IV.

NOTICE OF A CIST AND ITS CONTENTS IN THE PARISH OF EDDERTOUN, ROSS-SHIRE, RECENTLY OPENED. By Rev. J. M. JOASS, Cor. Mem. S.A. Scot. (Plate XXI.)

About three miles to the west of the Eddertoun station, on the Ross-shire railway, the line passes through a piece of waste land on a terrace close by the sea, where there are several sepulchral tumuli, associated with hut circles. During the progress of the railway works there in February last, I observed that one of these tumuli stood right in the way of the workmen; and understanding that the cutting at this point was to be about eight feet deep, I requested them to be careful when digging there, and to preserve anything uncommon which they might chance to find.

Sometime thereafter the foreman of the squad brought me the fragments of an urn which had been found in a ditch about three feet deep, which seemed to surround the tumulus, but of which no trace appeared on the surface. On carefully piecing the fragments together, I found that they did not nearly make up the whole vase, but were sufficient to show that it had been about 16 inches in diameter at top, 9 at bottom, and 16 high. It was formed of rudely baked clay, which bore the marks of hand moulding, but showed no traces of ornamentation, save two slightly relieved encircling ridges which divided its height into about three equal parts (see Plate XXI. and fig. 2.)

The urn, so far as I could ascertain, stood broad end upwards, and was uncovered. Its mutilated condition, however, when brought to me, suggested that it had been smashed by some heedless blow ere its original position could have been accurately observed. It contained incinerated bones, and several very minute fragments of oxydised bronze.

On visiting the tumulus I found that the direction and depth of the surrounding ditch were easily traceable from its being dug into coarse boulder-drift, and filled with fine black mould and small stones, such as composed the tumulus, the whole being covered with short scrubby heather, growing out of a coating of moss, thin on account of the exposed situation. Further examination only enabled me to discover a few small fragments of the urn among the débris which had been barrowed off to a considerable distance.

Leaving with the workmen directions to be most careful in dealing with the centre of the tumulus, which was yet a day's work ahead, as they were obliged to breast the full breadth of the cutting, I was unfortunately unable to be present next day, but arrived on the following morning, just as they had cleared away the central cist, of which the stones lay near. This was formed of rude sandstone slabs, which showed no trace of artificial marking. Its direction was north and south, and its dimensions were stated to have been found on measurement to be 4 feet long, by $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet broad, and about 15 inches deep. It contained fine black mould and sand, with a sprinkling of burnt bones at the bottom, also a small piece of bronze, apparently the point of a blade, and a bead of streaked glass, now presented to the Museum.

The glass of which this bead was composed was of a dark blue colour,

and but partially transparent. It was ornamented by three volutes, which sufficed to surround it. These were traced in a yellow pigment (or enamel) as hard as the glass, and seeming to sink slightly below the surface into the body of the bead, as could be seen where this was flattened, as if by grinding at the opposite ends of its orifice. (See Plate XXI. figs. 1 and 2.)

At this time my friend, Mr Stables, Cawdor, kindly sent for my inspection several beads which had just been found there during the clearing out of a ditch. These, though of a pale green colour and more transparent, were identical with my specimen in size, shape, and design, except one which was flat, and measured about an inch across, but only three-eighths of an inch along its perforate axis, like the others, which were almost spherical, but for the rubbing down at the ends, as already mentioned. The design of the larger bead, too, was more intricate and uncommonly beautiful. It was a twist of alternate bands of dull white and deep blue; into the latter there was wrought a delicate yellow band, which could be traced in its elegant spiral windings through the transparent glass.

These beads having been found in circumstances not necessarily implying their great age, I was fortunate in having just been enabled to offer mine as a voucher for their value as genuine antiques.

Such beads, although very rare, are yet not unknown in the north. One of exactly the same size and pattern as the Eddertoun specimen, and now belonging to a lady in this county, was for many generations in possession of a family in Skye, from whom it was occasionally borrowed by people from a great distance on account of its supposed efficacy in the treatment of diseased cattle, which were said to be cured by drinking of water into which the charm-bead had been dropped. Such beads were known among the Highlanders as CLACHAN NATHAIREACH, serpent stones, from their peculiar markings, as some of them suppose, while others assert that their name and virtue are derived from their connection with a very venomous serpent, which carries a set of such beads on his body or tail. Is this a mere adaptation of recently acquired knowledge on the part of the Highlanders, or is it a memorial preserved by tradition of the early home of our Celtic ancestors in some eastern country?

Whether we believe, with the author of "The Prehistoric Annals of Scotland," that such beads were probably introduced into Britain by the

"Phœnicians, or by traders in direct communication with that people, whose early skill in the manufacture of glass is familiar to us;" or suppose, with a leading London ethnologist, that those of the Eddertoun pattern are of Saxon origin, its occurrence in a cist, associated with articles of bronze, would imply, even in the Highlands, a very great antiquity, pointing, perhaps, to a time when the nomades of the north exchanged the skins of wolves and other animals slain in the chase for beads and baubles, such as tempt the Indians of the far west to part with their peltry. The occurrence, however, of the *single* bead in the Eddertoun cist may imply, as it has been held to do in similar circumstances elsewhere,[1] its use as a charm more than as a personal ornament, in which case the claim of the CLACH-NATHAIREACH to antiquity is strengthened, if we believe that even at that early time it was not of recent introduction, but, deriving its value less from its scarcity than its age, was beginning to acquire some of that importance which always attaches to the relics of antiquity, and so often passes into superstitious regard. "It appears," says Wilson, "to be only natural to the uninstructed mind to associate objects which it cannot explain with some mysterious and superhuman end, and hence the superseded implements of a long extinct race become the charms and talismans of their superstitious successors." Hence the value attached to the flint arrow-head, which I have seen set in silver, to be worn as an amulet. Hence too, perhaps, the occurrence in the Eddertoun tumulus of the solitary bead, possibly its owner's most valued possession, interred with him to secure his safety on his long journey, and thereafter, perhaps, to become his patent of nobility and passport to respect in the unknown land to which the road lies ever through the gates of the grave.

If articles of human manufacture may yet be old enough to become thus venerable, we need not wonder that older objects have occasionally been pressed into the service of superstition. Geology was doubtless in its nonage in 1716, when the intelligent Martin, in his "Western Islands," refers to the fossils of the oolite as being the natural products of the calcareous clays, much in the same sense as mushrooms spring from middens, yet not without a hint as to the credulity of the "natives," who ascribed to these curious organisms a mysterious medicinal power.

[1] Wilson's Prehistoric Annals, p. 304.

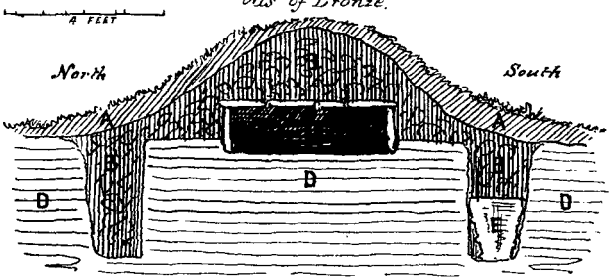
"Some banks of clay on the east coast are overflowed by the tide, and in those *grow* the *Lapis ceranius* or *Cerna Amomis* [*Cornu Ammonis?*] of different shapes;" and "These stones are by the natives called cramp-stones, because (*as they say*) they cure the cramp in cows, by washing the part affected in water in which this stone has been steeped for some time."—*Martin's Western Islands*, p. 133.

These ammonites, popularly known in England and elsewhere as "snake-stones," may be the original CLACHAN NATHAIREACH, to which name they seem to have a better title, both from their origin and their form, than the glass beads of the tumuli, whether speckled or streaked.

Fig.1

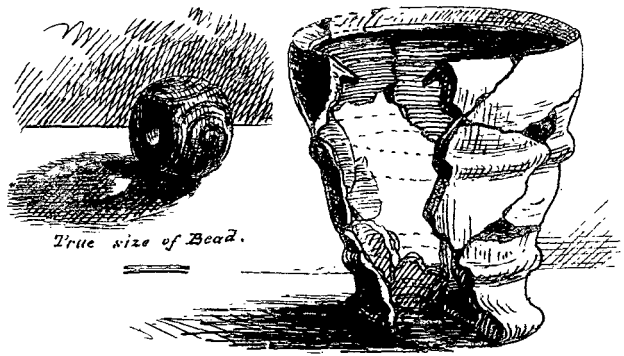
Section of Tumulus AT EDDERTOUN, ROSS-SHIRE,

Containing central stone cist, with streaked glass bead and point of bronze blade; also, in surrounding trench, a rude urn with incinerated bones and bits of Bronze.



A, *Peatmoss & heather.* B, *Black mould & stones.* C, *Cist of rough sandstone slabs.* D, *Boulder clay.* E, *Urn.*

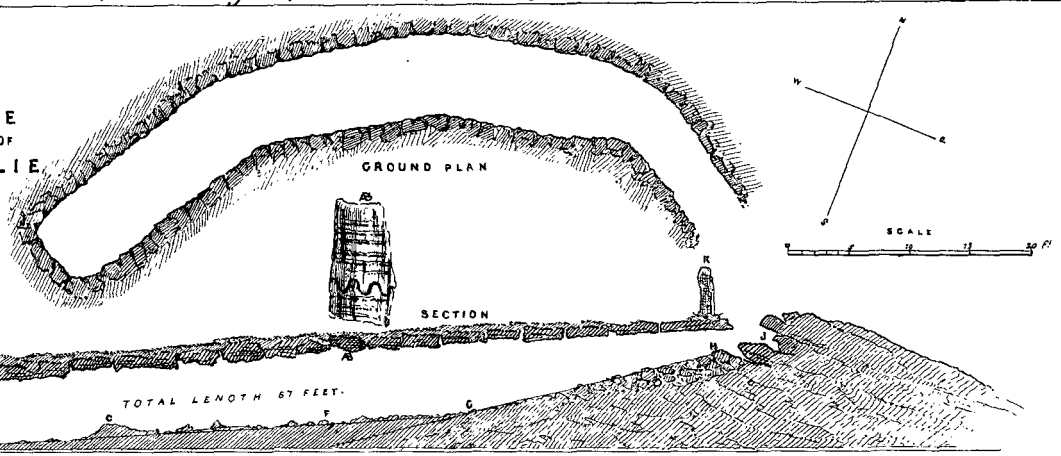
Fig.2.



Urn & Bead Found in Tumulus at Eddertoun

J. M. Joass del.

PLAN OF EIRDE HOUSE UPON THE FARM OF BARNS OF AIRLIE FORFARSHIRE



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