

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

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Scottish "Elephant" Designs.

PROF. G. ELLIOT SMITH has referred in NATURE of January 27 to the "conventionalised drawings of the elephant in . . . Scotland," and has been helped by these designs in his building up of an important theory. But, alas! these Scottish drawings are not of elephants.

I have gone most carefully into every known specimen, whole or fragmentary, of these so-called "elephants," for the purpose of attempting an elucidation and reading of the corpus of Pictish symbolism. They are invariably accompanied by other Pictish symbols. From consideration of their positions in series, their varying dimensions, the angles at which they lie, and other factors, I believe I have been able to arrive at a correct solution of the problem of their meaning. I am sure that they never had anything to do with elephants. But whether my solution is right or not, I merely here desire to point out that a close study of the drawings reveals that the supposed trunk consists of two elongated jaws. The other parts of the anatomy are likewise quite non-elephantine in character.

The fancied resemblance of these very early Christian sculpturings to elephant figures was first promulgated some forty years ago by a writer familiar with Indian mythology, who attempted to connect up Scottish with Indian inscriptions and designs. The attempt, however, was speedily abandoned.

LUDOVIC MACLELLAN MANN.

Royal Societies Club, February 1.

MR. MANN'S letter serves as a reminder that the discussion of the significance of the Scotch pictures of the elephant has followed a course remarkably analogous to that which has been waged for a century around the American representations of the elephant.

In both cases all the early scholars, as well as those of our contemporaries who do not claim to have a special ethnological insight, are satisfied to regard them as pictures of elephants; but the ingenuity of modern pundits insists on interpreting these sculptures in some more recondite way. In America the ethnologists are not sure whether the creature depicted was a tapir, a tortoise, or a macaw. In Scotland and Scandinavia the dispute around the elephant is maintained by scholars who are wrangling as to whether it is a walrus, a sun-bear, or a lion-rampant! (For the literature the reader should consult Haddon's "Evolution in Art," p. 194; the Earl of Southesk's "Origin of Pictish Symbolism," 1893; and Hildebrand's "Industrial Arts of Scandinavia," 1882.) Your correspondent tells us he has "been able to arrive at a correct solution of the problem," but with singular modesty he declines to tell us what it is.

In 1856 and 1867 the Spalding Club published two magnificent volumes dealing with "The Sculptured Stones of Scotland," in which the learned editor, Mr. John Stuart, brought his wide knowledge and common sense to bear upon the problems raised by the pictures of the elephant, and, I believe, settled the question for all time. He had no doubt whatever that the animal depicted was the Indian elephant, the knowledge of which "was brought into Europe by the Greeks after the Indian expeditions of Alexander the Great" (vol. ii., pp. xi. and xii.).

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"The elephant of the Scotch stones cannot be regarded as a likeness but rather as a conventional representation of the animal, and the unvarying adherence to one form would suggest that the sculptors were unacquainted with the original and were not working from a traditional description . . . but rather were copying a figure with defined form" (p. xii). He adds further that the ornamental scrolls found on the elephant were not found on any other beast. These scrolls were derived from the Indian sea-elephant type of "makara."

Mr. Mann's remark that "the fancied resemblance of these . . . sculpturings to elephant figures was first promulgated some forty years ago by a writer familiar with Indian mythology," presumably refers to Col. Forbes Leslie, who, on the first page of his book on "The Early Races of Scotland," states that Mr. John Stuart's work "has been taken as the basis of the present work."

I presume, therefore, that Mr. Mann is not acquainted with the real evidence upon which my case is established.

There is, of course, a very considerable mass of other literature relating to these elephants, both serious argument and modern speculation; but the only other item that I need refer to now is an episode in one of the Norse fairy tales, as translated by Sir George Dasent, of "an old hag drawing water out of a well with her nose, so long was it."

One might make the same remark about this story as Mr. (now Sir) Edward Tylor made in reference to the American legend of the "great elk," told by Father Charlevoix ("History of New France," 1744, vol. v., p. 187): "it is hard to imagine that anything but the actual sight of a live elephant could have given rise to this tradition" ("Early History of Mankind").

G. ELLIOT SMITH.

The University of Manchester, February 3.

The Remarkable Warmth of January, 1916.

A COMPARISON of the Greenwich temperatures for January, 1916, with past records may be of some interest.

Record temperatures for the time of year have occurred with considerable frequency this winter, and the warmth of January was unique in many respects. The maximum and minimum temperature observations taken at the Greenwich Observatory are used for the examination of the exceptional character of the month, and the Greenwich records afford trustworthy means of comparison extending over a long period.

The average temperature for January obtained from the maximum and minimum observations for the last seventy-five years is 38.5°, and the mean for January this year was 45.7°, which is 7.2° higher than the average, and it is 2.0° higher than in any January since 1841, the previous highest mean being 43.7° in 1846, which is followed by 43.5° in 1884. There have only been six previous Januarys in the last seventy-five years with the mean temperature as high as 43°. The mean of January, 1916, was 1.5° warmer than December, and 6.5° warmer than November last, whilst the month was warmer than in five Aprils during the last thirty years.

The mean maximum or highest day temperature for the month was 50.6°, which is 7.5° warmer than the average, and is 2.1° above the previous highest mean maximum, 48.5° in 1890, and there have only been four previous Januarys with the mean maximum temperature as high as 48°.

The mean minimum, or night temperature, was 40.8°, which is 7.0° above the seventy-five years' aver-