WITTENHAM CLUMPS.

Mr. James Parker, standing on the northernmost height, with the party around him, looking towards the junction of the Tame and the Thames, with Dorchester Abbey in the distance, delivered an address on the history of the spot. He said Dorchester Abbey Church was the beginning of the ecclesiastical history of Mercia, and one of the great beginnings, if not the most important, of the ecclesiastical history of their country. The first attempt from Canterbury to christianize the country was practically a failure. What Augustine did bore such little fruit, that within forty or fifty years the country was almost as bad as if he had never come. There was only one Bishop left, and he was packing up his things to return to Rome; whereas it was very different with the great Birinus, who came as Bishop of Wessex. They must remember that the Thames was practically the boundary between Wessex and Mercia. The country they were looking at was the country which Birinus christianized. Why he fixed upon Dorchester was not very easily to be guessed. Mr. Parker pointed out some ridges or ditches in front of Dorchester, and he said that fifteen years ago those ditches extended from stream to stream (from Thames to Tame). He himself saw most of the ridges at the near end being carted away. A good deal was done to try to stop the farmer from carting them away. The taking away of those mounds was really the beginning of the effort, not yet successful, of having a commission appointed by Government for the preservation of ancient monuments. If it should prove successful, he should not regret having lost half of what he had been pointing out. What did those two great ditches mean? Undoubtedly they were Roman remains. Roman fortifications were not made according to any definite rule. There were general rules. The Romans always adapted themselves to the nature of the country. They attempted to obtain a parallelogram as nearly as could be, for the reason that they endeavoured to arrange their companies as in their camps at Rome and elsewhere, and to make the same arrangements within the boundary walls. One rule was that wherever they found a stream they made a sort of loop, and did exactly what they had done at Dorchester. Hills were generally chosen, and they made fosse round to prevent the enemy getting into the citadel. There were on that spot, therefore, two capital and typical examples of two modes of fortification. It must be remembered that before the arrival of Julius Cæsar, we know nothing of what was going on in this country. The hill on which they stood was an outlying spur of a range of chalk hills, and on that range, from one end to the other, from the Thames down to Wiltshire, there was a range of camps all more or less like the one which they had just left. There were one or two

outlying places, like the one on which they stood; for instance, at Blewbury. Roughly speaking, that great line of hills ran parallel to the Thames. The Thames separated the southern country into two parts. It was the main artery, so to speak, of the country, and naturally the low level ground along the banks of rivers was taken advantage of by an invading army. In that particular case they saw coming down from the north another stream, the Tame, running north and south on the western side of the Bucks hills. The other great range of hills stretched east and west, and the Thames ran east and west. When the historical curtain was drawn aside, all they were told about the country was that a great territory belonged to one king, with whom Cæsar made peace, Cassivelaunus. Cæsar said his territory was bounded by the Thames above seventy or eighty miles from the sea. It was difficult to see how the Thames could bound his territory, but its most important tributary on the north was the Tame, and it would be observed that it bears the same name. If they followed the Tame northward, they would find that it almost joined the Ouse in Buckinghamshire. The word Thames was composed of two words, tham and es, which was not altogether a guess; and es and ouse were practically the same word. It would be found in the Chronicle, under two different heads, that a battle was fought on the Ouse a little eastward of Bedford, at Tham-es an-ford (Thames ford). So that in the north and the south the stream was called the Thames. It was, then, not difficult to understand how Cæsar, who did not know the country, finding a great stream surrounding the whole of the dominions of Cassivelaunus, called it the Thames. Then the upper part of the stream (now called the Isis) received the name of the Thames, and the other stream the Tame. Mr. Parker then alluded to the subjugation of Britain by Aulus Plautius, in the reign of Claudius, and said his campaigns were described by Tacitus, whose description was lost, but a summary of it was made by Dion Cassius, a Greek, a hundred years before the books were lost. This summary stated that Aulus Plautius was very successful, and penetrated as far as the Dobuni, as far as Cirencester. He might have gone up the Thames, and made peace there. Describing the return, Tacitus states, that the Romans crossed the river to the north side in the face of the enemy, sending the Celti first, and Dr. Guest put that at the spot near where the party were standing. The country was then well wooded, and that would be a natural place to cross. This was merely a little incident, and would hardly be told unless it were connected with some more important and greater incident. The fortress where they were was the only one which could be said absolutely to overlook the Thames. It was doubtful whether Windsor was a fortress, and besides St. George's Hill was a long way from the river, but at Wittenham people could not pass up and down the river without being liable to be cut off from the British camp there; therefore the Romans were obliged to take that fortress, and, as that would be an arduous task, they had to construct the large camp at Dorchester to watch the hill and prevent the garrison doing them any damage. That was the state of things for the first two

centuries of the Roman occupation. Then, here, as at the other Dorchester, a town grew up near the camp. In Dorchester cellars, when being repaired, tesselated pavements had been found, and the fields around Dorchester had for years yielded heaps of coins. Leland speaks of large numbers in his time. He (Mr. Parker) had had handsful which were made in the third or fourth centuries, they were not made before. He had had several of the fifth and sixth centuries, as if the Roman coinage remained till a later period, which he was not aware was the fact. Explaining the name of the hill on which they stood—Sinodun—Mr. Parker said it was not to be found in any written document till the time of Leland, who said it was what the common people called it. It was probably a Celtic name. Some of the Celtic names had been petrified into the Roman name: for instance, Dorchester, derived from Dour (Celtic for river) and Castra (Latin for camp). The Saxons called it Doricaster, and it had afterwards become Dorchester. Of course, many thoughts rose to the mind while standing upon such a spot. They might look from that hill and realize something of the nature of the population that could be seen at that time, and there was one thing which they must remember, that in spite of all those changes the physical features of the country were absolutely the same. This was a subject which might exercise the ingenuity and research of the members of the society.

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