

ART. XXXIII.—*Something about The Reycross on Stainmore.*

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Read at Reycross, July 8th, 1887.

ON a ridge of the Pennine Range, at an elevation of 1468 feet above the sea level, a short distance on the Yorkshire side of the present boundary line between that county and Westmorland, within an ancient camp of singular shape on the Roman road from Bowes to Brough, one of the roughest and most exposed situations in England, stand the remains of what has long been known as Reycross. Whatever its former design and appearance may have been we see nothing now but a roughly squared pillar, like a milestone of modern days, set in a square base, with no trace of carving or inscription on stem or socket. Mr. Hylton Longstaffe in his "Richmondshire," published in 1852, says that near the cross "is a weather worn slab, about four feet long, having traces of a human figure, apparently once inlaid with some precious metal. A conical aperture in the top perhaps contained a metal cross." Of these no vestige now remains.

Geoffrey of Monmouth, Matthew of Westminster, and Randal Higden, credit Reycross with a very early origin. They state that during the latter part of the first century (A.D. 75), in the time of the Emperor Vespasian, Roderic, King of the Picts, coming from Scythia (by which name these writers must have meant Scandinavia) with a great fleet, and arriving in the north of Britain called Albania, began to ravage the country. The native King Marius, after slaying Roderic in battle, set up this stone as a memorial of his victory, with the inscription *MARIUS VICTORIÆ*; and the country around was from that day called Westmorland. William of Malmesbury tells us that
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in his time there was a stone in the city of Luguballia or Carlisle inscribed *Marii Victoriæ*, and, as he had never heard of a British king so named, conjectures that the stone might have been brought hither by stray Cimbri when driven by Marius from Italy!

With Camden, Archbishop Ussher thinks this inscription was probably *MARTI VICTORI*. Gruter gives examples of such inscriptions in his “*Inscriptiones Antiquæ*”; and according to Gough, in his edition of Camden’s *Britannia* (iii., 245), an altar with this inscription :

MARTI VICTORI
COH. III. NERVIVORVM
PRÆFECT. I. CANINIUS

was in the south-west end of the well-house, at the west end of the station at Little Chesters. As Ritson (*Annals*, vol. i., p. 78), says, this “though now lost, may be fairly inferred to have been the identical altar mentioned by William of Malmesbury.”

Abp. Ussher in his “*Antiquities*” quotes an old writer who asserts the inscription on the stone alluded to by Geoffrey to have been

Here the king Westmer
Slow the king Rothynger.

If there were any truth in this statement we should have not merely a myth but a miracle—an inscription written in the English language four centuries before there were any English in Britain, and nearly 14 centuries before the English themselves wrote or spoke in that fashion.

In the Anglo Saxon Chronicle we find :

A.D. 584. This year Ceawlin and Cutha fought against the Britons at the place which is called Fethan-lea, and there was Cutha slain; and Ceawlin took many towns, and spoils innumerable, and wrathful he then returned to his own.

Fordun

Fordun in his *Scotochronicon* (lib. iii. cc 28-29), always anxious for the ancient military valour of his nation, contrives to mix up Aidan, King of Scots, in all the chief events of this early time. He makes Aidan appear as the ally of Maelgwn, King of Gwynedd, at this battle of Fethan-leag, and of Cadwallon at the battle of Wodensburgh, when Ceawlin was defeated. Dr. Guest, late master of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, in his paper on the "English Conquest of the Severn Valley," (*Origines Celticæ*, vol. ii., p. 285), goes on to say :

Unfortunately for the zealous Scotchman, Maelgwn died nearly forty years before the battle of Fethan-leag, and Cadwallon flourished in the seventh instead of the sixth century. *According to Fordun the battle of Fethan-leag was fought at Stanemore in Westmorland.* The motive which led him to fix on this locality is an obvious one. On Stanemore is the 'Rie Cross' which certain Scotch writers maintain to be the ancient and proper *limes* between Scotland and England. It was accordingly selected as a suitable place for a meeting between a Scottish king and the invading Southron.

In a foot note the learned doctor goes on to say :

Ussher, whose great demerit is the deference he occasionally shows to our historical romancers, after describing the incidents of the battle of Feathan-leag as he found them in the *Chronicles* and *Huntingdon*, quotes Fordun as his authority for fixing the locality at Stanemore. *Ant. c. 14.* Chalmers, whose great object is to bring his Scotsmen as far south as possible, tells us that 'coming to the aid of the Cumbrian Britons, Aidan defeated the Saxons at Fethan-lea, at Stanemore, in 584,' and he gives as his authority, not his countryman Fordun, but *Saxon Chron.*, p. 22., *Ussher's Princ.* pp. 870, 1147, which quotes the *English Chronicles*.

Dr. Guest then goes on to prove that the battle was fought at Faddiley, in Cheshire, and defends this conclusion against Mr. Wright and all others.

But had Dr. Guest referred himself to the *Scotochronicon* he would have found that Fordun makes no assertion
whatever

whatever as to the locality either of the battle of Fethan-leag or Wodensbury. After describing the latter he goes on to relate how S. Columba in Iona at the very time of the engagement suddenly called his minister and ordered him to ring the bell. At the sound the brethren hurried to the church. Then Columba said to them,

Now let us earnestly pray for King Aydanus and his people ; for this very hour they are going into battle.

After a short interval he walked out of the church, and looking up to heaven he said,

Now the barbarians are being put to flight ; and to Aydanus, unhappy though he otherwise be, yet God doth grant him victory.

Then without any reference to the battles Fordun continues :

Now, contemporaneously with S. Columba there flourished the most blessed Kentigern, Bishop of Glasgow, a man of wondrous sanctity, and a worker of many miracles. . . . The utmost boundary of his bishopric southwards was, at that time, as it ought by right to be now, at the royal cross below Stanemore.

Here you see Fordun is not referring to any battle whatever, but to the ancient boundaries of the see of Glasgow, which in the sixth century were coincident with those of the kingdom of Strathclyde, and which had been encroached upon by the foundation of the bishopric of Carlisle. Whence then arose the false assertion that Fordun located the battle of Fethan-leag at Stanemore? This question I think I have solved. Turning to Abp. Ussher's "*Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates*," (edition mdcclxxxvii. p. 296), we find the author, after quoting the Chroniclers' account of the battle of *Feahanlea*, goes on to say :

Ad annum dlxxxiv. cum Saxonibus Annalibus, Ethelwerdus et Florentius posterius hoc prælium referunt ; quod juxta *Moram lapideum* (*id est*

est Stanemore in Westmorlandæ et Richmondiensis Comitatus confiniis) Scottis Albiensibus Aidano et Britonibus Malgone imperante commissum fuisse confirmat Johannes Fordonus in Scotichronico.

Here then we have the "origo mali." Abp. Ussher hastily misreads a passage in the Scotochronicon (we must remember in excuse that he was writing history from an ecclesiastical rather than from a civil or military point of view) and is copied and quoted by Chalmers; and both draw down on themselves the wrath of the Master of Caius, who did not himself take the trouble to see whether poor John Fordun had really made any such assertion. Had he done so he might have saved himself the labour of confuting what Fordun had never said.

But though neither the victory of King Marius nor the battles of Fethan-leag and Wodensburgh, may have been fought here, yet I think, with the late Father Haigh in his Anglo-Saxon Sagas (ch. 6), that there is a solid foundation for the ancient tradition of the people hereabouts as to a great conflict on this spot. When the C. and W. A. and A. S. visited this place on August 18, 1880, I spoke on this subject and shall now repeat what I then said :

Authentic history tells us nothing about this encounter, which seems to have taken place during the interval of time between the Roman abdication and the English conquest of this district, about which we have very slight record. So far as my knowledge extends the only account of this battle of Stainmoor is found in the story of 'Horn Childe and Maiden Rimmild,' printed by Ritson, in the third volume of his 'Metrical Romances,' from the Auchinleck MSS. in the library of the Faculty of Advocates, Edinburgh. Though the poem is of the 14th century, yet we may conclude that it embodies a much older story, for Celtic names are given to the Britons and Irish, and English names to the Angles. I may also be allowed to observe, by the way, that as this ridge of Stainmoor was the water-shed between the eastern and western seas, so, at this time, it was the great boundary between the Christian Britons on the west, and the heathen Angles on the east. The story is briefly this :—About the middle of the 5th century

century an Angle prince named Hatheolf, had established himself in North Yorkshire. After repelling, at Alerton Moor, a Danish incursion, Hatheolf held a feast at Pickering; and there, on Whit-Sunday, news was brought to him that three kings, Ferwell, Winwald, and Malkan, had landed from Ireland and ravaged Westmorland. The names Ferwell and Malkan, you will observe, are Celtic. Winwald was apparently an Angle in league with the Irish. Hatheolf immediately marched to meet the invaders, and a great battle took place on Stainmoor, in which Ferwell and Winwald perished with six thousand men of both armies; and Hatheolf, after slaying five thousand men with his own hand, was beaten down with stones by the Irish, and stabbed by King Malkan. Malkan himself returned to Ireland with but thirteen of his men surviving, and was afterwards slain at the battle of Yolkil by Horn the son of Hatheolf. Besides the local tradition it is possible that we have another piece of evidence as to the Irish invasion, in the name of Melkinthorpe, a township in Lowther parish, about $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles south-east of Penrith. The Irish king may have made Melkinthorpe his halting-place on his way to and from Stainmoor, and the memorial of the event have been thus embodied in the place-name.

Through these obscure mists which, like the thick fogs which so often enshroud the place itself, veil the history of this spot, we seem at length to discern what may be a gleam of light. Raphael Holinsbed, one of the very latest of our English chroniclers, whose great work appeared first in 1577, accounts for the existence of Key-cross in this way. He says that William the Conqueror and Malcolm King of Scots met near here in arms and entered on a treaty of peace, the conditions of which were :

That Malcolme should enjoy that part of Northumberland which lies between Tweed, Cumberland, and Stainmore, and doo homage to the King of England for the same. In the midst of Stainmore there shall be a cross set up, with the Kinge of England's image on the one side, and the Kinge of Scotland's on the other, to signify that one is to march to England, and the other to Scotland. This was called the Roi-cross; that is the Cross of the Kings.

Now this story is not found, as far as I know, in any old English Chronicle, but in that of Hector Boece, who
published

published his "Scotorum Historiæ" about half-a-century before Holingshed's Chronicle. The early English Chronicles with one voice declare that this meeting took place within Scotland, which then meant the country north of the Forth. Florence of Worcester, Ingulf, Gaimar (who calls the place Alberni), the trustworthy Simeon of Durham, the Melrose Chronicler, and Peter Langtoft, all state that William the Conqueror and Malcolm met at "Abernethy," in the county and 7 miles S.E. of Perth—a most likely place, as it had been formerly the capital of the Picts; and to this day is most interesting on account of its famous round tower and other extensive remains. Wyntown, the Scottish Chronicler, writing a century before Boece, declares distinctly :

A thowsand twa and seventy yhere
 Wyllame Bastard wyth hys powere
 In Scotland come, and wastyd syne,
 And rade al throwcht till Abbyrnethyne.

We have therefore, I fear, to abandon this long-credited story of the meeting between the Conqueror and Malcolm at this place. The feeling which prompted Boece to place the interview here was probably the same which induced a later Scottish historian to move the district of Lothian to the neighbourhood of Leeds!

It is by no means impossible that two kings did in by-gone days meet on Stainmoor; but who they were, and when they met, we have no available evidence now to show.

The earliest authentic record, I believe, we have of the Reycross is in the Chronicle of Lanercost under the year 1258, when John de Cheham, an Englishman, who had succeeded William de Bondyngton as Bishop of Glasgow,

obtendebat jus antiquum in partes Westmorlandiæ in præjudicium Karliolensis ecclesiæ, dicens usque ad Rer Cros in Staynmor ad diœcesem suam pertinere,

and

and started on a journey to Rome to prefer his claim to the Pope, but died on the way.

Camden adopts Holinshed and Boece's story, and also connects the Cross with the Brandreth Stone near Tebay, considering both as mere-stones marking the boundary between England and Scotland. Describing the Westmorland course of the Lune, he or Bishop Gibson, his editor, says :

It runs down a field call'd Gallaber, where stands a red stone (Brandreth Stone, *margin*), about an ell high, with two crosses cut deep on one side. The tradition among the inhabitants is that formerly it was the Mere-stone between the English and Scots. How true it may be I dare not affirm, but shall only observe that it is about the same distance from Scotland that Rerecross upon Stanemore is, and to what end that was erected hath been already observed. (Gibson's Camden, Vol. ii., p. 987).

The remains of another ancient cross called Hollow Mill Cross, stand just within the Yorkshire boundary on the road from Kirkby Stephen by Nateby to Birkdale. This may well be connected with Reycross and the Brandreth stone as a mere-stone.

The natives of Stainmore have a tradition that once upon a time a very stately royal funeral, that of a queen, rested at Reycross. This, I believe, to be a reminiscence of the funeral of Edward I. He died at Burgh-by-Sands, July 7th, 1307; and his body was removed from thence to Carlisle, where it was prepared for transfer to Westminster. Then, the Lanercost Chronicle tells us that after receiving the homage of the English leaders there assembled, the new king, with Antony Beck, Bishop of Durham, who had just been created by the Pope Patriarch of Jerusalem, the English chieftains and a great crowd of seculars and regulars, accompanied the royal corpse some way on its journey southwards, large alms in money and wax being bestowed on the churches by which the procession passed, and

and especially where it rested at night. That it must have travelled over Stainmore we know from a letter, first published by Sir Harris Nicolas in his *Chronology of History*, written by one of his retainers to Hugh, Baron Neville, which informs us that the cortege was at Richmond, on the Saturday next before "la goule Daust" (i.e., August 1st). I think we may safely conclude that in the popular mind a confusion has arisen between the funeral of the king and that of his loved first consort Queen Eleanor.

General Roy, in his magnificent work on *Military Antiquities*, gives a plan of the camp and marks distinctly the position of the Cross, and writes :

Reycross stands within the camp, by the edge of the road, and seems to have been a Roman milestone, having a fine square tumulus fronting it, on the opposite side of the way ;

and on pages 109 and 110 the General repeats the idea, and gives other instances. Dr. Guest, one of England's most learned antiquaries, in his *Origines Celticæ* (Vol. ii., p. 107), adopts the same notion, and also gives an interesting list of other examples. With such authorities to support us we may, I think, come to this conclusion that the Cross was originally a milestone on the great Roman road to the North ; and that after the Romans quitted the country it served (in consequence of its position on the natural boundary) in after times as the military and political boundary between the two kingdoms, as the Solway Firth does now.

When we stand to-day on this storm-bleached height, contemplating this venerable fragment of the Sign of our Redemption, with nothing to disturb us but the whistle of the wind, the shrill shriek of the curlew, and the timid bleat of the mountain sheep, our minds naturally revert to the very different scenes this place has witnessed—the march of Roman legions, the bitter internecine contests
of

of savage tribal wars, the proud mail-clad array of mediæval armies waging wars of mutual reprisal ; and when coming down to later times we think of the midnight forays of the moss-troopers, and the time of which Sir Walter Scott sings when

. . . the best of our nobles his bonnet will veil,
Who at Rere Cross on Stanmore meets Allen-a-dale.

how grateful we must feel that now our fatherland is but one nation,

The land that freemen till,
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A land of settled government,
A land of just and old renown,
Where Freedom slowly broadens down
From precedent to precedent.

APPENDIX.

Speed in his "Historie of Great Britaine," A.D. 1623, p. 442 tells the same story as Camden, Holinshed, and Boece. As the members of our Society may like to see his account, I here give it in full.

"But Malcolme wisely considering the event of warre, and that ye occasion thereof was not for owne subjects, but for a sort of forraine fugitives, beganne to thinke, that the wrongs therein done to another

hee could hardly brooke himself and sent therefore to
Henry Hunt. William proffers of peace ; whereunto lastly the Eng-
Gemeticensis. lish King inclined, and hostages delivered upon further

Conferences, what time (as I take it) upon Stane-more, not far from
an homely hostilrie called the Spittle, a Stone Crosse (on the one side

of whose shaft stood the picture, and armes of the
Hector Boetius King of England, and on the other the Image and
armes of the King and Kingdome of Scotland, upon that occasion

called the Roi-crosse) was erected to shew the Limits
that is Kings of either Kingdome ; some ruines of which meere-
Crosse. marke are yet appearing : for King William granting

Cumberland unto Malcolme to hold the same from him, conditionally
that the Scots should not attempt anything prejudiciall to the Crowne
of England (for which King Malcolme did him homage, saith Hector
Boetius the Scottish writer) and the English being reconciled to his
fauour, after he had built the Castle of Durham, returned cleared
from all Northern troubles."