

*An Inquiry into the Expedients used by the Scots before the  
Discovery of Metals.*

*By William Charles Little of Liberton, Esq;*

*Accompanied with an Engraving.*

NOTHING can excuse the present attempt but the motives which inspired it.

The author has observed, that the collections of antiquaries are too frequently the objects of curiosity, or an article of pride; nay, it often happens, that, after the first gust of novelty is over, the whole mass sinks into oblivion, forgotten by the proprietor, and unknown to the public, till possibly the heir of the painful collector makes a display of the whole in printed catalogues, as the prelude to a public sale; and an antiquary may sometimes have the mortification to discover the curious reliëts of other times amongst the play things of a child.

To correct the latter abuse was one of the reasons of our association, and to prevent the former is the object of the present attempt, in which the author feels all that diffidence and anxiety which generally attend a person who must grope his way, unassisted by any other light than the feeble and uncertain gleam which attends the exertion of very limited abilities: But he proceeds, under the cheering hope that this Society will treat with indulgence every effort, however imperfect, which, by paving the way, may stimulate the exertion of superior talents.

We

We all know with what avidity the expedients used by the Islanders in the southern hemisphere, to supply the want of metals, were sought after by the public; and the Patoo Patoo, wooden spear, stone hatchet, and shell chisel, have obtained a place in the cabinets of the curious. This, therefore, suggested to me the idea of inquiring into the expedients made use of by our ancestors in similar circumstances.

In this attempt I can derive no benefit from history, as the earliest writers are, and indeed must be, silent on the subject.

When Julius Caesar made his first descent upon Britain, he saw, and his legions felt, the arms of the brave Islanders, who not only knew the use of metals, but had it from their own mines; for Caesar, in his description of Britain, says, "nascitur ibi plumbum album in mediterraneis regionibus, in maritimis ferrum; sed ejus exigua est copia, aere utuntur importato;" lib. 5. cap. 12. In the age of Fingal, the sword, the shield, the arrow, were common weapons; and in these days metal was well known. The period, therefore, which I treat of, must have existed long before any of these aeras; and the evidence of the fact I shall take from the Society's collection.

In this remote period, the axes used by the Scots were made of hard stone, and consisted of two different kinds. In the first, the handle is inserted so exactly in the middle, that both ends may be used with equal facility; the one for the purpose of cutting, and the other for driving home or breaking any solid body. In the second kind of axes, the handle is inserted nearest the upper end, by which means the weight is thrown downwards; and this sort, therefore, was principally intended for cutting, although, indeed, the upper end is squared, and might, in cases of necessity, be used as a hammer.

The

The evidence of this arises from No.'s 97, 127, and 135, in the list of donations, which are each about six inches long, and above two inches thick, in which, although these articles are called by the vulgar denomination of *Purgatory Hammers*, yet they appear to be diversified in the manner I have already described.

These axes differed in size, according to the different purposes in which they were to be employed, and were sometimes very finely polished, as appears from No. 211. This hatchet is unfortunately broken; however, the fragment is sufficient to show what it has been. It is made of green blood stone, very finely polished; and, from the manner in which it is executed, there can be no doubt that this species of manufacture had arrived to a very great degree of perfection. No.'s 299 and 309, also exhibit specimens of these instruments.

In this way did our ancestors provide for their domestic convenience. I shall now consider the arms by which they provided for their defence, so far as the Society's collection enables me to trace them.

In the most early periods they armed their arrows with flint, and the point was of a lozenge shape, No. 253. One end being more obtuse than the other, and shorter, indicates that it was meant to be inserted into the wood; and the whole operation was concluded, by securing it either with the gut of some animal, or wrapping it round with thongs of fine leather, as at this period neither hemp nor flax were known, and it does not appear that any of our trees afforded such bark as could be manufactured into twine.

In process of time an improvement was made in this arrow, for both ends were extended to an equal length, which was attended with

with this conveniency, that if, at any time, the point was broken, they could turn that part inwards, and fix it in the wood, and were therefore ready to provide against an accident of this kind, without having recourse to a new flint; and, by degrees, they improved likewise the matter, as well as the form of this manufacture, as we find one of these arrow heads made of Cornelian, No. 41.

In process of time, the lozenge form fell into disuse, and the arrow head was formed with two witters, No. 309; but I apprehend this form was soon laid aside, as, making allowance for a part to be inserted in the wood, the point must have been extremely short. I accordingly observe a very useful improvement made upon this figure of the arrow head, by their leaving a piece of stone betwixt the witters, which could be inserted into the wood without diminishing the size of the arrow, No. 321.

The javelin or spear differed from the arrow only in this respect, that it was longer, but resembled the first kind of arrows, being of a lozenge form. In evidence of these facts, besides the articles in the Society's collection already mentioned, I appeal to No. 67.

Having thus traced the arms of our ancestors in the rudest ages, with the gradual improvements made upon them in process of time, I may be allowed to argue from analogy, and to extend this flint manufacture to similar purposes; as the same ingenuity which formed the head of an arrow could also produce a knife, a saw, and a piercer; and from this source, too, the surgeon might derive his bistory, his lancet, and his probe; and, by an easy transition from flint to bone, we can account how the antient Scots were provided with the awl, the bodkin, and the needle; and I need quote no authority to support this plain proposition, that the horns of animals, some of which, of a very large size, have been discovered in this country,  
and

and are deposited in our museum; and shells of different kinds, specimens of which we likewise have, supplied the place of the goblet, the cup, and the platter.

Besides the flint and cornelian manufactures already mentioned, and the probable use of the horns of animals, shells, and bone, I have discovered another expedient made use of to supply the want of metals; and No.'s 253, and 298, of our collection afford specimens of it; the first being a clasp, and the other a large fibula of cannel coal. At what period this manufacture was introduced, it is impossible at this distance of time to discover; but it is obvious, from these specimens, that a number of very useful articles might be made of it; and, from the very fine polish, and the neat manner in which these specimens are executed, it is clear that this manufacture had arrived at very great perfection.

Aided by our collection, I have thus endeavoured to trace the arms and the domestic implements of our ancestors at a very remote period,

“ *Ante nocens ferrum, ferroque nocentius aurum*

“ *Prodierat,*

and to grope my way through an aera, which, as it existed long before the use of writing, is not only unknown in history, but unsupported by tradition; and, though I see many deficiencies which I cannot supply, and many faults which I cannot correct, yet I have the satisfaction to think, that I have clearly demonstrated the very great advantage which our association may afford to our country, in enabling us, from the relics of antiquity, to trace, at least in some degree, the most early periods of our history; and, as our collection increases, and as gentlemen apply to study and consider the different

D d d

articles

articles which are daily presenting themselves to our observation, I have no doubt that light will be gradually thrown upon these aeras which have hitherto been considered as dark and impenetrable.

From the warlike instruments I have described, it may at first occur, that the wounds inflicted by our ancestors could not be very considerable, as the arrow heads in our collection are but of a very small size, and, indeed, upon that account, are vulgarly called *Elf Arrows*; but we must consider, in the first place, that the specimens in our possession can only ascertain the fact; but we are by no means tied down from thence to believe, that they might not increase in size, as well as improve in shape. But, in the second place, even these arrows which we have would prove exceedingly dangerous, when used against a people very ill clothed, and possibly, in the most remote periods, altogether naked: And this supposition is by no means improbable, as, even in the days of Caesar, the Britons were only "pellibus vestiti;" and that these made but a very indifferent covering, appears from another passage in the same author, in which he informs us, that the Britons were shaved in every part of the body; "praeter caput et labrum superius \*;" a piece of information he could not have received but from the very imperfect manner in which their bodies were covered; and, we may safely conclude, that if such was the situation of the inhabitants in the south part of the island, our predecessors in the north could not be in a more improved state.

I own it gives me pleasure to observe, that, even in the most remote period, our ancestors were neither destitute of arms nor domestic conveniencies.

The

\* Caesar, B. 5, cap. 14.

The ancient Scot had his bow formed of some tough wood; the gut of an animal supplied him with a bow-string; his arrows were armed with flint and cornelian; his lance was a sufficient weapon either for offence or defence: With these he could annoy his enemy, or provide food in the forest; and, upon his return home, could regale himself with his venison, and cheer his heart with the ancient ol, or lusadh; and at this rude period our ancestors, confessedly more hardy, were possibly not less happy than the inhabitants of the present times.