

IV.

NOTES OF AN URN FOUND IN A CIST IN A GRAVEL HILLOCK, NEAR OBAN (IN A LETTER TO THE SECRETARY). BY DUNCAN CLERK, Esq.; WITH NOTICE OF THE SO-CALLED SERPENT-MOUND OF LOCHNELL. BY JOHN STUART, Esq., LL.D., SECRETARY.

When at Oban last autumn, I had an opportunity of examining the site of the burial places referred to in Mr Clerk's letter, and I requested that gentleman to give me such a note of the details as might be entered in our Proceedings, with the view of adding to our store of facts illustrating early modes of interment.

I took an opportunity, at the same time, of inspecting a gravel hillock on the shore of Lochnell, which has of late attained some notoriety from the wild fancies of amateur archæologists, who, out of a natural eskar, have invented a "serpent mound," and adapted it to theories of serpent worship, neither of which ever had existence beyond the imaginations of sundry writers who have celebrated them both in prose and verse.

The upper end of the eskar had, in early times, been chosen as a place of burial, and the ruins of the cairn by which the deposit had been covered still remain.

From the eskar the lofty peaks of Cruachan are visible, over the shoulder of the group of lower hills which intervene, and it has been gravely assumed that this "serpent mound" was originally placed with some special and mysterious reference to this circumstance.

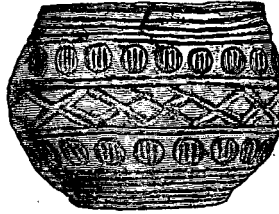
As such absurdities bring well-merited ridicule on archæological study thus conducted, I have thought it right to draw the attention of the Society to the "Serpent of Lochnell," and to disclaim all sympathy with the wild theories which have invented and magnified it.

The following is Mr Clerk's note of the discovery of the urn at Oban :—

OBAN, 30th Sept. 1875.

DEAR SIR,—I send you herewith a photograph of an urn which was found here lately, in a gravel mound at the side of the road leading to Dunollie. When the workmen were clearing away the gravel, they came upon a stone coffin, which was found to contain human bones of a large size. When removing these, a piece of an urn was observed, and,

on carefully removing a little more of the gravel, the urn was found,— its position being at one end of the stone coffin. I was on the ground at the time, and took charge of the urn, and got the photograph taken the same evening. There was nothing inside the urn except gravel of the same kind as in the rest of the mound. It is at present in the hands of Sir Donald Campbell of Dunstaffnage. The size of the urn is 5 inches diameter at the rim, $6\frac{1}{4}$ at the bulge, and $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches deep. The stone coffin or cist was built of rude slabs of slate and conglomerate, without any dressing. The length was 29 inches, by 16 inches in breadth, and 21 inches deep. It was at no great depth from the surface, only 18 inches or so.



Clay Urn found at Oban
($4\frac{3}{8}$ in. high).

Another stone coffin, found in the same mound, was about the same size as the one above-mentioned. The workmen put it aside carelessly, and having been opened on a Saturday afternoon, the contents (said to have been broken pieces of bone) were taken away by different persons before Monday. There was also a small tomb found, which had its sides and ends made of a thin layer of clay instead of stones, and inside there was a quantity of calcined bones in small pieces.

On the opposite side of the little burn that passes the base of the mound above-mentioned, there is another mound that has much the appearance of an ancient burying place. There was a stone coffin turned up in the course of some field work, and there is a round mound in the north-west corner of the field, supposed to be a tumulus. It is different from the little *eskars* that are so common in this part of the country, and on the crown of it there is one erect stone, and others lying near.

I will be curious to hear what you think of the curved mound at Lochnell. Although I am convinced that it is not artificial, still I would not say but there are stone coffins on the ridge, of which I think there are some indications. The whole being neatly sloped off, is only in keeping with the round hillocks, each with one cist, of which you have seen many.

D. C.