

Inscribed Stone on Winsford Hill.

BY JOHN LL. WARDEN PAGE.



WHEN on Exmoor last summer I learnt that a stone with some lettering which no one had been able to decipher, was to be seen upon Winsford Hill. I had previously heard from Mr. W. Bidgood that such a stone existed, and this additional information at once decided me upon visiting the spot. But it was not till the second visit that I was fortunate enough to discover the stone. It stands by the side of an old road cutting off the angle made

by the road from Dulverton to Withypoole crossing that from Tarr's Steps to Winsford, and is of the ordinary local, hard, slaty rock, roughly shaped, and with the surface fairly dressed. The height is three feet seven inches; the breadth fourteen inches, and the thickness seven. Across the middle runs a dyke of quartz. The upper part (how much it is impossible to say) has disappeared, thanks to the vandalism of a labourer, who, but three months before my visit, amused himself by knocking it off with his pick.

The inscription is perpendicular, and cut in letters of rude design, of which one at least appeared extremely doubtful. After a careful examination I came to the conclusion that the legend read—

C V R A A C I
F P V S

the last letter representing either S or C, the tail of what I am since assured is S being in the then light almost indiscernible. The first word was, I thought, manifestly *Curataci*, the ligature \bar{A} (=AT) being not uncommon in stones of Romano-British type. But the second was a puzzle. Dealing, therefore, with the first only, I interpreted it to be *son of Curatacus*, and came to the conclusion that the FPVS was the remains of a word of which the first part had disappeared owing to the reprehensible treatment above referred to. I could find no trace of ogams.

The next proceeding was to obtain the opinion of an expert, and through the kindness of Mr. Elton, Q.C., M.P., my sketch was forwarded to Professor Rhys, probably the best living authority on these inscriptions. He wrote me as follows: "I take the inscription to be of the Romano-British type, which I have been in the habit of associating in Wales and Cornwall with the fifth and sixth centuries. I am not sure, without seeing the stone itself, as to the correct reading, but I should say that, according to your facsimile, the first name should read *Curataci*. The next letters I can make nothing of, unless they are the imperfect remains of F I L₁ V S, that is to say—*filius*. This is, however, a mere guess."

On the 20th August inst. (1890), I met the Professor, his wife,—a lady of no small experience in these matters,—Mr. Elton, and Mr. F. T. Elworthy, by appointment, and conducted them to the stone. Unfortunately, our time was limited, but after an examination of less than an hour, the Professor, though, like myself, doubtful about the second character, pronounced for

C A R \bar{A} A C I
E P V S

That is *Carataci nepus* (the N having vanished in the fracture). *Nepus* being an occasional Romano-British reading of *nepos*, the interpretation would be "a (or *the*) kinsman of *Caratacus*," or, as we wrongly call him, *Caractacus*. At the time of our

visit there was no actual evidence that this N had ever existed. The reading given by Professor Rhys has, however, since been supported by the Rev. J. J. Coleman, the Local Secretary of the Society for Dulverton, who has known the stone for seven of eight years. Hearing, about three years¹ since, that a portion had become broken off, he visited the spot and secured and buried the two pieces. "One of these pieces," he writes, "is inscribed distinctly with **N**, and it exactly fits on to the part of the stone which is inscribed EPVS, the **N** evidently forming part of the same word as that to which EPVS belongs." It will be observed that the buried letter is cut *reversed*, a not uncommon error even nowadays.

Owing to the doubt attaching to the second letter of the first word, it was decided to take a mould of the inscription. Accordingly, on the 11th September we again gathered at the stone, those present being Mr. Elworthy, Dr. Murray, Editor of the new English Dictionary, Mr. Beuttler, Head Master of Wellington Grammar School, and myself. The mould or 'squeeze' was taken on wet blotting paper, and left, we thought, little doubt that the reading was "Carataci epus."

What Caratacus this was it is of course impossible to say. The most famous bearer of the name was Caradoc, King of the Silures (South Wales), who opposed a most determined front to the Romans, but was by them defeated in 46, and led captive to Rome in 51. Every one will remember the story of his artless expression of amazement at the wonders of the Imperial City, and his bitter remark on the possessors of such palaces envying him his Celtic hovel. The story came to the ears of Claudius. Caradoc "was taken before the Emperor," says Professor Freeman in his *Early English History*, "who received him kindly and gave him his liberty, and, according to some writers, allowed him still to reign in part of Britain as a prince subject to Rome."

¹ The stone therefore must have been mutilated twice.

“*In part of Britain.*”—Evidently not the land of the Silures, where the Roman probably feared further revolt as a consequence of his return. Is it not possible that he made a new home on the southern shore of the Severn estuary, within sight of the mountains he loved so well, and became a prince of the Damnonii?

Another Caratacus was the son of Gruffydd, prince of South Wales—that Gruffydd who was deposed and slain by a prince of the northern portion the Principality, son of the warlike Llewellyn. This chieftain flourished a thousand years later. He it was, who in 1065 slew Earl Harold’s workmen, as they were building King Edward’s hunting lodge at Portskewett. But, if Professor Rhys is right in assigning a date as far back as the fifth or sixth century to the stone, this Caratacus can hardly have been the ancestor of the man whose weathered monument stands on Winsford Hill.

“The kinsman of Caratacus.”—This is all we know about him. But that he was a great man among the Damnonii who will doubt? At any rate it is pleasant to think that this stone may mark the last resting place of a chieftain, proud, even four hundred years after the death of Caradoc, to claim descent from the brave but simple prince whom we learnt to admire in the days of our youth.

A legend clings to the spot as a matter of course, but a legend too common to be of the slightest assistance. The neighbours say that treasure is buried here—a treasure, thinks Professor Rhys, so mythical that it would be a pity to disturb the stone to seek for it.

I know of no similar stone in Somersetshire, though I have seen three—one with ogams, as well as the Romano-British inscription—in Devonshire. They stand in the garden of the Vicarage at Tavistock. Another formerly stood at Fardel, near Ivybridge; it is now in the British Museum; and I fancy a fifth will be found in the neighbourhood of Modbury.

In conclusion, Professor Rhys regards the stone as “one of

the most important monuments in South-Western England," and will therefore, I venture to hope, support Mr. Elton, who gave me to understand that he would write to Genl. Pitt-Rivers, Director of Ancient Monuments, and endeavour to induce him to take the proper legal steps for its preservation. May success attend his efforts; but, from the manner in which the Act for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments is drawn, and its neglect of similar relics in Devon and Cornwall, it is not well to indulge in any very sanguine expectations.

Since writing the above my attention has been directed to a note written by Professor Rhys for the *Academy* of August 30th last. After giving the reading as Carataci (n)epus, he notices "an oblique line meeting or nearly meeting the second limb of the first A, apparently forming a small conjoint V." This would make the word CAVRATACI. But on the whole he was inclined to think that this mark formed no part of a letter,² thus leaving the word CARATACI.

His interesting dissertation on both words I copy *in extenso*. "As to the form *nepus* for *nepos*, this is countenanced by *pronepus* for *pronepos* in the Bodvoc inscription on Margam Mountain in Glamorgan. "Carataci," I need hardly say, is the genitive of "Caratacus;" which is the reading adopted by the best editors of Tacitus, instead of the gibberish "Caractacus."³ In Welsh the name became Caratauc, later Caradawg and Caradog. In Irish, on the other hand, the name is now Carthach, genitive Carthaigh; which we have in an Anglicised spelling in "MacCarthy." I mention the Irish forms, as I

² This mark, whatever it is, does not come out, except very faintly, upon the mould.

³ Mr. Sanford of Nynhead informs me that Zonaras (Ann. 10, 11) spells it *Καρατακος* (Caratakos), and that in a MS. of Tacitus, quoted as MS. Reg. in MS. Jes., it appears as Caratticus. Also that in MS. *Dionis Historia Romana libri deperditi excerptum Vaticanum*, 90, the name is *Καρτάκης (των βρεττανων αρχων Καρτάκης)*.

am inclined to think that this inscription, like the ogam inscriptions of Devon, belongs to the Goidelic conquerors of the lands on both sides of the Severn Sea. This I infer from *nepus* being used just like the Irish *ua* or *O'*—"grandson, descendant," as in "the O'Donoghue," and the like. In fact the Four Masters mention no less than four men styled *Ua Carthaigh* or *O'Carthy*, of whom three are called chief ollaves of Connaught. To one of the three the Four Masters gave no name but *Ua Carthaigh*; the same is also the case with their fourth *O'Carthy*, an Abbot whose death is given under the year 1442. This kind of nomenclature is more familiar, to say the least of it, among Goidels than among Brythons; and I am inclined to guess the nationality of the Winsford Hill stone accordingly, though it would have been very gratifying to come across the resting-place of a descendant of the great Caratacus, who made such a vigorous stand against the legions of Rome."

NOTE. — The mould referred to became clearer when thoroughly dry, and shows the inscription much more legibly than the stone itself.⁴ It brings out two or three other letters — *R* and *G* are quite distinct—evidently of a later date. The mould itself, or a cast of it, will be placed in the Society's Museum. It has been examined with great interest by many eminent antiquaries at Oxford, who fully support Professor Rhys in his opinion.

Sir Thomas Acland, the owner of Winsford Hill, has caused the stone to be securely protected by a stout fence.

The two pieces lately broken off from the top of the stone were found, and have been carefully hidden by the writer close by.—F. T. E.

⁴ The inscription of course appears much more plainly on the wood-cut than upon the stone, where, in a dim light, it is scarcely legible.—J. LL. W. P.
