

A RECENT DISCOVERY AT HEDSOR.

OUR Member, Mr. JAMES RUTLAND, F.G.S., makes the following important communication :—

“In digging a cess-pool twelve feet deep at Hedsor Wharf, some twenty yards from the Blessing Ditch, and about a hundred yards from the bank of the Thames, the workmen, after digging through two feet six inches of alluvial, and about six feet of peaty soil, containing much decayed wood, leaves, etc., came upon an oak floor, about four inches in thickness, supported upon oaken and beechen piles varying from five to nine inches in diameter. The principal and larger piles were about five feet apart, the small thickly studded about between. One oak pile they drew up was pointed, having a long draft, about three feet, which would give easy driving. Unfortunately, the extent of the floor was not ascertained, but hopes are entertained that Lord Boston will cause further research to be made. Just beneath the floor an iron dagger-knife was found, six inches in length, with an open socket, and two rivet or pin-holes on each side of the opening to secure it to the haft; the neck between the socket and blade is ornamented with three bead-like bands. The blade is slightly hollow, with a raised rim running round the edge about three-sixteenths of an inch in width. It is in a perfect condition. There was also a horn of a small ox (*Bos longifrons*), and some bones of the red deer. A small piece of pottery of bright grey colour was picked out of the soil after it had been thrown up, which may have been in the upper or alluvial soil.”

It has been reasonably inferred from the position, structure, and the bones and weapon discovered, that this is none other than a lake or pile-dwelling. “The lakes of Switzerland, as well as those of most other countries,” quoting the words of Dr. Archibald Geikie, “have yielded in considerable numbers relics of Neolithic man. Dwellings constructed of piles were built in the water out of arrow-shot from the shore.”

A detailed description of the construction of a pile-dwelling would, it need scarcely be said, be unnecessary and out of place in the publication of an archæological society, and, therefore, is not introduced.

The beautifully arranged museum at Constance discloses relics from the later Stone Age before the historic period, and also from the Bronze, and from the Iron Age, and in such abundance as to make it clear that lake-dwellings reveal the conditions and habits of early man under remarkably favourable circumstances.

As Keller says in his "Lake-Dwellings of Switzerland," the bottom of the water, where these dwellings stood is strewn with a thick accumulation of debris, partly from destruction by fire and partly from successive reconstructions, so that vast numbers of relics of the old population have been recovered, revealing much of their mode of life. The same site would no doubt be used for many generations, so that successive layers of relics of progressively later age would be deposited on the lake bottom. And these lacustrine dwellings are still to be found among uncivilized tribes.

It is well known to every anthropological student that the Thames Valley has yielded in the river drift striking evidences of the existence of Palæolithic man, and that the polished implements of Neolithic man discovered abundantly testify to the fact that he, too, made the margin of this important water-way his accustomed habitation. The discovery of pile-dwellings in contiguity with the Thames should, therefore, undoubtedly lead to the recovery of relics of the Bronze and Iron Ages, and might also yield the weapons and implements of a pre-historic period. It should be borne in mind that the Thames has, in course of ages, narrowed its waters, and that, at a very remote period, it was a broad and majestic river, as the present chalk cliffs and rising ground on either side attest. It will not, consequently, be a matter for surprise if evidences of pile-dwellings should be traced at a comparative distance from the existing bed of the river, as is the case from the description already given of the site of the present discovery at Hedsor, should it be conclusively found that this is none other than a pile-dwelling of the early inhabitants of the Thames Valley.—ED.