

CORRESPONDENCE.

I. PREHISTORIC BURIAL SITES IN SOUTHERN INDIA.

DEAR SIR,—In the *Journal* for October, 1901, p. 925, Dr. Burgess draws attention to the interesting excavations made by Mr. Rea in South India, and announced by him in his Annual Report to the Government of Madras. This Annual Report, being embodied in a 'G.O.,' is circulated among a few favoured individuals and institutions, but it does not reach the public. What we want are annual volumes such as those produced by the Egypt Exploration Fund. The world is the richer this month by the publication of Professor Flinders Petrie's last volume. The "Royal Tombs" is a monument of splendid energy, published while all the facts are fresh in the explorer's mind, and profusely illustrated. These volumes are published every year.¹ They embody the outcome of the previous season's work. They profess no finality. They are not kept back, as our Indian volumes are kept back, until some great specialist shall have assimilated everything that can be known, and can write with certainty his full and deliberate convictions. And the result is that while in every civilized country the work going on in Egypt is watched with intense interest by numbers of people who do not profess to possess any great scientific knowledge of the subject, and while, therefore,

¹ The Egypt Exploration Fund has published thirty-three handsome volumes in the last twenty years, besides other Reports and Summaries. Only one or two concerning South India have seen the light in that period, so far as I know.

the Societies engaged are supplied with funds which enable them to carry on the excavations and print their volumes, the labours of the Indian Archæological Departments fall invariably dead and lifeless. Whatever is being done in India is done almost in secret, and everybody knows that nothing will be heard of it for fifteen or twenty years, so that no one cares to support it. If we could have for India annual volumes such as we have for Egypt, I am confident that the Royal Asiatic Society and the Indian Exploration Fund would receive numbers of new adherents, and the value of their work would be greatly increased.

Dr. Burgess's seven handsome volumes have appeared at intervals since 1874, an interval of twenty-seven years. We have had no volume dealing with South India (setting aside epigraphical publications) since 1887. For fourteen years, therefore, the *public* have had no information as to the progress of archæology in that tract. Can this state of things not be remedied?

Notes.

A.—Urn-burial was common in the South of India, and apparently the practice lasted into historic times, for it is clearly mentioned in the "Purra Nânnûru." Dr. Pope publishes in the *Indian Antiquary* for October, 1900 (p. 284), the following extract from one of these poems (date unknown, but apparently of the Chola period). It is ascribed to Mudanâr, the lame bard of Aiyûr :—

"O potter-chief! maker of vessels!
 Thou whose furnace sends up thick clouds
 Of smoke, veiling the outspread heavens,

 Valavan, the great
 Hath gained the world of gods. And so
 'Tis thine to shape an urn, so huge
 That it shall cover the remains of such an one."

B.—The rock-bruisings at Bellary are very interesting. They are to be found on a hill about four miles east of that town, above a trap-dyke which had been extensively used for the manufacture of stone axe-heads, hammers, and the like. I made a rough drawing of some of these, which Mr. F. Fawcett published in the *Asiatic Quarterly Review* in 1892, p. 147.

C.—The 'prehistorics' of South India include innumerable quantities of rude stone circles, cromlechs, dolmens, menhirs, and kist-vaens — the 'holed dolmens' being particularly interesting, and some of them of very elaborate design; flint and other stone weapons, a few being palæolithic but most of them neolithic; hammers, adzes, chisels, mealing-stones, corn-crushers, grinding-stones, and axe-heads of all sizes and shapes; bronze and iron weapons, ornaments, and implements; funereal urns, coffins, and other vessels in pottery; bruising and cuttings on rocks; cinder-mounds in places (if these are prehistoric); carvings and rude sculptures on stone; gold ornaments; pottery whorls and beads; and many other objects.

Shortly after the above note was written I received, through the kindness of the author, a copy of Mr. R. Bruce Foote's "Catalogue of the Prehistoric Antiquities" in the Government Museum at Madras. No one could be more competent to undertake such a work. Mr. Foote is not only an expert in 'prehistorics,' but his long service in the Geological Department has led him into most of the wild tracts of Southern India. Here, then, is the first attempt at the much-needed classification, and it will be widely welcomed. When I add that a great deal remains to be done it must be understood that the opinion is expressed without the slightest wish to disparage the work of the author, to whom I am personally indebted for much kindness in former years, and for much help, advice, and encouragement. But this publication, in one of its aspects, proves the truth of the assertions made above. The gem of the Madras Collection is the great series brought together by

the late Mr. J. W. Breeks, of the Civil Service, from his explorations amongst the cairns and barrows of the Nilgiri Hills. The volume, however, dealing with this was published in 1873, and during the subsequent twenty-eight years no systematic researches appear to have been carried out in the Madras Presidency, except by Mr. Bruce Foote and Mr. Rea; and no volume bearing on the subject has been laid before the scientific world until the present year.

We learn from Mr. Foote's treatise that there were in Southern India a palæolithic, a neolithic, and an iron age, but apparently no age of bronze. In the neolithic age men had learned how to drill the hardest stones and how to make household vessels of pottery. In the iron age they knew how to smelt that metal and to forge it into shapes for daily use, both in agriculture and warfare. They used the potter's wheel also for making their pots. They do not, however, appear to have been possessed of any knowledge of mixed metals—of copper or of bronze. There appears to have been a great gap, historically speaking, between the dates of the palæolithic and neolithic folk, but none between the men of the neolithic and iron ages, the latter being the direct descendants of the former. The carved kistvaens and cromlechs of Sholûr and Mêlûr seem to belong to the later iron age, and the grotesque pottery 'figurines' (represented as armed with axes, daggers, and swords) to the earlier iron age. The iron age pottery was frequently so shaped that the vessels might rest embedded in soft soil, or on detached earthenware 'ring-stands.' (This was also the case in Egypt.) No trace of any alphabetic writing has been yet found.

The author himself expresses the regret which all interested will feel, that in so many cases the information is imperfect. Often we have objects incapable of being classified in order of date, or of being assigned to any particular locality, because this information has been for ever lost. Is it too much to hope that in future greater care will be exercised, and that everything found will be so recorded as to convey to the world the full knowledge which it is capable of teaching?

Some of the points of interest in this study of prehistoric man—points which must be worked out in the future—are the following :—(A) As to disposal of the dead. What was the practice in palæolithic days? In neolithic and subsequent ages various customs seem to have obtained. But in what tracts, and amongst what tribes? There is burial in large urns, the body being doubled up. There is burial in large pottery coffins with several legs. There is cremation, followed by burial in small urns. What was the practice amongst the tribes who buried their dead in (1) kistvaens sunk in the ground, (2) dolmens and cromlechs placed above ground, often on slopes of solid rock, as may be seen in the North Arcot District forests? (e.g., was there any cremation prior to interment?) and at what period of history were these monuments raised? It would seem that the custom of urn-burial was in vogue in Choḷa days, and if so, it is perhaps the latest form of sepulture in existence prior to the introduction of Brahmanical worship into Southern India. (B) As to civilization, arts, industries, manners, and customs. It will be most interesting to compare the condition of primæval tribes with that of the Dravidian and pre-Dravidian races of to-day. In one respect the older folk contrast favourably with the moderns. Their pottery appears to have been far harder and more durable. To what age belong the elaborately-arranged dolmens of the western hills in the North Arcot District? Was the country densely or sparsely populated in prehistoric days? Can the ancient tribes be so localized that in historic sequence their descent can be traced into the dynastic period, and thence to the present day? Thus, if it can be shown that the practice of urn-burial was confined to the pre-dynastic Pallavas of the Eastern and Southern coasts, what was the practice of the tribes which afterwards became merged under the sovereignty of the Cheras, Choḷas, and Pāṇḍiyans?

All these riddles and many others will be solved, no doubt, in course of time; but when is the process of solution to be earnestly taken in hand?

And, once more, will the Government, or the Indian Exploration Fund, publish annual volumes, fully illustrated like those issued by Professor Flinders Petrie and his co-workers, containing the results of the work, not of past decades, but of the year immediately preceding the issue of each? It may be safely prophesied that, if this be done, the number of persons interested in Indian antiquities will rapidly increase, and both our Society and the Indian Exploration Fund will greatly benefit.

R. SEWELL.

2. THE AUTHOR OF THE LIFE OF SHĀH ISMA'ĪL.

DEAR SIR,—With reference to Professor Denison Ross's paper in the J.R.A.S. for 1896, p. 249, I beg leave to suggest that the author of the life of Shāh Isma'īl may have been Khawāja 'Abdullah Marwārid. He was a high officer under Sultān Husain Baiqra of Herat, and some years after the death of that prince he entered into the service of Shāh Isma'īl. Ill-health, however, obliged him to give up public employment and to retire into private life, when he occupied himself in writing the life of Shāh Isma'īl in prose and verse. He completed the prose history, which had the name of the Tārīkh Shāhī, but did not live to finish the poem. These facts are recorded by Shāh Isma'īl's son, Sām Mirzā, in his Taḥafat Sāmī, of which an abstract has been given by Silvestre de Sacy (*Not. et Ex.*, iv, 273). It is true that Sām Mirzā says that 'Abdullah died in 922, and that Khwandāmīr makes a similar statement in the Ḥabīb-as-Siyar (B.M. MS. Add. 17,925, 438^b). But it seems to me that this date, which is only given in figures in the Taḥafat, must be a mistake for 932. In the first place, Sām Mirzā tells us that 'Abdullah completed his history, but he could hardly be said to have done this unless he lived to the end of Shāh Isma'īl's reign, which did not occur till 930. Secondly, Sām Mirzā tells us (see p. 283 of De Sacy's notice) that he had been 'Abdullah's disciple. Now Sām Mirzā, as we learn from the Ḥabīb MS. (*loc. cit.*, 536^b), was born in 923, and so