

CHAPTER XIII.—THEIR AGE, OR THE DATE OR DATES AT WHICH
THE RINGS AND CUPS WERE CUT.

The central cup, with or without a surrounding circle or circles, constitutes one of the most simple, and consequently most frequent, forms of ancient sculptured ornamentation. Nothing could possibly be more rude and primitive, except it were one or more unornamental straight lines or grooves such as we occasionally see both traversing and passing beyond the cups and rings. The very simplicity of the cup and circle forms is one strong reason for our regarding these types of sculpture as the most archaic stone carvings that have been left to us. When once begun, such types of lapidary carving and ornamentation would—for the same reason—be in all likelihood readily transmitted down to future generations—and perhaps to races even—that followed long after those who first engraved them on our stones and rocks. Possibly their sacred symbolisation—if they were sacred—contributed to the same end; for forms and customs that were originally religious observances often persist through very long ages after their primary religious character is utterly forgotten, and even where the type of religion has been totally changed.¹

¹ As, for example, the use of the old pagan marriage-ring in the Christian marriage rites of some churches; the general avoidance of marriage in May, a supersti-

As yet, we want a sufficient body and collection of data to determine with any accuracy the exact age or ages and periods at which the lapidary cup and ring cuttings we have described were sculptured. But the facts we possess are quite sufficient, I think, to prove that the date or dates at which they were for the most part formed must be very remote. In evidence of this I shall appeal in the following chapters—though at the risk of some recapitulation—to their precedence of letters, and traditions; to various data regarding the connection of these rude sculptures with the dwellings and sepultures of archaic man; to the archaic character of the antiquarian relics with which they have been found in combination; and to their geographical distribution as bearing upon their antiquity.