

OBSERVATIONS ON DANISH TUMULI, AND ON THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLECTING CRANIA FOUND IN TUMULI.

VERY little, we may perhaps more properly say nothing, has yet been ascertained as to the characteristics of the least ancient tumuli, or those erected by the Pagan Danes and Norsemen, during their occupation of so large a district of this island in the ninth and tenth centuries. In many parts of the kingdom, however, topographers inform us there exist tumuli which bear the names of "Danes' Graves," "Danes' Hills," &c. ; some of which, at least, are in all probability rightly attributed to people of Scandinavian race. Several of a very large group of tumuli near Driffild, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, bearing the former of these names, have recently been examined by the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club ; and in this instance it would appear probable that the tumuli are really what this name would imply. The contracted position of the skeletons in these barrows was very remarkable, and this is a point which will merit the close attention of subsequent observers. Other tumuli, called "The Danes' Hills," at Skipwith, near York, were subsequently examined ; but these have been erected over the burnt remains of the dead, and though their external configuration is an unusual one, it would appear more probable that they are of British origin. The want of previous examples, examined in this country, of tumuli ascertained or even supposed to be Danish, with which to compare those alluded to, must for the present induce us to speak with less confidence as to their age and origin. With such grounds for doubt, it appears very desirable that the attention of archaeologists should be directed to such tumuli in their several neighbourhoods, as either from their popular designation, situation, or other circumstances, may, with more or less probability, be presumed to be of Danish or Norwegian origin. Tumuli, under the name of Danish, are described by Camden, or his editor Gough, as existing at Osburgh in Norfolk, at various situations in Devonshire and the western counties, and at other places. Through the zeal of some archaeologists interested in inquiries calculated to throw not a little light on history and ethnography, the hope, I trust, is not a vain one, that some of these tumuli may before long be examined and carefully described.

I venture likewise to call attention to the importance of preserving the skulls found in all tumuli, which may, for the future, be examined. Crania even, which are much broken, are capable of restoration, if all the fragments are obtained. On a former occasion (*Archaeological Journal*, vol. vi., p. 127—132) I ventured to direct attention to some of the facts and conclusions which may be elicited from the examination of human remains found in barrows. It is satisfactory to observe that, in Mr. Worsaae's work on "Primeval Antiquities," recently translated by Mr. Thoms, this subject is not overlooked. We cannot, I think, but agree in Mr. Worsaae's conclusion, that when a greater number of crania shall have been obtained, "we may reasonably hope to acquire, by means of comparison, certain historical results which may possibly lead to other and more important discoveries as to the descent of the aborigines."—P. 133.

In the meantime I beg to announce, that I am collecting information in reference to the crania from tumuli of different ages, with the view of deducing, if possible, some conclusions as to the form of the skull, and other characteristics of the skeleton in the aboriginal and succeeding races who settled in the British Isles. A few crania, valuable for this purpose, have already been collected by the labours of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club, and during another season more may be expected from the same source. One gentleman, who possesses a valuable collection of antiquities from tumuli, has promised the use of his series of crania, chiefly Celtic. There are also a few skulls, scattered through public collections, to which access may be obtained. In conclusion I may be permitted to express my desire to receive information which may assist in the proposed inquiry. I shall feel indebted to any gentleman who may possess any crania from barrows, the age of which can be authenticated by the associated remains, who will allow me the use of them, for the purpose of being measured and described.

There were, and we may presume still are, numerous tumuli at Burnham Deepdale, described by Sir H. Spelman, as seated on the shore, and which by tradition are attributed to the Danes. The locality renders this not improbable, and it is highly desirable they should be properly examined. Will not some of the Norfolk archaeologists direct this attention to these barrows as well as to those at Osburgh?