

# THE CLUB AT BENNACHIE.

BY THE REV. ANDREW GALLOWAY.

*Moderate.*

O! gin I were where Gadie rins, Where Gadie rins, where Ga-die

*FINE.*

rins, O! gin I were where Gadie rins, By the foot o' Ben-na-chie.

*♩*

I've roam'd by Tweed, I've roam'd by Tay, By Border Nith and High-land

*D.C.*

Spey, But dearer far to me than they, The braes o' Ben-na-chie.

Detailed description: The musical score is written in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. It consists of four staves of music. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is simple and folk-like. The second staff ends with a double bar line and the word 'FINE.' above it. The third staff begins with a repeat sign (two dots with a vertical line) and continues the melody. The fourth staff ends with a double bar line and 'D.C.' (Da Capo) above it. The lyrics are printed below the notes.

SINCE 1871, when the writer was "settled" in Oyne, he has climbed Bennachie, on an average, three or four times a year. But one of his pleasantest roamings over the hill was as the guest of the Cairngorm Club, on 26th September last. The programme on that occasion was comprehensive, and did justice to the attractions of Bennachie:—Walk from Oyne Station; an inspection of the "Waterspout", Oxen Craig, Craig Shannoch, Mither Tap, Maiden Castle; dinner at the Home Farm of Pittodrie—thanks to facilities afforded by Mr. Diack; and an inspection of the "Maiden Stane o' Bennachie" *en route* to Pitcaple Station.

Bennachie is a short hill range of about five miles, east and west, situated in the old earldom of the Garioch, near the centre of Aberdeenshire, and about 20 miles north-west of "the Silver City by the Sea". Although the "Garioch" means "the rough district", its productiveness early earned for it the title "the meal giral" of Aberdeenshire. The

10 ft.  
high



hill range is bounded on the south by the Don, and by the Gadie on the north, the chief summits being Oxen Craig (1733) in the west, Craig Shannoch (about 1600) in the north, and Mither Tap (1698) in the east. Owing to its comparative isolation, Bennachie is seen from a radius of 40 miles, the Mither Tap having long been a landmark for sailors steering round the shores of the county.

From the various summits a wide and magnificent view is obtained in clear weather. As the eye sweeps the horizon from the smoke of Aberdeen round against the sun, it catches the coast of Buchan, the hill of Mormond with its White Horse, Troup Head, and even the Caithness hills in the blue distance of fully 70 miles. Continuing the sweep, one sees the Bin, Knock, Tap o' Noth, and, far away, Ben Rinnes. Further round, in the south-west, and towards the south, Cairngorm, Ben Muich Dhui, Lochnagar, Clochnaben, and others are easily identified. Towards the east and north of Bennachie the country is more level, and highly cultivated; but towards the west and south hills and crags rise in close and varied profusion. Through the Vale of Alford one traces the silver flow of the Don; south-east the Loch of Skene gleams in the sunshine; while off Newburgh there is a peep of the German Ocean; and off Portsoy is seen the Moray Firth.

From several parts of the hill little rills, or "gills", as they are locally called, run northward into the Gadie, and southward into the Don, and in their course are utilised in driving the wheels of thrashing mills.

The hill is easily ascended from all sides, the favourite starting-places being the Railway Stations of Pitcaple and Oyne. Leaving the last-named, we soon cross the old Aberdeen road, which

" Cam' in by Dunnideer,  
An' doon by Netherha' "

ran along the north side of the hill, and passed near the Church of Chapel of Garioch and Balquhain Castle. Along this old road the clans marched to Harlaw in 1411. Near where we cross the old road tradition speaks of a stiff struggle having taken place between the Laird of Harthill



with his followers, and a party of the Gordons, carrying twelve waggon-loads of treasure from the Cathedral of Old Aberdeen to Strathbogie.

Passing the old Beeches, we work our way over very indifferent footing up the west side of Oxen Craig to Shannoch Well, the lunching place of many a sportsman and "the rest-and-be-thankful" of many a perspiring tourist. We are here at an elevation of upwards of 1000 feet, and a fine view is had towards north and west. But move a hundred yards up, and examine the great and recent cleft in the hillside. In the early afternoon of 9th August, 1891, a waterspout burst over the side of the hill a few hundred yards further up. For a time a great volume of water rushed down the peat road, washing out the gravel, and carrying immense quantities thereof and of stones down through the woods, and in the bed of the road to the levels below. Arrested at what is known as the Little Cut of '29, the waters, pent up to a great depth, at length burst, at right angles, through the east bank, tore down the hillside to the Gill Burn—the great torrent bearing with it trees and soil and boulders, and wearing out a wide gap in a rocky bed, in some places 40 feet wide and 30 feet deep. From markings on the trees at the side of the Gill Burn, the seething, roaring stream must have been eight to ten feet deep in some parts. The hopelessly ruined peat road, and the enormous quantity of sand, gravel, stones, and boulders lying everywhere in endless confusion, testify to the fearful force of the water, whose sound resembled rumbling thunder.

The remainder of the ascent to the top of Oxen Craig is easily accomplished, and the splendid view obtained of hill and vale will reward the climb. The small oblong socket, seen in the rock, held for a short time the memorial stone which marked the spot where the half-witted Robbie Dawson perished in a snowstorm in November, 1856.

We now cross over, through heather and numerous wild plants, to Craig Shannoch ("the hill of foxes"), having on our right the peat moss, still largely drawn upon. This high mossfield has yielded up a few articles of antiquity, most of which are in Edinburgh Antiquarian Museum.



Craig Shannoch looks out boldly to the north, and is best seen from the valley of the Gadie. The stones in some places have a "masonry like appearance", and in one place lightning has left its mark. Down the rocky front of the craig is Harthill's Cave—so named from the tradition that the Laird of Harthill in 1644 here watched the burning of his Castle, which is a little to the north-east.

Approaching the Mither Tap, around which interest greatly deepens, and which is visited by thousands from all



*Photo. by*

THE CLUB ON OXEN CRAIG.

*Rev. Robert Semple,*

quarters, the Nether Maiden—a bold and detached mass of rock, layer upon layer, illustrating in a striking manner the process of weathering—catches the eye, and lends a distinctive feature to the "Tap". This summit is most easily reached by a detour towards the east, striking what is called the "Maiden Causeway", and stepping softly over toppled-down stones by the old entrance into the Fort, so notable a feature of the Mither Tap. (For a detailed description of the Fort, see Miss Maclagan's "Hillforts, &c., of Scotland";



an abbreviated account is given in "Bennachie").\* Suffice here to say that the summit of the Mither Tap was early and strongly fortified, most probably by the ancient Caledonians, on hearing of southern invasions threatening to over-run and conquer all the north of Scotland also. The whole structure of the fortification, with its enormous outer and inner encircling stone ramparts, in some places 26 feet thick; its round "houses", the largest of which has a diameter of fully 50 feet; its semicircular terrace of 600 feet, and its other buildings and arrangements, reflects credit upon its architect, who had taken full advantage of the natural configuration and strength of the hilltop. The work exhibits as much care and tact as that of the best "dry stone dyker" of to-day. The "hands" employed must have been numerous; the time of erection long; the labour entailed in collecting and transporting the stones, which average in size 18 inches by 12 inches, and are wonderfully uniform, must have been immense. The undertaking is herculean, and, with its high and broad walls, and its coigns of defence, the Fort, if well manned, must have been well-nigh impregnable. A libertine Baron of Balquhain is reputed to have abducted and carried thither such handsome maidens as he fancied; and tradition makes it also the hiding-place of Lord Pitsligo after the fatal field of Culloden in 1746.

Report says that a well-made and distinctly-seen causeway—long known as the "Maiden Causeway"—once stretched from the Mither Tap down the north-eastern side of the hill, and into the woods of Pittodrie; that it was 14 feet broad, and was of Roman origin. Just outside the north-east entrance to the Fort, and on the wind-swept height, there are broad stones, which seem to have been laid in the moss; but, if such a "causey" once existed down the hillside, it has sunk out of sight under peat and heather. We are safe in rejecting the old legend that—aided by the Prince of Darkness—a rejected wooer of the Maiden of

---

\* "Bennachie", by Alex. Inkson M'Connochie, 2nd Ed., 1897. Aberdeen: Lewis Smith & Son.



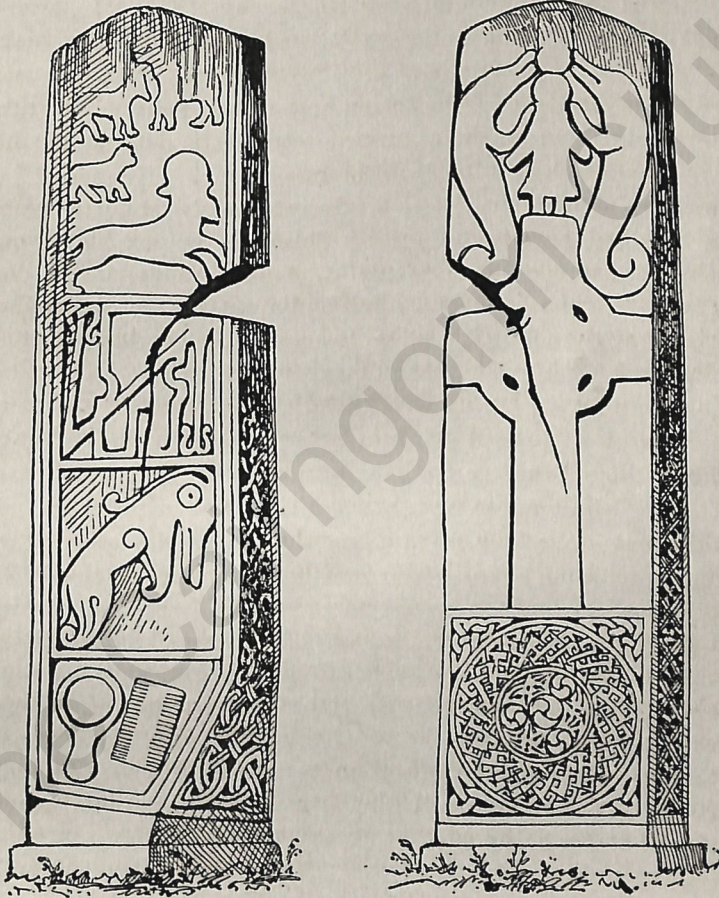
Drumduro managed, in an afternoon, to "lay a causey up the Craigs of Bennachie" ere the light-hearted, liling girl finished baking her firlot of meal. And we may similarly treat the story that it was the work of the Baron of Balquhain, to facilitate his flight with his hapless victims. But probably the builders of the Fort did lay a kind of causeway, that they might the more easily transport the vast quantity of uniform stones they required, and which must have been gathered from a wide area. The "causey" would also help them in their hurried retreats in danger, or in their sallies forth to repel invaders.

On a now wooded knoll, a few hundred yards north-west of Pittodrie House, and quite adjacent to the old Aberdeen road, are the remains of a circular Castle ("Maiden Castle"), about 90 feet in diameter, apparently originally defended on the south side by a moat, and on the north side by the steepness of the rock. It could never have been a formidable structure. Its low grass-grown foundations now afford a refuge for "that feeble folk, the conies, which make their houses in the rock".

The "Maiden Stane o' Bennachie" is one of the most remarkable of the Sculptured Stones of Scotland. It stands by the roadside about half a mile to the west of the Church of Chapel of Garioch; is placed east-south-east and west-north-west; is almost erect, and is supposed to be sunk six feet in the ground. Above ground it is  $10\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, about 2 feet 10 inches broad, and on an average 12 inches thick. Its north edge is enriched with endless bands or ribbons of interlaced work of loose, open knots, forming apparently throughout a symmetrical pattern, similar to the interlacings on the edge of the monument at St. Vigean's in Forfarshire, and on several other cross-bearing stones. Its south edge is enriched with St. Andrew's Crosses from top to bottom. Its eastern side is divided into four compartments. In the uppermost may be traced portions of four quadrupeds, none of which we can easily identify. In the next is one of the most frequently recurring figures, viz., the double V, or Z, floriated at the extremities, which is so often represented—as in the Logie, the Insch, and other



stones—cutting through the bands which connect the two discs on these stones. Here, however, its parallel lines are perpendicular, as in the stone at Newton, at Arndilly, and



EAST SIDE.

THE MAIDEN STANE.

WEST SIDE.

elsewhere. In the third compartment is the figure, as many take it, of an elephant rampant with the trunk cast over the back—a very frequently-found symbol. In the lowest com-



partment we have what appears to be a single disc or mirror with handle and a comb—figures also very often found. Whether—as Dr. Moore (“Ancient Pillar Stones of Scotland”) tries to prove—most, if not all, of these figures are Buddhist in their origin, we cannot say. It is generally believed they are religious symbols, each with its own signification. Dr. Joseph Anderson (“Scotland in Early Christian Times”, Second Series, p. 183) says:—“*The Divine Bestiary* has enabled us to see how it was possible for the apparently incongruous representations of beasts and mythical monsters to have been appropriately placed in association with the Cross, the Scripture subjects, and other symbolical representations of Christian import, both on churches and on monuments”. Again, on page 178, he says:—“The mirror and comb had a ceremonial use in the ritual of the Church, and thus acquired a symbolic significance”. “The ceremonial comb was required at the celebration of a Bishop’s Mass”. “Bede notices the gift of a mirror of silver and comb of ivory sent with his blessing from Pope Boniface to Ethelburga . . . in the year 625”. Figures similar to some of those now mentioned and others are found in caves along the northern shore of the Firth of Forth. In these caves lived hermits, such as St. Serf. They were a resort for pilgrims, who frequented them for religious exercises, and the figures had religious significance. On the west side of the Maiden Stone we have, above the highly ornamented concentric circles in the lower compartment, a large figure of the cross with short arms, and the angles of intersection rounded off by the usual circle. Above the cross is the figure of a man, and on either side of him a figure of some grotesque animal.

Discarding the theories (1) that this singular and ancient stone fixes a march between the Earls of Mar and Buchan; (2) that it bears the figure of a woman and bread girdle, representing the Garioch as the Land of Cakes; (3) that the stone marks the place where the daughter of the Laird of Balquhain fell in a *rencontre* with the Laird of Harthill; (4) that here the libertine Baron of Balquhain—lured from his fortress on Bennachie—was slain in 1420;



or that (5) the stone is the hapless Maiden of Drumdurno petrified on her bridal day, under the grasp of the mysterious builder of the "causey"—may we not rather believe that the stone marks a religious *rendezvous* in the transition age between Paganism and Christianity? Its east side, with its Pagan symbols, but with altered application and interpretations, and its west side, with the figure of the Cross—the great emblem of the Christian faith—might well be an illustrated text-book. The human figure may represent the patron saint of Scotland. Let it be remembered that, within a radius of two or three miles, we have a large number of "Druid Circles", some of them within view of the stone, and may we not hold that these were centres from which the worshippers could gather at this stone in response to signal fires?

That in more recent times Bennachie was the centre of stirring scenes may be inferred from the number of castles and family seats quite near. At one time it was a Royal forest; and up to the year 1859 it was a commonty, to which the inhabitants of Oyne had access for peats, sods, stones, and pasturing cattle and sheep. But envious eyes were fixed upon the hill, and proceedings were taken for its division among the surrounding landlords, notice being served upon any supposed to have an interest in the matter. But no organised action or opposition was offered, and the decree of the Court of Session went out in due form. There has often been talk of testing the legality of the division of the commonty, but practically nothing has been done. Law-abiding tourists and mountaineers and holiday-seekers, in yearly increasing numbers, "do" Bennachie without molestation; and unless—after the ensuing spring, when the proprietors will have had forty years' possession—restrictions are imposed, we presume that the general public will enjoy at least their present rights and privileges.

In the meantime let the attractions of Bennachie draw towards the well-known and favourite hill increasing hosts of visitors; let the legends and folk-lore associated with it while away spare hours of old and young; and let the song of Bennachie and the Gadie be sung, in any of its versions,



and especially in those of Imlah and Park, wherever the Scottish heart beats, wherever the Aberdonian may roam.

DID not the Egyptians of old place on the board at their festal gatherings a "Memento Mori"? Was it with a like



good intent that on your table the other day, under the shadow of Bennachie, you set this cinerary urn? Whatever were the reasons for placing it there, they are good for having it here. When Byron's gardener brought to him the old monk's skull, which he had just dug up in the garden of Newstead, it was solid,

large, and round, and on to London the poet sent it, to be made into a drinking cup. On its return to Newstead it was like unto tortoiseshell, and his lordship hailed it as a chosen vessel. I don't think you could, with any comfort to your guests, have made a water vessel of any kind of this urn. It was found by Mr. Diack on the Home Farm of Pittodrie, on the N.E. slope of Bennachie, and is one of many found in and around the district. In shape and ornament it is like others got some years ago in Maryculter. On several of these the ornament was of the tightened rope impression. On this it is of the broad thumb type. It is a matter of regret that no one has yet devoted some little time to the study of these Aberdeenshire cinerary urns. Their general unity of form and ornament point to a oneness of class. Who made and used these ancient coffers? Are they of the age or older than the Stone Period? We will gladly put space at the command of anyone who may feel inclined to take up this subject.

A. W.