

EXCAVATIONS AT THE BELTOUT VALLEY ENTRENCHMENTS.

BY H. S. TOMS.

AFTER briefly referring to the square-shaped earthwork on Kingston Hill, in his *History and Antiquities of Lewes*,¹ the Rev. T. W. Horsfield goes on to say that—

The number of these square encampments on different parts of the Downs in this district is very great; and as they are found in the vallies, as well as on the summits of the hills, it is difficult to say by whom or for what purpose they were constructed. If for defence, they would seem but inefficient bulwarks to check a daring enemy; if for permanent habitation, it is strange that the bleak summits of the hills should have been chosen. It may be remarked, however, that the square inclosures in the vallies are not so large as those on the higher parts of the Downs; the embankments are lower, and the area is much less extensive. It is not improbable that the latter may have been occupied as the residence of one or other of the many British tribes; whilst the encampments on the hills were resorted to as temporary places of refuge in times of alarm.

The above extract forms an excellent preface to the following notes, for Horsfield's description—the earliest one can trace of this type of earthwork on the Sussex Downs—is equally applicable to similar entrenchments in Wilts and Dorset. He appears, also, to have been the first to consider the valley works as a class apart from the square-shaped entrenchments of the higher ground. His mention that their number was very great is worthy of note; for, presuming he did not mistake the roughly rectangular *lynchets* for entrenchments—a failing not unknown among archæologists even at the present day—it seems evident that many of the

¹ *The History and Antiquities of Lewes and its Vicinity*, by the Rev. T. W. Horsfield, F.S.A., vol. II., pp. 151-2, published 1827.

quadrilateral earthworks to which he refers have been eradicated by cultivation during the last eighty years.

The prehistoric origin of the square-shaped hill-top entrenchments was maintained by the late General Pitt Rivers (then Col. A. Lane Fox) in his monograph on *The Hill Forts of Sussex*.² In this work the entrenchments of the valleys receive no mention, either because they were unknown to Pitt Rivers, or that they were not considered by him to be works of defence. In both hill and valley types, however, Pitt Rivers ultimately became especially interested; and, by methodical and extensive excavations, he proved that some of them undoubtedly belong to Bronze Age times.³

An intimate association with these researches of Pitt Rivers directed the writer's attention to the valley type in Sussex. Through the support of the Brighton and Hove Archæological Club this interest has been sustained; and, as few of such valley works are shown on the Ordnance Surveys, an endeavour is being made to trace all our Sussex examples and to obtain detailed surveys of them. In this the Club has received the hearty co-operation of Mr. A. Hadrian Allcroft, M.A.,⁴ and of Mr. A. G. Chater.⁵

A study of valley entrenchments in Sussex, Wilts and Dorset has led to their being provisionally divided into three types:—

- A. THE VALLEY-HEAD ENCLOSURE.
- B. THE VALLEY-SIDE ENCLOSURE.
- C. THE VALLEY-PROPER ENCLOSURE.

Examples of type A occur at Loose Bottom, Falmer; Swanborough Coombe, near Iford; and in the valley south of Fulking Corner—the greater portion of the latter has been destroyed by cultivation in recent years.

² *Archæologia*, Vol. XLII., 1869.

³ See *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, Vol. IV.

⁴ Author of *Earthworks of England*.

⁵ Late Hon. Secretary of the Committee of Earthworks and Fortified Enclosures, Congress of Archæological Societies.

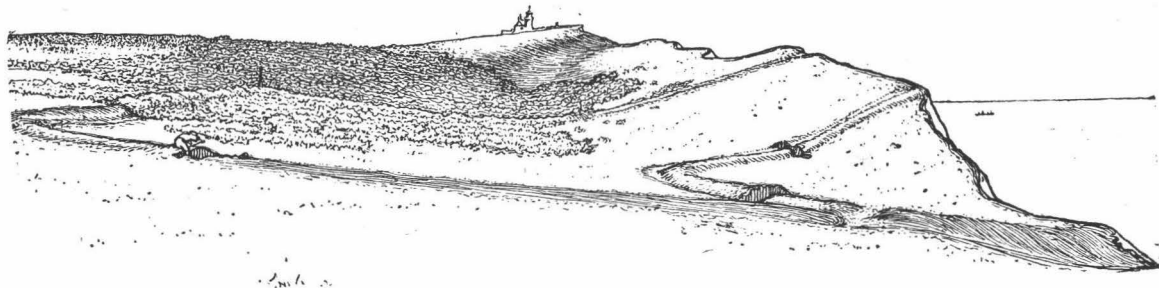


FIG. 1.—VIEW, LOOKING EAST TOWARDS OLD LIGHTHOUSE, SHOWING POSITION OF VALLEY ENTRENCHMENTS AT BELTOUT.

From a Drawing by Mr. W. H. Bond, Headmaster of the Municipal School of Art, Brighton.

In this type, except where the entrenchment at its lowest point crosses the valley, the ditch and rampart are wholly confined to the sides of the surrounding hill, and the space enclosed consists entirely of the valley head.

The second type, B, includes the smaller example shown in Figs. 1 and 2. Another occurs in Bramble Bottom, near Halfway House, between Eastbourne and East Dean. In these, and in others of the same type in Wilts and Dorset, the side of a valley seems to have been chosen for their construction; but in each case the lowest side of the entrenchment runs approximately parallel to and adjoins the base of the valley.

Of type C the only perfect example yet recorded in our local list is "The Bible,"⁶ near Mount Caburn. The largest of the intersecting enclosures at Beltout (Figs. 1 and 2) falls under this type. These appear to have been constructed to enclose not only the valley floor, but portions of each side of the valley as well.

The valley entrenchments within the great promontory fort of Beltout, near the old Beachy Head Lighthouse, were brought to the notice of the Club by Mr. A. G. Chater. They are not marked on the Ordnance Surveys, and, as inspection showed that they were being rapidly destroyed by cliff erosion, it was determined to survey them without delay, and, if possible, to make an endeavour to solve their period by excavation. The proposal to excavate was brought by Major F. J. Maitland before Mr. Carew Davies Gilbert, D.L., J.P., who readily granted his permission.

The survey and excavations occupied the week commencing 16th August, 1909, and the work was carried out by the voluntary efforts of Major F. J. Maitland, Captain H. J. H. Pakenham, Messrs. H. J. Rutherford Jones, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., W. H. Bond, and H. S. Toms, who were assisted by a labourer paid out of a grant from the Excavation Fund of the Brighton and Hove Archæological Club.

⁶ *Ancient Cultivations*, by R. Blaker, S.A.C., Vol. XLV.

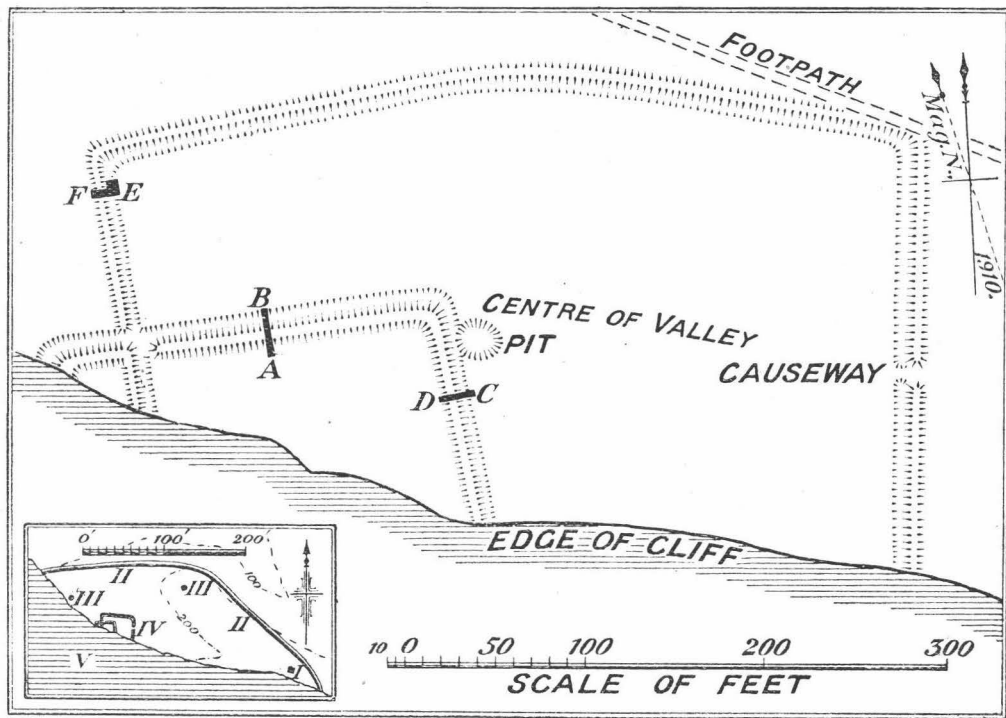


FIG. 2.—PLAN OF INTERSECTING VALLEY ENTRENCHMENTS AT BELTOUT, SHOWING POSITIONS OF SECTIONS EXCAVATED IN AUGUST, 1909.

The inset in S.W. corner shows the relation of Valley Entrenchments to the Promontory Fort of Beltout, etc.—
 I, Old Lighthouse; II, Ditch and Rampart of Beltout Hill-fort; III, Tumuli;
 IV, Valley Entrenchments; V, the English Channel,

DESCRIPTION OF THE BELTOUT VALLEY ENTRENCHMENTS.

Just west of the old lighthouse (see Fig. 1) a dip in the cliff represents all that is left of the head of a valley which runs inland for a short distance, turns, descends westward parallel to the coast line, and then, making another turn seaward, disappears over the cliff. On the inward dip of the cliff, at this lower bend, appears the angle of a very pronounced valley-side entrenchment, the greater part of which has been carried away by coast erosion. An examination of the western extremity, on the cliff edge, showed that it formed a turning angle, and that consequently the lower or northern side of this earthwork was intact. This side measures about 210-ft. in length, and the remains of the eastern side 120-ft. So, assuming the original earthwork was, like others of its kind, approximately square, its area must have been about 4,900 sq. yards. The area of the remaining remnant is about 1,400 sq. yards, which means that something like three-quarters of the original enclosure has gone over the cliff.

Figs. 1 and 2 also show a much larger entrenchment, of the valley-proper type, constructed across, and enclosing part of, the one occupying the valley side. This, too, is imperfect owing to cliff erosion; but at the time of our survey the most interesting feature was still in evidence near the face of the cliff, where the second earthwork is shown running north with its ditch cutting through the rampart of the smaller work. From this point of intersection it runs up the side of the hill to the angle, just above section E.F., situated 145-ft. from the cliff edge. Most of the upper side is covered with gorse, but it skirts the northern brow of the coombe for a distance of about 460-ft. From the N.E. angle the remnant of the eastern side (240-ft. long, horizontal measurement) descends into the centre of the valley where there is a depression in the rampart—apparently a true entrance and causeway—and then up the other

side of the valley till it finally disappears on the cliff edge.

A peculiar feature of the larger entrenchment is that its ditch is *within* the enclosing rampart. At the point of intersection its rampart is not continued across the ditch of the smaller work; but, in this gap, the filling of the intersecting ditch is appreciably higher than that of the larger work adjoining—a fact which first gave rise to the impression that the large earthwork was of later construction than the one it intersects.

It is to be regretted that these two entrenchments were not shown on the earliest Ordnance Surveys, for had they been then noted, it is possible that we should now possess a perfect record of the outlines of these interesting enclosures. Their destruction by cliff erosion is rapidly proceeding. According to Major Maitland, only a year or two ago the rampart south of the intersecting point was twice the length shown on the plan.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

The prelude to our excavations at Beltout was an examination of the various soils which cap the chalk in the valley. The rabbit holes and sides of the cliff showed that the centre of the valley was filled with a deep layer of clayey loam, which apparently fined out as it ran seaward up the side of the cliff. The east side of the smaller earthwork was therefore chosen for our experimental section. Here we hoped to reach solid chalk at no great depth and, therefore, to have little difficulty in defining the sides and bottom of the filled-in ditch and also the base of the rampart. Owing to bad weather, the completion of three sections occupied the whole week. The general view and plan (Figs. 1 and 2) show the positions of the sections. These are described in the order in which they were excavated.

SECTION C. D.

Ditch.—In this, as in the other sections, the original ditch is seen sunk into the underlying solid chalk. The bottom of the ditch was filled with a chalk rubble which

had become welded together, and was nearly as hard as the undisturbed chalk. Above this hard rubble was a layer of mixed silting composed of mould, chalk and flints. The top soil, as will be seen from Fig. 3, consisted of pure mould. It will be noted that here the mould, mixed silting, and chalk rubble filling the ditch, were readily distinguished.

Rampart.—In order to expose the whole of the soils, the trench through the rampart was cut down to the chalk. Resting on the solid chalk base was an undisturbed layer of flints and clayey mould. Immediately above is seen a streak of mould representing the old surface line. Still higher is shown a heap of mould which is undoubtedly the material removed from the top of the original ditch and then thrown inward to form the first stage of the rampart. Over this heap of mould is another layer of chalk, flints and mould, the top of which may be taken as the crest of the old rampart after it had suffered considerable denudation, and before the present capping of mould had commenced to form.

Finds.—The finds consisted of a few flint shore-pebbles, of a form commonly known as "sling-stones," and artificial chips of flint. These objects were fairly evenly distributed throughout the section, and were situated at the base of the top layer of mould over the ditch and on the underlying crest of the old rampart.

SECTION A.B.

Ditch.—Our second section was made near the centre of the northern side of the smaller earthwork, which is the boldest portion of the two entrenchments. Although at this point of the valley there is a deep sub-soil of clayey mould, it was found that the bottom and lower sides of the original ditch had been sunk well into the solid chalk floor. The chalk sides and bottom were well preserved, and the lower part was filled with a loose chalk rubble containing very little mould. Above this was the mixed silting of chalk and mould, with a layer of large lumps of chalk at its base. These blocks of

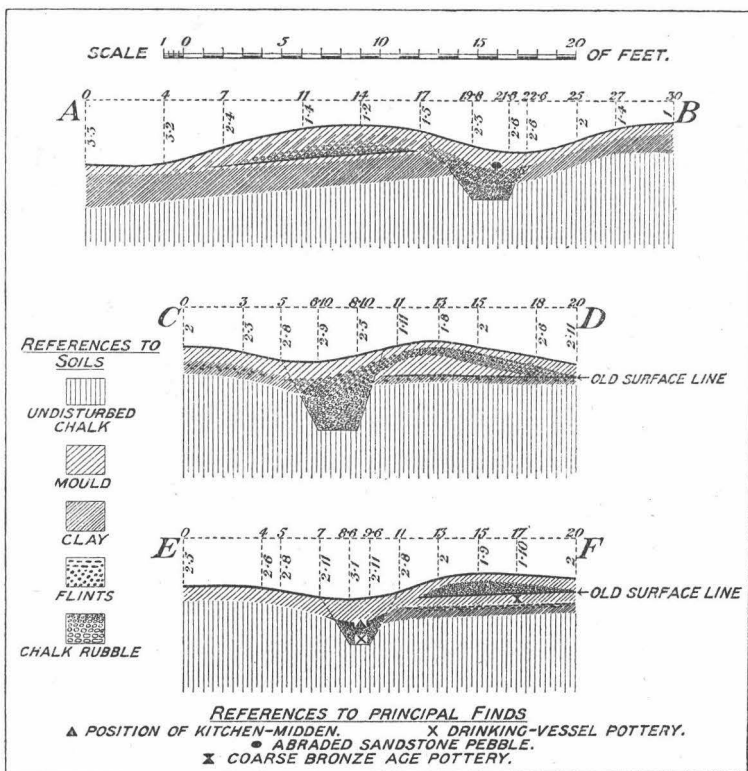


FIG. 3.—SECTIONS A.B., C.D., E.F., DUG THROUGH THE VALLEY ENTRENCHMENTS AT BELTOUT, AUGUST, 1909, SHOWING SOILS AND POSITIONS OF PRINCIPAL FINDS.

chalk had evidently fallen in from the sides of the original rampart. The uppermost filling of the ditch consisted of pure mould.

Rampart.—This mould extended over the crest of the old denuded rampart. The body of the latter is composed of mould, clay and chalk; and below this, on the top of the thick clayey sub-soil forming the base of the rampart, large blocks of chalk were again met with. When they were originally deposited along this stage of the rampart, the ancient excavators must have got down to the chalk in the adjoining ditch.

Finds.—In character and position, the finds in this section were, with one exception, much the same as those found in the section already described, *i.e.* flint flakes and egg-shaped pebbles. These were found below the capping of mould along the crest of the old rampart and across the ditch. The exception was a flat, elliptical sandstone pebble, about 3-in. long, 2-in. wide, and $\frac{3}{4}$ -in. thick, found at the base of the mould, near the centre of the ditch—its position is indicated in Fig. 3.

SECTION E.F.

Ditch and Rampart.—A capping of mould, of varying thickness, extended over the whole of this section. The centre of the rampart consists of a mixture of chalk rubble and mould. Below this is a layer of mould representing the old surface line; and, between it and the solid chalk, is seen an undisturbed stratum of flints and clay. In the ditch there was, strictly speaking, no layer of pure mixed silting. Its position was occupied by a coarser mould than that of the upper capping; but, between these two kinds of mould, there was no line of demarcation. The one gradually merged into the other. Here, too, the chalk rubble filling the bottom of the ditch had become extremely hard.

Finds.—In section E.F. the rampart was first excavated, where, after removing the top soil, another series of egg-shaped pebbles and flint chips was found similarly situated along the underlying surface of the old

rampart. Passing through the body of the rampart, the old surface line was reached, and in this old surface line we met with the first fragment of hand-made pottery of a purely Bronze Age type.

The Associated Find.—After removing most of the mould from the ditch, the following objects were found lying practically in a heap, as shown in Fig. 3 :—

Three hundred flint flakes, eleven flint cores (one burnt and another used as a hammer-stone), small shore pebbles, a fragment of tabular flint chipped for use as a scraping or flaying instrument, two flat sandstone pebbles (one abraded or battered at the end), thirty-eight flint scrapers, burnt flints or cooking stones, numerous fragments of typical Bronze Age pottery (consisting of rims, bases and sides, many being decorated with rough incised patterns), one fragment of the Bronze Age Drinking Cup or Beaker pottery, ornamented with the usual oblong punch marks, and about half-a-bushel of limpet, mussel and other marine shells. These shells were mixed with the other objects, but they occurred in greatest quantity from the centre of the ditch towards the east side. The section was extended, as shown on plan, until the associated find was exhausted. The area it occupied in the ditch was not more than 3-ft. by 6-ft.

EVIDENCE OF THE FINDS.

Both locally and elsewhere pottery of the two kinds found in the ditch of Section E.F.—the coarse quality containing grains of chalk, flint and quartz; and the finer drinking vessel type—have been found with burials of the Round Barrows which belong to the Bronze Age; and, associated with them, flakes, scrapers, arrowheads, and other implements made of flint. Further, perfect examples of the Drinking Vessel pottery do not appear to have been found with any interment other than those of the period in question.⁷

Corroboration of the Bronze Age character of the associated find is also obtained by comparing it with the

⁷ See *The Beaker Class of Fictilia*, by H. St. George Gray, in *The Antiquary*, January, 1906, pp. 18-20.

objects discovered by General Pitt Rivers in the Martin Down Valley Entrenchment—an earthwork which, in situation and superficial characteristics, has much in common with the valley enclosures of our own district. The whole ditch and rampart of Martin Down Entrenchment was dug down to the undisturbed chalk; and in the Bronze Age zones⁸ were found (scattered over a distance of 1000-ft.) 554 fragments of pottery identical to the coarse quality found at Beltout, but only 14 small pieces of the Drinking Vessel type. In the ditch and rampart there occurred 2439 flakes, 10 scrapers, 114 pebbles of the sling-stone variety, and 1549 burnt flints or cooking stones. Metal objects were nearly conspicuous by their absence, only a small knife or razor and a bronze awl being found.

Reference to Section E.F., Fig. 3, will show that the ditch of the larger earthwork had become partially filled with chalk rubble before the associated find, or kitchen-midden, was deposited in it. Experiments carried out by Pitt Rivers⁹ have demonstrated that this rubble takes little time to accumulate. Bearing this in mind, and also the fact that neither of our sections yielded any evidence of the ditch having been re-cleared of its natural silt, we may conclude that but a year or so had elapsed from the time of the larger earthwork's construction till its visitation by the individuals who formed the kitchen-midden. Moreover, the fragment of Drinking Vessel pottery, found on the bottom of the ditch, must have reached this position shortly after the earthwork had been made and before the disintegration of its sides had commenced. The fragment of coarse pottery, found in the old surface line of the rampart, is of the same quality as that found in the kitchen-midden, and it is evident that this must have dropped on to the old surface of the Downs at this point before the rampart was thrown over it.

⁸ See *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, pl. 300, facing p. 196, Vol. IV.

⁹ See *Introduction to Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, pp. 24-5, Vol. IV.

Careful comparison of the character and positions of the finds in Section E.F. with the results obtained by excavation of the square-shaped entrenchments of Wilts and Dorset, shows that the evidence in favour of the Early Bronze Age origin of the larger Valley Entrenchment at Beltout is as conclusive as that gathered in the elaborate researches recorded by Pitt Rivers in *Excavations in Cranborne Chase*, Vol. IV.

THE PERIOD OF THE SMALL ENTRENCHMENT.

One of the sandstone pebbles found in the kitchen-midden is artificially battered at the pointed end, thus indicating its probable use as a hammer-stone for converting flakes into scrapers—a purpose such pebbles admirably serve. The other shows no sign of use in this direction. The example found in the ditch of Section A.B. is, however, abraded or battered at both ends.

Similar sandstone pebbles are fairly common with local prehistoric remains, the abraded examples being particularly associated with flint implements and cooking stones on those areas of the Downs to which the term "Prehistoric Camping Grounds" has been applied.¹⁰ Reasoning from the nature of the finds, these camping grounds seem not later than the transitional period of the Stone and Bronze Ages.

Of the flakes and egg-shaped pebbles found underneath the top layer of mould in the three sections, only a typical selection was preserved; but, judging from their presence in each of the three sections, it would appear that such sling-stones and artificial flint chips are distributed under the soil all over the two earthworks. Comparing these flakes with those of the associated find, we observe they are alike in character, and that, from the point of view of workmanship, they differ from the bold chipping seen on the neolithic flakes at Cissbury, as well as from the long and beautiful refuse flakes found with pigmy flint implements in Sussex.

¹⁰ See *Another Prehistoric Camping Ground near Brighton*, by Herbert S. Toms, Proc. Brighton and Hove Nat. Hist. and Philosoph. Soc., 1910.

A critical examination of these scattered flakes and sling-stones leads me to believe they were dropped over the earthworks by the same persons who deposited the associated objects in the ditch of Section E.F. This belief is strengthened by the position in which the abraded pebble occurs at the base of the mould near the centre of the ditch in Section A.B.

Assuming, therefore, that all the relics found in the three sections are co-eval, we are brought to the consideration of a most important question, *i.e.* "Which of the two intersecting earthworks is the older?" For this purpose let me again refer to the relative positions of the remains in the ditches of the sections. In Section E.F. the kitchen-midden lies directly on the chalk rubble, thereby showing the original ditch had become filled to this level before the associated find was left in it. In the other sections the flakes and pebbles are situated not on the chalk rubble (as they ought to have been had both earthworks been made at the same time), but on the top of the layer above it—the mixed silting. Now, granting that all the relics discovered are co-eval (and it seems difficult to argue otherwise), the obvious conclusion is that, at the time of the deposition of the relics in Section E.F., the ditch of the large earthwork had received its first stage of silt; whilst in the ditch of the smaller work, not only had this rubble accumulated, but the second layer of mixed silting as well. Therefore, the first impression that the smaller entrenchment was constructed before the larger one which intersects it is, in the writer's opinion, fully substantiated by the evidence of the finds.

CONCLUSION.

The objects discovered at Beltout are now in the Sussex Archaeological Society's Museum at Lewes, to which institution they were generously presented by the landowner, Mr. C. Davies Gilbert.

These notes cannot be concluded without an expression of sincere thanks from the Brighton and Hove

Archæological Club to Mr. C. Davies Gilbert for allowing the excavations at Beltout to be undertaken, and also to those whose interest and assistance enabled the work to be brought to a successful termination.

Comparatively little has yet been done in the study of valley entrenchments. Excavations recently carried out in Wiltshire¹¹ have demonstrated the need for further investigation of our Sussex examples in order to ascertain whether any of them belong to periods earlier or later than the Bronze Age.

¹¹ *A Medieval Earthwork near Morgan's Hill*, by Mrs. M. E. Cunnington, *Wilts Arch. and Nat. Hist. Magazine*, Vol. XXXVI., p. 590.