

IV.

NOTICE OF A LONG CAIRN, ENCLOSING TWO PARALLEL ROWS OF CISTS, ON THE CUFF HILL, NEAR BEITH, AYRSHIRE; WITH NOTES BY DR SPEIRS, OF BEITH, ON THE HUMAN REMAINS FOUND IN IT, AND NOW PRESENTED TO THE MUSEUM. BY R. W. COCHRANE PATRICK, OF LADYLAND, Esq., B.A., LL.B., F.S.A. SCOT.

The cairn in which the bones now exhibited were discovered is situated at the base of a rocky slope, on the south-east side of the Cuff Hill, near Beith. It seems to have been originally about 150 feet in length, by 57 (or thereby) in breadth, and about 10 feet high, though now considerably reduced in size. It is composed mainly of stones, generally of no great size, and similar to those which have fallen from the face of the hill not very far from it. There is very little to distinguish it from the natural rocky mounds which surround it; and it was not till 1810, when some workmen were employed to excavate, with the view of procuring some road metal, that it was discovered to be an ancient place of burial. Several graves appear to have been then opened, but no accurate account has been preserved of what was discovered. It is stated that some human and other bones,¹ a bead of clay, and a piece of defaced metal, were amongst the objects then brought to light, but no trace of them can now be found. The cairn was immediately afterwards carefully fenced round; and no further excavation was made till the end of 1863 (or early part of 1864), when a grave at the north-east end of the tumulus was opened, in which the bones now presented were found.

From a careful examination of what remains of the cairn, it would appear that the cists were in two parallel lines throughout the entire length, with a passage between the rows about 7 feet in width. Each grave is composed of slabs forming the sides and ends. These slabs are of great size—one, forming part of the cover of one of the graves opened in 1810, measures 6 feet in length, by 4 feet 2 inches in breadth, with an average thickness of about 1 foot.

The cairn lies almost north and south, and the graves are at right angles to the central passage. The one last opened, in which these bones

¹ Robertson's *Cunninghame*, p. 293; Paterson's *Ayrshire*, vol. i. p. 263.

were found, differs from the others in one curious particular. The slabs which compose it are like the earlier ones, of great size (one of them being 8 feet 1 inch in length), but are of limestone, while the others are the same stone as that of which the cairn is made (a sort of whinstone). This limestone is not found nearer than a mile and a half from the spot where the graves are. When opened, it was found that the covering slabs were broken in by the great weight of stones above, but in other respects the grave was perfect. It measures inside 7 feet 6 inches in length, by 3 feet 8 inches at the west end, and declining gradually to 2 feet at the other. The average depth is about 3 feet 5 inches. There is an outer passage leading in from the east side about 7 feet in length, with an average width of 2 feet to 18 inches, and about 2 feet 6 inches in depth. In this passage some dark earth was found, but all the bones were inside the grave. Many of them crumbled into dust almost as soon as they were discovered; and though a most careful search was made, no other object was found.

The following note on the principal fragments was made at the time by Dr Speirs of Beith:—

“The bones are human. (a) There is a lower jaw-bone, containing eleven teeth, one of them, a molar, appearing to have been the seat of toothache. The front teeth are in a good state of preservation; and from the enamel being very much worn, and the teeth flattened, the person must have been fifty years of age at least.

“(β) A right humerus, the head of the bone wanting, the ulna and radius of the forearm of the same side adapted themselves to the condyloid surfaces of the humerus. In the upper portion of the radius was a distinct exostosis.

“(γ) The lower extremity of the right side of one-half of the pelvis, supposed, from the perpendicular direction of the internal surface to the bone, to be that of a male.

“(δ) Two femurs; that of the right side entire, except that the epiphyses and the condyles were separated. The head of the femur adapted itself very accurately to the acetabulum.

“(ε) Two tibiæ, both of the right side, one in good preservation, the other much decayed. This proves the interment of two bodies at least.

“(ζ) Two fibulæ, one of which articulated with the entire tibia.

“(7) One os calcis: with this exception, no bones of the feet were found.

“Judging from the size of the bones, and particularly from the thigh bone, the person would be of the average make and height of the present day (5 feet 8 inches).”

To the above anatomical description of the bones, it need only be added that one, at least, of the bodies had been laid on its right side, with the face to the south, and back to the north, and in a doubled up position, as the jaw-bone was within 18 inches of the west end of the cist, and all that remained of the feet a little more towards the east.¹

A great portion of the cairn is still unexplored.