

V.

NOTICE OF A SMALL BRONZE BLADE FOUND IN A CINERARY URN AT BALBLAIR, SUTHERLANDSHIRE, ALSO TWO SMALL BRONZE PLATES; IN THE COLLECTIONS OF HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF SUTHERLAND. By JOHN ALEX. SMITH, M.D., Sec. S. A. Scot.

The curious bronze implement now exhibited (see the annexed wood-cut, where the bronze is figured full size (fig. 1) was discovered, about twenty years ago, by a crofter at Balblair, Sutherlandshire. He was removing some stones from a cairn, when a coarse sepulchral urn was exposed resting in an inverted position on a stone slab. The urn contained small portions of bones—which were very brittle, and were believed to have been exposed to the action of fire—and also this highly finished bronze implement.

The urn was so coarse and rude in its character that the crofter's wife refused to admit it into the house, it was accordingly placed on an adjoining knoll or hillock, where it attracted the notice of some school-boys as a mark for trying their skill in stone-throwing, and was soon smashed to pieces. The bronze, however, was fortunately preserved, and

was presented to His Grace the Duke of Sutherland, and to his kindness, through the Rev. J. M. Joass, I am indebted for being able to exhibit it.

The bronze, which is a good deal chipped at the edges, measures about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches in length by  $1\frac{1}{4}$  inch in greatest breadth; it has a narrow part or handle about one inch in length by about a quarter of an inch in breadth, and gradually expands from it into a somewhat sharp and pointed leaf-shaped and double-edged blade. The edges of this leaf-shaped or oval portion are very thin and sharp (fig. 2), and running along the centre of the blade there is a thicker raised portion or rib which measures

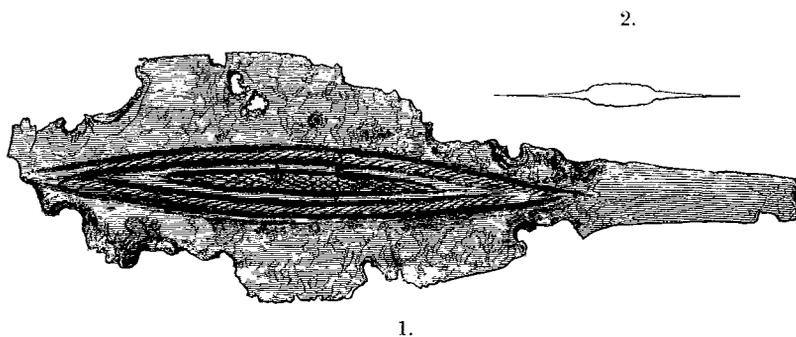


Fig. 1.—Bronze Blade found in a large Cinerary Urn at Balblair, Sutherlandshire.  
(Full size.)

Fig 2.—Transverse Section of Blade, showing its midrib and very thin edges.

about three-eighths of an inch in breadth in the middle, and tapers gradually to a point towards each extremity; it is ornamented with simple incised patterns of oblique and crossing lines. Altogether this implement, which is composed of a fine yellow bronze, is very peculiar, and, as far as I am aware, almost unique in pattern. It seems much too slender, thin, and delicate for a spear or arrow head, and appears to me rather to be allied to the class of small bronze implements, of a closely corresponding size, which are believed to have been articles connected with the toilet, and used possibly as depilatory instruments.<sup>1</sup> It is pecu-

<sup>1</sup> See Proc. Soc. Antiq. Scot. vol. v. p 84, vol. vi. p. 357.

liarily interesting to find this very highly finished bronze, as the only relic connected with this rude form of apparently early urn burial.

The Rev. Mr Joass has also forwarded, from the Duke's collection, two small somewhat square-shaped portions of highly polished bronze plates (which are now exhibited), the broken portions of one plate, possibly part of an ancient mirror; they measure together about  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches in length by a little more than 2 inches in greatest breadth, and the narrowest extremity of the plate shows apparently a rivet hole, by which it might have been fixed to a frame or handle. These plates are believed to have been found in the county of Sutherland, but unfortunately, except the name of the finder, no details of the discovery have been preserved.

The Society has been indebted to the Rev. Mr Joass of Golspie, on many occasions, as well as in this instance, for so kindly enabling us to exhibit and place on record the discovery of various curious relics and remains found in the northern districts of Scotland.

---