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Daniel Wilson

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Prehistoric Annals of Scotland

Born in Edinburgh, Daniel Wilson (1816–92) planned on becoming a painter and spent time working in Turner's studio. But in 1842 he became secretary of the Society of Antiquaries in Scotland and devoted the rest of his life to archaeology, anthropology and university administration. This two-volume work, first published in 1851, brought him to immediate academic attention. Carrying out pioneering work of scientific archaeology, Wilson brought the very word 'prehistoric' into use in English for the first time. And although a devout Christian, he accepted the theory of evolution, unlike many of his contemporaries. Split into four periods, the work is richly illustrated, with many of the illustrations created by the author himself. For this second edition, published in 1863, Wilson updated his work to reflect recent discoveries. Volume 1 looks at the earliest human settlers up to the Bronze Age.

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VOLUME 1

DANIEL WILSON



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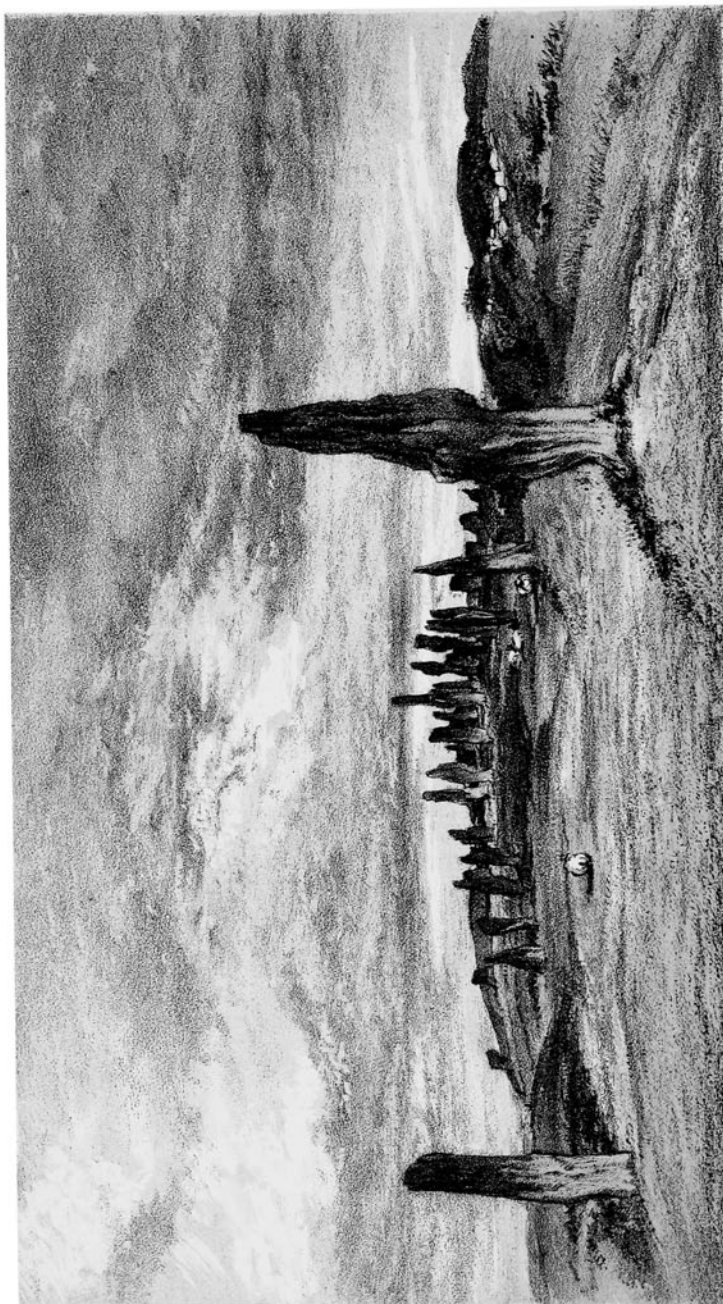
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GREAT CIRCLE OF CALLERNISH

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PREHISTORIC ANNALS

OF

SCOTLAND.

BY

DANIEL WILSON, LL.D.

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE IN UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO ;

AUTHOR OF "PREHISTORIC MAN," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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EDINBURGH : T. CONSTABLE,
PRINTER TO THE QUEEN, AND TO THE UNIVERSITY.

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TO

J. Y. SIMPSON, M.D. F.R.S.E.

PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE AND MIDWIFERY IN THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

WHO AMID THE ENGROSSING DUTIES OF PROFESSIONAL LIFE

HAS LARGELY CONTRIBUTED TO THE PROGRESS OF ARCHÆOLOGY

ALIKE IN ITS SCIENTIFIC AND HISTORICAL ASPECTS

THESE VOLUMES

DESIGNED TO SYSTEMATIZE ARCHÆOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

IN ITS RELATION TO SCOTTISH ANTIQUITIES

ARE DEDICATED BY HIS FRIEND

THE AUTHOR.

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P R E F A C E.

DURING the interval that has elapsed since the first edition of this work appeared, the relations which it aimed at determining between Archæology and kindred sciences have been matured to an extent then very partially apprehended. The progress of antiquarian investigations, and the value they have acquired in recent years in relation to other studies, render the changes demanded in a second edition unusually extensive. I have accordingly availed myself of the opportunity to remodel the whole. Fully a third of it has been entirely rewritten; and the remaining portions have undergone so minute a revision as to render it in many respects a new work.

One object aimed at when this book first appeared, was to rescue archæological research from that limited range to which a too exclusive devotion to classical studies had given rise; and, especially in relation to Scotland, to prove how greatly more comprehensive and important are its native antiquities than all the traces of intruded arts. In some respects the aim has been so effectually accomplished, that it has become no longer necessary to retain arguments constructed with a view to the refutation of learned or popular systems involv-

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ing Roman, Danish, or other foreign sources of native art; or to combat Phœnician, Druidical, or other theories, invented to substantiate equally baseless systems of pseudo-historical fable. In other directions, however, speculations then indulged in, have since been followed out to an extent compared with which the boldest of them can no longer seem extravagant. In the application of the term *Prehistoric*—introduced, if I mistake not, for the first time in this work,—it was employed originally in reference to races which I then assigned reasons for believing had preceded the oldest historical ones of Britain and Northern Europe. But since then the term has become identified with a comprehensive range of speculative and inductive research, in which the archæologist labours hand in hand with the geologist and ethnologist, in solving some of the most deeply interesting problems of modern science. The plan of this work only embraces the evidence derived from a narrow insular area; but, limited though its pages are to the prehistoric arts and ethnic affinities of one country, and that apart from regions hitherto productive of the most primitive traces of human art: it will nevertheless be seen that the evidence which bears on the great question of the antiquity of man finds many illustrations from Scottish chroniclings. Now also that the relations of archæological investigations to other scientific inquiries are intelligently recognised, the evidence and speculations embodied in these volumes in reference to prehistoric and pre-Celtic races may acquire a new significance and value. The careful study of the primitive antiquities of Britain led me to the conviction, set forth in the former edition, that we must look to a much more

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remote period, and to earlier races than any of those with which classic historians have familiarized us, for the beginnings of our insular history. Since then, long residence on the American continent, and repeated opportunities of intercourse with the Aborigines of the New World, have familiarized me with a condition of social life realizing in the living present nearly all that I had conceived of in studying the chroniclings of Britain's prehistoric centuries. The experience thus acquired in novel fields of ethnological research, have materially aided me in the revision of opinions originally based on purely speculative induction; and recent opportunities of renewed study on the scenes of my earlier investigations, have enabled me to enlarge in many respects the illustrations which Scottish antiquities contribute to the broader aspects of Archæological science.

The Second Volume is chiefly occupied with subjects of antiquarian and historical research of a very recent date, when compared with the essentially prehistoric traces of man. Nevertheless they are replete with interest in their bearings on national arts, customs, and social progress; and are of no less value to the historian than those of earlier periods have become to the geologist. To those also the opportunities for revision which a second edition supplies have afforded means for making numerous additions and alterations, which I venture to hope accomplish more nearly than formerly the ambitious aim then set before me, of establishing a consistent and comprehensive system of Scottish Archæology.

Along with the other changes by which this edition of the Prehistoric Annals of Scotland aims at more effectually achieving the purposes implied in its title,

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the pictorial illustrations have been greatly increased ; several of the former plates and woodcuts have also been reëngraved from new drawings ; and in addition to those, I have to acknowledge the great liberality with which the Councils of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Archæological Institute of Great Britain, and the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, have placed their woodcuts at my service. To my friends PROFESSOR SIMPSON, GEORGE HARVEY, Esq., and THOMAS CONSTABLE, Esq., I am also indebted for other illustrations with which the following pages are enriched.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE, TORONTO,

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THE zeal for Archæological investigation which has recently manifested itself in nearly every country of Europe, has been traced, not without reason, to the impulse which proceeded from Abbotsford. Though such is not exactly the source which we might expect to give birth to the transition from profitless dilettanteism to the intelligent spirit of scientific investigation, yet it is unquestionable that Sir Walter Scott was the first of modern writers “to teach all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was as good as unknown to writers of history and others, till so taught,—that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men.”¹ If, however, the impulse to the pursuit of Archæology as a science be thus traceable to our own country, neither Scotland nor England can lay claim to the merit of having been the first to recognise its true character, or to develop its fruits. The spirit of antiquarianism has not, indeed, slumbered among us. It has taken form in Roxburgh, Bannatyne, Abbotsford, and other literary Clubs, producing valuable results for the use of the historian, but limiting its range within the Medieval era, and abandoning to isolated labourers that ampler field of

¹ Carlyle's *Miscellanies*, second edition, vol. v. p. 301.

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research which embraces the Prehistoric period of nations, and belongs not to literature but to the science of Nature. It was not till continental Archæologists had shown what legitimate induction is capable of, that those of Britain were content to forsake laborious trifling, and associate themselves with renewed energy of purpose to establish the study on its true footing as an indispensable link in the circle of the sciences.

Amid the increasing zeal for the advancement of knowledge, the time appears to have at length come for the thorough elucidation of Primeval Archæology as an element in the history of man. The British Association, expressly constituted for the purpose of giving a stronger impulse and a more systematic direction to scientific inquiry, embraced within its original scheme no provision for the encouragement of those investigations which most directly tend to throw light on the origin and progress of the human race. Physical archæology was indeed admissible, in so far as it dealt with the extinct fauna of the palæontologist; but it was practically pronounced to be without the scientific pale whenever it touched on that portion of the archæology of the globe which comprehends the history of the race of human beings to which we ourselves belong. A delusive hope was indeed raised by the publication in the first volume of the Transactions of the Association, of one memoir on the contributions afforded by physical and philological researches to the history of the human species,—but the ethnologist was doomed to disappointment. During several annual meetings, elaborate and valuable memoirs, prepared on various questions relating to this important branch of knowledge, and to the primeval population of

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the British Isles, were returned to their authors without being read. This pregnant fact has excited little notice hitherto ; but when the scientific history of the first half of the nineteenth century shall come to be reviewed by those who succeed us, and reap the fruits of such advancement as we now aim at, it will not be overlooked as an evidence of the exoteric character of much of the overestimated science of the age. Through the persevering zeal of a few resolute men of distinguished ability, ethnology was at length afforded a partial footing among the recognised sciences, and at the meeting of the Association to be held at Ipswich in 1851, it will for the first time take its place as a distinct section of British Science.

It has fared otherwise with Archæology. Rejected in its first appeal for a place among the sister sciences, its promoters felt themselves under no necessity to court a share in popular favour which they could readily command ; and we have accordingly its annual congresses altogether apart from those of the associated sciences. Archæology, however, has suffered from the isolation ; while it cannot but be sooner or later felt to be an inconsistency at once anomalous and pregnant with evil, which recognises as a legitimate branch of British science, the study of the human species, by means both of physiological and philological investigation : but altogether excludes the equally direct evidence which Archæology supplies. It rests, however, with the archæologist to assert for his own study its just place among the essential elements of scientific induction, and to show that it not only furnishes valuable auxiliary truth in aid of physiological and philological comparisons, but that it adds

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distinct psychological indices by no other means attainable, and yields the most trustworthy, if not the sole evidence in relation to extinct branches of the human family, the history of which possesses a peculiar national and personal interest for us.

Meanwhile the close relations which subsist between the researches of the ethnologist and the archæologist, and the perfect unity of their aims, have been recognised by Nilsson, Eschricht, and other distinguished men in various countries ; and while the two sciences have advanced together, in harmony and with mutual advantage, Scandinavian archæologists have given an impetus to the study of Primitive Antiquities, which has already done much to establish its value as the indispensable basis of all written history. The facilities afforded to the Scandinavian archæologist by the purity of his primitive remains, and the freedom of his ethnographic chronicles from those violent intercalations of foreign elements which render both the ethnology and the historical antiquities of Central Europe so complicated and difficult of solution, peculiarly fitted him for originating a comprehensive yet well-defined system. The comparatively recent close of the Scandinavian primitive periods has preserved in a more complete form those evidences by which we recover the knowledge of the first rude colonists of Europe, whose records are distorted and nearly effaced within the wide pale of Roman sway. The isolation, moreover, of these northern kingdoms preserved them from being the mere highway of the first Asiatic nomades. Whatever traces of early wanderers they retain are well defined, so that to them we may look for clear and satisfactory evidence in illustra-

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tion of one portion at least of the primal north-western tide of migration from which the origin of all European history dates. It chanced, however, from various accidental causes, that the revival of archaeological research in Britain, influenced by canons directly supplied from Scandinavian sources, has a tendency to authenticate some of the most favourite errors of older British antiquaries. Based, as nearly all antiquarian pursuits in this country have heretofore been, on classical learning, it has been accepted as an almost indisputable truth, that, with the exception of the mysteriously learned Druid priests, the Britons prior to the Roman Period were mere painted savages. Hence, while the artless relics of our primeval Stone Period were generally assigned to native workmanship, whatever evinced any remarkable traces of skill distinct from the well-defined Roman art, was assumed of necessity to have a foreign origin, and was usually ascribed to the Danes. The invariable adoption of the latter term in preference to that of Norwegians or Norsemen, shows how completely Scottish and Irish antiquaries have abandoned themselves to the influence of English literature, even where the appropriation of its dogmas was opposed to well-known historical facts. The name of Dane has in fact for centuries been one of those convenient words which so often take the place of ideas, and save the trouble and inconvenience of reasoning. Yet this theory of a Danish origin for nearly all native arts, though adopted without investigation, and fostered in defiance of evidence, has long ceased to be a mere popular error. It pervades the Scottish and English Archæologiæ, and the great majority of works on every department of British

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antiquities, and has till recently proved a perpetual stumblingblock to the Irish antiquary. It is, moreover, a cumulative error: Certain Scottish relics, for example, found in Argyleshire, as well as others in the Isle of Man, being assumed in the *Archæologia Scotica* to be Scandinavian,¹ an able writer in the *Transactions of the Cambridge Camden Society*, taking these assumptions as indisputable facts, employs them in proving that other equally undoubted native works of art are also Scandinavian.² So, too, a writer in the *Archæologia Scotica*, ascribing a similar origin to the monolithic structures of the Orkney and Shetland Islands,³ is quoted by Danish antiquaries⁴ as referring to an established truth, and as proving, accordingly, that similar structures in the Hébrides are also the work of the Northmen! Pennant, Chalmers, Barry, Macculloch, Scott, Hibbert, and a host of other writers, might be quoted to show how this theory, like a snow-ball, gathers as it rolls, taking up indiscriminately whatever chances to lie in its erratic course. Even the poets have lent their aid to propagate the same prevalent error. Cowper, for example, — no uneducated or superficial writer, — thus strangely postdates Britain's birthtime:—

“Now borne upon the wings of truth sublime,
Review thy dim original and prime,
This island, spot of unreclaimed rude earth,
The cradle that received thee at thy birth,
Was rocked by many a rough Norwegian blast,
And Danish howlings scared thee as they past.”⁵

¹ *Archæol. Scot.* vol. ii. p. 506; vol. iv. p. 119.

² *Trans. Camb. Camden Soc.* vol. i. pp. 76, 91, 176.

³ *Archæol. Scot.* vol. iii. p. 103.

⁴ *Report by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries*, Copenhagen, 1836, p. 61.

⁵ “Expostulation.”

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Similar examples of the influence of this predominant theory might be multiplied from the most diverse sources; nor are even the recently established archæological periodicals free from it. It is obvious, therefore, that such opinions must be sifted to the utmost, and either established or got rid of before any efficient progress can be made in British Archæology. In Scotland this theory is much more comprehensive in its effects than in England, where the Anglo-Saxon element is recognised as the predominating source of later changes; and now that the character of genuine Roman antiquities is well ascertained, nearly the whole of our native relics have latterly been assigned to a Scandinavian origin. It is altogether unnecessary, I trust, to disclaim any petty spirit of national jealousy in the rigorous investigation of such theories which will be found pursued in the following pages. The error is for the most part of native growth; but whencesoever it be derived, truth is the end which the archæologist has in view; and the enlightened spirit in which the researches of the Northern antiquaries have already been pursued, is the best guarantee that they will not be less ready to coöperate in overturning error than in establishing truth. It is not a mere question between Northman or Dane and Celt or Saxon. It involves the entire chronology of the prehistoric British periods, and so long as it remains unsettled any consistent arrangement of our archæological data into a historical sequence is impossible.

The following work, embracing within its plan such a comprehensive scheme of Scottish Archæology as has not been hitherto attempted, has been undertaken under the conviction that this science is the key to great truths

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which have yet to be reached ; and that its importance will hereafter be recognised in a way little dreamt of by those students of kindred sciences, who, while busied in investigating the traces of older but inferior orders of being, can discern only the objects of an aimless curiosity in relics pertaining to the human species. That such, however, should still be the case, is far more the fault of the antiquary than of the student of other sciences. It is his misfortune that his most recondite pursuits are peculiarly exposed to the laborious idling of the mere dabblers in science, so that they alternately assume to the uninterested observer the aspect of frivolous pastime and of solemn trifling. I cannot but think that a direct union with the associated sciences, and an incorporation especially with the kindred researches of the ethnologist, while it might, perchance, give some of its present admirers a distaste for the severer and more restricted study, would largely contribute to its real advancement, and free its truly zealous students from many popular trammels which at present cumber its progress. Meanwhile the archæologist may derive some hope from the remembrance that astronomy was once astrology ; that chemistry was long mere alchemy ; that geology has only in our own day ceased to be a branch of unreasoning antiquarianism ; and that ethnology has scarcely yet passed the jealously guarded porch, as the youngest of all the recognised band of sister sciences.

In nothing is the want of the intelligent coöperation of the kindred sciences which bear on the study of antiquities more apparent than in the present state of our public collections. The British Museum contains the elements of a collection which, if arranged ethnographi-