

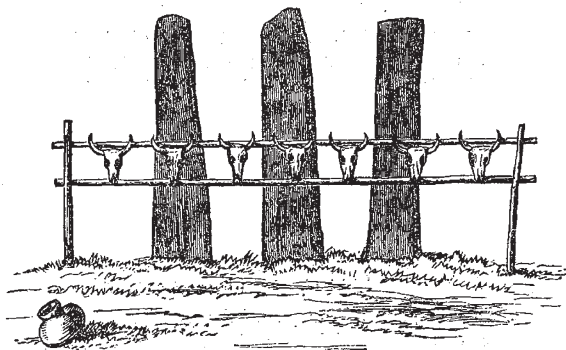
ANCIENT AND RECENT STONE MONUMENTS

IN Mr. Fergusson's new book on Ancient Stone Monuments, mention is made of the Menhirs and Dolmens, both ancient and modern, which are found in the Khasia Hills, North-Eastern Bengal.

Having been for some time engaged in the survey of these hills, I can furnish a few particulars concerning these monuments which may be of interest. On one occasion, returning to my camp after a day's work, I was startled by hearing a loud shouting as of a number of men exerting their strength together and getting the time by shouting in chorus, much as sailors do on board ship.

I found that the sound proceeded from an assembly of Khasias, who were putting up three of these menhirs to the memory of a deceased villager. They were at a considerable distance from me, so that I could not clearly see their mode of procedure, and as on occasions of funerals and the ceremonies connected with them the Khasias are invariably more or less drunk and unruly, it would have been inexpedient to have gone amongst them. I was therefore compelled to wait until the next morning, when I went and inspected the scene of operations.

I found that three menhirs of no very great size had been put up, and that the stones had been raised in a very simple way by the use of long levers formed of young trees and ropes made of an exceedingly tough kind of creeper found in abundance all over these hills. The whole affair had been made the occasion of a feast on a very large scale; bones of slaughtered cattle, and empty grog jars lay around in numbers; the skulls of the oxen (some fourteen or fifteen in number) being arranged in a very fantastic way before the menhirs. As the arrangement of these skulls at once suggested to my mind the probable origin of a well-known architectural ornamentation, I attach a sketch showing how they were placed, viz.,

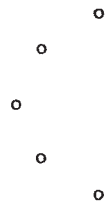


in a row at even distances apart on two horizontal poles, which were themselves supported on two upright poles. I was at some pains to inquire the meaning of these menhirs, but could only gather that they were intended to perpetuate the memory of some local celebrity.

In the case of the dolmens, so often found put up in front of the menhirs, I was informed that they served to give a kind of rough shelter to the ashes of the deceased, these ashes being kept for a year or two in the house and then brought out and scattered under the broad flat stone of the dolmen.

Moreover, the Khasias use these dolmens in their extraordinary form of divination by the breaking of eggs. This divination, which may be said to form their nearest approach to a religious worship, and which is on that account of peculiar interest, is conducted as follows:—On the top of the dolmen the Khasia who officiates puts five

little pellets of clay and chewed betel nut, in the form of a semicircle, thus—



Then he stands upon the stone, and commences a wild kind of chant, having a rhythm and intonation utterly different from that of their ordinary songs. At a certain period in this chant he draws an egg from his pouch, and dashes it down on to the stone, as near the centre of the semicircle as he can. If the mass of the yolk scatters towards and over the pellets the omens are propitious, each pellet of the five having its meaning; but if the yolk scatters away from the semicircle of pellets the prognostication is unfavourable.

In his book Mr. Fergusson seems to suppose that the Menhirs and Dolmens mark places of assembly; but this is not the case, for near almost every large and old-established village there is found a place of assembly provided with stone seats, often prepared with much labour, and well adapted to the purpose for which it is intended.

I would also demur to Mr. Fergusson's inference that the Khasias are a physically inferior race; on the contrary they are a race possessing muscular strength to a singular and exceptional degree, as witness the fact that it is a very ordinary feat with them for one Coolie to carry a full-grown man in a kind of chair strapped on his back, along a road more than eight miles long, and ascending upwards of 4,000 feet.

M. T. SALE

DISCOVERY OF EXTINCT MAMMALS IN THE VICTORIA CAVES, SETTLE

THE scientific public will be pleased to hear that the Committee who have been exploring the Settle caves for two or three years past, have at length met with a great success. Till within the last fortnight we had discovered only remains of different ages from the Neolithic period to the present. These, though of great interest as throwing light on the vicissitudes and succession of later races, had to a certain extent been forestalled by the previous researches in this district of Mr. James Farrer, of Ingleborough, and by Mr. Jackson, the original discoverer of the Victoria Cave, and present superintendent of the work carried on in it by the Committee. Those remains were all in comparatively recent deposits. Beneath them was a great thickness of barren ground, consisting of a laminated clay in some places twelve feet thick, and below that again a great accumulation of angular fragments of limestone in a matrix of clay.

At a depth of about twenty feet in this we have now found elephant, rhinoceros, hyæna, a crushed canine of a much larger carnivore, &c. The elephant's teeth found belong to a young individual, and the number of gnawed bones and other indications of the cave having been a den of some large carnivores render it probable that the elephant was dragged into it by them.

The facts have a special interest, from this older group of mammals not having been previously met with in this district. It is to be hoped that when we can investigate these important beds more thoroughly we may get some light thrown upon the relation of man to these extinct animals, and of both to the Glacial period, undoubted deposits of which occur in other caves hard by.