

I.

ACCOUNT OF THE OPENING OF A CAIRN ON THE ESTATE OF PIT-
TODRIE, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY CHARLES E. DALRYMPLE, Esq.,
F.S.A. Scot.

The hill of Knockolochie, where this excavation took place, rises abruptly from the vale of the Urie, near the centre of the district of "the Garioch." The name is said by Celtic scholars to signify "the hill of crying," or "of lamentation;" and this, coupled with the fact that several cairns lie hidden amongst the woods which clothe the slopes, while another, not yet examined, crowns the summit, is suggestive of ancient conflict, or at least of death and sepulture.

Lieut.-Col. Knight Erskine of Pittodrie, the proprietor, believing that these monuments were probably sepulchral, decided on investigating one of them, and lately accomplished the exploration, accompanied by the writer of these notes, and one or two other friends.

The cairns are much of the same character, being of scanty elevation in proportion to their circumference, and so moss-grown as to blend with the ground around them almost indistinguishably.

The cairn chosen for examination was 40 feet in diameter, but only $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the surface of the ground. It was decided to try the centre. On removing the mossy turf the workmen came to small stones, with mould between, but as they penetrated deeper they found them of a larger size—those at the bottom, which lay on the original surface of the ground, requiring two men to lift them. On reaching the bottom the earth showed a yellow colour, with pieces of charcoal intermixed, proving to those experienced in such researches that a sepulchral or sacrificial deposit existed. On further examination it proved that a hole

had been dug in the subsoil, in which a large baked clay urn was placed, mouth downwards, on the subsoil rock, which had been laid bare to receive it, the hole being then filled in with the yellow earth, closely packed round the urn, the bottom of which was by this arrangement uppermost, and had a small flat stone laid upon it. The urn proved to be about half-full of incinerated bones, apparently human, and was got out in fair preservation, considering its size and imperfect manufacture, being somewhat soft and spongy in texture. Its dimensions proved to be, 16 inches in height, and 12 inches across the mouth. It was ornamented with a Vandyke pattern round the upper part, just below the brim. The yellow earth which surrounded the urn appeared to have been calcined, and crumbled in the hand like chalk-powder. It had been sifted, or in some way freed from foreign matter, excepting three fragments of stone, which lay embedded close to the urn, and seemed to the finders to have been placed there designedly. They were—1st, A piece of serpentine or other greenstone, flattened on one side, and marked as if the points of weapons had been sharpened on it; 2d, A piece of flint, from which flakes had been struck, and which looked as if it had been the intention to make it into an arrow head, but had proved a failure; 3d, A small stone, 4 inches in length, bearing a remarkable, though apparently natural, resemblance to a miniature "celt" or axe head. The question suggests itself, were these stones placed there intentionally, and, if so, as appears most probable, were they intended to represent the weapons of the deceased—the survivors being unwilling to part with the originals, from their scarcity and consequent value? If this be the explanation, it indicates a degree of barbarism and poverty of resources which throw back the period of these cairns to a very remote date. The whole of the rest of the cairn was carefully examined, but no traces found of any further deposit. A raised ridge which ran round the top, about half-way between the centre and circumference, and which was principally composed of large stones placed upright, and reaching from the bottom of the cairn to a little above its general surface, was expected to yield some remains, as in the case of a similarly-shaped cairn in the Alford district, explored by Mr John Stuart, our Secretary, and some friends, last year; nothing, however, was discovered.

While the secrets of the cairn were being laid open, several trains of the Great North of Scotland Railway, which skirts the base of the hill, passed in both directions. The savage barbarism of the dark ages was thus brought face to face, as it were, with the enlightened civilisation of our own, and the effect was most striking and suggestive.

Mr STUART drew attention to the varieties of the modes of interment recently communicated to the Society, and to the value of every additional discovery as widening the basis of ultimate induction.

Dr JOSEPH ROBERTSON made some remarks on the so-called Periods of Stone, Bronze, and Iron, of the Danish antiquaries, and held that they were untenable in the strict sense of their originators.

The Rev. E. L. BARNWELL, Secretary of the Cambrian Archæological Association, took the same view, and gave instances of interments by burning and inhumation in monuments of the same character and period, which on the Danish theory would have to be ascribed to different times.