

II.

NOTE ON A CIST, WITH AN URN, DISCOVERED AT PARKHILL, NEAR ABERDEEN, IN OCTOBER 1881. BY WILLIAM FERGUSON OF KINMUNDY, F.S.A. SCOT.

Parkhill, the residence of John Gordon Cumming Skene, of Pitlurg, Dyce, and Parkhill, is about seven and a half miles from Aberdeen, on



Urn found in a Cist at Parkhill ( $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches high).

the Formartine and Buchan Branch of the Great North of Scotland Railway.

The site of the cist is a mound of sand and gravel within a hundred yards or so of the station buildings to the north-east. This is the second cist which has been discovered at the same spot, as one had been previously disclosed in 1867, the contents of which—an urn and bones—are preserved in the Anatomical Museum of Marischal College, University of Aberdeen.

The gravel mound belongs to the railway, and is quarried from time to time for ballast for the line. In the course of the night of 3d October 1881, the men who were digging the gravel came upon the cist at a depth of from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  to 2 feet from the surface. The upper part of the mound is roughish gravel, and below this gravel is sand. The cist was just below the gravel, but in the sand. The sides were formed of four large slabs, one of which fell down as the workmen moved the sand from below. It was also closed above with one large stone. The length of the cist was 3 feet 9 inches, the breadth 2 feet 3 inches, and the depth 18 inches at the ends, and 27 inches in the centre.

The contents were an urn, certain bones, and some small pieces of charcoal. The urn is small,  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches high, and  $4\frac{1}{4}$  inches at the mouth. It is of graceful shape and elaborately carved.

The other contents of the cist besides the small pieces of charcoal were bones. These indicated that the interment had been one of those in which the body is bent, the knees being drawn up towards the chin. Surrounding many of the bones was a coating apparently vegetable in structure. In the case of the cist discovered in 1867 there was a matting, in which true hair was mixed with the vegetable matter, this latter being probably the mycelium of a cryptogamous plant.

The base of the cist was covered with small pebbles, not so uniformly as to form a continuous floor, but quite close enough to show that it was not the result of chance, whilst scattered about were fragments of wood charcoal. Dr. Fife Jamieson examined the structure of the charcoal, which is true vegetable charcoal, and wrote me regarding it as follows:—

“In examining microscopically a piece of the charcoal I thought

I had stumbled on a *find*. With a high power, seemingly embedded in a little fragment of charcoal, were two or three isolated structures marvelously like striped muscular fibre. I began to weave a nice theory about some of the flesh (human or boar's) having somehow or other got impacted in the charcoal, which by its preservative or antiseptic power had retained the muscular fibre all these ages. The preparation was in clove oil, as it was only a temporary examination, and before I could show it to the Professor of Botany, as to whether it was vegetable or not, the clove oil had so cleared it up as to obliterate all the previous structural-like appearances. In all probability it was some vegetable cell with which I am unacquainted; the other theory is too fine to be true."

The bones which were in the cist are very fragmentary. They are those of a man along with fragments of the left fore limb of a boar. The deficiency in the human bones is chiefly from decomposition by natural agencies, but partly also from the rough handling to which they were subjected by sight-seers prior to their removal to the Anatomical Museum. It is probable that the subject was a male, evidenced specially by the prominence of the frontal sinuses, and the general size and strength of the different bones. His age at death seems to have been from twenty-five to thirty, judging specially from the condition of the sternum. His height must have been about 5 feet 9 inches, of fairly muscular build, and specially developed in the lower limbs.

The fragments of the boar bones are those of the left fore-limb, the humerus, radius, and metacarpal of the third finger. The humerus showed the upper epiphysis unanchylosed, so that the animal, large as it must have been, was not fully developed.

I may add that Mr. Anderson informs me that this interment is one of the less common class, and that it has these two very rare features connected with it: (1) the occurrence of charcoal; and (2) that of the bones of an animal.

Mr. Anderson divides the sepulchral urns of Scotland into four groups.

Groups 1 and 2 are found with burnt bodies, and are—(1) large cinerary urns; and (2) small cup-shaped urns.

Groups 3 and 4 are usually, though not exclusively, found with unburnt bodies. They are (3) food vessels (so called), and (4) drinking-cups. The Parkhill urn seems to belong to group 4—the drinking-cup type of vessel, tall and thin, and with an expanded brim.

Dr. J. A. Smith suggested that the bones of the boar might probably be the remains of food cooked, it may have been, by the burning wood or charcoal, and buried with the deceased, along with the fluid or water in the drinking-cup; and, if so, was the only instance of the kind he remembered having heard of in Scotland.