



BUILDING AT BLEA MOSS, LANGDALE.

PLATE I. (TO FACE P. 129.)

ART. X.—*A Contrast in Architecture.* Part I., Primitive Quadrangular Structures. Part II., The Sod Hut: An Archaic Survival. By H. S. COWPER, F.S.A.

Communicated at Bowness-on-Windermere, Sept. 18th, 1900.

PART I.—ON PRIMITIVE QUADRANGULAR BUILDINGS OF UNCERTAIN DATE.

6-inch Ord. surv. Westmorland Sheets 19 (S.E.) and 25 (S.E.)

ALTHOUGH there exists a large series of primitive dwellings and enclosures scattered over the Lake district fells, there is one type apparently very rare, which, I believe, has so far been unnoticed. The examples about to be described are the only ones I know.*

I shall take first two small groups, in Little Langdale, which although close together differ much in character.†

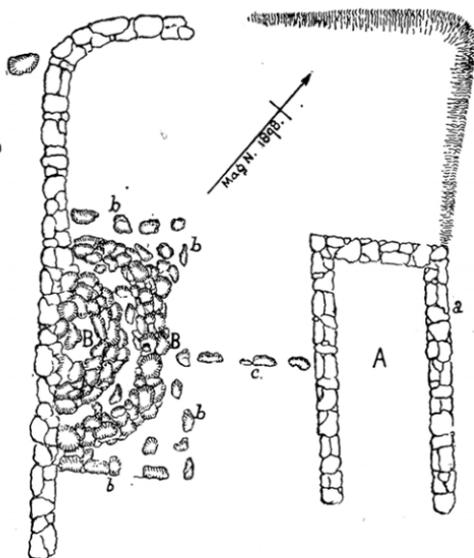
The site of these ruins is a singularly romantic one, placed in the hollow of the rugged mountain pass which connects the head of Little Langdale with that of the sister valley of Great Langdale. They lie, however, on the side of the first named, and are under half a mile from the River Brathay at Fell Foot. Group No. 1 is on a natural level formed, I believe, by the flood-wash from the fell streams;‡ and it is to be noticed that after heavy rains a layer of shingle is deposited over its surface. The same little plateau extends across a small beck in front of group No. 2. (See sketch plan overleaf.)

* The similar buildings on Armboth Fell have been noticed by Mr. W. Wilson in *Transactions* of the Cumberland and Westmorland Association, vol. ix, (1883-4) p. 62. (Ed.)

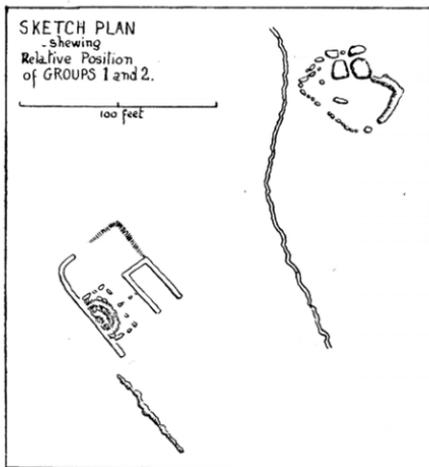
† I have long been acquainted with these. My first visit was 26th October, 1894. In 1898, 18th May, I had three men digging there, and began a rough plan. On 19th May, 1900, despairing of any elucidation, I revisited them, and completed the measurements.

‡ Blea Moss beck runs about 25 yards west of the north-west angle of group No. 1.

BLEA MOSS,
LANGDALE
N°1.



30 feet.



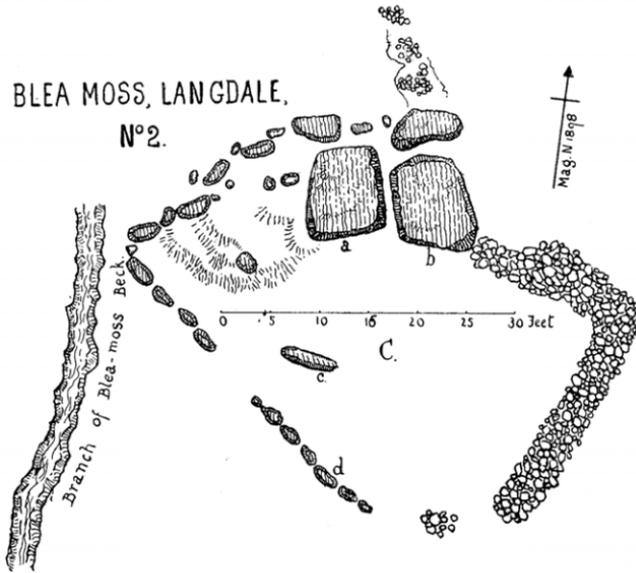
On referring to the plan (Blea Moss No. 1) it will be noticed that this group is in a ruinous condition. The principal feature is the small building (*A*) lying north-west and south-east, rhomboidal in plan, though there are no traces of the south-east wall; but since the side walls appear at this end to terminate with jambs, I think they did not extend further. The internal dimensions of this structure are $9\frac{1}{2}$ by 25 feet, and the walls average about 2 feet 4 inches in width. At present, however, little remains but the foundations, except at *a* where two or three courses exist, shewing that the masonry was of a very rude order without any lime. It is plain, however, that it was a constructed wall, and not a bank of stones, and that although the stones were not laid in courses, there was a distinct attempt to fit them in a manner akin to the so-called polygonal cyclopean walling. Plate I. is a photograph looking over the east or most acute-angled corner.

This building occupies a portion of the north-east side of a roughly rectangular garth or enclosure, the longer axis of which is north-west and south-east. At the north corner where the ground rises, there is evidence of excavation to level the enclosure, but it is not evident if there was also a wall. On the south-west side opposite the building *A*, the wall is quite traceable.

On the last-mentioned side also is a heap of *débris* (*B B*). This in its present condition, is a mass of loose stones, roughly thrown together, probably in modern times. But at *b b b b*, there can, I think, be traced the foundations of another quadrangular building, from the ruins of which the heap *B B* has probably been chiefly formed. Obscure traces of a cross wall also seem to be indicated at *c*; and *d d* is a straight bank of stones 52 feet in length, concerning which it is not now easy to decide whether it was originally a properly constructed wall or not. In a line with this, and 20 yards south-east there is also a group of natural boulders, where partly by

clearing, and partly by rude walling, one or two chambers of square or oblong form have been constructed. The plan of this part of the site is, however, very obscure.

Blea Moss No. 2. (see plan) lies about 50 yards to the north-east on the other side of a small tributary of Blea Moss beck. Although it is roughly quadrangular in plan, it is very different in character to No. 1. On the north side stand two immense boulders side by side, with a narrow opening between them. They rest apparently in



their natural position where they stopped when they rolled from the fell side. The boulder marked *a* is 10 feet by 8 feet and 9 feet high, while its fellow *b* is of similar dimensions, but not so high, and leveller on the summit. Plate II, shows their appearance directly on the south side.

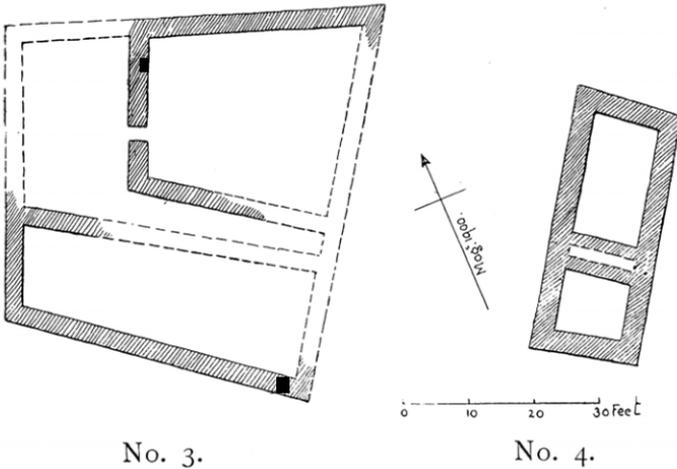
In front of them there has been formed a small enclosure, each side of which contains an acute angle, and their limbs converge to an obtuse angle opposite the



THE TWO BOULDERS, BLEA MOSS.

PLATE II. (TO FACE P. 132.)

boulders. These two sides, however, differ in construction, that on the west, being of single stones set up on edge, of which the largest (*d*) is 2 feet 3 inches high. The eastern side on the contrary is a bank of loose stones (mostly small) varying from four to seven feet wide. Within the enclosure is an isolated stone (*c*) set on edge and measuring $3\frac{1}{2}$ feet high. There are obscure traces of a bank of small stones leading north from the rear of the big boulders, where the ground begins to rise rapidly.



No. 3.

No. 4.

The evidence of neighbouring ancient structures and Roman roads will be best discussed after describing the other examples.

Nos. 3 and 4† are examples from the north end of Troutbeck (near Windermere). The actual situation is $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles north of Troutbeck Park Farm and beyond the oblong fell called the Tongue; where a wild and desolate

† The plans three and four are quite hasty, and the result of only a few measurements with the tape. But they suffice to shew the general shape of the foundations. The measurements quoted are external if not stated otherwise. I made a note in 1894 that 20 yards north of No. 3 is a curious oval enclosure 9 yards long, with two or three small standing stones east of it, and nearly touching the wall.

valley (900 feet above sea level) runs up between Froswick and Hart Crag. The situation is equally as romantic as Blea Moss, but more remote.

In order to find these sites, the antiquary on leaving Park Farm must traverse the west slope of the Tongue, and on reaching its northern end, he will find the valley crossed by a modern stone wall. On both the north and south side of this wall there exist foundations of buildings akin in character to Blea Moss, No. 1.

The largest I have seen, marked No. 3, lies north of the wall and is just on the edge of Sad Gill, a tributary streamlet of the Troutbeck, running down from Hart Fell. It is in an ill-preserved condition, and its plan is not altogether clear; but we can trace an oblong quadrilateral chamber on the south, which measures 47 feet in length, and about 16 feet across the west end, which is narrower than the east end. North of this lie two courts or enclosures, and one of these seems to have been divided from the oblong chamber by an intervening passage.

Building No. 4 lies also on the north side of the wall, but about one hundred yards south of No. 3. It is a simple irregular quadrangular building measuring $16\frac{1}{2}$ by 39 by 16 by 41 feet, with its longer axis north-east and south-west. The walls appear to have been three feet wide, and a cross wall, perhaps double, can be traced dividing it into two chambers. There are obscure foundations of an enclosure traceable to the east.

The building itself is better preserved than the last, and lies snugly between two natural hillocks, probably glacial, at its north and south ends. South of the wall and just west of the Troutbeck is another small building of the same character. It measures 14 by 29 feet, and lies with its longer axis north and south.*

* I find that in the revised O.S. 6-inch sheet No. 3 is marked as "Ancient Settlement, Remains of," but curiously not in the Gothic type adopted for antiquities. There is another place also so marked a short distance north, of which I did not know, and did not visit.

EVIDENCE OF OTHER VESTIGES OF POPULATION.

Though it is necessary to allude briefly to such other remains as exist in the vicinity of these structures, their very variety deprives them of much value as evidence, and we shall be driven back to study the structural type of the buildings themselves. Both in the vicinity of Langdale and Troutbeck there are groups of early remains, and there have been some finds of relics of pre-historic types. At the north end of the Blea Tarn pass, for instance, only about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles from the Blea Moss ruins, are groups of cairns and walled enclosures; and at the same distance east in Little Langdale I found a rude ovate enclosure above Dale End Farm. There is also an ancient enclosure of uncertain date near the Wrynose and Hardknott road; but none of these are marked on the 1862 6-inch Ordnance Survey, nor even in the Archæological Survey of Cumberland.*

In the vicinity of Troutbeck we find similar vestiges. On the Tongue itself are numerous piles of stone which appear to be sepulchral cairns, though locally it is asserted that some are destroyed buildings of the oblong type we are discussing; and along the west side of the same hill runs a broad dyke or bank of stones, which is believed by some to be an ancient trackway. To this idea I cannot subscribe, for it looks to me like a big dyke similar to others in Furness associated with sepulchral cairns.† Besides these, there is a ruined stone circle in Herd Wood a little west of Park Farm, and there is the site of a big sepulchral cairn called Woundale or Woundel Raise $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south-west.‡

* *Archæologia*, vol. liii.

† I cannot, however, claim to have examined the Troutbeck one very carefully.

‡ A stone adze was found one mile north-west of the Sad Gill group. A celt at or near the Herd Wood circle; a bronze spear-head at Woundale Raise; and a quern $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles south-west of the same place. Other implements, &c., also further south in Troutbeck valley.

Both the Langdale and Troutbeck groups are remarkably similarly situated as regards Roman roads. The main road from Ambleside to Ravenglass ran only about half a mile south of the first mentioned, and it is believed a minor road traversed the Blea Tarn pass itself and led to Derwentwater. In the same way the Troutbeck group lies just below the Roman road skirting over Froswick and High Street to Penrith. It is, therefore, important to ascertain if these little quadrangular houses exist only in proximity to main Roman roads; or if, like the rude irregular settlements, they occur on fell sides isolated from Roman sites or roads.

Lastly, close to the Blea Moss group, there is at Fell Foot the terraced mound, which, as long back as 1889, I pointed out was in type but a slight variant of the Norse Thingmount or Law Hill in Man.*

THE STRUCTURAL TYPE.

Since no one has, as yet, attempted any critical examination of the early sites and settlements of the Lake district, it is manifestly impossible to forecast in what association other examples of these quadrangular buildings may be found; but I have personally made a somewhat careful study of such early remains as are known in Furness, and I can testify that nothing identical has so far been observed there. The fell side settlements of Furness are of a rude type, and were apparently the dwellings of communities who lived in rude "wigwam" huts, folded their flocks in enclosures which still exist, and buried their dead beneath heaps of stones in the immediate vicinity. Isolated quadrangular dwellings are in fact unknown in these groups; and their type is primitive and pre-historic, though it is impossible at

* See these *Transactions*, vol. xi., p. 1, with plan; also *Hawkshead, its History*, &c. (1899), pp. 139-40. Papers by our Editor in *Viking Club Saga* book, 1896, with illustration, and *Barrow Naturalists' Field Club Reports*, 1896, &c. So far my suggested theory as to its origin has only received support.

present to assign a limit either backwards or forwards to their era of occupation.*

The Troutbeck and Langdale dwellings on the other hand, do not appear to have been placed in communal groups, nor do they seem to have any intimate connection with groups of cairns, or large enclosure walls. They look like small self-contained family habitations, and their plan and construction lead us to assign them with little hesitation to a post-Roman era.

Turning, however, to Scotland and Ireland, we find a group of primitive structures, which at first sight seem to exhibit a most tempting homology. I allude to the early Irish and Scottish cells and churches so lucidly described by Dr. J. Anderson in his *Scotland in Early Christian Times* † (First Series.) Yet although it is true that both in plan and dimensions the two groups have a great resemblance, there is at present little or no reason to connect our local examples with a primitive Christian church.

I say "little or no reason" because a word remains to be said concerning the object of the mysterious enclosure (No. 2) at Blea Moss. Two things must at once strike any careful observer who visits this and the neighbouring group. The first is that the two exhibit such different structural types, that they may well be assigned to

* See *The Ancient Settlements, Cemeteries and Earthworks of Furness* by H. S. Cowper. *Archæologia*, vol. liii., p. 389-426.

The only instances in the series where anything analogous occurs, are (1) at Seathwaite Stone Walls (p. 400, Fig. 6), where quadrilateral courts or chambers are associated with large walled enclosures. Possibly this Seathwaite group may be a late post-Roman modification of the rude type to which it really belongs. There is also at Seathwaite a small rude enclosure, 8 by 4 feet with a sort of walled forecourt 15 feet long (p. 412); but the whole is much more primitive in type than those at Langdale and Troutbeck.

† The reader should refer to the following examples in this work:—Pp. 81-84, Skellig Mhichel, co. Kerry, Beehive huts and rectangular churches; pp. 87-89, Innismurry, Cashel with three churches (dimensions $25\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 12 feet and 17 feet by $11\frac{1}{2}$ feet); p. 91, Oilen Tsenach, Cashel, circular huts and a church, 28 by 22 feet; p. 94, Skye, Cashel and churches, 30 feet by 10 feet and 21 feet by 12 feet; p. 96, Mull, a church, $21\frac{1}{2}$ feet; p. 102, Deerness, oblong cells and church, $24\frac{1}{2}$ feet by $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet; pp. 107-8, Kilmalkedar, Kerry, churches, 24 by $16\frac{1}{2}$ feet and 23 by 18 feet. On p. 126 he quotes a note by Petrie that the simplest Irish type averages 15 by 10 feet interior measurement.

different races and periods, or at any rate to races in different degrees of culture. The second, that in group No. 2 the constructors were planning for a totally different use than for that of group No. 1. I do not think that anyone can enter this strange little enclosure and look upon those massive boulders with the cleft between them, without experiencing a feeling that he is in some primitive shrine or "Bethel." He may combat the idea as unscientific and illogical; but while he remains there he cannot throw it aside.

Then when the imaginative antiquary has ransacked his library, and is confronted by the Scottish and Irish churches, he will say—"Have we not here on the 'one hand some primitive shrine of heathendom, and on the other the tiny Christian church which superseded it?" Certainly the notion is a fascinating one, but for many reasons, which need no discussion here, it will, I think, carry no conviction.

EXCAVATIONS.

On May 18th, 1898, I entirely cleared the interior of building A, No. 1 down to the footing of the stones, and I dug deep in front of the big boulders in No. 2. The result was absolutely *nil*. There was not even a vestige of charcoal in either place.

CONCLUSIONS.

We may nevertheless, I think, draw certain conclusions as to these quadrilateral buildings.

1. They are not modern shealings or hoghouses.
2. Their structural type assigns them to post-Roman date.
3. Their propinquity to Roman roads would tend, if it were necessary, to confirm this. It should be remembered that the High Street road has long since ceased to be a line of communication. The presumption, therefore, is

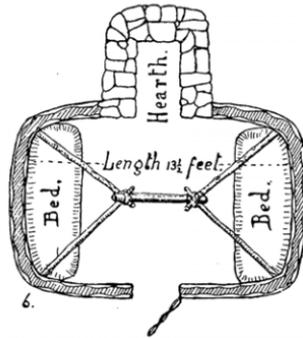
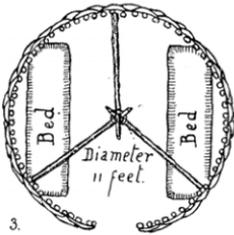
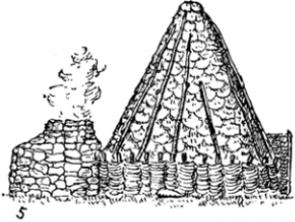
that though the top end of Troutbeck is now the "end of the world," these buildings were erected when the road was still in use.

4. That the type is that of the squatter's farm, not of the communal village hut.

If these postulates be admitted, we have, I think, only two explanations to choose between. These dwellings must be either the houses of (1) Britons who after the Roman evacuation retained some feeble vestiges of Roman culture, or (2) of the bold Norse settlers who took up the land 1,000 years ago. Between these two suggestions I shall leave the reader to judge, limiting myself to one or two remarks. Firstly, if we attribute them to Romanized Britons, their rude construction, and their actual situation tend to confirm the belief I have ventured to express elsewhere,* that after the evacuation, such British who escaped the Pictish massacres, reverted to almost their primitive savagedom, and fell back into the fells before the Teutonic invaders. On the other hand, to assign them to the Vikings, especially looking at the juxtaposition of the Thingmount, seems plausible but for one objection. In making their settlements the Norse had no predilection for the Roman roads. They squatted right and left on the hill sides throughout the Lake district; and farms with Norse names are as numerous in the remote valleys as in those traversed by Roman ways; yet we have seen that the only examples noticed of these oblong houses are suggestively associated with Roman roads.

Lastly, we need not, I think, imagine, that because these houses are quadrangular, they were built with stone walls of any considerable height. They may very likely have been earthen or wooden houses placed on a stone foundation. Or the walls may never have exceeded a few feet, and had a thatched roof descending almost to the

* "On the Influence of the Roman occupation on the population of Cumberland and Westmorland," *Archæological Journal*, March, 1899.



SOD HUTS :

1, 2, 3, Charcoal-burner's.

4, 5, 6, Bark-peeler's.

ground level. Both types are used in constructing quadrilateral buildings by modern and recent savage races.*

PART II.—THE SOD HUT: AN ARCHAIC SURVIVAL.

We have thus seen that probably at least about a thousand years ago, there was dwelling in the fells a people who built and lived in rectangular walled houses. It is, therefore, very curious to find that in the adjacent district of High Furness, there remains in actual use, what is the most aboriginal type of circular wigwam. This is the sod hut of the collier or charcoal burner, whose occupation has existed here from time immemorial.†

In Fig. 1 (opposite) one of these huts is represented. The method of construction is as follows. First, three poles or young trees about $9\frac{1}{2}$ or $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet long and about 4 inches thick at the thick end are set up as a tripod (Fig. 2) the tops being fastened together by a withy. Then the intervening space is filled in with lighter poles, of which the ends, resting on the ground, form a circle just outside the ends of the three larger poles. The light poles overlap each other to some degree at the apex, but have slight intervals between them where they rest on the ground. There is also a gap left in one side for an entrance, and this is filled in above with smaller poles. Finally, large flat sods are cut from the common, and commencing at the bottom these are laid on the poles overlapping each other like tiles until the top of the hut is reached; and in order to keep these from being loosened by wind and rain, poles and other articles such as ladders or tools are laid against the sloping sides of the hut.

These huts are provided neither with windows nor fireplace, the door forming the only aperture. In the one

* I ought to have said that Mr. Thomas Browne, of High Green, Troutbeck, who is well acquainted with the Troutbeck sites, most kindly helped me in my search for these buildings.

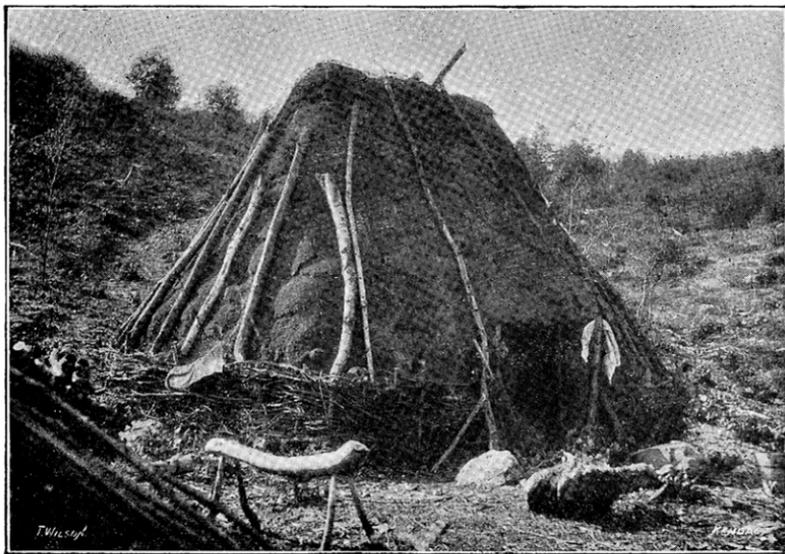
† See the writer's *Hawkshead*, p. 289-290, for the work of the "Collier" and making "Charrecoales." The industry is mentioned in the Commissioners' certificate of Furness Abbey Revenues, 1537,

shewn (drawn from one in Graythwaite woods) the internal dimensions are 7 feet 9 inches high, 11 feet wide, and its external height is close on 10 feet. The door is 3 feet 8 inches high, $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide at the bottom and $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the top.

Now it is a very reasonable surmise that in these structures we see the direct representatives of the woodland wigwams of the Britons of ancient Cumbria—a survival due no doubt to the simplicity of the type and its suitability for the temporary purposes of the coal burner. Similar huts are still in use in many parts of the world among savages, or as Ratzel more aptly calls them “natural races.” For instance, there are the huts of the Kaffirs and Wanyoros, similar though more spherical. The Hottentot’s hut is like the Kaffir’s, but he covers it with mats or skins. The Red Indian’s wigwam preserves the same type, only here it has become a tent. Returning to Africa we see in the Ovambo and Bechuana huts a rather more advanced form, constructed with low side walls. Even in the far north the Esquimaux built their ice houses in a beehive shape, which may have been learned in more temperate climates.*

The charcoal burners’ huts are inhabited for a month or two, and the work engages the attention of the colliers both day and night. As a rule and to save trouble, food ready prepared is brought from neighbouring farms; and the hut is, therefore, unprovided with hearth or chimney. This, however, is different with the bark peelers’ huts, for this occupation gives more leisure, and the dwellings being intended to stand longer, are of a more advanced type. In Plate III., and Nos. 4, 5, and 6 (p. 140), one of these is shewn. The construction is as follows. Instead

* For illustrations of these types the reader may refer to Wood’s *Natural History of Man*, vol i., pp. 54, 252, 331, 351, 365, 474, &c. Also to V. le Duc’s *Habitations of Man in all Ages*, where he will find an imaginary picture of the first hut (p. 6), and also a design for the house of the early Pelasgian peasant very like our sod huts, but with low stone walls, and a smoke hole in the apex of of the roof.



BARK-PEELER'S HUT.

PLATE III. (TO FACE P. 142.)

of three, four strong poles are selected, and the tops being lashed to a short ridge-pole 4 feet long, the four feet are planted on the ground at the four angles of a parallelogram of about 13 by 8 feet. Side walls with rounded corners, and constructed of two faces of wattle packed between with earth, are then raised to a height of two feet. On the top of this wall lighter poles of elder, birch, and ash are then placed close together, with their top ends supported against the ridge-pole. The sodding is then proceeded with as in the colliers' huts, but it only extends down to the top of the wattle wall. On one side a door is left $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, and 3 feet 10 inches high, with a closing door of wattle; and opposite this is a stone-built hearth projecting externally from the hut about 5 feet, and about 5 feet in height.

This hut measures internally $13\frac{1}{2}$ by $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet and is 10 feet high. It is for four persons, and is much roomier and more comfortable than the collier's hut. Moreover, it has the great addition of the hearth for cooking, from which, unlike many savages' huts, the smoke escapes from a specially-constructed chimney, and not from a mere hole in the roof.

[The illustrations are from photographs and drawings by the Author.]