

CHAPTER IV.—ON STONES CONNECTED WITH ARCHAIC SEPULTURE.

This is no fit place to debate the question whether the megalithic or so-called "Druidical" circles, which formerly stood in great and imposing numbers in different localities in Great Britain, and many remains of which still exist, were used by our archaic forefathers as temples for worship, or places for political assemblages, or courts of law, or places of sepulture,—or whether all of these characters and uses did not pertain to them. Various analogies and inferences from superstitious usages, &c., have been adduced; but we have no classical or other ancient and direct data left us to prove them to have been sacred fanes or courts of convention and justice. The circles themselves offer no tangible or visible evidence that can settle such questions.¹ But they usually contain within their

¹ By far the ablest defence of the sacred or temple character, &c. of our Megalithic Circles is to be found in Dr Thurnam's very learned Essay on the Historical Ethnology of Britain in the "Crania Britannica," p. 121, &c.

flat area sufficient evidence—as ascertainable by the spade and mattock—that they were used as places of human sepulture at least, whether they were used for other purposes or not. Occasionally the centres of the smaller circles contain sepulchral mounds or barrows; or, perhaps, more correctly speaking, the barrows are surrounded by a single or double circle of stones. Again, in regard to our ancient cromlechs, we have not the slightest evidence that they were ever intended for aught else than sepulchres; but we have ample evidence that they were used for this purpose, in the finding of bones, urns, and sometimes of cists, within their cavities. The same proof applies to the old chambered tumuli, which often, indeed, contain within their centres cromlech-like structures as their skeletons or nuclei. The single standing stones or monoliths of our island,—erected occasionally, we know from ancient records, for various other purposes,—were often also raised as monumental stones for the dead, as we learn from the sepulchral urns, and the human bones and ashes oftentimes found deposited at their base. The remains found in the interior of the ancient kist-vaen or stone coffin, and of the stone-covered urn, afford also incontestible evidence of their sepulchral character. And in all of those localities of ancient sepulture,—on the megalithic circle, on the cromlech, on the stones of the cairn and chambered tumulus, on the monolith, on the lid of the kist-vaen, and on the stone-covering of the mortuary urn,—cup-cuttings and ring-cuttings have been detected.