

Castle Neroche :

ITS POSITION WITH RELATION TO NEIGHBOURING EARTHWORKS.

BY J. HOUGHTON SPENCER.

STANDING on the Beacon, 905 feet above sea level,¹ and looking north-west by west (nearly) at the Summer Solstice, the sun will be seen to set over Elworthy Barrows, 1,290 feet high, and if a straight line joining these two elevated points is drawn upon a map, of a sufficiently large scale, and continued, it will be found to cut the highest part of the North Hill, Minehead, 1,011 feet above the sea, near Bossington Beacon, above Porlock Bay, and the Ancient British work known as Bury Castle.

If the observer then turns and looks in the opposite direction, south-east by east (nearly), he would, if a few trees near Neroche Beacon were removed, see those prominent Dorsetshire points, Pillesdon Pén, 910 feet high, and Lewston Hill, which can now only be seen by going a few yards beyond the intervening trees, and if the line before referred to as running north-west by west were continued exactly in the opposite direction, viz., south-east by east, it would pass between these two heights touching Chilcombe Hill, 643 feet above the sea, lying beyond them between Shipton Beacon and Eggardon, and eventually reach Weymouth Bay.

This end of the line would indicate the point where the sun rises at the Winter Solstice. Thus a line defined by the rising sun at Mid-winter and the setting sun at Midsummer

1. The height of the Beacon, 905·2ft., is reckoned from the approximate mean water at Liverpool, which is the Ordnance datum, 1886 Survey. The other altitudes taken from older maps are believed to be reckoned from *Trinity High Water Mark*, which is 12·48ft. above that datum.

stretching from Weymouth Bay to Porlock Bay, passes through Castle Neroche, an almost central point on that line, and connects other distant hill-fortresses with it.

It may be noted that at a distance of about three-and-half miles from Castle Neroche, on the north-west by west line, lies the village of Corfe, but hidden from view by the intervening Pickeridge Hill, where exists a series of ancient cross pathways, about 600 feet long, known collectively as the "Monks' Walk," the two principal paths forming a St. Andrew's Cross. It can be demonstrated by means of maps that the line under consideration passes over the "Monks' Walk," and in precisely the same direction as one of the main arms of its cross points. In other words, the line developed from the centre line of one of these long pathways coincides with the line developed from Castle Neroche, and both, consequently, are connected with the same series of distant points on the line marked by the sun at the Summer and Winter Solstices. The suggestion, therefore, is that as the orientation of our ancient churches was probably determined by the sun, and, although varying considerably in direction from each other, yet, as the variations in the lines of their axes appear to lie within the extreme limits north and south of east as reached by the sun at the Summer and Winter Solstices respectively, so each denotes a particular day when the sun rises at that point upon the horizon to which the axis is directed. Similarly, with our earlier hill-fortresses, their positions and relation to each other in many cases may be seen to be connected with lines derived from the sun at important seasons of the year.

For a full description of the association of local ancient works, including Membury Camp, with the crosses of the "Monks' Walk," also their connection with the ancient natural harbours at the mouths of the rivers Wey, Axe, Otter, Exe, Teign, Parret, Brue, and Avon, reference may be made to "The Antiquary," No. 117, vol. xx, p. 94: ART.—*Ancient Trackways in England.*