

ACCOUNT

OF THE

DISCOVERY OF AN ANCIENT TOMB AT FETTERESSO, IN KINCARDINESHIRE, IN JANUARY 1822.

*Communicated in a Letter to one of the Secretaries of the Society
from Professor Stuart of Aberdeen.*

IN the beginning of January last, while some labourers were digging gravel for the high roads in a small tumulus or hillock near Fetteresso, the seat of R. W. Duff, Esquire, they found a stone coffin or kistvaen about six feet below the surface, in which were the remains of a human body. The length of the grave was about four feet, and breadth somewhat more than two; the depth twenty inches. The sides and ends consisted of single stones set on edge, and had no appearance of being hewn or dressed. The top or cover was also of one stone (whin) of about seven feet long, four broad, and six inches in thickness. The bottom of the grave was plentifully strewed with round sea pebbles from the neighbouring beach. Above this appeared some

vegetable substance in which the body had been imbedded, and over that, covering the whole, a most singular sort of net-work beautifully executed, but which, along with all the other contents, fell into dust soon after being exposed to the air. The bones seemed tolerably entire; but, from the shortness of the grave, the legs were bent back, so that the knees almost touched the foot of the coffin. The body appeared that of a man rather below than above the ordinary stature, and the flesh of the abdomen and other parts seemed converted into that fattish substance often seen in old cemeteries. A great number of small black balls was also found surrounding the body, which were plainly vegetable, and had much the appearance of acorns. At the top of the coffin, there seemed to have been placed a fresh sod or turf, on which the head was supposed to have rested, and still retained such an impression, though no part of the skull, nor even any of the teeth, were to be found. A considerable quantity of hair was scattered among the other substances, at least in part human, and four or five inches long, of an auburn colour; so that the whole looked and felt very much like a bird's nest. Over the breast were also seen the remains of a small box of an oval shape, about four or five inches long, apparently of wood elegantly carved, which may be supposed to have contained the heart or other viscera.

Soon after the discovery, Mr Duff, proprietor of the grounds, sent me an account of it, along with specimens of the different substances found in the grave; but they were all so much broken and reduced to powder, that scarcely any one of them could be distinguished from another, excepting the hair and what appeared to be acorns. From the account that I received, and the place where the grave was found, I immediately remembered a con-

versation I had held several years before with Mr Pinkerton, the well known author, about the death of Malcom the First, King of Scotland, as given by Thomas Innes in his Critical Essay on the ancient inhabitants of this country; and in which I with some difficulty convinced him, by the inspection of old maps and otherwise, that the name Fodresach mentioned by Innes was certainly Fetteresso, although this place be not noticed as the scene of Malcom's death by any of our other historians. Father Innes' authority, however, appears very unexceptionable, especially when we consider the absurdities and contradictions into which almost all our writers have been betrayed concerning the early periods of our history. The authority referred to by Mr Innes is one of five or six old Pictish chronicles discovered by him among the Colbertine MSS. in the French King's Library, and published as an appendix to his Critical Essay, London, 1727, vol. 2d, p. 787. The words are these: "*Et occiderunt viri na moerne Malcolaim in Fodresach in Claideom.*" No place has yet been discovered answering to the latter word.

Other writers tell us that Malcom was killed in Moray; and they all agree that his body was carried to Iona for interment, which is said to have been the common burial place of our Kings until the reign of Malcom the Third. I acknowledge, however, that I have always entertained some doubts on this subject; not thinking it at all probable that, after the extension of the Scottish Dalriad kingdom over the possessions of the Picts, it would have been found very convenient to remove the bodies of all our kings, during so long a period, to a very remote island with which the Scots could then have little intercourse,—especially as many of their Kings were called usurpers, and had been cut off by a violent death in these northern parts. Or, may it not be supposed,

that, on some occasions, instead of carrying the bodies to such a distance, they may have been satisfied with depositing the head or heart of the deceased king in that consecrated spot, as Robert Bruce ordered his heart to be carried to the Holy Land? If this can be imagined in the present case, it will very well account for neither the skull nor any of the teeth being discovered in this grave, though these parts are by far the most indestructible of the whole human body. Whatever may have been the case, there is at least a great degree of probability, from the situation and name of the place, and the variety of splendid ornaments surrounding the body, which really appeared wonderful for that early age, that this was indeed the place of interment of King Malcolm I. There have indeed formerly been found several ancient graves in this vicinity, some of them containing urns, though none of them in any respect resembling the one now described; but this is not at all to be wondered at, as the great Grampian Battle with the Romans is supposed to have been fought hard by, and another with the Danes, said to have happened near the same place.