

WHAT IS A CAMP?

BY R. N. WORTH, F.G.S.

(Read at St. Marychurch, July, 1886.)

WHAT is a Camp? The question seems a simple one; but it is not so easily answered as might at first appear. The etymologist can reply readily enough from his point of view, by telling us that originally it meant a field or plain. The soldier has no difficulty with his rendering, for to him it is a place where an army, or section of an army, pitches its tents, or takes up extemporised and temporary quarters; and this is the general sense in which the word is always understood in current use.

The only man who cannot give the enquiry a direct and consistent answer is the antiquary. The last thing he means by a camp is a "field or plain," and while the idea of temporary occupation may have been present to the minds of those who first introduced the word into archaeological nomenclature, the propriety of this application has long been almost wholly ignored. If we find a "camp" mentioned in an ordinary antiquarian work, without further detail, all that we can safely understand by it is an enclosure defenced or defensible.

Five years ago I had to remark, "There is hardly a single cause which has led to so much confusion in the interpretation of our early history as the unfortunate error of nomenclature which has indiscriminately ranked the earthworks scattered throughout the country as 'hill-forts,' 'camps,' and 'castles,' whereas the immense majority are simply the enclosures of the ancient villages or towns . . . the evidence, not of long continued or desperate warfare, but of settled and comparatively dense population."*

* *Trans. Plym. Inst.* viii. 38.

I have seen no reason to change that opinion; but, on the contrary, the need of its expression has been again and again emphasized. There never was a time when so much general interest was taken in matters of archaeology as now; but unfortunately there is no line of scientific research which suffers so seriously from the domination of a few great names. It seems to be quite sufficient for the great majority of antiquarian investigators nowadays to quote the words of some antiquary of the past generation, or the last century, either to base an argument or to end a controversy; that Stukeley or Borlase or Polwhele said this or thought that is enough.

I am the last man to undervalue the work of our elder antiquaries; but I do not think it can be too often insisted that they are not "authorities" on questions of fact, where they do not speak of matters within their own personal knowledge. We must always distinguish between that portion of their writings which has a basis or backing from outside, and that which embodies simply their opinions, or perchance has no higher claim upon us than its origin in a fertile imagination. No one knows better than myself the danger of questioning any accepted matter of historical or antiquarian belief, with nothing to sustain the objection but patent facts, or the plain statements of contemporary witnesses: the strange array of "men in buckram" certain to be mustered as "authorities" on the other side; or the amusing superiority of those who, being imperfectly acquainted with the points of controversy themselves, are unable to distinguish between the sceptic's ignorance and his information. To these little drawbacks, however, one soon gets accustomed.

Now this word "camp," when used in an antiquarian sense, is purely a creation of the antiquaries. It is never employed in genuine popular speech. The ancient topography knows it not. Our Saxon forefathers were wiser men. They almost universally applied the word *byrig* (burgh, borough)—at present commonly "bury," which means nothing more than an earthwork—literally a "protected place," essentially of permanent habitation, as in the modern borough. Add "stock" or "stoke," and you have the ancient terms by which nearly every so-called "camp" in the county was once known. Most other appellations in common speech are of later origin, as often proved by their reduplicative character. Hembury Fort will serve for an example; the "fort" simply repeats the "bury." So with Membury Castle, Sidbury Castle, Blackbury Castle, and their kin—"castle" is only "bury"

over again. In Stockland Castle it is the "stock" that is repeated. Here the original idea of the "bury" has been lost, and new epithets applied. Then there are cases in which the "bury" is not found, such as Hocksdown Castle; and here the simplest inference is that the earthworks as earthworks were unnamed in Saxon times. In some cases we have a simply descriptive, and not interpretative term, as in Clovelly "Dikes" (or the Dichens), Mambury "Ring," Perran "Round" (where the Cornish mystery plays were acted), Brent and Loddiswell "Rings." The "burys" and "rings" of the common folk are far safer than the "camps" of the learned, who were probably in the first place led astray by hypotheses of Roman invasion and conquest, carried far beyond legitimate bounds.

The finest description of an English "bury" yet penned is the account of Worlebury by Mr. C. W. Dymond, F.S.A., equally valuable for the accuracy of its facts, and for the cautious abstinence of its theories. Mr. Dymond divides the so-called "camps" into three great classes—enclosures for permanent residence; for retreat (hill forts and citadels); for temporary shelter (slight and open earthworks). It is of course to the third class only that the term "camp" can with any accuracy be applied; and if upon enquiry it be found, as I believe it will, that this kind of defensible enclosure is by far the rarest of all, the misleading character of the appellation can hardly be more strongly emphasized, or the necessity of its abandonment wherever it cannot in strictness be justified. We can hardly nowadays fall back as an alternative upon "bury," where a doubt exists; but there can be no objection as a rule to the term "earthwork," with very few exceptions.

There is a great task before any Devonshire archaeologist who will undertake the classification of these "camps" under their proper heads; and we are far, as yet, from being in a position to estimate the amount of light which such an enquiry will throw on the early history of the county. I believe, and have elsewhere tried to show, that a good deal commonly accepted as historical will vanish in the process. One of the first things to disappear will be the idea that any definite conclusions are to be drawn—save perhaps in the case of some of the few "camps" proper—from their shapes or structure. As I said in the address already quoted—"as a rule the lines follow simply the contour of the ground," while the construction would naturally depend on the

materials at hand. Where stone was available, the walls would be of stone; where stone was wanting, banks of earth would be raised; where wood abounded, the enclosure would commonly be stockaded. There is, in fact, as much reason for assuming the existence of distinct races in England now, because in some localities bricks are the building materials, and elsewhere granite, or slate, or flint, or sandstone, as there is for arguing to the same conclusion from the existence merely of kindred structural differences in these ancient strongholds. And anyone would see the folly of reasoning up to different nationalities from the straight streets of a town built on a plain, or the winding roads of a city set on a hill.

From all we know of the manner of life of our pre-Roman predecessors; and from all we can glean by analogy from the conditions of races of the present day, approximating the same stage of culture, and the same capacity of intellect; we may be sure that the need of means of defence was always present, and that there was no collection of huts without some protection. The practice of defence is all but universal; quite so when warlike races, like the early Kelts or Saxons, are in question.

This need of protective strength dictated the selection of the more remarkable sites, where the ancient earthworks or piled stone ramparts yet remain. The absence of water was a small matter compared with defensive capacity. The inconvenience of these positions in more peaceful times led alike to their abandonment and their preservation. Hence the more modern Dorchester has replaced the ancient Maiden Castle, the more modern Salisbury the ancient Sarum, the more modern Honiton the ancient Hembury. Where the site was equally well adapted to both sets of conditions, it was frequently continued, as at Exeter. But the probability is that most of the old settlements were early abandoned as civilization progressed.

Still, it is likely that a much larger number do continue in occupation than is commonly imagined. The "bury" name is not invariably preserved. Lydford is shrunk to the shadow of its former self within its older cincture: less notably, but not less clearly, than Wareham within its huge ramparts. Torrington, I doubt not, was once a "fenced city" on its hill.

There is, as I have said, far more work to be done in the investigation of this class of remains than may be imagined. The larger are indeed fairly known, but the

smaller have frequently escaped observation; and occasionally it happens that little more than a name is left—sometimes nothing but an epithet. As an illustration of the way in which structural antiquities may still exist unrecognised among us, I mention three instances in close neighbourhood on the Dartmoor borders. Trowlesworthy on the Plym undoubtedly takes its name from the *wearthig* of some old Saxon. It has been a warren for centuries; but hard by the warrener's house are the foundations of the hut, either of the original settler, or of a dweller of kindred date, and surrounding this the remains of the enclosure of the "worthy" itself. Not a couple of miles distant, at Greenwell farm, the farm buildings, partly Tudor, but mainly modern, stand within an ancient enclosure, the rough stone-wall bank of which ranges up to seven and ten feet thick; while adjacent are the foundations of a rectangular building, piled moor stones, of probably equal age. So, near the village of Meavy, in the valley below, there is a farm enclosure so massive, that if the more modern buildings and the turf were cleared away, and it stood fairly out in the open, it might almost rival Grimspound. It continually happens that we cannot recognize the ancient settlement for the modern dwelling or hamlet.

The purpose of this paper is simply to plead for a much-needed reform in our archaeological nomenclature, and to point out the absolute necessity, if we are to interpret this class of antiquities at all, of distinguishing between things that differ. It almost surpasses belief how it can ever have been thought possible that the vast mounds of Clovelly Dikes could be thrown up for casual occupation in the imminent presence of danger, or by anything less than the united efforts of a powerful tribe; and in its degree the same argument applies to such works as Hembury, Cadbury, Prestonbury, Woodbury, and their kin.

We may, I believe, divide the so-called "camps" of the county, much upon Mr. Dymond's lines, into three classes—two of an exceptional and one of a customary character. The most important exception is that of the few enclosures of great magnitude and strength, which apparently formed the strongholds of a district or of a tribe, playing much the same part in Keltic Britain that the exceptionally-fortified and castled towns did in post-Norman and mediæval days. These are the hill forts. The other exception is that of the slight earthworks which may very well in many cases have

been "camps" in the strict sense of the term, which were not fitted for more than casual occupation, and which involved comparatively little labour in their construction.

Between these two extremes range the great majority of these remains, varying in size and strength so much that they seem at either end to merge into the other two, but differing in this, that they were intended for permanent occupation, and that their enclosures were essentially defensive against ever-present danger—the cities, towns, and villages of our remote predecessors.

If this view be correct, these ancient settlements ought to yield traces of habitation, and I admit that hitherto that line of evidence has not been prominent. But it is not absent, and when we make allowance for the fact that it has not been sought for, and that its character must vary with varying structural conditions, I believe that what is lacking may be fully explained. Where a bank is of earth, the huts in the enclosure would be of such perishable materials as wattle, and would leave no structural relics to our days. When however the agger is of stone, the stone foundations of dwellings are almost invariably seen. They occur at Grimspound, as every one familiar with moorland antiquities very well knows. They are found in the "rings" at Brent, in the stronghold of Worlebury, and at many other points. Where these evidences are wanting, other traces of occupation are often present, but they have yet to be systematically looked for.

The subject branches out most temptingly in various directions. We may speculate as to the neighbourhood of rival tribes; as to the relative dates of these antiquities from the extent of the defences and the indications of urgent need; as to the distribution of the population; and in many other ways. But the object of this paper is not to speculate. It has no higher purpose than a plea for full and accurate inquiry into the true character of our so-called "camps," and their classification upon sound principles. That done, the foundation will have been laid of far more certain information upon many details of our early history than we now possess.