

SOME ACCOUNT OF STONEHENGE, THE GIANT'S DANCE, A DRUIDICAL RUIN IN ENGLAND

THE pile called Stonehenge is an assemblage of upright and prostrate stones on Salisbury plain, England, and is generally supposed to be the remains of an ancient Druidical temple. From its singularity, and the mystery attending its origin and appropriation, it has excited more surprise and curiosity than any other relic of antiquity in Great Britain. It is situated about two miles directly west of Amesbury, and seven north of Salisbury, in Wiltshire. When viewed at a distance it appears but a small and trifling object, for its bulk and character are lost in the extensive space which surrounds it; and even on a near examination it fails to fulfil the expectations of the stranger who visits it with exaggerated prepossessions. To behold this "wonder of Britain" it should be viewed with an artist's eye, and contemplated by an intellect stored with antiquarian and historical knowledge. Stonehenge, notwithstanding much that has been said to the contrary, is utterly unlike any monument now remaining in Europe. Many of its stones have been squared or hewn by art; and on the top of the outer circle has been raised a continued series of squared stones, attached to the uprights by mortices and tenons, or regular cavities in the horizontal blocks, with projecting points on the perpendicular ones. Nearly all other so-called examples of Druidical circles are composed of rough unhewn stones, and are without imposts.

Our engraving represents the present appearance of Stonehenge — a confused heap of erect and fallen stones. The original arrangement of these, however, may be readily understood; for by the situation and condition of the yet standing and prostrate members, we are enabled to judge of the number and site of those which have been removed. The whole consisted of two circular, and two other curved rows, or arrangements of stones, the forms and positions of which may be easily ascertained. Horizontal stones, or imposts, were laid all around, in a continued order, on the outer circle, and five similar imposts on ten uprights of the third row. The whole is surrounded by a ditch and vallum of earth, connected with which are three other stones. The vallum does not exceed fifteen feet in height, and is exterior to the ditch. Through this line of circumvallation there appears to have been one grand entrance from the north-east side, and this is decidedly marked by two banks and ditches, called *The Avenue*. Approaching Stonehenge in this direction, the attention is first arrested by an immense unchiselled stone, called the *Friar's Heel*, which is now in a leaning position, and measures about sixteen feet in height. Immediately within the vallum is another stone lying on the ground. It is twenty-one feet two inches long, and a hundred feet from the stone just mentioned, and about the same distance from the outside of the outermost circle. Each impost of this circle has two mortices in it, to correspond with two tenons on the top of each vertical stone. The imposts were so connected as to form a continued series of architraves. The stones of the inner circle are much smaller and more irregular than those of the outer. Within these two circles are arranged two inner rows of stones, one of which constitutes the grandest portion of Stonehenge. It was formed by five distinct *trilithons* — a trilithon is a large impost upon two uprights. The workmanship here appears to be better. The interior row of stones which next claims attention consisted of nineteen uprights without imposts, and inclined to a pyramidal form. The most perfect among them is seven feet and a half high. The *Altar Stone*, as it is usually called, lies flat on the ground, and occupies the *adytum* of the temple. The total number of stones of which Stonehenge was composed, is, according to Dr. Smith's plan and calculation, one hundred and twenty-nine. Some of these were of a compact sand-stone some of fine-grained grünstein [[grunstein]],

interspersed with black hornblende, feldspar, quartz, and chlorite, some a siliceous schistus, others an argillaceous schistus, others horn-stone. The Altar Stone is gray cos.

In regard to the history of these extraordinary monuments, there is little of any definite nature. The earliest account of them occurs in Nennius, who lived in the eighth century. He says they were erected by the Britons to commemorate a massacre which took place at the spot. The Historical Triads of the Welsh refer their origin to the same cause. Camden calls the structure *insana*, but says nothing about it entitled to notice. Modern authors have been profuse in speculation, but no more. The general opinion seems to be in favor of a Druidical Temple. The Rev. James Ingram supposes it to have been “a heathen burial-place.” Borlase remarks that “the work of Stonehenge must have been that of a great and powerful nation, not of a limited community of priests; the grandeur of the design, the distance of the materials, the tediousness with which all such massive works are necessarily attended, all show that such designs were the fruits of peace and religion.” Bryant, whose authority we regard as superior to any, discredits the Druidical theory altogether.

We may be permitted to conclude this cursory article by an extract from the Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus — leaving the application of the passage to the judgment or the fancy of our readers.

“Among the authors of antiquity Hecatæus and some others relate that there is *an island in the ocean, opposite to Celtic Gaul*, and not inferior in size to Sicily, lying towards the north, and inhabited by Hyperborei, who are so called because they live more remote from the north wind. The soil is excellent and fertile, and the harvest is made twice in the same year. Tradition says that Latona was here born, and therefore Apollo is worshipped above any other deity. To him is also dedicated *a remarkable temple of a round form*.”

The ancient superstitions gave the giants credit for the construction of Stonehenge, believing that the massive piles were moveable but by giant power — hence, the name of *Choir-gaur*, which literally means “The Giant's Dance.”

The whole number of stones now visible, amounts to one hundred and nine.