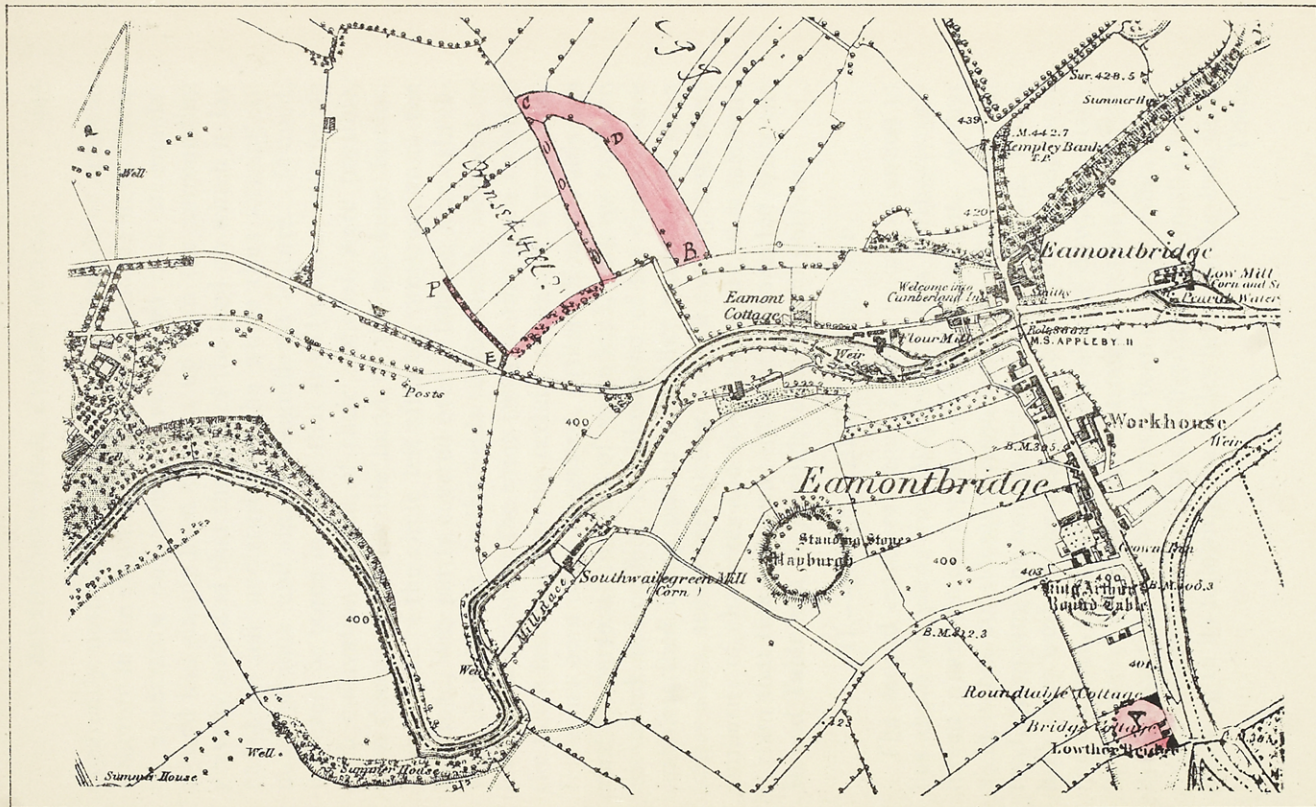


ART. XLII.—*On some Earthworks near Eamont Bridge.*
By WM. ATKINSON.

Read at that place August 2nd, 1882.

I.—MARKED (A) ON THE MAP.

ABOUT 150 yards south of what is known as Arthur's Round Table, on the same flat alluvial tract as that structure, and almost exactly opposite the bridge of the Penrith and Kendal road over the Lowther, there existed, before the construction of the new private road to Lowther Castle, a low circular ridge of considerable diameter, about half of which was contained in the field adjoining the road and river, and the rest in the two fields to the north of this. The ridge was, through most of its extent, not more than 6 to 9 inches above the level of the surrounding ground, and from 3 to 5 feet broad at the base. It would have a diameter of from 60 to 80 yards as nearly as I can now estimate, and this considerable area, slight elevation, and extension over three fields, probably account for its being previously overlooked. When it first drew my attention some 8 or 10 years ago the circle was incomplete on the side towards the river, and had doubtless been removed here in the erection of the wall enclosing the road, or obliterated by traffic when the road was less circumscribed, or it might have been destroyed by tillage, which had no doubt considerably reduced the parts still visible at the time I have mentioned. The ridge was composed mainly of gravel, with a little soil intermixed, and seemed to be scarcely at all different from the subjacent soil, in fact no line of demarcation between the two was evident. I had an opportunity of noting this during the formation of the new private road, above referred to, 4 or 5 years ago, when part of the ridge had been newly removed. There was apparently



The name Ormssett Hill written on the map should be *Wetherick Hill*, the corner referring to another eminence near; and the -igg should be -ick, the termination of the word Wetherick, a spelling which seems best in accordance with local pronunciation.

apparently nothing in the way of earthwork or artificial structure in the ground enclosed by this ridge ; in fact from its appearance one would have judged that an annular mound had simply been thrown up from the surrounding gravelly soil, and that the rest of the land on which it lay had been left undisturbed — the whole thus forming an inconspicuous and almost insignificant feature. It must, however, be borne in mind that any structures interfering with cultivation would, if their removal were possible, soon disappear under the hand of the northern farmer. The portion of the circle left after the construction of the new road, was partly covered over in forming a new shrubbery, and the rest, in the fields to the north, removed or levelled down about the same time, so that when I visited the place last summer no certain vestige of it remained. If, as has been often suggested, Arthur's Round Table was used for personal contests of some kind, perhaps both on horseback and on foot, the likelihood of the circle I have just described being put to a similar purpose, but on a larger scale, seems very strong. At all events, from their similarity of character and their proximity, it is tolerably certain that this circle was intimately connected with the Round Table and Maybrough in origin and purpose.

II.—MARKED (BDC) ON THE MAP.

The second earthwork that I wish to call attention to lies about 400 yards from Maybrough, in a north-westerly direction, and on the opposite side of the Eamont. At first sight it has considerable resemblance to a broad curving road, occupying the low ground between two hills, with a high steep bank on the east side, the result of cutting away the hill here, and in the lower part sloping down gradually to the river. It has perhaps a stronger likeness to a broad railway-cutting which has never been used for traffic, and is overgrown with grass. The curving direction which it takes is owing to its following the valley between the two hills.

These

These hills are (1) on the east, the south-west flank of the long ridge of high ground known as Wetherick, which stretches from near Penrith in a south-east direction to end abruptly near here in the alluvial plain of the Eamont, and (2) a much lower eminence on the west side, without a distinctive name so far as I am aware, but which it will be convenient to call "West Hill" in the remainder of this notice. Both these hills are examples of those enormous accumulations of glacial drift so widely scattered over the two counties, and so remarkable for their uniformly hog-backed contour, and their general parallelism over large areas. They often possess peculiarities of shape which lead to their being considered of artificial origin, and taken for tumuli, &c., but the structure I have at present to describe is, I think, unquestionably one of human handiwork. The distance over which this road-like structure is evident is about 430 yards, its breadth in the upper or north-west part is about 16 to 20 yards, while lower down it suddenly becomes about twice this width. To the west its course is indicated by the hedge of the field, which marks the boundary here between the earthwork and the gradual slope of the westerly hill. On the east side it ends abruptly at the foot of the steep sloping bank which has been formed by cutting away part of the south-west shoulder of Wetherick, the hill to the east. This steep slope, which is the feature giving rise to the appearance of a railway cutting, varies in vertical height from a few feet at the upper end to about 15 feet near the middle, dying away again to the south as the general contour of the ground slopes down to the river. Between its two banks the road-like tract is flat from side to side, and in the direction of its length fairly level for about 120 yards, but then slopes gradually down to the low alluvial land bounding the river. Just before this slope begins the flat tract suddenly widens, as before mentioned, to about double its former breadth; *i.e.*, a new tract is added (at D),
of

of the same breadth and running side by side with the first. This second is not on the same level, but is about a foot or in some parts over 3 feet lower than the first.

At the point (D) where this second tract begins, the field also widens, the hedge running outwards some 22 feet or more so as to enclose the whole. Indeed it is curious that this earthwork is all in one field, and in no way crossed or obscured by hedges, a circumstance which, taken together with its unusual shape, goes to show either that it was enclosed very early, or that when a general enclosure took place its exceptional character was recognised.

At the south-east end (B) the evidence of artificial structure gradually disappears towards the flat alluvium of the old river bed. At the north-west end (C) I have been informed that there formerly existed a circle of stones, of which I hope to be able to elicit more definite information from other sources. No trace of these stones is apparent at first sight, but on examination of the wall here its foundations on the north-west side are seen to consist of stones of considerably larger size than are to be found in the neighbouring walls. This concurrence of large stones would hardly occur accidentally just at this place, and would certainly not be collected to one point for the mere purpose of building the wall, but if on the spot they would naturally be put to this use.

The letters (OO) are placed on a long narrow field, which appears to have been an old road leading directly up to the wall just mentioned at the north-west end of the long earthwork, with which it agrees both in being now all one field, and apparently in not having been ploughed.

III.—MARKED (EP) ON THE MAP.

On the opposite side of "West Hill" from the places just described there occurs another earthwork. This is a
long

long narrow trench with a high mound on each side. It is about 160 yards long, only a foot or two wide at the bottom, and about 12 feet across at the top. In some parts it is 5 or 6 feet deep, but generally less than this. It extends from the south-west shoulder of "West Hill" (at E) near the Skirsgill road, in a north-west direction, parallel to the ridge of the hill and along its base, and rudely parallel to the earthwork last described. At its northern termination (P) it bends at right angles to the east, and ends abruptly in the side of the hill. From this point onwards to the north-west the hill rises more sharply from the lower ground lying to the west, and it seems in places along this north-west boundary, as well as across its northern extremity, and especially near the head of the earthwork, B D C, to have been artificially scarped as in the case of the latter. At its southern end the trench turns abruptly to the south, and after running a few yards in this direction terminates against the Skirsgill road mentioned above.

It is impossible to examine remains like these without speculating upon their origin and the purpose they were intended to serve. And since the life and therefore the history of our forefathers was made up largely of battles and wars, one is perhaps inclined to look first for a military purpose in such cases. That such an explanation can be given of the places I have attempted to describe above, seems at least doubtful. The trench (EP) on the west of "West Hill" may have been used to defend the hill from an attack from the west, and the artificial slopes to the north-west and north, together with its steep south end, give support to this theory, but on the other hand, its low elevation and want of natural advantages for defence are strongly against its choice for such a purpose. It might, however, be conjectured to have formed a first line of defence, and the larger earthwork (BDC) a second, having Wetherick at its back, and the steep eastern slope of (BDC) would strengthen this view; but again, the tract at the
foot

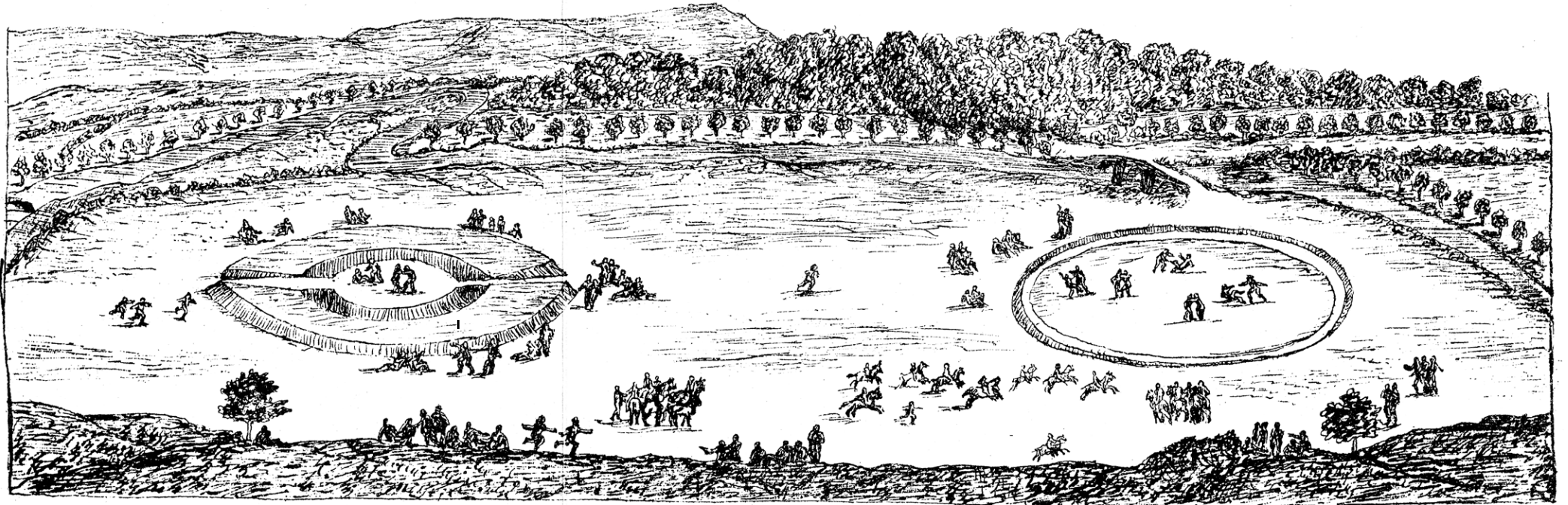
foot of the latter would surely not have been left flat but converted into a deep trench, whereas it has been on the contrary artificially levelled, and further, the whole position could have been easily turned by a slight detour to the north, which would lead round to the west of Wetherick by an easy and continuous slope. Leaving out of question the long trench (E), for whose existence I can think of no satisfactory explanation, it seems that much the most likely purpose which the large road-like excavation (BD) could serve would be that of a racecourse, probably for horses or for chariots, with the starting point at its north-west extremity (C), and the goal at or near Maybrough. The road-like tract will be seen after its first slight curve to lead almost directly to the centre of Maybrough. This, if the course were straight, would necessitate the crossing of the river, which was probably at that period by no means so much below its banks as now. The private house known as "The Bleach Green" would lie in or very near this course. The long road-like field (marked OO on the map) might serve as a straight path for competitors to reach the starting point, or it may have formed a first part of the course, but in this case the turn at the north-end (G) would be very abrupt. The whole of this course would lie in full view from Maybrough, and the passage of the river would add a difficulty to riders or drivers very much of the nature of the modern "water jump." Of course the whole of this suggestion is only a conjecture, underlain, as all such conjectures must be, by more or less of probability, but the Round Table and the annular mound near Lowther Bridge, seem better adapted for contests of skill and strength than for any other assignable purpose. And it is at least likely that chariot and horse as well as foot-races would form part of such sports if we may follow the tradition which has ascribed these structures to the British times of Arthur. It certainly appears not at all impossible that, perhaps in the late British period, when this district

was

was part of Strathclyde, the neighbourhood of Eamont Bridge was the scene of a periodical festival, for the celebration of games of a similar character to those held at Olympia, and like those, probably also religious in origin, if Maybrough and its large stones are to be regarded, as they often have been, in the light of a temple. If this supposition has any ground in fact it becomes an interesting question how far the modern north country games are descendants of those formerly practised here, and whether the local wrestling, pole leaping, and general strong taste for athletic sports, are not as real and important relics handed down of the condition of our fore-elders, as are the more tangible but less easily read remains of Maybrough and the Round Table.

Since writing the foregoing I have been able to add a few other particulars, which it seems desirable to append, so that this notice of the remains may be as nearly complete as my opportunities will allow. The first of these addenda is from the "Itinerarium Curiosum" of the Rev. W. Stukely, to which I was directed by the Editor of these Transactions. Here, to my great gratification, I found a drawing which includes both the southern circle (A) and the Round Table, together with a description of these and Maybrough as they appeared at the time of his visit. I have made a tracing of the drawing and transcribed the letterpress, and from their quaintness and interest I am glad to have permission to print them as an appendix. It will be seen that Stukely considered, as I do, that Maybrough and the two structures just mentioned, *i.e.*, the circle (A) and the Round Table mark the site of a religious festival, which was accompanied by games; but he places the racecourse, or circus, round the two latter. This, however,

View of the Circus of the Brittons on the Bank of the Louthier near Perith. Aug 15th 1725.



ever, is pure conjecture, unsupported by any evidence, for there is no trace visible now of such a track, nor was there in his day. Indeed he seems to lay down a racecourse here because he thought it would form a necessary part of the games. The earthwork (BDC) to which his attention had not been drawn, would answer much more correctly to the "*ad flumina*" of his quotation from Virgil.

He gives the diameter of the southern circle (A) as 100 yards, while Hutchinson puts it at 70 yards, which from my recollection I should think more nearly correct. It will therefore be seen that I have only re-discovered this structure.

With regard to Stukely's remark that the stones of Maybrough have been brought from some other place, I ought to mention an ingenious, and to my mind very probable, suggestion of Mr. J. G. Goodchild of H.M. Geological Survey, to whom I owe thanks for the idea of laying down the places referred to on the 6 in. ordnance map, and for other useful hints. Mr. Goodchild believes that Maybrough may very well have been originally one of those great mounds of glacial drift known as Eskers which are so common in this neighbourhood, and that the centre has been cleared out, and the larger stones thus obtained placed round the margin, while the gravel and smaller stones were used to form the level internal area. The large stone in the centre is one of the great bluish-grey boulders of volcanic ash, so commonly found scattered over the country by glacial action, and probably brought from the Lake District, and it would, with the others formerly existing here, in all likelihood be found in the centre of such a mound.

From Mr. C. Valance Stalker I have learnt, by correspondence, that most of Wetherick, and the parts adjacent, were known as the "Castle Lands" and were unenclosed in the present century, and crossed by tracks in various directions, and that they then formed a usual resort

resort for the encampment in summer of the nomadic population known as potters. He throws no light on the long earthwork (BDC), but says that the trench, meaning I suppose the one I have marked (EP), was used for filtering and carrying water for the town. Here, however, he is surely in error, and must have failed to identify the locality from the map-tracing I sent. The water from the Eamont could not have been brought up to this higher level, and no surface or spring water could very well be collected here because the hill on the east side ("West Hill") is formed, as has been said, of permeable glacial drift, while the field bordering the trench on the west is underlain by limestone, as evidenced by a "swallowhole" about 50 yards from the trench, and therefore we have a subsoil in both directions about as unfavourable for the collection of water as possible. Indeed the porous nature of the ground is remarkable here, for no runlet I believe enters the Eamont between the Redhills stream and Carleton Hall. I can therefore only conclude that his remark is based on mistaken identity. I am indebted to Mr. Stalker also for a reference to the following paragraph in Hutchinson's history:—"Opposite to Maybrough on the Cumberland side of the Eamont is a large tumulus, or cairn, called Ormsted Hill, formed of pebbles, which appear where the turf is broken: it is set round with large grit stones of different sizes, some a yard square, the circle being about 60 feet in diameter." This is evidently Stukely's tumulus "on the high ground overlooking all," and very likely, as he says, was a funeral monument connected with the other remains of the neighbourhood. I do not know that any trace of it still exists, but it must, from the description, have stood at the top of the high bank known as Kemplay.

By the kind help of Mr. J. F. Wilkins, I am able to add measurements of the head of the earthwork (BDC), which seems worth attention. The flat tract does not extend

extend up to the wall at (C), but ends somewhat curiously against ground a foot or two higher which reaches up to the wall. This higher ground sends a kind of tongue 8 feet in breadth and 25 feet long into the lower tract, thus leaving two recesses or bays one of 14 feet and the other about 30 feet in breadth, and the same depth as the tongue, *i.e.* 25 feet. The rest of this higher ground about 18 feet broad is continued into the field (OO). This, on the supposition that the place was a racecourse, might be used for chariots, &c., to reach (C) the head of the long earthwork, where they might be stationed for starting in either or both of the two recesses, which would thus be analogous to the Roman carceres, I do not mean to suggest that the people who used this structure for a racecourse, if ever it were so used, were Romans, but there is every probability that any Aryan people like the Britons would have in their games some points of similarity to those of the Romans and Greeks.

PENRITH.

(Extract from the *Itinerarium Curiosum* of the Rev. W. Stukely.
Published 1776.)

At the conflux of the rivers Louthier and Eimot there is a remarkable curiosity, that illustrates the method of the religious solemnities, as much as any I have seen. Upon the edge of the Louthier, where the bridge now passes it, is a delicate little plain, of an oblong form bounded on the other side by a natural declivity: this is used to this day for a country rendezvous, either for sports or military exercises, shooting with bows, &c. On this plain stands the antiquity commonly called King Arthur's Round Table, and supposed to be used for tilts and tournaments: it is a circle inclosed with a ditch, and that with a *vallum*. At first sight we may see that it was intended for sports, but not on horseback, because much too little; the *vallum* on the outside lies sloping inwards with a very gradual declivity on purpose for spectators to stand around it, and it would hold at least 10,000 people. The outside of the *vallum* is pretty steep: it was high originally as may be seen now in some parts; but it is worn down, as being by the side of the common road; and the inhabitants carry it
away

away to mend the highways withal. There are two entrances into the *area*, north and south, or nearly so; one end is enclosed into a neighbouring pasture: the area had a circle within, somewhat higher in elevation than the other. The outer verge of the *vallum* is a circle of 300 foot: the composition of it is entirely cobbles and gravel, dug out of the ditch. Upon part of the plain are marks of the tents of the Scots army, that accompanied King Charles II. on his way to Worcester: they encamped here for some time, and drew a small line across part of the southern circle: this was done within memory.

Just 400 foot from the verge of the south entrance is another circle, 300 foot in diameter, made contrarywise to the former: the *vallum* is small, and the ditch whence it was taken is outermost. Thus these two circles and the interval make 1000 foot in length; and there is just room enough without them, next the river and next the bank, for a *circus* or foot race, according to the manner of the Grecians which were always celebrated by the sides of rivers:—"Centum ego quadrijugos agitabo ad flumina currus" &c., *Virgil*; and probably British chariots had here their courses. On the southern end it is manifest they contrived it just to leave room enough for the turn; and it required good skill to drive a chariot so as not to fall there, or into the river. It must be understood that the bridge at present, and another of wood formerly below it, have impaired the banks by the more southern circle. This is the most delightful place that can be imagined for recreation: the rapid Louthier runs all along the side of it; the Eimot joins it a little way off, in view; beyond that is a charming view of a vast wood, and of Brougham Castle; beyond that the ancient Roman City, and the Roman Road going along under the high hill whereon is the beacon. But these are things later in time than our antiquity.

Though upon first sight of the place I knew its purport, yet I was more fully convinced thereof when I went to see Mayborough, as it is called, which is a little higher up the hill, on an eminence higher than any near it, and full west from this place or *circus*: it is a vast concavity, of the same diameter as the circles just mentioned, viz., 300 foot: it is made with an artificial *vallum* of loose stones, without any ditch, carried with great labour from some other place, and here piled up, so as to make a rampart as high and broad as that at Abury: in some places the turf with which it was covered originally, is peeled off: it slopes inward with a gentle descent on account of spectators; outwardly it is as steep as the nature of the materials would suffer, and now covered over with great timber trees: the entrance is wide and opens full east, and to the *circus*. Within this fine plain which is now ploughed up, have been two circles of huge stones; four remaining

maining of the inner circle till a year or two ago, that they were blown to pieces with gunpowder, they were of a hard black kind of stone like that of the altar at Stonehenge: one now stands, ten foot high, seventeen in circumference, of a good shapely kind; another lies along: this inner circle was fifty foot in diameter. One stone at least of the outer circle remains by the edge of the corn; and some more lie at the entrance within side, others without, and fragments all about. Just by the entrance, along the road runs a spring, full eastward.

This I suppose to be a great British temple, where the country met on solemn days to sacrifice. After the religious duties were over, they went down to the *circus* to celebrate their games: and I could not but admire the fine genius of the people in chusing places for their sports; for upon the verge of the acclivity, along the *circus*, an infinite number of people might stand to see the whole without the least inconvenience, besides those in the plain between the two circles; and these two circles admirably well executed the intent of the *meta's*, but much better than those in the Roman *circus's*. In ploughing at Mayborough they dug up a brass celt. On the other side of the Eimot, upon a high ground overlooking all, is a very fine round *tumulus*, of a large size, and set about with a circle of stones: this in all probability was the funeral monument of the king that founded the temple and *circus*. Somebody has lately been digging away part of the barrow and carried off some of the stones, and demolished others.
