

II.

NOTICE OF EXCAVATIONS IN THE CHAMBERED MOUND OF MAES-HOWE, IN ORKNEY, AND OF THE RUNIC INSCRIPTIONS ON THE WALLS OF ITS CENTRAL CHAMBER. By JOHN STUART, Esq., Sec. S.A. Scot. (PLATES XVI., XVII., XVIII.)

To one who visits the Orkney Islands for the first time, nothing perhaps is more striking than the many vestiges of a primitive and abundant population which are yet to be seen. These remains consist

of innumerable cairns and mounds which cover the remains of the dead, and not dissimilar structures which formed the abodes of the living. The ruins of the round towers (the burghs or brochs of popular speech) also occur very frequently, and are sufficient to astonish by their number, their size, and importance, while they serve to interest and puzzle from the intricacy of their arrangements.

But the most impressive remains of early days are accumulated on the two necks of land which meet so as to divide the loch of Stennis into two sheets of water—that of Stennis on the south, and that of Harray on the north.

In this locality, which has been aptly styled the Salisbury Plain of Scotland, are still to be seen the great Stone Circles of Stennis, with other circles and pillars, and groups of grass-covered mounds of various sizes and shapes.

It would appear that this collection of stone monuments had been equally striking to the Norsemen, who, in the end of the ninth and beginning of the tenth centuries overran the Orkney Islands, and from whom the locality received the name, which it has ever since retained, of the Stone-nes or naze.

I do not at present mean to go into any general description of the circles and surrounding mounds. My present design is to direct the attention of the Society to the results of an examination of one of the mounds in the neighbourhood of Stennis, known as Maeshowe, executed by Mr Farrer. This remarkable object had long been regarded with interest from its locality and its great size, and frequent wishes for its exploration have been expressed. With the sanction and encouragement of Mr Balfour of Balfour and Trenabie, on whose property the "howe" stands, Mr Farrer made all the requisite arrangements for a thorough examination in July 1861; and besides other friends in the district, he requested the presence of Colonel Forbes Leslie, Mr James Hay Chalmers, Mr Joseph Robertson, and myself, as Fellows of the Society. Mr Farrer has been so fortunate as to associate with him in most of his excavations of Orkney antiquities Mr George Petrie of Kirkwall, whose zeal and skill in antiquarian research are not new to the members of this Society; and Mr Petrie was of course present on this occasion.

The great barrow of Maeshowe lies between the Stromness road and the shore of the loch of Stennis, being perhaps a mile to the east of the ruined circle of Stennis, and about three miles from the sea. Its appearance and position will be understood from the "General View of Maeshowe" (Plate XVI.); the Interior View of the Chamber (Plate XVII.); and the Ground Plan (Plate XVIII.), give a good idea of the arrangements of the structure. It is said by Mr Petrie to measure 92 feet in diameter, 36 feet in height, and about 300 feet in circumference. It tapers much to the top. It is surrounded by a trench 40 feet wide, and averaging in depth from 4 to 8 feet. The workmen first came upon the passage on the west side of the barrow, but at Mr Farrer's suggestion the excavation was pushed from the centre of the mound, working from the top. Here there was a great depression, of which the cause soon appeared. After a time the covering slabs of the chamber were reached; but at one place it appeared to have been forced, or to have given way at some previous time when the superincumbent stones and earth had been precipitated into the area below. It was the work of some days to remove the rubbish from the chamber; and it is not easy to imagine the eagerness of the onlookers to ascertain the result, as bit by bit of the interior was laid bare. This interest was greatly enhanced by a discovery made by Mr Robertson, who, before the workmen had reached the bottom, and while standing on the rubbish at a height which brought his eye in a line with one of the slabs towards the top of the chamber, was able to discover an inscription in runes. The excitement was heightened as slab after slab was laid bare, and fresh inscriptions in the same character were discovered, and our impatience at the necessarily slow operations of the workmen was aggravated.

Mr Farrer has taken care that the results of that memorable digging shall be preserved for inquirers in all time hereafter. From these it appeared that Maeshowe contained a central chamber about 15 feet square on the level of the floor, and 13 feet in height to the top of the present walls. This chamber has three cells, one on each of the north, south, and east sides, entering from it by small doors in the wall at a height of about 3 feet from the floor. The doors are about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet square. The cell on the north measures 5 feet 9 inches by 4 feet 6 inches; that on the east measures 5 feet 6 inches by 4 feet 6 inches;

while that on the west measures 7 feet by 4 feet 6 inches. Their height is about 3 feet. Two of the cells have raised flags for floors. The roofs, floors, and back walls of the cells are each formed by a single slab of stone, and stones apparently fitted to close up the doorways entering into the cells were found on the floor of the central apartment. The slabs which had originally formed part of the dome, at the point where it was now open, were not found amid the rubbish on the floor, so that the entrance had probably been made by raising up those slabs, which may have been thrown on the side of the mound, and afterwards removed, and used for other purposes.¹ In each angle of the central chamber stands a large buttress, doubtless intended to strengthen the walls, and resist the great vertical pressure. The buttresses vary in dimensions, but on an average they are about 3 feet square at the base, and from 9 to 10 feet high. One side of each buttress is formed by a single long slab, the other sides of square stones. The walls and roof of the chamber are formed of large stones, which generally extend the whole length of the side, and there is no appearance of lime or mortar having been used. On the west side of the chamber is a doorway giving access to a passage which leads to the outside of the mound, and measures in length from the chamber to its extremity nearly 54 feet. At its mouth on the west side the passage measured 2 feet 4 inches in width, and probably about as much in height, but the covering stones had here fallen in for about $22\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Near its commencement, and somewhat within two projecting slabs which narrow the passage at B, there is a triangular recess in the wall, about 2 feet deep, and $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet in height and width; while opposite to it, in the passage, is a stone of corresponding shape and size, which was probably used to block up the access, and then pushed back into the recess when entrance to the chamber was required. On the edge of one of the covering stones of the passage, at this point where it was opened up, a figure resembling a single rune was noticed. It is figure 29 on the 13th plate of Mr Farrer's book. From this recess to the chamber, the sides, floor, and roof of the passage are formed by immense slabs of flagstone, one of them measuring about 18 feet in

¹ This is said from my recollection and Mr Gibb's notes. But Mr Farrer notes that some of the slabs forming the roof *were* found among the debris, and in some cases they were broken.

length. After the recess the passage increases in dimensions to $3\frac{1}{4}$ feet in width, and 4 feet 4 inches in height, and continues so for 26 feet, when it is again narrowed by two upright stone slabs to 2 feet 5 inches. These slabs are each 2 feet 4 inches broad, and immediately beyond them the passage extends 2 feet 10 inches, and then opens into the central chamber, where it measures 3 feet 4 inches in width by 4 feet 8 inches in height.

It was thus plain that Maeshowe was a great chambered barrow, and that it had been constructed by first building on the surface of the ground the chambers and gallery, then covering the structure with a layer of small stones, and finally heaping over this a layer of earth from the adjacent surface, and from the trench by which the barrow is surrounded.

Chambered tombs have been found in many countries,—that is, a chamber, or a series of chambers, in the centre of mounds of earth or of cairns of stones, approached by long passages. In Denmark structures of this sort are called giants' graves; they are found throughout the north of Europe; they occur frequently in Brittany; and very remarkable examples have been found in some of the Channel Islands. But all the chambers now referred to are formed by the imposition of covering flags on walls also formed of flags, as in the simple cromlechs, without any appearance of the horizontal arch which is a distinguishing feature of the central chamber at Maeshowe. Some rare examples of chambered tumuli, having traces of the horizontal arch, have been found in England, as at Uleybury in Gloucestershire, and at Stoney-Littleton in Somersetshire;¹ but in the great majority the mode of construction is the same as in the foreign examples.

The horizontal arch formed by the projection of one stone beyond the other till the converging walls are spanned by a single flag at the top, is found in the underground chambers in every part of the north of Scotland, as well as in the chambered cairns and "brochs." It is also the distinguishing feature of early Irish remains of a similar character, the cloghauns, the underground chambers in raths and other places, and in the chambered cairns at Newgrange and Dowth on the banks of the Boyne.

¹ Arch. Journal, vol. ii. p. 326; Archæologia, vol. xix. p. 43.

I paid a visit to Newgrange shortly after my eye had been familiarised with the arrangement of Maeshowe, and the likeness between the two structures was so remarkable as to leave no room for doubting that the same idea had suggested both.

In each there was a long narrow gallery, issuing in a central domed chamber, from which three lateral crypts branched off, although the structure of Newgrange is much ruder and less developed than the other. This, however, may partly be accounted for by the difference of material at Maeshowe; the builders got abundance of slabs in the neighbourhood, split up in such regular forms that the work has the appearance of ashlar, without being touched by a tool; while at Newgrange the builders had principally to deal with large shapeless pillars and small boulders. Here the gallery leading from the outside to the central chamber, and which measures 63 feet in length, is formed of large upright stones, covered with flags of immense size. The central chamber is formed by a series of upright pillars partially sunk into the ground, on which the converging walls of the dome are supported, and the whole covered with enormous quantities of small boulders exactly on the principle of the chambers in Picts' houses. The top of the dome is 19 feet 6 inches from the floor. From the entrance to the inside wall of the chamber opposite measures 18 feet, and between the extremities of the crypts on the right and left the distance is 22 feet. The chamber itself is of an irregular shape, not above 8 feet in diameter in any direction.¹

The chamber at Maeshowe was about 15 feet square at bottom, and the top of the dome, when complete, was probably about 20 feet from the floor. If we include the cells, the structure measured about 28 feet across, and nearly 20 feet in the opposite direction. In each of the recesses at Newgrange is an oval stone, slightly hollowed, which may have been used for the same purpose as the raised slabs on the floors of the cells at Maeshowe. It seems probable that in both cases the remains of the dead in some urn or cist were placed here.

The cairn at Newgrange was protected by a circle of great standing stones, which surrounds it at some distance from its external limits, as the ditch does at Maeshowe; and if the cairn of stones were removed, it

¹ See measurements in *Archæologia*, vol. ii. p. 254.

would leave a structure, consisting of a narrow alley of standing stones, leading to an irregular circle, with three offshoots of similar pillars, which may suggest some points of analogy between it and groups of pillars not under cairns, such as Callernish.

When Newgrange was examined in the seventeenth century, it was found to be much in the same state as it now is. We are told that underfoot there was nothing but loose stones of every size in confusion, and among them a great many bones of beasts and some pieces of deer's horns; and with the exception of a quantity of bones and teeth of the horse, and a small fragment of a human skull of unusual thickness, which were found in the debris in the chambers, no relics were discovered at Maeshowe. There is reason to believe, however, that in both cases there had been early visitors of these mounds, who had left the chambers in confusion after having rifled them of everything of value which they contained.

The rifling of tombs was carried on to a great extent in the middle ages; and the temptation to it was great, from the practice which long prevailed of burying, with the departed, jewels and ornaments of great value.

One of the laws of the Visigoths, entitled "*De Violatoribus Sepulchrorum*,"¹ provides special punishment for those who violated the sepulchres of the dead. "*Si quis sepulchri violator extiterit aut mortuum expoliaverit et si aut ornamenta aut vestimenta abstulerit, si liber hoc fecerit, libram auri coactus heredibus mortui et quæ abstulit reddat. Quod si heredes non fuerint fisco nostro cogatur inferre et præterea centum flagella suscipiat. Servus vero, si hoc scelus admiserit, ducenta flagella suscipiat, et insuper flammis ardentibus exuratur: nichilominus redditus cunctis quæ ausus est abstulisse.*" The practice, however, was sanctioned to a limited extent by Theodoric the Goth, who allowed articles of the precious metals to be abstracted from tombs, but nothing else. He justified the practice by an argument on which the law of treasure-trove was subsequently founded, "*Aurum enim sepulcris juste detrahitur, ubi dominus non habetur; immo culpæ genus est inutiliter abditis relinquere mortuorum, unde se vita potest sustentare viventium.*"

¹ *Corpus Juris Germanici*, by Walter. Tom. i. p. 625.

Non est enim cupiditas eripere quæ nullus se dominus ingemiscat amisisse.”—Cassiodor, var. iv. 34, in “Cities and Cemeteries of Etruria,” by Dennis, vol. i. p. lxxxv. In later times the examination of tombs was occasionally carried out under royal license. Thus on the patent roll of the seventeenth year of Edward II. a document occurs,¹ in which the privilege is granted to Robert Beaupel of examining six barrows and some other places in Devonshire.

We know from the remains which have been found in Scandinavian tombs, and from the historians of that people, that the Northmen were accustomed to bury valuables with the remains of the dead. On this subject, we are told by Olaus Wormius, in his work on Danish Monuments, p. 45, “Tumulis vero suis, non solum cadavera aut cineres inferebant veteres, sed arma, hastas, equos, aurum, argentum aliaque defunctis charissima κειμηλια.”

That the Danes ransacked Newgrange and the other tombs of the kings of Tara in the year 861, we are assured on the authority of the Irish annalists (*Annals of Four Masters*, by O'Donovan, pp. 497-8), and we shall see that Maeshowe suffered from a like visitation. Whether a gold coin of Valentinian, and another of Theodosius, found on the outside of Newgrange, or the two ancient gold torques, a golden chain, and two rings, found in digging a little to the west of its entrance, ever formed part of the treasure which it contained, we cannot now say, any more than whether the silver ornaments found near the bay of Skail, and now in our Museum, formed part of that great treasure said to have been carried off from Maeshowe.²

The word “houe,” which is used in some parts of Orkney to describe any knoll or eminence, natural or artificial, seems in others to be very much confined to the latter. The Rev. J. C. Atkinson, writing from Danby in Yorkshire, in the “Gentleman's Magazine” for December

¹ Printed in Sir H. Ellis' “Letters of Eminent Literary Men,” for the Camden Society. Lond. 1843. Page 32.

² Dr Charlton has collected some interesting notices from the Sagas of the custom of the northern people to break into sepulchral tumuli in search of treasure; Arch. Æliana, part xix. Jan. 1863, pp. 138-145. Many enactments against the violation of sepulchres occur in the Penitential of Archbishop Theodore. See “Ancient Laws and Institutes of England,” by Thorpe, vol. ii. p. 28.

1861, says that "here, in what was almost literally the seat of a Scandinavian colony, all the grave mounds are termed 'houes.'" The country around Whitby abounds in moors covered with tumuli, which are also called "houes;" and according to the historian of Whitby,¹ most of the varieties of them are to be regarded as ancient repositories of the dead. He adds that a number of the most conspicuous houes are distinguished by particular names. Many of those names are derived from their colour, as Swarhoue, Greenhoue, Brownhoue, and Blackhoue, corrupted into Blakey; some of them from their form, as Flathoue, Basinhoue; some from substances near them, as Brackenhoue, from the ferns near it; some from the names of men, as Fisterhoue, Walpelhoue, Lilhoue, Robhoue. Many are conical, but flattened at the top, which is generally the case with those composed of stone; a still greater number are of the basin or crater form, having a deep hollow in the centre of the top. Some of both these forms have a circle of large stones set round their base; some have a double trench; some, in lieu of a circle, are surrounded by a trench; and some have both a trench and a circle.²

The meaning of the word "maes" prefixed to the "houe" which I am now describing, seems to be very doubtful. Professor Munch did not pretend to do more than guess at it, so we may safely believe that the word has no obvious sense in the northern languages. He suggested that it might have been derived from Meitis (pronounced almost like Meiss)—not as in Mr Farrer's work, p. 23, where this word is misprinted "Meiris"—which was the name of a fabulous sea-king, and was afterwards used to denominate any mighty king or warrior. Principal Barclay believes (in his interpretation of one of the inscriptions) that the chambers were erected by a lady, and that "Maeshowe" means "Maiden's Mound."

I may remark, in passing, that Maeshowe is believed to have been tenanted by a goblin inhabitant of great strength, popularly known as the Hogboy (perhaps corrupted, as Mr Farrer suggests, from Haugbuie, which in Norse means "The Ghost of the Tomb"); and that both Professor Philips and Mr Bateman, in describing sepulchral mounds in

¹ Young's History of Whitby, vol. ii. p. 658.

² Ibid. vol. ii. p. 657.

Yorkshire and Derbyshire, inform us that there also some of these houses are reputed to be the abode of an unearthly or supernatural being.¹

The northern scholars who have written on Maeshowe say nothing to lead us to believe that it was the work of their countrymen, but rather the reverse. Mr Worsaae is careful to disclaim any northern origin for the circles of stones, as well as the underground chambers and the burghs, in the latter of which we find the same rude arch which occurs in the central chamber of Maeshowe. All these structures he assigns to the old Celtic inhabitants. Thus, "Of these older inhabitants memorials still exist in different kinds of antiquities of stone and bronze that are dug out of the earth, as well as in numerous ruins of castles, or Pictish towers, originally built of flagstones laid together without any cement of loam or mortar. There are also cairns and stone circles, the most prominent among which are the 'Stones of Stennis,' on each side of Brogar Bridge, in Orkney. They are, like Stonehenge and Abury circle in England, surrounded with ditches and ramparts of earth, and, after Stonehenge, must be regarded as amongst the largest stone circles in the British Islands."²

We are also assured by the Royal Society of Northern Antiquaries of Copenhagen, that "nothing has as yet been observed approaching to the form of an arch in the stone sepulchres of the north."³

The idea which suggested the arrangement of the chambered tomb was only a modification of that which governed the builders of the "Picts' Houses." One large central chamber, surrounded by a group of smaller ones, and approached by a long, narrow passage, is the description applicable to this latter class of buildings, exemplified by those at Quanterness and Papa Westray in Orkney, and Kettleburn in Caithness.

In all these the passage to the internal chambers is so confined as to imply a crawling posture in one requiring access, and the communication between the chambers is equally confined. We find the same

¹ In Dr Charlton's notices from the Sagas, of the breaking into cairns by the Northmen, we find that they generally had to undergo a combat with a goblin tenant of the tomb, watching over the treasure which it contained. Arch. Æl. Jan. 1863, pp. 140-145.

² The Danes and Northmen, p. 220.

³ Guide to Northern Archæology, p. 78.

narrowness of passages in subterranean chambers in Ireland. Dr Wilde¹ has described some underground chambers at Clady in Meath, which correspond very closely to those at Cairn Conan in Angus, described in our "Proceedings" (vol. iii. p. 465; vol. iv. p. 492) by Mr Jervise and myself. At Clady two of these apartments were found about 9 feet high and as many in diameter, in the shape of a bee-hive dome, connected by a passage $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet high and 3 broad; and indications were noticed of other galleries probably leading to other chambers. Similar underground chambers in Cornwall, connected by galleries, and approached by entrances of like narrow dimensions, have been recently described in the "Gentleman's Magazine" for January 1864. We may safely conclude that these structures were not made for such men as those referred to by Joan Ben, in his Description of Orkney in 1529, where, under the head of Stennis, he says,—"*Illic in monticulo prope lacum in sepulcro inventa sunt ossa unius viri, quæ quidem conjuncta fuere et in longitudine erant 14 pedibus, ut auctor aiebat, et moneta illac inventa fuit sub capite illius mortui et ego quidem sepulcrum vidi.*"²

It is even hard to understand how they could have been used by men of ordinary stature, did we not find that such narrow entrances and passages are still in use in the bee-hive houses in the Western Islands, described by Captain Thomas,³ as they are the characteristic of the African wigwam of the present day. Speaking of graves of the stone period, Mr Kemble says,—"*The stone houses in question often have a very low entrance, which can only be entered by going down on one's knees. In this particular they bear a striking resemblance to the winter house where the Greenlander, with his family and friends, awaits the return of a milder season; and the circumstance has led to the supposition that these stone graves were built in imitation of houses, and by a race related to the present Greenlander—an idea not lightly to be rejected, and one which has been applied to Sweden with great acuteness.*"⁴

The idea of the sepulchral chambered cairn was much the same, only

¹ The Boyne and the Blackwater, p. 114.

² Barry's Orkney, Appendix, No. vii. p. 441.

³ Proceedings, vol. iii. pp. 128, 133, 136, 139.

⁴ Lecture at the opening of the Hanoverian Museum, in "*Horæ Ferales*," p. 39.

that the internal cells seem to have been fewer in number, while not unfrequently there was only one large domed apartment in the centre approached by a narrow passage, as in the striking group of cairns at Clava on Nairnside, described in our "Proceedings" (vol. iii. p. 47); and as in the chambered cairns at Yarrows in Caithness, opened by Mr Rhind, and described by him in the "Ulster Journal of Archæology," vol. ii. p. 100.

In this partial similarity of arrangement between the sepulchral and the living chambered cairns, we recognise a feature in which they agree with one class of the early Etruscan tombs, which have their internal arrangements constructed in imitation of a dwelling chamber, with furniture, like the apartment itself, cut out of the rock.¹ The principal chamber of one of these, the Regulini Galeassi Tomb, has furniture, biers or bedsteads, shields, arrows, and vessels of various sorts.² Many of these Etruscan tombs consist of five or more chambers, vaulted on the horizontal principle, in the centre of mounds of earth, which are surrounded by a circle of standing stones. The curious specimen of early Pelasgic art, called the Treasury or Tomb of Atreus, one of the kings of Mycenæ, bears a strong resemblance to the plan of some of our chambered cairns. In it is a great circular chamber, in a mound of earth, nearly 50 feet in diameter, vaulted on the principle of horizontal layers of stones projecting the one beyond the other, till one small stone closed the whole, and made the vault complete. This chamber, approached by a long gallery, has on one side of it a small crypt cut in the rock, which appears to be the true sepulchre.³ The central chamber of Maeshowe was unpaved, and although Mr Farrer, at my suggestion, made some digging into the soil, no deposit was found, nor was there any appearance of the soil having been disturbed. So that here also the lateral crypts may have been the real sepulchres.

From what has been said it seems likely that Maeshowe must be regarded as the work of a race who long preceded the coming in of the Norse population. The chambered cairn at Uleybury, described by Dr Thurnam,⁴ had, at least in some of the chambers, the horizontal arch used at Maeshowe. Many remains in these chambers attested their original

¹ Ferguson's Handbook of Architecture, p. 259.

² Ibid. p. 292.

³ Ibid. p. 258.

⁴ Arch. Journal, vol. xi. p. 326.

use as sepulchral receptacles. There was also discovered on the summit of the cairn a sepulchral cist, which no doubt was a deposit after the chambers had been disused. In this cist were found three Roman coins of the Antonines, which, considering all the circumstances, may be held to indicate the period of this secondary interment, and, in that case, to prove the still earlier date of the chambered structures below.

It has been observed that no structure similar to Maeshowe is known in Scandinavia. We are not, however, without specimens of the structures which the northern people raised over their kings about the very time when they first took possession of the Orkneys. King Gorm the Old, who, at the end of the ninth or the beginning of the tenth century, first united the numerous small kingdoms of Denmark into one connected whole, married Thyre, the daughter of a petty king of Jutland or Holstein. Over their remains were erected two enormous mounds of earth, measuring about 75 feet in height and 550 feet in circumference at the base. That of Queen Thyre was examined in 1820, when it was found to contain a chamber formed of wood, which appeared to have been forcibly entered from the top and plundered at some former time.

The wooden chamber is a circumstance which, we are told by the northern antiquaries, is a sure indication that the date of the structure is of the latest pagan period, even if we had not, as in the present instance, Runic inscriptions which of themselves fix the date.

Therefore, if we had been able to assume that Maeshowe had been the work of the Northmen, from its resemblance to similar structures in their own country, we should have been driven from such a conclusion by finding that the period for the erection of stone chambers over their kings had passed away before they set foot in Orkney.

To how much earlier a period than the ninth century we are to assign the erection of Maeshowe it would be difficult to say. We may learn, however, from Adamnan, in his *Life of Columba*, what was the practice of burying a Pict of some importance soon after the middle of the sixth century. The man in question is called by this venerable author "*Geonæ primarius cohortis*," an expression of which Dr Reeves tells us, "*The Geona cohors was probably a Pictish corps deriving its name from the district to which it belonged.*" He being baptized by Columba when in Skye, immediately afterwards died, and in the place where he died he

was buried by his companions, they raising a cairn of stones upon him, —“ eodem in loco consequenter obiit, ibidemque socii, congesto lapidum acervo sepehant.”¹

This was no doubt an extemporised funeral, but we know that the cairn was one of the recognised monuments of great men, both in regal cemeteries and on battle-fields, in pagan times in Celtic Ireland, till the establishment of the Christian religion, when all such modes of burial were abolished.² There probably was a transition period in all countries, and in such cases as this Pictish convert; and it was no doubt a difficult matter to withdraw people from the ancient mode of burial in mounds. Thus we find that one of the capitularies of Charlemagne directs the bodies of the converted Saxons not to be carried “ad tumulos paganorum,” but to the cemeteries of the Church.³

But if a cairn was a suitable monument of a Celtic chief, we are left to conjecture the greatness of him for whom Maeshowe was erected. It is like comparing the humble headstone in one of our churchyards with

¹ Vita Sancti Columbæ, auct. Adamnano, p. 63. Dublin, 1857.

² Dr Petrie's Round Towers, pp. 102-106. Dr Petrie quotes notices of pagan cemeteries from the *Dinsenchus* and other treatises contained in the Book of Ballymote. One at Rathcroghan is the place of interment of many of the kings of the Scotie or Milesian race.

“ Niam and Drucht and Dathi,
Three daughters of Rossachi;
His seven brothers—great his household,
With Ailell of fair Bregia;
These are buried in the great mound
Which is at the Oenach.”—P. 104.

“ There is not at this place
A hill at Oenach na Cruachna
Which is not the grave of a king or royal prince,
Or of a woman or warlike poet.
The host of great Meath are buried
In the middle of the lordly Brugh.”—P. 105.

At Rathcroghan, within a cathair, are still to be seen small circular mounds, which, when examined, are found to contain rude sepulchral chambers formed of stone, without cement of any kind, and containing unburned bones.—P. 106.

³ Walter's Corpus Juris Germ., tom. ii. p. 107.

some gorgeous mausoleum of a regal family, or as if we should contrast the little cells used of old for common interments in Egypt (as described to us by Mr Rhind¹) with those wondrous fabrics of the Pyramids which cover the remains of the Memphian monarchs.

Among the Celtic people of Ireland certain spots were set apart as regal cemeteries. Of these one is on the banks of the Boyne, and contains the cairn of Newgrange, and many other monuments of the kings of Tara. It would seem that Stennis had been a spot of similar consecration at some remote time for the people of Orkney, or, more generally, of the north of Scotland, although it is not easy to suggest a reason for its selection. Like all the rest of Orkney, the neighbourhood is bare and somewhat sterile; but the remains of trees which are found in the mosses of Stennis, as well as in many other parts of Orkney,² show that in ancient times it was at least partly covered with woods; while it has been supposed, from the horns, and at times the skeletons, of the deer which are found in the same mosses, that they were tenanted by the stag. But while the surface of the ground may have been very different in old times, it seems plain that the adjacent country could never have supported any great population, such as that which no doubt surrounded the "lordly burgh," with its many monuments, on the fertile banks of the Boyne.

But, as at Stennis, so the great remains on Salisbury Plain are on a bare, unfertile down, whither the builders of its great structures must have come from other districts to erect them; and the wonderful stone monuments of Carnac are set down on the remote and desolate shore of Brittany, which could never have been the permanent abode of a large population.

¹ Proceedings, vol. ii. p. 274.

² Old Stat. Account. See as to the trees and deer in mosses, New Stat. Account (Orkney), pp. 173, 175, 193, 210; and Barry's Orkney, pp. 24, 28, 29, 36, 38, and 439. Mr Petrie tells me that there are remains of ancient forests to be seen at low water in various parts of Orkney, as in Widewall Bay in South Ronaldshay, in Otterswick in Sanday, and in a bay near Trenabie in Westray. He speaks also of the discovery of great quantities, not only of deers' horns, but of the remains of skeletons. The same is the case in Sandwick Bay. In Evie and Rendall are great stretches of moss, so full of the roots and branches of trees that the people cannot work to advantage.

We are familiar with Runic inscriptions on monuments in Scandinavia. They most occur frequently on memorial stones, and generally state that the runes were carved by the person who put up the stone in memory of his deceased relative, with merely such variations as the different relationships might require. In the Isle of Man many crosses are to be found, the work of northern hands, and having inscriptions in runes. These also are mostly confined to a simple record of the names of the person who erected the monument and him who is commemorated. Thus we read on one of the crosses at Kirk Andreas, "Jualfir, son of Thurulf the Red, raised this cross after (to) Fritha his mother." In such cases as the Runic font at Bridekirk in Cumberland, the inscription is to inform us that its maker was named Richard, who "me wrought." The cross now at Alnwick Castle, but originally at Alnmouth, also relates that "Myredeh me wrought." Such inscriptions as I have now referred to are generally cut with great sharpness and precision, and were doubtless executed by persons trained to such work. We know that in the case of the Manx crosses, they were almost all executed by one person, Gaut, the son of Bjorn, of whom it is recorded on one of the Kirkmichael crosses, that he "made this and all [the crosses] in Man."

It would appear that the Norse monuments in Man, with Runic inscriptions, were erected at a late period of their occupation of that island, viz., about the middle or end of the eleventh century. It is remarkable that their occupation of Orkney should not have left a single Runic memorial stone like those to be found in their own country and in Man. Indeed, until the recent discovery of runes in the chamber at Maeshowe, there was not known to remain a record in the Runic character of any sort in Orkney.

These runes on the stones at Maeshowe are of an entirely different style of execution from those on the monuments to which I have referred. They are cut throughout in a slight style as compared with the Scandinavian or Manx memorials. The lines are frequently little deeper than a scratch, the letters are far less uniform in shape or style, although originally quite distinct, and they are obviously the work of different sculptors who used varying tools, and who, having to cut on a vertical surface, found it impossible to prevent their graving-irons from squirting into irregular lines, resembling some writings of the current hand of the

tenth and seventeenth centuries as compared with the regularly defined letters in charters of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

It is a point of some difficulty to say at what time the inscriptions on the walls of Maeshowe were cut. It seems plain that the carvers of such delicate writings must have required an amount of light which was unattainable while the structure was closed up in its original state. We can easily suppose, and it is not unreasonable to believe, that some of the inscriptions which occur on the stones forming the dome of the chamber, about 11 feet above the floor, were cut by a person standing on the rubbish which had accumulated. But the stones on which the greater number of the inscriptions are written were covered by the debris, and there can be no doubt that the writing must have been completed at a time when the chamber was clear to within 3 feet of the floor, and when access to the cells was open, as two inscriptions are found in the inside of one of these. Below this line of 3 feet from the floor no inscriptions are found, but it is to be remarked that a line of runes occurs on two stones, which appear to have been used for closing up the doors of the cells, and on such a part of them as to show that they were cut either before the stones were inserted in the doorway, or after they were torn out. No runes have been discovered on the slabs forming the long passage.

It would therefore seem that Maeshowe may have been broken into at first in such a way as to leave opportunities for the lower inscriptions being cut, and that as subsequent visits increased the ruin, and the chamber became more filled up, those on the upper slabs were cut.

There is reason to think that the chamber may have remained open for a time before some of the inscriptions were cut. The surface of the slabs which form the walls is easily acted on by the weather, and is apt to peel off, after having been covered up for ages, and some of the runes are cut on stones where flaws and cracks had previously occurred from natural decay of the building, while they sometimes avoid the fractured part of the surface, and at others are written on an abraded surface.

The inscription on the flat side of the large stone forming a buttress at the south-east corner, forming No. 11 on Mr Farrer's plate, which was in a clear neat line, was destroyed by the exposure of a few weeks, and scaled off in fragments, so that no cast of it could be got. The

drawing, however, was carefully made and collated while the surface was entire. Four large stones, used as buttresses, have their surfaces polished and their edges rounded, as if they had been subjected to the action of water before their erection in Maeshowe.

The inscriptions, as I have remarked, appear to have been the work of various hands. According to Mr Farrer, the entire number of Runic characters may be about 935, exclusive of scribbles and many doubtful marks. There are also some marks which may have been intended to represent a horse, and an otter with a fish in its mouth, also a winged dragon and a worm-knot (Farrer's Maeshowe, p. 16). The runes forming the inscription No. 11 of Mr Farrer's work, and which merely inform us that they were carved by Ofram, son of Siward, have six small crosses cut round them; and one in the centre, of much the same character as the crosses which accompany similar Runic inscriptions in St Molios' cave at Lamdash (Wilson's Prehistoric Annals, vol. ii. p. 280). A larger and deeper cross is cut below the runes on the buttress No. 10, where the inscription, although doubtful, seems to be merely a proper name. On two of the slabs (Nos. 8 and 18 of Farrer), Limrunar or bough runes occur, which, according to Munch, was used in the later times of the Runic period, in the same manner as the Irish ogum (Farrer, p. 29). Another slab, No. 5, contains the Scandinavian alphabet. Many of the inscriptions are of such a trifling character as to suggest the idea that they were executed by idlers, with much the same purpose as is shown by those individuals who, even in our own day, cannot resist the pleasure of carving their names in conspicuous places; and if *they* are not deterred by the hardness of the material from cutting their names on stone, it is less wonderful that the rune-writer, who was quite accustomed to cut on this material, should employ an idle hour in such scratches. If the writers who may be supposed to have taken shelter in Maeshowe, or to have been detained within its walls for some other cause, were influenced by the feelings which came across some of the recent explorers, while watching the tedious excavations in a cold stormy day, or which possessed "Thatir the viking," who, as the first inscription tells, came here "to weary," we may understand the motive and weight of some of the inscriptions. We accordingly find that many of them merely record the writer's name. Thus we read, "Tholftr Kolbainson cut these runes in this cave," "Wemund engraved;"

then such names as "Orkason," "Haelhi," "Ifram Sigurdson," "Totar Fila," "Arnfitr the strong," "Hermund Hardaxe," with the addition, "carved these runes," or the like. An inscription on No. 8 speaks of Ingibiorgh the fair lady, or fair widow, adding, "Many a woman has wandered stooping in here (although) ever so haughty." We know of one historical lady of this name, Ingiborg, the widow of Earl Thorfin; but the name was not uncommon, and cannot be assigned to any one in particular. One of the inscriptions modestly tells us that the runes were by "that man engraved who is the best runed west of the ocean" To him we may owe the beautifully carved dragon on one of the buttresses, which is of a size and style suggestive of its having been copied from a MS. or drawing. It resembles in many ways the grotesque monsters found on the tombstone of King Gorm, which is dated before the middle of the tenth century, and a similar one on a Runic stone, recently dug up in St Paul's Churchyard, dated about a century later. (See plates i. and ii., "Remarks on a Danish Runic Stone," by C. C. Rafn, Copenhagen, 1854; and references there to drawings of similar monsters, in Bautil, Nos. 383, 595, 639, 642, 644, 758, 760, 956, 968.)

Two slabs adjoining the entrance to the cell on the south side, with smooth square surfaces, have been selected for one of the principal inscriptions. Of these Mr Gibb noted, at the time of making his drawings, "The inscription is cut in a dull, blunt line. The two first lines look as if they were continued on the other stone immediately to the left. The two short lines of runes in the centre, at the bottom of the stone, are evidently cut by a different hand, and at a different time from the rest, being more roughly and coarsely cut, and carefully formed." The conjecture thus hazarded, from the appearance of the runes, proved to be correct, both as to the mode of reading the lines, and also as to interpolations, of which there probably were more than one. Of these one set of runes inform us that "Simon engraved;" and as there was not much room, the runes are crammed into the former lines.

The difficulties incident to the deciphering of runes are well instanced¹ by the inscriptions on the two slabs in question, being Nos. 19 and 20

¹ The difference of the runes in inscription No. 13 of Mr Farrer's Plates, and
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of Mr Farrer's section of the south side of Maeshowe; for even if the value of the characters is adjusted, which, however, is a very difficult thing, especially if they are written on a rough surface, when a dot or stroke will alter the letter, a greater difficulty remains in the division of the letters. In the present case, different views have been taken of the order in which the lines are to be taken; and as these inscriptions seem more important than the class which I first described, I will read the different results arrived at by Professors Munch and Stephens, Mr Rafn, Principal Barclay, Mr Mitchell, Dr Charlton, and Dr Wilson.¹

The inscriptions are read separately by Professor Stephens as follows:—

No. 19.

SIA, HOUGHR, UAR, FYRLATHIN HAELR,
THAEIR, UORO, HUATER, SLITU, ORO
UT, NORTHR, ER, OLGHIT, MIKIT, THAT, UAR.

SIMON, SIGHRIK

SIGRITH.

INRONINSE ÆI.

Translation.

"This How was closed up—was quite abandoned. Out North is Fee (treasure) buried much. That was in Roninsey (North Ronaldshay Island).

"*Note.*—The writing is in different hands apparently, and it is probable that the How was abandoned when the inscriptions were engraved. The three names are most likely the names of the writers; they point to treasure buried in North Ronaldshay.

No. 20.

LOTHBROKRA SYNAR,¹ GHAENAR,
MAEN, SAEM, THAEIR, UORO, FYRI, SIR,²
IORSALAFARAR, BRUTU, ORKOUGH²—LIFMUT

No. 6 of Principal Barclay's, is not very great; but the different mode of dividing the letters produces such diverging results in the English translations as follows:—

"That fellow, whom Tirig convicted of the murder of Atfi, went abroad (was banished). While in banishment, he was three nights in a state of unconsciousness, and died mad."—(Barclay in *Collectanea Archaeologica* of Brit. Arch. Assoc. p. 11.)

"It is true indeed, as Ingi states, that the goods were carried away during three nights. The goods were carried away before."—(Rafn, in Farrer, p. 32.)

¹ Farrer's "Maeshowe," p. 35.

SIA, LI, AI, ARIS, LOFTIR,¹—HIR UAR, FI, FOLGHIT
 MIKIT.² (RAEIST). SAEL ER, SA, ER, FINA,
 MA, THAN, OUTH, HIN, MIKLA.³
 OKO, NAEKN, BAR, FIRR, OUGHI, THISUM.⁷

Translation.

- ¹ Lothbrok's sons.
- ² Doughty men as they were for them, or what doughty men they were.
- ³ Jerusalem Farers (pilgrims) broke open Ork How.
- ⁴ Shelter mound; that ill (this bad retreat) aye ariseth lofty (still stands erect).
- ⁵ Here was fee buried much.
- ⁶ Happy is he who find may that treasure the mickle (that great wealth).
- ⁷ Otho Naern bare past part How this. Otho was carried past this How in the ship Naern.

"*Note.*—Written apparently by seven different persons, perhaps some of Lothbrok's sons. This first writing was probably inscribed about the year 870 or 880 by the celebrated Scandinavian sea-kings, and the others at a later period. One appears to complain of the mound itself, that bad retreat—perhaps on account of its affording shelter to the pirates who devastated the island; another inscription describes the breaking into the How by the Jerusalem travellers; and the later writings refer to the common belief at that time of the existence of concealed treasure. Naern is frequently used as a name for ships in Scandinavia. The word Baeirt (at the end of the fourth line) is not in the same hand as the rest of this line, and can only be considered as a mere scribble."

Professor Munch says of these two inscriptions,¹ "These must be taken together. The two first lines in both numbers, the third in No. 19 and the fourth in No. 20, must be read in continuation.

SIA HOUHR UAR FYLATHIN H.....R LOTHBROKAR SYNER, HAENAR.
 THAEIRUORO HUATER SLETUORO MAEN SAEM THAEIR UORO FYRISIR.

¹ Farrer's "Maeshowe," p. 36.

Translation.

“ This tumulus was formerly erected as tumulus (for Lodbrok, if Haugr is read, or ‘ as that of,’ if we read Hennar) her sons they were gallant, hardly (there) were men (such as they were.) For themselves (*i.e.*, showed themselves).

“ Then read line three in No. 20—

JORSALAFARAR BRUTU ORKHAUG.

Translation.

The Jerusalem travellers broke the Orkhill.

“ Then line three in No. 19 and four in 20, four in 19 and five in 20, taken in continuation, give

UTNORTH ER FE FOLGIT MIKIT THAT ER LA EFTIR, HER VA FE FOLGIT MIKIT (RAEIST SIMON SIGB..... SIGRITH) SAELL ER SA ER FINNA MA THAN OUTH HIN MIKLA.

Translation.

“ North-westerly is much money absconded, that which lay behind, here was much money absconded (Simon — engraved); lucky is he who may find that great treasure.

“ *Note.*—The *raeist Simon*, &c., was written afterwards, and does not belong to the sentence.

“ The sixth and last line in No. 20 is—

OKONAÆKN BAR FE UR HAUGI THIESSUM

Okonaekn bore money out of (away from) this tumulus.

“ *Note.*—It seems, then, that it was supposed to have been originally erected for a mighty woman called Lodbrok, who had gallant sons, and that the Jerusalem pilgrims had dug into the Orkhill, which was probably a different place to this Maeshowe, that the treasure there had been taken away, and that he would be lucky who found it. It also implies that Okonaekn carried off some of the treasure.”

Mr Rafn also reads both inscriptions together, dividing the words thus—

SIA HÖUHR, VAR FYR LATHIN HÆLR LOTHBROKAR
 SYNER HAENAR THÆIR VÖRO HVATIR SIIKT VÖRO
 MAEN SAEM THÆIR VÖRO FYRI SIR
 JORSALAFARAR BRUTU ORKÖUH LIFMND
 SALLIA JARLS UT NORTHR IR FE FOLHIT MIKIT
 THAT URLOFOIR HIR VAR FI FOLHGET MIKIT
 RÆIST SIMON SIHR IN THO INGI SIHRITH
 SÆLIR SA IR FINA MA THAN OUTH HIN
 MIKLA. OGDONÆGN BAR FI YR
 OUHI THISUM.

Translation.

“ This barrow was formerly a sorcery hall erected for Lodbrok ; her sons were brave. Such were men as they were for themselves (such we may call valiant men, such as they were in their achievements). The Jorsalafarar (visitors of Jerusalem) broke open Orkhow..... Earls. To the north-west a great treasure has been hid (but few believe that) a great treasure was hid here. Simon Sigr (victor) carved (the runes) and afterwards Inge. Happy he who may discover this great wealth. Ogdonaegn carried away the goods from this barrow.

“ *Note.*—Ogdongn is probably a Gaelic name, perhaps corresponding to the present O'Donavan ; and the person alluded to may have been of Scottish or Irish origin.”

Mr Mitchell reads the two inscriptions separately.¹

No. 19.

SIA HOUHR VAR FYRLATHIN HÆLAR
 THÆIR VORO HVATER SLIT VORO
 UT NORTHR ER FIFOL HIT MIKEL THALUR
 SIMON SIHBRG
 SIHRITH. INROINSÓ.

¹ Meschove : Translations in Danish and English of the Inscriptions in Meschove, p. 52.

Translation.

Behold the ship was abandoned, and
 The Hull lies here among the breakers.
 To the North is hidden treasure, and many Dollars.

Simon Sigberg
 Sigred. In Roinso.

No. 20.

LOTHBROCK ARSYNAR HÆNAR
 MÆN SÆM - THÆIR VORO FYRASIR
 JORSALA FARAR BRUTU ORKOU HLIF MIT SAILLAIRIS
 LOFOIR HIR VAR FIFOL HKET MIKIL RÆIST
 SÆLER SAIR FINA MATHA A THOGUSTH HIN MIKLA
 OKONAKN BAR FIYRAR HITH IS W. I. N.

Translation.

Lothborg Arsynar (they are) careful
 Men who were appointed our commanders.
 Jerusalem leaders wrecked on the Orkney cliffs
 In a mist slothfully.
 Here was hidden treasure; many chains,
 Cut silver, fine ornaments, and much fine stores.
 The hidden place lies out from this W. by N.

“*Note.*—Nos. 19 and 20 are the most ample inscriptions, and are placed together in the building. They are in juxtaposition, but they allude to different shipwrecks and different circumstances. The one ship or fleet was wrecked on the cliffs in a mist, in the Bay of Skail probably, and was likely the ship or ships from which the silver treasure had been saved and hid, which is now in the Museum. The other ship was lost and left among the breakers ‘in broken water’ ‘to the north’ of Mesehow, probably on ‘Rowsay,’ as one of the words may imply; the other ‘west by north’ of Mesehow. The one had much treasure, consisting of money; the other had saved the treasure and hid it, consisting of ‘chains, cut silver, fine ornaments,’ &c., and the situation of the place where the treasure is hid is mentioned. The one says that the ship

was lost through carelessness in a mist by the commanders, Lothbrog and Arsyner; the other does not appear to have been lost from any fault of the commanders, whose names appear to have been Simon Sigberg and Sigred. As to the treasures, there can be no doubt that, when the Vikings were returning from their predatory expeditions, they were subject to considerable dangers, such as being wrecked, being attacked by their own or other sovereigns, by other pirates, or by a superior force of the natives. Under such circumstances, the pirates who might escape would doubtless endeavour to get the plunder put into a place of safety or security, hidden in such places as only could be known to themselves, whither they could return with other ships or fleets, when fortune was more favourable, to recover the hidden treasure."

Principal Barclay reads the inscriptions together. He says (p. 15), "The inscriptions on this slab are by far the most important in the collection. They are five in number, and are wholly unconnected with each other. The first is written across the whole slab, and occupies two lines and a half. The second is contained in three lines, very closely written, on the right of the vertical fissure. The third is written immediately after the preceding. The fourth and fifth are only names, and are written on the lower part of the slab, on the left of the fissure.

SIA HOUGE VAR FYR LATIN HALR LODBROKAR SYNER. KENAR THEIR VORO OK HVATIR. SLET VORO MEN SEM THEIR VORO FYRI SIR UTNORDR. ERFI FOLGIT MIKIT. RETUR.

. " *Translation.*—This sepulchral mound was (raised) for the sons of the deceased hero Lodbrock. They were wise, brave, and powerful. Scarcely have there ever been men such as they were in the north-west. Great funeral honours were paid to them.

"If HALR be intended for HALIR, the meaning will be 'for the late heroes, the sons of Lodbrock.' But if HALR be read as the old spelling of HOLR, which is exactly synonymous with HAUGR, then FYRLATIN must be read as one word, and the translation will be, 'This barrow was the abandoned sepulchral mound of Lodbrock's sons.' The only objection to the latter reading is a grammatical one. SYNER should be SYNA; but in

these, as in almost all other Runic inscriptions, we meet with numerous solecisms in grammar.

“*Retur*.—This word has been added to the inscription by another hand, and in a smaller character. Some one may have thought the expression too elliptical, and may have intended to explain it by the addition of *Rietur*, *symposium*, synonymous with *OL*. The words which I have translated ‘great funeral honours, &c.,’ seem to have been an established formula, as they occur a second time in the next inscription. The northern professors explain the expression as intimating that “here great treasure is buried.” One objection to this interpretation is the fact that where treasure was buried in the *haug* of the deceased, every precaution was taken to conceal it, and to preserve it from the sacrilegious plunderer. Such an intimation as the above would, however, be an advertisement of the treasure deposited, and an invitation to violate the tomb in search of it.

“If the Lodbrock mentioned in this epitaph was the famous Ragnar Lodbrock, the original erection of the barrow cannot have been much earlier than the latter part of the eighth century, or much later than the early part of the ninth; and it must, in that case, have been more than 300 years old when the chambers containing these inscriptions were formed by Ada the Wealthy, as we learn from the next epitaph.

“The fame of Lodbrock’s sons was not confined to “the north-west.” They were the most renowned Vikings of the age in which they lived, and were the scourge of every coast of Europe. Their connection with Orkney was more intimate than Orcadians of the present day are perhaps aware of. We learn from Saxo Grammaticus that Ragnar Lodbrock and his sons made two great expeditions to Orkney and the Hebrides; that they subjugated the whole of these islands, expelling or killing their rulers; that two of the sons were placed as rulers over the Hebrides; and that a third son, Fridleif by name, was made *ruler of Orkney*. In a third expedition to the west, two other sons of Lodbrock were slain in battle; and perhaps their bodies were transported to the family *haug* in Orkney.

JORSALA FARAR BRUTU ORM OUK LIF MED SAILIA JARLI LOFOIR
GERU. ERFI FOLEGIT MIKIT. REIST SALIR SA ARFI NAM ADA OUD HIN
MIKLA.

Translation.

"The Jerusalem pilgrims, Orm and Leif, along with the blessed Earl, fulfilled their vows. Great funeral honours were paid to them. Ada the Wealthy, who succeeded to the inheritance, erected these chambers.

"The epithet SAILIA (SÆLA) applied to the Earl, would seem to imply that he was canonised before this inscription was carved. If so, it must date not earlier than the very last decade of the twelfth century; for though Earl Ronald was murdered in 1159, he was not canonised till 1192. The chambers, no doubt, had been erected somewhat earlier.

"LOFOIR GERU (for LOFIR GERDU) ERFI FOLGIT MIKIT.—This is the same formula as in the preceding epitaph—literally, *symposium hereditarium magnum secutum est (sepulturam)*. FOLGIT is the past participle, used instead of the præterite, of which No. 6 furnishes a similar instance. ADA is ADAN in Mr Farrer's transcript.

"This inscription, which informs us that the chambers were erected by a lady, explains the name of the structure, and shows that tradition has been faithful in handing it down, long after it had ceased to be understood. MAES HOW is the MAIDEN'S MOUND; Islandic MEY, MAY, MEY, *virgo*, a maid; and HAUGR, Scots HOW, *tumulus*, a sepulchral mound. MEY, a maid, is also Scots."

Dr Charlton's reading of the two inscriptions,¹ 19 and 20:—

"The two first lines in these, the longest and most important inscriptions, must be read straight across the two stones; but for all that, we are by no means certain that there are not two, if not three, inscriptions altogether here. Professor Stephens separates the two stones, and of course constructs out of the dis severed inscriptions a very different story. Stephens throughout seems impressed with the idea that the mound was a shelter for pirates, but it is on the shore of an inland fresh-water lake, and a considerable distance from the sea. Munch and Rafn are as usual nearly agreed in their reading and interpretation:—

SIA HÖUHR VAE FYR LATHIN HÆLTR .
 LOTHBROKAR SYNER HÆNAR
 THAIR VORO HUATER, SLET VORO

¹ Arch. Æliana (new series), vol. vi. p. 137.

MAEN SAEM THAIR VO RO FYRI SER.
 UTNORTHR ER FE FOLHIT MIKIT THAET VAR
 JORSALAFAR BRUTU ORKOUH
 LIF MLT SAILAIARLS
 LOEFTIR HIR VAR FE FOLHKIT MIKIT RÆIST
 SIMON SIHRK

IN ROINOE

SIHRITH

SAEL ER SA ER FINA MA THAN OUTH HIN MIKLA
 OK(T)ONAEKN BAR FE YR SUHI THISUM

“ This How was formerly raised to the hero(ine?) Lodbrokar, her sons were brave, hardly were there men such as they were for themselves. To the north-west there is much treasure hid. It was the Jerusalem travellers (*i.e.* Crusaders) broke open the orkhill (in the lifetime?) of the fortunate Earl. Leff here was hidden treasure much; cut the runes Simon Sihri Sihrid in Roninoe. Happy is he who may find that great treasure. O’Conachan bare away treasure from this how.

“ It is plain that the last line was inscribed previously to those above, for the latter are distorted to fit the contracted space. The reading we have given assimilates very closely to that of Munch and Rafn, but they were both misled by the word HÆLR, which they were inclined to render ‘a sorcery hall,’ but which we discovered to be most plainly HÆLTR, a hero or heroine. The two last words of the third line are also hardly correct in the lithograph.¹ They are ‘THAET VAR,’ and not ‘THAT

¹ I have examined the cast of this inscription with the view of verifying Dr Charlton’s proposed emendations, but I am unable to adopt his conclusion. There is no appearance of the letter “t” in the word Hælr, nor can I see any ground for altering the two last words in the third line. Principal Barclay has founded his reading of the runes upon copies made by Mr Henry Leisk. They differ from the casts, and do not seem to me to be reliable transcripts; but even assuming their correctness, I am unable to reconcile the proposed readings (of the first inscription for instance) with the runes given by the learned Principal.

With regard to the plates of runes in Mr Farrer’s volume, I feel confident that they are as nearly accurate as such copies can be made. The original drawings were made with great care, and the proofs were twice collated by myself, and again by Mr Gibb; in the course of which each rune was compared with the corresponding rune on the casts in various lights. When, however, it is considered that there

ER,' and we differ from Munch in the sequence of the lines, though not materially in the sense. After the words, 'the Jerusalem men broke up the orkhow,' there comes the word 'LIF,' but the next three letters, which apparently are MLT, do not make sense, but we suspect they mean the word lifetime of the Earl. The name of the Earl is not given; but it would be very natural for a crusader to speak thus of his leader, Earl Ronald, who was afterwards murdered by Thorbjörn Klerk in Caldale in Caithness in 1158."

Dr Wilson gives "the following attempt to render the principal group of inscriptions in what thus seems to be their order of execution,"¹

SIA HOUHR VAR FYRLATHIN HAELR LOTHBROKAR
SYNGR HAENAR THAEIR VORO HUATIR SLIT VORO
MAEN SAEM THAEIR VORO FYRI SER UTNORTER
ER FI FOLHET MIKIL THALUR. SIMON SIHRITH.
JORSALAFARAR BRUTU ORKOY HLIF MULT SAILIA
JARLU LOEFTIR HIR VAR FI FOLHGET MIKEL
RAEIST OGONAGN BAR FE YR OUHI THISUM.

"This tumulus was appropriated as Lodbrok's. Her sons, men were they matchless. Carefully to the north is treasure hid; much money. Simon Sigreth." "Jerusalem farers, or crusaders, broke open the Orkhill in the time of the fortunate Earl: left here was much treasure. This was graven by Ogonagn, who carried off money from this mound." To this some later visitor has added, sarcastically, the interpolated line,—

SAEL ER SA ER FINA MA THAN OUTH HIN MIKLA.

"Lucky is he who may discover that great treasure."

Without minutely analysing the different results, it will be seen that the majority of the readings agree in two statements, that the Orkhill,

are frequent lines and dots on the surface, which are of natural formation, and that it is often difficult to be sure where an artificial line terminates and the natural one commences, it must be obvious that there are many risks of error in all such work. It is in this view especially that the casts come to be so valuable, as they enable us to bring all criticisms of the plates to a conclusive test.

¹ Prehistoric Annals of Scotland, vol. ii. p. 288. Edin. 1863.

which I take to mean Maeshowe, was broken open by the Jerusalem farers, and that a treasure carried away from the barrow was hid to the north-west of it.

The sons of the hero or heroine Lodbrok are also referred to, but whether the writer meant to say that the howe was erected or only taken possession of by them or their parent, seems uncertain.

Professor Munch supposes that these Jerusalem farers were connected with an expedition to the Holy Land organised by the Earl Ragnald. He says, "Many of the northern warriors joined the Earl in 1152. They assembled in Orkney, and after passing the winter there, sailed in the spring of 1153, and after being in Spain in December of that year, reached the Holy Land in August 1154; they went thence to Constantinople, where they passed the Christmas of 1154-55, returning home by different routes. During their stay in Orkney they had frequent quarrels with the inhabitants."¹ He also concludes, that the inscriptions suppose the "howe" to have been originally erected for a mighty woman, called Lodbrok, who had gallant sons, and that the Jerusalem pilgrims had dug into the Orkhill, which was probably a different place to this Maeshowe, that the treasure contained there had been taken away, and that he would be lucky who found it. It also implies, that Okonacker carried off some of the treasure.

On the whole, it would seem that we are to believe that the Howe was broken into by some of the Crusaders in search of treasure. But the inscriptions on two of the buttresses (13 and 14 of Mr Farrer's plan) inform us (if we take Dr Charlton for our guide, who here harmonises Rafn and Munch) that they were too late; for "It is true, as Ingi said, that the treasure was carried away. Three nights was the treasure carried away before the Jerusalem men broke open this tumulus."

I must, however, take this opportunity of recording a corrected reading of the runes on the stone No. 14—substantially agreeing, however, with what I have just read—which only occurred to Professor Munch sometime after he had given his first translation. It was communicated by that lamented scholar in a letter to me, dated from Christiania, 21st July 1862. "A light," he writes, "is gone up to me as to the

¹ Farrer, p. 23.

right reading of No. 14, and if, perhaps, you might find a proper opportunity, you would oblige me by bringing it to the knowledge of the public. It is—

THAT MAN SAT ER EK SÆHE AT FE VAR FÖRT

which in normal spelling looks thus :—

Þat man satt or ek segi, at fe var fœrt, &c.

and in Anglo-Scottish translation,—

That maun (be) sooth, what I say, that the money was carried, &c.

“ It is therefore, not ‘Igi sæhi,’ as Mr Rafn reads, translating ‘ Ingi says,’ because the final *i* in Ingi is wanting, and the third person of the verb ought to be *segir*, not *segi*.

“ The whole runs therefore thus :—‘ It is true what I say that the treasury was carried away. Three nights was the treasury,’ &c. It is written by somebody, perhaps in the neighbourhood, acquainted with the fate of the tumulus, to whose words other greedy diggers would not listen, and consequently were disappointed. At first I did not hit upon this explanation, because the form *man*, in the sense of the Scottish *maun* (English, *does*), is not used in very old manuscripts but *mun*, while *man* means ‘remember.’ It is, however, evident, that the *man* here is ‘maun,’ our *mun*, and not ‘remember;’ and it gives an instance and proof more of the not very ancient date at least of this inscription.”

It is plain, however, from what has been said, that if the Crusaders broke into Maeshowe from the top, they did not at once ruin the dome, or fill the chamber with rubbish.

With our knowledge of the predatory habits of the Norsemen, I would have been inclined to expect that Maeshowe would have been plundered at an early period of their occupation; and if they had penetrated to the chambers by the passage, as they seem to have done at Newgrange, the “howe” would have still remained so apparently entire, that the breach from the roof would have remained to be begun by the Crusaders, and widened by the visits of subsequent plunderers.¹ But however this

¹ In the accounts of breaking into tombs, which Dr Charlton has collected from the Sagas, already quoted, it always appears that the Norsemen “descended” into the cairn.

may be, there will be little reason for doubting that the runes in Maeshowe were cut by the Crusaders, if we adopt the opinion of Professor Munch, that the inscriptions are of the later class of Norse runes, and most probably may date about 1150. That this was the matured opinion of this great scholar, I gather from a passage in the letter to me, already quoted, where he says, "Runes of this kind are *never* older than 1100 at the earliest."

In concluding this account of Maeshowe, it would be impossible for me to pass over without reference the long-continued and systematic excavations of Mr Farrer in Orkney. For years he has employed a set of men in the careful examination of early remains in that country, under his own eye, and with the valuable assistance of Mr George Petrie. Of these excavations he has, from time to time, furnished us with details; and instead of forming a private collection, he has made his labours entirely subservient to public objects, and has presented to our National Museum the objects which he has thus brought to light. On the discovery of the runes in Maeshowe, he procured careful drawings of the whole, which he printed for the use of scholars and public libraries, besides presenting correct casts of the inscriptions to the Museum here and at Copenhagen. The Society has already recorded its sense of Mr Farrer's services by electing him as one of its Honorary Members; but I trust that I may be excused for availing myself of this opportunity of adding my own individual tribute to Mr Farrer's zeal and public spirit. Nor does it seem unsuitable that on this occasion I should make special reference to the great services rendered to our pursuits by the careful and long-continued researches of Mr Petrie, as well as by the accurate descriptions which he has occasionally contributed to our Proceedings. His zeal in securing the great collection of silver ornaments found in the Bay of Skail, led him to much trouble and exertion, especially in getting the finders to rely on the then recent enactment on treasure-trove, which secured to them the intrinsic value of the relics.

It is gratifying to have to notice the care with which the breach in Maeshowe has been closed by the proprietor, Mr Balfour, and the arrangements by which he has combined the easy admission of the public to the chambers, with proper care for their protection from injury. And if Maeshowe was great at its origin, and for many an after age, it will

henceforth be memorable for the amount of literary zeal and labour which the elucidation of its Runic inscriptions has evoked ; and that not only by the scholars of Scandinavia, but among others by Mr Mitchell, an office-bearer of this Society, whose handsome volume on Maeshowe, printed at his own expense, must be mentioned as an evidence of the earnestness of purpose with which he devoted himself to the difficult task.

I am indebted to my friend, Mr Gibb, for the accurate sketches of Maeshowe now on the wall, as well as for information on many points of detail, which he noted at the time when he made the original drawings for Mr Farrer's work.



Hoy la: Stearns Kirk.

Stearns Circle.

Bridge of Brogar.

Maeshowe Mound.

Great Circle of Brogar.

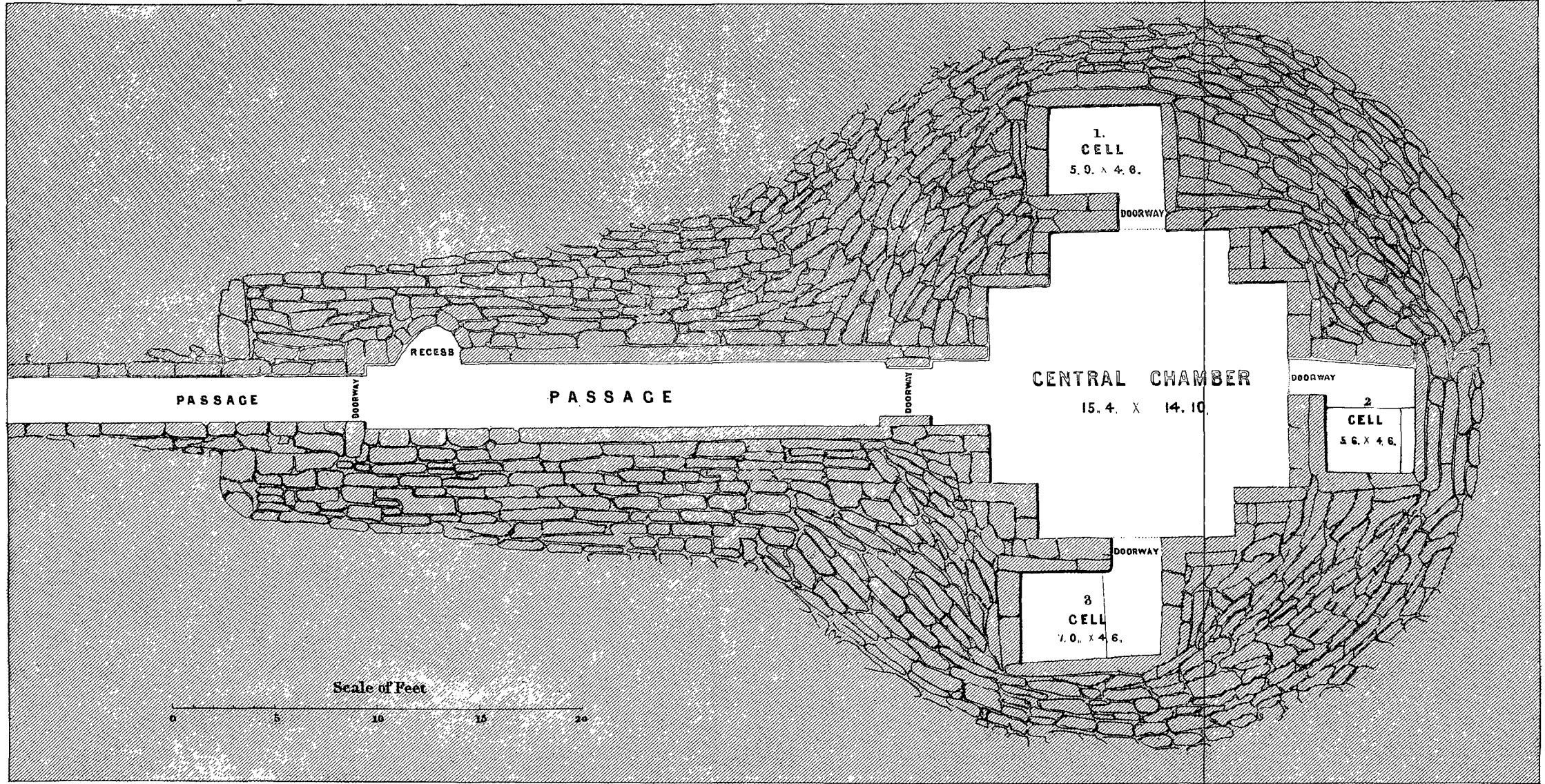
GENERAL VIEW OF MAESHOWE.

Drawn by A. Gibb, and Lithographed by Keith & Gibb, Aberdeen.



W & A. K. Johnston, Edinburgh

INTERIOR VIEW OF MAESHOWE.



W & A.K. Johnston, Edinburgh

GROUND PLAN OF CENTRE CHAMBER &c. MAES-HOWE.