"A Military Study of the Conquest of Britain by the English."

An Abbreviated Report of a Lecture Delivered by MAJOR GODSAL Before the Berks Archæological Society.

MAJOR GODSAL expressed himself pleased at having been invited to deliver his first lecture on "A Military Study of the Conquest of Britain by the English" at Reading, since if the Military theory was correct the founding of the settlement of the Readingas was the consummation of the first stage of the Conquest.

And he was eminently in order in addressing Reading Archæologists as he claimed that the Military theory explained how Silchester was taken, and the existence of the great Grims Dyke from Henley to Wallingford, and of Englefield (the *Campus Anglomen* of an early historian) and of Aescesdun (or Aesc's Hill) close by.

After some remarks intended to draw the attention of the audience to the importance, and terrible completeness of the Conquest of Britain by the English as compared with the Conquests by the Goths, Vandals, Lombards and Franks, and after pointing out that it was the masterly success of the Angles that established those free institutions and that system of constitutional government that are still regenerating the political world, the Lecturer proceeded with his subject.

He began by explaining that he used the name English for the invaders of Britain because they used that name themselves, and Saxons and Jutes all agreed in calling their new home Anglaland and themselves Englishmen. The use of that conventional name, Anglo Saxons, would beg the question, since it must be admitted that Military principles could hardly have had the influence that he claimed for them unless the invasion was conducted by a united nation and under the direction of one leader.

The lecturer claimed the historian, Tacitus, as a witness to the fact that even in his time there was a great and united Nation holding the hegemony of the Baltic, and under the strictest form of Monarchical government.

Of this great nation Tacitus evidently had only a vague knowledge, and he cautiously speaks of it as the "Communities of the Suiones" without venturing to specify them, as he does in the

case of the Communities of the Lygii and others nearer to the Roman Empire. The lecturer contended that this nation was none other than the Angles under the rule of the Scyldings, ancestors of Woden. As Englishmen at this day call themselves Britons, because they live in Britain, so then they were called by the name, Latinised by Tacitus into Suiones, because they lived in Sweden, as well as in the islands of the Baltic. At any rate the lecturer argued that a nation with a Monarchy that had "no precarious conditions of allegiance, and that had a fleet and great possessions," were not a nation that would disappear when the great moving of the nations began; on the contrary, it was more likely that other tribes and nations would seek their help and guidance. Where then was this great and highly organised nation (then in the Baltic) at the present time, if indeed they did not indeed become the invaders and conquerors of Britain?

The Lecturer then explained his theory of place-names. He claimed that by means of studying the various types of place-name on the spot, and explaining their distribution by the light of Military principles, that he had been enabled to decipher what the late Professor Maitland had called the great palimpsest of the Map of England. After the writings of later ages have been erased, we come to the bold characters in which our illiterate forefathers wrote their history on the face of the country.

The united character and organization of the first stage of the invasion has been concealed by the fact that it was gradually broken up and squandered by territorial settlement, and when we first find the descendants of the invaders it is as peaceful settlers scattered over the country, and we cannot bring ourselves to believe the historian Bede, when he tells us that one great man had the leadership of all, and that, therefore, they must have been united.

The most important of these bold characters appear in place-names as tuns or tons, burhs, steads, stokes, hams and wicks, and their combinations, ham tons, ham steads, wick hams and stock tons.

The tun was undoubtedly some form of enclosure, and the lawyers in later times in drafting the charters seem to have used it as an agricultural enclosure. And in Scotland they still speak of a farm as a tun. Also in an early version of the Scriptures we find "ich bohte eine tune" for "I have bought a piece of ground."

But the Lecturer asked the audience whether place-names that had been burned into the memories of the people by the fires of war were likely to have been enclosures for keeping out cattle and

swine, or enclosures for keeping out armed men? On the whole it seems probable that the typical tun of the Conquest was a small enclosure surrounded by a moat. At any rate, tuns are almost always found on low ground, or if on higher ground, then always where there is enough water to fill a ditch.

But the actual form of a tun is a secondary consideration, the primary and undoubted fact about the tun was that it connoted the simplest form of organization of the Angles, and every tun had, at its inception, a garrison called a tun scipe and a leader called a tun-gerefa. As the tide of war rolled away we may be sure that each tun quickly lost its organization for defence, and its garrison were rewarded by gaining the land they had guarded, and soon lapsed into a mere agricultural community.

The second feature of the tuns, that is of primary significance is their distribution, and we always find tuns in districts, that at the time of the foundation of the tuns, must have been threatened by the enemy, and in positions that it was important to defend.

The lecturer pointed out, that with exception of a few tuns along the river, East Berkshire was a tun-less district, and the same remark may be made of South Bucks. Whilst the valley of the Loddon, with the exception of Hinton near Haines Hill, was without tuns, and for eight miles up the Kennet there were none, thence from Aldermaston onwards there were several tuns, and the valley of the Thame and vale of Aylesbury were full of them.

Any theory of the Conquest that did not explain this remarkable distribution of the tuns, must be a worthless one.

The burhs were also organized settlements, and the place of the tun-gerefa and tunscipe was taken by a chieftain and his followers. Burhs therefore shared the Military character of the tuns, but they are not so significant as they are less numerous, and besides, the strongholds of the enemy were also called burhs in many instances.

Then there are the steads. Steads are always, almost without exception, to be found on high ground.

Hampstead is a typical stead, and there is a remarkable line of Steads in the Surrey Hills. Berkhamsted, now a town in a valley, may seem to be an exception, but the original name-giving place was undoubtedly Berkhamsted Place, on the top of a high hill.

The most instructive name of all, and the one that helps us most in tracing the actual course of the Conquest, is the Stoke.

The singular characteristic of the Stokes is their singularity. No two stokes are found together, in fact seldom within ten miles of

one another. This statement is not traversed by the fact that we find a North Stoke and a South Stoke near together near Moulsford, and again near Arundel. There was doubtless, at first only one Stoke, and a village near it being called, say, North Stoke, the other got called South Stoke to distinguish it.

Each Stoke was at first simply "the Stoke" of its district, and it is only later ages that have for convenience distinguished them by such additional names as Bishopstoke, and Basingstoke, Stoke d.'Abernon, &c.

It is quite evident from their positions, and their singularity that the stokes were stockaded camps where supplies, and arms and munitions of war were collected for a campaign, for the purposes of permanently seizing and occupying a fresh bit of country, a campaign in fact that was something more than a mere marauding expedition. Thus in Bishopstoke and Itchen Stoke we see the invaders converging upon Winchester, in Basingstoke we see Cerdic preparing to take Silchester, whilst supplies from the north were cut off by the Thames valley force encamped at Englefield.

The Hams were merely homes, in which old men, women and children, and mere artizans settled, and hams were never placed in positions that were exposed to attacks by the enemy.

As we get up country it is of course difficult to disintangle the various stages of the invasion, and we find hams of a later stage in positions that in an earlier stage would have been exposed to the enemy, and it is only round London that we find the principles laid down in their greatest purity.

The lecturer explained that the current version of the history of this great Conquest is merely a patchwork of traditions, and snatches of old war songs, and some few chronicles, preserved in the casual remarks of ecclesiastics who did not write until long after the events, and did not care to record the great deeds of heathens. The orthodox version of the Conquest may be summarized by the statement, that historians, following one another like sheep through a gap, agree in telling us that Britain was conquered by a fortuitous concourse of patriarchally conducted family parties.

The fact that historians have to admit that at certain junctures there must have been a certain amount of cohesion and unity of action amongst the invaders does not affect the general fairness of the above summary.

No soldier will allow that a Conquest that was accompanied by Colonization could have been conducted on such terms. Surely it

is time, in justice to both the invaders and defenders of Britain, to consider whether they were not capable of something higher in their methods of warfare ?

The lecturer also pointed out that the Grims dykes throughout Britain mark the various stages of the Conquest.

Beginning with the dykes in Norfolk, we next find the Grims Dyke near Bushey, the War dyke near Chichester, the fifteen miles of Grims ditches in the Chiltern Hills, the great dyke from Henley to Wallingford, Bockerley Dyke with a Grims dyke opposite to it near Salisbury. The great Wans dyke or Wodens dyke. Dykes in the Midlands, ending with Offa's dyke and Watts dyke on the border of Wales. These dykes were in a sense treaties written by illiterate nations on the face of the country, and could only have been instituted by a conquering race that wished to settle for a time peaceably in the neighbourhood of a defeated enemy. For the time being they each created a "modus vivendi" very much in favour of the conquerors, who absolutely declined to have any dealings with the conquered.

The lecturer then gave the story of the Conquest as explained by Military principles, premising that it would be quite impossible in a short lecture to give reasons for all his statements, but his hearers must credit him, whilst giving the synthesis, with not having neglected the analysis of his investigations.

The lecturer thought that the invaders probably first tried their prentice hands at permanent conquest in East Anglia, and there realizing the difficulties of conquering and colonizing at the same time, they made great preparations for continuous warfare before landing in Thanet in 449.

He then traced the course of the preliminary campaigns in North Kent from the landing at Thanet in 449 to the battle of Crayford in 457, when the Britons fled with great fear to Londonbury. Henceforward the muse of history has drawn the curtain of oblivion across the scene. It is however only reasonable, when we see men, through long years of warfare, working in one direction, namely towards London, to assume that when we lose sight of them they continued what they were doing when we last saw them. The army that was victorious at Crayford must have been supported by a fleet in the river, and with the chief port in Britain, the commercial and strategic centre of the country at their mercy, it is inconceivable that invaders, who never failed to attack and destroy other walled towns, did not take this opportunity for seizing London.

London was a dual city with the ancient Londonbury on the South bank and joined by a bridge, probably of wood, to the Roman fortress of Augusta surrounded by a Roman town on the North bank.

As the fleet floated up with the tide and attacked the bridge, the army attacked Londonbury and drew the defenders to that quarter. But the sailors of the fleet of the invaders must have known all about London, through having visited it as traders in years gone by, and their chief object must have been to storm the Roman fortress, and then the rest would be at their mercy. It is a curious fact that the only salient of that fortress that was exposed to their attack retains the name of the Billinga's Geat.

If a storming party in ships specially prepared and provided with scaling ladders made a determined assault at Billingsgate, whilst the defenders were engaged elsewhere, we can understand how it has come about that no memory of the taking of London had remained to later ages, since no Briton survived to tell the awful tale of slaughter that then ensued.

The lecturer, however, pointed out that the evidence in favour of the military theory of the Conquest is cumulative, and that he did not build the theory on any one item of evidence, and Billingsgate was merely one of hundreds of place names that seem to explain, whilst they are themselves explained by the military theory.

At this point the lecturer brought two great characters on the scene. The Military theory demands that there must have been a great leader, to whom all the invaders rendered willing obedience. It is quite in keeping with what we know of the Teutonic nations, that the invaders, from the King downwards should chose a leader who was not the King, and not even of the royal race of Woden. We know from Bede that Aella had the leadership of all the invaders, later on he was known as King of the South Saxons, and later still he was given the glorious title of Bretwalda, a title that was claimed as the highest honour they could assume, by the greatest of the kings of the Heptarchy down to Egbert. The qualification for the title seems to have been that a king should, like Aella, have been a conqueror of the Britons.

It is evident that Aella could never have induced the South Saxons to proceed down channel to attack Regnum (Chichester) unless he had had some previous records of a victorious career to commend his leadership to them, and that being the case the Thames valley is the only arena in which he could have displayed

his abilities, and so we may be sure that it was at about this time that Aella was made heretoga.

The lecturer therefore assumed that after London had been taken Aella, who had probably directed the assault, after making the necessary dispositions of his forces, left Hengist in command and returned at once to the Continental base, which must have been Altona or Hamburg, to bring reinforcements, and above all settlers to till the deserted fields. The other great character was Ambrosius Aurelianus, who now assumed command of the Britons.

The lecturer then pointed out the remarkable distribution of place names round London, there being only tuns and burhs in North London, where the settlements being exposed to attack, had to be organised for defence. In South London on the other hand, we find a remarkable group of hams, from Eltham to Clapham, etc. These hams are protected by a line of tuns, Kingston, Surbiton, Thames Ditton, Long Ditton, Chessington, Horton, Cuddington (Nonsuch), Sutton, Carshalton, Wallington, Beddington, Addington, Keston, Farnborough, Crofton, Orpington, Kevington, and beyond these, on the Surrey hills is an equally remarkable line of steads.

The place of assembly for the settlements of North London was Oswulf's stone (near where the Marble Arch stands), and the same for South London was Brix stone, and Ossulston and Brixton are still the hundreds of Middlesex and Surrey that contain North and South London. The hundreds are evidently vestiges of the Conquest and could have been defined so permanently at no other time.

It is impossible without a map, and in a reasonable space to follow the lecturer through the wonderful story of the Thames Valley campaign, and the campaigns of Sussex and Hampshire, and of the Chiltern Hills, but the way in which every place-name, camp, and grims-dyke fitted into its place in a rational scheme of conquest was marvellous and most fascinating.

The real difficulties of the invaders did not begin until after they had taken London and had given hostages to fortune by founding settlements, which, if only the Britons could have won one great victory, must have been all swept away. Ambrosius tried to draw the invaders up country to the neighbourhood of his fortress towns, and away from their base. Aella well knew that, holding as he did the strategic centre of the country, Ambrosius must attack him, if only Aella could induce his triumphant warriors to wait. Ambrosius' first attempt seems to have been on the river Lea but he was defeated, and it was not until the year 473 that he drew all his

forces from the South and North to the Thames Valley for one final effort to sweep the invaders into the sea.

We have only to study the Military positions in the Thames Valley to find out where the great battle that finally decided the fate of Britain was fought, and "the Welsh fled from the Angles as from fire" as the Chronicle says. But we must leave the rest of the story, as it would not be fair to the lecturer to try and epitomise a lecture that was itself a mere epitome of great events. We can only say that the taking of Silchester and the founding of Reading were fully explained, as well as the campaigns of Cerdic in Wessex.

Even if we admit for the sake of the argument that such a bold investigator, who cannot possibly have had the time or means to verify every item of evidence, may have made some mistakes, there yet must remain a superabundance of evidence to give reasonable probability to the lecturer's conclusions, and it is quite evident that the Military theory of the Conquest cannot be ignored, and those who advocate the "family party theory" of the Conquest are bound to produce a better account of the Conquest or stand aside.

The end of the lecturer's story was of overwhelming interest, as he shewed reasons for believing that Aella, having accomplished his work, and having become too old for active service in the field, resigned the heretogaship to Cerdic; and having called together a great meeting at Runemede he was there proclaimed Bretwalda.

Whilst Cerdic was prosecuting the Conquest in the West with the assistance of the West Saxons, who joined him in the year 514, Aella in his old age retired to a spot whence he could still watch the armed and dyke guarded frontier that he had established on the Chilterns. Then probably in the year 518, since in that year Cerdic assumed the Kingship of Wessex, came the death of Aella, and he was buried in a spot that overlooked the scene of his final victories, and the dene of his brave but unfortunate opponent Ambrosius Aurelianus.

Of one thing we may feel quite certain, and it is that the noble barrow at Taplow once contained the bones of the conqueror of the Thames Valley, having regard to its contents and splendid position it can hardly be otherwise.

Those who have it fixed in their minds that Aella was never anything more than a mere Kinglet of a few Saxon clans on the south coast, may have a difficulty in believing that Aella, though he did at one time have the leadership of the invaders, was the conqueror of the Thames Valley. If he was, then he was buried at Taplow.

If it was Aella that was buried at Taplow, then the magnificence of the interment is accounted for, and the remains of splendid arms and gold embroidered raiment that were found there must have been royal gifts worn by Aella when he was proclaimed Bretwalda at Runemede.

But it would be unfair to the lecturer to have it supposed that we have been able here to explain the full significance of that splendid tomb.

In conclusion, the Lecturer did not leave the subject here, but gave full proof that he did not shirk any difficulty. He pointed out that assuming his story to be true, the question would naturally arise as to how these great events came to be forgotten.

We can only state very briefly that he attributes the oblivion of the great events of the English Conquest mainly to William the Conqueror and the Normans, jealous of a Conquest greater than their own. With the demand for a false history came the supply, and Geoffery of Monmouth was the cuckoo historian that laid the egg of falsehood in the English nest.

The Lecturer added that to try and deduce history from legends was as foolish an operation as spinning ropes from sand. Yet legends had a value in two ways. First of all they exposed the state of mind of those who composed them and of those who accepted them. And, secondly, it was decidedly a confirmation of a true version of history if it helped to explain legends. On such grounds he claimed that the truth of the Military theory of the Conquest of Britain by the English was confirmed by the fact that it offered a full explanation of the origin of the legends of King Arthur and his Knights and round table, and of St. George and the Dragon. Legends are but the result of fancy revelling in facts, distorted to suit the prejudices of the dreamer and of the public for which he catered. They were as often written to conceal as to reveal.

The curtain of oblivion thus spun with a warp of fiction and a woof of facts is roughly torn aside when the true version of history, from whence the few facts embedded in legends have been culled, is discovered.

We must admit that, as the Lecturer contended, the Military study of the Conquest of Britain by the English is far too great a one to be dealt with in a single lecture, and that it would be unfair to judge it without a much fuller explanation, but in the short time at his disposal the Lecturer certainly made out a case for it that proves it worthy of the serious consideration of historians.

Small have continuous plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others books.