

SOME IMPRESSIONS OF PRICELESS STONEHENGE.



BY LADY ANTROBUS.

ILLUSTRATED FROM PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY MISS CLARISSA MILES.

THE great Druidical temple, or, as some hold, Phœnician observatory, composed of gigantic, beautifully coloured, hewn stones, stands in the middle of Salisbury Plain. These stones have been measured, counted, defaced, praised, depreciated, commented upon, by numerous authorities on countless occasions, but to my knowledge no account of their poetical and picturesque aspects at different seasons of the year has been attempted. I shall feel satisfied if I succeed in conveying feebly in words what David Cox, the artist, did ably in colours with his glowing brush. I do not propose to enter into any statistics as to the "market value of Stonehenge to the nation," or to tell you the number of miles that lie between it and the town of Salisbury, the goodness or inferiority of the roads to it, the number of visiting tourists, etc. ; I only wish to place before you some impressions I have felt of its grandeur and charm through many seasons, in all sorts of weather and varying moods.

There is always a constant surprise and delight to me in the manner in which Stonehenge bursts upon one, approach it as one may, from various points across the undulating plain which surrounds it. Starting upon one's "pilgrim's path" to visit it, from any side, at first

there is nothing to be seen but the crisp, crackling grass underfoot and the white, glittering roads ; then, as one advances nearer, unexpectedly dark, mysterious forms seem to start up which gradually shape themselves into the incompleated circle we call "Stonehenge."

The late spring and early summer are enchanting periods. Myriads of starry white flowers and gorgeous yellow and blue ones wave together in a glowing harmony of colour as they are swayed by soft breezes, whilst a "Hallelujah Chorus" of skylarks sing overhead, making the air full of scent and sound. In this setting the old stones seem all yellow and grey in the brilliant sunshine. Picturesque shepherds, wrapped in their great, dark blue cloaks, appear upon the horizon ; tinkling sheep-bells are heard, reminding one of the Roman Campagna ;



A VIEW OF STONEHENGE.

even falling brings a sense of peace and stillness; chimes from the old church at Amesbury float across the valley. The light comes and goes, and the world seems far away.

To my mind the magic of Stonehenge is never more powerfully felt than during the wild, tempestuous autumnal gales that usually sweep across the plain in October. Great clouds roll above, enfolding the circle in a shadowy purple mantle, sometimes tipped with gold. Thoughts rise up suddenly of the many tragedies, feasts, sacrifices, mysterious rites that must have been enacted here in far-off bygone days. One wonders if beautiful, golden-haired Guinevere passed this way on her flight to safety at the convent at "Amesbury" (the land of Ambrosius), or if

sad King Arthur tarried there on his lonely homeward journey.

I prefer to picture to myself Stonehenge in happy, thoughtless, Pagan days, Druid priests and priestesses forming grand pro-

cessions, crossing the "rushing Avon" and winding up from the valley to Stonehenge, clothed in pure white

and holding gleaming sickles in their hands, chanting hymns on their way to perform the sacred rite of cutting the mistletoe. Perhaps they sang and chanted through the short summer night, waiting for the sun to rise over the pointed, outlying stone, on the day which marks the solar half-year (June 21st), and which bathes the altar-stone in golden light. Probably this was the signal for sacrifice, the death of the victim and the appeasing of wrathful gods. In mid-winter the stones appear like black masses in the midst of driving snows. The least interesting time of year in this enchanted place is the bright, clear, commonplace summer, when

no mysteries abound, except by moonlight. The old gods are sleeping; everything is orderly; agriculture and its implements surround us, and Romance seems dead for the moment.



THE FRIAR'S HEEL STONE.

