

IV.

ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF AN ANCIENT CIST IN THE PARISH OF CABRACH, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY THE REV. JOHN CHRISTIE, KILDRUMMIE, ABERDEENSHIRE.

The cist was discovered while excavating in a field for building sand. It was situated on a grass-covered slope, declining with a north-eastern exposure towards the banks of the Deveron. There was no tumulus nor any apparent mark of its existence above ground.

Some years ago another cist was discovered close by it in a line towards the south-west. It contained bones and an urn (a sketch of which was exhibited). Numerous other cists have been found in the same field, containing urns and bones, generally in a good state of preservation. Great care was taken in opening the cist. It was about 3 feet below the surface of the ground to the covering stones. The excavation made in laying down the cist would appear to have been circular; about 6 feet in diameter. In excavating, two stones were first reached, one towards the west 2 feet 8 inches by 2 feet 6 inches, and the other on the east 1 foot 8 inches by 2 feet 2 inches. They were laid above the ends of the cover of the cist. That cover was $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet in length by 3 feet 7 inches at the broad end, 1 foot at the narrow end, and 2 feet 11 inches about the middle, the whole of an irregular heart shape, $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches thick at the thinnest part, and $10\frac{1}{2}$ at the thickest.

The cist was formed in the usual manner, with two stones set on edge

forming the sides, one at the foot and another at the head. The bottom was paved with one large flat stone irregularly shaped, with smaller ones carefully laid to complete the causewaying. Where the head had rested was a stone, the whole breadth of the cist, raised like a pillow at an angle of about 30°. The dimensions of the cist were 2 feet 4 inches in width by 2 feet 4 inches in depth.

The cist contained the remains of a skeleton, lying in a line from east to west, the head being in the east end. Of the skull only one of the parietal bones remained in preservation. The skeleton was in a contracted position, as if lying on the left side, with the legs bent upwards at the knees and thighs, and the arms crossed over the ribs. The bones were so much decayed as not to be removable without fracture, but by carefully removing the superincumbent sand which had completely filled the cist by gradual percolation, most of the bones were uncovered and seen in their original position on the causewayed floor of the cist. The thigh bone measured 1 foot 5½ inches in extreme length.

The cist also contained an urn, lying on its side as if across the neck. It appeared as if it had fallen into that position from the perpendicular, the bottom towards the north; the bottom of the urn was separated by fracture from the body of it, and lay at a distance of about 2 inches therefrom. It contained one of the pieces of a flint which had been split into two, and a whitish yellow powder, which dyed the part of the pavement on which it had so long rested. The urn when taken out was completely filled with the gravelly sand which had filled the rest of the cist. It broke into several fragments on being lifted, but on being reconstructed was found to be of the following dimensions, 8½ inches high, circumference at the top 21 inches, at the contraction 19 inches. (A sketch of the natural size was exhibited.)

In excavating to come at the cover of the cist some pieces of charcoal were found. Some were also found near the skeleton in the cist. It is reported also that, on afterwards lifting the flag with which the bottom was paved, considerable quantities of charcoal were found. Some remains of a darkish fibrous-looking substance like dry moss were also found beside and under the remains of the body. What it had been, whether hair, wool, or vegetable matter, could not be discovered.

Mr Shand, the farmer in Forteach, deserves great credit for having

left the cist untouched after discovering it, until it should be carefully opened and examined.

There were present at the opening of it, Dr Taylor, Leochel Cushnie; Mr Smart, minister of Cabrach; and Mr Christie, minister of Kildrummie. The urn taken from the cist formerly opened close by it, is in the possession of Mr Taylor, Boghead of Lesmurdie. Its dimensions are $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, diameter of the mouth $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches, of the bottom $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches, and circumference of the narrowest part 19 inches.