RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS: ANGLO-SAXON AND SCANDINAVIAN.

By A. Craig Gibson, Esq.

(Read 10th March, 1859.)

It must be obvious that a subject on which many volumes have been written, in various languages, can scarcely be treated as its importance demands within the limits of one of our papers; but a cursory examination of the nature, origin and history of Runes, with notices of a few remarkable Runic monuments, and the relation they bear to portions of our early history, may possibly be compressed within allowable bounds, and induce us to extend further our researches into a highly interesting field of observation.

It is significant of the general neglect of this subject, that even the meaning of the word Runes is often misapprehended, and it is by no means uncommon to find that when Runic monuments are spoken of, persons otherwise well informed apply the phrase to the remains of some ancient people who have borne the name of Runes. For instance, I have seen a letter where the writer, a very intelligent person, says, "I have no doubt "but there were freemasons amongst the Runes"! This being the case, it may be excusable to state *in limine*, that Runes, and its adjective Runic, are terms applying simply to the alphabets used by certain Northern nations before the settlement amongst them of Christian priests brought into general use the now ordinary Roman letters. The original meaning of the word Rûn was that of "a mystery or secret," and those possessing the power of using the Runic characters, who formed only a small portion of the community, were regarded as magicians, or practitioners of a secret art; the characters themselves being looked upon as "mysterious and "awful symbols" not only by the uninitiated but even by those who understood and practised their use. Even after the light of Christianity was shed upon the races whose only literature had been Runic, their ancient alphabets long continued to be extensively employed in constructing charms and incantations, and being regarded as a remnant of Pagan superstition, their use was strongly discouraged by the priesthood.

Though there is abundant evidence to shew that in ancient times Runes were applied to a variety of purposes, it is chiefly in the form of inscriptions on monumental stones, commemorative either of individuals or of exploits, that they have come down to us; and the Runic inscriptions to which I am anxious to direct attention may be said to consist of two distinct varieties, Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic, and Norse, Danish or Scandinavian. That eminent Saxon scholar, the late Mr. Kemble, in a paper on this subject in the twenty-eighth volume of the Archæologia, gives specimens of a third Runic alphabet called Marcomannic or Norman; but as these closely resemble Anglo-Saxon Runes, and the people who used them—the Nordmanni—were the Saxons dwelling in the country north of the Elbe, in fact our own Anglo-Saxon forefathers, it is unnecessary to treat them as a separate variety.

Nearly all the monumental inscriptions in Anglo-Saxon Runes now in existence are to be found within the territories of the ancient kingdom of Northumberland, which up to the close of the eighth century was more advanced in civilization than any other Teutonic nation, and it is from these native monuments that I have collated the materials for the first alphabet in the diagram. Some of the Runic alphabets given by Mr. Kemble comprise more than thirty characters, but this, from the sources indicated, consisting of twenty-six letters, is sufficient for our purpose. The most remarkable features of this Saxon Runic alphabet are the complex form of some of the letters, and the number of characters representing vocal sounds. The first characteristic is well marked in the D, G, H, K, Y and the letter possessing the power of our N G. The number of vowels, without reckoning W and Y, is nine, four being diphthongal, but all possessing their own distinct sounds in the old Saxon tongue, adding greatly to its variety and expressiveness, and existing at the present day in some dialects of the English provinces or of Scotland. The Runic letters standing for these sounds, with two exceptions, may be said to be formed on the basis of the I; the A, O, Æ and EO appearing to be nothing more than slight modifications of the same figure, while the U is our U inverted. The B, I and R are similar to ours. The D resembles an H with a cross between the perpendiculars—the M differs from the D only in having the cross at the upper part instead of half-way down the letter; the E is like the common M; the H has two diagonal cross strokes instead of one horizontal like ours; the N is simply an I with a diagonal bar across its

middle; the T has its superior limbs bent downwards; the L is the T deprived of its left upper limb; the W is like the ordinary Roman P; the Y is the Runic U with a cross stroke and a caudal appendage; while F, G, K, P, S, with the figures that represent the double letters EA, Œ, NG and TH scarcely admit of comparison, and our soft C, our J, Q, V and Z have no representatives in the Runic alphabet.

THE BEWCASTLE CROSS.

Of the inscribed stones from which this alphabet is derived, perhaps the most remarkable and interesting is the famous Saxon cross at Bewcastle, a small town, the capital of a wild district in the north-eastern confines of Cumberland, noted in former times for harbouring a race of cattle lifters and moss troopers, and more recently for possessing an equally honest tribe of horse dealers, popularly said to be, in more than the geographical sense, farther north than even Yorkshire itself. The noble monument that confers so much celebrity upon this remote and otherwise unimportant locality, stands in the church yard, and in the centre of an extensive and distinct Roman castrum. Its form is that of a square pillar, fourteen feet in height, by twenty two inches in width at the base, tapering upwards to fourteen inches at the top. Local tradition has always held that it marks the burial place of a king; but it is only by investigations in our own day that this tradition has been established as veracious. The column formerly supported a cross, its summit still shewing a cavity in which the foot of the cross was sunk; and we learn from a manuscript note in Camden's own copy of the Britannia, in the Bodleian library, that this cross was taken down by Lord William Howard, the belted Will of Border story, who was a zealous antiquary and scholar, as well as a good soldier, and the transverse part sent by him to his relative, Lord Arundel, by whom it was transmitted to Mr. Camden. A copy of an inscription upon it was forwarded by Sir Henry Spelman to one of the earliest Runic scholars, Olaus Wormius, who read it RICÆS DRIHTNÆS, *Domini potentis*, probably signifying the monument, or cross, or sign of a mighty lord.

The pillar remaining is fixed by means of lead into a cube of stone, and the carvings worked in relievo upon it would suffice, were there no other evidence of the fact extant, to prove the comparatively advanced state of civilization at which the Saxon Northumbrians had arrived in the seventh

century, for as will be shewn, this remarkable monument dates from that epoch, and nothing equal to it, as a work of art, was produced in this country for at least six hundred years later. Its eastern face bears a vine arranged in graceful undulations, profusely branched and supplied with foliage and fruit, each curvature being occupied by a bird or other animal feeding upon the fruit. According to the Rev. John Maughan, rector of the parish, to whose pamphlet on the subject I may here acknowledge my obligations, "The sculpture on this side of the cross has suffered very little "damage from the corroding effects of the weather. The buds, blossoms "and fruit have been so carefully and exquisitely delineated by the chisel of "the workman, and are still so faithfully preserved, that they seem as if "they were things only just starting into life." This side of the pillar bears no inscription, though it is possible that the broken part near the top may have been lettered. All the other sides are copiously inscribed, as well as sculptured ornamentally; and on the west is a figure, now allowed to represent John the Baptist, holding the Agnus Dei. Immediately below this are two lines of Runes, forming the names of the Saviour, and spelled thus, GESSUS KRISTTUS. The initial G, I may remark, had the power of I or Y, so that it may be read Iessus Kristtus, being very near the Latin pronunciation of the sacred words. Below these two lines is a figure, supposed to be that of the Saviour, and below this figure are nine lines of Anglo-Saxon Runes, forming the main inscription on the column. In the interpretation of this inscription a discrepancy exists in the versions given by the most recent authorities. The Rev. John Maughan, whose residence on the spot would indicate superior opportunities for observation, gives one copy which he maintains to be correct, and which when rendered into Roman letters, and properly divided—for it may be observed, that in most Anglo-Saxon inscriptions the letters are placed all in equal proximity, and a line being filled up the next is commenced without any attempt at division into syllables, or even into words—resolves itself into four alliterative couplets, thus:

THISSIG BEACN
THUN SETTON
HWÆTRED WÆTHGAR ALWFWOLTHU
AFT ALCFRITHU
EAN KYNING
EAC OSWIUING
GEBID HEO SINNA
SAWHULA

which may be rendered—*Hwætred, Wæthgar, and Alwfwol erected this slender pillar in memory of Alcfrid, ane king, and son of Oswy. Pray for them, their sins, their souls.*

For reasons I shall give presently, I attach more credit to the reading given by the Rev. D. H. Haigh, of Erdington, in his paper on this subject in the Archæologia Æliana. Mr. Haigh also reads it in alliterative couplets, thus, with an English translation annexed:

THIS SIG BEKUN,	*This beacon of honour*
SETTÆ HWÆTRED,	*Set Hwætred,*
EOM GÆR F(E)LWOLDU,	*In the year of the great pestilence,*
ÆFTÆR BARÆ,	*After the ruler,*
YMB KYNING ALCFRIDÆ,	*After king Alcfrid,*
GICEGÆD HEOSUM SAWLUM.	*Pray for their souls.*

Without taking into account Mr. Haigh's superior knowledge of the ancient Anglo-Saxon dialects and idioms, and his unquestionable skill and experience in solving antiquarian problems such as this, his reading is to be preferred for several reasons. First, because his accuracy is so clear in the Beckermont inscription, and in other known instances. Secondly, because Mr. Maughan, in his pamphlet, damages his own character for fair dealing, by boasting that he furnished Mr. Haigh with rubbings intentionally made imperfect and inaccurate, for the purpose of misleading him in his early attempts to decipher these Runes; a flagrant, I trust a unique, violation of the courtesy and candour that usually distinguish the correspondence of fellow-labourers in archæological investigation. Thirdly, Mr. Haigh's version is a more correct specimen of the dialect of Anglo-Saxon Northumberland, so far as it is known. Fourthly, Mr. Maughan's copy of the Runes presents several inaccurately formed characters, more especially the letter A wherever he makes it occur. And lastly, an imperfect sketch of this inscription taken by the late Mr. Howard, of Corby, published in 1801 in the Archæologia, and giving little more than the perpendicular parts of the characters, can, by adding the missed portions, be made to coincide much more nearly with Mr. Haigh's transcript than with Mr. Maughan's. Considering well these and other circumstances not necessary to particularize, I cannot hesitate to accept Mr. Haigh's reading of the Runic verses inscribed upon the western side of this monument as the best yet offered.

On the northern and southern faces, besides repetitions of those of the

Saviour, several names occur, such as OSLAAC KYNING (*king*) WILFRID PREASTER *(priest)* CYNISWID. CYNIBURUG, CYNGN (*queen*) EANFLÆD . CYNGN . ECGFRID . CYNING . OSWU CYNINGELT (*elder king*), all in the same Runic characters. These dignitaries, with the single exception of St. Wilfrid, who was his protégé, friend and religious counsellor, were near relatives of the Saxon prince to whose memory the pillar was erected; and this prince, Alcfrid, son of Oswy, king of Northumbria, and in his father's life time king of the province of Deira, performed a very important part in the history of the times, when the Saxon population of England was emerging from the darkness of ancestral paganism into the light of Christianity. Efficiently seconded by his wife, Cyniburg, he was more active than any contemporary in the great work of supplanting amongst his own subjects, and those of his father and father-in-law, Penda, king of Mercia, the rites offered to the repulsive old Saxon gods, by the pure worship of Christ. It is pleasant to find that on the most important particulars, the occurrence of the names of Alcfrid and his relatives surviving on the Bewcastle cross, and the fact that it is a monument raised to his memory, there is no difference of opinion.

Considerable difficulty in arriving at a correct knowledge of the history of this king Alcfrid has been caused by his name being confounded, by many writers, with that of his brother Aldfrid, under the appellation made common to both of Alfred. It would appear, however, that his services to the cause of the only true religion have served, as in many other instances, to cover a multitude of sins. His first appearance upon the stage of history is in the character of a rebel to his father Oswy, combining with Penda, of Mercia, to make war upon him, the plea for this unnatural alliance being that Oswy had made submission to Cadwalla, king of the Britons. Later we find him fighting in the great battle of Winwæd-field, against his father-in-law, who was slain. And lastly, offering to the monks whom he brought from Melrose to Ripon the alternative of recantation of their Easter doctrine, or dispossession; which last they chose. After being reconciled to his father he married the princess Cyniburga, daughter of Penda, a lady who became famous for the exercise of every Christian virtue. To her influence it is probable that the great exertions of Alcfrid in the cause of Christianity may be attributed; such as founding monasteries and making benefactions to the church, extending protection

and friendship to eminent proselytising members of the priesthood, and causing the settlement of disputed points of doctrine and discipline, especially that existing between the Romish priests and those trained at Iona as to the period within which Easter ought to fall,—the Scottish party insisting that this great festival should be held from the fourteenth to the twentieth day of the equinoctial moon, whilst all other Christians kept it, as now, from the fifteenth to the twenty-first. This disagreement was likely to cause great scandal, inasmuch as one class of converts might be observing all the austerities of Lent at the moment that the other would be revelling, after the manner of their time, in honour of the anniversary at the close of the season of fast. By Alcfrid's persuasion his father caused a synod to be held at St. Hilda's convent at Whitby, where the leaders of both parties were required to attend and discuss this question, with a view to its settlement. The principal speaker on the Roman side was Wilfrid, afterwards bishop and saint, whose name is found upon the cross at Bewcastle.

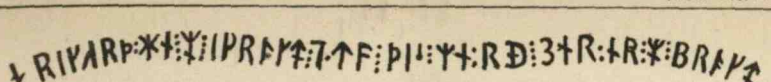
The manner of king Oswy's conversion to the orthodox observance does not say much for the intelligence of the greatest Saxon of his day; for it was effected not by force of argument, or by the superior sanctity of the advocates on the successful side, but by their assumption of the exclusive power of admission to paradise, in their possession of the keys of heaven entrusted to St. Peter, still held by the living head of their church. On being asked by the king if *they* claimed to hold any such power, the followers of St. Columba then present, at the head of whom was Colman, the bishop of York, admitted that they did not, and Oswy at once decided the question in dispute against them, stating sagely that he would not risk being excluded from paradise by offending those who possessed such palpable means of giving their friends admission. The most important effect of this sagacious decision was the establishment, throughout Christian England, of the rule for the observance of Easter that has been in force ever since. Its most remarkable immediate consequences were the resignation of Bishop Colman, his retirement in disgust into Scotland, and the appointment, as his successor, of a priest called Tuda, who, as we are told by Beda, died, within a few weeks of his induction, of the plague, which spread over England in the year 664, and was buried, where it is probable he died, at the monastery of Pagnalæch, which there is now good reason to believe stood at Beckermont, in West Cumberland, a province

then under the rule of the Anglian kings of Northumbria, to which, there is every reason to conclude, the name of Pagnalæch, probably signifying the district of the heathen, was at that period very properly applied.

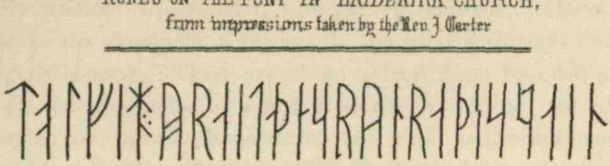
THE BECKERMONT CROSS.

This leads us to notice a very remarkable monument, not Runic, but interesting from being coeval with the Bewcastle cross, and connected with a striking passage in the history of the prince whose place of interment is marked by the latter, and from furnishing us with an authentic example of the kind of letters with which, at that early period, the Christian priesthood were labouring successfully to supersede the Runes inherited by the people from their heathen ancestors. By the courtesy of a gentleman resident near the spot, I have been put in possession of a description of this monument, so full and so clear that I feel no scruple in quoting it here entire, and I do so the more readily because, though noticed in the county histories, no satisfactory account of it has been published up to this time.

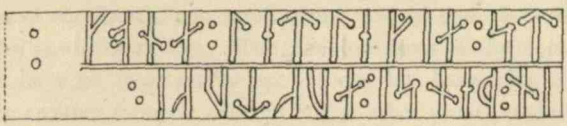
"The grave over which this ancient monument is erected is situated in "the midst of the church-yard, about twenty yards from the south wall of "the church, and runs in a south and north direction, contrary to the "other graves in the burial ground, which all run east and west. It is "covered by two rough undressed slabs of red freestone, to the extent of "seven feet in length by two and a half in breadth, which join each other "in the middle, and rise about six inches above the ground. In the "centre of each slab is a socket, which receives the base of an upright "pillar. The pillar at the south end of the grave, which probably marks "the head, has evidently had a portion of its length broken off, as it is the "shorter by more than a foot." I may mention that since receiving this description I have learned that this now shorter pillar bore a rude cross upon its summit, as is distinctly remembered by an aged native of the parish, still living, so that the sacrilegious mutilation it has suffered is of quite recent perpetration. "The dimensions of this pillar are four feet "four inches in height, the breadth and thickness being about twenty "inches at the base, diminishing upwards to fourteen inches by ten. Its "lower half—not entirely round, but having the appearance of a rude "square, with the angles roughed off—rises about two feet above the slab, "and has no marks of any description upon it. It is then marked by "three rings, or projections of the stone entirely round the pillar, each



RUNES ON THE FONT IN BRIDEKIRK CHURCH,
from impressions taken by the Rev. J. Carter



THE CARLISLE RUNES
Mr. Charlton's transcript



RUNES DISCOVERED IN ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD, LONDON.
Copied from Rafn.

MONUMENTAL PILLARS AT BECKERMONT
from a sketch by Brookbank Jones, Esq.

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"about an inch in diameter, with grooves between. Above these rings, "and for the remainder of its length, the pillar is wrought into four faces, "slightly concave. These are of an oblong form, rounded at the lower "ends, and surrounded by a sort of frame or rim, cut out of the stone, "forming two convex projections; the outer one about two inches in "breadth, and the inner about one. On that looking westward is seen the "inscription. The letters are upright, cut into the stone to a trifling "depth, and are about two inches in length, the lines being divided from "each other by narrow grooves. The face looking eastward is covered by "a sort of scrollwork, one scroll rising out of and above the other, and "divided down the middle. The other two faces of the upper part of this "pillar have no clear marks upon them, but have faint traces of some "device or other formerly existing. The other pillar, at the foot or north "end of the grave, is of smaller dimensions and ruder appearance, except "as regards its height, which is five feet six inches, its breadth one foot "four inches, and its depth one foot. It is of a different sort of stone "from the shorter column, being a coarse grained white sandstone or "grit. It has a single ring or projection, about half way from its base, "about four inches in breadth, and but slightly raised. The other part is "more rudely faced, and with no discernible characters or device upon it. "It slightly leans from the perpendicular eastward, and apparently rests "against a low tombstone of more modern date. Both pillars are quite "grey with lichens of various sorts, some of the fronds of which are tufted, "and above an inch long, giving the stones a very venerable and ancient "appearance."

In addition to this excellent description, I have been supplied by the kindness of other friends in the neighbourhood with several rubbings of this inscription and some sketches of the stones. In all the former the letters may be distinguished as under, and in the latter they may be completed so as to coincide. They are the Roman minuscules of the period: the words they form are, like those of the Bewcastle cross, in the old Northumberland dialect, and when properly arranged, resolve themselves also like them into alliterative verse, thus—

HIR TÆGÆD
TUDA SCÆAR
QUÆLM TER FORAN
FÆLS ERXNAWANGAS ÆFTÆR.

The rubbings, so distinct as regards five of the lines, shew that the sixth has been nearly obliterated; but the sense of the preceding lines indicates perfectly what the last must have been; all required to complete the sentence being the final syllable of the long word erxnawangas, and, equally obvious, the word æftær; so that after many anxious examinations of rubbings and drawings, and the most careful study, I must conclude this transcript to be correct.

Many attempts have been made to interpret this inscription, but the rude form of the letters and the limited acquaintance of most observers with the dialect in which it is written have hitherto defeated all such trials.

It is to Mr. Haigh again, and his rare knowledge of the old Anglo-Saxon dialects, that we are indebted for being at length supplied with a correct translation of these lines; and that gentleman gives it thus—

Here enclosed
Tuda Bishop
The plague destruction before,
The reward of Paradise after.

So that these pillars are now shewn to mark the grave of a prelate who died twelve hundred years ago, and also to point out the site of a Saxon monastery, the proximity of which to the sea shore probably caused its early destruction by the heathen Danes who, some time later, wrought great havoc amongst the religious houses of the north of England.

To return to King Alcfrid; the last recorded act of that prince was, conjointly with his father, to assemble the Wittenagęmote of their kingdoms for the purpose of appointing a successor in the bishopric to Tuda, who has slept so long a sleep in the quiet little churchyard of Beckermont. No account has been given of the time, manner or place of King Alcfrid's death; but as the last notice taken of him and his acts refers to "the "year of the great pestilence," there can be no doubt now that he was the king whose memory has been preserved though his name was lost for so many centuries, in the vague traditions of the wild borderers of Bewcastle.

THE RUTHWELL CROSS.

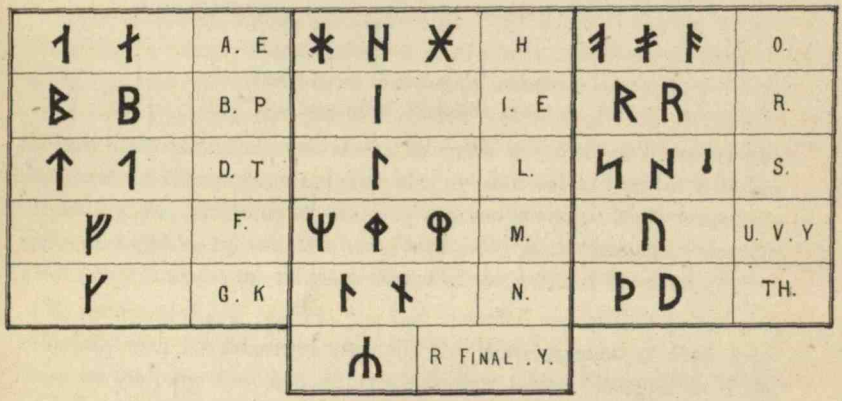
The northern side of the border land also possesses a Runic monument of equal celebrity, and probably of equal antiquity, with that of Bewcastle, standing now in the Manse garden at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire. In form, workmanship, and ornamentation this closely resembles the Bewcastle

THE ANGLO SAXON RUNIC ALPHABET,

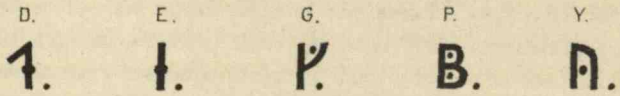
COLLATED FROM THE

BEWCASTLE & RUTHWELL CROSSES.

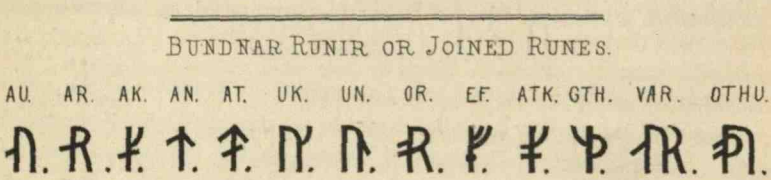
SCANDINAVIAN RUNIC ALPHABET.



STUNGNAR RUNIR OR POINTED RUNES.



BUNDNAR RUNIR OR JOINED RUNES.



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column, but differs from it in the nature of the stone and the character of the inscription, which is not commemorative in the ordinary sense, and comprises, besides Runic verses in Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon, scriptural texts in the Latin character and language, both arranged in columns two or three letters in width down the margins of the several faces of the stones, the pillar being in two pieces. These texts relate to incidents in the life of the Saviour, represented in relievo on the central tablets round which the lettering is cut. As, for example, round that containing the figure of Christ with Mary Magdalene washing his feet, we find this passage—"ATTULIT ALABASTRUM UNGUENTI ET STANS RETROSECUS PEDES "EIUS LACRIMIS COEPIT RIGARE PEDES EIUS ET CAPILLIS CAPITIS SUI "TERGEBAT."

Many attempts have been made to give a correct interpretation of the Runes on these stones, but no satisfactory conclusion respecting them was arrived at till Mr. Kemble shewed that they formed part of an Anglo-Saxon poem on the Crucifixion, called the Dream of the Holyrood, one of a collection discovered by Dr. Blum at Vercelli, and since published by the Record Commission. Mr. Haigh calls this "beyond all doubt the most "interesting discovery that has ever been made in the field of Anglo-"Saxon antiquities." This gentleman proceeds to argue, and with some success, that the author of this poem must have been no other than Cædmon, a Saxon who composed sacred poems in his own language about the period of the death of King Alcfrid and the erection of his monument at Bewcastle. For a more perfect description than my limits allow of this noble specimen of early Saxon art—for a most succinct and lucid interpretation of all its inscriptions, and an analysis of the transcripts and readings of previous authorities, I must refer to Mr. Kemble's paper in the Archæologia, and to Mr. Haigh's remarks published in the Archæologia Æliana for 1856. As it bears no names, and alludes to none save sacred events, the Ruthwell Cross has no obvious connection with, and throws no light upon, the early history of our country, and is in that respect of inferior value to those of Bewcastle and Beckermont. Its own history, however, is curious. It is traditionally said to have been cast on the northern shore of the Solway by shipwreck, first erected at a place called Priestwoodside, and afterwards removed to Ruthwell, where a church was built over it, within which it stood for many centuries until, by a barbarous edict of the General Assembly of the Kirk, it was thrown down and

broken, though it remained in the church till the end of last century, when it was cast into the churchyard. The late venerated minister of Ruthwell, Dr. Duncan, to whose memory his country owes a debt of gratitude for more good works than this, collected the fragments and erected the pillar in his garden, where it is still to be seen. From the similarity of workmanship and from other circumstances, Mr. Haigh infers that this was once a companion column to that at Bewcastle; and that it was being carried off by a band of Danish and Scottish marauders when the vessel containing it was cast ashore by a storm. There is certainly more probability in this supposition than in that on which the Irish claim to Stonehenge is founded; and, for the arguments supporting it, I must again refer to Mr. Haigh's most valuable paper.

SCANDINAVIAN RUNES.

The Scandinavian Runic alphabet, while it exhibits in the predominance of straight lines the same evidence as the Teutonic of having been used chiefly to be cut in stone, wood or metal, differs from it in the simpler forms and smaller number of its letters, consisting as it does of only sixteen characters, while, as I have shewn, the Anglo-Saxon contains twenty-six. Some characters, however, in the Danish series possess a double power, and, in some instances, it gives two or more varieties of the same letter. The connection of Runes with the ancient worship of the northern nations is more apparent in the Danish than in the Anglo-Saxon alphabet. They were said traditionally to have been invented by Odin, and several of the letters bore the names of members of the old northern mythology. Thus F was called Freya, TH, Thor, O, Odin, and T, Tyr. Professor Rafn, in his work on this subject published at Copenhagen, and written in Danish with a partial translation into French, expresses his belief that these ancient letters had their origin in the Asiatic country whence the Scandinavian nations migrated, and points out the resemblance existing between them and the old Greek characters, which probably were invented in the same part of the world. The Danish series of Runes, in the work just named, is not arranged in the same order as our alphabet; but I have thought it more convenient to place the letters as ours stand, as shewn in the diagram. It will be observed that nine, or more than one half, of these characters closely resemble their representatives in the Anglo-Saxon series; but the greater advance of that people in the peaceful arts is again indicated by their native alphabet, containing characters equivalent to all the essential

letters used even at this day, besides others representing the diphthongs and double consonants; while the Scandinavians had no diphthongal characters and no separate letters to distinguish B from P, D from T, E from I, G from K, or U from Y, and on nearly all their monuments it is left to the ingenuity of the reader to discover which of these letters is intended. In some, however, of later date the D, E, G, P and Y *are* distinguished by a dot in the letter, as shewn in the diagram. These were called Stúngnar Runir or pointed Runes; also the Runes of Waldemar, because they occur in a Runic series communicated in 1239 by Waldemar the victorious, King of Denmark, to Olaf, the Skald of Iceland. Joined letters, Bundnar or Binde Runir are also of frequent occurrence. These consist of two or more letters so combined as to form a monogram. The diagram gives several examples of these. In some instances a surprising number of letters is included in one of these figures, as in a well-known inscription in Iceland which runs thus—HER LIGGR HALR KARTAN OLAFSSON—*Here lies brave Kiartan Olafsson.* The eight letters of the last word being thrown into one figure, shewn in the diagram.

Inscriptions in Scandinavian Runes are abundant in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and the Isle of Man, while Ireland and Scotland, where the Norsemen so long maintained a footing, and the Northern and Western Isles, which were colonised by the same people and constituted a Norwegian kingdom independent of the mother country, are singularly destitute of these traces of their occupation. Of the Runic remains of Scandinavia Proper Professor Rafn's work contains a vast collection. Those of the Isle of Man are treated of in Mr. Daniel Wilson's Archæology of Scotland, and in the Rev. J. G. Cumming's "Runic and other "monumental remains in the Isle of Man."

THE BRIDEKIRK FONT.

In this country stones, bearing Danish Runes, are very scarce and the inscriptions upon those we have remarkably brief. Till within the last few years that upon the famous font in Bridekirk Church in Cumberland was the only example known to exist in England; and of this, through the courtesy of the Rev. James Carter, Vicar of Bridekirk, I am enabled to produce an accurate copy. It has engaged the attention of the learned for more than two centuries and a half; and the comparatively late period at which it is evident the work has been executed, the consequently defective and mixed character of the Runes, and the fact, only

recently established, that the letters are principally Danish while the words are old Saxon-English, have been productive of much difficulty and some confusion in the various attempts made to decipher this inscription. Analogous instances of these characteristics are not wanting in the recent histories of Runic inscriptions.

In those in St. Molio's Cave in the small island called Holy Island at the entrance of Lamlash Bay in Arran, Mr. Wilson finds an occasional Saxon letter amongst the Scandinavian Runes, of which they mainly consist. In some of the Manx inscriptions we find a letter resembling the ordinary Runic N, which the context and general sense compel us to read E as in this; and on the beautiful Runic cross at Kirk Braddan, all the letters in the sacred word "IHESUS" are rude attempts at Roman characters, except the U which is Runic; so, in the Bridekirk inscription, A and G are obviously crude imitations of the Roman form of those letters. Of the use of Norse Runes to form sentences in a different language, a curious instance exists in the case of the Hunterston Runic Brooch which, in 1830, was dug up near to the supposed site of the battle of Largs, fought in 1263. This beautiful relic bears an inscription in Scandinavian Runes, which Mr. Wilson shews to be in the Gælic language.

The first mention of the inscribed font at Bridekirk is made in 1607 by Camden, who says of the Runes, "But what they mean, and to what "nation they belong, let the learned determine, for 'tis all a mystery to me." Dr. Gibson's edition of the Britannia contains a letter on this inscription written in 1685 by Archdeacon Nicholson, afterwards Bishop of Carlisle, and his interpretation was accepted by all subsequent commentators, including Mr. Howard of Corby, in the Archæologia in 1801, down to 1820, when Mr. Hamper, in the same transactions, published an entirely new reading of it. Mr. Kemble, in the paper already referred to, ridicules Mr. Hamper's version; and making rather unwarrantable alterations, not having seen the font itself, in Mr. Howard's transcript as adopted by Mr. Hamper, offers a reading of his own which he admits to be unsatisfactory. In 1856 Mr. Haigh proved that Mr. Hamper's version was as nearly as possible correct. The earliest and latest interpretations of this famous inscription are as follow—

Bishop Nicholson's reading was—

ER EKARD HAN MEN EGROCTEN, AND TO DIS MEN RED WER TANER MEN BROCTEN;

i.e., *Here Ekard was converted; and to this man's example were the Danes brought.*

The version now received as correct differs widely from this. It is—

RIKARTH HE ME IWROCTE AND TO THIS MERTH GERNR ME BROCTE;

which is, *Ricard he me wrought, and to this form diligently (or yearningly) me brought.*

Of this total incongruity a considerable portion is due to recent authorities commencing with the letter R, taking the first figure which Dr. Nicholson called E, to represent no letter, but the emblem of the Christian faith, and making the characters consisting of a perpendicular line with a middle cross stroke into vowels instead of consonants. Mr. Kemble's strongest objection to this last version is that the name Ricard is not Anglo-Saxon. Without recognising the weight of this objection, for, supposing this font to be a work of the thirteenth century, it is certain that Ricard, or Richard, had then become an English name, I would suggest another reading, which might meet Mr. Kemble's views so far as the name is concerned. Taking the almost obliterated initial marks, which are certainly doubtful, to have been H E, or either of these letters, I would divide the first word and read it thus:—

HERIK, OR HERIG, ARTH HE ME, &c.;

Herig arduously he me wrought.

The word *arth* is an old Norse adverb, and may be supposed to describe the difficult nature of the work, as the Saxon *gernr* does the anxiety and care with which it was finished. I advance this conjecture with the utmost diffidence, for I am conscious that it is in opposition to authorities whose ability and experience in this branch of knowledge are very far superior to mine.

The only relations to history borne by this extensively discussed inscription are to be found in the evidence it bears in the sculpture of the font being inferior to that of the Bewcastle and Ruthwell crosses, of the retrogression of the arts of civilised life in our northern provinces during some five hundred years of warfare; and, in its interblending the Saxon and Norse letters and languages, of the progressive amalgamation of the once hostile occupiers of the country.

Of the other two Danish Runic inscriptions known to exist in England

the next in date of discovery is that found in St. Paul's Churchyard in London in 1852; which is to the following effect:—KONAL LET LEGGJA STEN THENNSI AUK TOKI; in English, *Konal caused this stone to be laid, and Toki.* A sentence very meagre and insignificant so far as regards historical interest.

THE CARLISLE RUNES.

The third inscription in Scandinavian Runes known in this country is that discovered about four years ago on the wall of the south transept of Carlisle Cathedral, on removing the plaster from the stones forming the lower part of the inside wall. The letters composing this inscription are faint and slender, cut in a stone rough hewn diagonally, the deep chisel marks rendering it a peculiarly unfavourable subject for a rubbing; consequently the one procured for me by a friend in Carlisle is miserably indistinct and unsatisfactory, so that by the most careful tracing and pricking I have not been able to copy from it much more than one-half of the characters. This roughness of the stone and the slightness of the lettering are doubtless the main causes of discrepancy in the readings of the different local antiquaries who have examined this inscription. The most prominent of these are Mr. Ferguson, the author of "The Northmen "in Cumberland and Westmoreland," the Rev. John Maughan of Bewcastle, and Dr. Charlton of Newcastle-on-Tyne. All these gentlemen, besides Professor Munch of Christiania, to whose inspection a transcript was submitted by Mr. Ferguson, are now agreed that the first word is "Dolfin," a proper name of frequent occurrence in ancient chronicles, still in use as a surname in Cumberland, and also as a component of several topographical words. They also agree that the last word is "*stain*," but there all agreement ends. Professor Rafn relates a circumstance which may in some degree account for these perplexing discrepancies. He says that in 1834 he, with Finn Magnusen, a great authority in Northern Archæology, and Theophilus Hansen, went to Herrestrup, a village in Zealand, to examine a group of antique engraved stones, and after spending several hours in vainly endeavouring to discover the engraved marks, they were preparing to depart, just as the sun was upon the horizon, when one of the party happening to throw a parting glance upon the stones, the faint marks appeared clear and distinct in the gleam of twilight, and they were able to complete the object of their journey by taking an exact copy of the design. After relating this incident at some length, Professor Rafn says, "I con-

"ceived that similar decayed inscriptions rarely become clear by one single "inspection of a few hours, or at the most, of a few days, the ordinary "space of time that a traveller can devote to them." With such an opinion as this from such an authority we need not remark further upon the incongruities exhibited in the different interpretations of the Carlisle Runes. As Mr. Ferguson adopts Dr. Charlton's first reading, from a copy supplied by Mr. Purday, the clerk of the works for the renovation of the Cathedral, and as Dr. Charlton, after examining the stone itself, abandons this version, it is unnecessary to allude to it farther. Mr. Maughan also modified his reading after examining the stone, and the version he finally adopts is—TOLFINN HRAITA AT ULPHARA THIS STAIN.

Dolfin inscribed this stone to Ulphar.

Now this reading is peculiarly interesting, because Dolfin was the name of the last Danish governor of Carlisle, expelled by William Rufus in 1092 or 3, when that Monarch took possession of, and re-built and re-peopled the ancient city, which had long lain in ruins. This Dolfin, according to the Saxon Chronicle, had a son, called, in Latin, Ulphius, corresponding with the Norse Ulf or Ulfhar, who was murdered under truce, at York, by Tosti, brother of King Harold. If we could accept this version, and it is extremely tempting, we might fairly infer that Dolfin, contrary to the received opinion, had, before his expulsion, commenced the restoration of the Cathedral, destroyed two hundred years before by his countrymen, and had caused this stone to be inscribed in memory of his murdered son.

Dr. Charlton, to a correspondence with whom I am indebted for much information on the general subject of this paper, holds that this inscription is not monumental, but has had its origin in the mere freak of a workman, and reads it thus:—

TOLFIHN YRAITA THASI RYNR A THISI STAIN.

Dolfin wrote these runes on this stone.

I am inclined to believe that a correct view of the origin and purpose of this inscription is to be found somewhere between the theories propounded by these two gentlemen; and without entering into any minute analysis of the comparative merits of their several versions, only premising that so far as my own knowledge of the subject may carry me, I prefer Dr. Charlton's, I would remark, that the appearance of the stone, with nothing save the Runes to distinguish it from its rudely chiselled neighbours—the faintness of the cutting, consisting as it does of little more than a series

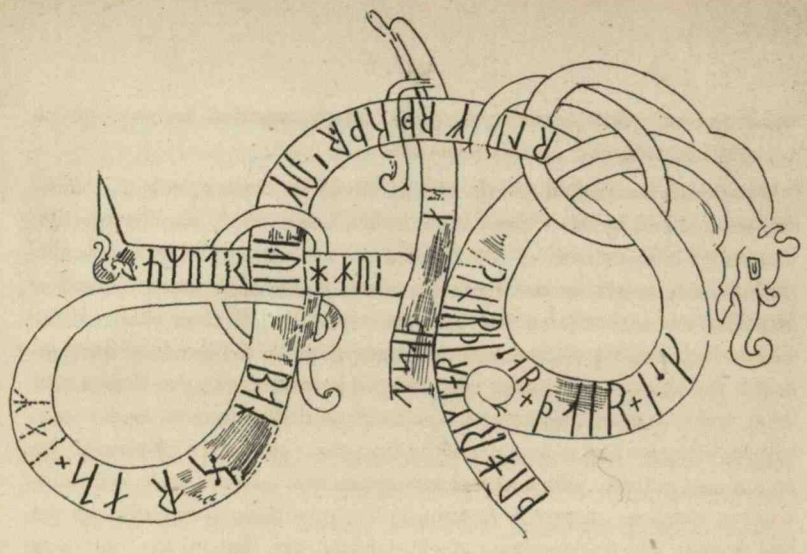
of mere scratches, which had disappeared ages before but for their position in the interior of the building and the protection afforded by the plaster—and its situation within a foot of the ground, all militate against the supposition that this inscribed stone was ever intended to serve as a monument to the son of a chief holding supreme command over the district; while the similitude of the stone to those about it renders equally untenable the suggestion, from another quarter, that it has been a sepulchral stone brought thither from some other situation.

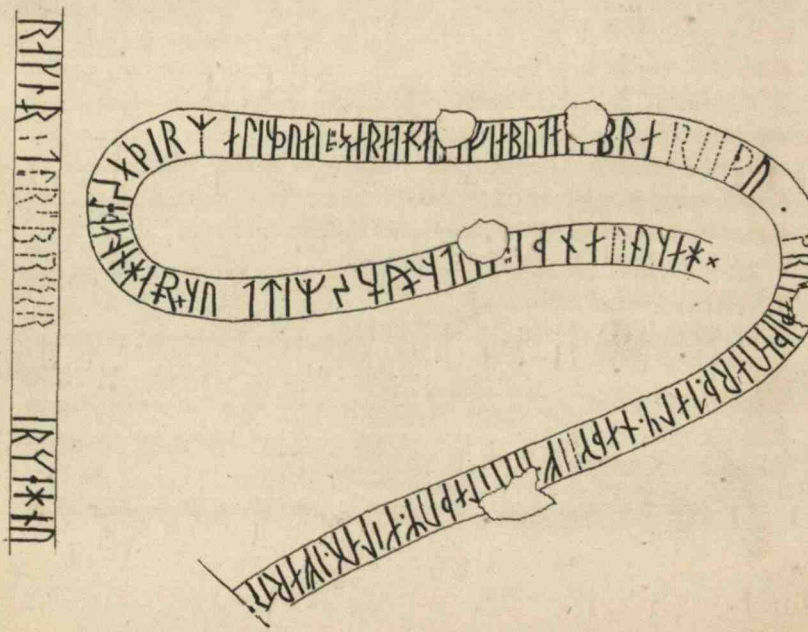
I think, however, that Dr. Charlton underrates its importance when he supposes the inscription to have been produced merely by the whim of a workman. The remarkable circumstances on which there can be no two opinions, that the Runes are Danish and that they commence with the name of the last Danish governor of Carlisle, taken along with the supposed age of that portion of the venerable edifice, also agreed upon, lead forcibly to the conclusion that they relate in some way to the chief in question, and it appears to me the most feasible solution of the mystery to suppose that the inscription is commemorative of Dolfin's share in the restoration of the Cathedral—that this slight vestige of a race from whom the people of our northern counties derive some of their most valuable attributes, had no sepulchral or monumental object, but was simply designed to indicate a pious work of the last Northman who exercised anything like independent rule in England.

THE LION OF THE PIRÆUS.

My remarks have been confined thus far to Runic remains in our own country. Of those existing in other lands, numerous as they are, there is but one to which I would now wish to direct attention—an instance where a noble specimen of ancient Grecian art, dating at latest from five centuries B.C., is made to subserve the purpose of recording in Scandinavian Runes an exploit of certain Norwegian warriors, whose chief, fatally to himself, and most disastrously for England, afterwards acquired a place in our early history.

I had hoped to be the first to offer, in English, a notice of this most interesting monument, but find that, to some extent, I am forestalled by the writer of a short letter in the Athenæum of January 15th, in which attention is called to Professor Rafn's finely illustrated account of it, of





RUNIC SCROLLS ON THE SIDES OF THE PIRÆEAN LION AT VENICE.—FROM KAFN.

LIVERPOOL PUBLIC LIBRARY

which no translation, partial or complete, has yet appeared, but from which I deduce the materials for these remarks.

The inscription now in question is that upon the famous piece of antique sculpture known as the Piræan Lion, which, since 1687, has occupied its present position in front of the Arsenal at Venice, having been brought thither as a trophy from Greece when the Venetians, under Francisco Morosini, took Athens from the Turks who had held it from 1456. This Lion, which had stood from time immemorial upon the beach of the port called the Piræus, and, from possessing this monument, the Port of the Lion, had long attracted attention by its high merit as a work of art, its magnitude, being ten feet in height, and its antiquity. It was not till towards the end of last century, however, that any notice was taken of certain inscriptions in unknown characters contained in serpentiform scrolls cut into the two sides of this fine specimen of old Grecian art, that on the right side being rather elegant in design and arrangement. Akerblad, a Swedish traveller, was the first to discover that these characters were Danish Runes; and since his time they have engaged the attention of Antiquarian scholars of nearly every European country, including Wilhelm Grimm, the great German philologist, and the high Runic authority, Finn Magnusen of Iceland. But it is to the persevering industry, the practical knowledge and great experience of Professor Rafn that we are indebted for a satisfactory removal of all the difficulties which have heretofore prevented a correct reading of these inscriptions. He has shewn that they are written in the ancient Danish or northern language—in the dialect which of old was spread over the whole of Scandinavia and many other countries, and which still exists in Iceland. The orthography is that usually found in Scandinavian inscriptions, and the letters are Runes such as were in use during the earliest period of Christianity in those countries.

The inscription enclosed within the scroll upon the right side of the Lion is now read as follows—

ASMUDR : HJU : RUNAR : THISAR : THAIR : ISKIR : auk : THURLIFR : THURTHR : AUK : IVAR : at : BON : HARADS : HAFA : THUAT : GRIKIAR : UF : hugsathu : auk : bnathu : In English—*Asmund cut these Runes with Asgeir, Thorleif, Thord and Ivar, at the request of Harold Hafi (or the tall), though the Greeks considered about and forbade it.*

The distinct portion of the inscription is here given in capitals, while

the indistinct and obliterated parts are in minuscular letters. It may readily be supposed that a large experience in deciphering similar records, and a familiar acquaintance with the old dialect in which it is written must have been required to enable any reader to supply the defective parts, trivial as they are, so as to make them accord so perfectly with the context.

This inscription, it will be seen, merely preserves the names of those persons who engraved the Runes upon the marble; that upon the left side, enclosed in a scroll of a much less ornate character, relates the exploit they were meant to commemorate, with the names of the principal actors in it. It is read thus, with the distinctions used in the last—

HAKUN : VAN : THIT : ULFR : AUK : ASMUDR : AUK : AURN : HAFN : THESA : THIR MEN : LAGTHU : A : UK : HARADI : HAFI : UF IABUTA : UPRAISTAR : VEGNA : GRIKIATHITHIS : VARTH : DALKI : NAUTHUGR : I : FIARI : LATHUM : EGIL : VAR : I : FARU : MITH : RAGNARI : TIL : RUMANIU : . . . AUK : ARMENIU :

In English—*Hakon with Ulf and Asmund and Orn made conquest of this port. These men and Harold Hafi imposed a heavy fine on account of the insurrection of the Greek people. Dalk is detained captive in far lands. Egil is gone on an expedition with Ragnar into Romania and Armenia.*

There is a touch of sentiment in these rude warriors causing the names of their captive and absent comrades to be cut in the enduring marble along with their own; and the circumstance illustrates a remarkable trait in the character of the old Norsemen; for, though "stern to inflict, and "stubborn to endure," it is known that they were also remarkably susceptible to the domestic and social affections.

Of the names occurring in these inscriptions, the only one possessing interest to us is that of the chief Harold, surnamed at that period of his life Hafi, or the tall; and the whole history of this famous Norse leader is replete with romantic interest. He was the sister's son of St. Olaf King of Norway, who was slain at the battle of Stiklastad in 1030. Harold, a youth of fifteen, though according to the Sagas he had even then attained the stature of five ells, old Norwegian measure,—about six feet three of ours,—fought under his uncle at this battle; and, escaping the slaughter, made his way to the court of Jaroslav, Grand Duke of Russia. After remaining there three years, and failing in his addresses to a daughter of his host, Harold proceeded to Constantinople, where, at the age of eighteen, he took service with the Emperor, and soon after was made chief of the

celebrated mercenary corps called the Varangians. This body, prior to the date of the Norman conquest of England, when many refugee Saxons entered it, was composed entirely of Scandinavians. It was probably to this circumstance and to his princely rank in his own country, that Harold Hafi, still a mere youth, owed his elevation to command amongst them. He remained in the Emperor's service ten years and, as the northern Sagas relate, distinguished himself by many glorious exploits and in many countries, as Africa, Palestine and Sicily.

In 1043 he returned to Russia, and in crossing the Black Sea, being, like many of his countrymen, a poet as well as a soldier, he relieved the tedium of the voyage by composing a poem in sixteen stanzas, on his rejection by the parents of the Russian princess, Elizabeth of Holmgard. One of these verses, which is now supposed to allude to the feat of arms recorded on the Piræan Lion, may be given in English rhyme, thus—

The virgin and the matron both
  Know well that once at early morn,
Into the city of the south
  Our brandished blades by us were borne.
A path we hewed with falchions bright,
  A monument our fame retains;
But yet, with rings of gold bedight,
  The Russian dame my suit disdains.

The poem appears to have been prepared in anticipation of the rejection of his renewed addresses; but it would seem that his fears were groundless, for he married the princess, whose hand had been denied him ten years before, and then returned to his native country, where he was made joint sovereign with Magnus the Debonair, and after the death of that king, succeeded to the undivided monarchy of Norway. Harold's surname of Hafi was changed soon after this to Hardrada, or the severe, and by this designation he is well known in history, more especially in the history of this country. It will be remembered that in 1066 this King of Norway invaded the dominions of his Saxon namesake, in alliance with the rebel brother of the latter, Tosti the outlawed Earl of Northumberland; and that the allies were both slain with thirty thousand of their army at the battle of Stamford Bridge near York.

It was previous to this battle, that English Harold's famous reply was made to the demand of what he had to offer to Hardrada as conditions of peace:—"Seven feet of English earth; or, as he is taller than other men,

" perhaps a few inches more." Though defeated, this invasion was most disastrous in its consequences to the Saxons of England. Harold had to hasten southward, all unprepared, to meet the Normans ; and, but for this Norwegian invasion, and the hard won fight of Stamford Bridge, the battle of Hastings might have had a different result. Thus the name that in defiance of the prohibition of the Greeks was cut in barbarous characters on the ancient ornament of their port, is associated with the events of the most fateful passage in the annals of England.

In connexion with the main subject of this paper I have but further to remark that the only instance I am aware of where numeral figures occur in a Runic inscription is in that discovered, in 1824, at Kirgiktórsoak, in Baffin's Bay, which includes certain unusual characters supposed to represent in figures the year in which it was cut, 1135. It may be observed that the discovery of this evidence of the early visits of the northern voyagers to the far North-West, tends to confirm the accounts given by the Sagas of Iceland, of Norwegian expeditions to America, ages before its discovery by Columbus ; these accounts being overlaid with so much obvious romance, that many find it difficult to believe that they contain even this amount of fact.

Having considerably exceeded ordinary limits, I must conclude abruptly, my subject far from exhausted, with the hope that I may have succeeded in attracting the attention of this Society to a most interesting and suggestive field of enquiry which, so far as is indicated in its published transactions, it has hitherto overlooked.