

II.

NOTICE OF A SMALL CEMETERY OF CREMATED BURIALS, WITH CINERARY URNS OF CLAY, RECENTLY DISCOVERED AT CULLA VOE, PAPA STOUR, SHETLAND. BY REV. DOUGLAS GORDON BARRON, M.A., MINISTER OF DUNOTTAR.

In July of last year, while a party of crofters were engaged in cutting turf on the summit of a small hillock situated near the head of Culla Voe, on the east side of Papa Stour, they uncovered, almost at the very surface of the ground, a flat stone, which on being raised disclosed a large clay urn, containing burned bones and ashes. At the distance of a few feet a similar stone was encountered, and beneath it a second urn. Unfortunately the Papa mind associates such discoveries with hidden treasure rather than with sepulture. The inhabitants retain many traditions, more or less trustworthy, of hoards of Viking silver having, from time to time, been met with on the island, and they are continually on the look-out for such. Consequently, in the scramble which ensued to secure the possible contents of the different vessels, both were hopelessly destroyed.

Nothing might have been heard of the occurrence had not two coopers, employed at the fishing station of Messrs T. M'Adie & Sons, which is situated on the island, determined to explore the ground further, on their own account. Proceeding to the knoll, they speedily discovered, at a short distance from the former finds, and barely protruding itself above the turf, a small circle, composed of stones set on edge, and having a diameter of about 2 feet. Here they resolved to dig, and, at a depth of 18 inches, came upon another flat stone, under which there proved to be a third urn. This, with commendable care and patience, they succeeded in removing in its entirety. Subsequent shaking during transit resulted, indeed, in its also going to pieces, and in the loss of a portion of the upper part of one side. Otherwise, the urn, as now restored and presented to the Museum, is practically complete.

Since then, the knoll has, I believe, yielded various urns, all of them marked on the surface of the ground by the significant ring of stones.

In course of conversation with one of the coopers, whose interest in the matter did not rest with the discovery which he and his friend had made, I learned that these circles are not confined to the knoll in question, but occur elsewhere and frequently throughout the island. Questioned as to the position and shape of the urns, he informed me that they were all firmly imbedded in the earth, were all large, and of practically the same form. The first urn discovered, however, was of finer clay than the others, and bore marks of ornamentation round the rim. He likewise assured me that he kept a careful watch while digging round the urn he himself unearthed, but is positively certain that no stone implements or articles of bronze or other metal had been buried with it.

The urn, which is now reconstructed, stands $17\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, and is of the usual cinerary form, conical or flower-pot shape below, with a slightly bulging shoulder, and a slight contraction at the neck, from which the lip is again slightly everted. The total diameter at the mouth is $13\frac{1}{2}$ inches, narrowing to 12 inches at the neck, and widening again to nearly 15 inches at the shoulder, from which it tapers conically to a base of $4\frac{3}{4}$ inches diameter. It is, of course, hand-made, and has been burned in an open fire. No attempt at ornamentation of any kind has been made, but the exterior is fairly well smoothed, and the paste has been slightly mixed with broken stone to prevent cracking. It is interesting as being the third urn of clay from Shetland in the Museum. Cinerary urns of stone, mostly made of steatite or soft micaceous schists, have been frequently recorded from the Shetland Isles, but the only previous examples of cinerary urns of clay are two found on the lands of Kergord, in the parish of Weisdale, by the late Mr D. D. Black, F.S.A.Scot., and by him presented to the National Museum in 1866. They are described by him in the *Proceedings*, vol. vi. p. 325, as found respectively on the farms of Housegord and Flemington; and he adds that, so far as he is aware, no clay urn has ever previously been discovered in Shetland; at least, he has not been able to hear of any such discovery.

Subsequently, the writer of this notice received another urn found in the same place, which was also acquired for the Museum. It is much broken in the upper part, the interior being a solid mass of burnt bones mixed with hardened clay. It is of the same wide-mouthed, conical, and

nearly flower-pot shape as the other, and, like it, quite devoid of ornamentation. It appears to have been originally also about the same size as the other one. The finder, Mr Hugh Hughson, jun., gives the following account of its discovery :—“This urn was found on the same hill as the last one, but there was no circle of stones round it. Like the last one it was not in a cist, but simply placed down in the earth, with about 6 inches of clay over the top of it. No stone tools were found with it, or any trace of metal ; nothing but burnt stones and ashes of wood.”