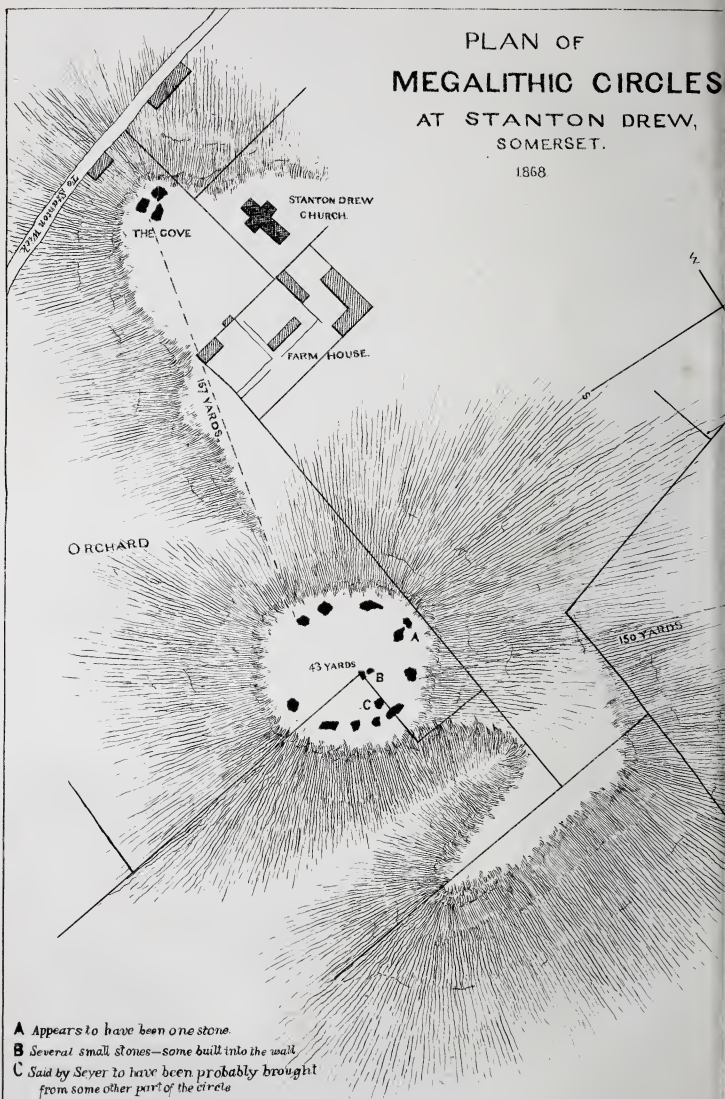


PLAN OF MEGALITHIC CIRCLES AT STANTON DREW, SOMERSET.

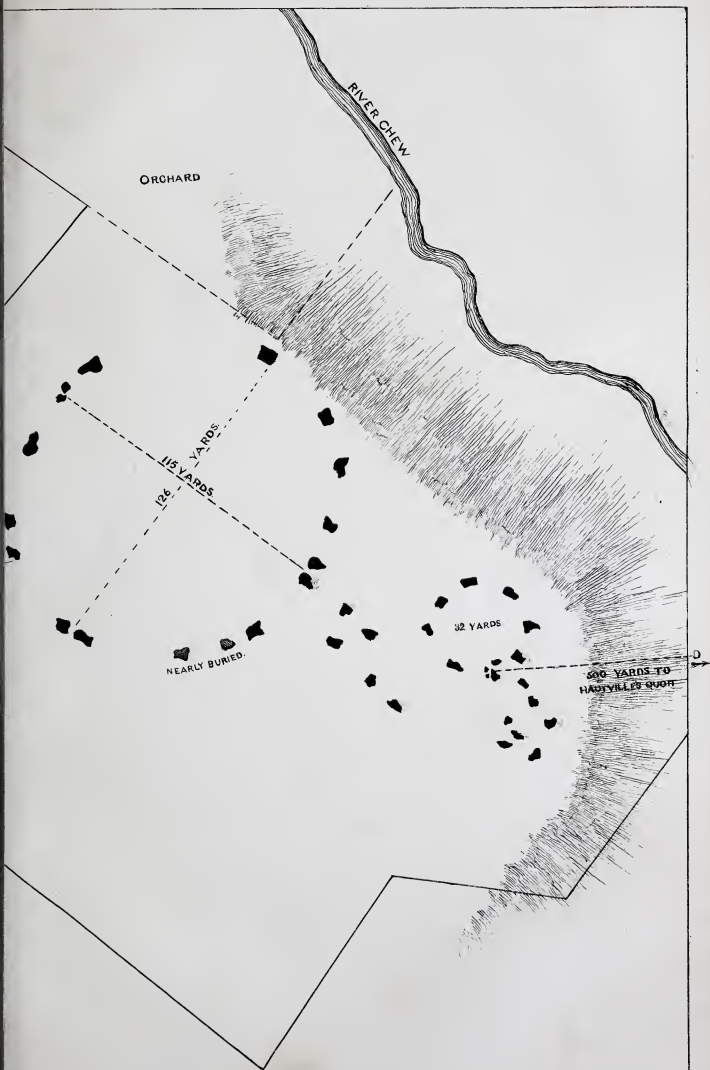
1868



A Appears to have been one stone.

B Several small stones—some built into the wall.

C Said by Seyer to have been probably brought from some other part of the circle.



On the Megalithic Remains at Stanton Drew.

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STANTON DREW is one of the most interesting megalithic monuments of this island, and probably one of the most ancient. It is situated in the county of Somerset, about seven miles south of Bristol, in the valley of the Chew, and near that river, not far from the range of hills called Dundry, and is overlooked by the portion of that hill called Maesknoll, on which there is a camp. It lies to the south of the ancient earthwork or line of demarcation called the Wansdyke, which can be traced at intervals from Great Bedwyn in Wilts, over the downs to the river Avon at Warleigh, near Bathford, and over Hampton Down south of Bath, and on to Stantonbury Camp, and by Compton Dando to Maesknoll. Stanton Drew was therefore situated within the line of the supposed Belgic boundary. The three great megalithic monuments of the south and west of England, are Stonehenge, Abury, and Stanton Drew; and of these Stanton Drew is the smallest. It consists of three stone circles,

or more properly, a central oval and two small circles, which seem to have been connected with the central oval by stone avenues, and give the appearance of two serpents passing out of a central enclosure : such it has been taken to represent.

The first writer by whom it is mentioned is John Aubrey, A.D. 1664, who says, that he was told that the number of stones were much diminished within a few years of his time ; and Dr. Stukeley speaks of a "late tenant," who for covetousness of the little space of ground they stood upon, buried them for the most part in the ground. Mr. Long states in his interesting memoir of Stanton Drew, in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xv, p. 200, "It does not appear that since Stukeley's visit, A.D. 1723, a single stone has been removed," and we trust that the day is past when historical monuments, such as these, shall suffer wanton destruction ! John Aubrey first brought Abury and Stanton Drew into notice, the former A.D. 1648, the latter 1664. Dr. Musgrave, in his *Belgium Britannicum*, vol. i, p. 206, A.D. 1719, gives an account of Stanton Drew, and illustrates it by an accurate plate of the structure as it then stood. Keysler, in his *Antiquitates Septentrionales*, A.D. 1720, gives a short account of Stanton Drew. But none of these writers, says Mr. Long, appear to have been aware of the existence of the cove, or of the circle which is near it, as their descriptions are confined to the portions of the structure in the field nearest the river Chew.

Collinson briefly describes Stanton Drew in his *History of Somerset*, published A.D. 1791 ; and Seyer in his *History of Bristol*, A.D. 1821, gives a more detailed account, with measurements of the stones and lithographic drawings. A plan of Stanton Drew is given by Sir R. C. Hoare in his *Modern Wilts*, from a survey by Mr. Crocker.

The COVE is situated a little to the south-west of the parish church, and is formed by three stones standing in an orchard. The two side stones are still standing, but that which formed the back is fallen down. These three stones are 18 inches thick, and the respective lengths of from 10 to 14 feet. The cove is 10 feet wide and about 8 feet deep, and opens to the south-east.* The first circle is distant 157 yards from this cove in an easterly direction; the number of stones which originally composed the circle appears to have been twelve, and the diameter of the circle, according to Mr. Crocker, is 129 feet. There are now remaining in the orchard, in which it is partly situated six stones, and three in the adjoining field, and one under the wall which separates the orchard from the field, making ten in all; but the circle when complete probably consisted of twelve. 150 yards from this circle in a north-east direction, is the Great Circle, the diameter of which, according to Mr. Crocker's measurement, is from east to west 345 feet, and from north to south 378 feet. It is therefore, strictly speaking, an ellipse, with the longer axis from north to south. The number of stones remaining is fourteen, of which three only are standing, others are said to be beneath the surface. The tallest of the standing stones is $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet high, and about 6 feet thick. They are all of a very rude appearance. The original number was probably twenty-four. Seyer says twenty-seven.

Eastward from the Great Circle, at a distance of 150 feet, is a circle of eight stones, its diameter is 96 feet; four only are now upright. Adjoining this circle on the east and south are seven scattered stones. The general

* See Stukeley's *Itin. Curiosum*.

opinion respecting these stones (says Mr. Long) is "that they formed a sharply curving avenue which connected the circle of eight stones with the large circle."

From the mention made by Aubrey that the number of the stones had diminished much within a few years of his time, we may conjecture that the corresponding avenue which led to the great circle from the other circle in the orchard has been carried away or buried, and thus we have the structure at present in an imperfect state. The stones appear to have been procured near the spot where they now stand from a stratum about six feet under the surface. Most of the blocks are stated to be composed of conglomerate, which has been slightly coloured by red oxide of iron ; but there are others of a much finer grain. For a fuller account of the geology of the district I must refer to Mr. Long's paper in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xv, p. 207, which will be found to contain, as I think, nearly all that can be said on the subject of Stanton Drew, and we have reason to feel thankful that in the present day, gentlemen of learning, ability, and leisure, can be found to undertake the elucidation of these interesting monuments.

It is a curious fact that all the measurements of the circles at Stanton Drew, as well as the account of the number of the stones in each, differ from each other. Since the above paper was written, a gentleman much interested in the study of antiquities, has surveyed and drawn with his own hand the circles, as well as measured each of the stones, and I find his measurements to differ considerably from those of Mr. Crocker, as well as from those given by preceding writers. I can only explain this by supposing that the points at which the measurements are taken are different, and so the diameters of the ovals or circles vary ; and

the distance of one circle from another varies as well. They all agree upon the main points, and in some cases the difference is only a few feet. In one or more instances stones which should have been taken into the circle are left out, in other instances they are included where they ought not.*

The Somersetshire Archæological Society could not do a greater service to archæology than have a new and careful survey made, and the size and position of every stone indicated, as well as the position of each stone once known to exist. Recent investigations in other countries have thrown much light upon the study of megalithic structures, which appear to be common to all lands. Thus Dr. Hooker, in his *Himalayan Journal*, gives drawings as well as a description of the megalithic monuments in that region.† Speaking of the Khasia Mountains and the people that inhabit the district, he says, “The funeral ceremonies (*i.e.* of the Khasias) are the only ones of any importance, and are often conducted with barbaric pomp and expense; and rude stones of gigantic proportions are erected as monuments, singly, or in rows, circles, or supporting one another like those of Stonehenge, which they rival in dimensions and appearance.” At page 319, he says, “Nurtiung contains a most remarkable collection of these sepulchral and other monuments, which form so curious a feature in the scenery of these mountains and in the habits of their savage population. They are all placed in a fine grove of trees, occupying a hollow, where several acres are covered with

* The map which accompanies this paper is that of Mr. Crocker, revised by the kindness of a friend living near the spot, who has bestowed much pains upon it.

† See *Himalayan Journal*, vol. ii, c. xxix, p. 276, pl x, and c. xxx, p. 320.

gigantic, generally circular, slabs of stone, from 10 to 20 feet broad, supported 5 feet above the ground upon other blocks. For the most part they are buried in brushwood, and nettles and shrubs : but in one place there is an open area of fifty yards encircled by them, each with a gigantic headstone behind. Of the latter, the tallest was nearly 30 feet high, 6 broad, and 2 feet 8 inches thick, and must have been sunk at least 5 feet, and perhaps much more, in the ground. The flat slabs are generally of slate or hornstone, but many of them, and all the larger ones, were of Syenitic granite, split by heat and cold water with great art. They are erected by dint of sheer brute strength, the lever being the only aid. Large blocks of Syenite were scattered amongst these wonderful erections. The Nurtiung Stonehenge is no doubt in part religious, as the grove suggests, and also designed for cremations, the bodies being burned on altars. In the Khasia these upright stones are generally raised simply as memorials of great events, as of men whose ashes are not necessarily, though frequently, buried or deposited in hollow stone sarcophagi near them, or under horizontal slabs."

A paper of much interest, entitled "Descriptions of Cairns, Cromlechs, Kistvaens, and other Celtic, Druidical, or Scythian Monuments in the Dekhan," by Captain Meadows Taylor, has been published in the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xxiv, in which he cites examples of stone circles, and gives measurements of megalithic monuments which bear a striking resemblance to these found in our own island and in Brittany. Towards the conclusion of his paper he remarks on the great similarity which exists between the megalithic structures of the east and west, and says, "It is impossible to compare the views

and diagrams given by Mr. Higgins in his beautiful work, (*Celtic Druids*) with these of the Dekhan, without the conviction that however widely separated, geographically speaking, they must have had their origin in the same people, or people possessing the same faith, and using the same rites of sepulture." Any one of the Cromlechs or Kistvaens might be Kits Coty House, in Kent; while the great array of stones of Carnac, in Brittany, the Druidical Temple at Rowldrich, in Oxfordshire, or that of Abury, in Wilts, have this analogy with the rocks of Vibat-Hullie, or those around the great tumulus of cremations at Shahpoor.

The largest rock of Carnac, as given by Mr. Higgins, measures 22 feet high, 12 feet broad, and 6 feet thick, inclusive of what is concealed by the sand, and the weight as estimated by him is 256,800 lbs. The dimensions I give, if none are so high, are greater in girth, and on the same data of calculation of weight—200 lbs. per cubic foot of granite, would be 465,800 lbs., 432,000 lbs., and 324,000 lbs. respectively.

In relation to the fields of Cairns (Barrows) also, the plan of Stonehenge, with the circles irregularly disposed about it, agrees with the great group at Jewurgi, where they are only more numerous; while the great fields of Narkailepullee, Dewarkonda, Haiteepamela, and Goormutcal, would, if surveyed and planned, cast the fields of Mr. Higgins' diagrams and my own altogether into the shade. The same writer also refers to the Celtic remains in Dartmoor, given by Sir Gardiner Wilkinson, in the *Journal of the Archæological Association*, March and June, 1862, as also agreeing with those given in his paper. He says also, that "the very traditions agree most strangely." Mr. Higgins, p. 37, quotes Camden, in regard to the stones of

the Temple at Rowldrich, that "they were believed to be men turned into stones, and they were the king and his soldiers." So of the rocks of Shahpoor, those round the parallelogram are believed to be men : the largest being the chief, watching black and grey cattle, (the black, green-stone ; the grey, granite boulders), lying in the middle. The people of the country, especially the Beydurs, who are no doubt descendants of the aborigines, not of Aryans, believe this perfectly ; and also tell you in regard to the rocks placed at Vibat-Hullie, that "they were men who as they stood marking out the places for the elephants of the King of the Dwarfs, were turned into stones by him because they would not keep quiet."

The usual traditions in this country connect stone circles with a dance. Thus, at Stanton Drew they are "fiddlers" and the "maids," or the revel rout attendant on a marriage festival, and the whole the "wedding." For according to Stukeley, the country people believe that "a couple were married on a Sunday, and the friends and guests were so profane as to dance upon the green together, and by a divine judgment were turned into stones." There are also the "nine maids" in Cornwall, the "nine ladies" in Derbyshire, and "Long Megg and her daughters" in Cumberland, all of which seem to carry our ideas to marriage festivity and dancing.

In Brittany, at Carnac, the common idea is that the stones, which are very numerous, and extend to a great distance, being eight miles long, with an average width of two hundred feet,* were an army turned into stone. This monument for its vast extent, if not for the size of its

*See Mr. Bathurst Dean's paper in the *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxv, and his work on "Serpent Worship," p. 369.

stones, is certainly one of the most striking anywhere to be seen. The work is traditionally ascribed to the Croins, men or demons two or three feet high, who carried the rocks in their hands and placed them there. This, according to Capt. Meadows Taylor, agrees with the Indian traditions. See p. 362.

If any one has walked from Marlborough up Clatford Bottom, to the Cromlechs there, and has noted the continuous wavy line of Sarsen stones which fill the valley, and has imagined the largest of these to be placed on end, and continued in parallel rows all through the valley far beyond the Cromlech, he will have a good idea of the Celtic monument at Carnac, and will probably be of opinion that these stones at Carnac, which are now set upright, once lay prostrate upon the surface of the ground, like the grey wethers on the Marlborough Downs, but that they were gradually placed upright, and used to record the dead buried under or near them. Remains of ancient interments have been found in Brittany, at the foot of these stones, both weapons and ornaments, and it was therefore most probably a gigantic necropolis—a common burial ground for a large tribe, or it may be for several tribes united, while the megalithic circles on the continent and in our own island probably answered the purposes of great religious gatherings at funerals, or on great public occasions. It is curious that researches into these megalithic structures should bring us much to the same result as the study of the science of language seems to have brought the most learned philologists. Professor Max Müller, in concluding his learned lectures on the Science of Languages,* observes “the science of language thus

*See Lectures given at the Royal Institution, London, in 1861, p. 398-9.

leads up to the highest summit, from whence we see into the very dawn of man's life on earth, and where the words which we have so often heard from the days of our childhood, 'and the whole earth was of one language, and of one spirit,'—assume a meaning more natural, more intelligible, more convincing than they ever had before." Surely the study of these megalithic remains leads us back to a central point from whence the human family at first had its origin, before it became scattered over the face of the earth; surely they indicate a similarity of custom both of burial and of worship. They indicate a universal habit derived from a common centre.

While this paper was passing through the press, some remarks on the subject were made by Dr. Hooker, in his address to the British Association in August, 1868. In it he presses upon the Association "the great and urgent importance of adopting active measures to obtain reports on the physical form, manners and customs of the indigenous populations of India, and especially of those tribes which are still in the habit of erecting megalithic monuments," and states that systematic efforts are now being made by the Government of India to obtain photographs and histories of the native Indian tribes, and that Captain Meadows Taylor has been appointed to the literary and scientific portion of the work.

He says, "It will no doubt surprise many to be told that there exists within 300 miles of the capital of India, a tribe of semi-savages who habitually erect Dolmens, Menhirs, Cists, and Cromlechs, almost as gigantic in their proportions, and very similar in their appearance

and construction to the so-called Druidical remains of Western Europe; and what is still more curious, though described and figured nearly a quarter of a century ago by Colonel Yule, the eminent Oriental Geographer, except by Sir J. Lubbock, they are scarcely alluded to in the modern literature of pre-historic monuments.

In the Bengal Asiatic Journal for 1844, are to be found Colonel Yule's descriptions of the Khasia people of East Bengal, "an Indo-Chinese race, who keep cattle but drink no milk; estimate distances traversed by the mouthfuls of pawn chewed *en route*; and among whom the marriage tie is so loose, that the son commonly forgets his father, when the sister's son inherits property and rank."

Dr. Hooker states that he and Dr. Thompson dwelt for some months among the Khasia people eighteen years ago, and found Colonel Yule's account to be correct in all particulars. The undulatory eminences of the country, some 4000 to 6000 feet above the level of the sea, are dotted with groups of huge, unpolished, square pillars, and tabular slabs, supported on three or four rude piers. In one spot, buried in a sand grove, they found a nearly complete circle of Menhirs, the tallest of which was 30 feet out of the ground, 6 feet broad, and 2 feet 8 inches thick, and in front of each was a Dolmen or Cromlech of proportionately gigantic pieces of rock; while the largest slab hitherto measured is 32 feet high, 15 feet broad, and 2 feet thick. Several were recently erected, and they were told that every year some are put up, but not in the rainy season. The method of removing the blocks is by cutting grooves, along which fires are lit, and into which, when heated, cold water is run, which causes the rock to fissure along the groove. The lever and rope are the only mechanical aids used in transporting and erecting the blocks. The objects

of these erections are various—sepulture, marking spots where public events had occurred, &c.

The Khasia word for a stone “man” as commonly occurs in the name of their villages and places, as that of man, maen, and men, does in those of Brittany, Wales, Cornwall, &c. Thus mansmai signifies in Khasia, the stone of oath; manloo, the stone of salt; manflong, the grassy stone; just as in Wales, Pen-maen-maur, signifies the hill of the big stone; and in Brittany, a Maenhir is a standing stone; and a Dolmen, a table stone. As this country has now been opened to English scientific investigation, and a British cantonment established among the people, we may look for a fuller description of their manners and customs, as well as their megalithic monuments, and as Dr. Hooker observes, it will throw great light upon that obscure and important branch of pre-historic archæology—the megalithic monuments of Western Europe.
