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ON SOME

ANCIENT MOUNDS

UPON THE SHORES OF THE

BAY OF QUINTE.

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ON SOME
ANCIENT MOUNDS

UPON THE SHORES OF THE
BAY OF QUINTE.

BY THOMAS CAMPBELL WALLBRIDGE.

From the Canadian Journal for September, 1860.

During the early occupation of this country by the French, there existed, in what is now called Upper Canada, various artificial works of the aboriginal races, the vestiges of which, from an archæological point of view, possess a certain degree of interest at the present day. Erected at various periods, under different circumstances, and perhaps by different people, what the wear of time, the plough of the husbandman, and the spade of the curiosity seeker, have spared of these works, will scarce serve to point out the objects for which they were constructed. This is the more to be regretted since no systematic exploration of them has taken place, and the only information we have upon the subject, in many instances, is from their accidental mention in connection with other questions. In general terms, however, the antiquities of this country may be said to resemble those of the State of New York, which have been so ably described by Mr. Squier in his *Aboriginal Monuments of that State*; but, as most of the works explored by Mr. Squier present significant variations, an examination of the Indian works of this country would

no doubt throw some additional light upon the archæology of the continent, such ruins containing the evidences of general customs and common arts among the distant tribes.

Embankments of earth styled "Indian Forts," and which are perhaps the ruins of the palisaded encampments the Hurons dwelt in, are said to be met with in the Townships of Beverley, Vaughan, Whitchurch, and the country about Lake Simcoe. The same tracts of country abound in tumuli, bone heaps, deposits of warlike stores,* and other evidences of savage life; but the lapse of more than two centuries since the dispersion of the Huron race, their probable builders, by the Iroquois tribes, has made great havoc among their perishable contents. Some of these works, especially the palisaded enclosures, have been mentioned with more or less particularity by the early writers upon this country; but we may search in vain the records of that period for any allusion to certain other antiquities, and which are now objects of greater interest than the works described by them as appertaining to the savages they encountered. It is difficult to reconcile this omission with the general character of the writings of that era, for, in some parts, the traces of a more ancient race must have formed prominent features in the landscape of the country, passed and re-passed, on their way to and from the Far West, by explorers and missionaries, among whom were many close observers of Indian character.

Perhaps the omission may be accounted for upon the hypothesis that the race who erected the works, passed over unobserved, had been exterminated at a period so remote, that those whom the early travellers encountered possessed no tradition that would lead them to the discovery of existing ruins. In this category I place the mounds of the Bay of Quinté—the immediate subject of this paper—and which, though locally known for the last fifty years as artificial works, have not heretofore been mentioned in connection with the archæology of this Province. The similarity which the mounds occurring upon the shores of the Bay of Quinté bear to the barrows or tumuli described by American Antiquarians, and incidentally mentioned by other

* We were shewn, yesterday, a small bagful of Indian arrow heads, brought from Beaverton by Mr. Henry White. We understand that there are several cart loads in the place from which these were taken. They are all well shaped, and must evidently have been stored away in this place, at some remote period, for future use. Mr. White intends presenting the bagful to the Museum of the University of Toronto.—*The Leader Newspaper, Toronto, 10th July, 1860.*

writers, as found at intervals from the Alleghany to the Rocky Mountains, or even to the Pacific coast,* alike intermingling with the huge structures of the Mississippi and Ohio valleys, and the more humble works of the Atlantic States, may perhaps give them a degree of interest beyond their immediate locality.

Commencing at Rednerville, in the Township of Ameliasburg, they may be traced along the Bay shore to the Plains of Massassaga Point, a distance of about eight miles. In this space, including the islands of the so-called "Big Bay," upon which they also occur, perhaps one hundred distinct mounds can be counted; they are not, however, confined to these limits, for, from enquiries made with a view to ascertain their extent, it is probable they will be found at intervals following the shores, from the eastern to the western extremity of the Bay; they are likewise said to occur at a place called "Percy Boom," upon the River Trent, and perhaps by ascending to the head waters of that river they may be traced to the shores of the Upper Lakes, and thence to the most remote parts of the continent.

As far as has yet been ascertained, there is but one class or form of mounds in this part of the country, and the truncated cone is the shape they assume. In size they vary from a diameter at the base of thirty to fifty feet, to a diameter at the apex of twelve feet. Each mound has a shallow basin or circular depression upon its summit, which, whatever be the size of the work, has a diameter of eight feet; and no mound under my observation possessed an altitude of more than five feet. It is a remarkable peculiarity of these works, that in almost every instance they occur in groups of two, and at irregular distances the one group from the other. Irregularity is likewise observable between any one mound and its fellow, these being sometimes found in juxta-position, and again from fifty to one hundred feet asunder.

The two of the same group are always of one size. With respect to the surrounding country they are situate apparently without design, now at the foot of a commanding hill, then half way down the side of a bank, and again so near the shore that in several instances they have been destroyed by the action of the water. Twice they have been found in very low or swampy ground, and in those cases they occur singly.

In the month of August, 1859, I caused five of the mounds upon Massassaga Point to be opened as follows:—Through the centre of

* Smithsonian Contributions, Vol. I, p. 2, and foot note.

one a cut was made thirty-three feet long, two feet wide, and three feet deep, to the original surface of the ground; after removing a few inches of mould, a heap of broken gneissoid rock was displayed, conforming to the shape of the outside of the work. The bits of rock composing the work were of various sizes and forms, and would weigh from one to twenty pounds each, but immediately under the basin, and forming the bottom of it, the bits of rock were much smaller than those constituting the general pile. All the pieces presented angular fractures, but no marks of tools were discovered upon them. Many of the bits of rock were in a disintegrated state, so much so as to crumble into coarse sand before the pick. This circumstance may perhaps be attributable to the employment of fire as an agency in preparing the stones for the builders, from the boulders of the adjacent plain. No other traces of fire were observed. In a cross section, at right angles to the former, and again passing through the centre of the basin, several small pieces of bone and birch bark were turned up; they were found a few inches from the surface, between the soil and the bed of stone. No other remains were discovered. It may be here remarked, that the presence of a few bones near the surface of a mound, is no indication of the purpose for which the work was originally built, for it is well ascertained that many of the mounds of the Western States, constructed evidently for different objects than those of sepulture, have been used by modern Indians for that purpose.*

The other mounds examined agreed in all particulars of construction with that above described, excepting in one pair where it was evident from what remained that the inside margin of the basin of each mound had been surrounded with flat stones placed vertically and touching at their edges, as if designed to prevent the earth falling into the hollow. Similar stones, perhaps used for the same purpose, were observed lying near most of the other mounds in this vicinity. The marginal stones have been displaced, it would appear, by the so-called "money-diggers," a class of superstitious beings everywhere found, the traces of whose Vandalism are not wanting upon most of the antiquities of this continent; and the absence of all remains in the works examined, can best be attributed to their operations. In several instances the builders have been forced, from the nature of the

* It is only a few years since, that two French Canadians, found drowned, were taken by the people of the vicinity, and buried upon one of the best preserved mounds upon Massasaga Point.

surrounding country, to carry their material from a distance, but to obtain the usual covering of mould for the pair of mounds last mentioned they have bared the smooth underlying rock of its scanty soil, in a well defined circle about the works.

The use of broken gneiss for a building material, to the almost entire exclusion of limestone, is a noticeable feature in the construction of these works, and it is the more remarkable when it is known that the latter could have been procured at much less labour from the immediate Bay shore, where it abounds in the form of debris. This circumstance may perhaps show the migration of the race, and with other characteristics assist in unveiling the customs and philosophy, or superstition, which obtained among them.

From the limited data before us, it would be impossible to determine the positive age of these mounds, but the usual evidences of the antiquity of such works are not wanting here, and will enable us to arrive at a proximate period. The growth of the largest sized forest trees upon the tops of them, (in one instance an oak stump eight feet in circumference, and now seen in a decaying state), place the date of their erection several centuries anterior to the first exploration of the country. It may also be inferred that the Massassaga Indians, who were found by the early French Voyageurs inhabiting the Bay region, were ignorant of the origin of the works, for previous to 1820, and whilst that tribe was still numerous and pagan, they allowed the mounds upon their favorite camping ground to be ransacked with impunity. Neither have the survivors of that tribe, and who were removed in 1830 to Alnwick, near Rice Lake, any known tradition which will assist this enquiry. The Bay of Quinté, and the River Trent, formed parts of a well-known route for war parties to pass to and from the west; and during the French occupation of this country, were frequently used by soldiers, missionaries, and traders to ascend to the Upper Lakes; and yet the writings of that period, in many other particulars so precise, are silent as to rites or ceremonies among the neighbouring Indians, which would have required such works. We must therefore look for information in some other quarter, and, as yet, the facts collected by the various writers of the present day, are expressed in such general terms that we cannot arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. The supposition, however, that a common custom prevailed in very distant parts of the continent, whether in branches of the same tribe or among various races, is no more unreasonable

- than to admit that the stone and copper axes, pipes, arrow heads, and coarse pottery of the same character, and which are everywhere found, were made by different tribes. Thus a race possessing a knowledge of mound building, in common with very distant tribes, may have been dispossessed by the Massassaga Indians, when they came, as tradition relates, from the Upper Lakes. But this is mere conjecture, and like all other theories depending in any manner upon imagination or Indian tradition, should be received with caution.

The theory so commonly held that certain relics of rude art, found among tribes who cannot be supposed to have made them, have been procured by barter, I think, from what is known of Indian character, not to be well founded. I am inclined to believe that the sculptured images, as well as the copper implements, are the fruits of distant wars; the tribe last possessing them have taken the articles by force from some more western or civilized people. This argument receives strength from the fact that the whole system of earth-works throughout the west shows that a terrific struggle was there waged for an existence; but with what result such heroic efforts were made to defend civilized communities against overwhelming barbarous hordes, the Cyclopean embankments of those regions are the only memorial. When we find, however, the vestiges of a wide-spread race, or monuments that point to one common idea, intermingled with works of a superior order, and meet with evidences of a certain civilization in parts equally distant, perhaps the fruit of plunder, we may form some conception of the turmoil that once agitated this continent.

A further examination of the mounds on the Bay of Quinté, undertaken in the month of August last, in company with Henry Cawthra, Esq., of Toronto, has led to the discovery in them of human remains and objects of curiosity and art. These remains clearly point out the purpose for which the works in question were erected, and prove them to belong to the class of sepulchral mounds, such as the observations of Drake, Squier, Schoolcraft, and many other writers, show to exist over a very wide range of country.

A brief description of the work in which the remains were found, with the aid of the accompanying lithographic plates, prepared from accurate sketchings taken at the time by Mr. Cawthra, will enable the reader at once to understand the nature of all the mounds in the Bay of Quinté region.

After partially opening several mounds in the vicinity of those already mentioned and with the same result as to general characteristics, we fortunately chose a mound which to all appearances had not been previously disturbed. Commencing upon the top of it and throwing out all the material from the centre of the work to the natural level of the soil beneath, we were enabled thoroughly to inspect its contents, and from very full notes made during the examination, the substance of what follows is taken. Figure 1, Plate I., presents a view of a portion of the mound, and the excavation made, with the position of a perfect skeleton, found in a sitting posture, over the head of which stands an oak stump, now measuring eight feet in circumference, but from which the tree has been felled probably thirty years. A short distance from this stump stands a red cedar one, also represented in the sketch, measuring four feet two inches in girth, and from which the tree has likewise been cut a number of years.

Figure 2, Plate I., is a diagram showing position of articles found during the examination. Figure 3, Plate I., shows a section of the mound exhibiting general features of construction.

Upon breaking the surface of this work, at a point designated by figure 10 in diagram, we came upon a flat limestone lying horizontally a few inches beneath the surface, under which were found a few fragments of human bones, and pieces of birch bark, together with a sharpened bone implement,* worn smooth by use, and in its present state nearly eight inches long.

About two feet from the surface, on removing a flat stone, three crania were exposed, in what appeared to be a rude box, composed of flat limestones. One of these crania, being uppermost, was broken by the carelessness of one of the labourers employed to excavate. It was smaller than the other two and rested upon them. Of the other heads, one laid upon its side, facing north, the body of which would lie due east and west, the feet being towards the east. The other one shewed the skull uppermost as if the body had been placed erect. On clearing away the broken stone and soil a great many bones were found, in fact almost entire skeletons; and from their positions, these evidently belonged to the heads in the box. The latter had probably been separated from them by the compression of the sides of the box

* Similar implements are mentioned in *Smithsonian Contributions*, Vol. I. page 220, Fig. 119, Nos. 1 & 3. "They were obtained," it is there stated, "from a mound in Cincinnati, and were evidently formed from the tibia of the elk."

or by the intertwining roots of the overgrowing trees; and this may also to some extent account for the position of the crania. From all the circumstances connected with these three skeletons, I am led to believe that they were originally entombed in a sitting posture, back to back, having their heads merely surrounded by flat stones, which rested upon their breasts or folded arms, whilst the remainder of the bodies were covered or built up in the general material of the work.

Figure 6, marks the position of a skeleton, by the side of which was found what appeared to be the contents of a magician's or conjurer's bag. The objects of art contained in it are represented in Plate II.

Figure 8, portion of wall exposed, formed of layers of limestone rudely laid up, and which appeared from examination made at different points of the circle of excavation, to be built around the edge of the enclosure containing the relics. The wall did not form a perfect circle, but the sides of it were about seven feet asunder. This work did not contain the same proportion of gneiss as the works previously described, the flat limestones, before mentioned, and soil assisting to make up the pile.

Figure 1, Plate II., is an exact representation of the back of a comb elaborately ornamented by lines scratched upon the smooth surface of a flat piece of bone. Figure 2, fragment of a bone instrument, polished perhaps by use. Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, are either the teeth of the comb (fig. 1) or awl-shaped instruments, commonly found with Indian remains. Figure 8, is a barbed arrow-blade (Schoolcraft) or the point of a fish-spear (Squier). It is made of bone and polished. Figures 9 and 10, represented half-size, are waterworn limestones, somewhat resembling the Indian foot covered with a moccasin.

The three cylindrical ornaments, at the bottom of plate II., are what Mr. Schoolcraft calls baldrics, specimens of which he found in the Indian ossuaries at Beverly, Canada West; and he remarks that "the ancient Indians formed baldrics for the body, from the hollow bones of the swan and other large birds or deers' bones, in links of two or three inches long. These were strung on a belt or string of sinew or leather." Those here represented are made of the thick parts of shells, and bear upon their outside surface a spiral groove. In some specimens the groove is not distinct, and perhaps its presence, in any case, is more attributable to necessity than design, the groove being a

natural mark upon the part of the shell used for this purpose. They are bored from end to end and polished.

The other articles found interred with this skeleton were: 1. A number of common fossils occurring in the Trenton limestone, in the vicinity of the Bay of Quinté. 2. Several queerly shaped, waterworn stones. 3. Several fresh water shells so much decayed that they could not be preserved. 4. A few small lumps of iron ochre perhaps used for painting the face. 5. The breast bone of an eagle. 6. A bear's tusk. 7. A tooth of a beaver. It is said that Indians of other parts of the continent used beaver teeth for scraping the flesh from the hides in the process of tanning.* 8. A pair of horn-cores resembling those of a ram, a circumstance of difficult reconciliation with the undoubted antiquity of these works, unless the existence of the wild sheep of the Rocky Mountains be taken into consideration.†

The number of crania taken from this mound in a good state of preservation, is five. These are now in the possession of the writer. There were perhaps a dozen bodies originally deposited in this work.

Whatever be the origin of these remains, it is clear that the Massassaga Indians were not the builders of the works in which they are entombed, since this tribe, it is well known, buried their dead in wrappers of birch-bark, and laid them at full length a few inches beneath the surface of the soil, as the sand-hills about Belleville clearly prove. The remains found in the surface-soil of the mounds are perhaps of their interment; but the skeletons found in the sitting posture belong to some other and far earlier race. The question, to what race, is wrapt in the same mystery that overhangs the ancient mound structures which lie in the remoter regions of the West, and which of late years have been the subject of so much philosophical speculation.

* This information was obtained from Assikinack, an Odawah chief of the Manitoulin Island, who is now aged about 104 years.

† The above list of articles corresponds in many particulars with the remains found by Dr. Drake, in a mound examined by him, in the vicinity of Cincinnati, an account of which is given in the "Biography and History of the Indians of North America," by Samuel G. Drake. 10th edition, page 41.

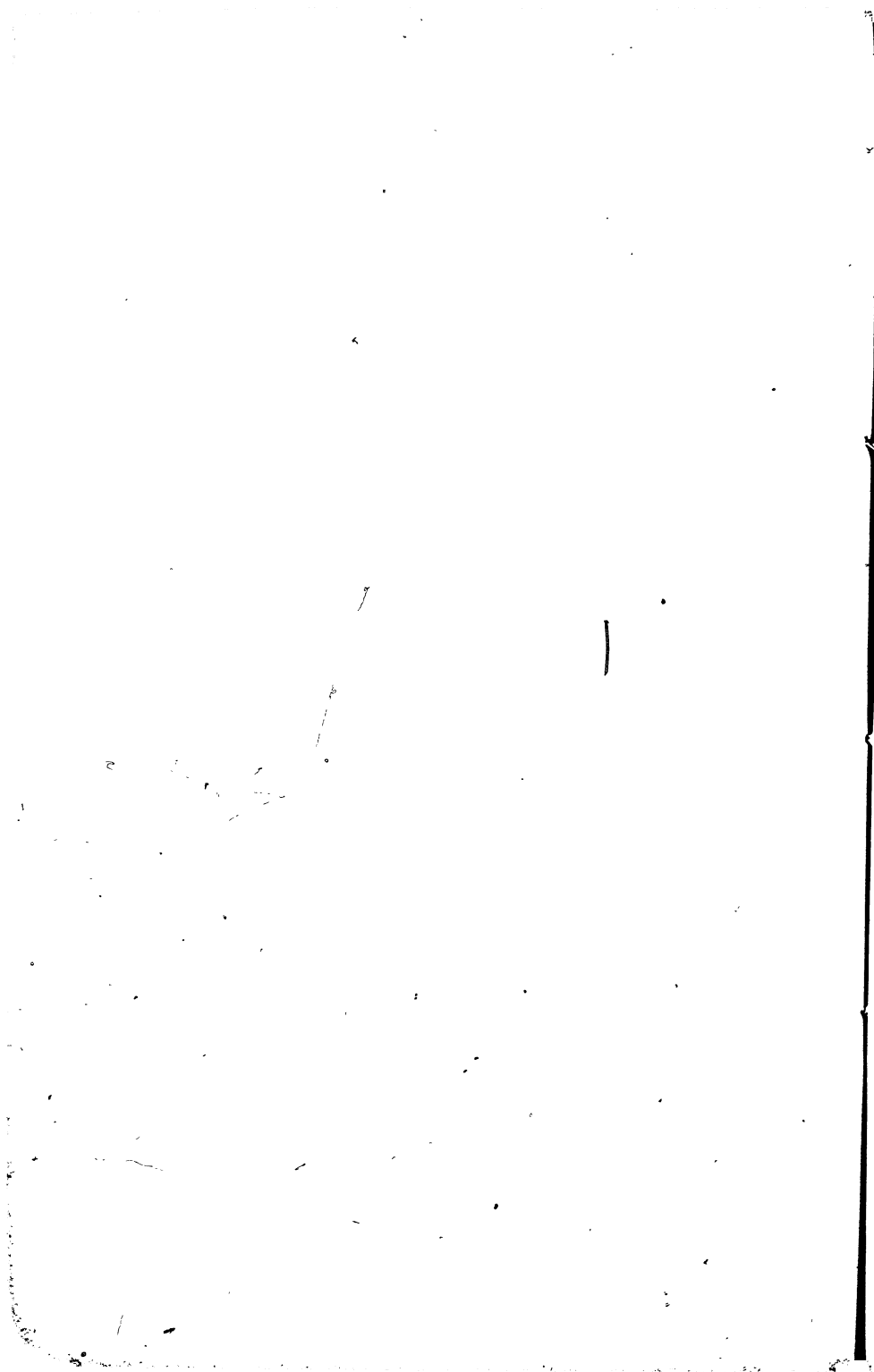
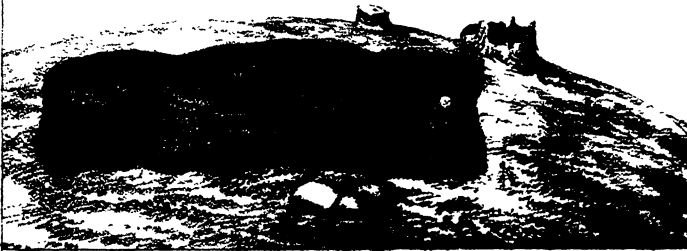
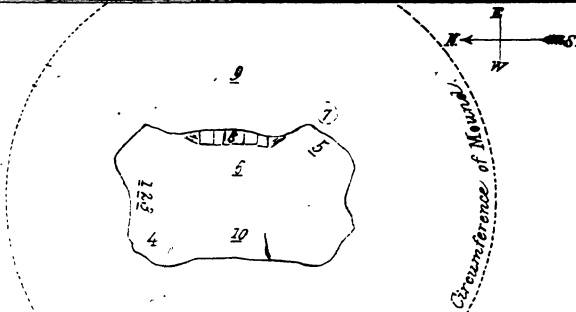


Fig. 1.



Sketch shewing position of skeleton found at root of Oak stump.

Fig. 2.

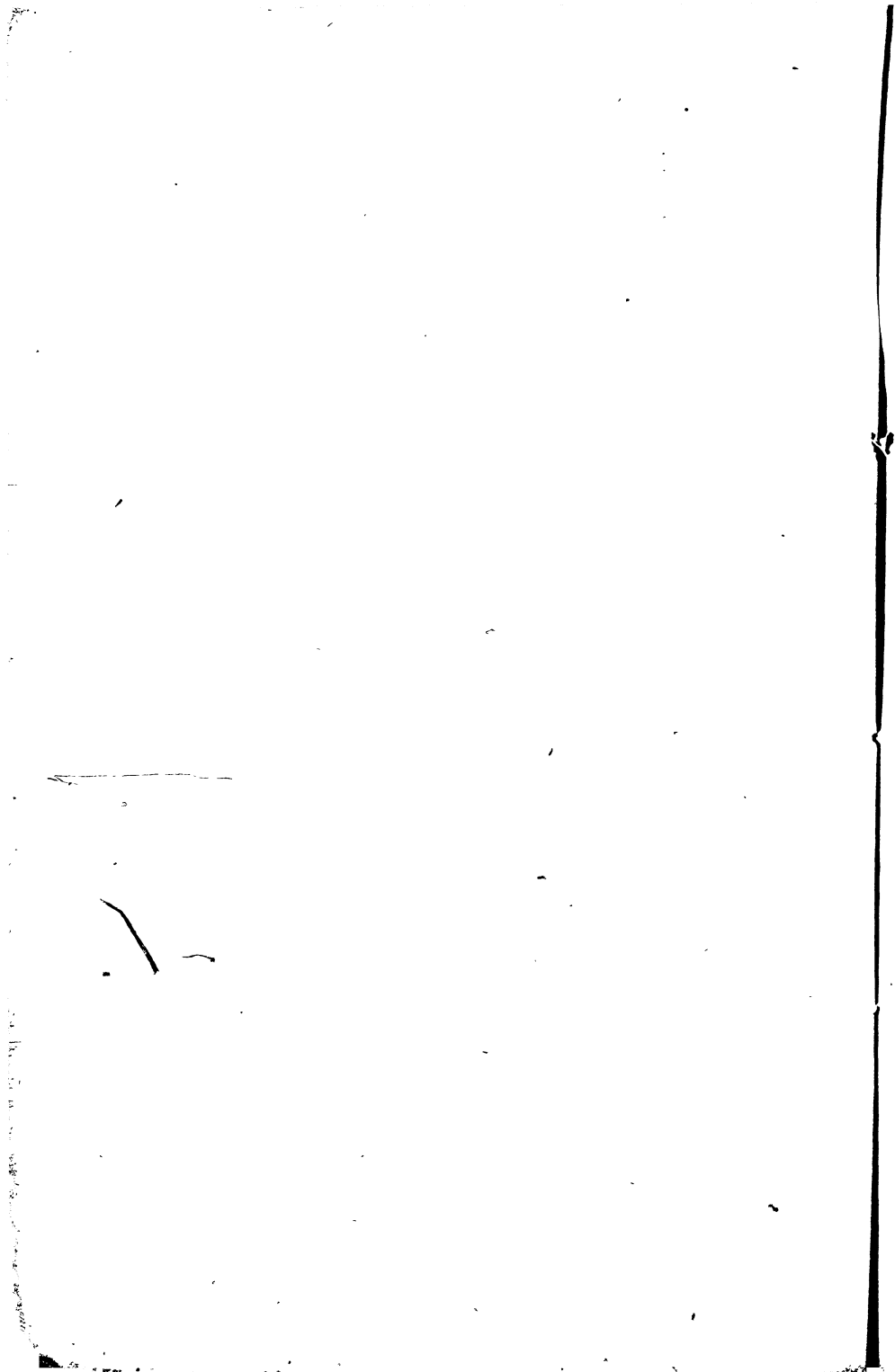


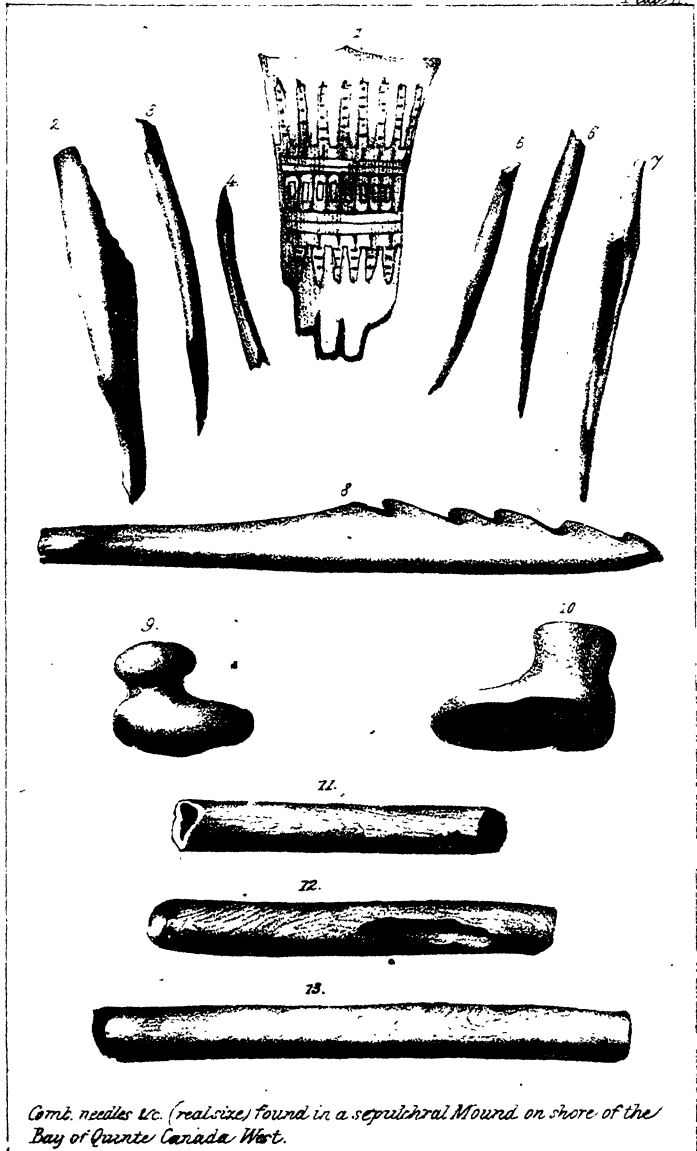
Plan shewing the excavation made in the above Mound, with the positions of skeleton found therein, and the shape of the rude wall of the sepulchral chamber.

Fig. 3.



Section of Mound shewing its construction!





Corn. needles &c. (real size) found in a sepulchral Mound on shore of the Bay of Quete Canada West.

H. C. ...

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