

CELTIC REMAINS ON DARTMOOR.

BY JOHN KELLY.

ON the western borders of Dartmoor, verging upon the present cultivated districts, are numerous vestiges of ancient people. Within an area of six or seven miles, and at a short distance from Plymouth, are hundreds of these remains, consisting of Hut Circles, Sacred Circles, Barrows, Kistvaens, Cromlechs, and Cairns.

Hut Circles.—The Hut Circles (as being most numerous, are first mentioned) are for the most part placed on slopes, facing either the south or west, and are of various dimensions, ranging from 10 to 30 feet in diameter; some insulated, but more commonly in clusters or groups, of from 4 or 5, to 30, and upwards. They are formed of stones gathered from the surrounding Moor, loosely thrown together, and are about 3 or 4 feet in height. Each hut has an entrance, or doorway, formed by placing two large slabs on their ends; they are conjectured to have been completed for habitation by erecting poles on the circular basements, brought together at the top, and either covered with turf or thatched with rushes. There are some "Beehive Huts," but these are not numerous, and are composed entirely of stones overlapping each other, and forming a flattened cone. They are intermingled with the Hut Circles, but are so small, only 7 or 8 feet in diameter, that they do not seem to be well adapted for habitation, and were probably storehouses or something of the kind. These groups are in most instances surrounded by a rude fence, either circular or oval, about 6 feet in height, and formed of the same materials, and in the same manner as the Hut Circles.

The Hut Circles on Dartmoor, spoken of by Rowe in his perambulation of the Moor as aboriginal towns or villages, and the remains in connection with them, are supposed by him to be Druidical; it is, however, to be observed of those in this neighbourhood, that ancient Tin Stream Works are their invariable accompaniment, though this does not

necessarily take from their antiquity, and the persons working them may have been observers of the Druidical form of worship. Along the banks of every stream there is undeniable evidence that the ground has been worked for tin, and in every instance these Hut Circles are in close approximation. The Circle is the prevailing form of the Huts; but there are some exceptions, which will be subsequently noticed.

Kistvaens.—There are only two Kistvaens in this neighbourhood, as far as is yet known; one on the Erme, on the east side of the stream, near Lower Piles Wall, about a mile above Harford Church; the other in Langcombe Bottom, between Yealm Head and Plym Steps, on the right bank of the valley; both have been disturbed. As far as has yet been discovered, there are three Sacred Circles; one on the west bank of the Erme, at some distance above the river, on the south-east part of Stall Moor; another at Cholwich Town; and a third near Trolsworthy Tor, on the Plym.

Rectangular Buildings.—Four Rectangular Buildings have been found, two on the Erme, and two on the Yealm.* Of those on the Erme, one is in a small ravine, near the Sacred Circle on Stall Moor; the other on the opposite bank of the river, and at no great distance from the first. On the Yealm, one is a little above the waterfall near Yealm Head, on the west bank of the stream; the other at a short distance below it, on the eastern bank. All are close to the streams, while the Hut Circles are in more elevated positions.

In the construction of these Rectangular Buildings, more care has been bestowed than in that of the Hut Circles, the stones having been laid in courses, having the interstices filled with earth; and some of the stones appear to have been roughly worked. In one of those on the Yealm is a dwarf wall about 18 inches high, reaching nearly across the hut. In that on the east bank of the river was found an oblong worked stone (granite), about 3 feet in height, by 20 inches in breadth, and 3 or 4 inches thick, having in it two cavities, about 12 or 14 inches long, 4 or 5 inches wide, and 2 inches deep, at right angles to each other; and part of a similar stone was found in the hut on the west bank of the river. In the present stage of information, it would not, perhaps, be safe to hazard an opinion to what purposes these stones may have been applied; but it is not altogether improbable (as they were evidently connected with the stream works) that they might have been moulds for casting ingots of tin; why

* Two also exist on the Walkham, above Merivale Bridge.

they should be found in the Rectangular Buildings only future enquiries may solve.*

The Kistvaen is composed of five slabs, two forming the sides about 4 feet in length, and 18 inches deep; two forming the ends, and one the cover. It stands on the surface of the ground, and resembles a rude tomb; it is enclosed in a circle of stones, set on their ends, 3 or 4 feet high, and about 8 or 10 feet in diameter, and is admitted to be a place of Sepulture.

Sacred Circles.—As far as is yet known, there are three Sacred Circles; one on the west bank of the Erme, on the S.E. part of Stall Moor; another at Cholwich Town; and a third near Trolsworthy Tor, on the Plym.

The Sacred Circle is from 20 to 30 feet in diameter, and is formed in the same way as the circle round the Kistvaen, but of stones of a larger size. In connection with the one on the Erme, commencing at and leading from it, in a straight line, and extending eastward about half a mile, is a single row of stones, of a less size than those forming the circle; and it is understood that similar rows of stones are attached to the others.

They are stated by Rowe to be places set apart for the performance of Druidical religious ceremonies, an error which seems to be commonly prevalent; but in the explorations of the Castle Howard tumuli, in Northumberland, by the Rev. Mr. Greenwell, of Durham, among which similar circles occur, sunk Kistvaens were discovered in the enclosure, containing human remains—beads, urns, flints, &c.; and it will probably prove that these in this neighbourhood are also places of sepulture, and contain similar relics.

Barrows.—The Barrows are of considerable magnitude, 20 feet high, and 40 or 50 in diameter. They are conspicuously placed upon the crests of the hills, and are composed of loose stones of such a size as could be conveniently carried by a man. They are believed to be places of burial of chiefs, or persons of eminence; but although some of them have been opened, nothing of a sepulchral description has been found, though this probably arises from the examination not having been made with sufficient care; in fact, the explorers have

* In one of the Rectangular Buildings examined this summer by Mr. Spence Bate, there was found, besides two granite stones, in which supposed moulds of different shapes and forms had been cut, a place that was undoubtedly the remains of a furnace, from which a flue passed away to one of the corners in the outer wall.

not gone below the surface of the soil upon which the Barrow rests.

Cairns.—The Cairns are similar to the Barrows, but smaller, and in some instances hollow.

That all the objects in this neighbourhood are of great antiquity there is no reason to doubt, but of what particular "period" has not yet been determined, no relics having been yet discovered, nor, except in one or two instances, has any search been made.

If it be admitted that the people were tanners, they were probably acquainted with copper, and the "bronze period" may then be the one to which they belong; that they were in possession of metal tools, the sinking of the hollows in the stones before referred to is strong evidence.

As similar remains of habitations have been discovered in many parts of England, Scotland, and Wales, those on Dartmoor are, no doubt, the type of the dwelling places of the ancient inhabitants of this country. Constructed of different materials in different localities, they appear to be alike in their general plan, varying only in the materials of which they are composed. Where earth was most convenient, they, as well as the Tumuli or Barrows, were constructed of earth; and where stone was plentiful and available, as on Dartmoor, recourse would naturally be had to that material.

With such a field for investigation as is offered in this immediate neighbourhood, it is hoped that another summer will not be allowed to pass without an examination of these long neglected remains, which, from what has occurred in other places, will, it is believed, be attended with satisfactory results.

The Rev. Mr. Greenwell, before referred to, has been communicated with, and he is decidedly of opinion that these objects, if examined with proper care, will be found to contain relics of their ancient occupiers.

A small subscription, say 5s., if only 20 or 30 persons should contribute, would suffice for a fund to begin with; and surely there can be no difficulty in finding, in Plymouth and its neighbourhood, persons devoted to scientific pursuits who would willingly lend their aid to redeem from neglect these very interesting objects of antiquity.