

CHAPTER XII.—THEIR POSSIBLY RELIGIOUS CHARACTER.

The Scottish concentric ring-cuttings and cup-cuttings, however, are far ruder and simpler than the Irish and Brittany examples of old lapi-

¹ M. Dumont d'Urville, in his "Voyage de l'Astrolobe," gives numerous figures of tattooing amongst the Polynesians. The principal figures upon the face consist of simple or compound spirals (see the accompanying plates, tom. i. pl. 63, 74, &c) They indulge also in abundance of circular and crescentic lines and figures.

dary ornamentation to which I have referred. They lack that elaborateness and diversity of detail which characterise the cuttings within the Irish and Brittany sepulchral chambers. They are also in most cases far more sparse in their distribution, and more rough and rude in their details, than we would naturally perhaps expect in rock or stone surfaces carved for mere and pure decoration only. At the same time these ancient rock-cuttings in Scotland and England present indisputably, wherever they occur, the same archaic "handwriting on the wall,"—they are everywhere so wonderfully similar in their type of art,—so nearly and entirely like to each other in all localities in their general artistic conception and details, as to prove that they originated in some fixed community of objects or ideas among those that cut and formed them—whether their origin was ornamental, or symbolic, or both. But, whatever else was their object, that they were emblems or symbols connected in some way with the religious thoughts and doctrines of those that carved them, appears to me to be rendered probable, at least, by the position and circumstances in which we occasionally find them placed. For in several instances we have seen that they are engraved on the outer or inner surface of the stone lids of the ancient kistvaen and mortuary urn. The remains of the dead which occupied these cists and urns were covered over with stones carved with these rude concentric circles, apparently just as afterwards—in early Christian times—they were covered with cut emblems of the cross placed in the same position. Man has ever conjoined together things sacred and things sepulchral,—for the innate dread of death and the grave has ever led him, in ancient as in modern times, to invest his burial rites and customs with the characters and emblems of his religious creed.

In some instances the carved stone employed to cover the body or ashes of the dead, or used in the construction of their megalithic cists, seems to have been taken for that purpose from other localities where possibly it had been already regarded as sacred, and had possibly served for other religious purposes. Thus, for example, the carved cist-cover at Craighiehill is, at one end, broken off right through two or three series of concentric rings (see Plate XI. fig. 2), which must have been cut upon it before it was reduced to its present shape and size; the small slab from the cist at Caruban has been similarly mutilated through the

linear course of the carving upon it, to allow of it being placed as a panel in the end of the grave; and a few of the sculptured stones in the megalithic sepulchral crypts and galleries of Ireland and Brittany have been ascertained to be carved upon their hidden as well as upon their exposed sides, showing that they were sculptured, in part at least, ere they were placed in their present situations.

Perhaps it might be further argued that the presence of the concentric rings and cups on the sides of Long Meg, the Calder stones, and the stones of other "Druidic Circles," goes to show their sacred or religious character,—whether we regard megalithic circles as places of worship, or places of sepulture, or both. The same remark applies to their appearance upon cromlechs; and, if possible, more emphatically still to their occurrence upon sepulchral monoliths and standing stones.