THE DESTRUCTION OF CAMULODUNUM BY BOADICEA.

By HENRY LAVER, F.S.A.[1]

I have chosen this subject for my paper although I have no doubt that most people are familiar with the narrative of that frightful act of vengeance recorded by Tacitus and those other historians who have copied him more or less correctly. The reasons which have induced me to again describe this revolt are that I wish to try to show that the accounts given by the late Rev. Henry Jenkins, which he was unfortunately allowed to publish in *Archaeologia*,[2] was not serious history at all, but simply a distortion of facts to suit his fanciful theories. That there is necessity for some warning that Mr. Jenkins' account is of no value and incorrect, is seen in the record by the Rev. Prebendary Scarth in the *Archaeological Journal*[3] of the meeting of this Institute in Colchester in 1876. In this report it is apparent that he was misled by Mr. Jenkins' map and description in the paper I have previously referred to of the position of Camulodunum at Lexden. In this map are marked the intrenchments which surround an area in which the British city was situate in Mr. Jenkins' opinion.

Had Mr. Scarth examined this area carefully he would have convinced himself that it could not have been the site of the British city, as in all the intrenchments the fosse is on the western side. And therefore one trench or ditch must have been inside the camp or city. Anyone who will take the trouble to refer to Mr. Jenkins' paper in *Archaeologia*, although it is hardly worth while, will find on the map the lines of intrenchments laid down on three sides, but there is no mark indicating a rampart towards the north. On the eastern side, that towards Colchester, the intrenchments are so irregularly formed that the most cursory examination will disclose

[1] Read at the Colchester Meeting of the Institute, 30th July, 1907.

[2] xxix, 256.

[3] xxxiii, 325.

the fact that they never could have been erected to protect a British city on this site. Mr. Jenkins, when necessary to support his theory, ignored completely portions of the intrenchments, as for instance that on the west, where he left out the portion from near the Stanway Union House to the river Colne at Newbridge. He also left out the continuance of that parallel to the straight road which extends nearly to Bottle End, and the result is that the map, like the rest of the paper, is of no value at all, but instead most misleading and mischievous.

Anyone without preconceived theories endeavouring to determine the site of British Camulodunum—for it is I suppose taken for granted that Colchester is Camulodunum—will find three intrenchments, from north to south across what was formerly Lexden Heath, the first beginning at the Colne at Newbridge and ending at the Roman river near Stanway Hall, and known for ages as Grymes Dyke or the outer ditch of Wyldenhey. Inside this at a short distance, close beside the straight road and to the eastward of the first, is a second dyke easily traced from one river nearly to the other. This dyke has no name, and then inside this again is another, and all of them have the ditch on the western side. There are other intrenchments in this area, but from their imperfect condition their object is not clear. From the position of these three main dykes it is, I think, plainly evident, as I have mentioned before, that the large triangular area inclosed by the Roman river on the south, the river Colne on the east and north, and these three dykes on the west, was the site of British Camulodunum, an area capable of affording protection to a large population, with their cattle for their support, as was customary in any of the principal cities of the Ancient Britons. When the Romans under Aulus Plautius invaded Britain in A.D. 43 they came with an army, including those joining later under Claudius, of over 80,000 men, and their objective was Camulodunum, a large and important centre; and therefore the little area previously referred to could hardly have sufficed, but the larger triangular space would answer the purpose admirably. Had the smaller space been the original city it would

have been easy for the Romans to have fortified it, and we should not read in Tacitus that there was neither wall or rampart around Camulodunum when Boadicea attacked it. Several papers by the Rev. Henry Jenkins are of the same Stukeley-like character, theories first and then facts made to fit them. I should not have referred to these papers but for the grave mistakes which, in my opinion, they contain, and but for the false authority given them by their position in *Archaeologia*.

It is evident that the Rev. Prebendary Scarth used the paper in *Archaeologia* when preparing his report of the Colchester meeting, and here again an air of authority is given by its position in the *Journal*. Naturally those members of the Society attending this meeting will have referred to the report in the *Journal* to enable them to get some information as to what occurred at the last Colchester meeting, and it is my desire to prevent these errors being accepted as facts.

I propose to briefly examine the causes which led to the revolts of the British under Boadicea and its results, using local knowledge to illustrate the events as recorded in the third volume of the *Annals of Tacitus*, and for this purpose I shall use the well known translation by Murphy published in 1805.

Tacitus tells us that Suetonius, the Roman governor and general, had undertaken an expedition against the Druid stronghold in the island of Mona, having with him the greater part of the Roman garrisons of the south-eastern portion of Britain, and that while he was employed in making his arrangements to secure the island, after his victory over the enemy, he received intelligence that Britain had revolted and that the whole province was in arms.

The historian then breaks off in his narrative to describe the causes which led to this revolt. He states that Prasutagus, the late King of the Iceni, in the course of a long reign had amassed considerable wealth. By his will he left the whole to his two daughters and to the Emperor in equal shares ; the King died in A.D. 61, and it was this unfortunate will that caused all the troubles which afflicted the Roman colonists and led to the destruction of so many lives. The statement that Prasutagus

in the course of a long reign had amassed considerable wealth may fairly lead us to assume that this wealth consisted of the precious metals, and not that form of wealth, cattle and such like, which constitute the riches of a Kaffir chief for instance at the present day; and the historian in speaking of a long reign could hardly have meant the seventeen years since the Romans had conquered some large part of Britain. This idea of the wealth being in gold and silver is not necessarily contradicted by the fact that we do not find any coins inscribed with this prince's name, because his coinage might have been uninscribed, and possibly the numerous uninscribed Icenian coins discovered were minted by this king. I have dwelt on this will because I think it has an important bearing on the question whether there is any evidence that money was in circulation in Britain before A.D. 43, the year of the invasion by the Emperor Claudius, and also as proving that the British were not simply barbarians, as we were always taught in our school days.

If the statements of Tacitus are correct, Boadicea was brutally handled by the Roman colonists, who seemed to consider that the whole country was bequeathed by the will of Prasutagus to them, and the veterans lately planted as a colony at Camulodunum treated the Britons with cruelty and oppression. The temple built in honour of Claudius was another serious cause of discontent from the conduct of the priests. To overrun a colony which lay quite naked and exposed, without a single fortification to defend it, did not appear to the incensed and angry Britons an enterprise that threatened either danger or difficulty. The fact was that the Roman generals attended to the improvements of taste and elegance but neglected the useful. They embellished the province and took no care to defend it.

Tacitus in describing the occurrences of this period tells us that awful portents were seen and heard just before Boadicea started on her career of destruction.

By the appearance of these portents the Romans were sunk in despair, while the Britons anticipated a glorious victory. In this alarming crisis the veterans sent to Catus Decianus, the procurator of the province, for reinforcements. Two hundred men, and these not completely

armed, were all that that officer could spare. The colony had but a handful of soldiers. Their temple was strongly fortified, and there they hoped to make a stand. Secret enemies mixed in all their deliberations. No fosse was made, no palisade was thrown up, nor were the women and such as were disabled by age or infirmity sent out of the garrison. Unguarded and unprepared they were taken by surprise, and in the moment of profound peace, overpowered by the barbarians in one general assault, and the colony was laid waste with fire and sword.

The temple held out, but after a siege of two days it was taken by storm. Petilius Cerealis, who commanded the Ninth Legion, marched to the relief of the place, but the Britons, flushed with success, advanced to give him battle. The Legion was put to the rout and the infantry were cut to pieces. Cerealis escaped with the cavalry to his intrenchments, while Catus Decianus, alarmed at the scene of carnage he beheld, betook himself to flight and escaped into Gaul.

Suetonius, undismayed by this disaster, marched through the heart of the country as far as London, a place not dignified with the name of a colony, but the chief residence of merchants and a great mart of trade and commerce. Here he proposed to make his headquarters, but, changing his mind, gave orders to march and leave London to its fate; though he offered to take charge of and try to defend all those able and willing to follow him. Many for various reasons determined to remain behind; of these not one escaped the rage of the barbarians. The inhabitants of Verulamium, a municipal town, were in like manner put to the sword.

The number massacred in the places which have been mentioned amounted to no less than 70,000, all citizens or allies of Rome. The Fourteenth Legion, with the veterans of the Twentieth and the auxiliaries from the adjacent stations, having joined Suetonius, his army amounted to little less than 10,000 men. Thus reinforced, he resolved without loss of time to bring on a decisive action. The Britons, nothing loath, soon gratified his wishes, and the well-known engagement soon took

place, the Britons being defeated with the loss of at least 80,000 persons, Boadicea afterwards poisoning herself. The Roman loss was about 400, and the wounded did not exceed that number. Thus ended the greater dangers of this revolt, but the further record of proceedings we will pass over as they have no connection with our subject.

It will be seen by these quotations from Tacitus that Boadicea attacked Camulodunum first, and that when she had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants, she proceeded to London, which she treated in like manner, and then wiped out Verulam as thoroughly as the two other towns. It would appear that soon after Boadicea had destroyed Verulam she was met by Suetonius, and the great battle which decided the Roman supremacy shortly followed. Numerous places have been suggested for the site of this engagement, but so far without anything definite being decided, excepting that it is not likely to have been in Essex, where there were no garrisons left for her to attack, and therefore no reason why she should return. Possibly she might have been following after Suetonius, or she might have been proceeding towards some of the other Roman stations when he met her; anyway, there could have been no reason for her returning into the Lea valley, where it has often been said that the battle took place. It is much more probable that the western side of Hertfordshire was the site of this terrible carnage. We have seen, according to Tacitus, that when Camulodunum was destroyed in A.D. 63 it had no defences in any shape. It could not, therefore, have been at Lexden, where, according to Mr. Jenkins and the Rev. Prebendary Scarth, the present earthworks were those of British Camulodunum. The position of Roman Camulodunum was almost certainly where Colchester, within the walls, now stands. For this opinion there are several reasons. One is, on comparing it with other British cities we find that like them its size was too great for the Roman requirements, and therefore they only took a small part of the area and fortified it in their accustomed manner as they did at Silchester and many other extensive British camps.

The late Dr. Duncan in his paper on the Roman Wall of Colchester, published in the *Essex Archaeological Transactions*,[1] gave reasons for considering that the still existing Town Wall was erected in the beginning of the second century A.D. This accords very well with the fact that there was no protecting wall or trench when it was overrun by Boadicea in A.D. 63, and the Romans being pre-eminently a practical people, would have taken care never to have risked another attack in an unprotected condition. In the opinion of some, the walls were built at a later period than that stated by Dr. Duncan, but whenever built, there is one fact which proves that they were not built before A.D. 63. It will be seen by an inspection of the wall that the earth from the ditch, outside or from elsewhere, has been piled up inside the wall, thus raising the surface inside considerably. That this was done when the wall was built cannot be gainsaid, because whenever for any purpose the inside of the wall has been exposed the mortar in the joints shows the marks of the trowel, and is as smooth as if done yesterday, which would not be the case had it been exposed to the weather for even one winter.

In all parts of the wall on the west and south—I mention these sides from having seen what I am about to describe—this earth is piled over remains of Roman houses, and in one place in Priory Street I observed that the wall was built over and stood on the ruins of a house. Every one of these houses, without exception, showed that it was destroyed by fire, as did some just outside the wall on the west, near St. Mary's church. I am not given to theorizing, but I feel that here I may safely suggest that these ruins seen under the wall, and beneath the earth inside the wall, are remains of Roman houses destroyed by the Boadicean revolt.

If this be so, it is an important argument for Dr. Duncan's suggestion that the wall was built not earlier than the second century, and that Roman Camulodunum stood in the area inclosed by the present walls.

[1] Vol. i, 5.