

XVI.—*On the Duns of the Outer Hebrides.*

(Plates XLVII.—LIII.)

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It is proposed in the following paper to describe such pre-historic fortifications in *Innise-fhada*,¹ *i.e.*, the Outer Hebrides, as the writer has seen, or of which he has been informed by trustworthy correspondents, together with the mythological or legendary tales connected with these ancient defences ; to be followed by remarks on the examples herein described.

Dun Eistein, Ness, Lewis.

At the north end or Ness of Lewis, in the townland of Cnoc Aird, is the natural stronghold of Dun Eistein ; it is a flat, cliffy island, of a somewhat oval shape, about 75 yards long and 50 yards broad ; separated from the mainland by a narrow and perpendicular ravine, through which the sea flows at high water. The ravine is between 30 and 40 feet broad, and the same in height. The remains of a strong wall follow the edge of the cliff on the landward side of the island, through which it is said there had been squints or loopholes for observation and defence.

Towards the north-east corner are the ruins of a dun, sometimes called "Tigh nan Arm," or the House of Arms ; now but $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. The outside of the dun is an oblong square, 23×18 feet ; but the central area is of an oval shape, only $6\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ feet, and there is no appearance of any doorway. The entrance was probably at the height of the first floor, similar to a *dún* in Taransay. The walls are of drystone masonry, but that is no proof of

¹ *Innis-fhada*, pronounced *Innish-á-da*, *i.e.*, the Long Island. Giraldus Cambrensis states "In the Northern Ocean, between Ulster and Galway, there are various islands, for instance, the Orcades and Incades" (*Bohn*, p. 72). The Orcades are, of course, the Orkneys, and the latter I take to be *Innis-fhada*.

any great age in this part of the country. When exploring the ruins, the Rev. M. Macphail (who made the above measurements) found a very small piece of flint (probably a strike-light), some small bits of charcoal, and a strip of leather such as was used for making brogues.

There are the remains of houses on the island, said to have been built by the Morrisons. On the south side of the island is a flat ledge, called "Pallanna Biorlinn," *i.e.*, the ledge of the Barge or Birlin, where the Morrisons used to haul up their boat.

Mr Macphail is of opinion that Dun Eistein gets its name from two rocks which lie at a short distance from its outer end, called Eistein Mor and Eistein Beg; otherwise I should have supposed it to be the Norse personal name, Eystein.

It is difficult to assign an age to Tigh nan Arm. The absence of mortar by no means proves a great antiquity. The "Tigh" or dun rather appears to have been an incipient peel, but I am unwilling to believe that it dates from the seventeenth century; it is more probable that it belongs to the age when Kolbein Ruga built his castle in Weir, Orkney, namely, the twelfth century.

This part of the country, Ness, was the location of the Clan, *i.e.*, Ghille Mhuire, that is, Servant of Mary, and Mac Ghille Mhuire (pronounced Vu-da) has been translated into Maryson, now Morrison. A writer of the seventeenth century, himself a Morrison, says, "The first and most ancient inhabitants of this countrie were three men of three several races, viz, Mores, the sone of Kennanus, whom the Irish historians call Makurich, whom they make to be a naturell son to one of the Kings of Noravay, some of whose posteritie remains in the land to this day. All the Morrisons in Scotland may challenge their descent from this man." But the writer forgets to mention the interesting fact, that the head of this clan was the Breitheamh (which formidable combination of letters is simply pronounced Bre-ave or Brieve) or Hereditary Judge of Lewis. "The Brieve is a kynd of judge amongst the ilanders, who hath ane absolute judicatorie, vnto whose authoritie and censure they willinglie submitt themselves, when he determineth any debateable question betuein partie and partie." As it is not likely that any one of the Brieves ever understood a word of English, and as the Scotch laws were never translated into Gaelic, it seems that the native or Brehon laws must have been administered in this part of Scotland as late as the seventeenth century. The Judge lived at Tigh Mor Thabost—in English, the Great House at Hall-stead.

About the middle of the sixteenth century, Macleod of Lewis (Old Rory) repudiated his second wife, Barbara Mackenzie, for adultery with the Brieve of Lewis (Hucheon Mac Ghille Mhuire or Morrison). Her son, Torquil Conanach, was never

acknowledged by Old Rory; but a younger son, by a third wife, was named and acted as heir. To bring Torquil Dhu to his end, Kenneth Mackenzie (afterwards Lord Kintail), Torquil Conanach, the Brieve of Lewis, and Murdo Macleod, a natural brother of Torquil Conanach, held a secret meeting, when Lord Kintail stated it was necessary to make away with Torquil Dhu; to which the rest agreed, but neither liked to put the proposition into force. At last, the Brieve was persuaded by the earnest entreaty of the other three, and the promise of a great reward, to undertake the matter. Afterwards, the Brieve with his clan (*Mhic Ghille Mhuire, i.e., Morrisons*), went in his galley to Rona, and took on the way a Dutch ship, which was partly freighted with wine; he took her into Stornoway, and invited Torquil Dhu to a banquet on board. "So being set down in the ship, expecting some wine, instead whereof they bring them cords;" and Torquil was seized by the Morrisons and carried to the Mackenzie's country, where, by the instructions of Lord Kintail, Torquil Dhu and his company were beheaded, in the month of July 1597. At the instant of the execution there was an earthquake, which greatly astonished the malefactors, though naturally hardened in cruelty and crime. This act of the Brieve is readily understood if it benefited his own son, while it explains the dislike of the Mackenzies to the Morrisons, in spite of their felonious co-operation. After the death of Torquil Dhu the Morrisons fortified themselves at Ness—without doubt, at Dun Eistein—but Neil Macleod, another "sone naturell" of Old Rory, attacked them, killed some, and made the rest leave the fort at Ness.

About 1599, Neil Macleod fell out with Murdo (another "sone naturell" of Old Rory) for allying himself with the Morrisons, when Neil seized and killed some of the Morrisons, and delivered Murdo to be hanged.

It seems John Morrison, the Brieve, must have escaped at this time; but that afterwards being in Assynt, with six of his kindred, it happened that John MacDonald MacHuchean (an Assynt Macleod), with four others, came by accident to the same house in which the Morrisons were. At this unexpected rencontre, each waited for the onslaught, till John MacDonald attacked and killed the Brieve and five of his men without losing any of his own party.

Malcolm Mor, who became chief of the Morrisons by the death of his father, sought to revenge himself on John MacDonald, but John, by chance, met this Malcolm in the Cogach, fought with him there, killed most of his men, made Malcolm prisoner, and carried him to Lewis, where Tormod Macleod beheaded him. This John MacDonald died in Strathnavir in 1620.

Such is the narrative taken from Sir Robert Gordon, who had one of the sons of Neil Macleod living in his house, and it is no doubt substantially correct. The *seanachaidh* of the Mackenzies tells a widely different story, which need not be noticed here.

In Lewis the traditions of those times have taken a romantic form; and Allan, not Malcolm, is said to be the son of John, the contemporary of Old Rory. Many a wild and impossible story has been invented from the shadowy remembrance of the tragedies of the seventeenth century, but the only one relating to Dun Eistein is the following, which has a narrow foundation in fact:—

Neil Macleod, called in this legend Odhar (pronounced O-ar) or Dun, attacked the Morrisons on the Habost moor, but was defeated. Neil sent to Harris for assistance, and again came to Habost; but the Morrisons had taken shelter in Dun Eistein, The Macleods arrived at night, and marched to Dun Eistein, when one of the Morrisons, unaware of the presence of an enemy, came out of the hut, and was struck by an Uig man with an arrow—Baobh an Dòrlaich (literally, the Fury of the Quiver)—the last arrow of the eighteen that should be used, and it passed right through his belly. The wounded Morrison cried for help, when the rest came out, and Allan, the eldest, and by far the bravest of them, sprang across the ravine, and loudly demanded that the assassin should be given up to him. The Macleods denied all knowledge of the deed, but Allan reproached them with cowardice, saying, “If you have come to fight, you ought, according to the laws of war from the creation of the world, to have waited till there was light enough to see each other.” He then asked Neil to send his Leigh, *i.e.*, doctor, to the wounded man. Neil, after some hesitation, consented; when Allan took the Leigh under his oxters, and leaped across the ravine with him back into the dun. The man died, however, and the Morrisons fled to the mainland; thither Neil pursued, but the Morrisons had seen Neil crossing the Minsh, and, slipping out from among the islands, tried to get back to Lewis. The Macleods ascended a hill, espied the Brieve’s birlin, and gave chase. There were only Allan Morrison and his two brothers in the boat, so Allan Morrison, who was very strong, set the brothers to row against himself, and composed and sung this “iorram” or boat-song, with which the Ness fishermen still lighten their weary toil:—

The chorus—“Nàilbh i, ’s na-ho-ro” is repeated after every line.

“Iomair a Choinnaich fhir mo chridhe;
Iomair i gu làidair righinn;—
Gaul nam ban òg ’s gràdh na nighean.

“Dh’ iomrain féin fear mu dhithis,
’S nam éiginn e fear mu thri.
Tha eagal mòr air mo chridhe
Gur i biorlinn Neil tha tighinn,
No eathair Mhic Thormaid Idhir.

“’S truagh nach robh mi féin ’s Nial Odhar
An’ lagan beag os ceann Dhun Othail;
Biodag nam laimh, is e bhi fodham,—
Dhearbhinn féin gun teidheadh i domhain.
’S gun biodh fuil a chlàibh ’na ghabhail.”

Translation—

Chorus—"Na liv ee 's na-hò-rò," words having no meaning.

"Row, Kenneth, man of my heart;
Row with vehement might;
The darling of damsels, and the beloved of girls.

"I myself could row against two;
And may be against three.
There is great fear on my heart
That it is Neil's barge that is coming,
Or the boat of the son of dun Norman.

"It is a pity that I and dun Neil were not
In a small hollow above Dun O-aile:
A dirk in my hand, and he beneath.
I would be sure that it should go deep,
And that the blood of his breast should flow down his reins."

Neil overtook the Morrisons a short time after they passed Dun Othail (O-aile), where they fought desperately. Neil attacked them on one side, and the Harris men in a second boat on the other. Allan engaged Neil's party, and killed nearly all his men, when Neil exclaimed—"My men, something must be done, or the monster (*biast*) will not leave a head on a neck among us." They fastened a sword to the end of an oar, therewith to stab Allan; who, when he saw it coming, made such a desperate blow as to cut the oar in two, but, striking into the gunwale of the boat, his sword stuck fast, and before he could withdraw it both himself and his two brothers were killed.

Such is a Lewis romance of history.

Dun Eòrradail (in English, *Eordale*; for *Eyrardalr*, Norse = *Beach-dale*), *Ness, Lewis*.

Dun Eòrradail is situated on the coast, about a mile to the southward of Dun Eistein. It is a small tidal island, joined at low water to the main by an Eyrr or Ore, *i.e.*, beach, and which has apparently been fortified by a wall.

Martin describes it as a natural fort, Dun-coradil, evidently a typographical error for Dun-eoradil.