


NOTES ON A
BRONZE SWORD AND AN IRON SPEAR-HEAD
FOUND IN THE THAMES,

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HE implements represented in the accompanying diagrams are a leaf-shaped sword of Bronze; and a spear-head of Iron, which were taken from the Thames river at Henley-on-Thames during the present year, and are now in my possession. As the former is a fine example of a weapon not common throughout England, it is likely that a short notice of it will be of interest to the members of the Berks Archæological and Architectural Society. Its dimensions are already given in the notices on the plate; but in addition its type is that stated by Sir John Lubbock (*Pre-historic Times*, p. 16, figs. 14, 15) as Irish and Swedish, swords of this character being comparatively more abundant in both countries. Mr. Thomas Wright represents the same type (*The Celt, Roman, and the Saxon*, p. 75); and a very similar blade taken from the Thames, at Battersea, is in the British Museum. A weapon of the same kind forms fig. 344, in Dr. Evans' new work, *The Bronze Implements of Great Britain*; but there is a difference in the arrangement of the rivet holes in the hilt, and it has slight flanges at the edges of the hilt-plate to retain the horn or wood. The usual form of swords of this kind is leaf-shaped; and their total length is about 24 inches, although they range from about 16 inches up to 30 inches. The number of rivets also varies, the commoner number being seven. In some the ends of the rivets have conical depressions in them, as if a punch had been used as a riveting tool; but in the specimen here depicted the rivets have been closed by a hollow punch, so as to leave a small stud projecting in the middle of each, surrounded by a hollow ring. With these rivets the plates, which usually consisted of horn, bone, or wood, were secured on each side of the hilt-plate. The Henley sword has a very shallow bead or ridge extending along each side of the blade within the fillet. It is undoubtedly of the Bronze period (*Celtic*); for although their advocacy as being Roman has met with some considerable support from Archæologists of reputation, as the late Mr. Thomas Wright, the weight of opinion, from evidence which we have not space to detail here, has determined that weapons of this kind are to be regarded as anterior to the Roman period.

In Scandinavia it is not uncommon to find Bronze swords with interments in barrows, but such is not the case in Britain. In Britain, therefore, Dr. Evans classifies the Bronze Age as comprehended of three stages, placing the sword in the latest group. The first group is characterised by the presence in tumuli of flat or flanged celts, and knife-daggers, with instruments of stone. The second is determined by more heavy dagger-blades, flanged celts, and tanged spear-heads or daggers. While the third comprehends palstaves, socketed celts and other forms of tools and weapons, as well as swords and socketed spear-heads. And he attributes the Bronze Period in Britain as having extended to eight or ten centuries; which would place the beginning of the period some 1,200 or 1,400 years B.C.

The moulds employed for casting are of stone, burnt clay, and sometimes of bronze; and occasionally, as in Ireland, sand or loam has been used. But the moulds found are mostly of stone. The lengthened sword-blades required great skill in casting; and in addition there were the processes of hammering-out and sharpening the edges, which were conducted not only by those who first made the weapons, but also by their subsequent possessors.

The art of casting no doubt originated on the Continent; indeed their manufacture appears to have been localised at particular places; and that they must have formed an important article of commerce, as the same type has been found in countries widely separated. But the fact that some British types are rarely found abroad, with the discovery of moulds, would seem to prove that they must have been cast in this country. The alloys used in casting have been found to vary in different countries; in some cases lead and other impurities having been found to be present. But an amalgam of nine parts copper to one of tin is considered to furnish the most tough and durable bronze.

The developement in form of the bronze sword from the rude stone spear-head is traceable through the bronze spear-head, thence onwards to the bronze dagger, which is simply a spear-head hilted, the bronze leaf-shaped sword being an elongated form of bronze dagger.

The iron spear-head, Fig. 2, has details regarding it attached to the figure. It is in good preservation as an iron instrument, and has a socket with rivet-holes for fixing the shaft, together with the somewhat unusual addition of guards. Its period is probably Roman.