

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

New Views respecting Stonehenge.

An epitome of the Presidential Address given by the late Lt.-Colonel the Hon. Aubrey Herbert, M.P., at the Society's Annual Meeting, Dulverton, July 10th, 1923.¹

THE HON. AUBREY HERBERT in the opening sentences of his address expressed the hope that his choice of subjects would be acceptable, for although beyond the confines of Somersetshire the rise and development of Stonehenge in the remote ages cannot have taken place without some influence on the early dwellers within that county. New facts and ideas concerning this ancient monument recently gleaned and put forward may even go to prove a still closer connexion, for it seems possible, or even probable, that some of the megaliths of which Stonehenge is constructed were transported from their source across Somersetshire to Salisbury Plain. It is surely, therefore, not out of place for Somerset men of to-day to take into their serious consideration the new theories that are propounded.

Quite recently Dr. H. H. Thomas of the Geological Survey has made an investigation into the petrographical character of the foreign stones that compose the inner circle and horse-shoe at Stonehenge, and he arrives at the conclusion that all the thirty-four foreign stones with the exception of the altar-stone are identifiable with and furnished by rocks that outcrop at the eastern end of the Prescelly Mountains in Northern Pembrokeshire—more than 150 miles distant from Salisbury

1. This epitome was kindly edited, at the Council's invitation, by Dr. H. H. Thomas, Petrographer to H.M. Geological Survey.

Plain.¹ Three distinctive types of rock are represented among the monoliths of Stonehenge, and identical types all occur close together in Pembrokeshire.

Dr. Thomas makes it clear that the idea of natural transport of the monoliths from Pembrokeshire to Salisbury Plain by ice during the Pleistocene Glacial Period is untenable, and thus they must have been transported by human agency. The altar-stone, he states, is unique in type and differs from all the other monoliths of Stonehenge. It possesses special characters that point to its source lying in the Old Red Sandstone of South Wales, either in the outcrops of Carmarthenshire, or on the northern shores of Milford Haven.

Accepting, as it appears we must, the views of geologists on a matter concerning which they speak *ex cathedra*, we are at once driven to ask ourselves why were these stones desired and chosen by the builders of Stonehenge? What was the motive for their transport and how was their transport effected? Still other points of hardly less interest and importance obtrude themselves, as for example the determination of the period in which these events came to pass, and of the peoples involved in the transactions. With regard to the primary question—the special virtue of certain stones in far-away Pembrokeshire—this virtue was so great that it made men undertake the Herculean task of transport. Dr. Thomas has discussed this aspect of the question and has come to the conclusion that the foreign stones were the first to be erected at Stonehenge, whither they were brought in a rough undressed condition; and, further, the reason for their transport was that they existed close to their source in a form of a sacred circle, which was removed in its entirety to Salisbury Plain. They possess no specially artistic or valuable constructional properties, so that no other reason than their sanctity is forthcoming.

On the authority of Dr. Owen, Secretary to the Royal Commission on Ancient Welsh Monuments, it is certainly correct that at least one stone circle is placed at the foot of the Prescelly Hills, of which the slopes are strewn with boulders similar to those used in the construction of Stonehenge. The summits

1. H. H. Thomas, *The Antiquaries Journal*, July, 1923, vol. III, pp. 239-260.

of the hills are crowded with monuments of antiquity in the form of cairns and erect monoliths, and everything betokens a considerable population in early times. Not more than six miles distant from the Prescellies is a site that must have presented many of the features of Stonehenge, and the following is an account of it written by a local observer about the year 1690¹:—"The diameter of the circle is about twenty yards. The stones are as rude as may be, and pitch'd on end at uncertain distances from each other, some at three or four foot, but others about two yards; and are also of several heights, some being about three or four foot high, and others five or six. There are now standing here fifteen of them; but there seem to be seven or eight carried off. The entry into it for about the space of three yards is guarded on each side with stones much lower and less than those of the circle, pitch'd so close as to be contiguous. And over against the avenue, at the distance of about 200 paces, there stand on end other large, rude stones, which I therefore note particularly, because there are also four or five stones erected at such a distance from that circular monument they call King's Stones near Little Rolrich in Oxfordshire." The Royal Commissioners in their Report deplore its almost total destruction, but say that the locality is littered in all directions with diabase boulders.

Dr. Owen considers that much more might be said to emphasize the similarity of many of the early megalithic structures of Wales, and particularly Pembrokeshire, with the great Wiltshire monument; but in the final balance of opinion it must be remembered that the social and political conditions of the country at so early a period as is demanded are factors of extreme importance as well as extreme difficulty.

The route and manner of transport of these far-derived stones is of great interest, and if the altar-stone came from the shores of Milford Haven it is easy to imagine the route that would be followed. From Milford Haven there is easy access to the Bristol Channel, and doubtless the people would be acquainted with the principal creeks and river-mouths along that waterway. From the slopes of the Prescelly Mountains

1. Camden's *Britannia*, 1695, col. 628.

to the waters of the Western Cleddau at Canaston Bridge—from early times an important position on that river—is a distance of no more than ten miles. Thence they could proceed by log-raft to the safe waters of the Haven, and hugging the shores of the Channel enter the mouth of the Parret or Avon. An easy journey from the head of the navigable water over the watershed and across the comparatively open plain would bring them to their goal. This, surely, would be the natural, as it would be the quickest and easiest, line of travel. All this, however, presupposes physical and social conditions that are not easy to imagine as having existed in those early times. Although our surmise may be correct we have no evidence that, in the uncharted period before the stern discipline of Rome introduced us to culture and order, such an adventure as we have outlined would have been an easy matter.

The consensus of scientific opinion as to Stonehenge regards the principal features of the monument and the great trilithons as belonging to the early Bronze Age, that is, somewhere about 1700 B.C. Dr. Thomas has expressed the opinion that the Pembrokeshire stones were amongst the first to be erected on Salisbury Plain and thus were older than the main fabric. It seems almost impossible to imagine, existing in this country at such an early date, a condition of things that would allow of the knowledge of scarce and sanctified stones in Pembrokeshire and of their removal to Salisbury Plain. It demands on the part of the people dwelling at that period in Pembrokeshire a higher degree of civilisation than that of the dwellers in the southern part of Britain—a proposition that appears inherently improbable.

Whatever the date of construction, however, one point of supreme interest clearly emerges from the diverse views, and that is that this great monument—as unique as the Pyramids of Egypt—is the work of more than one period. It is probable that three distinct periods of construction or reconstruction will be proved, and that, as held by Sir John Evans, the latest of these extended into the Age of Metals.

From its nature, pre-history is a fruitful field for imagination, but, through the protective work of the Society of Anti-

quaries, and the diligent researches of Colonel Hawley and other workers at Stonehenge, we are gradually acquiring a vast number of valuable facts that are directing our speculations into safe channels along which we may ultimately pass to certainty. Much more remains to be discovered, many difficulties have to be overcome and divergent views reconciled ; but by the exhibition of patience and the astute use of local knowledge, we may do much to unveil the truth and to prevent imperfect or impossible hypotheses.