

I.

NOTICE OF THE EXCAVATION OF A "PICT'S HOUSE," ON THE FARM OF STENSALL OF KERGOR, ZETLAND. BY D. D. BLACK, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Mr Stuart read a paper addressed to him by D. D. Black, Esq. of Kergord, F.S.A. Scot., communicating information as to certain tumuli in Zetland, called Fairy Knowes; and more especially as to one on the farm of Stensall of Kergord, recently excavated by Mr Black and his tenant. There were two on Mr Black's property, besides that at Stensall, one of which, somewhat larger than the latter, was dug out on this farm in the course of improvements three or four years ago. Another, fully double the size of that on Stensall, remains on Housegord, about a quarter of a mile from where I write. The third, on Stensall, distant from Housegord fully a mile, is about to be removed. All three were covered with very fine natural grass and clover, interspersed with wild flowers, and did credit to the taste of the fairies who used them for their revels. It was growing in a black mould, which dyed the fingers, and had every appearance of burnt matter, but, on minute examination, proved to be decayed vegetable matter, mixed with a good deal of silica, similar to what we find in moss banks here. Below this mould we came upon stones, generally red sandstones, none larger than 7 inches long by 3 inches broad, and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches thick; most smaller. All these stones, when they came in contact with the vegetable matter, were black, as if they been charred or burned; some were wholly so, some only partially so; and in these latter, the line of demarcation was not gradual, as in a charred or burned stone, but decided at once from red to black, just where the vegetable matter had reached. Digging farther into

the mound, we came upon stones wholly red, noways discoloured, and mixed up with red earth or clay matter. We found nothing else. The stones had no appearance of having been regularly built, but, as we found them, were carelessly thrown together, broad at the bottom, gradually narrowing to the top, as stones would naturally adjust themselves if carelessly tumbled down. These red stones are to be found loose on the ground all about. Weisdale itself is composed of hard lime-rock or coarse marble, standing up every where perpendicular, in layers like the leaves of a book, affording excellent materials for building, and capital lime when burned; it is, however, from its hardness, rather difficult to work. We did not find a single piece of limestone in the mound. Other excavations gave the same results. The mound is in the middle of a field which has been long cultivated, and externally there is the appearance of a ditch, produced no doubt by the repeated ploughings round the hitherto respected fairy mound. This mound at Stensall corresponds exactly with the description my grieve gave of the mound removed by him on *Flemington* (called, till I got the property, *North House*, evidently a modern name, changed by me because it was modern, and because I had three farms *north* of it). I do not mean to disturb the mound on Housegord; although I see the tenant there has so far got over his fear of the fairies as to have capital potatoes growing in the centre. I should mention that the mound on Housegord is almost circular; that on Flemington was similar; but the mound on Stensall is nearly oval. The low space within the circle at Housegord is pretty considerable; that at Stensall only about four or five feet at the most. All three lay on sloping banks; those of Housegord and Flemington sloped to the east; that at Stensall slopes to the south, and the slope from two stones on the south end of the summit is more the natural fall of the ground, than produced by any artificial causes. I have seen similar mounds at various other places in this country; and also conical mounds, particularly at the Bressa side of the Sound of Noss, and all, whether conical and solid, like that on Bressa; or oval or circular, with an opening in the middle; all seem to be composed of the same pieces of small red sandstone, carelessly thrown together, at least so far as I could detect. Here, everything of ancient structure is called a Pict's house, from the tower in Mousa to the mound at Stensall; but I see my tenants prefer the title of Fairy's Knowe, as applied to the mounds in this vale.

I may add, that although we have no trees now growing on Weisdale, we find trunks of small trees in the mosses, generally birch, some fully six inches in diameter, and all very much twisted, as if the climate then had been as stormy as now. Acorns also are found; and I have detected beech and elm in small portions; but I never found pine of any kind. I am attempting a plantation:

of 10,000 Scotch firs, planted six years ago, I do not think ten are alive. Birch and larch, however, promise to thrive, if I could only get the Zetland deer, namely, the native sheep, kept out of the plantation. So it is fair to infer that wood of some kind, for domestic purposes, had once grown here.