

## TERRITORIES OF THE ANCIENT BRITISH KING VORTIGERN ON THE WYE, AND IN THE SOUTH OF WALES.

BY THE REV. BEALE POSTE.

[*Read by the rev. Thomas Hugo.*]

THE story of the monarch of old times of whom I now speak, is probably sufficiently known to those here assembled. He was notorious in having been mainly instrumental, as king of the Britons, in bringing in the Saxons; but his connexion as a local sovereign with the part of the kingdom in which we are now assembled,—the banks of the Wye, the picturesque regions of the south of Herefordshire and the adjoining parts of Wales,—may perhaps not be equally known, and may be touched upon with advantage. He was in the first instance, I repeat, a local king in these parts; but ultimately, by the election of the Britons, he became king of the whole country.

Thus much by way of introducing the subject, as it is not intended to enter upon the history of those times, which must be sought for elsewhere.

The points I shall briefly advert to will be these: (1) His original patrimonial territories, and some additions subsequently made to them; (2) The fortress in which, in the course of the political dissensions of the day and civil wars, he was ultimately besieged and destroyed; and (3) The Roman roads and stations which were either within, or the more immediately connected with his provinces. Now then for the matters of our detail; my authorities for the first part of which will chiefly be the various editions of the ancient British historian Nennius, including the celebrated Irish one published at Dublin not many years since, Cambrian literature, and a passage in the old Caledonian historian Boethius, at the point where he happens to cross our path and has materials to the purpose. The interest excited by the scenery, in this one of the most picturesque and romantic parts of the British isles, may

possibly be increased by knowing what has been transacted in these quarters in ancient times.

As a general view of his career; he is first known to us for his treachery to the family of the king his predecessor, and then appears as a successful competitor for the crown of Britain in those peculiarly unsettled times; but when he obtained the object of his ambition, his reign was only signalised by the misfortunes of his country, and, as far as we are informed, he governed with no other skill than to retain his seat on the throne. He was able in some measure to compass this point, having been king, with one interval of abdication, nearly twenty years; that is, from 448 to 454 and from 468 to 481.

The territories which he held from his ancestors seem pretty well ascertained. They are admitted on all hands to have been the two lordships of Erging and Ewas, lying together in the present county of Hereford, in what was in ancient British times a portion of the kingdom of the Silures, but which in later British times constituted a part of the kingdom of the Demetæ; the extent being the southern part of Herefordshire abovenamed, bounded by Gloucestershire, or the Dobuni, on the east, and Radnorshire and Brecknockshire on the west. Erging appears to have been by far the largest lordship of the two, and an extensive district in the said south part of Herefordshire is still called Archenfield, which is very commonly supposed to be the modern form of the ancient appellation. Ewas, the name of which is still retained, lies west of this, and is about thirteen miles long by six broad. Both together the two districts formed a tract of country about twenty-five miles long by a breadth averaging ten miles. You see here the territories of a minor British chieftain, and their small extent doubtless prompted him to go into the military service of the British king of those times, whose family, as has been remarked, he superseded. It is true he acquired some further territory afterwards, as the districts of Built and Gworthigirnian, lying respectively in Radnorshire and Brecknockshire, which continued in his family for many centuries; but these may be rather viewed as acquisitions made after he came to the throne.

To continue. There were two Roman stations, which lay within the limits which have just been described, Ari-

conium, now known as Bury Hill, two miles and a half from Ross, and Blestium, called otherwise Old Town, or Castle Hên, at the southern extremity of Ewas. Ariconium may be considered to have been his capital, and in it he perished, and the place was destroyed. The ruins now attest a destruction attended with much violence: and we may learn from the fate of this place, that the entire subversion which most of the Roman stations present at this day, was not always effected by the Saxons, as commonly supposed, but was sometimes the consequence of international wars among the Britons themselves.

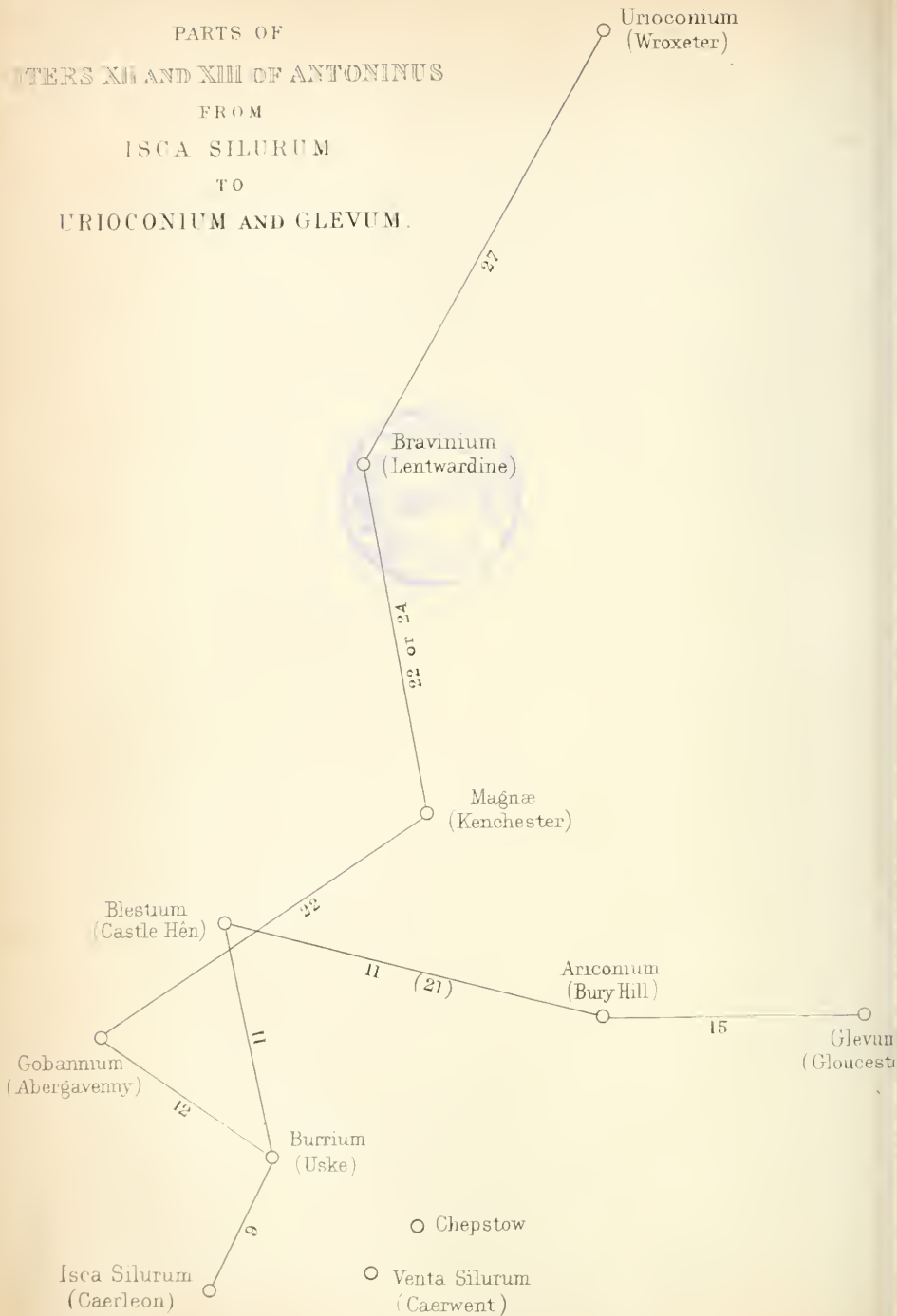
With regard to authorities for the place of his death; it will appear by a comparison of the various copies of the ancient, and as we may say, notwithstanding its brevity and deficiencies, the valuable British history of Nennius, that the said work does not precisely name it. The most authentic text in the Dublin edition, p. 103, says, that he fled first to his fortress, called after his name, in his own province of Gworthigirnian, in which the fortress known as Caer Gwrthryinion is situated, afterwards to another fortress belonging also to himself, the name of which is not expressed. The words added in other editions, as those of Gale, Gunn, and others, "on the river Teibi or Thesidi," seem rather interpolations; whilst the British chronicles, as far as they have weight, unanimously say that he perished in Erging. One chronicle says, in the "Castle of Goronwy;" but as that term is merely of general import, implying the castle of the governor or commander, for it is not a personal name, it only more strongly points to Ariconium, the supposed seat of government and capital of Erging, where I have ventured to suggest that the catastrophe took place, and where ruins and traditions much evidence it.

Omitting then, as I have said, the other actions of the life of Vortigern, which are not required to be related for our present purpose, I pass on to the last scene of his existence, which had a termination not uncommon perhaps to many of the chieftains in the middle ages; and as there is a detailed account of the catastrophe in the writings of Hector Boethius, which is nowhere else to be found, to that I will concisely advert.

He tells us that Aurelius Ambrosius, his competitor for



PARTS OF  
 ITERS XII AND XIII OF ANTONINUS  
 FROM  
 ISCA SILURUM  
 TO  
 URIOCONIUM AND GLEVUM.



the British crown, coming over with a large body of troops from Gaul, surprised him in his fortress before he could collect a sufficient force to oppose him effectually. It is related, nevertheless, that Vortigern drew up his men in array outside his stronghold, and endeavoured to make head against his enemy in the open field, but in vain, for after some conflict he was driven back into it by superior numbers. Here "the fortress's strength seemed to laugh a siege to scorn", as his opponents, sitting down before it, were neither able to force the gates or get possession of the walls. The old Roman town showed the strength and solidity of its defences: but still they went on fighting, and approaching nearer and nearer they filled the ditch with faggots, and drawing on to one of the principal gates they piled heaps of the same material against that, and set them on fire. They burnt the gate, and by that means effected their admission more easily into the place; but the fire at the same time communicated to the other buildings, and Vortigern and his whole family that were there perished in the general conflagration which ensued.

Thus fell Ariconium, whose ruins yet strike the eye, and thus perished the usurper of his day, for such the accounts represent him to be; but ancient Celtic customs were strongly exemplified in one of the transactions which took place after his decease, for Nennius tells us in his *History*, c. 48, that, enemy as Ambrosius had been during his life, he allowed Pascent, Vortigern's son, to hold the two districts of Built and Guorthigirnian, which indeed continued in his descendants above four hundred years. The Celtic national character thus appears to great advantage, for though they punished a time-serving monarch, yet they extended not that punishment to his offspring. It would be pleasing could we say that Pascent duly requited this indulgence; but such accounts as we have of those times unfortunately represent him as soon afterwards becoming one of the bitterest opponents of Aurelius Ambrosius, and of his successor.

I have now to consider Iters XII and XIII of the well-known and much cited Itinerary of Antoninus, which refer to these parts, and also to exhibit due proof that the two stations, Ariconium and Blestium, were within the dominions of Vortigern. (See plate 23.)



Neither of the above two are iters direct, but are rather discursive in their routes, which arose from the geographical characteristics of this part of the kingdom, namely, its being indented by large rivers and bays, as also studded with numerous mountains; the roads therefore took a winding direction; and besides this the said twelfth iter had a peculiarity in the arrangement of its stations, which it is necessary to note. This went from Calleva, that is Wallingford, to Isca Dumnoniorum, or Exeter. Thence the route was recontinued from some unexplained cause at Leucarum, or Lohor, in Wales, one stage from the present Carmarthen, at a great distance from the preceding station of Exeter. From this point it takes a direction to Isca Silurum, or Caerleon, where begins the part of the iter with which we have the more particularly to do. From Isca Silurum it goes on for four or five other stations, coming to its termination at Urioconium, or Wroxeter, in Shropshire. Its progress from Isca to Burrium, which is at or in the immediate vicinity of Usk, and the distance nine miles, is very clear. Thence it makes a right angle to the north-west, and twelve miles bring it to Gobannium, or Abergavenny. Here the road diverges somewhat considerably more than a right angle from its former line, and takes a pretty direct course to the right to Magnæ, or Kenchester; the ancient Roman way being sufficiently traceable, particularly near Madley, a few miles short of the last named place. From Magnæ twenty-four, or according to one copy of Antoninus, twenty-two miles bring it to Bravinium, or Lentwardine, at the northern extremity of Herefordshire, otherwise called Branogenium, and twenty-seven more advance it to its termination Urioconium, or Wroxeter, in Shropshire; the traces of the ancient Roman road continuing all the way from Abergavenny.

The Iter XIII is from the same Isca Silurum, or Caerleon, to the same Calleva, or Wallingford, through Glevum, or Gloucester; but we have only to notice the part of it which is west of the last named place, and this portion of the iter is best arranged thus. From Isca Silurum to Burrium nine miles, as before. From Burrium to Blestium, that is Castle Hên in Ewas, eleven, or rather fourteen miles. From Blestium to Ariconium, or Bury Hill, near Ross, eleven, or rather twenty-one miles. From Arico-

nium to Glevum, or Gloucester, fifteen miles, which is correct. Thus we have it, and the noting this distance seems again all that is required for our purpose; for there being the lordship or principality in these parts called Erging, or otherwise Archenfield or Arconfield, it is pretty evident that it was either named after Ariconium, or Ariconium from it; and Bury Hill in Archenfield is at the distance from Glevum, or Gloucester, which Ariconium should be. We thus appear to connect sufficiently Bury Hill and Ariconium with the territories of Vortigern.

Ariconium, it perhaps should be further noted, must be the *Caer Guorthigirn* of Nennius, which he places among the twenty-eight principal cities of Britain; but it has not been hitherto so assigned.

With respect to placing Blestium at Castle Hên in Ewas, Vortigern's other province, no other station so well corresponds; and the name which is asserted to occur also in the form of Blescium (see Baxter's *Glossary of British Antiquities*, p. 37), and in that of Glescium (see Gale's *Antoninus*, p. 128), seems to have some reference to the river Eskel, on which the station stands, the same as the neighbouring station of Burrium was named from the Birthin, and even Isca itself from the stream of the same name, now the Usk.

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ON

## THE CHRONICLE OF TYSILIO, THE PRIMARY CHRONICLE OF THE CAMBRIANS.

BY THE REV. BEALE POSTE.

THE principal Celtic languages which are known in modern times are six: the Welsh, Erse, Gaelic, Armorican, Cornish, and Manx; of these the first four possess a literature, and especially the first two; and of those two, more particularly the Welsh, which has an extensive scope

