

OSSUARIES.

With many of the more important villages in the Huron country there are associated ossuaries, or bone-pits. The number of these, discovered and undiscovered, has been variously estimated; more than one hundred and fifty have already been excavated by different persons, but chiefly by the farmers. As to the number of skeletons in each pit, a great diversity exists. The ossuary of average size contains about three hundred, but a few have been found in the townships of Tay and Tiny containing more than a thousand, while others contain less than a dozen. These, however, are exceptional cases. Light, sandy soil was almost invariably selected for the pits, clearly because the Indians had no good implements for digging heavy soils.

The Huron mode of burial resembled in some respects that of the Sioux, Blackfeet, and other Northwest tribes of our own day. The body was placed after death upon a scaffold supported by four upright poles. At regular intervals of time, varying from seven to twelve years, (frequently ten) the skeletons were collected from the scaffolds and buried in a large pit dug for the purpose.

Brebeuf's famous account of the burial ceremony (*Relations des Jesuites*, 1636), has been fully confirmed by excavation of the ossuaries. In most cases, the small bones of the feet and hands, and such as could easily be blown from the scaffolds or removed by carrion-eating fowls, are not to be found, showing that the bodies were exposed on scaffolds before interment. In a few instances we found some large bones of the limbs (femora, tibia, humeri) arranged in bundles of a size convenient for carrying. Although the thongs which bound them together had entirely perished, the surrounding mould had kept them in their original position. Further proof of the strange mode of burial among the Hurons exists in the fact that the dimensions of the pit are almost always less than would have been required for dead bodies. No definite arrangement of the bones in a pit can be traced: although we sometimes observed that all the skulls had been placed with the face downwards—an arrangement by no means universally adopted. The few ossuaries, in which entire bodies were buried together, can easily be distinguished from the prevailing variety. When buried in this way, as sometimes occurred after a massacre, it was usual to arrange the bodies regularly with their feet towards the centre of the pit.

After the arrival of the French, brass kettles were often buried with the bones. These were purposely damaged at the time of interment by having a large hole knocked in the bottom with a tomahawk. As many as twenty of these kettles have been found in some ossuaries, especially those of the townships of Medonte. Besides kettles, they buried copper and glass beads, wampum, pipes, pottery, copper and stone axes, chisels, and in fact almost everything to be found in a Huron household.