

ON AN INSCRIBED STONE FOUND AT SEA MILLS IN 1873, ON
THE EAST SIDE OF THE RIVER AVON, TWO MILES BELOW
BRISTOL.

By the Rev. H. M. SCARTH, M.A.

WHOEVER has followed the line of Roman road from Bath (Aquæ Solis) to Bitton, and from thence in the direction of Bristol, till it becomes lost in the suburbs of that city, and cannot be traced, until its track is discerned again on Durdham Down, about a mile out of Clifton, and pointing directly for Sea Mills, a well-defined Roman station on the River Avon, will know that this is one of the great Roman roads leading from Britannia Prima into Wales, or Britannia Secunda, and connected the principality in Roman times with the first conquered portion of Britain, and with the cities of Calleva Atrebatum, Londinium, Durovernum, and the Port of Dubris or Dover.

This great line of Roman road reaching from Dover into South Wales, as far as St. David's, and crossing the Severn at Sudbrook Camp, not far from Chepstow, has been called the Via Julia, or Julia Strata, on the authority of Necham, Abbot of Cirencester (1215—25). This name is adopted by Camden, but by Sir R. C. Hoare, it is called Via Julia Maritima, to distinguish it from another Roman road, called Via Julia Montana, which led from Chester to the Menai Strait.

The XIV Iter of Antonine is carried along the Via Julia, Ab Isca Calleva, and is thus given :—

	M. P.
Venta Silurum	ix.
Abone	ix.
Trajectus	ix.
Aquis Solis	vi.
Verlucione	xv.
Cunetione	xx.
Spinis	xv.
Calleva	xv.

Or beginning at Caer-Went, the modern representative of ancient Isca Silurum, it terminated at Calleva, the modern

Silchester, made so well known by the recent excavations there under the care of the Rev. J. G. Joyce. This Iter has given rise to much controversy, it being found most difficult to fix the sites of the two stations, Abona and Trajectus. The other stations are ascertained, I believe, to certainty. It is not my purpose here to endeavour to solve the knotty point, whether Abona and Trajectus have been misplaced, as has been supposed. I can only refer to the point, and leave my hearers to consult Mr. Ormerod's *Strigulenta*, or Sayer's *Hist. of Bristol* (ch. ii.), where will be found a plan of Sea Mills, which is undoubtedly a Roman station, and where the present interesting inscribed stone has been found within the wall or vallum of the station. Perhaps I may be allowed also to refer to a paper on the course of this road in the proceedings of the Bath Field Club,¹ where the road has been traced and the position of the stations given. It is there stated that Sea Mills, being on the Avon, may claim as well as Bitton the name *Abona*, but it seems to have a better right than Bitton to that of *Trajectus*. It probably was a point from whence the passage across the Severn was often made into Wales, although the Roman road passed on from thence to the shores of the Severn, near Aust. Sea Mills presents a safe anchorage for vessels of a moderate size, such as were used in Roman times.

At the mouth of the river Trim remains of ancient docks have been found, and others have been formed in more recent times, which are now in ruins. Many Roman remains were discovered in making the line of railway which passes by this station, on the eastern bank of the Avon to the mouth of that river.

Within the ancient station at Sea Mills, and lying under the turf in the orchard of a house situated outside the vallum, was discovered the stone which it is now my purpose to consider. It was lying with the carved face upon the surface of the rock, a few inches beneath the turf, and, not being distinguishable from the rock, was broken into four pieces; when turned up it was found to contain the representation of a human head surrounded by a semi-circular line,² at the extremities of which are carved a cock

¹ Vol. i. 1869.

² This would probably represent a niche in which the bust, which was probably

intended for a likeness, was supposed to be placed.



Stone found at Sea Mills.

on the right hand and a dog on the left. The hair is brushed off the forehead, and may give the idea of rays of light. This is not well marked in the photograph. The stone having been recently joined together, the lime has filled the lines of the hair or rays. There are *ear-rings* in the ears. Immediately over this curved line within which was the bust of a figure, is a cross like that of St. Andrew, but with a stem between the two lower limbs, thus making it appear like a star of five points. I mention this particularly, as the drawing of the stone, which was sent to me through the kindness of Mr. Nicholls the keeper of the Bristol City Library, had only the St. Andrew's Cross, but no stem at the junction.³

Wishing to have a perfectly correct representation of this interesting discovery, I went over myself, and, in company with Mr. Nicholls, examined the stone, and made a sketch of it. Mr. Nicholls had previously called attention to the discovery by a paragraph in the "Bristol Times and Mirror," and afterwards by a further notice; he had also caused a rough cut to be executed, by way of obtaining some explanation. This cut was taken from the drawing first sent to me, but I found on personal examination that the cross had not been drawn by the artist with sufficient exactness. Much may depend upon the precise FORM of the cross, and I therefore examined it with great care.

Under the drawing of the bust, supported by the dog and cock, are the Latin word *SPES*, with a leaf stop on each side, and the name *C. SENTI*, below on a second line. One of the fractures of the stone passes through the letter *C*, which renders somewhat doubtful if it is a *C* or an *O*, but as there is a slight mark discernible just beyond the fracture, I regard it as a *C*. Below this the stone terminates, or has been cut off, and it is uncertain if a second portion may not have been joined on to it. It is exceedingly desirable that further careful examination should be made in the orchard, under fitting guidance.

Mr. Nicholls lost no time in placing the drawing which he had had made in the hands of a learned member of the Society of Antiquaries, who wrote in reply, as reported in the

³ In the engraving from a photograph given in the Journal of the Archæological Association for December, 1873, a representation is given of the Labarum, but I

can find no trace of the upper part of the stone itself, nor does it seem to have been effaced.

“Bristol Times and Mirror,”—“I feel no manner of doubt upon two points.

“i. That the image and inscription are both Mithraic.

“ii. That a more interesting monument to the antiquary has never turned up.”

Several Mithraic remains have been found in this island, but they differ in character from the late discovery. A very full account of the Mithraic sculpture or tablet, found at York, will be read in Mr. Wellbeloved's *Eburacum* (pp. 75, 79, &c.), where a drawing is given, and a learned exposition of Mithraic mysteries. Remains of Mithraic worship are also recorded in Dr. Bruce's “Roman Wall,” and drawings there given, as well as in the “Lapidarium.”

Mr. King observes that “Mithraic bas-reliefs cut on the faces of rocks, or on stone tablets, still abound in the countries formerly the western provinces of the Roman Empire ; many exist in Germany, still more in France, and in this island they have often been discovered on the line of the Picts Wall, and the noted one at Bath.”⁴ This latter word is a misprint for York, no Mithraic remains having yet been found in or around Bath. Of the many altars and inscriptions there discovered, none have the slightest indication of Mithraic worship. The Goddess Sul, or Sulminerva, there reigns supreme, except that two portions of an altar, found about four years ago, are dedicated to the *Genius Loci*. This was dug up within the circuit of the ancient walls, and on the site of one of the buildings attached to the present market. The altar is about 4 ft. high, the first line distinct: GENIO LOCI. The second can only be read conjecturally: NVMINA, probably followed by Augustorum ; but here the stone is irregularly broken into two parts, and the lettering of the two next lines hardly legible, but the last line has the five letters VSLLM quite clear.

I am disposed not only to doubt that the stone found at Sea Mills is Mithraic, but think that it is much more probably Early Christian, *i.e.*, Roman Christian.

In the first place, the stone is *funereal*, in size, shape, and form.

2nd. The *leaf stops* are those usually found in funereal inscriptions.

⁴ King's *Gnostics and their Remains*, p. 60.

3rd. The head has earrings in the ears, which lead to the supposition that it is *the head of a female*. I know of no instance of Mithras being thus represented.

4th. "Spes" may be a proper name like that of the Greek "Elpis." Gruter gives several examples, thus : p. 608, No. 6, Asinia Spes, and p. 1818, No. 11, Torania Spes. These epitaphs belong to a good period, but in the Lower Empire the name of "Spes" seems also to have been borne by men, for Augustine (Ep. 77, or 136, new order) mentions Bonifacius having a squabble with Spes, who, therefore, was probably some ecclesiastic.⁵ There was Spes, Bishop of Spoleto, c. A.D. 400, and the lettering on his tomb, c. A.D. 500, is said to resemble that on this stone. For the name of Spes see De Rossi, N. 502, Perret, xxxii. There are also several Latin forms of this name as *Spesina*, *Sperantia*.

The inscription may, therefore, be read "Spes, the wife, or daughter of Caius Sentius."

Again, the cross over the head is probably a Christian emblem. As such it is found in Christian funereal monuments, and the cock as well as the dog are essential Christian symbols. The cock is a Christian symbol, and as such has many meanings.

1. It is supposed to indicate the *resurrection*. Thus Prudentius—

"Hoc esse Signum præcii
Novunt promissæ Spei
Qua nos sopore liberi
Speramus adventum Dei."

The word "Spes" expresses often the idea of resurrection.

The form "In Spe" is frequently inscribed upon Christian marbles, and in particular upon the stamps of the bricks which close up *loculi* in the catacombs (Lupi. Dissert. ii. 261).

The cock was a sign of *hope*, a symbol of the resurrection.

The epitaph of Donatus found in the cemetery of Saint Agnes (Aringhi, ii. 614) bears the image of a cock associated with the formula "in pace." In the Farnèse Museum at Naples the sepulchral stone of Leopardus has the symbol of the *cock*. See also Fabretti, In sc. Ant. p. 741, n. 505. M. Perret (iv. pl. xvi. 29) gives a stone on which is engraved a *cock* perched on a bough, with the monogram of Christ above.

⁵ For these references I am indebted to Mr. King.

2. The cock is also the symbol of *vigilance*;—on this account from the earliest times the Christians adopted the custom of placing it in front of their churches to represent the vigilance of the pastor.

3. The cock is also found on monuments in conjunction with St. Peter (Aringhi, i. pp. 297, 319, 613, and ii. p. 399).

4. Two cocks are sometimes depicted. Thus upon a fragment of Mosaic, which was placed on the tomb of a martyr, a single cock is seen, but in an attitude which leads to the supposition that he is in the act of fighting with another. (Perret, vol. iv. p. 73.) This seems to have indicated the Christian combat.

5. The cock is also the emblem of *preachers*, according to St. Eucherius, who, during the shades of night, which overhang the present world, announce the dawn of a brighter day.

6. It is also used as an emblem of the *just*, because during the night of this present life, the just receive by faith the intelligence and the virtue which enables them to call upon God: "O send but Thy light and Thy truth that it may lead me and bring me to Thy holy hill" (Ps. xlii. 3). See Dict. des Antiq. Chrétiennes, par M. l'Abbe Martigny.

The *dog* is seen in company with the numerous representations of the Good Shepherd. Thus Fabretti, 549, xiv. Here the Good Shepherd holds his dog by a thong. In another instance he is seated, having his dog in front which looks up to his master (Perret, vol. v. p. xxxi.).⁶

We have then on this stone three distinct Christian emblems, and, as appears to me, much more distinctly Christian than Mithraic. Again, the face and decorations are feminine, the name feminine, and the form of the stone funereal, as well as the form of the inscription, and the stops. The recovery of the rest of the stone would probably settle the matter beyond a doubt; but if, as I have supposed, and as I am led to believe by conferring with others who have gone deeply into the study of Christian emblems,—that this stone is a Christian monument,—it is one of great interest, and as such deserving of careful record. How many more may yet be discovered remains to be seen, but how many have been ruthlessly and wantonly destroyed through ignorance, we cannot easily conjecture!

⁶ Mr. King, in a note, tells me, "I once copied in the Villa Borghese Gardens a late epitaph on a certain Aurelia Proba

which was decorated on either side with a tiger and a peacock."