

## STONEHENGE.

THE first thing that strikes one whenever one examines a Gray Wether is the fact that it is very much weathered indeed. It is a hard lump or kernel of friable sandstone, worn away on every side by rain and wind; a mere relic or solid core of what was once a much larger and broader piece of sandstone. But the odd point is that these isolated blocks occur now in a country where there is no rock of any sort, save chalk, for miles and miles around in every direction. Why is this? Well, it is now pretty certain that once upon a time (a very safe date) a great sheet of just such friable sandstone overlay the whole of the English chalk downs. At that remote period, of course, they were therefore not chalk downs at all, but sandy uplands of the same character as the pine-clad country round Bagshot and Woking, where the troops from Aldershot camp out in summer-time. In point of fact, this layer of sandstone, or rather several such layers, still caps the chalk in all the London basin; and by boring through them you come at last upon the underlying chalk, beneath several hundred feet thickness of superficial deposits. But on the higher uplands of Wilts and Berkshire the rain and streams have gradually worn away and removed piecemeal the whole of the eoene and other upper layers, cutting down the hills to the level of the chalk beneath, and leaving only a few of the very hardest and lumpiest kernels of the sandstone strewn loosely about on the surface of the downs. These kernels are the problematical Sarsen Stones. Some of them seem to be derived from one layer of the tertiary deposits, and some from another; but they remain at the present day as solitary witnesses to the vast thickness of similar rock which has been slowly removed from the summit of the chalk downs by the rains and torrents of a million winters. They are but the last fragments of a wide-spread deposit which once covered the whole South of England with its barren sheet, and of which larger patches still remain among the wild heaths of Wilts or Surrey and the slopes of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Long, long ago, before England was yet even Britain, in the dim old days of the newer Stone Age, when short squat men of Finnish or Euskarian breed occupied the whole of what are now the British Isles, the utilization of the Gray Wethers first began for practical objects. "Let us exploit the Sarsen Stones," said primitive man, in his own language (probably agglutinative), and straightway he began to pile them up into dolmens and cromlechs, gigantic trilithons and prehistoric temples. And then it was, as modern archaeology tends every day more and more fully to show, that the large circles of Stonehenge were first piled up on Salisbury Plain. There can be little doubt at the present day that Stonehenge is a tribal temple of some petty Wiltshire kingdom in the newer Stone Age, and that it antedates by several thousand years the arrival of the Celtic Aryan conquerors in the Isle of Britain.

The really curious point about Stonehenge, however, is this—that it does not all consist of Gray Wethers, though the biggest and most conspicuous of all the trilithons are composed of those huge local boulders. There are other stones in that ancient temple which came from some far more distant land—stones the like of which certainly cannot be found within a hundred miles of Salisbury Plain, and some of which, in all probability, can only be matched on the continent of Europe. Stonehenge is undeniably not a native Wiltshire monument: it is probably not even British at all.

Later inquirers have suggested that the stones may have come from Belgium, or some other part of the Continent, where they find rocks still more closely resembling the Stonehenge specimens than any purely British igneous masses. This suggestion appears to me, from the archaeological point of view, far the most probable; and on the following grounds:—

Whoever put up the altar-stone and the smaller circles at Stonehenge must certainly have brought them from a great distance. Now, people don't usually carry about large blocks of greenstone or felspar in their waistcoat-pockets, without a good reason—especially if they don't wear waistcoats, and if the blocks are as big as a good-sized doorstep. Hence, I think, we may conclude that the imported stones at Stonehenge were originally sacred—in short, that they were the Lares and Penates of some intrusive conquering tribe, which carried them along with it, like pious Æneæ, through all its wanderings. All over the world, upright slabs or menhirs form common objects of worship to savage or barbaric people: the poor heathen, as we were universally informed in the nursery, bow down in their blindness to stocks and stones. These stones are in the most literal sense mere blocks—rude shapeless masses which it would be desecration to carve or cut with a knife, even if the unsophisticated savage happened to possess any proper knife wherewith to cut them. In India, to this day, our Aryan brother sets up just such unhewn stones in the centre of his agricultural holding, to represent the Five Brethren of the old Hindoo mythology. But, as a rule, I believe, the unhewn sacred stone is really a tombstone; it is the upright pillar or menhir, erected originally on top of a barrow, to mark the spot where a great chief or king has once been buried. Offerings are daily made at the stone by the grateful or terrified descendants, to appease the ancestral ghost; oil and wine (or whatever else the country affords of alcoholic stimulant) are dutifully poured over it; and all fitting respect is paid to the grave of the mighty dead by the obsequious survivors. In process of time, however, the object of the worship gets gradually forgotten; the ghost itself fades away, and it is the actual stone that comes to be regarded as sacred, not the tomb or barrow of which the pillar is but the outward and visible symbol.

But why may not the newer Stone Age men who built Stonehenge have come to Wiltshire from Wales or Ireland? Simply because the chances are against it: in Britain, at least, the wave of conquest has always gone in the opposite direction. Westward the tide of Empire takes its way. The conquerors, like the wise men, come always from the East.

It is as improbable that the Stonehenge folk came from Carnarvon or from Wicklow to Wiltshire, as that the founders of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston came from Chicago, St. Louis, or San Francisco to the Atlantic seaboard. The possessor of the plains of England and the lowlands of Scotland has often conquered the Welshman, the Highlander, and the Irishman, but he has never once been conquered by the mountaineers in return.

Taffy was a Welshman, Taffy was a thief,  
Taffy came to my house and stole a leg of beef;

but Taffy never dreamt of attempting to overrun the shires of the Midland and the pastures of the South. When Toulal descended on the lowlands, his utmost exploit was to "drive ta cattle," as in the familiar instance of the immortal Fhairshon. On the other hand, the possessors of the English plain have often been conquered and driven back or subdued; first the Euskarian by the Celt, then the Celt by the Roman, then the Romanized Briton in turn by the Saxon, then the Saxon once more by his still heathen brother the stalwart Dane, or his half-Christianized and Frenchified cousin the Norman; but in every case the conquering people came, without one exception, from the continent of Europe.

Since, then, most conquering people come to Britain from the continent of Europe, since such people are apt in early stages of culture to carry with them, in the rough, their country's gods, and since rocks capable of producing the raw material of the particular deities now in question are better found on the continent than in Britain, I think we may conclude with great probability that the builders of Stonehenge came to Wiltshire from somewhere south-eastward—especially as a broad belt of land at that time still connected the opposite shores of Dover and Calais, and rendered the proposals for a Channel tunnel at once premature and practically unnecessary. I don't doubt that for the Stone Age men it was a mere walk-over, and that they carried weight in the shape of the altar-stone and the smaller pillars.

When they got to Salisbury Plain, I take it, they called a halt, and began to set up afresh the standing stones they had carried with them on their long journey. Having set up their fetish stones in due order, however, the pious immigrants determined to add to the dignity and glory of their national temple by piling up around it a circle of the tallest and biggest Gray Wethers that all Wiltshire could readily produce. These Gray Wethers they dressed roughly with their polished flint axes into rudely quadrangular shape, piled them up by two and two, and then lifted by main force a third on top, so as to form the familiar shape of the existing trilithons. Thus it is the smaller stones of Stonehenge that form the really most ancient and important part of the whole erection. The other portion of that great prehistoric temple, the huge trilithons that astonish us still, even in this age of advanced engineering, by their bulk and massiveness, have grown up around the lesser and more sacred obelisks, much as the magnificent church of Our Lady of Loretto has grown up about the Casa Santa of Nazareth, which was miraculously transported through the air from Palestine, like Stonehenge from Ireland by the arts of Merlin.

It is probable that the greater part of the biggest Sarsen stones were employed at one time for just such purposes as at Stonehenge—dolmens, cromlechs, chambered barrows, and so forth—and thus they got to be mentally identified by the rustic intelligence, not, it is true, with Druids (for the Druidical nonsense, like Arkite worship, and all the rest of it, is a pure invention of the "learned" or pedantic classes), but with some old forgotten heathen worship. Hence they were commonly spoken of as Sarsen stones; and the name was justified by the common belief that the architects of Stonehenge, in carting the great blocks to their present position, had tumbled some of them about on the downs. Within the memory of men still living, a fair was held at one such prehistoric monument, and was opened by solemnly pouring a bottle of port over the sacred fetish of a race long since passed away from among us. Could anything prove more conclusively the persistence of custom in an old settled and very mixed population? Celt and Roman and Saxon and Norman have since come, and many of them gone again; but the heathen rites offered up at the grave of some dimly-remembered Euskarian chieftain survived through them all up to the very beginning of this enlightened nineteenth century.—GRANT ALLEN, in the *January Lippincott*.

On the 14th December Colonel C. E. Stewart read a paper at a meeting of the Royal Geographical Society on "The Herat Valley and the Persian Border, from Heri-rod to Seistan." In 1881 Colonel Stewart was employed by the Government on special duty on the Persian border, and he made a survey of the country to the southward of Khaf. Last May he was with Sir Peter Lumsden on the Afghan Boundary Commission, in connection with which he gave some interesting information. The Herat Valley is, in his opinion, the only place in this part of Central Asia where a large body of men could be fed, and any one holding possession of Herat would have a most commanding influence in the affairs of Afghanistan and Persia. Nothing, he holds, would ensure peace and quietness in Central Asia so much as our continuing the Quetta line of railway to Herat, and this line could eventually be joined on to the Russian line. If a string were stretched over a globe from England to India, it would nearly follow the line through Russia to Vladikafkas, at the foot of the Caucasus Mountains, where the Russian-European system of railroads at present ends, but which is about to be continued to Petrofsk, on the Caspian Sea, and then would pretty nearly follow the Russian Transcaspian line, and thence onward through Herat to Quetta. The possibility of running railroads in Central Asia had been greatly facilitated by the finding of almost unlimited supplies of fuel in the shape of petroleum. A discussion followed, in which Sir Henry Rawlinson, Sir Frederick Goldsmith, Mr. Blandford, of the Indian Geological Survey, and others took part.