

SOME DEVON MONOLITHS.

BY THE REV. S. BARING-GOULD, M.A.

(Read at Exeter, July, 1888.)

IN 1879 the leat for conducting the water to Lew Mill—a flour-mill in the parish of Lew Trenchard—let its water away. It was therefore laid dry, and it was discovered that one side of the leat, near the mill, was formed by a long granite stone. This was raised to the surface and laid on one side, and the leat made water-tight without it.

In August, 1880, the Rev. W. C. Lukis was in Devon, engaged in measuring and planning the pre-historic allignments on Dartmoor for the Royal Society of Antiquaries. He was staying with me, and one day I called his attention to the stone. He at once detected its character, and pointed out to me that it was a pre-historic monolith, a menhir, which had evidently stood erect for long ages, having been planted in the ground to the depth of 18 inches or 2 feet.

The stone is a coarse-grained granite from Arms Tor, or Brattor, under Great Lynx Tor, near the source of the Lyd. It had been rudely tooled, so as to smooth the edges or angles, except for the lower 18 inches or 2 feet, which portion was left *en brut* (in the rough), showing distinctly within six inches the depth to which the stone had been designed to be covered by the soil. The extreme width of the stone is 2 feet; at the ground-line it is 1 foot 8 inches; above that it bulges out, but contracts at the top to 1 foot 2½ inches. The height above the ground-line is 10 feet 10 inches. The stone is not square. The narrow side is 1 foot 2 inches at the ground-line, and 11 inches at the top.

Instead of the top being pointed, it is cut off, and in the

top is sunk a circular basin to the depth of 3 inches. This basin is not exactly in the centre, as may be seen by the drawing accompanying this paper.

At first we supposed that this cup had been bored in the top of the stone after it had been thrown down, for some purpose we could not conjecture, but on further inspection and consideration we saw that this was not the case. The cup had been in the stone when first erected, and it had remained unfilled up for a long period. The evidence for this is somewhat curious, but also conclusive.

From the cup runs a furrow to the edge of the stone on one of the narrow sides, and also down the side of the stone, for full 30 inches, sawn in the granite by the action of the water, the overflow from the cup. As our prevailing wind is from the south-west, we were satisfied that this drain from the cup was originally on the north-east, and this gave us the original directions in which the planes of the monolith stood.

The cup had not got a rounded bottom, and was not like one of the natural rock basins found on the Moor, besides being cut in the horizontal, instead of the vertical, lie of the bed.

Now it is obvious that the stone must have stood for many centuries to have enabled the overflow of a little cup to saw such a furrow in the granite.

When I saw the cup-like hollow, my first conjecture was, that it had been made in Christian times in the top of a pre-Christian monument for the insertion of a cross of iron or wood, but the furrow worked by the overflow shows that this was not possible. There had been nothing in the hole but water, nothing of the nature of a plug, since the erection of the monolith.

Where the stone originally stood can only be a matter of conjecture. When it was conveyed to Lew Trenchard I cannot say, but it was certainly at a period before the year 1664, when the dower-house was built by Edward Gould, of Lew Trenchard. This house has granite windows and mullions, and had this stone been then standing he would most certainly have used it for a top or bottom of one of the large windows, three and four-light, instead of going to Dartmoor for other stones.

The mill is close to the dower-house. It was a mill in the reign of Queen Elizabeth—how much earlier I cannot say; but it is the manor mill, and Lew Trenchard was a manor and knight's fee under the king, so that the mill

probably dates from the period when manors were constituted.

Almost certainly the stone was not standing and available when the church was built in Perpendicular times, or it would have been used up for the windows in it; nor either when Lew House (the manor-house) was rearranged in 1626. Coins found in the house show that it was built or rebuilt in the reign of Henry III. At that time granite was not used for windows and doors, and what windows there were in the earlier house were of oak or of Brent Tor freestone. Of the latter some cusped fragments have been found. But in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries granite was largely employed; and the great stone cannot have been standing at that time, or it would certainly have been employed in the rebuilding of the church in the beginning of the sixteenth century, or of the house in the seventeenth century. Why the stone was brought to Lew Trenchard cannot be said. It can hardly have been brought from the Moor to serve as a side wall of a leat. It is, of course, possible that it may have stood at Lew Trenchard in pre-historic times.

The stone has been re-erected on the spot where found, and with the faces of the stone as indicated by the overflow line.

At the time Mr. Lukis expressed his great interest in this monument, and he said that it opened up a new question relative to this kind of monument. He had sketched and planned many in Brittany. There these menhirs have frequently crosses at the top, which crosses are let into cups or hollows bored in the tops of the stones, much like that in the stone described. Hitherto it was supposed that these holes had been sunk in the stones on purpose to receive the base of the crosses—not, by the way, an easy thing to do without scaffolding; but the discovery at Lew Trenchard shows that not improbably the holes were already in existence in the menhirs, and were merely utilized in Christian times, when the stones were consecrated by the insertion in them of a Christian symbol.

I subjoin a sketch made by me in 1851 of the Pierre du Champ Dolent, near Dol in Brittany, because it presents some resemblance to the Lew Trenchard monolith, though it is on a vastly larger scale. It also has rounded edges, and a hole at the top now plugged by the base of the crucifix.

Recently (May, 1888) I have been to the Bairdun Man,

a monolith under Devil's Tor, in one of the most desolate parts of Dartmoor, about five miles north of the Tavistock and Two Bridges road. It lies 1783 feet above the sea. Curiously enough, in the new Ordnance Map a mistake has been made about its site, a group of rocks south of it is put down as Bairdun Man, and the menhir itself is simply marked as "Stone," and not in Old English letters, as used to indicate objects of antiquity. It stands near Devil's Tor, and I have little doubt contributed its name to the Tor; for the great stone is perfectly black, so covered is it with black lichen. The stone is evidently a top slab from one of the piles of rock constituting the Tor. It faces approximately with the broad planes south by south-east, and north by north-west; but not having a compass with me, I was unable to obtain the directions exactly. It is, to my mind, the finest menhir on the Moor; the utter solitude and weirdness of the situation, and the bold character of the stone itself, and its sombre, sable vesture, make it impressive to the imagination. It stands above the present ground-line 10 feet 9 inches; but the ground about it is soft, boggy peat, and I was able to sink a rod 3 feet below, and feel the stone to that depth. It must be planted in more solid soil, and wedged about with stones below that depth. I do not think we can be wrong in supposing that the peat has accumulated round it, since it was planted, to the height of 3 feet, so that originally the stone stood 13 feet 9 inches above the surface.

I found some difficulty in discovering the "Man," as hardly anyone at Two Bridges had seen it. I was directed finally by an old moorman who was cutting peat on Beardun, who told me, pointing to a pile of rocks, to keep "that Man" on my right. Apparently a survival of the Cornish "Maen" for stone, and the Bairdun, or, as the people pronounce it, "Bëardon," Man is the Bairdun Stone. At the same time I measured the monolith at Merrivale Bridge, that stands south of the well-known avenues. Though this is nearly the height of the Bairdun Man, it is not nearly as imposing a stone. There are stones around it that lead to the supposition that it once stood within a double concentric circle; but of this I cannot speak with confidence. This stone is 10 feet 6 inches in height.

I subjoin a sketch made by me in 1851 of the Pierre Fiche, at Peulvan, near Pouance, in Maine et Loire, because it bears some resemblance to both the Bairdun Man and the Long Stone at Merrivale Bridge. This stone has a hole

(square) cut in the face; but this has been done in modern times to receive a Madonna. This stone is much ruder than the Dol stone, and I give it to show how that in France, as in England, the upright stones belong to two distinct types; just as in the stone-weapon period the stone weapons belong to two epochs—the rude stone and the polished stone periods. So is it with the monoliths. Some have been rudely smoothed about their angles; of such are the Dol Menhir, and that at Lew Trenchard; others again are untouched by tool, in primitive rudeness; such is the Pierre Fiche, and such are the Bairdun Man, and the Long Stone of Merrivale Bridge.