

VI.

NOTICE OF A PIETA FROM THE OLD CHURCH OF BANFF. BY
ALEX. RAMSAY, OF THE "BANFFSHIRE JOURNAL."

This sculpture was dug up twenty-six years ago, in the old and now almost disused churchyard of Banff, by the late Mr John Kynoch, then sexton of the church. It represents the dead Christ in the arms of his mother. The body rests on the lap of Mary (see fig. 1), whose left



Fig. 1. Pietà from the Old Church of Banff.

hand supports the left arm of her Son. Unfortunately, the heads of both the figures are gone. They were broken at the time when the stone was found. Mr Kynoch informed me that he and an assistant were digging the grave in which are interred the remains of a daughter of the late Mr Marshall of H.M. Customs, when they came on a heap of stones, and were compelled to use pick instead of the spade. The pick struck the stone and destroyed the heads. I asked Mr K. what became of the fragments of the heads, when he replied that the whole was so broken as to render restoration impossible. Observing that there were some carvings on the stone, it was carefully raised and cleaned. The late Rev. Dr Bremner, then minister of the parish, had his attention drawn to it, and it was some time in his house. It was afterwards replaced in the churchyard. Mr Kynoch kept it for some time in the aisle which forms the chief remnant of the old church, but latterly he had it placed on a low pedestal by the side

of the grave. The stone is now in the possession of the Society.

of a tombstone. Its existence was known to several persons, but my attention was first drawn to it by Dr Grigor of Nairn, at the meeting of the Scientific Societies in Banff in July 1883.

The sculpture is a pieta of small size. As we see it, the stone measures 1 foot 5 inches in length by $11\frac{1}{4}$ inches in breadth, while the thickness is 6 inches. With the heads entire, the length would probably have been about 1 foot 9 inches. The material is the same as the Classock (Morayshire) sandstone. The carving is probably the work of a native artist.

The spot in the churchyard where the stone was dug up is on a line with the interior of the north wall of the ruin of the old church. The old church which had contained the sculpture was begun to be erected in 1471, and was occupied as a place of worship till 1789, when the church at present in use was erected on a site in a different part of the town. When it was resolved in 1778 to build the new church, it was urged, as a plea for change of site, that the space occupied by the old building was wanted to be added to the burying-ground. It was accordingly resolved that when the new church was erected the old church should be removed in order to make space for interments. The Rev. Abercromby Gordon, minister of the parish, writing in 1798, says—"The old church was taken down only last year, excepting an ancient vaulted aisle on the south side, now the burying-place of Lord Banff's family." This vault is still entire, and the inscriptions are in admirable preservation.

So far as known to me, the existence of a stone pieta is unique in Scotland. The close resemblance of the small Banff sculpture to the famous pieta by Michael Angelo, in St Peter's at Rome, will be seen on comparing the stone with the accompanying photograph of Michael Angelo's work, for which I am indebted to the kindness of Dr Grigor of Nairn. A photograph of the Banff sculpture, taken by Mr A. Rae, Banff, is sent with the stone.

It is probable that the Banff sculpture is about the same age as the old church (fifteenth century). It will be observed that the stone is flat at the back, and has in the base a socket, indicating that it stood against a wall, and rested on a pillar of some kind. It is intended to place the sculpture in the Banff Museum.