

III.

NOTICE OF TWO GOLD ORNAMENTS FOUND AT ORTON ON THE SPEY,
WHILE CUTTING FOR THE RAILWAY FROM ELGIN TO KEITH IN
1863. BY SIR NOEL PATON, R.S.A., F.S.A. Scot.

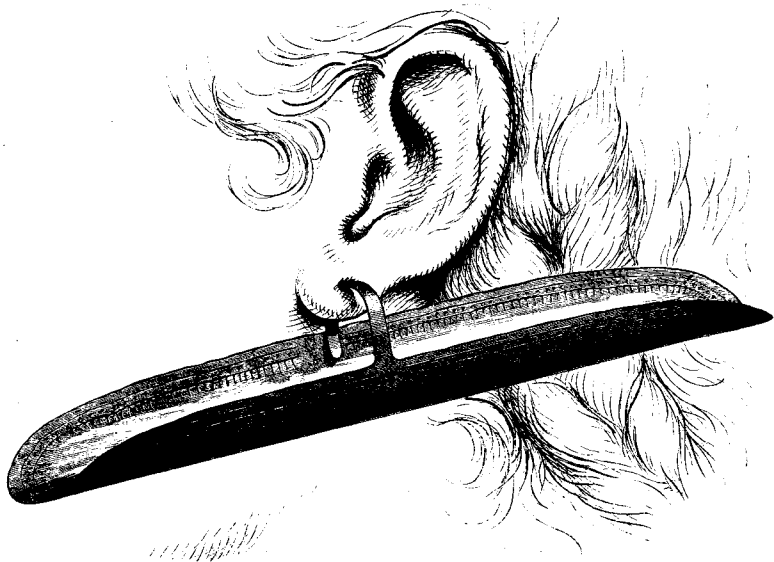
The interesting relic now submitted for the inspection of the Society, through the courtesy of its owner, Mr Alexander Walker of Aberdeen, is one of a pair, identical in form and material, found in 1863, at Orton, on the farm of Mr Geddes, Orbliston, during excavations for the railway from Elgin to Keith. Unfortunately, from the circumstances under which these relics were unearthed, it is now impossible to obtain accurate information as to those minuter details of position and surroundings which go so far to enable the archæologist to draw from such isolated remains those inferences by which alone the history of the unrecorded epochs to which they belong can now be constructed. Yet, meagre as they

are, the facts preserved may prove of some assistance in determining the probable use of the present example.

While cutting for the above railway, at a spot about two hundred yards north of the Fochabers station, and about forty yards from the side of what is locally termed the "Old Road," some navvies laid bare, at the depth of three feet from the surface of a gravelly hillock, a sandstone cist, almost crumbled into sand. About the centre lay a ridge of black dust; and on either side of that, about a third from one end, the two ornaments were found. The direction in which the cist lay has not been recorded, nor whether it was of the abbreviated proportions so frequent amongst those of the period to which it must be assigned. But from the fact that "the ridge of black dust" lay not in the centre, but "about the centre" of the bottom flags, it may be inferred that the body had been buried in the compressed attitude (which would necessarily throw the main bulk towards one side), and that, consequently, the cist was a short one. It does not appear that the cist contained any pottery. The ornaments were retained by the navvies by whom they were discovered; but they ultimately came into possession of the daughters of the sub-contractor for that section of the line, by whom they were transferred to the hands of a jeweller in Aberdeen, in exchange for certain *objets de luxe* of less obsolete fashion. From this person the one now before us was bought by Mr Walker, barely in time to save it from the melting-pot.

The ornament is of pure gold, and weighs about 8 dwt. It has evidently been cut out of a sheet of the hammered metal. Round the edge has been punched with considerable delicacy a border—its only decoration—in the simple and exquisite taste which everywhere characterises the spontaneous ornamentation of primitive races. It has then been rolled into its present semi-cylindrical form; a narrow, tapering tongue of the ductile metal being left in the centre of one edge, and curved over till in loose contact with the inner surface of the other; altogether presenting, to the best of my knowledge, a shape not only unique in its character, but destitute of even a family resemblance to any class of ornaments of the Bronze Period with which I am acquainted. But unusual as is the form which this article presents, I should not have supposed that there was much room for diversity of opinion as to its original purpose. I am told, however, that widely dissimilar views have been expressed on the subject.

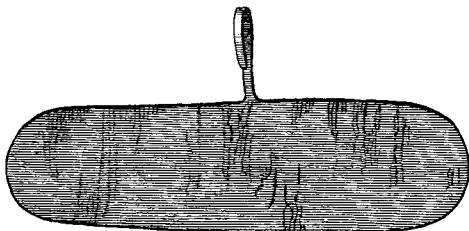
By one it has been pronounced a ring of office ; by another, a clasp for a roll document ; while a third conjectures that it was designed to secure a lock of hair at the side of the head. These hypotheses are clearly untenable. A more obvious conclusion would seem to be, that these things were simply personal ornaments, and were worn as ear-rings—in some such manner as that indicated in the accompanying cut. That they were



Gold Ornament found in a stone cist at Orton, Morayshire.
(Size, $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches long, $1\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad at the loop ; weight, 182 grains.)

thus used, as one of the earliest and most universal personal decorations adopted by human vanity, can scarcely, I think, be doubted, when we consider the preciousness of their material, their elegance, their lightness, and, above all, the position in which they are described as having been found in relation to the "black dust" of their original wearer. But whatever may have been the use of these graceful remains of archaic metallurgy, the specimen before us must be an object of considerable interest to all engaged in archæological investigations ; and the members

of this Society cannot but feel indebted to Mr Walker for its rescue from the fate to which it was destined, and which has probably long ere now overtaken its fellow. And I trust that gentleman will pardon me if I express a hope that he may yet see it to be his duty to provide for the permanent safety of so interesting a memorial of pre-historic Scotland, by the only means by which that desirable end can be attained—its transfer to the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries.¹



Gold Ornament in Museum of Irish Academy, Dublin (weight, 89 grains).

Since the above was written, Dr J. A. Smith has drawn my attention to an ornament figured in the Catalogue of the Antiquities of Gold in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy (figure 370, No. 73), which bears a remarkable resemblance to the Orton specimen. It is flat, however, but might easily be bent into a form exactly similar. It is without ornamentation of any kind, and weighs 3 dwt. 17 gr. It is described as having a "hook at top," and has undoubtedly been used as an ear-ring; although the compiler of the catalogue is of opinion that, like certain other thin plates of gold in the same collection, it was "either worn in the hair, on the forehead, or attached to the dress."

[At the date of our last meeting, when the paper, of which the foregoing is a summary, was read, there seemed no reason to doubt that the object to which it refers was found in cutting for the Highland line of railway between Dunkeld and Blair, as therein stated, on the authority of the

¹ With laudable promptitude, Mr WALKER has responded to this suggestion by presenting the ornament to the Museum.

jeweller from whom it was purchased by its recent proprietor. But on seeing a report of that meeting, the Rev. Dr Gordon of Birnie wrote to Dr Stuart, calling his attention to the fact that two similar ornaments had been dug up near Orton on the Spey, during excavations for the railway from Elgin to Keith;¹ at the same time forwarding a sketch and measurement of a model in tin made from one of these ornaments at the time of their discovery,—and deposited in the Museum of Elgin—the originals having subsequently disappeared. Dr Gordon's communication naturally suggested the suspicion that the information as to the locality in which the specimen submitted to the Society had been found was incorrect, and that it would prove to be actually one of the pair found at Orton. It seemed more probable that such should be the case, than that two distinct sets of ornaments in every way identical, and at the same time so peculiar in character, should be synchronously unearthed under circumstances so similar. I therefore wrote to Mr Walker, stating my suspicion, and requesting him to make further inquiries with a view to determine how far it was correct. The steps taken by that gentleman and by Dr Gordon to recover the missing facts in connection with this matter have resulted in establishing, on the testimony of the girl by whom the article was sold to the jeweller, and who was resident near Orton at the time of the discovery by her father's navvies of the two ornaments, that there was only *one* "find"—that at Orton, and that the specimen now presented to the Museum is one of the pair found in that place.]

¹ Since the foregoing was in type, it has been announced that, in August last, a surfaceman on the Highland Railway, while working in the ballast close to one of the sleepers on the line, and scarcely a mile on the Elgin side of the Fochabers Station, brought up with his pick, from among the gravel, a highly ornamented Gold Lunette, "closely rolled up as a scroll," which has been bought by the Exchequer, and will shortly be deposited in the Museum. It is understood that the "ballast" in which this interesting specimen was found had been carried, during the railway operations in 1863, from the "gravelly hillock" which yielded the gold ear-rings, as described above. It is therefore quite possible that all three may have been worn by the same person. With regard to the missing ear-ring—more recent information having led Mr Walker to hope that it might still be intact, he set inquiries on foot with a view to its recovery. These, he now informs me, have proved so far successful. There is reason to believe that it has escaped the melting-pot; and, although in the meantime it has fallen aside, its recovery is not despaired of—in which event it will be forwarded to the Museum.