

#### IV.

NOTES OF THE OPENING OF A STONE CIRCLE AT CRAIGMORE, IN STRATHFLEET, SUTHERLANDSHIRE. BY LAWSON TAIT, Esq., F.R.C.S.E., CORR. MEM. S.A. SCOT. (PLATE LIX).

At the mouth of Strathfleet, the glen running north from Little Ferry, and on the east side, stands a very picturesque hill of the Sutherland conglomerate, known as Craigmere. On a little platform at the foot of

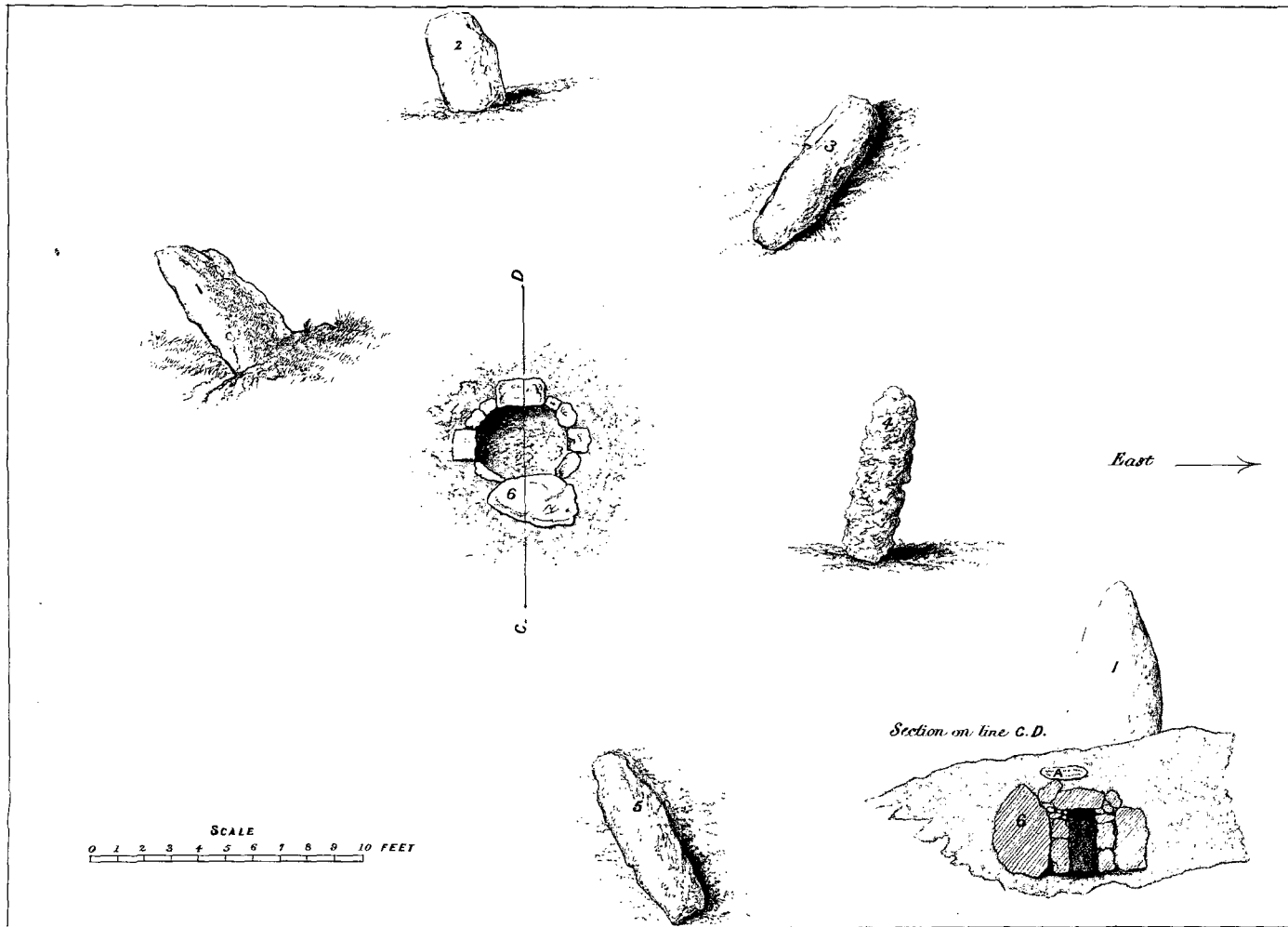
this hill, twenty feet above high-water mark, stands a megalithic circle through which I cut a trench, running east and west, on the 7th of May 1867. The stones were five in number, and of various, though all of large sizes. A sixth stone is wanting to complete the circle, which has probably been removed by some of the former occupants of the ruins left by the Highland clearances close to the circle. The relative situations and sizes of the stones are given in the plan, the accuracy of which is vouched for by the fact that my friend Mr Fowler, architect to the Duke of Sutherland, aided me in the measurements.

All over the surface of this platform flint-flakes are to be found in abundance, covered in every instance with the patina of age; and I have found one or two which may be fragments of weapons.

Exactly in the middle of the circle, and twenty inches from the surface of the soil, I came upon a cremated human burial, without urn or any weapon that I could find. The bones were very friable, in small pieces, and had much of the "*habbement à la langue*;" they were mixed with charcoal debris. The heads of a humerus and radius were sufficiently entire to establish the fact that it was the burial of an adult human being; it occupied a space about 15 inches square by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  deep. Four inches deeper, and immediately under the cremated burial, we exposed an irregular slab of conglomerate, with its long diameter due east and west. This proved to be the principal cover of the chamber-cist; but not being large enough to cover the cist entirely, it was supplemented by smaller stones in such a manner, in Mr Fowler's opinion, that it never could have been disturbed since the original construction of the cist. Having removed the covers, we found an oval cist-chamber, measuring 3 feet 6 inches, by 2 feet 7 inches, by 2 feet 2 inches deep. Its long axis was almost due east and west. It contained nothing except half an inch depth of water. The natural rock formed its bottom. From the ascertained conditions of this chamber I am certain that a human body deposited in it would entirely disappear in a very few years, from the constant passage through of the rain-water from the bare rock face above. We examined two of the standing stones to discover if there were any indications of burial in front of them, as there sometimes is, but we found none.

The cremated burial was exactly in the centre of the circle, and when

I came upon it I was inclined to believe that it also was the purpose of the monument. The cist was not quite in the centre of the circle, and deviation had to be made a little to the north on account of a granite boulder, which had been taken advantage of in the construction of the cist. These two facts seem to me to show that these monumental circles were made first, and that the burials were adapted to them. The relative height of the circle above water-level is worthy of notice, as, along with other facts of similar kind, it completely refutes the absurd objection to the value of Mr Laing's discoveries at Keiss. The east coast of Sutherland is studded with remains of the people of the stone age, often within a *few inches* of high-water level,—so that we must either bring down the stone age in Sutherland to a very late date, or give up the *theory* that the Scottish coast is slowly rising. The latter view I have entirely abandoned, and now am firmly convinced that it is sinking, and that we have begun the return course to another glacial period, as indicated in the works of Adhemar, Le Hon, and Croll.



MEGALITHIC CIRCLE AT ABERCROSS, STRATHFLEET. SUTHERLAND.