

The PRESIDENT then proceeded to deliver his

Address.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I HAVE been much struck with the great intelligence and care displayed in the collection of articles for the Local Museum. It is of the greatest importance to a town where the study of history is to take root, as we hope may be the case in Chard, that the inhabitants should form collections to elucidate the local archæology. If a man only reads of something in a book without realising its actual appearance he will form a very indistinct idea of it, and in fact can hardly be said to have any knowledge of it at all. I am very glad that Mr. Winwood has pressed upon you the necessity of defining the exact locality in which each particular object has been found. It is often of the greatest importance to know whether a fossil or pre-historic implement was found at the bottom of a hill, or on the surface, or in some particular stratum—indeed far more important sometimes than to know the details of the classification or even the name of the fossil or the implement itself. I desire to say a few words upon the way in which we should regard the early history of man in this part of the world. Even among our own

hills the record of the race attains a vast antiquity. It is but the other day that the subject as far as this western peninsula was concerned was dismissed as a rule with some remarks about the Celts and the Phœnicians: but unmistakable evidences have now been found showing that the valley of the Axe and the adjacent ranges of hills were inhabited by the tribes who in the Quaternary Age maintained their precarious existence in a perpetual war against wild beasts. It is well known to some of you how the discovery was made. A gentleman taking the train near Salisbury saw lying on the permanent way of the railroad what proved to be a "roach-backed" flint-axe of the rude "palæolithic" type. It was ascertained after long enquiries that the implement had come there in a load of gravel used for ballast, and on further enquiry it was found that it came with many others from a gravel bed not far from Chard, which had obviously at one time formed part of the bed of the great stream now shrunken to the limits of the little river that you know so well.

Now and again a gigantic river had overflowed its banks and risen into the combes and valleys where the hunter-tribes lived who had fashioned these implements out of the chert and flint of the hills. The flood would carry before it many of these weapons with other *débris* of the villages, and so in time they would be collected at the bottom of some pit or "pot-hole" formed by the eddies of the stream, which itself in time became filled with gravel and sand, and after the stream had in the lapse of ages disappeared, or all but disappeared, the relics of that ancient life would be found, as you have heard, at the bottom of a high hill of gravel ready to be dug and dispersed to meet the modern needs of society.

I should like to have told you the story of a discovery, which was made by myself with other friends at a cave called Hoyle's Mouth near Tenby, where we were the first to break through a thick floor of stalagmite in a den or cave far withdrawn in the limestone rock and to find the skeleton of a mighty bear,

the *Ursus Spelæus* of the books, of which we removed a portion to Oxford and left the rest to be re-discovered on another occasion, when the greatest surprise was forcibly expressed at the disappearance of half the bear. But I must pass without delay to the graphic pictures which Professor Boyd-Dawkins has drawn of the state of man in that most ancient Britain when (in the Professor's words) "the land stood 600 feet above its present level and the sea-board now marked by the sunken cliffs at the 100-fathom line reached far to the west of Ireland." To the southward a broad and level plain, the haunts of innumerable herds of wild cattle and wild horses, stretched from Cornwall to Spain, or at least to the Estuary of the Garonne. The animals migrated north or south according to the changes of climate and the consequent increase or diminution in the supplies of food, and close on them followed the tribes of men who are called the River-drift Hunters and the Cave-men, whose rough unpolished implements are still found scattered in the soil. From drawings or "scribings" found scratched upon mammoth-bones and horns of deer and bison in Pyrenean caves, it seems possible to know the physical appearance of these men. You may see the figure of the hunter standing by a mammoth or stalking the aurochs or a bison on the plain. The hunters appear to be tall and strong, shaggy-haired and Roman-nosed, and powerful of frame but undeveloped in intellect, if one may judge by the form of the skull. Little as it is to tell, that is nearly the sum of what we know about these tribes, for as the seasons suffered a further change, the earth swinging in her course and nodding her poles, the glacial tracts which had overwhelmed the relics of the oldest men gave way before an increasing warmth, during a period in which our country must have assumed its present geographical contour and have become ready for the advent of the more civilised people of the Neolithic Period, or age of the weapons of polished stone. These people were the pioneers from Asia who seem to have

brought with them a rudimentary civilisation, of which the continuity has never quite been broken in its long descent. They are named, according to various theories of their origin, Silurians or "Black Celts," or Iberians; and they are probably identical in origin with those tribes of small dark men in Ireland whose descendants called themselves the children of darkness and of the night. They may have crossed the North Sea and the Channel in several places, and it is certain that by creeping up from the estuaries into the valleys and spreading along the lines of down and mountain, they at last crossed the country from the Yorkshire Wolds to the Irish Sea, and from Kent to the Blackdown Hills, and so on further into the West. These are the builders of the "long barrows," of which so many have been found in Somerset. These barrows may be described as long mounds of earth constructed either as royal sepulchres, like the pyramids in Egypt, or as tribal cemeteries or "ossuaries," into which the bones of many warriors and the relics of many funeral feasts and sacrifices were swept together. The men were slight in build and had, so far as can be judged, heads of a peculiar long and narrow shape; whence the scientific saying or proverb, "Long barrows, long heads; round barrows and round heads." The women's heads and skeletons were, as Professor Rolleston ascertained by measurements, smaller in a very disproportionate degree to those of the men, and this of itself tells us something of the history of these tribes, for it shows at least that there could not have been much to eat, that the men took most and left the women but little, and that the weakest as was natural had to go to the wall.

I should wish particularly to refer to the admirable descriptions of some of these ancient people, which may be found in the writings of our neighbour Mr. Barnes, whose poems in the Dorset dialect have caused so much attention to be turned to our corner of the West. Mr. Barnes has described in a village lecture the picture that might have been seen by a

visitor to one of the little pastoral settlements which once occupied our valleys finding a refuge in time of war in one of those great camps which crown the neighbouring hills. The time of year selected by him is the end of the summer, when the oats and rye were reaped and the lawns and meadows round the homesteads had been mown "The cattle are on the downs, or in the hollows of the hills. Here and there are wide beds of fern, or breadths of gorse and patches of wild raspberry, with gleaming sheets of flowers. The swine are roaming in the woods and shady oak-glades, the nuts are studding the brown-leaved bushes. On the sunny side of some cluster of trees is the herdsman's round wicker house, with its brown conical roof and blue wreaths of smoke. In the meadows and basins of the sluggish streams stand clusters of tall elms waving with the nests of herons: the bittern, coot, and water-rail are busy among the rushes and flags of the reedy meres. Birds are 'churming' in the wood-girt clearings, wolves and foxes slinking to their covers, knots of maidens laughing at the water-spring, beating the white linen or flannel with their washing-bats, the children play before the doors of the round straw-thatched houses of the homestead, the peaceful abode of the sons of the oaky vale. On the ridges of the downs rise the sharp cones of the barrows, some glistening in white chalk, or red, the mould of a new burial, and others green with the grass of long years."

These barrows supply some slight details by which we may further realise the condition of these Neolithic tribes. They contain pottery incised with a rude ornamentation of cross-hatched lines, flint scrapers for dressing leather, and polished implements of stone in vast variety. A few ornaments of amber have been found, with here and there a golden stud or button on a breast-plate of stone, and even sometimes a cuirass or corselet of gold. Leaving the consideration of the "Age of polished stone implements," our enquiry now reaches a much more important epoch. Foreign commerce ap-

pears to have begun long before the arrival of the Roman legionaries. The men of the Bronze Age passing gradually along the shores of the Baltic and North Sea, came to our island at several points and began to dispossess and in many cases to enslave the ill-armed natives. The new comers had the vast material superiority of a knowledge of metal weapons, using all kinds of instruments in bronze, or a composition like bell-metal, consisting of about nine-tenths of copper and one-tenth of tin, to which by some process long lost, but said to have been quite recently re-discovered, they were able to give a fine cutting edge. The tin of Cornwall had not yet been discovered, but there were plentiful supplies in the neighbourhood of the Ural and Altai Ranges, to which localities we must refer the origin of these Bronze Age tribes. They seem to have been tall fair men of the type and probably of the race which is called the "White Finn." There is no need to describe in detail the discoveries which have been made in the "round-barrows" constructed by these "dolmen builders." The Local Museum and the other collections which have been made in the neighbourhood, will supply plenty of specimens of the bronze daggers, the grooved "celts," chisels, spear-heads, and axes, which are found in the graves and in the ditches round the camps which formed refuges in times of war. Something is known of the capacity of these men for trade and travel. It seems that long before Julius Cæsar forced a quarrel on the island kings, an extensive trade had been carried on between the western ports and the opposite coasts of Brittany. A Greek traveller who visited Cornwall and its neighbourhood in the 2nd century before Christ said that the people were extremely fond of strangers, and were civilised by their intercourse with the merchants. Some of the ports and markets may even now be identified. I have collected a few facts bearing upon this matter in a work which I recently published, and I will call your attention to their significance with reference to the question before us. The station on the Truro

River, which Ptolemy had called "the Outlets of Cenion," has lately been identified by the discovery of a huge slab of tin, shaped liked a knuckle-bone in the manner described by Posidonius. The emporium of Isaca can not be far from the site which the Romans afterwards selected for their permanent camp at Exeter. The trading port of Moridunum may reasonably be placed at Seaton, although there are difficulties as to the measurements of distance which appear in the old Itineraries. The course of the metal trade is shown by the names of places on the coast-road leading eastward from the Axe, as Stansa Bay and Stans-Ore point in Hampshire. The Greeks came for minerals, the Gauls for furs and skins and for those great wolf-dogs which they used in their domestic wars. There must have been many other sources of information by which the natives could learn what was passing abroad. 'The students were constantly crossing to take lessons in the insular Druidism; the slave-merchants followed the armies in time of war, the pedlars explored the trading roads to sell their trinkets of glass and ivory, and the travelling sword-smiths and bronze-tinkers must have helped in a great degree to spread the knowledge of the arts of civilized society.'

It is probable that the Western Damnonians were separated from the territories afterwards held by the Belgæ by wide reaches of forest, and by the spreading marshes in which the waters of the Tone and Parret were lost in those ancient times. Sir Henry de la Beche, in his account of the geology of the South-western Counties, has indicated the means by which our county was brought into its present shape and condition. "The lines of old sea-board about Sedgemoor, the remains found far inland of islands where the sands were drifted and a shingle beach thrown up, and the Roman antiquities found in the embankments and silt of the marshes, show that much of the land has been reclaimed within the historical period."

There are different opinions as to the date of the arrival of the Belgæ in these parts. For my own part I believe

that they did not push into this region until after Julius Cæsar's expedition to Britain. After the conquest of Gaul the Belgæ seem to have founded a settlement on the Southampton Water, and thence to have spread westward to the mouth of the Severn and to have built towns at Winchester, Bath, and Ilchester. The rising prosperity of the native states was marked by the foundation of these prosperous towns. When the Romans came they found the people in a thriving condition. The little western kingdoms were slowly learning the lessons of civilisation from the advancing power of Rome. Without repeating the dismal story of the Roman Conquest, I may remind you of the contrast between the British tribes, with their rising commerce and homely culture, and the terrible Romans, whose avarice has been so graphically described by Tacitus. "If their enemy was rich they were ravenous, if poor they lusted for dominion: and neither the East nor the West could satisfy them." The conscription, the heavy taxes, and the slavery of the natives in the mines and public works, must be set off against the advantage of belonging to the Empire. It was not until about the year A.D. 50 that any part of our own district was reduced to the condition of a Roman province. We are told that Vespasian and Titus about that time broke the forces of the two "mighty nations" of the South and West; and an inscription found at Wookey Hole at the foot of the Mendip Hills shows the turning point of Vespasian's chief campaign. It is probable that the Romans were principally attracted by the reports of the mineral riches of the West. The surface-iron was being worked in the Forest of Anderida and in the valley of the Severn; lead was already found in the High Peak, and it was said that the Mendips were covered with lead and possibly with silver "as with a garment," to adopt an expression used by Pliny the Naturalist. Many of the hill-tops in their immediate neighbourhood are covered with the *débris* of Roman iron-works. At Combe St. Nicholas and at Whitestaunton, for example,

we find great quantities of slag and refuse remaining from the mines which were first worked under Roman supervision, and which continued to yield an income long after the time at which they were described in Domesday Book. The Society will have an opportunity of visiting the remains of an extensive Roman Villa on Mr. J. Brown's estate at Combe St. Nicholas, and I may mention that the remains of another Villa have just been discovered in my own garden at White-staunton.¹

If time permitted I would refer to the accounts of the pleasant and easy life of the Romans in Britain, the large country houses, the great halls and libraries, the tennis courts, and the stiff Italian gardens with their trim hedges and long strips of lawn; of the hunting in the forest, and the dull hard life of the labourers whose cottages were clustered round the nobleman's mansion: all this and the like may be found by comparing the descriptions given by Pliny of his country houses, and the minute accounts remaining to us of the Villa of Sidonius Apollinaris, who was Bishop of Auvergne at the time when Hengist and Horsa or some like them were beginning their piratical incursions. The actual beginnings of the English Conquest may be told in the words of the old historian: "Many and frequent were the expeditions from Germany, and many were the lords who strove against each other in the regions of East Anglia and Mercia: and thereby arose unnumbered wars, but the names of the chieftains remain unknown by their very multitude." Looking down upon the Vale of Somerset, we may see for ourselves one of those districts, the area of an ancient conquest, where a tribe of Englishmen once settled down, with a code and customs of their own. The 'five fertile Hundreds' of Taunton Dean, comprising many parishes besides the town of

(1). This Villa has now been excavated under the superintendence of C. E. Davis, Esq., F.S.A. It is hoped that a description of the discoveries may be published in a later volume of the Society's *Proceedings*.

Taunton, form a district with peculiar local customs, which seem to denote that it had once been an ancient principality or kingdom, with separate laws of its own. The strangest peculiarity of this district consists in an exaggeration of the law of dower, which is perhaps only to be paralleled by certain usages which prevail in the Pyrenees. According to the custom of Taunton Dean, "if a tenant dies seised of customary lands of inheritance, his wife ought to inherit the same lands as heir to her husband, and to be admitted thereto to hold the same to her and her heirs for ever." The husband has under similar circumstances the privilege of succeeding as heir to his wife; but failing the widow or widower, the descent of the lands is to the youngest son, or, failing sons, to the youngest daughter, and so on in each degree. We have no time now to refer more particularly to the course of the English conquest in the west, and to the destruction of the British cities which left the country completely at the mercy of the invaders. Many of the towns and castles were burned and uprooted by the newcomers, who hated the life of cities. Some of the towns and great mansions which were spared at first were left neglected to be destroyed by the frost and rain. As the people became more civilised they seem to have regarded the Roman ruins with some feelings of wonder and regret, and I will end by citing part of a version of the poem called "The Ruin," contained in the *Exeter Book*, describing the destruction of a castle or fortress, in which some have desired to recognise the ancient City of Bath:—"Wondrous the wall-stone that Weird hath broken . . . the roof-tree riven, the gray gates despoiled. Often that wall withstood Rægar and Readfáh, chieftain after chieftain rising in storm. Bright was the burgh-place, and many the princely halls, and high was the roof of gold. . . . And the court is dreary, and the crowned roof lies low in the shadow of the purple arch. Princes of old time, joyous and gold-bright and splendidly decked, proud and with wine clate, in war-gear shone. They looked on their

treasures—on silver and gems, and on stones of price—and on this bright burgh of their broad realm. The stone court stands, the hot stream hath whelmed it, there where the bath was hot on the breast.”

Mr. E. SURTEES proposed a vote of thanks to the President for his instructive address.

The motion was seconded by the Very Rev. the Dean, and carried with acclamation.