

ART. XX.—*The Last Years of Roman Cumberland.* By
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STUDENTS of the Roman age in our district have in the past devoted so much attention to its beginning that they have had little to spare for its end. Yet the interest of the events by which Rome lost her British possessions is hardly inferior to that of the operations by which she won them; and since we know far less of the former, it is perhaps worth while to review the evidence and ask how far it leads us towards a connected narrative.

The "departure of the Romans" in the early fifth century* did not mean that everyone who talked Latin and lived like a Roman went away, leaving only barbarian Britons behind. It was a withdrawal of the garrison from a country where the garrison was by no means the only representative of Roman civilisation. The people who stayed behind were Romans in virtue of the habits acquired in three and a half centuries; Romans by conviction and sentiment, Romans in material civilisation, Romans to a great extent in language. In the south of England this is familiar enough; it is well known that an urban civilisation of the regular Roman imperial type took deep root there and outlasted, at Silchester for instance, the departure of the garrison. But even in our own district something of the same kind happened,

* Professor J. B. Bury (*The Notitia Dignitatum*, *Journal of Roman Studies*, vol. x) has recently tried to shift the date of the departure from 407-410 to 442 or later. His arguments appear to me, and to other students of the subject, wholly inconclusive and based on ignoring all the archæological evidence; I have given my reasons for rejecting them in *The Roman Evacuation of Britain*, *J.R.S.*, vol. xi.

though on a smaller scale and with humbler results. It is generally assumed that here in the north the cleavage between Briton and Roman never disappeared as it did in the south, and that to the last our district remained a wild country inhabited by wild tribes and policed by Roman cohorts of alien race and habits. But there are indications that this was not the case, and that here also a real degree of Romanisation was achieved.

The first of these is the existence of *vici* or *canabae*, villages outside the forts. Every Roman fort was surrounded by such a village, inhabited by the wives and children of the soldiers and also by traders and others, who made a living partly out of the garrison and partly out of each other; for as time went on such villages, except in the most inhospitable regions, must have become self-supporting by agriculture and industry. Of these villages, setting aside the regimental bathhouse which normally stood outside the fort, we have actual relics in our district at Ambleside, where the plateau north of the fort is covered with the remains of buildings (N.S. xxi, 31);* at Papcastle, where structures outside the fort were examined in 1912, and where carbonised wheat is often found on the roadside east of the fort ("Roman Papcastle was more than a mere fort," N.S. xiii, 134); at Old Penrith, where most of the finds have been made outside the fort (N.S. xiii, 177 *seqq.*; e.g. a well, 179; various buildings, 180; *cf.* 182); at Old Carlisle, where an area at least equal to the fort itself and lying to the east of it is covered with the remains of buildings and fragments of pottery (information from Mr. Harold Duff), and where an altar dedicated by the *vicani* was once found (CIL. vii, 346; Tullie House Catalogue, ed. 2, no. 24); at Birdoswald, where remains found in 1897 suggested to Haverfield the presence of such a settlement (O.S. xv, 184); at Raven-

* All references, except where otherwise stated, are to these *Transactions*.

glass, where a considerable area north of the fort is littered with potsherds (personal observation and reports from Miss M. C. Fair); and at Maryport.* Others would certainly be discovered if search were made.

Now these *vici* were not mere appendages of the fort. They had a corporate unity of their own, and were capable of corporate action. This is proved by the fact that they could, as a body, dedicate altars (Old Carlisle, quoted above; also Chesterholm, N.S. xviii, 223), and appear to have had magistrates of some kind. The *vicani* were not mere native hangers-on of a Roman cohort, for they consisted in great part of the wives and children of the regiment, and were therefore to that extent Romanised both in manners and in blood. This marriage of auxiliary soldiers was not, before the time of Caracalla, legally recognised, for no one but a Roman citizen could contract a legal marriage: but it was certainly recognised by usage and considered binding. The proof is that in the diplomas by which citizenship was granted to auxiliaries on their discharge, a standing formula gives them the right of *conubium* "cum uxoribus quas tunc habuissent cum est civitas iis data, aut siqui caelibes essent cum iis quas postea duxissent dumtaxat singuli singulas" (with the wives whom they had at the time of this grant of citizenship or with those whom, if they were then bachelors, they should thereafter marry, provided one man marry one woman only). This implies that an auxiliary during his term of service might either "have a wife" or "be a bachelor," and that it would be officially known in which state a given soldier was. As the leading authority on the Roman *auxilia* puts it,

* Excavations in April, 1923, proved that the enceinte, described in N. S. xxiii, 151, as a fortified annexe to the Maryport fort, is in reality a series of post-Roman banks. At the same time, remains of at least one large and well-built Roman structure were found, and this, together with the so-called temple (? bath), proves the existence of a considerable *vicus*, perhaps amounting to a small town.

“such unions were sufficiently permanent to be officially recognised during a soldier’s period of service, though only legalised at his discharge” (Cheesman, *Auxilia of the Roman Army*, 119). The *vici*, so constituted, must have formed real centres of Roman civilisation from which a permanent influence radiated into the surrounding country. The British neighbours, hostile at first, must by degrees have become friendly and even intimate: their sons must have become accustomed to join the regiment as servants or soldiers, and their daughters to become soldiers’ wives. When this had been going on for three centuries, the removal of the soldiers to fight elsewhere—even if they took their wives and families and the other *vicani* with them, which is not conceivable—could not undo the work of Romanising their neighbours, the inhabitants of the so-called British settlements which abound in our district.

We have positive evidence that these settlements were in many cases inhabited by Britons who had become partly Romanised; in some cases the very planning and construction of the settlement was influenced by Roman ideas. The most remarkable case yet known to us is that of Ewe Close. Here the masonry, which was very solid, was imitated from rubble-cored Roman work (N.S. viii, 361), the plan was “a rude imitation of a Roman camp” (N.S. ix, 297), and the finds consisted almost exclusively of objects always found at Roman sites in Britain (*ibid.*, 306-309). The very placing of this large village alongside a main Roman thoroughfare speaks emphatically of friendly and intimate relations between its inhabitants and the Romans. Nor does Ewe Close, in spite of the scanty attention as yet given to our British settlements, stand alone. At Millrigg in Kentmere (N.S. i, 175-185) the rubble-cored masonry and the plan of the gateways point unmistakably to Roman influence; at Hugill (O.S. xii, 6) and at Threlkeld (N.S. ii, 38-52) Mr. Dymond’s

plans indicate masonry of the same type, and even apart from Mr. Hodgson's conjectural dating of the latter (third to eighth century A.D.) the planning recalls that of Ewe Close; at Urswick Stone Walls (N.S. vii, 72-94) the square annexe has been generally taken for a Romano-British addition to a pre-Roman site, and in the vicarage garden at Little Urswick a Constantinian coin has been found (N.S. xiii, 283); the little settlement on Heaves Fell (N.S. xii, 397-401) yielded a burial with grave-goods of regular Romano-British type; and the cave-dwellers of Dog Holes (N.S. xi, 479, xiii, 55-58) were hardly less Romanised than those of the Mendip caverns. Finally, at Carlisle we have a Romano-British town of a kind totally different from the *castella* of the neighbourhood. Post-Hadrianic Carlisle had no garrison; it was a civil town, no doubt inferior in the degree of its civilisation to the towns of the south, but in kind resembling them (see Dr. Shaw's paper in the present volume).

A third type of site, the small Romano-British hill fort, is briefly considered in another paper in this volume (Art. VIII), and we need say no more about it here.

Now the "departure of the Romans" may have entailed the desertion of the *vici* along the Wall, whose inhabitants had little to keep them there when the troops had gone; but at places like Maryport and Lancaster the case was different, and clearly the withdrawal of the troops cannot have brought about a general migration of the half-Romanised Britons from their innumerable settlements, and the whole population of Carlisle. What can we say, apart from guesswork, as to the fate of these people?

In 383, when Magnus Maximus crossed the Channel and set himself up as Emperor in Gaul and Spain, he took with him a great part of the army of Britain. Till that date there is no doubt that the Wall had been garrisoned, but after that we may provisionally at least suppose it

to have been abandoned; for in six Wall forts the coins go down to Gratian, whom Maximus assassinated in 383, and none has yielded a single coin of Maximus himself or any later Emperor. But if the Wall was given up in 383, it is improbable that Cumberland was still held. If your capital is York, and if you give up the Tyne-Solway frontier, the next line on which you would fall back is the Wear or the Tees in the east and Stainmore in the west. The surrender of the Wall implies as its natural consequence the military evacuation of Cumberland, though Westmorland might still be held as an outpost on the far side of the true frontier.

There is some reason to suppose that this was what Maximus did in 383, and that his arrangements were perpetuated by Stilicho, who reorganised the defences of Britain a dozen years or so later. Maximus can hardly have abandoned York, the military capital of Britain; and if he held York he must have held a group of forts clustering round it. But just such a group of forts, reaching from the Humber to Kirkby Thore, is described in the *Notitia Dignitatum*, in a passage generally, and in my opinion rightly, explained as recording the arrangements made by Stilicho.

But the *Notitia* also includes the much-discussed list of forts *per lineam valli*. Under this head we are given 23 names, the first twelve on the Wall from Wallsend to Birdoswald, the remainder not on the Wall but beginning in West Cumberland and running on, apparently, southward along the coast. It is, I think, hopeless to attempt any explanation of this list based on the assumption that it is a complete account of anything whatever. I suggest that it is a fragment of two separate lists: first, a list headed *item per lineam valli* and enumerating the forts from Wallsend to Bowness-on-Solway, and secondly, a list whose title, now lost, must have been something like *item per litus occidentale*. The end of the first list and

the beginning of the second have perished, and the two together record a state of things which came to an end in 383 if not earlier; for the Wall forts, and therefore probably those of the western littoral, were held to that date and not beyond it.

But these lists owe their preservation—so far as, in their mutilated condition, they are preserved—to the fact that they were included about 395 in a document recording the dispositions of Stilicho. At this date they were obsolete, for it is fairly certain that Stilicho did not re-garrison the Wall and the western littoral. Why then were they incorporated in the British *Notitia* of that date? Obviously, as a reminder of districts which were, if and when occasion offered, to be reoccupied once more. About 395, therefore, a dozen years after their military evacuation, the Wall and the western littoral were thought to be worth recovering: and this means that they still contained a Romanised population of some importance and had not been utterly ravaged, still less permanently occupied, by Picts and Scots.

The policy, common to Maximus and Stilicho, of concentrating troops in the east, may have been based on the principle either that the west could not be defended, the enemy being too strong there, or that the west did not need defence, the enemy being too weak there. The principle actually operative seems to have been the second. About 369 Theodosius had taught the Picts and Scots a severe lesson, not only clearing Britain of their roving bands, but chasing them home with his ships of war and, it would seem, crippling for the moment their power to raid; while, on the other hand, it was about 390 or soon after that a Saxon raid destroyed the signal station at Huntcliff on the Yorkshire coast. This suggests that in the years 370-400 the Saxons were a real danger and the Picts and Scots not. The evidence of coins confirms this suggestion. There are only two sites in Cumberland at

which coins later than 383 have been found. One is Carlisle, the other Maryport. These are precisely the natural centres of non-military population: and the coins of Honorius prove, not that garrisons remained in Cumberland after 383, but that a Romanised civil population lingered on after the time when the garrison, according to the other coin-evidence, left. The survival of this undefended population in touch with centres of coin-supply suggests that the Picts and Scots were fairly quiet till 400, or close upon it.* Another coin of Honorius at Lancaster tells the same tale for that site.

This period of peace ended about 400. There is ample evidence both in Romano-British archæology and in the Irish histories that about this time Scotic pirates began to plunder Britain more thoroughly than ever, assisted by Picts from beyond the now deserted Wall. When the wealthy inhabitants of Somerset were burying their rich hoards of silver coin and not living to dig them up again, it is not likely that the Cumberland coast was immune from danger; and we can hardly suppose that Carlisle and Maryport survived very long after 400. But they were defensible places, and it is quite possible that their inhabitants continued to beat off the haphazard attacks of the Scot by sea and the Pict by land for some time. At any rate, we know that some kind of Romanised life went on. St. Patrick, revisiting his early home as late as 430, found it still peacefully inhabited by his Romano-British friends and relations. We do not know where it was; but what happened there happened elsewhere. The genealogies of the *Historia Brittonum* suggest that the Britons of Cumbria "banded together as Cumbri, in early British *combrogas*, i.e. confederates, under a successor of the Dux Britanniarum called by them Guletic," and so held out till the seventh century, when the Angles began

* The suggestion is confirmed by the settlement of Candida Casa about this time.

to penetrate their territory (N.S. xx, 55, *seqq.*). This would imply that some tradition directly traceable to the Roman period lasted unbroken down to the Anglian conquest. But it is exceedingly difficult to say anything more definite than this. The scarcity of Celtic place-names, and the almost complete absence, on the modern map, of names even remotely derived from the recorded Romano-British names, do not suggest that the Angles found either a dense or a highly-civilised population in these parts; and in general the Anglo-Saxon settlement seems to have taken place in a country largely denuded of inhabitants and wholly incapable of organised resistance. In Wessex, Mr. O. G. S. Crawford has recently shown that a highly elaborate system of Romano-British villages and field-divisions, very like that which seems to have existed in our district, perished utterly before the Anglo-Saxon settlement took place (*Geographical Journal*, May, 1923, 352).

The evidence from these and other sources is, perhaps, best reconciled with itself if we suppose that in our district—we are not at present concerned with the rest of the country—descendants of Romanised Britons lingered on, impoverished by Pictish and Scotie raids, deprived of their larger settlements and their richer lands, not by conquest but rather by devastation, sinking lower and lower in the scale of civilisation, becoming by degrees mere barbarians to the outward eye, and yet, like the Celts they were, keenly conscious of their pedigree, nursing in song and legend the tradition of a greatness that had long passed away, and clinging to the belief that they were the lineal descendants of the Caesars, faithfully obeying to the end the command of Honorius, who in 410 told the British communities to look after themselves.