

FOUDLAND AND DUNNIDEER.

By ROBERT ANDERSON.

"Oh, if I were at the glens of Foudlen,
Where hunting I have been,
I wou'd find the way to bonnie Castle Gordon,
Without either stockings or sheen".

—*Ballad, "The Duke of Gordon's Daughter"*.

"But fa cud help it? ye mith as weel try't to stop the north win'
comin' throu' the Glens o' Foudland".

—*"Johnny Gibb"*.

ALEXANDER THE GREAT is said to have sighed for new worlds to conquer. The Club must be sighing for new hills to climb—outside the Cairngorms at least, and within easy reach of Aberdeen. Certainly the selection of Foudland Hill for the recent autumn excursion can only be excused on the plea that all the hills of note readily accessible for the easy-going outings of spring and autumn have been exhausted, and that, in consequence, the Club is obliged either to take to lower heights or to double back on its own footsteps and climb anew hills already ascended. Whether this dire extremity has been actually reached is matter of controversy—a controversy, however, with which this article has no concern, its purpose being to show that something is to be said for Foudland after all. Let us away with the question of height to begin with. No extenuation on that score is possible, even though Francis Douglas was pleased to call the Hill of Foudland "a high mountain"—but then old Francis speaks of Bennachie as a "great" mountain, as "by much the highest in this county"! A modern gazetteer more accurately states "the maximum" altitude of Foudland at 1529 feet only, and it must be frankly conceded that the ascent of that far from formidable altitude is by no means arduous—to be

quite honest, one reaches the summit without any great exertion. Nor is there anything picturesque or attractive about the hill or its adjacent scenery. Foudland is neither better nor worse than scores of hills in Aberdeenshire—an ordinary moorland eminence, absolutely featureless, set (as approached from the Inch side, at any rate) in a rather poor, bleak, desolate-looking country, its shoulders lined with the debris of disused slate quarries, and cultivation straggling feebly up its sides. Doubtless here as elsewhere that magic picture so skilfully drawn by Robert Louis Stevenson—

“Yet shall your ragged moor receive
The incomparable pomp of eve,

And when the wind from place to place
Doth the unmoored cloud-galleons chase,
Your garden gloom and gleam again
With leaping sun, with glancing rain ”—

may be realised; but, lacking these occasional glories, Foudland must be characterised as commonplace in the extreme.

Whatever interest attaches to Foudland is due partly to its position and partly to the romance with which the “Glen” on its northern side is associated. Foudland is one of a range of three hills—the Hill of Skares and the Hill of Culsalmond (formerly denominated Tillymorgan) being the other two—which form the outliers of the hilly country that spreads away to the north-west. These three hills—generically termed “The Foudlands”—form a rather prominent “rib” of Aberdeenshire, and are conspicuous objects from many quarters. They touch three important territorial divisions of the county; they mark, in a sense, the boundaries of these divisions. They are situated at the head of the Garioch; Strathbogie stretches away from their base on one side; and Buchan well-nigh reaches them on the other side—the wider Buchan that is, that has the Deveron and the Ythan for its western boundary. So situated, Foudland has a commanding view over a large area—a view ranging from Mormond in the

east—Mormond with its White Horse distinctly visible to the naked eye—to the Tap o' Noth in the west, and closed in by Bennachie on the south—Bennachie here more distinguishable by the Oxen Craig than by the Mither Tap. A large extent of cultivated ground is embraced in this wide survey, field upon field meeting the eye in a singular succession of what appear to be exact rectangular divisions. From this point one realises the force of the old saying that describes the Garioch as "the giral of Aberdeenshire". A chronicler of a century ago, indeed, would have it that Foudland is a distinct factor in the agricultural supremacy of the district indicated by the phrase just quoted, for, says he, "this extensive hill shelters the parish of Inch and a considerable part of the district of Garioch, upon the north, and hence partly occasions its great natural fertility". Be that as it may, the panorama of arable land spread out to the view from the top of Foudland is extensive—so extensive that the query has been propounded whether there is in Aberdeenshire a hill from which more cultivated land can be seen. The point is a little doubtful; probably anything in the nature of an exact investigation would reveal that Bennachie bears the palm in this respect.

Extensive, however, as is the fertile plain that spreads around and away from Foudland, it by no means monopolises attention or constitutes the sole interest. The landscape is not wholly monotonous; there is an abundance of diversity. Hills and woods are plentiful, especially in the northerly direction—the wooded slopes of Cobairdy for instance, the barer sides of the Fourman and the Clashmach, and, far off, the Balloch wood beyond Huntly (marked the Bin Wood on the Ordnance Survey map). This wood is said to be the largest wood in Scotland, which seems a rather startling assertion; more probably the claim that should be set up for it is that it contains more trees within its area than any other similar extent of ground, that area being 2700 acres. In the vicinity of the wood, of course, is Huntly Castle, the residence at one time of the Dukes of Gordon—

"Whaur Bogie flows, and Huntly shows
On high its lettered wa's".

Perhaps it may not be descried from the top of Foudland, even with a field-glass, though its location can easily be determined; but the old Castle of Towie is readily distinguishable in the nearer landscape—the ancient home of the Barclays of Tolly, with that caustic inscription above its door—

“ In time of wealth all men seem friendly;
A friend is not known but in adversity”.

To the north-east of Towie Castle are the Hills of Fishrie, where one of the Earls of Fife planted a number of squatters whom nobody else would take in, and some of whom had been turned off by other proprietors. There is a comparatively little hill in the neighbourhood of St. Sair's Fair-stance, from the top of which, the people thereabouts do say, you can see more parish kirks than from any other point in the region. How Foudland stands in that respect the present writer knoweth not, but you can, without much trouble, see Insch, Huntly, Rhynie, and Lumsden Village, and—away in a different direction—Aberchirder, better known perhaps by its local appellation of Foggieloan. The hill-tops discernible are those with which many excursions have familiarised the members of the Club. There, in particular, is the line of mountain heights that marks the Deeside Valley—Clochnaben, Mount Battock, Mount Keen, Lochnagar, and Ben Avon; the contour of Lochnagar as beautiful as ever, the mass of Ben Avon as imposing. Morven, The Buck of the Cabrach, and Ben Rinnes form an inner row of hills, which terminates with the Bin Hill of Cullen, beyond which is the sea. From Mormond to Ben Avon is, at any rate, a wide stretch to be comprehended in a view from a hill-top, especially a hill-top so insignificant as Foudland.

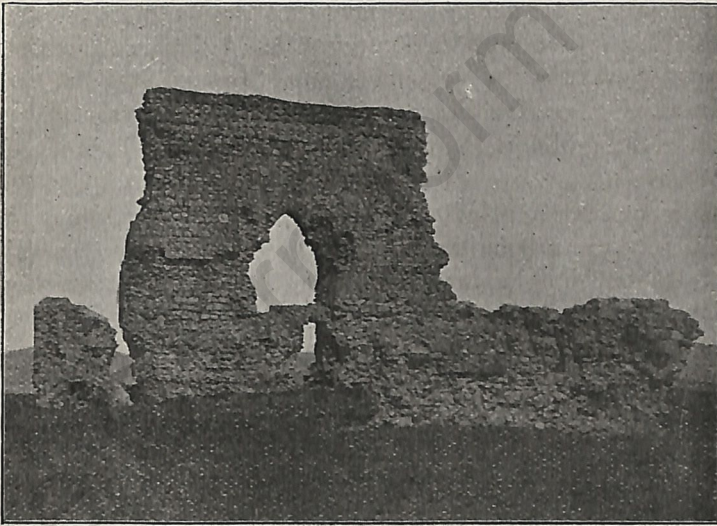
Foudland was at one time noted for its slate quarries. That they must have been numerous is attested by the many heaps of debris and quarry-holes that are encountered in all directions; nearly a million pieces a year, it is said, were for long produced at Foudland, chiefly for the Aberdeen market. The slates are described as having been of a clear light-blue colour and of excellent quality,

but the demand for them gradually ceased, principally owing to the greater cheapness of sea-borne slates from Easdale and Ballachulish. Thus a local industry perished—apparently not for the first time in the history of Foudland, for the writer of the account of the parish of Inch in the Old Statistical Account (1796) chronicles an abandonment of agriculture. “Several hundred acres uncultivated on the hill of Foudland”, he says, “and in the glens or narrow vallies which run up from the low country through that hill, not only are arable, but were formerly under cultivation. These are now neglected, and produce nothing but heath. They were first deserted by the farmers in the end of last century, when that part of the country was almost depopulated by 7 years of famine: And now they lie neglected, along with many thousand acres, in like situation, in different parts of the north of Scotland”. This reproach, however, seems now wiped out, so far, at any rate, as the Glen of Foudland is concerned. It is now fully cultivated; and, viewing this smiling valley on a bright autumnal day, one wonders how the Glen of Foudland came to have its evil reputation. It is indisputable, however, that in the days antecedent to railways, when roads were the chief means of communication in the country, there was no more difficult and dangerous part of the road between Aberdeen and Inverness than that through the Glen of Foudland. In a snowstorm it was speedily blocked, and even the “Defiance” coach—that stage-coach so familiar to our grandfathers, but the memory and the name of which are so speedily vanishing—was frequently brought to a standstill here, while it was quite a common thing for carriers’ carts to be snowed up. To the great Inverness Road in those days, the Glen of Foudland was a name as ominous, as suggestive of snowstorm and detention, as the Pass of Drumouchter on the Highland Railway is to-day. In the opinion of the late Mr. James MacDonald (“Place Names in Strathbogie”), the Glen of Foudland “merited the same evil repute in ancient times, as there are still traces of old roads over the shoulders of the hills, most likely used when the lower

road was impassable". Mr. MacDonald is also of opinion that the hill is named from the glen, not the glen from the hill. Foudland is virtually a combination of two Gaelic words—"fada", long, and "gleann", a glen; Foudland, "the long glen". The character of the glen secured it a distinctive name, whereas "the hill is without any strongly marked natural feature".

DUNNIDEER.

Dunnideer is a hill (876 feet) situated about a mile and a quarter to the west of the village of Insch, on the summit



DUNNIDEER CASTLE.

of which are the remains of a vitrified fort and the fragment of an ancient tower, from 50 to 60 feet high. The conical shape of the hill and the ragged wall a-top make Dunnideer a conspicuous feature in the landscape; but, obviously, there is nothing to be said about it from a hill-climbing point of view. The interest in Dunnideer is purely archæological, and even archæologists can make nothing of Dunnideer. Its history is wholly unknown; and what has been written about it is purely speculative,

not to say legendary. Thus the romancers would have it that Dunnideer was one of the places where King Arthur held his Round Table; that the Castle was built by Grig or Gregory the Great, King of Scotland, who died there in 1393 (the fragment standing is sometimes called Gregory's Wall, from this tradition); and that it was supplied with water from Foudland Hill, three miles distant, by leaden pipes, which being at last cut, the Castle was obliged to surrender from want of water (a similar legend is current in relation to Dundargue Castle, on the coast of Aberdour). These legends culminate in the ridiculous story that there is gold ore in the hill, the teeth of the sheep pasturing on it acquiring the colour of gold! To pursue "history" of this kind is a worthless occupation. Dunnideer is a mystery, and will ever remain one. Immediately west of Dunnideer, on the other side of the narrow vale of the Shevock rivulet, is the Hill of Christ's Kirk. This is said to have been the scene of the well-known poem "Christ's Kirk on the Green", generally ascribed to James V. Doubt prevails on these points, however; the authorship of the poem is claimed for James I., and an attempt—a blundering attempt—has been made to locate the place near Leslie, in Fife, instead of near Leslie, in Aberdeenshire.