

III.

NOTICE OF STONE CISTS AND AN URN, FOUND NEAR ARBROATH,
FORFARSHIRE. BY ANDREW JERVISE, Esq., CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT.

On Tuesday, 17th February 1863, while the farmer of West Newbigging, near Arbroath, was removing stones from a knoll, or hillock, called "the Pretty Thing," he came upon a cist, about six or eight inches below the surface of the ground, and situated near to the middle of the hillock. The cist was about 20 inches square, and about 10 inches deep: the top, sides, and ends were composed of pretty large flagstones; and the bottom, which was formed of the soil, was strewn with pieces of human bones. The cist lay from east to west, and a clay urn, in excellent preservation, was found on the south side of it. The mouth of the urn was turned upwards, and it contained some unctuous earth only. It is $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches high, about the same width across the mouth, and about $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches across at the bottom. It is composed of coarse clay, covered with a not uncommon zigzag and triangular sort of ornament, which appears to have been formed by some sharp sort of instrument. Another cist, about four feet to the north, contained pieces of human bones. It was of much the same size and construction as the one in which the urn was found.

The hillock or cairn in which these cists were placed appears to have been composed of a mixed mass of earth and stones—there being from 10 to 12 cart loads of stones already taken away, and to appearance, fully as many more loads remain. The hillock is about 14 yards in diameter, and upwards of 100 feet above the level of the river Brothoc, which flows

within 50 or 60 yards of the spot. On the opposite, and south-west side of the valley, there is a conspicuous hillock called "David's Hill," and tradition says that a battle was fought in the locality at some remote period, and that one of the contending armies occupied the site of "the Pretty Thing," the other that of "David's Hill."

There are many interesting points of antiquity in the neighbourhood. The parish church of St Vigeans, with the curiously sculptured and inscribed monument—the inscription upon which Professor Simpson has interpreted as relating to "Drosten, the son of Voret, of the race of Fergus," one of the last of the Pictish kings—is about a mile to the south of "the Pretty Thing." About two miles to the north-east is the rising ground of Kinblethmont, where some suppose was fought, A.D. 728 or 729, the battle of Drum-dearg-Blathmig, in which, according to the Irish annalists, Drost, or Drosten, a Pictish king, was slain. About three miles to the north-west is the famous Pict's house, or Underground Chambers near Cairn Conan.¹

I was told by old residents, that, some 50 years ago, the hillock of "the Pretty Thing" was enclosed by a stone wall, and covered by a few trees. When the wall was removed the hillock was also considerably reduced in size, and a stone cist was then found containing an urn, now lost; also, in the words of my informants, "a sword handle, finely mounted," the shells of a silver watch (?), and some other articles. At that time the common road from New Grange to Arbroath passed along the south side of the hillock.

As soon as I heard of the discovery of 1863 (which was some ten days after it happened), I visited the spot, and found the stones of the cists scattered about, also several pieces of bones, apparently human. I made some further searches, but these only went to show, as before said, that the hillock was composed of a mass of ordinary land stones mixed with earth. Some of them, however, seemed to have been laid very much like the stones of cists; but the ground was so broken up and destroyed, that, unfortunately, no satisfactory notion could be formed upon that point.

The field in which "the Pretty Thing" is situated is called the Quarry Park, simply from there being an old freestone quarry in it. It is upon

¹ Proceedings of the Society, vol. iv. p. 492.

the estate of Letham-Grange, the property of John Hay, Esq., who has kindly presented the urn to the Museum of the Antiquaries.

Mr Hay of Letham-Grange, in a letter dated 21st April 1863, kindly communicated to me the following interesting particulars relating to previous discoveries of stone coffins in the same locality. Mr Hay writes, that "in making out my present garden in the spring of 1826, two urns, and the remains of a Roman (?) road, were found. Unluckily they were broken before I arrived. About the same time other two urns were found in a gravel or sand pit about 100 yards distant from the others, near my gardener's house; but unfortunately these were also destroyed. An urn and human bones were found in making the Arbroath and Forfar line of railway, at the Waukmill, a few yards above the Quarry. I met lately with a weaver, named William Malcolm, about 65 years old, who lived thirty-nine years at Howyards, opposite the Quarry, who recollects of James Allan, tenant of Howyards, finding, about 1811, an urn in the mound called 'the Pretty Thing,' also a gold bracelet, and a quantity of human bones. The bracelet was a flat, thin piece of gold; but there were neither figures nor inscriptions upon it. Allan, who has been dead for many years, buried the bones where he found them, but kept the bracelet and urn."

As far as now known, the bracelet and urn referred to by Mr Hay are lost.