

ANTIQUITY OF SMOKING-PIPES.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE ARCHEOLOGICAL JOURNAL.

SIR,—Your account, in the last number of the *Journal*,* of the demolition of the cairn at Scraba, and the discoveries therein, interested me very much, in common, I am sure, with all your readers; but I would beg leave to take exception to the opinion expressed by Mr. Carruthers, that the finding of one of the well-known old Irish pipes among the *debris*, settles the question of the age of these articles, by proving, from the circumstance of being discovered in connection with the cairn, the contemporary character of the two objects, the cairn itself being admitted on all sides to have been an erection of a most distant age. I think it by no means settles the question, nor even advances a step in that direction, so long as the position of the pipe in the bottom of the structure, or some other place within it where it could not possibly have been laid by human hands subsequently to the erection of the cairn, remains undefined and unknown. These pipes have afforded Irish antiquaries much room for discussion: many entertain the opinion that they are not older than the era of the introduction of tobacco into the country—no documentary evidence having, I believe, yet been discovered, nor undisputed proof from any other source, that the practice of smoking was known to the ancient Irish. Tobacco, on its first introduction, seems to have seized at once on the public taste, if we may judge from the vast quantity imported into Ireland seventy or eighty years after that time: it is related that Raleigh himself, in the first or second year of James I., was pelted with *tobacco*-pipes in the streets of London. Now, it is but reasonable to suppose, that if any substance, possessed even of a portion of the fascinating qualities of tobacco, had been known in old times, there was nothing in the habits and character of our early ancestors to prevent it from being received with as much favour in their sight as the more genuine weed at the present day is almost over the whole world, and among people in every stage of civilization, and that it would have been noticed accordingly somewhere. I do not assert that the subject is not noticed, but if discovered by any learned inquirer in any ancient document, it should be made known; and it would go farther in settling the question of the antiquity of “Danes’ pipes,” as they are sometimes called, than any other species of proof that could be adduced.

These remarks, of course, prove nothing with respect to the age of the pipe found at Scraba. They merely prove that probably in the sixteenth century, and certainly 250 years ago, pipes were common and well-known articles, and I have never seen any having the outward or visible signs even of so great antiquity. I once saw one fully as antique in shape as that which is given as a *fac-simile*

* Vol. 3, page 315.

of the pipe found at the cairn, on which were impressed two capital letters, having no appearance of being more than a hundred or a hundred and fifty years old, and which had been sunk evidently in the substance of the clay when plastic. I supposed these letters to be the initials of the maker's name; and pipes so marked are not rare. Some have even been found stamped with names in full. When letters of this character are met with on pipes, they are unmistakeable proofs of a late origin; and, when on those with large bowls and short shanks, (supposed to be the most ancient form), they throw considerable doubt on the claims to antiquity of any of them at all. I have access to a considerable collection in which are some of those pipes, and in which there are also two of metal. One of the latter is of brass or bronze, and marked as having been found near Newry; the other is of iron, and has apparently at one time been coated or ornamented with brass, and is said to have been found near Ballymena. Both very nearly resemble in shape the pipes of the present day. The finder in each case has neglected to do more than give a bare record of the place of discovery, which is most unfortunate; as the information derived from the position in which anything is found, its depth in the ground, its union with or proximity to other articles either of known antiquity or indisputably recent, are often facts of more value than any to be derived from the possession of the object itself. As I have said, it is on this account I fear the finding of the pipe in or at the cairn at Scraba can be of no avail in settling the question of origin. The coins described, there is little doubt, are not co-eval with the cairn; and the writer of the account makes the very reasonable and probable conjecture, that they were concealed in the cairn at a much later period, perhaps by some depositor who had either forgotten them, or who had died with his secret unrevealed. Now, why may not the same reasoning be adopted with respect to the pipe? Why may not it also, at a period later still, have found its way to the same depository in some accidental manner—the forgotten spoils of some gathering of old at the famous cairn of Scraba—the lost pipe of some wayfarer—the “cutty” of some solitary shepherd, dropt from his mouth among the stones of the cairn, when gazing listlessly upon his silly sheep, or dozing in the summer sunshine? These are, of course, all fanciful conjectures; but I am afraid they must be considered at least as good—so far as any proof to the contrary is afforded by the present discovery—as that this Scraba pipe, with some now unknown substance in combustion, had been between the teeth of some Irish chief in the eighth or ninth century, or had been the conductor of soothing and happy influences to the mind of some bard or musician even in the tenth or the eleventh.

From these unconnected observations, it may, perhaps, be inferred, that I am entirely adverse to the theory of the antiquity of pipes. It is not so; but I do think that, at the present time, the weight of proof is in favour of their modern origin. As a minor, though still a curious branch of Irish archæology, the subject is very well deserving of investigation; and I shall willingly adopt a different view from that which I am now disposed to hold, from the evidence accessible to me, when sufficient proof to the contrary, by some more competent inquirer, shall be brought forward.

G. B.