

CURSORY VIEW OF THE MONUMENTS AND ANTIQUITIES OF THE NORTH.

How undeniable soever the proposition that no history of a country, that is, a narrative of events and actions connected and chronologically arranged, can be conceived which shall be independent of written materials, or, as they are called, immediate sources, it is not less certain that monuments and remains of antiquity, other than literary, have a just claim to be considered as indirect sources for the same historical result. Even if such may not avail to make us acquainted with new positive facts, if they fail to certify a list of sovereigns, or to fix a series of dates, they may yet serve, collectively considered, to give us a clearer perception of the religion, the culture, the external life, and other particulars of our forefathers than can be supplied even by the written sources, to which latter no such high antiquity can be ascribed, in which old traditions are mixed up with newer, and which, as they have been committed to writing in later times, must have been liable to many corruptions of their text. The other remains of which we speak, form, some of them, a complement to the literary, extending our knowledge beyond the periods when the latter begin to deserve belief, and sometimes awakening and fortifying conjectures as to emigrations and connexions of nations respecting which history is silent. But even the mute memorials have a still higher significance for us. They lead us back to the original population of our northern country, they make us live again our fathers' life. A grave mound, a lonely circle of stones, a stone implement, a metal ornament excavated from the covered chamber of death, afford a livelier image of antiquity than Saxo or Snorre, the Eddas, or the Germany of Tacitus. And will not the explorer of the past contemplate a work of the arts of the middle ages, with an interest which no record can excite.

Accordingly there never has been a period since our history began to be cultivated and studied but these monuments

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have formed an object of attention and investigation, although often viewed in a false light and though the subject has been treated in a tasteless and unscientific manner. Who can reflect without regret on the number of objects of this nature which in the course of the last two centuries have become irretrievably lost to us in despite of the exertions of our antiquaries Ole Worm, Bure, Resen and Rudbeck to transmit an account of them for the use of posterity, exertions not the less praiseworthy although now felt to be inadequate to their object. It must be so much the more gratifying to every one who takes an interest in the olden time to know that at no period were its monuments less exposed to the risk of being undervalued and destroyed than they are now. The interest in the study of Northern antiquity, and consequently in that of its monumental remains, has hardly been at any period more diffused or more active than at present. Discoveries relating to it are ever sure of being received with sympathy by the public. As in other educated countries, collections have been established here for the preservation of the remains of former ages. The parties connected with these hold profitable communication with each other. Scientific travellers in remote regions keep a watchful eye on the remains scattered over them.

But again the remains of the past require the attention bestowed on them by assisting other scientific pursuits than the strictly historical. They assist to answer questions as to the natural history of our northern countries, their people, changes of climate and the like. To instance one subject, the interest of which has been lately revived, the solution of the problem of the ancient colonization of Greenland, and the position of the Icelandic settlements in that quarter, would appear to depend quite as much on the objects of antiquity lately discovered, particularly on Runic inscriptions, as on written documents and nautical evidence.

We may in pursuance hope that the following summary which has for its object to set forth what has been regarded as

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the best authenticated and most worth knowing on the subject of the memorials of northern antiquity, may be found not unworthy the notice of the educated public.

GRAVE MOUNDS AND PLACES OF BURIAL.

In the North, as in almost all other countries, the tomb is the oldest memorial of the past. The desire to preserve the loved and lost, in remembrance at least, is so deeply implanted in human nature, that we find evidence of it even among the most savage tribes. In the North the fashion of the grave has greatly varied with different periods. One of the reasons for this is the difference which has from time to time occurred in the mode of dealing with the corpse. At some periods the body was deposited in sand in a chamber or a large stone chest; at others it was burnt, and nothing but the ashes or burnt bones were preserved in urns or smaller stone coffins; sometimes it was interred in a sitting posture. Sometimes the same receptacle contained not a single corpse, but whole families, or many warriors fallen in a battle; sometimes not only the human dead, but his caparisoned horse, his dog and other animals which it was wished should accompany him to another world. It is obvious that customs so varied required arrangements equally diversified. In almost all the districts of the North we meet with a number of mounds greater or smaller, the work of human hands. Experiment proves that most of them have served for burial, and that they are not inaccurately termed grave mounds. As a general remark we may observe that the greater number of them is met with on the coast, and in positions which command a view of the ocean, or at least of an arm of the sea, but that they are very seldom found in what is now morass or meadow land. On the other hand they are found in considerable number on the sandy heaths of our country. Some of these mounds, we must here remark, may have had another purpose; they may have served for signal stations, or what were formerly called *Baunehöie*, spots for