

XVIII. *Observations on Stone Hatchets.* By Bishop
Lyttelton.

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, March, 6, 1776.

GENTLEMEN,

THE stone I have now the honour of laying before you for your inspection, was found some years ago on ploughing some new inclosed pasture ground, near Spurnston, in the parish of St. Cuthbert, Carlisle, in a little hillock, or raised piece of ground, about four yards one way, and three the other, a little above a foot in height, consisting entirely of earth.

It is undoubtedly what Gesner, Aldrovand, and other early writers on Natural Philosophy, very absurdly name *Ceraunia*, or *Thunder-bolts*, affirming that they fall from the clouds in storms of thunder; and yet Aldrovand asserts that they all resemble either a mallet, a wedge, or an ax or hatchet [a]. The same author [b] gives us engravings of six of them, four of which agree with mine, in having a hole, or perforation for the reception of a wooden helve or handle. And all of them, he says, were found in Germany, chiefly by the sides of rivers, and particularly of the Elbe.

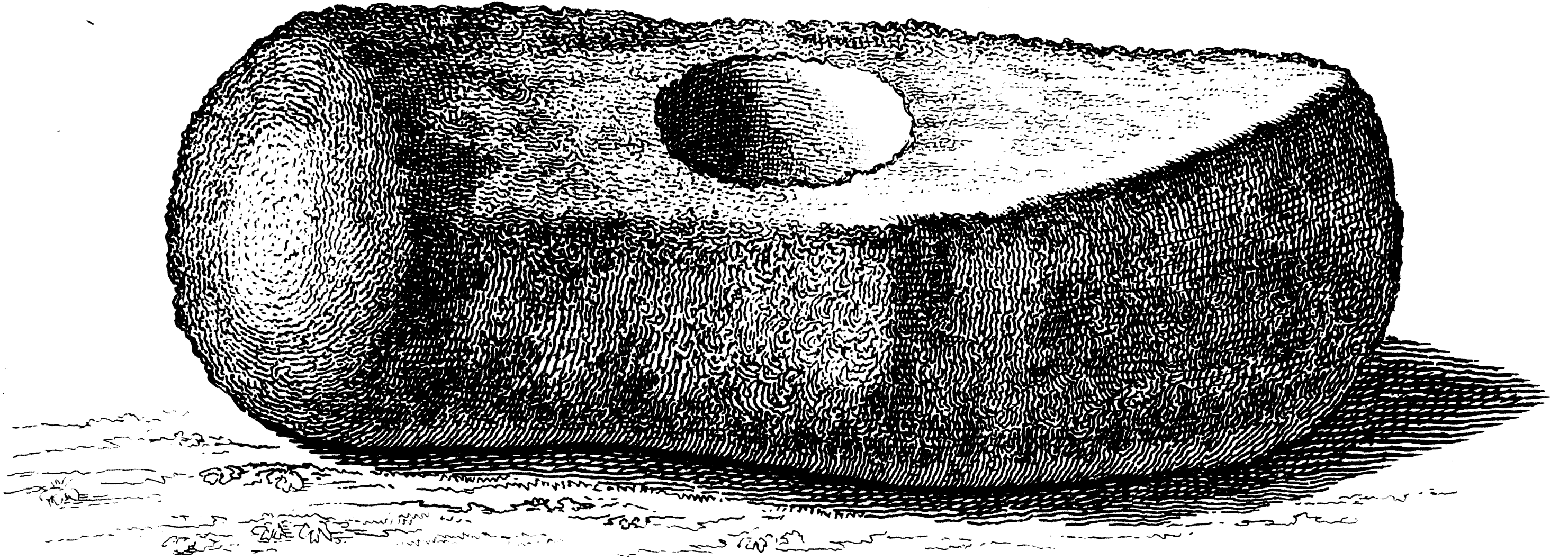
THERE is not the least doubt of these stone instruments having been fabricated in the earliest times, and by barbarous people, before the use of iron or other metals was known; and from the same cause spears and arrows were headed with flint and other

[a] Aldrovandi Museum Metall. lib. iv. p. 607, & seq.

[b] Ibid. p. 611.

hard

Fig. 1



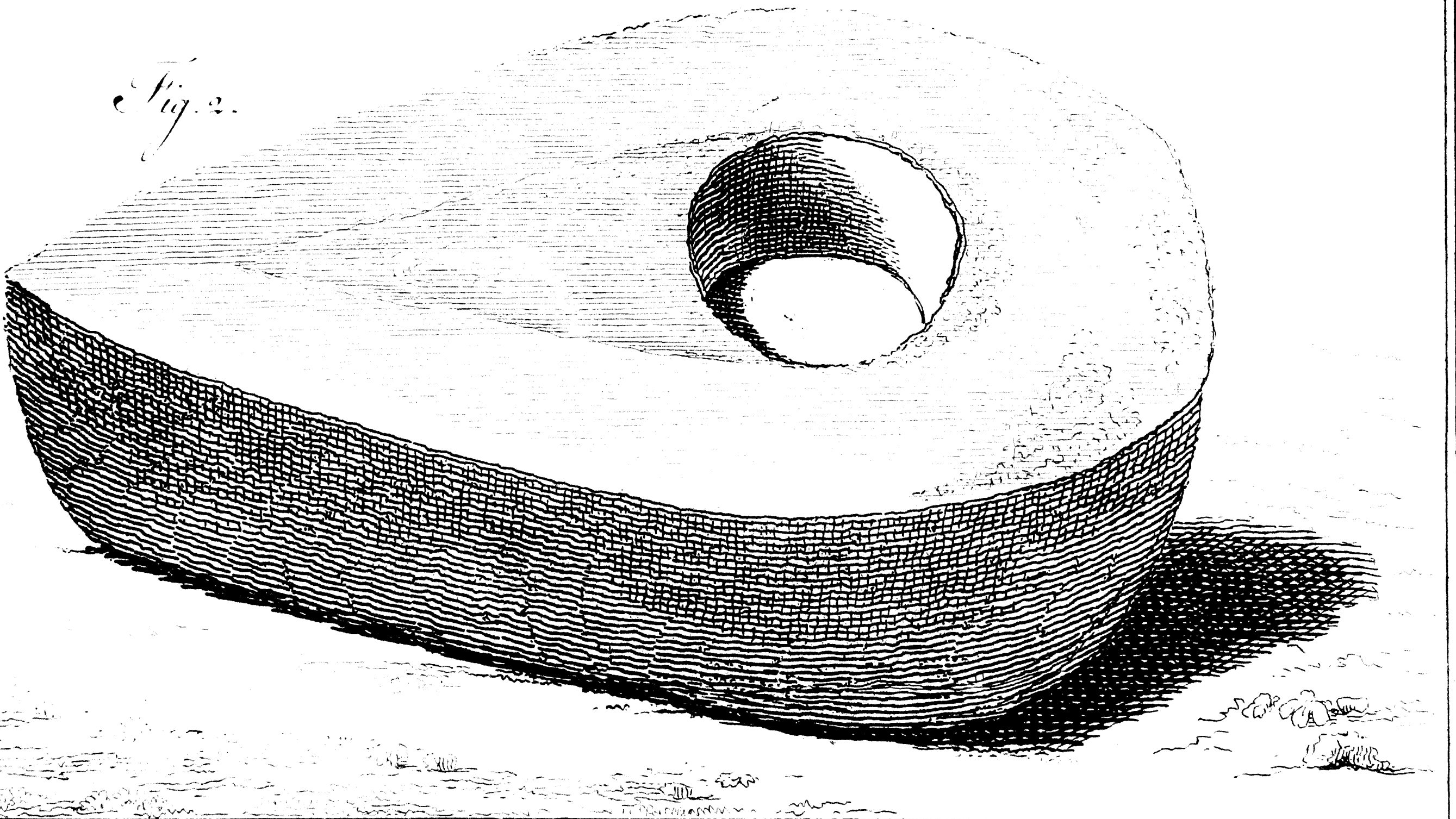
A Stone Hatchet found near Carlisle

Barrett

A Stone Hatchet found in Westmoreland.

p. 125.

Fig. 2.



hard stones; abundance of which, especially of the latter, are found in Scotland, where they are, by the vulgar, called *Elfs arrows* (*lamiarum sagittae*) [c], and some few here in England: elegant specimens of which I shewed the Society not long since, which were dug out of a gravel pit in Hertfordshire [d].

WHEN Mexico was first discovered by the Spaniards, the use of iron was unknown among the inhabitants, and the same ignorance prevailed in some part of the East Indies at the time that Aldrovandus wrote; for in page 158 of his afore-cited work, he gives us the icon of a very elegant stone ax, repositied in his own Museum, and used, he says, *in sacrificiis Indorum*, but does not specify from what particular part of the Indies it came.

THIS which now lies before you being found in a *tumulus*, inclines me to pronounce it a military weapon, answering to the steel or iron battle-ax in later times, for warlike instruments only, or, at least, for the most part, were interred with the bodies or ashes of men in the early ages of the world.

THE most extraordinary discovery of this kind that ever was made in this part of Europe, or perhaps in any other, is recorded in Pere Montfaucon's *Antiquité Expliquée* [e], which as it greatly illustrates the subject we are now upon, and confirms my conjecture of this stone being a military weapon of very great antiquity, I beg leave to give you the substance of. "In the year 1685
" Monf. Cocherell, a gentleman living at a place so called in the
" diocese of Evereux in Normandy, caused to be opened an an-
" tient Gaulish sepulchre, situated on his estate there. After
" removing some very large stones, two human skeletons were
" found, the skulls of each resting on stone axes or hatchets, one
" of which was a pyrites, measuring about seven inches long,
" and one and a half broad, worked to the finest edge, and

[c] Sibbaldi Prodrum. Nat. Hist. Scot. p. ii. lib. iv. cap. 7.

[d] Professor Ward, 1748, shewed the Society one found in a field in Jersey, the stone not perforated. Minute Book, V. 199.

[e] Tom. v. p. ii. p. 194. & seq.

“sharpened

“sharpened at the corners. The other ax was of an oriental
 “stone, called *Giadus*, or a species of the *lapis nephriticus*, about
 “three inches long and two broad, with a hole or perforation
 “on the outside. These bodies rested on a flat stone, which
 “being removed, two others presented themselves with the
 “like stone axes under their heads, exactly resembling the for-
 “mer, as to shape and figure, but of a different kind of stone.
 “These last bodies were accompanied with three urns filled with
 “coals, or, I should rather suppose, with wood burnt to a coal.
 “The workmen proceeding still farther, and extending the pit or
 “cavity to a greater breadth, discovered sixteen or eighteen more
 “bodies, all laid in a regular order, in the same line, with faces
 “towards the south, and an ax or hatchet under every head.
 “Near the bodies lay three spears, or lances made of bone, and
 “one of them evidently of a horse’s shank bone, together with
 “several arrow heads, some made of bone or ivory, and others
 “of stone. Not far distant, though somewhat higher than the
 “last stratum of bodies, was found a vast quantity of half burnt
 “bones intermixed with ashes.”

THIS is the purport of Monsr. Cocherell’s account of the con-
 tents of this antient sepulchre; and Pere Montfaucon’s opinion
 upon it was, that here were interred the bodies of people of dif-
 ferent nations, and of the remotest age. The lowest course, or
 stratum, he supposes, were of a very barbarous race of people, who
 had not the use of iron or any other metal, and the like of the
 two uppermost; but from the circumstance of one of their axes
 being formed out of the *lapis nephriticus*, a species of *precious*
stone, as he calls it, he infers that these were bodies of the princi-
 pal commanders or chiefs. The burnt bones, he supposes, were
 the remains of Gaulish soldiers, as they had the custom of burn-
 ing their dead.

ON relating this discovery to different people, Pere Montfaucon
 was informed, that these kind of stone axes were dug up frequently
 in

in the Netherlands, Picardy, Artois, and other parts of Lower Germany, where Barbarism long prevailed, and the uncivilized inhabitants oftentimes made incursions on their neighbours, and sometimes driving them out, fixed themselves in their seats. On this information he applied to the procurator of Corbie abby, who sent him two stone axes, found at a great depth in the earth. One was of pyrites, the other of a much softer kind of stone, and for that reason much thicker in its substance than its companion: which circumstance, by the way, accounts for the unusual thickness of the stone ax now under consideration; for it vastly exceeds in substance all those which are repositied in the British Museum, where I lately examined several, which are all thin and elegant in their form, and composed of the hardest stone, as *basaltes*, *flint*, and the like. I could not but observe too, that not one in this repository has any hole or perforation, so that they may rather resemble the British instruments of brass, called *Celts*, than battle-axes or hatchets. The two which were sent from Corbie to Montfaucon, are engraven in plate cxxxviii. of his *Antiquité Expliquée*; but that made of the soft stone was very imperfect when first discovered, so that the edge or thin end was quite gone.

DOUBTLESS these stone axes have, at different times, been dug up in all parts of this island. We have before observed, from Sir Robert Sibbald, that they are found in Scotland. Dr. Plott, in his *Natural History of Staffordshire* (p. 397), speaking of the flint arrow heads, adds, “either the Britons, Romans, or both, “also made them axes of stone, whereof there was one found on “the Wever hills, made of a speckled flint, ground to an edge; “and I heard of such another that was met with on the Morridge “(a hill so called in the Moorlands), which how they might be “fastened to a helve, may be seen in the *Museum Ashmoleanum* “at Oxford, where there are several Indian ones of the like “kind fitted up in the same manner as when formerly used.”

That found at Wever hills is engraven in plate xxxii. of Plott's Staffordshire, and nearly resembles one of these engraved by Montfaucon, and above described.

SIR William Dugdale, in his History of Warwickshire [e], also gives us the icon of one found with several others, in an old fort (as he styles it), containing seven acres of ground, at Oldburg in that county. "They were (says he) about four inches and " an half in length, curiously wrought by grinding, or some such " way; one end is shaped like the end of a pole-ax;" and he thinks they were weapons used by the Britons before the art of making arms of brass or iron.

I AGREE entirely with Dugdale, that these were British instruments of war, and used by them before they had the art of making arms of brass or iron; but I go farther, and am persuaded that when they fabricated these stone weapons they had no knowledge at all of these metals; and that must have been at a very early period indeed, as in Julius Caesar's time they had abundance of *scythes* chariots, which probably were introduced here by the Phœnicians some ages before; since the Gauls, who together with the Britons had one common origin, had no use of these chariots.

How low an idea soever some people may entertain of the Antient Britons, they can hardly be thought so barbarous and ignorant as to have made their battle axes and spear heads of stone, and this with great labour and difficulty in the execution, when, at the same time, they were mechanics sufficient to make iron scythes, and had such plenty of iron as to arm their chariots of war with this destructive weapon.

ON the whole, I am of opinion that these stone axes are by far the most antient remains existing at this day of our British ancestors, and probably coeval with the first inhabitants of this island. As such, I flatter myself, this short dissertation, imperfect

[e] P. 778.

as it is, on this curious species of military weapons will not appear to you quite useless or unentertaining.

I remain, GENTLEMEN,

With great esteem and respect,

Your most obedient, humble servant,

CHARLES Carlisle.

Old Burlington Street, Dec. 5, 1765.

P. S. SINCE my finishing this letter I have met with a passage relating to these instruments in an anonymous letter from Edinburgh to Mr. Gordon, printed in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, p. 172, which I beg leave to add here.—“ In a cairn in Airshire
“ was found an instrument of stone of the flinty kind, resembling
“ a wedge. Such are very common in Scotland. They have
“ been considered as a sort of arms, which the antients made use
“ of before the use of brass and iron. I rather think they were
“ the hatchets which the priests in those days used for killing
“ victims. That flinty stones were antiently used for killing sa-
“ crifices is evident from Livy, where, speaking of the Roman
“ *Pater Patratus*, who was sent by Tullus to make a league with
“ the Albani, he says, *Porcum faxo filice percussit*. How these
“ hatchets came to be left at the sepulchres of the dead, will be
“ no difficult matter to account for, if we consider the custom
“ of throwing arms and all sorts of things into the funeral pile.”