

The President's Address.

Mr. H. D. SKRINE then delivered the following address :—
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

My first duty is to thank you, as I do sincerely, for the kind confidence you have reposed in me, by conferring on me the great honour of being your President for this year, and to assure you that I will do all in my power to justify your choice. It is indeed a great honour, and one to which I feel I had no right to aspire, to hold this office in my native city, and, as it were, to represent its neighbourhood on the present occasion, and to offer you all a most hearty welcome to the “Queen of the West.”

It is just nineteen years since you visited this neighbourhood, and I think we shall be able to show you some worthy finds of ancient historical treasures, which were not to be seen when you were here before.

I will not attempt to enumerate the valuable discoveries among the ancient Roman Baths, which will be detailed to you by very competent authorities ; nor need I enlarge on the *agrémens* of the city and its environs, which are patent to your observation ; but I would venture to assert that, for its beauty and picturesqueness of situation, the elegance and dignity of the architecture—ecclesiastical, municipal, and domestic—this city may fairly lay claim to its title of “Queen of the West;” while its philanthropical institutions and those connected with literature, the arts and science, merit high consideration. But when all is said and done, it seems to me that the greatest and most influential attraction to Bath is its matchless healing springs, and we may ask you to acknowledge the truth of the motto on the Pump Room, *Ἀριστον μὲν ὕδωρ*. The water is best.

My predecessor in this chair, nineteen years ago, was a dear friend of mine, and it is with very great regret to us all that he has passed away from this world very recently ; for I am

sure that were he with us now he would have been able to promote the interest of this meeting, and I greatly miss his counsel. Sir Jerom Murch was, for very many years, the earnest promoter of all good works started in this city, and by his wisdom and tact had great influence in the council and elsewhere.

He laid down some rules for his guidance in making his address to this Society, which I shall endeavour to follow. He said, he thought any subject which he should present to the meeting should be something local, but not of merely local interest, rather of general or national importance. Secondly, such as had not been treated of before at the meetings of this Society. And thirdly, that it should be kept within reasonable limits.

He gave you the coronation of King Eadgar in Bath, which formed an epoch in the history not only of Bath, but of the nation.

I can offer you the result of some investigations of my own since we met here, which will, I think, throw some light on the historical traditions which belong to this neighbourhood. I allude to the occupation of Hampton and Claverton Downs by the Belgæ, the conquerors of the South of England.

The Hampton Camp was indeed well known before by name to antiquaries, but has never been accurately described, and its extent has been very much underrated. It will, I think, well repay a visit to the members of this association; and it will be a great pleasure to me to point out on the spot the importance of my small discoveries, and to receive the members at Claverton Manor before or after the inspection.

I am not sure that I shall be justified in enlarging a little at present on the camp and its importance in the early history of this country, but there may be no opportunity of doing so later, and I crave your indulgence.

The camp crowns a steep and wooded hill, some six hundred feet above the valley of the Avon, and commands a view over

a considerable expanse of country on the south, including Salisbury Plain and the Dorsetshire Hills; on the east, the Wiltshire Downs; and on the north, the Cotswold range, in Gloucestershire; on the west, the Bristol Channel and the Welsh mountains.

It must, therefore, have been of great strategic importance to a people occupying the South of England.

The interior area of the camp, formerly supposed to be only thirty acres, is really seventy-four acres, and this space is divided into a number of irregular parcels of land, varying in extent from one to seven or eight acres, and divided from each other by longitudinal mounds, the remains of ancient walls, which once separated the huts and gardens of the inhabitants and the fields where they housed their cattle. These mounds are also clearly traceable outside the camp on my land, and we can show them to have also extended much further on both sides, before the plough levelled them.

The ancient inhabitants of Britain were, it seems, accustomed to choose the sites of their villages and forts on the hills; and this camp was, I believe, a frontier post of the Belgæ, who settled in these parts many years before the Roman invasion.

The Belgæ are supposed to have had for their northern boundary the wansdyke, which can be traced on both sides of this camp. It is distinctly visible on the east, in a field of mine at Warleigh, on the opposite side of the river Avon, but the plough has obliterated it on Monkton Earleigh Down; but at Newton Park it is again to be seen, where it has been utilized by the Romans on their road to Marlborough.

It is also said to be traceable near Combe Down, and farther on, at Englishcombe, Stantonbury Camp, and Maes Knoll, on the way to Portishead.

There is a rather remarkable boundary which divides the parishes of Claverton and Hampton, which resembles the dyke as seen at Englishcombe.

A little stream, called the "Mere Broc," or boundary brook,

in a land limits document of the tenth century, has apparently at times worn the sides of the ravine, and its spring-head may have supplied sufficient water to the camp. On the Claverton side the bank is very precipitous, and has quite the character of an ancient dyke, and the boundary is said, in the Saxon document, to lead along the road up from the river to the Herces, Dik, or ditch of the camp.

If we can connect, as I believe we can, the wansdyke with the Belgic Camp on Hampton Down, this would seem to fix the construction of that great earthwork anterior to the Roman occupation of Britain, and the irregular shape of the camp, and the lines of its enclosures, are clearly pre-historic. I must not, however, omit to mention that General Pitt-Rivers considers that the result of his excavations near Devizes, on the line of the dyke, has convinced him that it cannot have existed previous to the time of the Romans. The question, however, is by no means settled, and the name given to it by the Saxons is a remarkable one, and is suggestive of mythical antiquity.

Sir Richard Celt Hoare, a great observer of antiquities, says that where he has seen marks on a hillside, near a camp of irregular lines of mounds, the remains of ancient inclosures, he is satisfied that a British village once existed there. The lines of mounds on Hampton Down and Claverton Down are manifestly the foundation of walls, inclosing fields and dwellings; and it is equally clear that the camp was later in its origin than the mounds outside, some of which can be shewn to have been cut through transversely by the rampart and ditch of the camp. This is shewn on a map I have had made by a competent surveyor. I contend, therefore, that at Hampton and Claverton Downs are the remains of a great settlement in pre-historic times.

The camp itself, before the quarries had destroyed the east front, must have been eighty acres in extent, and was larger than the Roman city of Bath, and, as I have already observed, the settlement extended far beyond the camp.

The most important discovery I have made was by tracing the foundations and excavating the area of an ancient dwelling, which is surrounded by a wall three feet high and six feet in diameter; in extent eighty-nine feet by sixty. I have extracted from the floor of this dwelling broken pieces of ancient pottery, part of a quern, teeth of domestic animals, and stones brought from some distance, used apparently for polishing and various purposes.

The shape and dimensions of the inclosure nearly tallies with a British dwelling which I saw at Chyoster, near Penzance. There is, at that place, a considerable area (the remains of a village) covered with walls and *débris* of walls, which once contained a number of separate dwellings. One of these is nearly perfect: the walls about seven feet high, an outer wall all round, and a concentric wall on two sides. The dwelling itself is approached by a passage between the two walls, eighteen feet long.

The sides of the inclosure between the walls were divided into four distinct habitations. The first, fourteen feet by thirteen; the second, fifteen by seven-and-a-half; the third, twelve by nine; the fourth, opposite the entrance, twenty-five by twenty-one. Each of these dwellings was open to the court by a doorway, and was no doubt roofed with turf or thatch. I entered four other similar buildings, but all in a more or less dilapidated condition. The space within the walls was about the same as the one at Claverton. A high "agger" was all round the village, and there was a fortified camp on the hill above.

The camp at Hampton Down exactly corresponds with Cæsar's account of a British "oppidum" or town. He says "the Britons call a place with a tangled wood round it, and fortified by a rampart and ditch, a town." Such was the "oppidum" of Cassivellaunus, which was assailed by Cæsar, after passing the Thames at the Conway Stakes. "It was," he says, "very strong by nature and art, and the enemy held their ground for

some time, but at last yielded to the onset of the Romans, and abandoned the place. A considerable number of cattle was found in the place."

Strabo tells us that inside their fortified places they would build their huts and collect their cattle, but not with the view of remaining there long.

Hampton Camp was, however, a fortified camp of the Belgic frontier, and was probably held by a strong garrison and permanently occupied. Supposing then that this was also a settlement or town, it would be the city of Bath, said by Ptolemy to be one of the cities of the Belgæ.

And now comes a very interesting question: Who were the Belgæ? Dr. Guest, in his "*Origines Celticæ*," says they were a powerful and aggressive people, but from what quarter they intruded themselves into the seats where we find them settled, is a question difficult to answer. He says that they were certainly Celtic in their origin, but distinctly different from any other Celtic race with which history is acquainted.

The ultimate conclusion to be drawn from his argument, as it appears to me, is that they were a mixed race, having in their migrations inter-married with the tribes with whom they came in contact. Before the end of the third century B.C. they had overrun and peopled the districts where Cæsar locates them.

Cæsar himself says Gaul was parcelled out between three great tribes—Belgæ, Celtæ, Aquitani—and he places the Belgæ north of the Seine and Marne. But the south of France, from Lyons downward, which was called *Provincia* (now Provence), was, between the Rhone and Marseilles, peopled by a tribe named Volcæ or Belcæ, who Guest shows to have been of Belgic origin.

These Volcæ or Belcæ (the letters V and B are interchangeable) are shown to be identical with those of the North by the testimony of Jerome, who, having lived at Treves among the Northern Belgæ, said that he had found men of the same speech

at Ancyra, in Phrygia, and these were Volcæ; so that identity of speech proves identity of race.

Guest, in a long argument from etymology, concludes that the name *Belgæ* was rather a characteristic than an actual tribal name, and that it means "Herdmen."

If this be accepted, then in it we may see a good reason for their migrations. Herdsmen must have had, frequently, occasion to shift their quarters, where their flocks and herds had outgrown their pastures; and so we find *Belgæ* not only in Britain, but in Italy, Greece, and Asia Minor, and even on the steppes of the Danube.

It was with the intention of breaking the power of the *Belgæ* in Gaul that Cæsar attacked what he considered to be their central stronghold in Britain; and it does not appear that he encountered here any other race, though he does mention other tribal names.

But now to return to our camp and settlement. The rampart on all sides but the east, where the ground has been quarried, is perfect, and a road is clearly seen to traverse it from the south. This must have been the old line of the British road from Seaton to Lincoln, afterwards diverted by the Romans, so as to pass through Bath, and it was called the fosse road.

A very similar, though narrower, trackway can be traced in my field, "Bushy Norwood," leading towards the camp.

This field in question, rightly named "Bushy Norwood," is all that remains of the wild forest waste called Claverton Down, and may give some idea of the ancient borderland, crowned by the camp on Hampton Down.

Such is a brief account of such historical proofs as I have been able to collect of the origin and history of this ancient settlement of the Britons; and I think it well deserves further investigation, and to be included in the list of ancient historic monuments protected by Act of Parliament.

On the motion of Canon CHURCH, seconded by Mr. W. DAUBENY, a hearty vote of thanks was passed to the President for his address.

Mr. SKRINE reminded them that the Society was established twenty-four years before it visited Bath, and nineteen years had elapsed since it came here. That perhaps accounted for the lack of local interest.

After the meeting the members assembled at the Guildhall, where a splendid