

I.

DESCRIPTION OF AN ANCIENT TOMB DISCOVERED NEAR STONEHAVEN.

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The following curious discovery occurred some years since ; the precise date is uncertain, but the accompanying notes were made at the time.

When engaged in digging materials for repairing a road in a gently rising eminence, Terrachie, near Stonehaven, the labourers, on the 4th of February, came on an ancient grave. On the top of this eminence there was, some time ago, a cairn of stones, on the removal of which some sepulchral urns are said to have been found. The excavation was commenced at the north-east side, and continued horizontally towards the centre, on approaching which the gravel appeared to be in a state different from the general mass, yielding more easily to the spade, in fact to have had its original strata previously disturbed. On reaching the centre

the workmen were impeded by several large stones; and when these were removed, 4 feet 6 inches below the surface of the ground, the top of a coffin appeared, a whinstone slab 7 feet long and 4 broad. The sides and ends were found to be composed of four stones of the same kind as the lid, length 4 feet 1 inch, breadth 2 feet, depth 20 inches.

From observations made at the first opening on the 4th, and a subsequent one on the 11th, the following account is given:—

The whole of the bottom was covered with pebbles, evidently from the sea-beach, about a mile distant. Along the top, for about 11 inches above the pebbles, was a carpet curiously wrought in hair, in the manner of a modern hearth-rug; above this a bolster, as it were of turf, and again on this a pillow formed of some vegetable substance like hops when taken from the original package. On this pillow had been laid the head of the departed, and on it lay a large quantity of beautiful auburn hair, some of it more than 5 inches long. No part of the skull remained in its proper form—it had formed into reddish dust; but the front of it, even at the second examination, when the vegetable substance was found to be much decayed, was distinctly seen imbedded in it. Though in a very far advanced state of decay, enough of the bones remained to shew that they were those of a full-grown person, and from their relative position, that he was about the middle stature. The body had been laid on its right side, and the bones of the knees were found near the foot of the coffin, making it evident that the legs had been folded back. The whole substance of the body had passed into that fatty matter (usually styled adipocere) found in the cemeteries of Paris and many other places. Near the breast of the corpse was a box resembling a section of a cocoa-nut shell, having an oval top 6 inches by 3, of a very thin piece of wood finely smoothed, and sewed to it very neatly, as appeared from the marks of the stitches. Along the lower end of the coffin there were found not fewer than 150 small black balls, which, on examination, proved to be vegetable, and were most probably acorns. But no part of the contents of the tomb attracted so much attention at the first opening of it, as a robe of net-work in which the whole body had been swathed. It must have been wrought with a high degree of art, shewing various figures, particularly an oval one (from its position, most likely the covering of the face of the corpse), which had all the elegance of a compartment in a modern shawl or lace veil. The materials of which this network was composed cannot be discovered, neither can it be ascertained of what substance the box was formed, nor what were its contents. The matter in it, when first seen, had a reddish-yellow hue, and was unctuous to the touch; but on being removed, it soon became hard and earthlike.