

II.

NOTICE OF CAIRNS, CALLED "FAIRY KNOWES," IN SHETLAND, RECENTLY EXAMINED. By D. D. BLACK, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

On the lands of Kergord, in the parish of Weisdale, or rather in the united parishes of Tingwall, Whiteness, and Weisdale, and county of Zetland, there were a number of circular or nearly circular gatherings of small stones, called by the inhabitants "Fairy Knowes." Most of these knowes have been removed in the course of the improvements made during the last half century. Two, however, still remain—a small one on the farm of Stensell, at the top of Weisdale Voe, or arm of the sea; and the other, or larger knowe, on the farm of Housegord, about a quarter of a mile farther north. Each of these knowes is composed of small stones of irregular shape, from two to six inches in length and breadth, and from an eighth of an inch to half an inch in thickness, apparently sandstone gathered from the land and from the small river, the Weis, which flows through the valley. There is abundance of limestone in the valley cropping up in all directions, and especially standing in vertical strata immediately adjoining the two knowes spoken of; but no limestone is found in any of the knowes, which are composed of sandstone only (composite with mica), covered over with the mossy soil of the valley, and overgrown with grass and wild flowers, especially primroses. The smaller knowe may be four or five yards in diameter, the larger six times this size. The walls or sides of the knowes slope both externally

and internally on the natural slope of an angle of about forty-five degrees ; the knowes are longest from north to south ; at the north end the walls fall away to nothing ; at the south end there is something like an entrance obstructed by a stone, of some three feet by eighteen inches. As already said, the sides of the knowes are overgrown with grass and wild flowers ; the centres are the same. This summer (1865) a few members of the Anthropological Society visited Weisdale, and examined the knowe at Stensell. It is believed they found nothing. Since then the centre of that knowe has been dug into, but under the turf nothing was found except the natural soil. Some of the stones forming the walls of the knowe had years ago been removed by a previous tenant, who, however, declared that he found nothing except small stones, most of which he said were blackened as with fire. The members of the Anthropological Society are understood to have been under the same impression, that some of the small stones had been subjected to fire. The workman who aided the society was desired by the writer of this to pick out from this small knowe at Stensell, and from the larger one at Housegord, stones which he conceived had been blackened by fire. These stones thus picked out were washed with soap and water and a brush, and readily gave off most of their colouring matter, which seemed to be nothing else than the vegetable moss or peat in which the stones had been imbedded. The stones were broken with a hammer, and were found to have no marks of discoloration in their centres. In the smaller knowe at Stensell, then, nothing has been discovered ; but in the larger knowe at Housegord, the fragments of a well-burnt urn were found, some three years ago, by the tenant when removing some stones from the west side of the knowe. Amongst these fragments there were two pieces of slate stone, which must have been imported, as no slate is found in the valley ; there was, further, found a small piece of oblong sandstone pierced with a hole at one end, and differing in quality from the stone of the valley ; and there was likewise found a pretty large glass bead, blue striped with white. It is hard to say if these articles had any connection the one with the other, but they were all found at the same place. No bones or dust were noticed, but what appears to be a calcined bone was found. Since then this knowe has remained undisturbed. The urn, the slate stones, the bead, the calcined bone, and the oblong stone, are sent

herewith; and also one of the stones composing the Fairy Knowes, as a specimen of the stones of which these knowes are formed.

About a mile north from Housegord, on the northern part of the cultivated lands of Kergord, on a farm which has the modern name of Flemington, a field rises by a gentle ascent in the middle of the valley. This field is in potatoes this year. When furrowing up the potatoes early in the season, the plough struck on a slate stone. The ploughman, who had been instructed to be careful in case of any discoveries, removed the stone, or rather stones, for there were two slate stones, the one above the other, although there are, as already said, no slate within many miles of Weisdale. Below the stones the ploughman found an urn full of bones. He replaced the stones, leaving the urn untouched. But the news got abroad; the urn had many visitors, and most of the bones were removed. In June the proprietor visited the place, and he found everything intact, except that most of the bones had been removed. The ground round the urn was then carefully dug out, when the urn was seen to be placed in a hole of pure virgin earth of coarse red clay. The urn seems to be composed of similar clay, and was placed nine inches in depth below the surface of that soil which had been disturbed by the plough. The urn was measured before being exhumed: it was circular, ten inches in width across the mouth, and fifteen inches in height. The mouth was a little jagged as from accident; there was a round hole in the bottom. There was no stone below it, nor any dark-coloured matter below or near it. The top of the urn when first seen and the sides of it, when the earth was removed, were red. They got darker by exposure to the air. The bones and dust in the urn were clean. Every care was taken to remove the urn entire, but it was impossible to touch it without breaking it; the clay seemed to have been ill burned, and, in fact, felt as if it were rotten. The urn was removed piecemeal, packed amongst wool, put in a warm place to dry gradually from the heat of the sun, and is now, along with some of the bones found in it, sent herewith. This urn seems to be inferior in composition to the one previously discovered, but both have the common zigzag marks upon them. Where this urn was discovered is the highest point of land in the valley, which is fully a mile wide, from the top of one hill to the top of the other hill; and the place where the urn was found is about a quarter of a mile from the east

hill, and an eighth of a mile from the west hill, the valley running north and south. The field where the potatoes are has been long in cultivation, but an old man says he recollects of a tumulus or fairy knowe in the field, and, as he thinks, on the exact spot where the urn was found.

So far as the writer is aware, no urn has ever previously been discovered in Zetland, at least he has not been able to hear of any such discovery.

It may be proper to add, that in August last the hole in the potato field where the urn had been discovered was excavated to a further depth, and the ground round about cut away, but nothing whatever was found except the original soil.

Along with this is also sent a stone hammer of a small size, found this summer on the farm of Scarpiegarth, which is on the east side of the hill immediately west of Housegord; and is now presented to the Museum, along with the remains of an urn, bead, &c., found in the Fairy Knowes.