III.

NOTE OF THE DISCOVERY OF SEPULCHRAL URNS IN FAIR ISLE, WITH LETTER FROM JOHN BRUCE, ESQ., YR. OF SUMBURGH, SHETLAND. BY JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, M.D., V.P.S.A. SCOT.

On a recent visit to Edinburgh Mr Bruce brought with him the broken fragments of a large clay urn and a small somewhat bowl-shaped vessel or urn formed of steatite, which were found on his property of Fair Isle.

At my request, Mr Bruce now desires me to present these sepulchral urns in his name, for preservation, to the Museum of the Society. And, in answer to my inquiries, I have received from him the following detailed account of their discovery:

"During the winter 1873-74 I employed a number of men to construct a road between the two landing-places of North and South Haven, in Fair Isle (as shown in the rough map exhibited). While so employed, the workmen had to lower the surface on the banks of a small stream running down to Fuiniquoy Mill, on the east side of the island, and level a small mound about 2½ feet high by 8 feet broad at base. Within this mound were found the two urns, the large one in the middle (I am not informed at what depth), and the smaller one a little on one side of it. The large urn was standing erect, closely covered by a flat stone, and containing a small quantity of greyish powder, supposed to be bone ash. The mound was composed of small stones (broken 4 to 6 inches) and earth. The road having been formed before I visited the spot, I cannot say what kind of soil was mixed with the stones forming the mound, but in draining and other operations I have frequently broken up similar mounds of broken stones, generally, to all appearance, bearing marks of fire, and being mixed with a blackish-looking soil of great richness, which I have always supposed to be animal remains of some sort.

"On one side, and adjoining the mound to the west, was a flat space of ground, and at the distance of 6 inches to 1 foot below the surface were found a number of flat stones, and below each stone a carefully-rounded hole about 6 inches deep by 10 inches broad, very smooth in the inside, and lined with about an inch thick of a soft black-looking
adhesive substance, resembling a mixture of peat moss and clay. Each hole contained a small quantity of a white substance resembling bone ash. The nearest hole would be about 8 feet from the base of the mound. The only hole I saw had about 1½ inch of water in it. These holes were about ten or twelve in number. I regret that none of the flat stone covers were preserved, but I believe no marks were found on any of them. The soil at this spot is a shallow mixture of clay, sand, and gravel on rock, and at one time must have been covered with more or less of peat moss. No remains of any building are found near this, and I heard of no peculiar name for this spot, or any tradition about it. As far as I know, no similar remains have been found in the island, but there are several mounds in various parts of the island called "Trows knolls," about which there is more or less of local superstition. At some of these places the hill folk, or fairies, are supposed to conduct their nightly revels, and these places may probably contain objects of antiquarian interest.

"If you will pay us a visit in summer, I will be happy to have some of these places opened under your directions, if this could induce you to give us the pleasure of your society for a few weeks."

The clay urn appears to have been of considerable size, as far as you can judge from the fragments that have been sent, and are now exhibited. It measures across the partially-broken bottom of the urn 8 inches long by 6½ or 7 inches in breadth, and the broken portions of its sides show a height of upwards of 12 inches. It is formed of a
coarse yellowish clay, and has been irregularly oval in shape, having been apparently formed simply by the hand. The smaller steatite urn or vessel, for it has probably been, in the first instance, a vessel for domestic use; is fortunately nearly perfect, being slightly chipped only on one side of its mouth. It is also rather oval in form, and the mouth measures 5\(\frac{1}{2}\) inches in length by 5 inches across. The vessel bulges out a little below the mouth, and contracts again towards its base. It is 4 inches in total height, and its cavity is hollowed to a depth of 3 inches, its sides being nearly half an inch in thickness. It is formed by being cut out of a solid piece of steatitic rock. The lip or mouth is ornamented by a small groove or bevelled band cut around its outer margin. (Its character is well shown in the preceding sketch.)

This rude vessel of steatite is of much interest, being an addition (differing as it does both in shape and size) to the curious small series of vessels for domestic use formed of steatite now preserved in the Museum of the Society. (For comparison I annex two figures of these vessels; one of an oval pot or vessel of steatite with handles, found at Brough, Shetland; the other a large urn or vessel formed also of steatite, which contained burnt bones and was found in a tumulus near the great circle of standing-stones at Stennis, Orkney.) These vessels have nearly all been found in graves, and contained the incinerated remain of the dead. With regard to the small rounded pits described by Mr Bruce as being sunk in flat ground adjoining the mound on the west, and some ten or twelve in number grouped together, each containing what appeared to be burnt ashes; it is probable they may have been also interments of the inurned ashes of the dead after cremation, like the remains found in the urns of the adjoining mound. From the moist character of the low ground near the stream where this group
of apparently small pits lined with a kind of soft clay were found, it is not improbable that they were also the remains of other vessels or urns; but that the superabundant moisture in the lower ground may have gradually decomposed them, and thus reduced them to the soft and pasty condition described by Mr Bruce; he mentions, indeed, that one he examined still contained a quantity of water.

We know very little of the antiquities of Fair Isle, the Fridarey of the Norsemen, and therefore value all the more any details with which we are favoured. This tumulus is situated about the middle of the island, and near the southern border of its northern half, which is used as the common pasture ground of the islanders; the southern portion being the more cultivated part of the island. It is also towards the eastern side of the island, on the bank of a stream which runs down to supply the Fuiniquoy Mill, the name of which shows as a part of it the old Norse word "Quoy" (a small enclosure), and therefore the former occupation by the Norsemen; and towards the west side of the island from this sepulchral mound, there is one of these mounds to which Mr Bruce refers as still styled the "Trow's Knoll;" "Trow" or "Troll" being also the Norse term for a giant, or supernatural being.

From the style and contents of these interments apparently after cremation, the rude clay urn of the mound or cairn, and the other adjoining small pits or urns, each having like the first mentioned its covering stone; it is probable they may be all of the same period, the principal interment being that of the clay urn still covered with its cairn, about the centre of which it was found. The presence of the steatite vessel seems to give a Norse character to the whole interment, although it was apparently found towards the side of the cairn. It shows at least a participation in the interment by the Norsemen, to whom these steatite vessels seem so peculiarly to belong.

The Keeper of our Museum, Mr Joseph Anderson, has done much to illustrate the Norse occupation of our country in his interesting and valuable "Notes on the Relics of the Viking Period of the Northmen in Scotland; illustrated by specimens in the National Museum of the Antiquaries of Scotland." He quotes numerous instances of the dis-

covery of these steatite vessels of various forms and sizes found in Norway, the old home of the Northmen, and shows their exact correspondence with the steatite vessels, their contents, and surroundings, which have been found in the north of Scotland—Caithness, Orkney, and Shetland, the districts formerly visited and occupied by the Northmen, and where alone in Great Britain these peculiar stone vessels have as yet been found. Mr Anderson considers these vessels to belong to the heathen Viking period, or late Iron Age, beginning about the end of the eighth century and reaching to the beginning of the eleventh, when the Northmen were converted to Christianity.

The discovery of this steatite vessel is therefore of much interest as an additional instance of the early presence of the Northmen in this outlying island between Orkney and Shetland, and the Society is much indebted to Mr Bruce for his account of the discovery, and the presentation of the urns to our National Scottish Museum of Antiquities; as well as for his kind and liberal offer to make further investigations in the island, which we may hope to be able to take advantage of on some future occasion.

Large Steatite Urn, found at Stennis, Orkney (20 inches high).
MONDAY, 12th June 1876.

DAVID LAING, Esq., Foreign Secretary, in the Chair.

After a Ballot, the following Gentlemen were unanimously elected Fellows:—

JAMES CRICHTON, Esq., 13 St Bernard's Crescent.
Rev. ALEXANDER STEWART, Minister of Ballahulish and Ardgour.

The following Donations to the Museum and Library were laid on the table, and thanks voted to the Donors:—

(1.) By Mrs MORRIS, Society, Hopetoun, through JAMES MACKENZIE, Esq., Chemist.
A Carved Pew-back from Abercorn Church, measuring 6 feet in length by 18 inches in breadth. It bears in the centre a shield with the Drummond Arms and the letters G. D.; A. D.; 1598; B. B.

(2.) By A. J. DONALDSON, Esq., Hawick.
Bombard, or Howitzer, 16½ inches in length, 7½ inches diameter, and having a bore 3 inches diameter, found near Hawick; date about the end of the seventeenth century.

(3.) By JAMES ROLLAND, Esq., 14 Shandwick Place.
Iron Crucie, with Hook for suspension, and wanting the inner shell, found at Lindores, Fifeshire.

Arrow-head of Whitish Flint, leaf-shaped, found in the parish of Urquhart. This specimen is remarkable for its neatness of finish and the smallness of its size, being only ¾ inch in length and ¼ inch in breadth.

(5.) By ROBERT CARFRAE, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.
Jewish Skekel, obverse SKEKEL ISRAEL round a chalice, over which are the letters indicating the fourth year of the reign of Simon Maccabeus;
Jerushalaim Ha-Kedoshah, "Jerusalem the Holy," round a triple lily.
Half-Shekel, same type, second year.

(6.) By Alexander Laing, Esq., F.S.A. Scot., the Author.
Lindores Abbey and its Burgh of Newburgh, their History and Annals.
4to, 1876.

(7.) By William Jolly, Esq., H.M. Inspector of Schools, Inverness, the Author.
The Scientific Materials of the North, and Scientific Work. The Inaugural Address delivered before the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club. By William Jolly, Esq., President of the Society. 8vo, pp. 27.

(8.) By Admiral Sir William H. Hall, K.C.B., the Author.
Our National Defences. 8vo, pp. 39. 1876.

(9.) By William Forbes, Esq. of Medwyn, F.S.A. Scot.
Memoir of Lady Forbes of Pitsligo. 1875. 4to.

(10.) By John Evans, Esq., Hon. Mem. S.A. Scot., the Author.

There were also exhibited—

(1.) By James T. Gibson Craig, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.
Carved Ivory Ciborium, or Cup with Cover, 14 inches high, curiously ornamented with beaded work, and with birds, lizards, serpents, and human figures in high relief. The lid is surmounted by the figure of a palm-tree trunk, the top ornamented with open work, on which sits a parrot-like bird. A man is climbing the tree on one side and a lizard on the other. A serpent issues from the man's right hand, reaching up to the bird on the top of the tree. Two serpents chase two birds in a circle round the base of the tree. Four lizards are carved round the base of the
middle of the lid, which is semi-globular in shape. The foot-stalk of the cup has a projection in the middle, from which four serpents hang down at regular intervals round its circumference. In the mouth of each of them is a bird's head. The swelling base of the foot-stalk is ornamented by a bird, a lizard, and a human figure, placed alternately at equal distances round the middle of its circumference. This rare and curious ivory was obtained by Mr Gibson Craig at Milan. There are two of the same style and period in the British Museum, and one in the Newcastle Museum, which is figured in W. B. Scott's "Antiquarian Gleanings," plate 21. They are regarded by some as West African, and by others as Indian, most likely from the neighbourhood of Goa, and dating probably about the middle of the sixteenth century.

(2.) By HERCULES LINTON, Esq., Dundee.

Collection of Flint Implements and Arrow-Heads, bronze bodkins, needles, pins, buckles, hooks, belt-clasps and fasteners, brooches, &c., &c., iron knives, rivets, and scale like plates, and pottery of Mediaeval type, from the site of an ancient settlement in the Culbin Sands, Elginshire. (See the subsequent paper by Mr Linton.)

(3.) By JOHN SMALL, Esq., M.A., F.S.A. Scot.

An Alchemical Manuscript, with coloured allegorical devices, on a roll 18 feet long, the property of the Royal College of Physicians, to whom it was presented in 1707 by George, Earl of Cromarty; formerly in the Library of Sir George Areskine of Innertiel. (See the subsequent paper by Mr Small.)

The following Communications were read:—