

3. ON CROMLECHS.

Cromlechs, or structures consisting of a large, heavy, flat capstone, resting upon two or more upright stone props, appear to have formerly existed in considerable numbers in various parts of the British Isles. Their numbers are now much reduced.¹ The stones composing these massive archaic monuments are usually and correctly described as presenting no evidence of having been tooled and cut by man. But there are some exceptions to this general law in the appearance of incised cups and lines upon them. For instance, a remarkable example of a sculptured cromlech-stone, popularly called the "Witch's Stone," exists at Ratho, within eight or ten miles of Edinburgh.

Ratho Cromlech.—On the farm of Bonnington, about a mile beyond the village of Ratho, Mid-Lothian, are the remains of this "partially ruined cromlech" (as it was first described by Professor Daniel Wilson), with the capstone partially displaced, as if it had slid backwards upon the oblique plane of the huge stones or stone which still supports it. Two or three large blocks lie in front of the present props. Its site occupies a most commanding view of the valley of the Almond, and of the country and hills beyond. The large capstone is a block of secondary basalt or whinstone, about twelve feet long, ten in breadth, and two in thickness. Its upper surface has sculptured along its median line a long row of some twenty-two cup-cuttings; and two more cup-cuttings are placed laterally, one, half a foot to the left of the central row and at its base; the other, two feet to the right of the tenth central cup, and near the edge of the block. The largest of the cups are about three inches

¹ By far the largest and most imposing cromlech which I have seen in Scotland is the so-called "Auld Wives' Lift," at Baldernock, nine or ten miles north-west from Glasgow. It consists of three enormous sandstone blocks. Their surfaces are cut in many parts, but the carvings are all, I believe, quite modern and apocryphal. There are various smooth scalps and outcrops of rock near this cromlech, but I could trace no sculpturings upon any of them.

in diameter, and half an inch in depth; but most of them are smaller and shallower than this. Professor Wilson¹ speaks of these cups as "possibly indicating a design of splitting it [the stone] in two." But the shallowness and scooped form of the cups show that they would have been utterly incompetent to accomplish any such object in a whin block so massive, hard, and thick. The lateral cups offer strong additional evidence against any such idea. Besides, among the various concentric ring and cup carvings which I have seen at Old Bewick, in Northumberland, one huge squarish block of stone which is carved with concentric circles on its upper surface, has a row of cup-carvings cut along two of its sides exactly similar to those on this cromlech; and no one can possibly imagine that on the Northumberland rock the cup-cuttings were made with any object, but as a portion of the numerous rude ring and cup sculpturings which abound upon the upper surface and-sides of this block.² (See this Bewick block and its cups and ring carvings represented in Plate XXV. figs. 1 and 2.)

Clynnog Fawr Cromlech (See Plate IX. fig. 2).—About ten or twelve miles from Caernarvon, and half a mile to the south-west of the village of Clynnog Fawr, stands near the sea a cromlech, consisting of a cap-

¹ See his "Prehistoric Annals of Scotland," vol. i. p. 95. On a very large prostrate block of Sarsen stone, lying on the left side of the avenue, and several yards to the exterior of the outermost circle of Stonehenge, there is a row of six small oblong, narrow, and deepish cavities. They are evidently artificial, and apparently made to cut off, as it were, a corner of the stone. But the cavities are too sharp in their edges and sides to be of any great age. One of the prostrate trilithons which, in falling, has broken into three pieces, has on one of its fractured surfaces a large and a small lateral cavity, with smoother surfaces already weathered out upon it.

² Since the account in the text was printed I have had an opportunity of re-examining this Ratho or Bonnington group of stones, and altogether doubt if they are the remains of a cromlech consisting of isolated and separate stones. They appear to be formed, on the contrary, of one large boulder of whin, which has partially split up. The upper layer or so-called "capstone" has cleft off by disintegration, and is slid backwards about a foot upon the earthfast masses which form its props. The largest of these props or under-masses is as broad at the "capstone," and after underlying all its eastern side, projects beyond it. The large fragments in front are fallen and separated portions of the same mass of rock. If either a heavy boulder or a mere outcrop of rock, it would resemble the sculptured projecting stones and rocks at Bewick, Rowtin Lynn, and elsewhere in Northumberland.

stone and four props. This cromlech is described, under date 1772, in the old Rhyl MSS., compiled by the Rev. J. Llwyd, of Caerwys, as having upon its capstone "near a hundred shallow cavities running in oblique but almost parallel lines along its surface, three much larger than the rest in a triangular position; it is supported by four strong bearers, and in length four cubits, in breadth three, its inclination towards the setting sun."¹ One large and two small carved or chambered cairns formerly stood near it. For the accompanying sketch (Plate IX. fig. 2) of this interesting cromlech as it exists at present, I am indebted to the great kindness of my friend, Dr Hughes of Llanwrst. The cup depressions are isolated and separated, except where some of the largest are united by a groove or gutter.

Lancrese Cromlech.—Among the numerous remains of cromlechs and sepulchral chambers which exist in the Channel Islands, none (according to Dr Lukis) show any carving or ornamental work upon them. "But," he adds, as exceptions, "in a small cromlech at Lancrese, Guernsey, there are on one of the props about fourteen circular hollows, as if they had been drilled with the intention of breaking the prop in the direction of the line of hollows. These depressions have been evidently worn with a rude muller to the depth of about one inch, and three or four inches in diameter. Only in one instance have I observed," he adds, "depressions similarly made; it is upon a menhir-like stone appertaining to the Abbey of St Michel du Valle, situated in the bourg or village of the Forest, Guernsey."² For sketches of this cupped cromlech prop, and monolith, I am beholden to the courtesy of Mr Uniacke. (See Plate X. fig. 2.)

Cromlech and Circle at Holywood, Dumfriesshire.—A few miles from Dumfries is a megalithic circle nearly eighty feet in diameter, and eleven of its massive compact stones are still left. The largest, about ten feet long and seven broad, is prostrated forward, and has upon its face, its top, and one of its sides, about thirty smooth and rounded cup excavations. At one side of the circle, and somewhat within the circuit of it, are three or four stones, which appear to me to be the prostrated remains

¹ See the *Archæologia Cambrensis* for January 1849, p. 1.

² *Journal of the British Archæological Association* for 1858, vol. iii. p. 276.

of a cromlech and its supports. The capstone has, running across its back, four oblique rows of cup-like excavations, some of them round and others irregularly elongated in form. One of the fallen props is similarly marked. It would be important to note accurately if the various strings of cups correspond in any degree with natural lines in these stones, and if, therefore, they may possibly have a natural origin; or if they are arranged quite independently of the mineralogical peculiarities of the blocks, and are hence, as they seem to be, the results of artificial tooling.

Rathkenny, Meath.—The cromlech markings which I have hitherto spoken of consist only of cups or excavations. An instance of a cromlech carved both with cups and circles has lately been discovered at Rathkenny, near Slane, in Ireland, by Mr Conwell of Trim; and I hope he will soon himself publish a full account of it. In the meantime, he has kindly favoured me with a sketch of the upper surface of the capstone. From this sketch the cups or depressions, whether natural or artificial, seem to be above a hundred in number, and are intermixed with straight lines or scores running in diverse directions. The capstone is about ten feet long, and six feet broad. On its under surface are “seven separate circles; and seven other circles of varying size are cut on the upright stone or prop upon which it leans, at an angle of 32°.”

In Great Britain, perhaps the most celebrated cromlech is that known as Kits Coty House, near Maidstone, in Kent. On visiting it some time ago when professionally in that neighbourhood, I found the huge capstone completely perforated or “holed” on one of its projecting sides, like some of the “holed” cromlech stones in Yorkshire¹ and Cornwall, in France, Algeria, Circassia, and India.²

¹ See Rooke in the *Archæologia*, vol. viii. p. 209.

² See Mr Brash on “Holed Stones” in the “Gentleman’s Magazine” for December 1864, where a number of instances are collected. As examples of holed cromlech-stones additional to those mentioned by Mr Brash, I may refer to the model in the British Museum of one that formerly stood at Trevethy in Cornwall (see Norden’s “Cornwall”); and to the holed prop of the cromlech at Trie in France, described and figured by Carro (“Voyage chez les Celts”). Bertrand, in a late essay upon the “Monuments Primitifs de la Gaule” incidentally states, that in perhaps a dozen of cromlechs (“*dolmens*”) in France there are “holes” (“*trous*”) “in the supports.” The capstone of a cromlech at Oulad Mohammed in the African province of Constantin

This capstone and its three supports are further scooped out in various parts by cup-like hollows, for the most part shallow, but some of them passing deeply into the stone. The outer or exposed face of the eastmost of the three props shows about fifty such round, smoothed excavations, two inches and upwards in diameter. Their irregular distribution, and the occasional obliquity and depth of their orifices, seemed to me to prove that they were the work of nature rather than of art. They are comparatively wanting, however, on the exposed edges of the blocks; and they exist, in some instances, on the protected interior aspects of the stones of this cromlech. One on the inferior and protected surface of the capstone penetrates upwards some eight or ten inches into its substance. The stones themselves are extremely hard blocks of limestone grit. It would be interesting to observe whether that rock *in situ*, where it had been long exposed to the action of the elements, weathered into any similar forms. They might, it must further be remembered, have been weathered blocks even before being used in the construction of the cromlech; and possibly they, and some similar stones, are originally hardened lapidary nuclei, left as relics and waifs out of geological superficial strata, the softer materials of which have all been long ago washed away by the action of water and time.

In a paper by Dr Lukis, in the "Archæologia,"¹ on Ancient Celtic Lapidary Remains, the author incidentally refers to traces of human chiselling upon cromlechs in the district of Dyffryn, North Wales—a region rich in antiquities. The reference is specially, I believe, to a cromlech called Arthur's Quoit, near Llanddwywe, Merionethshire. There is a second and larger cromlech within a few feet of it, and numerous cairns in the immediate neighbourhood. One of the supports of Arthur's Quoit has

was found "holed" by M. Feraud ("Revue Archæologique" for March 1865). Lately Captain Meadows Taylor has shown that a form of cromlech or external kistvaen, "holed" in one of its props or sides, is very common in the Dekkan of India. In the district of Bellary alone he alludes to 2129 cromlechs and kistvaens, 583 of which have "slabs on four sides, roof slab, and one side perforated by a circular hole;" and 527 as presenting no top or covering slab, but composed of four sides, and one of these sides "pierced with a circular aperture." (Trans. of R. Irish Academy, vol. xxiv.)

¹ See Archæologia, vol. xxxv. p. 250.

the heavy capstone resting merely on its edge ; and the remainder of the summit of this prop-stone is flat, but weathered and broken off at two sides. The free and uncovered flat top of the support presents a surface of about eighteen by twelve inches, and it has eight or nine very slightly curved, parallel, deepish lines run obliquely yet fully across it. These lines, if artificial, are quite different in form from any described in this essay. The sepulchral character of these two cromlechs—and consequently of cromlechs in general—is strongly shown by their interiors still containing short stone cists about four feet long and three feet high.

PLATE VIII.

OAKLAND CIRCLE, ISLE OF MAN, & CROMLECH, &c. IN GUERNSEY.

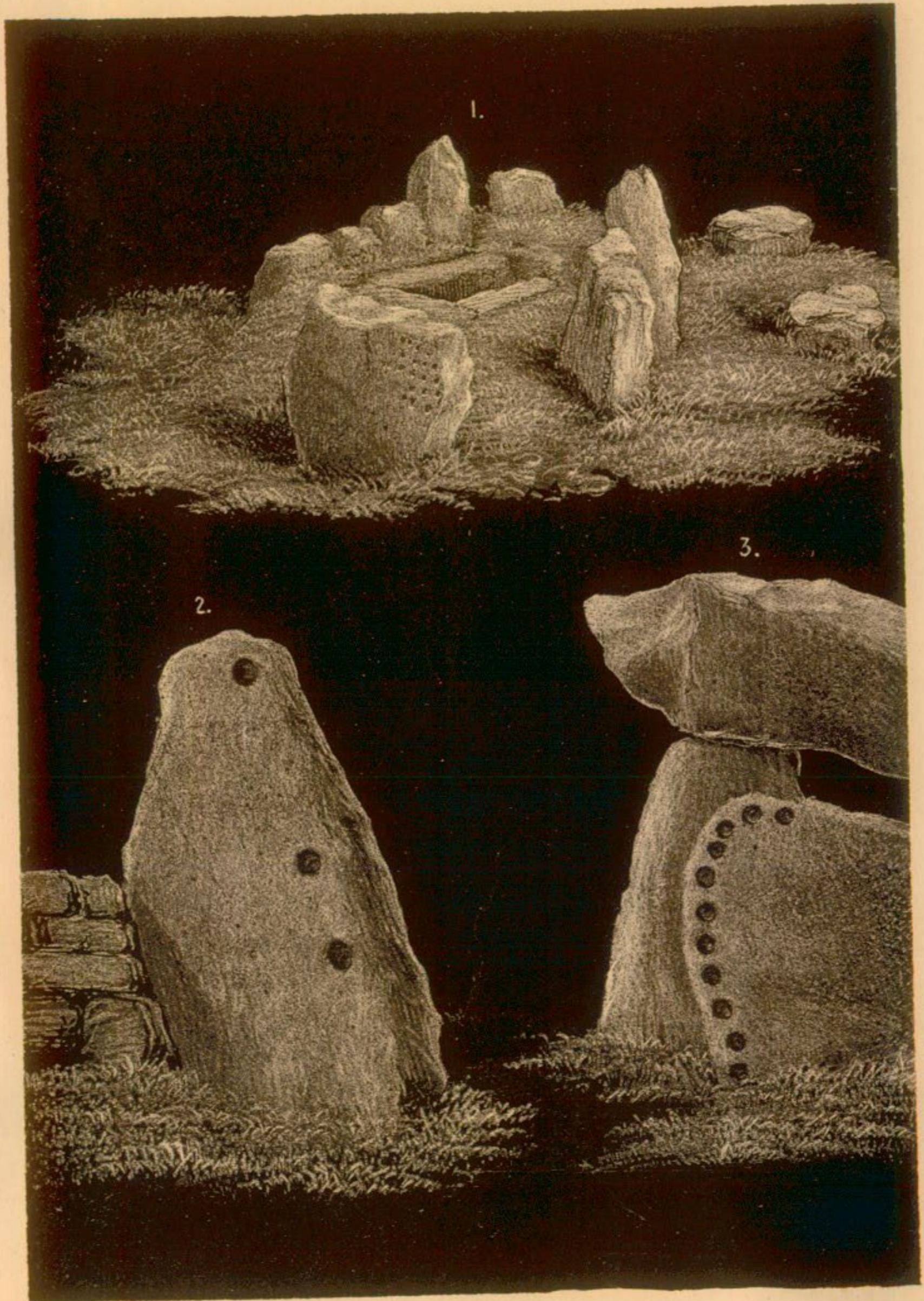


PLATE IX.

CROMLECHS AT RATHO AND CLYNNOG-FAWR.

