

ART IV.—*Elva Stone Circle.* By W. D. ANDERSON.

Read at Carlisle, April 6th, 1922.

THIS Circle is situated $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile due W. of the N. end of Bassenthwaite Lake. It stands about 470 feet above the sea level, on a plateau called Elva Plain, S.E. of Elva Hill.

At present the Circle consists of 15 stones and an outlier, whose positions are indicated on the plan and their apparent dimensions on a separate table (pp. 32, 33). In 1913 the stone marked "5a" was covered by turf, but it has since come into view. This would suggest that there may be others out of sight. Four of the stones are flush with the ground and four others are less than 1 ft. above the surface. It seems probable that these eight stones have sunk, but to determine this point, perhaps some excavation might be necessary.

Stone 10 presents a great many markings, and in 1913 I thought that some might have been the work of man. Since then, however, a careful examination of a large number of stones, marked undoubtedly by natural agencies, has convinced me that none of the marks on this stone are of human origin.

No astronomical significance has, as far as I know, been attached to the position of the stones. Like the Circles at Castlerigg (Keswick), Long Meg and others, Elva has an outlier situated to the S.W., and like these it is in the immediate vicinity of a farmhouse supplied with good spring water, a point I shall refer to later. At Castlerigg a line drawn from the outlier through the centre of the Circle gives an alignment through Long Meg to the summit of Fiend's Fell, suggesting not so much an interrelation between the two Circles as that to

both Fiend's Fell was a common object of observation. We know that at the beginning of May the Beltane fires were lighted on mountain tops. From Castlerigg the sun is seen rising over Fiend's Fell on May 1st and 2nd,* and my suggestion is that on this fell a Beltane fire was made in honour of the Earth god, Beal or Bile. With the advent of Christianity, Beal was officially abolished, but the missionaries, knowing that he still lived in the hearts of the people, compromised by allowing him to continue as a fiend.

As a possible origin of the word *Elva*, Prof. Sedgefield gives the hypothetical Old Norse personal noun, "Elfr," (*Place Names of C. and W.*, p. 47), but it seems simpler and quite as logical to take the word at its face value, Elfhow in 1488, and to suppose it an anti-pagan substitute for the name of some heathen divinity.

At Innerleithen, in Peeblesshire, a custom, whose origin is lost in antiquity, occurs yearly in August. A procession climbs a neighbouring hill, called Caerlee (Caerleu?, the Fort of Lugh, the Celtic sun-god), where an effigy of Satan, nicknamed "Cleikie," is ceremonially burnt. Lugh's feast, Lugunasd, it will be remembered, was in August. Here there seems to be a transmutation to a definite personality, Cleikie, instead of an indefinite fiend or elf.

Like most of the larger Circles in this district, Elva has been designed with a 50 ft. radius. As has been remarked before (these *Trans.*, N.S., xv., 101), this may some day throw light on the subject of the original builders. In the meantime, the question seems to be whether these Circles were built mostly by the Mediterranean race which spread from N. Africa over Europe as Neolithic man, or by their successors, the broad-headed people who brought bronze to Britain, and are known to have

* See the paper on Castlerigg Circle, these *Transactions*, N.S. xv., p. 111.

used circles for sepulture. These, according to Rice Holmes (*Ancient Britain*, etc., 424-425), were typical members of the Alpine race. They came from central Asia, and spreading through Asia Minor, crossed the Dardanelles and followed the great forest zone of Europe to the plains of France, whence some of them migrated to Britain, probably about 1800 B.C. It is not known that any of this race crossed to Africa, yet numerous Circles are to be found in Algeria and Tunis. This is in favour of the Mediterranean race having been Circle-builders, though it does not, of course, preclude the possibility of the Alpine race and even the Celts having constructed monuments of this kind.

The traditional, and commonly accepted view that some, at least, of the Circles were temples for religious rites, seems not unreasonable, especially as the stone Circles or Gilgals of Palestine, after they were taken over by the Israelites, were so used (Hosea XII., 11; Amos IV., 4; I. Sam., XV., and many other passages). Moreover, as I mentioned before, hard by the Circles of this district reliable wells are to be found, now supplying water to farm buildings. This does not apply to such Circles as those on Moor Divock, which were only burying places, but Long Meg, Gunnerkeld, Castlerigg, Elva and Swinside have each a good well of spring water in their immediate vicinity. It seems to me likely that in choosing the sites for all these larger Circles, the builders had in view the requirements of a resident community, which may have been simply a village settlement, or on the other hand, a society of tribal magi. The latter conjecture seems the more probable, when we consider the historical evidence to which reference has already been made.

The minor Circles, burial places of the bronze age, as shown by the relics found in them, were often near villages of people of their day ; but, unlike the larger Circles, they

do not appear to have had any close association with springs of pure water. It is possible that these springs were sacred, and had a religious as well as an economic value for neolithic man.

APPENDIX.

LIST OF STONES NUMBERED CLOCKWISE FROM THE NORTH.

Height above ground and dimensions.

No.			ft. ins.	ft. ins.	ft. ins.
1	..	..	1 9	2 6	X 2
2	..	..	0 7	2 3	X 1 6
3	..	..	Flush	2	X 1
4	..	..	do.	1 6	X 0 9
5	..	..	do.	3	X 1 6
5a	..	..	do.	0 4	X 0 4
6	..	..	1 ft.	3	X 3
7	..	..	2	3	X 4
8	..	..	0 6	3	X 1 9
9	..	..	1 4	3 6	X 2
10	..	..	0 9	3 6	X 1 8
11	..	..	1 6	3	X 2
12	..	..	0 9	3	X 2 6
13	..	..	3 6	4	X 4
14	..	..	1 2	2 6	X 2

