyrites, slightly decomposed and difficult to extract from the rock without breaking. Near this quarry the milky variety of quartz is seen lying on the surface. Most of the springs are deep seated, and, being little affected by surface climate, are said to be warm in winter and cold in summer.

The easiest course from Hallhead to the hill-top is to ascend by the Cromar bank of the Leochel Burn, the hill on the right bank of the stream having been planted by Mr. Wolrige Gordon of Hallhead and Esslemont. This gentleman deserves much praise for having thus made the whole hillside beautiful and improved a poor "scawp" of an estate. "The Ground", as Hallhead is, *par excellence*, termed, has been owned by the same family since the close of the fifteenth century. Tam o' Rivven's fourth son, George, was the first proprietor. He married, about 1480, the widow of Lumsden of Cushnie. Their grandson was slain at Pinkie in 1547. The House of Hallhead, according to a stone in the door cheek, shows the date 1668, but other evidence has placed its erection eighteen years later. The expense of building the house and other extravagant behaviour reduced the rightful heir to straightened means, but his uncle, Robert Gordon, Treasurer of Aberdeen, bought the family estate, and increased his property by the purchase of Esslemont in 1728. The thirteenth Gordon

of Hallhead was the first of Esslemont. One of his daughters was the mother of Black the famous chemist. Dr. Adam Ferguson's mother was a lady of this house, and several of them have distinguished themselves by their gallantry and courage in the field of battle.

The "flaughter spade"-like marshes, called the Polsons, give rise to the Leochel Burn, where bog asphodel grows abundantly in its season. This singular name, Polsons, where there never could have been a human habitation, seems to be a corruption of *buailtean*, "cattle folds", the *larachs* of which are still visible in the vicinity.

The county road leading between the Ford of Don at Drumallachie and Cromar passes through between the shaft and the blade of the so-called flaughter spade. This was in olden times a most important thoroughfare. General Mackay led the Royal troops from Strathbogie to Aboyne, in July, 1689, by this road, and when the parishioners of Forbes took steps in the translation of the Rev. Mr. Orem from Cushnie to Forbes in 1745, the Cushnie folks pleaded that it was but proper that so good a minister should be allowed to remain in a parish "situated on a public road from the north to the south, frequented by persons of all ranks, and who have sometimes to be hearers at Cushnie". It was probably by this road that Father Gilbert Blakhal went from the muir of Rhynie to Birse in 1641. He tells us in his "Brieffe Narrative" that, as he was crossing the hills of Cushnie, "as wyld a piece of ground as is in all Brittain", his horse was stung by an adder, and was so lamed that he could not put his foot to the ground. The worthy blacksmith "at the church of Birs" could detect nothing the matter with the horse, but removed the shoe and set it on again—"so I did sometimes lead him and sometimes ryde him to Aberdeine". We may remark, with due deference to his Reverence's opinion, that with his lame horse he was in no fit mood to criticise the scenery through which he passed. The wildness of the place, however, has been referred to by a modern writer. C. Elphinstone-Dalrymple, author of "Lays, Highland and Lowland", says in his excellent ballad "Duncan Gorme":

“The nor’lan’ win’ is blawin’ snell
 An’ Cushnie hills are cauld,
 It’s we maun lift an unco prey
 An’ syne we’ll draw to hauld”.

No doubt the author took his estimate of the climate from having heard the oft-repeated saying, attributed to the wild rieving Macgregors :

“Cushnie for caul,
 Culblean for heat,
 Clashanriach for heather”.

A riever is also said to have thus described one of his raids :

“At Cushnie cauld I bigget my fauld,
 At Ininteer I simmert my steer,
 At Little Lynturk I drew my durk,
 At Baldievin I stak it in”.

Climate suggests the plants of the district, which very much resemble the plants of any equally elevated locality. Some of the rarer species are *Cornus suecica* (dwarf cornel), in a sheltered hollow on the north-east side of the cairn, out of which the Tochie takes its rise; *Thalictrum alpinum* (alpine meadow rue) has been found, as also *Trollius Europæus*, but neither is frequent. *Helianthemum vulgare* (common rock rose) is common near Blackhills. *Ononis arvensis* (common rest-harrow) was found at Oldtown. The young lads and lasses from the Cromar and Cushnie sides of the hill used to meet on the Averin Brae on a Sunday afternoon to gather and regale themselves with this fruit (*Rubus chamæmorus*). *Senecio sylvaticus* (wood groundsel) and *Solidago Virgaurea* (common golden-rod) are met with in several places. Recent cultivation has expelled *Briza media* (common quaking grass), which used to be frequent near Bogfern. *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* (red bear berry) is sometimes seen; *Empetrum nigrum* (black crow-berry) frequently. *Galium mollugo* (great hedge bed-straw) was found in one situation and *Viola lutea* (yellow mountain violet) in several. The graceful plant which the great naturalist, Charles Linnée, associated with his name and fame (*Linnaea borealis*) (two-flowered Linnea) may be found in the plantation on the south shoulder of the

hill. As far as the writer's limited knowledge of the subject goes, he would conclude that there are no *Saxifragas* in the parish of Leochel-Cushnie.*

The summit, which has been crowned with a large cairn, is reached without great exertion. On a favourable day, at our altitude of 2032 feet, an extensive and varied prospect is unfolded. Directing our eyes towards Aberdeen, which, however, is hid from view by the Brimmond Hill and Hill of Fare, and turning round sunwise (for turning in an opposite direction might forebode mishap) we see the ocean, with boats scudding over its surface in the season of the herring fishing. Cairn-mon-earn, Kerloch, Clochnaben, Mount Battock, and Mount Keen (or rather let us say, with an older generation than ours, *Mounth* Battock and *Mounth* Keen—the writer's grandfather used *Mounth* Keen as the landmark in the direction of which the stooks had to be set up in harvest), Mortlich, Culblean, and Lochnagar—of which a grand view can be got—with a more distant and apparently higher peak to the right, not unlike Beinn a' Ghlo. Now comes Morven, "the big Ben", which, from our present point of observation, deserves its distinguished name more than any other. It presents a substantial front, and our only regret is that its magnificent personality hides regions beyond. Looking almost due west, we readily identify Ben Avon, Beinn a' Bhuid, and Cairngorm. The Strathdon hills are "too numerous to mention"—a phrase which may cloak the guide's indolence or ignorance. Ben Rinnes stands out clear and unmistak-

* Professor Trail gives the following note of plants observed by him, not mentioned above, on a visit to Sockaugh on 24th April last :—"Near Corse Castle there is a large bed of the white Butterbur (*Petasites albus*), an introduced plant in this district—seemingly a relic of old gardens. On the hill the cranberry (*Vaccinium Vitis-idaea*) is abundant, and so are several of the club-mosses, the common club-moss or tods'-tails (*Lycopodium clavatum*) and the alpine or savine-leaved club-moss (*L. alpinum*) being the more abundant on the ascent from the east, and the fir club-moss (*L. selago*) being very plentiful in fine fruit on the north slope. On some of the stones of and around the cairn a dark subalpine lichen—*Umbilicaria proboscidea*—grows, forming shallow cups often nearly an inch across, and studded inside with small black warts".

able. The Buck of Cabrach is also prominent—natives of Leochel-Cushnie are generally well acquainted with the Buck and with the famous corrective of a wayward disposition, "Cabrach sweeties", associated therewith. Almost due north are Tap o' Noth, Knock, Coillebharr, Forman and Foudland Hills, while looking north-east we detect the stack hills of New Byth, with its church and school. Part of Gamrie, with the hills of Cook, are quite discernible, and before Bennachie comes to curtail our prospect, we detect the "White Horse" of Mormond, resting his limbs on the slope of the hill, and the Fordyce Monument, near Brucklay. Passing Bennachie, which intercepts the greater part of Buchan, the eye rests upon Cairn William, the Red Hill, the Barmekin, and Hill of Fare.

A prominent object at the foot of Bennachie is Castle Forbes: and we feel constrained to turn right round about to admire the silver sheen of Lochs Kinord and Davan, so well known from the excellent history of them compiled by the accomplished and genial minister of Dinnet, the Rev. J. G. Michie. It would be difficult to say whether the Vale of Alford or that of Cromar were more worth a prolonged sweep of our binocular. Probably the direction of the wind at the time will put the question beyond doubt.

The late Rev. Alexander Taylor, D.D., a man universally esteemed and an excellent historian and enthusiastic antiquarian, in the *New Statistical Account*, thus writes of Leochel-Cushnie:

"The prospect from the summit of the Hill of Cushnie well repays the toil of the ascent. To the south is seen the fertile vale of Cromar, with the lofty chain of the Grampians beyond, among which Mount Keen and Lochnagar rise pre-eminent; to the west, Morven and Ben Avon; to the north-west, the windings of the Don through the valley of Towie, and Ben Rinnes in the distance; to the north, the Buck of the Cabrach and the Tap o' Noth, with the upper part of Strathbogie; and to the north-east and east, the vale of Alford, highly cultivated and richly wooded, with its bounding mountains, the district of the Garioch, and the flat country extending even to the Buchan coast. Various other points afford pleasing though much less extensive views".

At the foot of the hill stands Cushnie House, the residence of Sir William Samuel Seton, Bart., with the Auld Place, now called Cushnie Lodge, nestling among its old plane trees. Sir William succeeded to the lands of Cushnie on the death of his uncle's widow, Mrs. Lumsden. The Lumsdens have owned these lands since the middle of the fifteenth century. Their residence in Cushnie was the Auld Place, erected in 1707. Their hatchment, seen above the door and on stones in the kitchen of the old Mains and above the door of the mill, is two wolves' heads couped in chief and an escallop in base, with the motto, "Dei dono sum quod sum". Notwithstanding this motto, they were a wild race. One of them, in 1719, was summoned before the Presbytery of Aberdeen for some misconduct, but he caused the Presbytery's officer to swallow the summons "gnipper and gnapper". Most of the Aberdeenshire families of the name can trace their connection to the Lumsdens of Cushnie.

The Hill of Cushnie is hardly known as "Sockaugh". The latter name is familiar only to those who have studied the Ordnance Survey map, but the surveyors have no doubt good authority for the name. The writer has been endeavouring to clear up this perplexing matter, but as yet unsuccessfully. In Robertson's map (1822) the name is given as "Cushnie Hill". It is a somewhat singular circumstance that the Cushnie people know the hill as simply "the Hill", or more usually "the Glen". Accustomed to derive their fuel from the hill, they would speak of going to the *glen* to cast, set, or drive a fraucht of peats, and so "the glen" has come to be identified with the hill itself.

On the O.S. map the name Pittenderich (1655) will be observed. The inhabitants of Cushnie call this part of the hill Presandye, while the natives of Tarland contend that "Sockaugh" itself, as well as Pittenderich, should be called Presandye. The latter name would imply some prominent plant or shrub growing there in days of yore—preas-an-dye, "the bush of —", but of what? Curiously enough, but not without reason, the most prominent point from Cushnie,

and so called the Muckle Tap (marked The Top on the O.S. map), was called Pittenderich in a document of 1640.

The name Sockaugh may have been suggested to the surveyors by Socach Burn, which flows towards Towie, but we hope they had stronger authority than this. Perhaps (O! *perhaps*, for who has not got his fingers burnt in cooking Gaelic roots?) the word may be preserved in the "Auld Tochie" (Allt an t-Socach). Socach is the adjective formed from *Soc*, a snout, and means "the snouty hill". We are inclined to think that the hill, if so designated on good authority, was called by this name from the appearance of the marshes at Polsons. The Corse people speak of "the flaughter spade", and the fancy of earlier Celtic residents might for the same reason call it the "Sock" hill, from the resemblance to the sock of the plough. Hence Socach.

On the north side of the cairn is a deep hollow, out of which the Cushnie Burn springs. It is known as the Káchel. Last time the writer was on the summit, he and his companion saw a rainbow resting on the two wings of the hill, with the intervening glen to complete the circle. We were reminded of the reverent piety of a rustic who, on looking at a splendid view from the summit of a hill, exclaimed, "the works of God are jist deevlish"—the adjective meaning much more than he could, with a limited vocabulary, express.

At a short distance down the glen stand the ruins of Cushnie Church, around which many generations of our forbears rest from their labours. Although it dates from the middle of the seventeenth century, a more ancient style of masonry is noticed in the gable and walls. The Cromar farmers claimed a right to the moss on the Cushnie side of the hill, as far as within sight of the bell. In recent years the bell was lowered, but the people on both sides were deprived of their right. Here is a bit of choice Latinity from a 1638 retour:—"Privilegio focalium in maresiis, vulgo to cast peittis, turvis et clodds in maresiis vocatis the moss of the Auldtoun of Halheid infra parochiam de Cushnie", which privilege gave rise to the saying, "O' the three peats at the door o' Ha'heid's hoose, Cromar taks twa".

The shootings are considered good both on the Cromar and Towie and Cushnie sides of the hill, and heavy bags are carried off after the day's toil. The Cushnie part of the hill was regarded as good pasture in olden days. In 1751 the minister of Cushnie applied for an augmentation of stipend, and this application was opposed on the ground that "he lives at the base of a very fine pasture hill, where he can have plenty of sheep, and not a gentleman in the whole parish", and it was stated that "he is a very troublesome, turbulent creature".

Sockaugh, it should be observed, presents its best face to the south and south-west. From Cromar and many points on Deeside the hill has rather an interesting appearance, second only in the neighbourhood to Morven. In particular, as one comes down Glen Muick, Sockaugh looks quite a two-thousand feet hill, and peaked, and, seen a little to the right of Morven blocking a farther north-eastward view, his identity has puzzled not a few. The descent to Cromar is an enjoyable one, and is made by first proceeding westward from the cairn for nearly three-quarters of a mile (near the point where three parishes—Leochel-Cushnie, Towie, and Logie-Coldstone—meet), thence descending by Trotten Slack, past Hillfoot, and on to the farm of Bog, about two miles from Tarland, the capital of Cromar. Dinnet and Aboyne stations are each about six miles from Tarland.