

Two Barrows on the Brendon Hills.

BY THE REV. F. HANCOCK.

THE two barrows which I have recently opened on the Brendon Hills are situate at the extremity of a narrow tongue of moor which falls very abruptly on the east into the valley of the river Tone, and on the north into the valley of a small tributary of that stream. About one hundred yards in front of the barrows run the remains of a rampart and ditch, which at one time apparently defended this piece of land. The rampart, and the fact that the ford across the Tone immediately below the hill is called "Washbattle," have sometimes suggested the idea that this tongue of moor was at one time the scene of some fierce engagement, and that the barrows covered the ashes of the slain. But place-names are treacherous things, and the contents of the barrows on examination disproved any theory of the kind.

The barrows lie about one hundred and ninety feet from each other. The barrow lying further to the north is the smaller one. It measures one hundred and eighty-one feet in circumference, and eight feet in depth to the level of the moor. I drove a cutting through the mound from west to east, penetrating to begin with, through about two feet of moor earth and loose stones. I then came upon a quantity of dark-coloured, soft and unctuous earth, which, perhaps, marked the spot where were laid the bodies of the slaves or cattle sacrificed at the funeral obsequies. Immediately beyond this deposit I struck

the customary circle of stones which runs round the barrow within the outer covering of moor earth. The wall thus made is about one foot thick by two feet high, and appears to be quite perfect. No doubt, however, it has an opening in it, as is invariably the case with these circles, at some point hitherto unexposed. Within this outer circle was another peristalith about two feet high, and enclosing a space of ground about ten feet in diameter. Within this area I found fragments of pottery of a British type, which had apparently been put there in a fragmentary condition. Within it also was a hole similar to those mysterious holes which puzzled Canon Greenwell in his excavations in the North. Like those which Canon Greenwell has noted, this hole was about one foot six inches in diameter and two feet in depth. I explored its recesses with some eagerness, but found no reward for my labours. The soil about it, however, contained many pieces of dark-coloured material, which had the appearance of pieces of iron rusted to complete decay. Canon Greenwell considers that these holes must have been receptacles for food, although he found them, as was the case with me, always apart from any interment. Within the outer covering of moor earth the barrow was composed of very clearly defined alternate strata of grey and black material. This material appears to be composed of layers of decayed turf and brushwood. No human remains have as yet been found in this barrow.

The southern barrow is two hundred and twenty-four feet in circumference and nine feet in depth to the "floor" level. Its arrangement and composition are practically the same as those of the other barrow. I drove a cutting through this barrow also from west to east; and, as in the previous case, within the outer covering of moor stones and earth, and outside the peristalith, I found once more the deposit of dark-coloured unctuous earth. The stone circle which, like the previous one, is about two feet high, is apparently quite perfect. It is built of moor stones cleverly fitted together without any kind of

cement. Within the circle, as in the other barrow, the mound is composed of the same clearly defined alternate strata of grey and black pulverised material. In the centre of the barrow, lying on the level of the moor, I found a small heap of calcined bones, which probably represented the first interment. The floor of the barrow showed no sign of fire, and it seems probable that the body was burnt at some other spot and then removed for burial. The bones appear to have been simply laid on the surface of the moor, and the barrow then filled above them; at least I could find no trace of a vase or other protection. Near the bones I found a black flint scraper. Some two feet above this primary interment, and on the south side of the barrow, I came across some more remains. In this case the bones after burning had been enclosed in a vase of an oval shape. The vase appears to have been inverted, and to have stood on a tile of about two inches in thickness. The pieces of the vase were in so soft a condition that it was difficult to separate them from the soil; and it seems impossible to piece together even those fragments that have been recovered. The vase was composed of sun-dried clay, and had none of the familiar decoration of the British period, such as appeared on some of the pieces of pottery found in the northern barrow. Part of a skull formed a noticeable part of the contents of the vase. A little further to the west in the barrow, and within some two feet of the surface, I came upon a third interment. I was puzzled to find close about the fragments of bone, pieces of roughly glazed pottery, and even of glass, of a certainly much later date than that of the building of the barrow. Immediately above the interment a cavity about two feet in depth is traceable. A man who lives on the outskirts of the moor told me with regard to this hole, that some forty years ago he was tempted to explore the barrow, and that on digging the hole in question his labours were rewarded by the discovery of a weapon, which he describes as "a sword about three feet in length." Having made this discovery he dug no

further. He took his treasure trove home, but he was not allowed to retain it for long. His mother would not allow so uncanny a thing to be brought into the house further than the porch, and at last she insisted on the weapon being given away on account of the ill luck it brought to her home. Supposing the weapon to have been an iron sword, it looks as if some later inhabitant of the district had been buried in the barrow, a thing which is known to be far from uncommon. But if this were the case one would have expected to find the bones unburnt. They were, however, in the same calcined condition as the other remains. Possibly the weapon was a bronze one; but if so, three feet seems to be an abnormal length for it. It is, of course, quite possible that the sword and the interment had no connection with each other. On top of the barrow some scrapers composed of a light-coloured flint were discovered. With each of the interments pieces of charcoal were found, which, no doubt, had been gathered up with the bones after the burning. Neither of the barrows has as yet been exhaustively searched.