

THE DEFEAT OF THE NINTH LEGION, A.D. 60.

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“Sed quia procul Suetonius aberat, petivere a Cato Deciano procuratore auxilium. ille haud amplius quam ducentos sine iustis armis misit; et inerat modica militum manus. tutela templi freti, et impredientibus qui occulti rebellionis conscii consilia turbabant, neque fossam aut vallum praeduxerunt, neque motis senibus et feminis iuventus sola restitit: quasi media pace incauti multitudine barbarorum circumveniuntur. et cetera quidem impetu direpta aut incensa sunt: templum, in quo se miles conglobaverat, biduo obsessum expugnatumque. et victor Britannus Petilio Ceriali legato legionis nonae in subsidium adventanti obviis fudit legionem, et quod peditum interfecit: Cerialis cum equitibus evasis in castra et munimentis defensus est.”¹

Such evidence as we possess does not warrant any attempt to localise the scene of this disaster. All that can be asserted, with reasonable and approximate accuracy, is that the battle was fought at some place situated between Lindum and Camulodunum, for there are good grounds, both political and archaeological, for concluding that the ninth legion was stationed at Lindum at, or about, this date.² It is therefore more than probable that Cerialis was hastening, with all possible speed and by means of forced marches, from Lindum to the succour of the besieged veterans at Camulodunum when, somewhere en route, he was met by the victorious Britons, defeated and put to flight.

So severe was this reverse that only he himself and his cavalry escaped. Even then the pursuit was so relentless that he finally had to defend himself behind the

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, xiv, 32, 3-7, ed. Furneaux.

² The absence of the *cognomen* from two inscribed stones found at Lincoln in 1865 (*C.I.L.* vii, 183) and in 1909 (*Lincolnshire Notes and Queries*, vol. x, July, 1909) affords strong evidence of an occupation by the ninth legion ante-dating A.D. 60. This question, as it affects inscriptions to the

memory of centurions and soldiers of inferior rank, is discussed by Prof. Haverfield in *Lincolnshire Notes and Queries*, July, 1909, p. 195; also in his *Catalogue of the Roman inscribed and sculptured stones in the Grosvenor Museum*, p. 42; see also Mr. B. W. Henderson, *The Roman Legions in Britain*, *English Historical Review*, xviii, 21.

fortifications (*munimentis*) of the [? his] fortress (*castra*). The flight was evidently a long one, for no foot-soldiers escaped by this means.

The *castra* of the text cannot therefore refer to a temporary legionary camp within easy reach of the site of battle. Nor would a temporary camp afford protection to a mere handful of cavalry; its area would be too large and its defences too feeble for such a purpose. Time was precious and the exigences of the moment probably did not admit of the construction of even ordinarily efficient camps along the line of march.¹

To what fortress did Cerialis and his cavalry escape; within what fortifications did he successfully defend himself? The view of Dr. Hodgkin² that he sought refuge in his permanent base at Lindum appears to be the only tenable one. It is therefore highly probable that the Coritani, of the district between the Humber and the Wash were active participators in Boudicca's rebellion. Indeed, there appears to be some evidence that Boudicca was also supported by the Brigantes or a section of that tribe. The well-known speech which Tacitus ascribes to Calgacus suggests this view: "Under a woman's leadership the Brigantes were able to burn a colony, to storm a fortress, and, had not success ended in supineness, might have thrown off the yoke."³

There are, it is true, difficulties in accepting this passage as it stands, and some have substituted the Trinovantes for the Brigantes.⁴ But it must be remembered that the ever-threatening Brigantes had on at least two former occasions given trouble.

P. Ostorius Scapula was recalled from his expedition against the Decangi in the north-west by disturbances amongst the Brigantes.⁵

¹ See Tacitus, *Annals*, xiv, 33, 2; where the temerity of Cerialis is alluded to.

² *The Political History of England*, i, 41, 42.

³ *Agric.* 31, 5.

⁴ It may be conjectured that knowing of the part taken by a section of the Brigantes in Boudicca's rebellion, Tacitus, as ever, somewhat contemptuous of detail, loosely though perhaps naturally associated them with the leader of the revolt.

It is obvious that the "woman leader" here referred to cannot be Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes, for, so far as the evidence goes, she was always friendly to Rome. Thus she handed over Caractacus, A.D. 50-51 (*Tac. Ann.* xii, 36, 1) and was assisted by the imperial troops in her struggle against her husband and the *patriotic* party of the Brigantes, A.D. 52-57. (*Tac. Ann.* xii, 40, 3-8) and apparently again A.D. 69-71 (*Tac. Hist.* iii, 45, 1).

⁵ *Tac. Ann.* xii, 32, 2-4.

His presence was evidently required on the northern or north-eastern frontier line. During the legateship of Aulus Didius, A.D. 52-57, it was found necessary to despatch a legion, probably the ninth, from Lindum, against the patriotic party of the Brigantes.¹ Geographically also, the Brigantes and the Coritani were favourably situated for making the irruptions into the territory of the allies [Iceni] which Ostorius Scapula put down with a strong hand in the year A.D. 47.²

What more probable than that this nation should have seized the opportunity of Boudicca's rebellion as a favourable one for an advance upon the Roman province? This, apparently, is the implied view of Mommsen.³

But Mommsen considered that the words *expugnare castra* (*Agric.* 31, 5) indicated that the camp of the ninth legion had been successfully stormed. This reading, however, directly contradicts the more reliable account given in the *Annals*. It is, as Furneaux has suggested,⁴ more probable that the *castra* of the passage from the life of Agricola is a loose description of the temple precincts, and this view is quite in harmony with the account given in the *Annals*, where we are told that the colony was reduced to ruins or consumed by fire and the temple taken by storm. Bearing in mind the turbulent character of the Brigantes and granting the high probability of Dr. Hodgkin's localisation of the fortress of Cerialis, it would seem that the rhetoric of the address attributed to Calgacus contains, amongst much which is confused and apparently contradictory, an element of historical truth from which we may infer that the *patriotic* section of this tribe took an active part in the insurrection of A.D. 60.

The evidence which has been brought forward in this note, notwithstanding the fact that much of it is necessarily circumstantial, would appear to warrant an enlargement of the canvas upon which the historical picture of Boudicca's rebellion is depicted. From this point of

¹ Tac. *Ann.* xii, 40, 3-8.

- Tac. *Ann.* xii, 31, 1.

Eng. trans. i, pp. 180, 181; and substantially expressed p. 182.

⁴ Furneaux, Tac. *Ann.* xiv, p. 431,

³ *The Provinces of the Roman Empire*, note 4.

view a not unimportant incident of the great revolt was the successful defence of Lindum, under Cerialis, against the attack of the more northern tribes, the Coritani and Brigantes, whilst, about the same time, the main body of the rebels marched on to the sack of Londinium and Verulamium and to its ultimate defeat by Paullinus.