I.

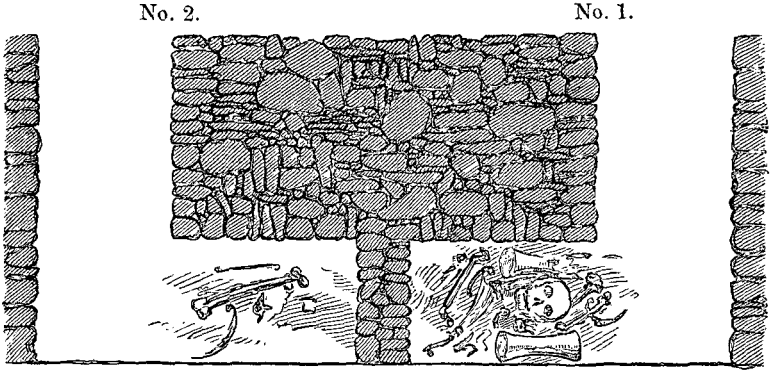
ON ONE OF THE SIMPLE FORMS OF BURIAL IN USE AMONG THE ANCIENT EGYPTIANS, OBSERVED IN A RECENT EXCAVATION AT GEEZEH. By A. HENRY RHIND, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

The splendour and costly care which characterized the funeral customs of the ancient Egytians, as evinced in the case of royal, noble, or wealthy personages, which dazzle by their magnificence, and challenge continued research, from their comprehensive design, naturally detract from the interest with which simple forms of burial, calculated for those in humble life, would otherwise be regarded. The massive grandeur of a pyramid, the solid structure of a mausoleum reared over deeply sunk shafts and chambers, the laborious display of sepulchral halls and corridors excavated in the sides of mountains, and covered with brilliantly-coloured sculptures; even pits, where hundreds of mummies found a common tomb, entirely overshadow the plainer, and probably more primitive ceremonial exhibited in the employment of less refined and artificial usages. Again, the elaborate treatment of the body, embalmed, frequently deposited in decorated coffins and chiselled sarcophagi, adorned with rich ornaments, and surrounded by effigies of the deities and other accessories—contrasts advantageously with the unattractive simplicity of a meagre interment. But yet the characteristic peculiarities of graves of this latter type are worthy of being noted; and with regard to two which, among other excavations near the Great Pyramid of Geezeh, I have recently opened, it may not be inappropriate to describe them to this Society, from certain remarkable resemblances to primeval remains in our own as well as other countries, which, it will be seen, that they present.

The accompanying section (see woodcut) will show at a glance their size, arrangement, and relative position. In dimensions, shape, and details, they were perfectly similar; therefore, the short statement of facts which I now give relating to No. 1 will in all respects apply to both, except with regard to the deposit.

At the bottom of a shaft of rude rubble work, 2 feet 10 inches square, and 6 feet 4 inches deep, a small chamber, 3 feet 8 inches long, 2 feet 10 inches broad, and 2 feet 6 inches high, of similar construction, and spanned by large stones, projected on one side. Within this cell the interment had been effected; and in it I found a greatly decayed skull near the centre, surrounded by, or rather in the midst of many of the other bones of the frame, and having on either side a

curious vase, if that term may be applied, of common baked clay. Of one of these objects, little more than one-half remained; the other is nearly perfect,



Graves excavated at Jeezeh. March 1856.

and presents the appearance of a cylinder compressed towards the middle, precisely like a modern dice-box, and open at the ends. Its height is about 10 inches, and greatest diameter 4 inches. (See Woodcut No. 1.)

These vessels, which are perfectly plain and unornamented, contained only the sand with which, intermixed with stones, the whole tomb was filled; and they were discovered in a recumbent position. For what purpose, and with what object they accompanied the body, it might probably be vain to conjecture; and it may or may not have any bearing upon the question, that nearly similar *shapes* occur not unfrequently in the sculptures, chiefly, it would seem, as tables or stands in connection with offerings to the Gods.[1] This resemblance which suggested itself to the practised eye of Sir Gardner Wilkinson, was first pointed out to me by him.

Besides these, and a fragment of a still coarser vase near the bottom of the shaft, retaining traces of burnt matter, there was no other deposit with the body; while in the corresponding grave, No. 2, nothing whatever was met with, even the bones themselves having almost entirely disappeared. This tomb formed, so to say, part of the same structure as the former. The sides of their shafts were parallel, and the chamber of the one was built so as to meet the chamber of the other, from which it was separated only by the thickness of the wall, which served as a partition between them.

[1] Examples may be referred to in Rosellini's Monumenti, vol. iii.. Plates iv. and xxxi.

That these graves are referable to a very remote period cannot, I think, be doubted, although, from the simplicity of their design, they furnish none of those more exact data from which it is usual to determine the relative epochs of Egyptian remains. Situated as they are, not many hundred yards from the Great Pyramid, in the centre of a necropolis of the Old Monarchy, and surrounded on all sides by monuments, whose origin is carried down to ages startlingly removed back into the past, the presumption is strong in favour of their own high antiquity, without straining the not perhaps very conclusive evidence derivable from their inartistic construction, and the fact that the bodies which they contained had not been subjected to any preservative process. But although for them, judged of by themselves alone, a date cannot be assigned even as vaguely approximative as those which prevail in the earlier chronology of the Nile Valley, this need hardly affect the most curious feature which they exhibit; for they still furnish one of those remarkable coincidences of primitive customs which, without leaping to wild deductions, archæologists are now accustomed to observe among races scattered over every quarter of the globe, from the Sandwich Islands to Davis Straits, from Terra-del-Fuego to Japan. In these graves, it will be seen, the bodies when interred must have been huddled up, or, not improbably, dismembered; and just as the stone knife in use among the ancient Exyptians in the art of embalming, finds its analogues throughout the world, and was perhaps a remnant of the barbarism from which they also had to emerge, so in this singular mode of burial we perceive a marked similarity, if not an identity, with a practice which prevailed among the primeval aborigines of Western Europe, which is followed at the present day by savage South American tribes, and which perhaps can be traced as having existed at one time or other over the whole earth.