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PEN-Y-GAER, CHIEFLY IN CONNECTION WITH CARACTACUS, AND OTHER BRITISH REMAINS IN NORTH WALES.

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SINCE our Congress this year is held in the famous Vale of Llangollen, I have been desirous to select a subject for a short paper on some point of interest connected with North Wales, and it has occurred to me that something might be said in reference to Pen-y-Gaer ("the summit of the fort"), near Cerrig-y-Druidion ("the stones of the brave"), about twenty miles from this spot.

When passing the remains in question, the mind naturally reverts to the stirring incidents relating to the conquest of Caractacus (or Caradoc) by the Romans, and the betrayal of that brave old British king by Cartismandua. I regret to say that about the actual ruin *per se*, I find the facts to be gathered are, like the ruin itself, not considerable. The most important reference that I have found occurs in a little volume entitled *Remarks upon North Wales, being the Result of Sixteen Tours through that part of the Principality*, by W. Hutton, F.A.S.S. (Birmingham, 1803). The writer thus describes these remains: "Upon the first hill east of the village of Cerrig-y-Druidion, and distant one mile, is Pen Gweryn, where the antiquary will be pleased with the small remains of a castle belonging to the celebrated Caractacus. As the traveller approaches the top of the hill, which is of easy ascent, he first comes to a trench about 36 feet wide. A small part of the soil having

been thrown up on the outside, constitutes a mound 3 feet high; but the greater part being discharged on the inner side, forms a rampart about 15 feet from the bottom of the trench. This rampart encircles the upper part of the hill, rather of an oval form; is everywhere visible, in some places nearly perfect, and encloses six or seven acres.

“Ascending 60 or 70 feet more, he next meets with the foundation of the wall, about 6 feet thick, which forms the upper area, running regular with the trench below, and enclosing four or five acres. From the thickness of the wall, now level with the ground, we may reasonably conclude it ran 12 or 14 feet high. As one part of the area is higher than the other, it points out the exact spot where the castle stood, nothing of which remains. The whole is a pasture. The situation is on a considerable hill, but not a mountain. The prospects are extensive, but barren, and its affinity to Cerrig-y-Druidion proves that the Prince and the priests were upon friendly terms.”

I have been unable to discover any reference to the British King by any British historian of the period, excepting a comparatively unimportant allusion to him in the *Triads*; therefore I trust I may be pardoned should I fly off somewhat from the subject, and refer rather more to the events in connection with the fortress than to the fortress itself; and further, that I may be allowed to shelter myself by one or two brief quotations.

In the year 47 we find the south-eastern part of Britain had been subjugated by the Roman invaders; but the Ordovices and Silures, inhabitants of North and South Wales, always famous for their bravery (witness their gallant bearing at Alma in our own time), still held Cambria; and although, as I have stated, the Romans were the possessors of a great portion of Britain, the Roman power under the Emperor Claudius was not shining with the same brilliancy as formerly. Hume tells us that “the other Britons, under the command of Caractacus or Caradog, still maintained an obstinate resistance, and the Romans made little progress against them till Ostorius Scapula was sent over to command the Roman armies. Under this commander Roman camps were established on the Avon and Severn; the Iceni were reduced after a desperate and brilliant struggle, and the league of the Brigantes were surprised and dispersed by

the rapid march of Ostorius, and the Roman eagles pervaded the greater part of Britain. But the Silures and Ordovices still held out."

Upon referring to Williams' *Cymry* we are told that "In a convention of the country and neighbouring country, under all the limits of the nation of the Cymry, Caradog, the son of Brân, was invested with the martial sovereignty of all the Isle of Britain, that he might oppose the invasion of the Romans. All the Britons, from king to vassal, enlisted under his banner, at the call of the country, against foe and depredation." After nine years' desperate fighting, Caractacus was compelled to retreat towards North Wales, the country of the Ordovices, when a decisive battle was fought, and Caractacus was defeated, although at the same time it must be fully understood that Cambria itself still remained in the hands of the British. The exact spot of this great battle has always been a subject of controversy; and is likely to remain so, there being nothing to enable us to decide its precise position. Tacitus says in his *Annals* (No. xii), speaking of Caractacus, that "he posted himself on a spot to which the approaches were as advantageous to his own troops as they were perplexing to us. He then threw up, on the more accessible parts of the highest hills, a rampart of stones, below and in front of which was a river difficult to ford. Picked men showed themselves before the ramparts." However, the Roman arms prevailed, and Caractacus, after bravely defending his country for nine years, was compelled to fly.

Pen-y-Gaer was at this time occupied by Cartismandua, Queen of the Brigantes, the inhabitants of the country lying between the Humber and the Tyne. To Pen-y-Gaer Caractacus fled, demanding sanctuary of his stepmother, the Queen, for himself and his family. Cartismandua is said to have hated her stepson, and being anxious to ingratiate herself with the conquerors, she most treacherously ordered the royal fugitives to be put in chains, and she subsequently delivered them up to the Romans :

"The cry is heard, the long, loud wail,
O'er flood and plain, o'er hill and dale :
It is the heart of Cymru bleeds
For fallen sons and treacherous deeds.
Dismay dwells in Caradoc's halls ;
The royal minstrel doleful calls
Forth from his harp a strain his own sad heart appals."

Had the brave but unfortunate British King not fled to Pen-y-Gaer, he might possibly have been ignominiously slain, and history would have lost one of her brightest pages. I allude to the memorable speech made by the prisoner before his conqueror, the Emperor Claudius, at Rome, and the magnanimous conduct of the latter. The full account of this will be found in Hoare's *Giraldus*, p. 105. With the true generosity of a great nature, Claudius immediately released Caractacus and all the members of his family, and thus added to his crown perhaps its brightest jewel, the quality of mercy. Caractacus is stated to have said, when viewing Rome, "Is it possible that the Romans, who possess such splendid palaces at home, can envy me my humble cottage in Britain?"

"And then his thoughts would wander back to those
 Old days when in Glamorgan, as a boy,
 He gazed upon the peaceful mountain herd,
 And never dream'd of bloody times to come,
 And treachery at Cartismandua's hand;
 Or when he watch'd, near prond Eryri's brow,
 Some hungry eagle circling round her prey,
 Ne'er saw foreshadowed in that airy flight
 The Roman eagles destined to swoop down
 Triumphant o'er the country of his birth."

These lines occur in a fragmentary poem entitled *Caractacus*.

There is an amount of interest attached to the stay of Caractacus in Rome, in connection with the history of Christianity. Caractacus and his family were at Rome at the same time as St. Paul, and tradition asserts that two of the relatives of the British King (a daughter and her husband) were Christian converts, and that they are identified with the Claudia and Pudens mentioned in St. Paul's 2nd Epistle to Timothy, chapter iv, verse 21.

We are informed by the author of a most interesting work entitled *Welsh Sketches, chiefly Ecclesiastical* (in the first Series), that "Caractacus had another daughter, Eurgain, who formed a college of twelve religious persons, called after her own name, 'Cor Eurgain'. She was married to Sarllog, lord of Caer Sarllog, the present Old Sarum." It has been conjectured by some writers on the subject, that Brân, the father of Caractacus, was the first to introduce Christianity into this country.

Claudia, previously referred to, must have possessed the

proverbial beauty of the Welsh women of the present day, for we find the poet Martial Valerius addressing her in the following complimentary lines :¹

“ Claudia cœruleis eum sit Rufina Britannis
 Edita, cur Latiā pectora plebis habet.
 Quale decus formæ ? Romanam credere matres
 Italides possunt, Atthides esse suam.”²

Such British remains as those I have alluded to are the only remnants we have in connection with many heroes and incidents of the past. Wales is particularly rich in these remains, although many, so far as I have been able to discover, have received but little attention at the hands of the archæologist. Almost every mountain range in Wales, from Snowdon to Plinlimmon, contains some evidences of the British aborigines. It would occupy too much time to enlarge upon the subject on the present occasion ; but I would point, *en passant*, to Dinas Emrys, Dinas Ddinlle, Dinas Dinorthen, and the surrounding neighbourhood, Dinas Dinorwic, Dinas Mawr, and many others. Dinas Emrys, on a rock at the end of Llyn-y-Ddinas, it may be remembered, is said to have been the place to which Vortigern retired after he had trusted the “treacherous Saxons, and accepted the hand of Rowena”. Mr. Timbs tells us that “the fatal feast had taken place on Salisbury Plain, and Hengist’s awful words, ‘Take your swords’, had been followed by the massacre of three hundred and sixty British nobles ; and their imprudent, weak Prince, who had suffered himself to be lured by beauty, had been dragged captive to a dungeon till he yielded to all the demands of the victors. Sullen, but yet not quite subdued, Vortigern summoned to his aid all the sages of his kingdom, and by their advice commenced the construction of a fortress in Nant Gwynant, which was to secure him against attacks, and make him independent of his foes.”

And this subject would bring us to the incidents of the legend of the birth of Merlin (or Merddyn), etc. Indeed the remains of Dinas Emrys would form the subject of a most interesting paper. Dinas Ddinlle overlooks the sea,

¹ Lib. i, Epigram 53.

² Although born among the blue-eyed Britons, how fully has Claudia Rufina the intelligence of the Roman people ! What beauty is hers ! The matrons of Italy might take her for a Roman ; those of Attica for an Athenian.

and is said to have been connected with Segontium (Caernarfon) during the occupation of the Romans, although it bears evident traces of British origin, and has a double range of escarpments. Near Llyn Padarn are the remains of Dinas Dinorwic and Dinas Mawr, and in the immediate neighbourhood are several highly interesting Druidic and other ruins. A few miles on the road from Caernarfon to Pwllheli is the British fortress of Dinorthen, and many other British traces on the surrounding heights. There are the remains of an ancient British fort called Castell Corndochon, on the summit of a crag not far from Llanuwchllyn—respecting which no historical facts appear to be known, and there is an eminence near Caer Gai where there has been a fort belonging to Cai Hir ap Cymyr, or, according to Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, Timon, the foster father of King Arthur. Several Roman coins have at various times been dug up in the neighbourhood, but little more is known relative to Caer Gai, except that we read in Vaughan's sketch of the history of Merionethshire that a stone was found with the inscription, "Hic jacet Salvianus Bursocavi filius Cupe-tian." And so I might continue enlarging on the British remains in which this country is so rich, but I have merely mentioned the foregoing to show what a vast field of research may be explored by those anxious to push their archæological inquiries.

The remains at Pen-y-Gaer should, I consider, not be overlooked, since they are indisputably connected, as I have endeavoured to show, with the history of Britain, and I have no doubt that if they were to be investigated, many points of archæological interest might be discovered. They may be seen from the road near Cerrig-y-Druidion, standing on the brow of a hill to the east of the Holyhead road. Cerrig-y-Druidion is a place in itself full of interest and antiquarian curiosities, and is referred to at some length by Camden. I have spoken of the site of Cartismandua's fortress as Pen-y-Gaer, that being the name put down in the Ordnance Survey, but it is known in the neighbourhood as *Pengwerwyn*. It would be well could some of my archæological friends spare time to visit the spot, and investigate thoroughly a place which must always be of interest to the lovers of history and archæology.
