

I.

NOTES ON (1) CARIB INCISED STONES AND (2) SHELL IMPLEMENTS. By PROFESSOR DUNS, D.D., F.S.A. Scot.

1. *Incised Stones*.—Early in 1885, the Society received from Dr Gunning of Rio de Janeiro, photographs of fourteen sets of Indian Rock Inscriptions. They occur in Amazonas, Brazil, chiefly on the banks of the Rio Negro, in positions known to be under water for six or seven months in the year. I had the honour to exhibit and describe these at a meeting of the Society on the 8th June of that year. After the publication of the *Proceedings*, several interesting communications on the subject reached me. Perhaps the most valuable of these were letters from the Rev. Professor Alban H. Wright, Codrington College, Barbadoes, an accomplished observer, who is giving much attention to some of the points raised in my paper. The illustrative drawings which accompany Professor Wright's letters add much to their value, by enabling us to compare the Rio Negro inscriptions with those met with in the West Indian Islands, St Vincents especially. No doubt the area within which they occur lies far a-field from that in which the Society's work is mainly done. But in the department of archaic-ethnology information is welcome from any quarter which helps to shed light on the history of tribes, for ages far removed from centres of civilisation, and before they have learned to copy the customs and imitate the arts of immigrants from such centres. There are few competent records of recent travel, in lands hitherto unvisited and among tribes hitherto unknown, that are not most suggestive from this point of view, for amidst much that is strange, novel, unexpected habits prevail, traces of mechanical and industrial art are met with,

and fragments of beliefs survive, which seem like the stray notes of an old melody, which both the civilised voyagers and the uncivilised tribes have lost in its entirety, but which all feel must at one time have been common to both. My own interest in this aspect of work—a work subject to the recognised principles of historical criticism—is of long standing. But it received a fresh impulse in 1865, when, with Sir J. Y. Simpson, Dr Joseph Robertson, and Dr Paterson, enjoying an archæological “outing,” the sculptures on the Fife caves were discovered. Simpson’s exclamation, “The cave men are going to speak at last,” showed how strong his hope was that the history of the tribes, alleged to be contemporary with the post-Pliocene great extinct mammals, might yet be found written by the men themselves in symbols on the rocks. We know a good deal more of the so-called cave men than we did even so recently as 1865, but for this we are not as yet much indebted, if at all, to the rock inscriptions.

Since writing the notes on the Gunning photographs, the subject has been kept in mind with the view of ascertaining the extent of the area within which similar and, in many cases, identical figures occur. And as to this Professor Wright’s communications may be taken as a good illustrative starting point. I need hardly remind the Society that the great groups of islands which lie in a semicircle on the edge of the Caribbean Sea, namely, the Greater Antilles, including Porto Rico, San Domingo, Cuba, and Jamaica, and the Lesser Antilles, including Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St Vincent, Barbadoes, and above seven hundred more, were found by the early voyagers peopled by several Indian tribes, which, though differing much both in appearance and habits, yet all spoke kindred dialects. The Caribs were the most widespread and most interesting of these, and were found to be expert seaman, brave warriors, and noted for intelligence above the rest. Geologically, the Greater Antilles may be described as “an axis of granite running east and west, overlaid on the northern and southern coast with recent limestone.” The Lesser may be regarded “as a continuation of the volcanic chain of the Andes.” These islands are now peopled by Europeans, Negroes, and Creoles, with here and there traces of the aboriginal inhabitants, as at St Vincent, in the locality

marked "Carib Country" in the sketch map on the table. But even these aborigines are gradually diminishing. The incised characters

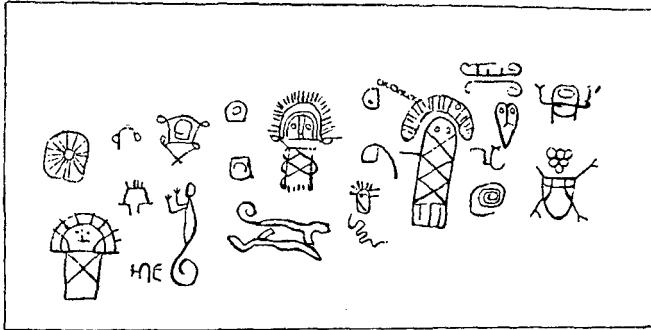


Fig. 1.

on the stones now under notice are generally traced to the Caribs, and are known as "Carib stones," "Carib sacrificial stones," and "Carib

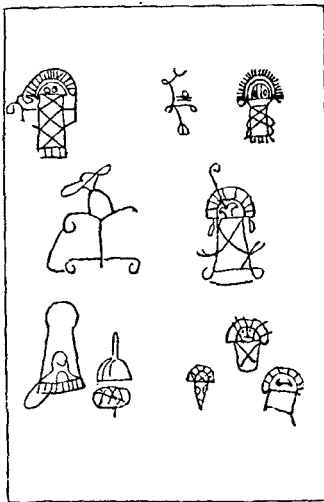


Fig. 2.

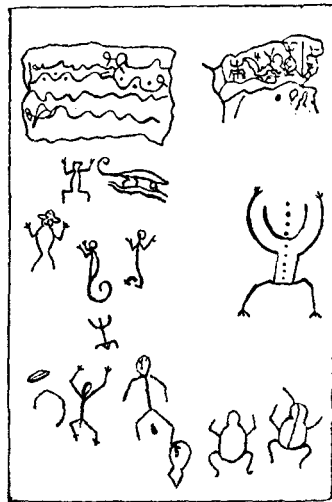


Fig. 3.

rock inscriptions." "Enormous stones," says O. T. Mason, in the *Smithsonian Report* for 1884, "covered with strange designs are found,

specially in a single quarter of Guadeloupe proper (Pointe-A-Pitre). In some the designs are so high that it is difficult to reach them, in others they are near the ground or buried under the surface. They are scattered without order about the country and in the beds of rivers. At St Vincent, also, the last refuge of the Caribs, stones and inscrip-

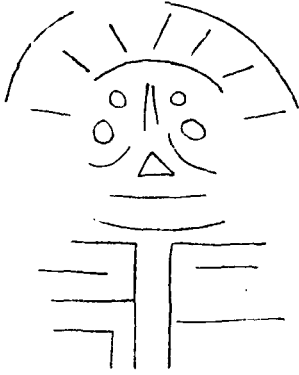


Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

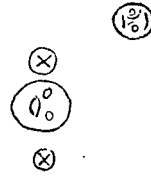


Fig. 6.

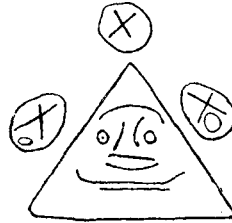


Fig. 7.

tions on them are found in the beds of rivers." In a letter dated "Codrington College, Nov. 11, 1887," Professor Wright says—"I am sending you drawings I have made of the two Indian-Carib Stones, which I saw last April in St Vincent. I find, from inquiries made, that some of the other islands possess similar stones, and I shall make it my business during my next long vacation to visit Dominica and Martinique, where I am told such incisions are to be found. On the sketch map of St Vincent I have marked the places. The stone at Layon (figs. 5, 6, 7) is very large, and must weigh some 20 tons. It has fallen from its original position, owing to the undermining of the bank on which it stood. The stone at Barouallie (fig. 4) is not above a cubic yard in content, and has not I think been moved for centuries. . . . I have sent

with my sketches the original paper on which I endeavoured to get rubbings, but the stone is so weather-worn that a proper rubbing was impracticable. However, I send the papers, as they may give some idea of the depths of the incisions." In another letter, Professor Wright says—"I am told of two Indian inscriptions in Barbadoes, but have failed to find any trace of them yet." "The Layon sacrificial stone has fallen on its side, and now slants south-west. The part marked with an asterisk (fig. 5) is like an oval basin, with a groove or channel running out to the side of the stone as if to carry off an overflow. The surface is much worn, but the figures are distinct from thirty yards distance on the opposite side of the mountain stream. The incisions are quite half an inch deep, and nearly an inch across." This reference to the depth of the incisions is important, because it is clear proof that the figures were not merely the result of slight effort in idle hours, but a laborious work implying serious and persistent purpose. The number of stones on which incisions occur, similar to or identical with those figured in the *Proceedings* of the Society for 1885, and which are now shown, is far greater than I was aware when the Gunning photographs were described, and the area far more extensive. In Schoolcraft's *History of the Indian Tribes* are instances of their occurrence, not only in North America, but he endeavours to illustrate the New World forms by references to instances in the Old, as in Tartary, for example. As has already been noticed, they are met with in Guadeloupe, where Mason has pointed out they resemble the figures in the cover of *The Timehri*,¹ a journal published in Demerara. A copy of this is now shown for the purpose of comparison with the Brazilian forms (fig. 1). But perhaps the most important contribution to the literature of "The Incised Rocks" is the description of them, as they occur in Guiana, by E. F. im Thurm, in his work *Among the Indians of British Guiana*. The copies now on the table supply a good illustration of their resemblance both in feeling and fact to Rio Negro forms. The Guiana examples are of two kinds—deep, as shown in the figures on the left hand (fig. 3), and shallow, as shown in those on the right hand (fig. 2). Some idea of the time and labour that must have

¹ A Carib word meaning "painted" or "marked," or "the writing."

been expended on them may be formed when it is known that one figure which occurs on a rock near the Corentyn river, is 13 feet high and above 5 feet wide. "The deep form occurs at several spots on the Mazeruni, Essequibo, Ireng, Cotinga, Potara, and Berbice rivers. The shallow form has as yet been reported only from the Corentyn river and its tributaries, where, however, examples occur in considerable abundance." It is noteworthy that these incised stones occur for the most part in river courses, or river banks, or in localities near rivers.

The question naturally arises, What are they? What is their meaning? Are they symbols of thought? Have they a linguistic value? Such questions were early and eagerly put, touching the pictographs of the Bushmen, the sculptured stones and pictographs of the North American Indians, the glyphs of Mexico, and even the hieroglyphs of Egypt, and to all these the answer has been affirmative. It seems to me that there is good hope of an equally intelligent kindred answer to questions regarding the forms now under notice, and that travellers knowing the language, and in sympathy with the feelings of the Indians themselves inhabiting the localities where the inscriptions occur, may learn from them the meaning of the symbols. It may, no doubt, be that to the present tribes these figures may have no significance, and be the work of families of men long since passed away. In this case our only chance of knowing much more of them than we now do would be the discovery of a key, which would be to them what the Rosetta Stone was to the Egyptian sculptures.

2. *Shell Implements.*—The term "implements" is a convenient one to apply to the specimens that form the subject of this notice, as it may be used for weapons, tools, and indeed articles of almost any sort that can be pressed into use.

(1) I notice the cutting implements first. "You may expect," wrote Professor Wright, on October 17, 1887, "in a week or two a small parcel of Carib implements, which I am sending to your address. The tools are mainly 'chisels,' turned up in digging the plantations. The jade stone article is remarkable. It was picked up in Barbadoes, where no such mineral exists, or indeed in no West Indian Island.

The limestone tools are common enough in certain spots, generally near springs, are always the same shape, and generally are found many together. Those I send are from three places in Barbadoes—Indian Pond, Three Houses, and Consett's Bay. See the sketch map." Ten specimens of shell implements, mostly of the form here figured (fig. 8), were sent to me, eight of which, selected by Dr Anderson, are now presented to the Society. The shapes vary more

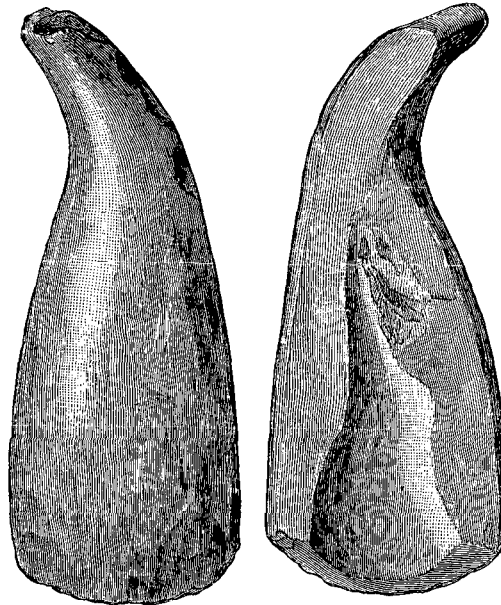


Fig. 8. Implement of Shell, from Barbadoes.

than was to be looked for after Professor Wright's remarks. This comes well out when we place the smallest beside the largest on the table. The smallest implement (fig. 9) is very pretty. Much time has been spent in shaping and polishing it. The resemblance it bears to some of the forms in polished stone in the Museum is worthy of notice (see fig. 10). All these implements have been made from the shell of a large mollusc, common in the Caribbean Sea, the giant top-shell (*Strombus*

gigas), a form which I have placed on the table. If the largest implement be laid alongside of this shell, and the hand be passed in below the rounded edge, it will be seen how little work would be required to shape it into its present form. These shell celts are said by Mason (*Smithsonian Reports*, 1884) not to be made of living shell, which

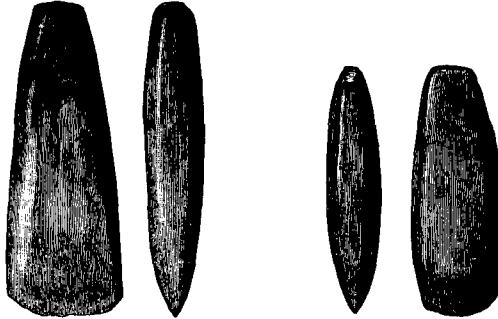


Fig. 9.

Fig. 10.

Fig. 9. Implement of Shell, from Barbadoes, and (10) of Polished Stone, from Yunan (actual size).

would not have been hard enough for the purpose, but of fossil shell. The statement is misleading. Strictly speaking, they are not fossils. The original substance has not been replaced by the matrix in which the celts are met with. The meaning must be that they have been long buried under conditions which go to harden such materials. On some parts of our own coasts, for example, where the sand consists largely of comminuted shells, it becomes consolidated by the carbonate of lime in the shell being acted upon by the carbonic acid in the rain water; and stones, laminarian stems, small crabs, and often unbroken shells are entangled in the mass, and preserved in their original shapes.

On the 14th April 1879, I read a paper on "Smoothing Stones," which is published in the *Proceedings* of that year. One example was referred to regarding the history, substance, shape, and use of which all that could be said was—"No. 5 has been long in my possession. I can, however, only hazard a guess as to its use. It was called a shoemaker's stone. I am inclined to think that it had been employed in the process of tanning, and, though not now in use, it most likely served the same

purpose as the stretching tool or slicker, which used to be of stone." At the time the general impression was that the substance is marble, though this seemed to me doubtful. When looking at the Barbadoes celts, Dr Anderson bethought him of this specimen. On again examining it, I had a thin slice taken off without interfering in any way with the shape, and on looking at it carefully with the microscope I found it to be shell.

At the same meeting I exhibited a "shell adze" from New Guinea, in its original handle, and made from the edge fold of a huge Pacific shell—*Tridacna gigas*. It is again placed on the table to illustrate the present notice.

(2) There are other two shell articles to which attention is called. These are (a) specimens of ring-money in the natives' net-work purse, and (b) a nondescript specimen which Mr Bryson, optician, kindly allows me to show to the Society. The only information I can give as to the first mentioned specimens, is that they were believed by the late Dr Mackintosh Mackay to have been brought from Polynesia, where they are used as money. Mr Bryson's specimen has been made from the second whorl of a large univalve shell, most likely *Tritonium variegatum*. In Mason's *Smithsonian Report*, 1884, reference is made to discs or quoits, and illustrations are given. He says the Caribs played with these. Is this specimen a Carib quoit?

In conclusion, I may point out that on most of the forms to which we have referred there are well-defined marks of an influence which, had they remained on the shores of their native seas, would in the long run have destroyed the shells, and returned their carbonate of lime to the ocean, to be again taken up and used by other generations of molluscs in building up their shells. I refer to the action of the tiny sponge, *Cleona*, whose influence is so powerful in the destruction of the oyster shell, and indeed the shells of all Mollusca.