

VIII.

THE FALL OF AN IRON-AGE MAN INTO THE STONE-AGE. By Sir
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Some years ago I had occasion to visit Woking Prison, in the county of Surrey, in connection with the presence in it of persons who were insane. On the occasion of my first visit I observed one of the inmates diligently working at some small object held in his hands, but I made no effort to ascertain what he was doing, as I was then engrossed with the matter which had brought me to the prison. At my second visit I observed that this inmate, a man who laboured under chronic mania, and who was becoming somewhat demented and childish, was occupied exactly as at my first visit. I was freer then to be interested in things outside my special mission, and I went and looked at what he was doing. I found him giving shape to a small piece of bone, and the implement he was using was a flint flake.

No knife, file, nor iron tool of any kind is allowed to be in the possession of any prisoner, and the rule is very strictly enforced in regard

to insane prisoners. This man, therefore, desiring to occupy himself with the carving of bone objects, and being unable to obtain tools made of metal, fell back to flint for them, and, though living very much indeed in the midst of iron, became at once, in a certain sense, a man in the Stone Age. The case struck me as interesting, and I purchased and carried away everything I could persuade him to give up, paying the price in tobacco, to be doled out to him by the officials,—a thing which was rendered possible by his not being a man undergoing punishment, though a prisoner.

I shall now endeavour to describe the tools he used, the kind of work he did with them, and its quality.

He got his flints by breaking the nodules which he came across when taking exercise in the grounds. From the broken bits he picked out those which seemed to him to suit his purpose. He did not dress or shape them in any way, and I believe he was often disappointed at finding nothing among the fragments of a nodule which he thought suitable. Blunt, thickish fragments, with a sharp edge, not very unlike what we call *scrapers*, he appears always to have wanted, and I found three of these in his pocket, one of them showing signs of use. He also used thin knife-like fragments, cutting with them as with a saw. I found three of these in his pocket. He complained to me that they did not last long. Pointed fragments he also employed, but he had not a specimen to give me. All the flints I got were of small size.

Even as a worker with flint tools he had hindrances. I think the chief of these arose out of his being allowed to bring into the ward with him only a small number of fragments. If it had not been for this rule, I should probably have carried away with me a large collection. He was prevented from bringing many or large fragments into the ward from the fear that he or some other inmate might convert them into a lethal weapon by tying them in a pocket handkerchief, and so using them to give a dangerous blow.

His pockets were carefully searched for other tools, but nothing was found except a broken and flattened J steel-pen, which could scarcely be said to show signs of use, and a bit of what appeared to be a needle, which showed no signs of use.

In addition to these objects he gave me two thin bits of sandstone and a thin bit of slate, which he used for grinding and polishing. A much larger bit of sandstone, which he was only permitted to use when under close observation, I got from a warder; and on one of its faces there is what seems to me an indication that it has been used for sharpening some such thing as a needle or bit of wire. This larger bit of sandstone is oblong in shape, about 5 inches long, $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, and $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch thick.

This completes the description of the contents of his tool-chest, if I may so call his pocket. Except perhaps the sandstone grinders, there was no good tool in it. He took the best that chance gave him; and the warders told me that when, as they said, he "chanced on a really good tool," and had to throw it away before returning to his ward, he was much vexed. Poor, however, as the tools in his tool-chest were, he did good work with them, as I think I shall be able to show.

He gets the bits of bone on which he works from splinters of the thigh-bone of an ox. I obtained one such splinter, which was in the keeping of a warder, ready to be operated on when the right time came.

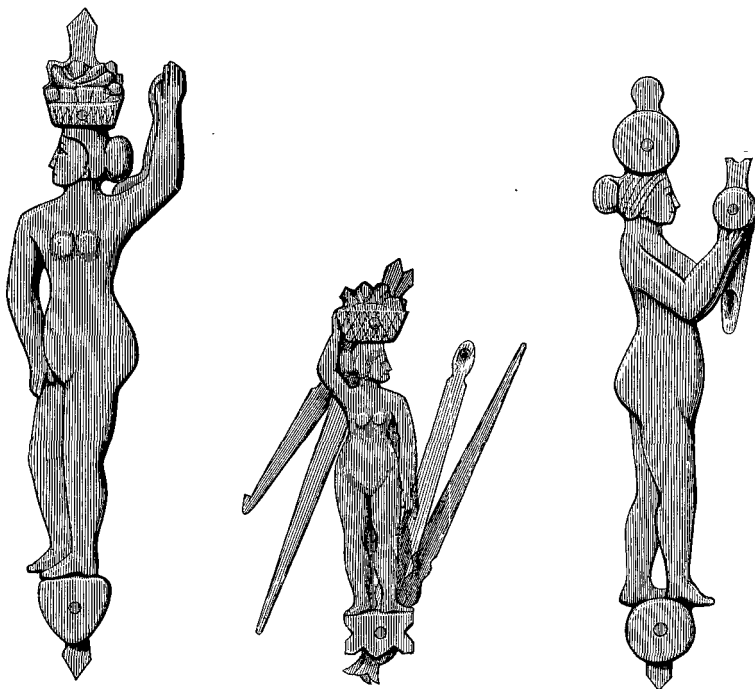
The first part of his work is to cut and grind this splinter down till it yields a thin plate of bone, about 4 inches long, 1 inch broad, and fully $\frac{1}{3}$ th of an inch thick. Two such plates I succeeded in getting. The cutting is done with flints, and the grinding with the larger sandstone grinder. In only one of the objects made by him was a thicker bit of bone used, and in that case the thickness did not exceed $\frac{1}{4}$ th of an inch. The cutting and scraping by the flints, therefore, is on a small scale.

He delights chiefly in carving the nude female figure. He gave me three such carvings (figs. 1, 2, 3), which vary in length from about 5 to about 2 inches. The form of these figures is by no means contemptible from the artistic point of view, and there is nothing coarse or obscene about them. His aim is to make tooth-picks and ear-picks, and he uses two nude women, cut out of the thin plates of bone just spoken of, to form shields for these things, which fall between them as the blades of a pen-knife fall between the two plates which form its handle.

In the general look of the figures, when the tooth- and ear-picks are

not thrown out, there is, I think, an oriental feeling, but this, I believe, is reached quite accidentally.

The figures are beautifully polished. In accomplishing this, the bit of slate is first used as a sort of burnisher, the final polish being obtained by diligent rubbing with a bit of rag which has been moistened with



Figs. 1, 2, 3. (4.)

saliva and made to pick up some of the chalk or lime from the white-washed wall of the ward.

The object, in the making of which a rather thicker plate of bone had been used, is the figure of Our Saviour on the Cross, and it is a copy of what was suspended over an altar in the ward. There is more undercutting here than in the figures of the women. When the figure of

the Saviour was cut out, it left a very thin plate of bone to form the Cross,—so thin that it appears to have broken; and it is strengthened by the addition of another thin plate on the back.

The two female figures forming the shields of the tooth-picks are riveted together by bits of ordinary pins. How the small holes for these rivets were bored I did not find out, but I do not think that they could have been made with flints. They were probably made with a bit of a needle, like that which I found in his pocket. If so, this is the only part of the work done by a metal implement. The steps forming the pedestal of the cross are fastened together by a bit of copper wire used as a rivet. If he had not easily got these bits of pins and bit of copper wire, he certainly had skill enough to make and use pins of bone. Indeed, it is known that he did use such bone pins, though not in the case of any of the objects which I obtained.

Unfortunately, I cannot tell the occupation of the man who made these carvings. I made inquiries on the subject, but omitted to note the answers I got. My impression is that he was a carpenter. I do remember that he was an artisan of some kind, and also that he was not a carver to trade. He desired occupation, but what suggested his finding it in this kind of work I cannot tell. It happens, however, that I have known several insane persons in asylums who took to making snuff-spoons and other such objects out of bone; and it is well known that the French prisoners in this country, though not trained to such work, occupied themselves greatly in the making of fanciful art objects.

Perhaps, if I had found a sane man using flint flakes successfully as tools for carving bone, when it had become impossible for him to obtain metal tools, I should have fallen on something of greater interest. That opinion, perhaps, may be held. But I do not myself see how the insanity of the carver affects the matter. He had fixed delusions, it is true, and was somewhat childish in talk and conduct, but I have shown that he was not mindless, and it was an act of intelligence to find in the broken flints the tools he wanted and could not get. A sane man doing the same thing would not have acted either more or less intelligently. It is perhaps improbable that a sane man would have greatly wished to make these useless and childish objects even if he had had access to files,

knives, drills, etc.; and if he had not had access to them, he would have required a great desire to make such objects to act as a stimulus to find something which might take the place of metal tools. It matters little, however, how it stands as between the sane and the insane in regard to the fall into the Stone Age of the man who cannot get iron for his use, though it may lie thickly all round him. It is at any rate true that the sanity or insanity of the carver does not come into the question at all when it relates only to the kind and quality of the work which can be done with flint implements of the rudest kind by a man who has had no training in the use of such implements. So far, at least, this story is instructive.

I regret that the piece of work on which he was engaged could not be got from him without causing him to become excited, though from habit he gave it up readily to the warder every night before going to bed—claiming it, however, next day. He also placed the finished bits of work in the warder's keeping, seeing them occasionally, but he did not object to my getting some of these. He did all parts of his work with extreme slowness; that is, each finished bit gave him occupation for a long time.