

## On British Cattle Stations.

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BY THE REV. F. WARRE.

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**A**T the time when the aboriginal tribes of the Loegri inhabited the County of Somerset, probably long before the men of Galedin had repaid their hospitality by depriving them of a large portion of their richest territory, certainly long before the Roman eagle had extended his flight to these western islands or Christianity had settled among us, the Isle of Avalon, in later days celebrated through the world as the site of the earliest Christian church established in Britain, as the burial-place of the renowned Arthur, and through the middle ages as possessing one of the most splendid monastic establishments that the world has seen, must have been a peninsula, rather than an island. Surrounded on both sides by what was then an impassable morass, or rather a lagoon. Overflowed by the sea at every high tide, it was connected on the east side by an isthmus of but slight elevation above the surrounding moor with the higher ground which, beginning at West Pennard, extends in an easterly direction towards Bruton.

Now we know with historical certainty that Glastonbury was inhabited in very early days, that in the days of the Romano-Britons it had a monastic establishment which

existed in great wealth and splendour down to the time of the reformation, rendered illustrious by the residence of such men as St. Patrick, St. Paulinus, St. Dunstan, Gildas the historian, and many others. Tradition tells us that here St. Joseph of Arimathæa established the first Christian Church in these islands, and that here the Christian warrior King Arthur, having fought well and gallantly against the northern heathen who were overwhelming his country by their constantly repeated invasions, rested from his labours after the fatal fight on the banks of Camlan. So interesting is it to the historian, the Christian, and the poet, that no excuse need be made for endeavouring to learn all that is known about it, or for investigating the marks of ancient occupation which still exist around it, with even more affectionate care than the archæologist will always be ready to devote to the search after the truth of things however remote in date or apparently unimportant in extent.

Now, as I before said, Avalon in primæval days must have presented the appearance of a peninsula. Wearyal Hill, Chalice Hill, and the Tor, rising boldly from the surrounding morass, encircle a small valley, in which reposed in its majesty the mighty Abbey of Glastonbury. But long before the building of the wooden church, where it may be St. Paul himself had preached the gospel of peace, this peninsula had attracted the attention of the aboriginal inhabitants of the country, and a great cattle station had undoubtedly been established there. The wealth of the primæval Britons consisted, as we know, chiefly in herds of cattle, to which the marshy ground of the estuary no doubt afforded a plentiful supply of food, and of course enclosed places of shelter and refuge were required both for the herds and the herdsmen. These

cattle stations being very different in their arrangement from either the purely military stations or primæval towns of British or Belgic date which I have before described, may, if not mentioned, confuse students of primæval antiquity, and in order to help them in avoiding error I will briefly point out the indications which have led me to suppose that Avalon was in the very earliest days occupied by one of the most important of the cattle stations frequented by the British herdsmen, whose cattle pastured on the vast reed beds which then existed in the drier parts of the morass.

The road from Glastonbury to West Pennard passes, at about two miles from the former place, between two hamlets, the one called East Street the other Woodland Street, names suggestive to the ear of the archæologist of Roman occupation. These are situated on each side of the isthmus which I have mentioned as connecting the Isle of Avalon with the higher ground, and immediately on the Glastonbury side of these hamlets a vallum of great magnitude extends across the rising ground, completely from one marsh to the other, effectually separating the peninsula of Avalon from the higher lands. This vallum is known by the appellation of Ponter's Ball, which I imagine to be a word compounded of the Roman, vallum, and the Saxon, pindan, to enclose; and to signify the vallum of the enclosure, or the enclosing vallum. And if we suppose the marsh to have been, as it probably was, impassable, this earthwork, if surmounted by a palisade, would have rendered the whole peninsula as safe and desirable an enclosure for cattle as can well be conceived. From this vallum, if we walk to the Tor, we shall find every point of advantage occupied with works of defence. Series of terraces not only occupy the sunny slopes, where they might possibly have been

vineyards, but in places where the sun hardly shines, but by which easy access is afforded to the summit of the hill, all of them similar in character to the defences which I have elsewhere described as constituting the exterior works of regularly fortified places, and probably amply sufficient to protect the herdsmen from any sudden attack. But on the top of the hill, where we should expect to find the stronghold, there is nothing but a platform, apparently levelled by artificial means, on which in mediæval times stood the chapel of St. Michael, the tower on which hill constitutes a very remarkable feature of the landscape. The descent towards the town is defended by a series of earthworks of irregular design, which, though they may perhaps have been originally natural, have evidently been scarped away, so as to supply the place of the undoubtedly artificial terraces which defend the other side of the hill, two of them, indeed, overlap each other in a manner so exactly similar to the outworks defending the beacon at Castle Neroche, that I cannot hesitate to pronounce them at once to be artificial fortifications.

Somewhere in the beautiful little valley surrounded by these hills no doubt the herdsmen lived in peaceful times, and took refuge on the partially fortified Tor in time of need. On Wearyal Hill is a large enclosure, the entrance to which has been made narrow by scarping away both sides of the hill, and which, if surrounded, as it probably was, with strong palisades, would afford a secure refuge for a very large number of cattle.

Perhaps the most important of these cattle stations, or, if I may so designate it, the head quarters of the herdsmen of the marsh, was situated at Brent Knoll. This remarkable hill cannot fail of being noticed by every traveller from Bridgwater to Bristol. An elevated plain of some

hundred acres rises abruptly from the marsh, terminating at one extremity in a high and bold peak of similar character to Glastonbury Tor, the summit of which is crowned by an earthwork, which, from its position when seen from a distance, appears to be a military work of great importance. This, however, will be found on closer inspection not to be the case. The ramparts, though of considerable magnitude, and enclosing what may possibly have been a small village arranged on the threefold system, are of the simplest construction, with hardly any attempt at outworks beyond an escarpment on the steep side of the hill and a few terraces commanding the principal entrance. The whole, however, of the elevated plain before mentioned has been enclosed with a low agger, and probably a palisade, and must have resembled a large park. Within this enclosure there is a fine spring, and a more favourable situation for cattle, when driven by high tides or stormy weather from the marsh pastures, can hardly be imagined.

There is one more of these stations to which I wish to draw attention. This is situated on the first rise of the ground, at Cannington Park, from the level of the marsh. It consists of several large enclosures, with little, if any, attempt at systematic fortification. It is held by some authorities that the primæval tribe of the Cangi, who are said to have inhabited the country between Quantock and the sea, were rather a body of professional herdsmen than deserving the appellation of a distinct people. If this was the case, the fact of one of these stations being situated in the immediate vicinity of Cannington—a name probably derived from the early occupants of the district—considerably strengthens the probability of my guess at the purpose for which they were established.

There is hardly an elevated spot on the whole marsh, or

immediately near it, undisturbed by modern cultivation, which does not bear the marks, more or less distinctly defined, of early occupation. I imagine that most of these mark the sites of British Cattle Stations, of which none but, perhaps, the largest and most important were occupied except during the dry months of summer, at other times they must, from the nature of the ground, have been, before the construction of the Roman sea walls, almost totally inaccessible. Nor would the marshes, during the winter, have produced herbage of much value for bucolical purposes. This may account for the absence of more distinct traces of permanent residence than I have discovered at any of these stations. In confirmation of this opinion, I may state that in the immediate vicinity of my own house, at Bishop's Lydeard, a slight elevation of red sand runs out, like a promontory, into the line of meadow, which, at the time of which I am speaking, must have been a marsh, resembling, on a small scale, that surrounding Glastonbury; and that the field which occupies its ridge, and shows some faint marks of ancient works, is still known by the name of Half Yard, which, I believe, would signify the summer enclosure.

I have then now done my best to point out the different types of primæval earthworks most commonly met with in this district. They are, as I suppose, the aboriginal type, marking the sites of permanent fortified towns, distinguished by their threefold arrangement, somewhat analogous to that of a Norman castle. The purely military, or, as I suppose, Belgic type, distinguished by its concentric arrangement and the Cattle Stations, differing from both the others in the great size of their external inclosures, and the absence of any very important or complex military works, and, as far as I have been able to observe,



of any considerable provision for permanent residence. I cannot, however, finally quit a subject which ill health prevents me following any further, without recommending it to those who have health and strength, (for the pursuit to be successful necessarily implies exposure to weather and fatigue) as one which is sure to afford much innocent enjoyment, and I believe as likely to conduce to the "mens sana in corpore sano" as any one that can be found.

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