

## CHAPTER II.

## TOPES AT SANCHI.—(Plates I. and II.)

THE Topes at Sanchi, which it is proposed to illustrate in the following pages, form part of a great group of these monuments situated between the towns of Bhilsa and Bhopal, in Central India. They extend over a district seventeen miles east and west, and about ten miles north and south, in five or six different groups, and number altogether between forty and fifty tumuli of various dimensions. The smallest of them are no doubt mere burying places of local chiefs, erected over their ashes, and contain no objects of interest. Others are Dagobas, or relic shrines, in the correct sense of the word; while the great Tope itself (A, Plate I.) is a Chaitya or Stūpa,\* erected apparently to commemorate some event in Buddhist history, or to mark some sacred spot.†

The great Tope at Sanchi (Plate II.) consists, first, of a basement 121 feet in diameter and 14 feet in height. On the top of this is a terrace or procession path, 5 feet 6 inches wide, within which the dome or tumulus itself rises in the form of a truncated hemisphere to a height of 39 feet. This was originally coated with chunan to a thickness of about four inches, but whether ornamented with painting or moulded plaster ornaments cannot be ascertained, owing to the very fragmentary state in which the coating now exists. On the top of the dome was a level platform, measuring 34 feet across. This was surrounded by a circular railing of stones, some of the pillars of which are still found among the ruins. Within this was a square Tee or simulated relic box, consisting of sixteen square pillars with rails, and measuring 11 feet 6 inches each way. Within this again was a circular support for the umbrella which invariably crowned these monuments. When Captain Fell visited this monument in 1819,‡ all this was *in situ* and nearly perfect; but shortly afterwards some bungling amateurs dug into the monument, and so completely ruined it, that the form of its superstructure can now only with difficulty be made out.

The most remarkable feature, however, connected with this monument is the rail which surrounds it at a distance of 9 feet 6 inches from the base, except on the south, where the double flight of steps leading to the berm or procession path reduces the width to 6 feet 4 inches. As before mentioned, it is 11 feet in height, and consisted apparently of 100 pillars, exclusive of the gateways. Each of these was apparently the gift of an individual, and even the rails between them seem to have been presented

\* Vide ante, page 79.

† The whole of these Topes were carefully opened and examined by General A. Cunningham and Lieut.-Colonel Maisey in 1851, and the results published by the first-named officer, in his work on the Bhilsa Topes, by Smith, Elder, & Co. in 1854.

‡ J. A. S. B., vol. III. p. 490, et seqq. General Taylor, of the Bengal Cavalry, who was probably the first British officer that visited the monument, confirms the account given by Captain Fell. He discovered the Tope when encamped near it, during the campaign of 1818. Three of its gates were then standing, and a great part of the Tee still *in situ*.