

XII.

NOTICE ON THE EXCAVATION OF "KENNY'S CAIRN," ON THE HILL OF BRUAN; CARN RIGH, NEAR YARHOUSE; THE WARTH HILL CAIRN, DUNCANSBAY; AND SEVERAL SMALLER SEPULCHRAL CAIRNS IN CAITHNESS. BY JOSEPH ANDERSON, KEEPER OF THE MUSEUM.

Kenny's Cairn.—This cairn stands on the shoulder of the hill of Bruan, and is about a quarter of a mile distant from the Horned Cairn of Get, described in vol. vii. p. 490. Externally, it measured about 40 yards in circumference at the base, and about 15 feet high in the centre, its form being nearly round, and flattened somewhat on the top where the roof had fallen in. When excavated, it showed the usual divided central chamber, differing in its form, however, from any of those previously described.¹ Instead of being tripartite, the chamber in this case was only bipartite in the usual form, but had a small *loculus* off the main chamber, on the south side. The passage leading into the chamber from the out-

¹ See Notice of the Chambered Cairns of Caithness, in "Proceedings," vol. vi. p. 442.

side, which was lintelled throughout with large and heavy stones, was 10 feet long, entering with an external aperture, 3 feet high, and 2 feet 9 inches wide, and gradually enlarging till its aperture on entering the chamber was 4 feet high, and $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide. This was narrowed to 3 feet, however, by a pair of projecting jambs.

The first compartment of the chamber measured 8 feet on the floor from side wall to side wall, and 4 feet from front to back, or from the jamb-like stones at the aperture of the passage to the two divisional slabs set up across the floor, and inserted in the side walls. The aperture between their edges, by which access was gained from the first to the second or main compartment, was $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The dividing slabs did not rise to the roof, which formed one dome over the two compartments. About 4 feet in height of the overlapping part of the roof remained entire; and as the walls of the chamber slanted outwards from the base to nearly the middle of the height, the form resembled that of a huge kettle.

As usual, a great slab was set in the back wall facing the entrance; and there were other two great slabs on either side, where the second pair of dividing stones ought to have been, but instead of projecting across the floor, they were set flat in the side walls, and the building carried over the top of them. The extreme height of the wall remaining in the main compartment of the chamber was 9 feet. The recess on the south side measured, on the floor, 4 feet by 3; one of its end walls, however, being $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and the other only $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet. The back was a single stone; and the doorway was formed by a slab 20 inches wide, set up at one end to narrow the aperture of the front. The roof is formed of a single flag, and the floor of another, the height inside being $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet. On raising the flag which formed the floor, another was found beneath it, and underneath them 4 inches of clay, plentifully intermixed with charcoal, ashes, and burnt bones; and beneath that again a third large flag, which lay on the undisturbed subsoil of the hill.

The whole floor of the main chamber and of the passage, more than halfway outwards, consisted of an accumulation of ashes and broken and burnt bones, about a foot in depth, impacted so closely that it rose to the pick in cakes, and was with difficulty reduced to a sufficiently friable condition to be examined for the included remains. These consisted of human and animal bones. The animals, as indicated by their teeth,

appeared to be the same as those of the other cairns, viz., the horse, the ox, the red-deer, the swine, sheep or goat, and the dog or fox. Flint chips occurred in less abundance than in the neighbouring cairns; but the quantity of broken pottery was extraordinarily large. Several hundreds of fragments of vessels, differing in size, ornamentation, and fineness, were turned up. The most common pattern was that formed by pressing the finger-nail and finger-tip obliquely into the soft clay. The twisted string pattern, and one made by the scoring of a pointed stick, also occurred pretty frequently. In the passage were found an oblong stone, about $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch in thickness, having its sides smoothed and its ends rubbed flat, and a flat piece of bone, 3 inches long, with a smoothed, chisel-like edge—probably tools employed in the manufacture of the pottery.

Carn Rìgh.—A cairn which bore this name, and had all the appearance of a twin barrow, on an eminence overlooking the Loch of Yarhouse, had long excited our hopes, from its bearing the appellation of “The King’s Cairn,” but when we got into it we found that it had been previously opened, and completely destroyed long ago. It had been a chambered sepulchral cairn of the round type, or possibly a twin cairn, but half the chamber was obliterated; and on the floor we found a rusty “phleam” for bleeding cattle, that had been dropped by the previous explorers. The excavation of this cairn, however, showed the circular wall, which defined the round cairn externally, still standing to a height of 3 to 4 feet, about 6 feet within the verge of the loose mass of the cairn.

Warth Hill Cairn.—On the Warth Hill of Duncansbay, there is a cairn which has been called a beacon-site. From its position, overlooking the Pentland Firth, and occupying the highest ground in the northern horizon, it may very well have been so. Indeed, the quantity of ashes filling all the crevices of the cairn may be taken as proof that it was used as a beacon-stance; but its construction shows as clearly that it was originally a sepulchre. Many years ago, a well-made cist of flagstones, containing a skeleton, was exposed in one side of it; but, as I was convinced that this was not the original interment, we opened the cairn in the centre, and found a cist lying east and west, $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 2 feet 4 inches wide, and 21 inches deep. It was covered by a very large irregularly-shaped slab. The bottom of the cist and the two end stones had been

roughly dressed to fit, by blows applied along the edges of the slabs on opposite sides. On the middle of the covering slab we found an oblong water-rolled stone, naturally shaped, but which bears marks on both its ends of having been used as a hammer, and which seemed to be the hammer with which the coffin was made. Traces of the skeleton, unburnt, appeared in the cist, but neither pottery nor implements. We took up the bottom slab, and dug down to the undisturbed soil without finding anything. The other cist, previously opened, was 3 feet distant from the south-west corner of the central one. It was $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet long, 2 feet 3 inches wide, and 20 inches deep, of unsquared slabs. Six feet from the east end of the central cist was a well-like hole, nearly square, with dry-built sides, and about 20 inches wide. It went down to the soil, and contained only black ashes. The cairn was nearly 40 feet in diameter, more oval than round, and seemed to have been surrounded at the outside by a double row of large blocks, the rows being about 4 feet apart, and the stones in each row about the same distance from each other.

Small Burial Cairns.—In a small cairn near the cairn of Get, about 20 feet in diameter, and not more than $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high in the centre, the whole cairn being covered with a growth of fully a foot of peat, we found in a cavity near the centre, lying on a flat stone, a skull, and the long bones and portions of the vertebræ and ribs of a human skeleton. The long bones lay all in front of the ribs, as if they had been tied in a bundle. We opened six or seven similar small cairns; but though we always found a cavity in which there might have been a deposit, we found no traces of the deposit itself except in the one instance.

Small Cairns of Broken and Burnt Stones.—In Caithness there are many examples of a most curious class of small cairns, usually 20 to 30 feet diameter, and 2 to 4 feet high in the centre. They are composed almost entirely of broken stones, a little larger than road metal, say 2 to 3 inches across. These stones are thoroughly burned, and the interstices between them filled with a black unctuous mould, so extremely fine as to be almost impalpable. I am aware that, in the case of some similar cairns described in Shetland, it has been denied that the stones were burnt; but I have satisfied myself, that in every Caithness example that I have seen they are actually burnt; and I produce the best evidence of that in this vitrified specimen with the mark of the wood charcoal

impressed in the vitrified stone. Charcoal is abundant in the mould which fills the interstices of them all. We opened two in this neighbourhood at this time; one near Yarhouse Broch, and one near Brounaben Broch, but failed to find any clue to their purpose. Towards the bottom there were layers of flat stones, pretty evenly laid above each other; and in the centre of the Brounaben one was what might have been a short cist, with the sides driven in, but, with the exception of charcoal, cinders, vitrified stones, and a few bits of bones, some of which were burned and some unburnt, we found nothing. Similar cairns, described as "ancient heaps of burnt stones, usually consisting of small stones broken to the size of road metal," and known in the county of Cork as 'Folach Fia,' in Tipperary as 'Deer Roasts,' and in Ulster as 'Giants' cinders,' are common in Ireland.¹ In several instances a wooden trough, hollowed out of a large tree, has been found in a depressed crater-like hollow in the centre of the heap. These troughs are described as 6 feet long, 2 feet broad, and 21 inches deep on the average. One was made of boards and trenails; and two of these troughs are mentioned as having been made of marl, hardened till it was like stone. A culinary purpose has been suggested for these troughs, but in their dimensions they are more like coffins than cooking-pots; and burial in such hollowed tree-trunks is a well-known sepulchral usage of less ancient date than the commoner stone-cist.

Whether these curious heaps are of sepulchral or culinary origin, it is strange that the peculiarities of the stones broken like road metal, the complete burning they have undergone, and the prevalence of wood-charcoal filling the interstices, should be common to the Caithness and to the Irish examples. Similar small circular mounds of broken and burned stones are described as occurring in Shetland,² in Orkney,³ at Caldale, near Kirkwall, and in Morayshire.⁴ It may be some incentive to future explorers to mention, that a hoard of gold ornaments, estimated at £6000,⁵ was found in one of these heaps at Newmarket-on-Fergus, in Ireland.

¹ See *Kilkenny Journal*, iii. pp. 59, 84-6, 182-7, 384, and *Archæological Journal*, ii. p. 384.

² See Dr Mitchell's paper in "Proceedings," vol. vii. p. 127.

³ *Catalogue of Coins of Canute, &c.* By Richard Gough, p. 8. Lond. 177.

⁴ Paper by Rev. Mr Morrison, on "Remains of Early Antiquities in Urquhart," in the *Proceedings*, vol. ix. p. 250.

⁵ *Collectanea Antiqua*, iii. p. 231.