

## VIII.

NOTICE OF THE DISCOVERY OF A QUERN IN A SUPPOSED GRAVE,  
CONTAINING BURNT HUMAN REMAINS, AT COMMONSIDE, ROXBURGHSHIRE. BY JAMES BRYDON, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

The farm of Commonside lies in the valley of the Teviot, about seven miles west from the town of Hawick, in a district rich in antiquarian remains. On almost every hill top the outlines of an ancient fortress can be traced; and on the slopes and water-side plains circular camps and other earthworks are of frequent occurrence. The Catrail or Picts'-ditch, that mysterious barrier or pathway which for the last hundred years has engaged antiquaries in fruitless speculations as to its nature, runs through the farm for a considerable distance. Several sepulchral cairns are still to be found in the neighbourhood. Two of these, about a mile from the farm-house, were demolished, a twelvemonth ago, to furnish stones for a park dyke; but as the labourers who removed them were ignorant of their nature, nothing was looked for, and nothing, with the exception of an iron spear-head, was found. On the other side of the farm there is a large artificial mound, in trenching a part of which, some years ago, a stone coffin and an earthenware vessel were exposed. Little more than half a mile to the east of this, at Teindside, a series of cists, containing human and other remains, was discovered last year, of which an account was read to this Society by Lord Rosehill. Flint arrow-heads, stone beads, hammers, and hatchets, have frequently been discovered when cultivating the land within the last few years—since the people have learned, through the labours of our local Society, to look for them.

The farm buildings have recently been reconstructed on nearly the same ground as the old set they replaced. These, in their turn, within the memory of those yet living, supplanted a still earlier onstead, which occupied the same position. Indeed, from the nature of the site, forming a commanding eminence, in a bend of the river, it has probably been, from a very early period, a place of human habitation. During the last changes it has undergone a lawn has been laid out in front of the house, three feet of the original soil has been levelled away, and a series of drains have been made leading to the plain below. While digging one of these

the workmen came upon a stone with the appearance of which they were greatly puzzled. Happening to be in the neighbourhood at the time, my attention was called to it, and I found it to be the upper stone of a quern, of the common bowl form, 9 inches in height. At the base its circumference is 3 feet 8 inches, and at the top 18 inches. The hopper at the top measures 5 inches across, and its lower aperture  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch. There is a hole about 2 inches deep on its side, into which the handle for turning it round would be fixed. As a number of large stones, coloured by the action of fire, and with pieces of charcoal adhering to them, had been thrown out from the same drain, I suggested that perhaps the nether millstone, and possibly something else connected with it, might also be buried near by, and asked Mr Stevenson the farmer's permission to have the place thoroughly investigated. To this he not only consented, but also offered to supply labourers to do it; and on the 25th March we had a regular digging.

The under stone of the quern was not discovered, but we found that the upper one had occupied the following interesting position. Down from the surface of the earth remaining, for a short distance around, the earth lay loosely together, and was of a dark colour. This latter character we found it derived from an abundant intermixture of charcoal, some pieces of which were of considerable size. It was all carefully removed, and we then found that we had excavated a triangular pit of the following dimensions:—Its greatest length, and this was from east to west, was 5 feet; its greatest width, which was 2 feet from its west end, was  $4\frac{1}{2}$  feet; and its depth was about 3 feet; but if we take into consideration the three feet of soil already taken away, then we have a depth of 6 feet. The drain in which the quern was found crossed at about two feet from the west end; and it must, from the depth in the drain at which it was discovered, have lain about a foot and a half from the bottom of the pit. But its position, and the shape of the cavity, will be best understood by referring to the diagrams exhibited. As the walls of the pit were formed of a dark tenacious clay above, and an equally tenacious, bluish-coloured clay below, and were blackened and otherwise marked by the effects of a great burning, there could be no mistake about their extent. Whether the same outlines had reached up to the original surface there was no way of determining. Every spade-

ful of earth was most carefully scrutinised; but, with the exception of the charcoal, and a few fragments of cinerated bones, nothing extraneous was discovered. In one of the latter, however, although in a state of extreme disintegration, I was able to recognise the lower part of a human *ulna*—a circumstance pointing to the probability that it had been a place of human sepulture.

In this view of the case, several interesting questions at once suggest themselves, two of which especially call for notice. The first is, Why was the quern in the grave? Was its presence accidental? Was it thrown in among the clay and other stones lying about, merely to help to cover the ashes of the dead? or was it placed there for a purpose? The former supposition is very unlikely, for, to the survivors who performed the funeral rites, it undoubtedly was a machine far too valuable to be thus loosely lost sight of. Moreover, this is by no means an isolated case. Only a few days prior to the present discovery a somewhat similar one was made at Jedburgh. Indeed, a "find," made by the late Mr Bateman, is sufficient of itself to settle the question. In two graves, a short distance from each other, he found in one the upper stone, and in the other the lower stone, of the same quern. If, then, as seems to be the case, it was placed there for a purpose, what was that purpose? One explanation is, that it was the same as we sometimes see expressed on old tombstones, where a hammer, a pair of scissors, or other implement of trade, is carved out, to show that the adjacent burying-ground is that of a blacksmith, a tailor, or whatever other occupation the emblem may indicate—that its object was to show that this was the place of interment of a grinder of grain. In the present instance, such an explanation does not seem far-fetched; for it was some distance from the bottom of the grave, and may originally have occupied a position still nearer to, or even at, the surface. This is the less improbable, seeing that the place has been for so long the scene of man's operations. But the position was exceptional, and it affords a good example of how worthless deductions are when drawn from limited observations. If querns are found in the bottoms of graves along with the remains of the body, their position being the same as that of arrow-heads and other weapons and implements, which are universally believed to have been designed to administer to the wants of the deceased in a future state of existence, there is no good reason

for thinking that their purpose was different from that which has been assigned to these other articles deposited with the deceased.

The second question is, to what time does this interment belong? The form, size, and other characters of the grave, show that it belongs neither to the earliest nor most recent period of man's history, but it shows us nothing more. The quern is a little more explicit. Its presence cuts us off from a great antiquity, and restricts us to within that period when man had not only learned to cultivate the soil, but also to prepare its products for his use, by a method undoubtedly the result of a lengthened experience, both of their nature and that of the materials used for their preparation. On the other hand, if the explanation of its purpose in the grave given above be accepted as the correct one, then it carries us back to pre-Christian times. This opinion is further corroborated by the fact that the body had been disposed of by the pagan method of burning.