

A SINGULAR ANCIENT WORK.

BY FREDERICK W. PUTNAM.

DURING the past summer, a singular ancient work on a high plateau in the Little Miami valley at Foster's, Warren county, Ohio, was explored under my direction with the assistance of Messrs. Cresson and Dorsey of the Peabody Museum.

This remarkable structure proved to be a circumvallation over half a mile in extent. Where it was carried across the northern portion of the plateau the bank is nine to twelve feet high above the level of the field, and is about fifty-five feet in average width. Across the southeastern portion, the bank, though partly destroyed, is still several feet high. Around the western edge of the hill, the rise above the level of the enclosed portion is hardly perceptible, but the structure extends into the sides of the hill about fifty feet, and from ten to twenty feet down the sides. The whole circumvallation is made up of a carefully laid wall of flat stones along the outer side several feet in height; behind this are loose stones, both large and small, making nearly half the structure; and behind and over these stones a mass of clay burnt to all degrees of hardness, from that only slightly burnt to great masses of slag, showing that the clay had been subjected to very great heat, in places forming a vitreous surface over the slag, which resembles that from a blast furnace. In many places the limestone had been burnt in varying degree, and here and there large quantities of pure lime were found. Large pieces of charcoal and beds of ashes were discovered in many parts of the structure. At one place on the north side, where the burnt material runs out in the form of a low mound nearly one hundred

feet long and eighty feet wide, there was a larger quantity of charcoal and ashes than in other parts of the work explored. Here was also uncovered a singular wall of small stones about six feet long and two feet high. At every part of the work through which a trench was dug the same story was told, — burnt stones and clay, ashes and charcoal, and the mass of stones, faced on the outer side by a good stone wall. In the northern portion, a few potsherds, two flint points and a few flint flakes were found in the burnt clay, and this was the only evidence discovered of the work of man, except the singular structure itself. Several trenches were made within the enclosure, and the ploughed portion was carefully examined for traces of former habitation and for burials. But with the exception of a few arrow points, found on the surface, not a thing was discovered to indicate that the place had ever been inhabited. And yet this stupendous structure must have been the labor of many persons working for a long time; and it is probable that their habitations were inside the enclosure, while their burial-places must be in the vicinity.

This is one of the most remarkable structures I have seen, and one that should be more thoroughly examined before we can hope to get at its meaning, or find the additional evidence of occupation which will lead to a knowledge of the people who did this strange work. Its singular construction and the manner in which the extensive burning was accomplished, as well as the uses of the work itself, make one of the greatest puzzles for the archaeologists.

Should it prove possible, further explorations will be made here in order to clear up the mystery in which it is involved. It is locally known as "The Fort," but although well situated it does not seem at all to answer the requirements of a fortification; and, apparently, if such was intended, a bank could have been made of ordinary clay with a retaining stone-wall that would have answered the purpose as well without all this labor of burning.

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