Notes on Some Irish Antiquities

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The following paper was read by the Author :—

NOTES *on some* IRISH ANTIQUITIES.

By A. L. LEWIS, M.A.I.

THE country round Dublin is considered by Irish Archæologists to be comparatively destitute of rude stone monuments, but nevertheless contains as many as some of those districts of England and Wales which are most fruitful in them. Thus, in the Island of Howth, on the north side of Dublin Bay, in the domain of Howth Castle, are the remains of a dolmen called "Finn's Quoit." The capstone, the extreme measurements of which are fifteen feet long and broad by six feet thick, has slipped from its supporters, of which seven remain in different positions, besides fragments, and now leans upon some of them, with one edge resting upon the ground, forming what has been called a demi-dolmen; the supporters were from six to seven feet high, and may have enclosed a chamber ten or twelve feet long, by five feet broad, the long sides of which stood in a direction N.W.—S.E. It seems to me probable that when this and similar chambers were constructed, the uprights were first fixed and the surrounding cairn or tumulus heaped up level with their tops, forming an inclined plane up which the capstone might be dragged on rollers and then covered or left exposed as might be thought best: if this were so, and if the surrounding cairn were afterwards removed, the uprights deprived of its support would be very likely to give way and let the capstone slip into just such a position as "Finn's Quoit" now occupies.

Turning to the south side of Dublin, in the grounds of "Mount Venus," a domain on the top of the hills, seven or eight miles from the city, is a large stone, twenty feet long (in line about N.W. and S.E.), ten feet broad, and three thick, leaning against an upright stone, eight feet high, and from three to five feet broad and thick, and forming, like "Finn's Quoit," what is sometimes called a "demi-dolmen." There are, indeed, some difficulties in the way of a restoration of this particular monument as a chamber, and, if there should be many monuments of the kind, it might be well to re-consider the possibility of their having been a special class by themselves. The difficulties in this case are that, while the position of the great capstone and the hollowing out of the ground indicate that the site of the chamber when perfect was on the north-east side of the upright stone, three other stones, which might have helped to support it, and which are all, except one fragment, that are

DRUIDS' ALTAR ; CARRICKMINES, NEAR DUBLIN
from the South.

DRUIDS' ALTAR ; MOUNT VENUS, NEAR DUBLIN
from the West.

STONES AT KILLINEY, NEAR DUBLIN.

A. Lewis, del.

J.P. & W.R. Emalie, lith.

now visible, are on the south-west side of the upright stone; the largest of these (fourteen feet long, four and a-half broad, and two high), is moreover not of a suitable shape for a supporter of the larger stone, but might have answered very well for an altar, and it is possible that this might have been a "free-standing" dolmen or demi-dolmen with an altar in front of it—a place of sacrifice rather than of burial. The old man who drove me to the spot intimated that the visit to it was likely to lead to a double increase of my family, and this, coupled with the name of the hill, seems to point towards a tradition of phallic rites in connection with it.

About a mile from Killiney Station, on the line from Dublin to Bray, are some small remains known as the "Druid's Altar" and "Druid's Chair." The latter, in its present form, is evidently of comparatively recent construction, several stones (the different measurements of which vary from one to five feet), having been piled together and cemented into a rather imposing throne with arms and steps; these stones may originally have formed part of a circle surrounding the so-called "altar," which stone and another are from twenty to thirty feet from the "chair," and appear to be in their original position. The "altar" is nine feet and a-half long, four and a-quarter above ground, and one thick, and has a deep notch in the middle in which it is said the neck of the victim was placed on the occasion of a sacrifice;* one side of this stone faces nearly north-east, and looks towards a round-topped hill now surmounted by an obelisk, and, if it were the central stone of a circle, it might in this way give that special reference to the north-east which I have so often found to exist in England, and would do so in a manner similar to the circle at Penmaenmawr, described by me in the "Journal of the Anthropological Institute" in November, 1877; the back of this stone is so shaped as to form two rude circles, which may represent the double disc found on inscribed stones in Scotland, and supposed to be a solar emblem, and the notch already referred to is the division between the two circles. Part of the fence enclosing these stones (at a distance of about forty feet), consists of a small bank of earth faced with loose stones, and may be the remains of an original enclosure.

Perhaps the finest dolmen near Dublin is that in the "Druid's Glen," Carrickmines, where five upright stones of considerable size support, at a height of five feet from the ground outside, a capstone, seventeen feet long, fourteen and a-quarter wide, and from two to five thick, forming a chamber about ten feet square, the interior of which is three feet below

* Many other harrowing but quite imaginary details are narrated concerning these stones in the guide-books.

the level of the ground outside; several small stones forming a square on the east side of this chamber are probably the tops of the stones of a second chamber now filled with earth; if this be so this dolmen would very much resemble that at Plâs Newydd in Anglesea, except that the Irish dolmen is in all twenty-six feet long, while the Welch dolmen is only twenty feet long, and that the former bears about due east and west, the larger end being at the west, while the latter bears a little east of north, the larger end being to the north-east. Besides the supporting stones I have mentioned, there are three others which formed part of the chamber, and it is noticeable that instead of being in a line the stones forming the sides of the chamber overlap each other; the "Trevethas Stone" in Cornwall is the only other example of this peculiarity of construction that I am able to point out at present. The Carrickmines dolmen is situated in a valley near a small stream, in opposition to the general rule, according to which such monuments usually stand so as to command a good view of the surrounding country, if not actually on the top of a hill.

Several other monuments of the kind are said to exist near Dublin, and, so far as I could make out (for the indications I could get of their whereabouts were not very precise), principally in the same district as those last described. Thus, two circles are said to stand somewhere near Tallaght, and dolmens at Kiltiernan and Shankhill, and the remains of one near Sandymount, while another brought from some other place stands in the Zoological Gardens in Phoenix Park. I should have liked to have visited some of these, but a variety of circumstances prevented me from doing so.

* * * * *

The largest of the Irish domed sepulchres is the great New Grange tumulus, situated between Navan and Drogheda, and about five miles from the latter; this is said to be seventy feet high, and has a gallery sixty-three feet long, having twenty-two stones on one side, and twenty-one on the other, varying from two feet and a-half high at the entrance to seven next the termination, which is a domed-roofed chamber, with three recesses, the walls of which are formed of eleven stones, the dome and the roof of that end of the gallery nearest to it being made of stones projecting one over the other till they meet at the top, while the passage at the entrance is only two feet and a-half high by three feet and a-half wide, and is spanned by a single stone. The passage bears about twenty degrees west of north by compass towards the chamber, so that the entrance is about true south.

This tumulus and chamber have often been compared with

those of Gavv Inis, in the Mer de Morbihan, Brittany. I have visited both, and, though time did not suffice for me to take detailed measurements of either, I may with advantage mention some of the points in which they differ.

The differences which are most apparent are that the tumulus of New Grange is much larger than that of Gavv Inis, and its gallery longer, and that it is surrounded by a retaining wall of uncemented masonry, some five or six feet high, outside which is a bank of earth, of about the same height, outside which again was a circle of stones, of which ten or a dozen now remain, in various states of preservation, the largest being about seven feet high by four broad and thick, none of which surroundings appear to have existed at Gavv Inis. Amongst the less apparent differences may be mentioned that the gallery at New Grange runs nearly south and north, that at Gavv Inis nearly south-east to north-west; that the chamber at Gavv Inis is smaller, has no recesses, and has a flat instead of a domed roof; and here I may point out a coincidence between the shape of the Irish cross, in which the junction of the limbs is enclosed in a circle, and the ground plan of some of these Irish dolmens, where the central chamber answers to the circle and the gallery and recesses to the limbs of the cross. In England we have cruciform chambers, such as Wayland Smith, or that at Wellow near Bath, without a circular chamber, and crosses without the surrounding circle. At Gavv Inis nearly all the stones of the chamber and gallery are covered with markings, while at New Grange they are found only in the recesses to the right and left of the chamber and on two stones outside the gallery, and although there is a general resemblance in the character of the markings, yet in detail they are very different, the only ones which are the same being the zigzag marking which occupies in each dolmen the edge of one or more of the stones forming the floor or roof, and may have been the source from which the zigzag moulding so common in our earliest ecclesiastical architecture was derived. At Gavv Inis the general form of the markings is that of segments of concentric circles springing out of one another like a conventional representation of a fountain, while at New Grange, in some cases at least, the incised line starts from a centre and runs round and round it like a coiled watch-spring. Gavv Inis again has figures of its own, which are thought to represent stone axes, and has also a hollow in one of its stones with bars in front worked out of the solid stone, while New Grange has other figures on what are called the upper and lower lintels outside the entrance. The edge of the upper lintel is ornamented in relief with a chain of open lozenge-shaped figures, each of which has a bar connecting the

top and bottom angles ; an attempt has been made to connect this with the ornamentation of some stone and earthen vases in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, but they have the connecting line running from end to end of the chain of lozenges, and, as the lozenges are not always exactly joined, it may be doubted whether they are, on the vases, anything more than a double row of zigzag lines with a straight line between. On the lower lintel are four circular figures, originally in bold relief, but now much weatherworn, two of which are nearly two feet in diameter, the other two smaller ; these are formed of lines starting from the centre and curling round upon themselves, but the large pair, and I believe both pairs, are connected by lines at the side, very similar to those of the "double disc," which occurs on some of the Scottish stones, and has been considered to be a solar emblem ; a very similar marking, but smaller, is figured in the catalogue of antiquities in the National Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on a stone from a "Pict's House" in Eday, Orkney (p. 115, G. 4). Col. Forbes Leslie in his View of the Entrance to New Grange represents six circles, whereas I only saw four, but he omits the connecting lines, which are of some importance, and which certainly exist. He also figures a double disc with sceptre from Aberdeenshire, the ends of which are ornamented with concentric circles or horse-shoes not unlike the Northumbrian rock circles. The tombs on the Loughcrew Hills, a few miles from New Grange, contain markings, some of which, according to Mr. Conwell's illustrations, resemble those of New Grange, while some more nearly resemble those of Gavv Inis than any I saw at New Grange, and others find no parallel in either place. In the recesses of these tombs are found large stones slightly hollowed out and covering nearly the whole floor of the recess ; these, so far as I know, do not occur elsewhere.

Mr. Gladwell, the hospitable master of Dowth Hall, near New Grange, invited our attention to a small chamber in his lawn of similar construction to that of New Grange ; the top stones of the dome have been removed, showing a chamber about eight feet in diameter and height, with three niches and a gallery of unknown length running a little south of east ; there are, I believe, many similar chambers within a short distance.

In Mr. Gladwell's grounds there is also a rath or fort consisting of an earthen rampart, six feet high inside, and in places as much as twenty feet high outside, enclosing a circular space about one hundred yards in diameter, and having entrances to the north, east, and west.

In the burial yard of the old Abbey Church of Slane, near Navan, are two rude stones which are locally supposed to mark

a "pagan's grave"; they are about four feet and a-half high, by two to three wide, and nine inches thick, and stand from four to five feet from each other in a line about east and west. These stones might well have formed part of a shrine-like chamber, like those in India described by Mr. Walhouse, and like that on the Great Orme near Llandudno, and it has occurred to me that if such a shrine were there, on the top of the lofty hill of Slane, it might have led to the building of the abbey: a circumstance which needs explanation, as abbeys were usually built in valleys where land is fertile and water near at hand. The burial of a pagan *as such* in a Christian cemetery would be another circumstance which would require explanation, but such a shrine as I have imagined might well, after the building of the abbey, have fallen into ruin, and its remains have preserved only such a tradition of their origin as is conveyed in the idea of their marking a pagan's grave; this, however, is at best mere hypothesis, and the stones may not be of great antiquity, but may have derived their name from their unworked condition.

It is naturally difficult to touch on Irish antiquities without attacking the "burning question" of Round Towers. These have been thought by some to have been used as fortresses to secure the lives and more valuable portable property of those living near, in case of sudden invasion, and they may have been used in that way sometimes, but their form precludes the idea of that having been their original object. It has been thought by others that they were bell towers to the churches, to which it has been objected that the only bells used in early times were small handbells, and that there are no traces of the suspension of larger bells. To those who have looked upon them as observatories for planetary worship and divination, it has been objected that they are always situated in valleys, and to those who would have them to be fire temples it has been pointed out that the floors and stairs (if any) were of wood. Father Smiddy considers them to have been baptistries and compares them to the Tower of Pisa and baptistries at Florence, Ravenna, and St. John Lateran of Rome, and considers his theory to explain some obscure points in the old Irish rubrics. Some stress has been laid by those who uphold the Christian origin of the towers upon a figure over the door of the Donaghmore Tower, which is considered to represent the crucifixion. But it has been objected to this that the arms are straight instead of being slightly raised; this objection does not seem to me to carry great weight, since, if O'Neill's beautiful lithographs are to be trusted, very similar figures with the arms straight and not raised are to be found on the crosses. The whole argu-

ment, however, seems to me to be of but little importance, because I have no doubt that the frame of the doorway, including the figure, was built into the tower some time, and probably some long time, after its first erection.

A phallic intent has been seen in the round towers, as in almost every other ancient object by those who look for it, and it must be admitted that the shape of the towers gives much reason for the notion in their case. It may also be remarked that the Babylonians had towers in their temples, on the summit of which were altars.

I believe it is established that wherever a round tower has existed, an ancient church has stood close by, but there is no reason to believe that wherever an ancient church has existed, a round tower has also existed, which shows that the towers did not go to the churches, but that the churches went to the towers, or that if either were built before the other the tower was built before the church. This makes it probable that the towers were places of assembly, most likely for religious purposes in immediately pre-Christian times, and that the missionaries, in accordance with their known policy, built their churches close by them, and ultimately took possession of them, and while taking advantage of whatever prestige belonged to them converted them in all likelihood to such uses as they could conveniently be put to as storehouses, places of refuge from very short and sudden attacks, watch-towers, bell-towers (for handbells only), and perhaps even as baptistries, as suggested by Father Smiddy; the fact of the towers being cemented, and well cemented too, seems to me to be an argument against their being of much greater antiquity than Christianity, as we have no trace left of any cemented building in other parts of the British Isles of greater antiquity than the Roman period.

When, however, we consider the probable primary object and origin of these round towers, it seems to me that the first step is to inquire where any similar edifices are to be found. With the exception of one or two doubtful specimens in Scotland and Man, which, if really round towers, are practically part of the Irish group, and with the possible exception of the Italian baptistries claimed by Father Smiddy as identical both in design and purpose with the round towers, there are no ancient buildings like the latter anywhere in Christian Europe. If, however, we go to Mahometan countries our attention can hardly fail to be attracted by the minarets, which are more inseparable companions to the mosques than the round towers are to the Irish churches, and which resemble the towers in appearance as well as in situation, the principal difference being that the minarets generally have galleries outside. I

am not going to infer from this similarity that Mahomet was an Irishman (though I am not sure that he may not have been claimed as a Scotchman), nor that any colony of Mahometans ever settled in Ireland, but I do think it probable that the minarets and the round towers are developments of the same idea. The Mahometans must certainly either have invented minarets or have borrowed them from some previously existing form of paganism—if the latter, the Irish towers were probably derived from the same source, but if the minarets were a Mahometan invention there must have been some idea at the bottom of that invention, which idea might have been developed in the same manner in Ireland, although in another form of religion. Without attaching too much importance to the Irish traditions, which nevertheless ought not in my opinion to be entirely ignored, I may mention that some of them attribute the round towers to a people coming from the north of Africa, a locality from which the Mahometans might well have derived their minarets and their custom of summoning the faithful to prayers from them. It is surely not unlikely that some such custom may have prevailed in some part of Northern Africa and in Ireland, and that the voice of the pagan muezzin may have been emphasised by those little handbells, which are not unlike the African bells of the present day, and the use of which was, like so many other modern Christian forms and customs, undoubtedly derived from paganism of some kind. I am aware that this suggestion can only be looked upon as a hypothesis until the particular form of African paganism which I have imagined can be proved to have existed, and until the descent of the minarets and round towers can be actually traced to it, and I am also aware that in advocating this or any other hypothesis about the round towers I am sure to lose, in some quarter or other, any little credit as an archæologist which I may previously have enjoyed.

DISCUSSION.

MR. HYDE CLARKE said it appeared to him there was value in Mr. Lewis's suggestion in the connection between round towers and minarets. The round tower may, or may not, have anything to do with the minaret; but Mr. Lewis asked how came the Mahometans by the minaret? It was most naturally suggested that this Mahometan practice was borrowed from an older one. Jewish it was not, and at that epoch it could scarcely have been distinctively Christian. Like the Kaaba, and many other things, it may have been local and pre-Islamitic. The minaret in this day is always attached to a mosque, but a church is not always attended by a round tower. It is possible that the minaret and the round tower, as proposed by

Miss Buckland, may have called people to worship in an open place. For himself, he knew nothing of the origin of the minaret, and must leave it to the competency of Islamitic scholars. He was more strongly impressed than before by the attention which Mr. Lewis had directed to the stone outside the circle and thought it must be of importance. The emblem of the crescent, for example, is commonly attended by a star.

MAY 27TH, 1879.

E. BURNET TYLOR, Esq., F.R.S., *President, in the Chair.*

The minutes of the previous meeting were read and confirmed.

The following presents were announced, and thanks were ordered to be returned to the respective donors:—

FOR THE LIBRARY.

From the AUTHOR.—French Accent. By A. H. Keane, Esq.

From A. H. KEANE, Esq.—Wallace's Australasia.

From the AUTHOR.—The True Theory of German Declension and Conjugation. By A. H. Keane, Esq.

From the AUTHOR.—The Devonshire Ash-tree Charm. By W. Pengelly, F.R.S.

From the ASSOCIATION.—Journal of the Royal Historical and Archæological Association of Ireland. No. 36.

From the ACADEMY.—Atti della R. Accademia dei Lincei. Vol. III, No. 5.

From the EDITOR.—Revue Internationale des Sciences, No. 5.

From the EDITOR.—Revue Scientifique, Nos. 46 and 47, 1879.

From the EDITOR.—Index Medicus. Vol. I, No. 4.

E. W. BRABROOK, Esq., F.S.A., Director, read a paper by HODDER M. WESTROPP, Esq., entitled "Notes on Fetichism." The Director also read a communication from JOHN MATHEW, Esq., entitled "Letters to Professor Max Müller on the Kabi Dialect of Queensland."