

I.

NOTICE OF THE SITE OF THE BATTLE OF ARDDERYD OR ARDERYTH. By WILLIAM FORBES SKENE, Esq., F.S.A. Scot.

Chalmers, in his *Caledonia*, after narrating the events connected with the reign of King Arthur, and which followed his death, gives the following account of this battle, couched in that extraordinary style, which he seems to have considered as the perfection of historical narrative.

“Such were the events which occupied five and thirty years, from the death of Arthur, to the battle of Arderyth, in 577. The British Triads reprobate this skirmish, as the *nugatory battle of Britain*. Whatever cause may have moved the wrath of the kings, whether a *bird's nest*, or a disputed boundary, Ryderech, the munificent king of Strathcluyd, defeated, on the height of Arderyth, Aidan of Kintire, who is stigmatised by Merlin, the Caledonian Poet, as *Aeddan Fradawg*, the perfidious Aidan. Merlin was a witness of the conflict, and he had the envied honour of wearing on that decisive day, the golden torques. Gwenddolau, the patron of Merlin, fell in the treacherous field. He merited a more disgraceful fate: Gwenddolau, according to the habits of the people and the perturbations of the age, had called in Aidan as an auxiliary against the munificent king of Alclyd” (vol. i. p. 246). And he adds, in a note:—

“It is of more importance to settle the site of the conflict of Arderyth; to give it a local position as well as a poetic name; it was not on the Solway, as the editor of Lhwyd's ‘*Commentariolum*’ supposes (p. 142), but on the Clyde, as probability attests: from a consideration of all the circumstances, it seems more than probable that *Airdrie*, in the parish of New Monkland, Lanarkshire, which was in the territory

of Rydderech, and is at no great distance from the Clyde, is the true site of the battle of Arderyth."

Chalmers took this account from the Welsh traditions, which he has strangely perverted; but, though I conceive he is right in considering this battle to have been a historical event, I consider him quite wrong as to the site he has fixed upon.

It may be as well to state first, what the Welsh traditions really tell us regarding this battle.

They are to be found partly in the triads, partly in the old poems.

In the triad called the three frivolous battles of the Isle of Britain. The second is said to be the battle of Arderyth, and a lark's nest was the cause of it, where 80,000 men were slain of the nation of the Cymry.

In the triad called the three retinues of the passes, the third is the retinue of Drywon, son of Nudd in Rhodwydd Arderydd. The word Gosgord here translated Retinue, was a body of 300 horsemen who defended the different passes in the island.

In the triad of the three horses who carried three loads of the Isle of Britain, the second load was that of Cornan, the horse of the sons of Eliffer Gosgordvawr, which carried Gwrgi and Peredur, and Dunawd Bwr the sons of Pabo and Cynvelyn Drwsel, to see the sacred fire of Gwenddolau in Arderydd.

In the triad of the three loyal tribes of the Isle of Britain, the third was the tribe of Gwenddolau, the son of Ceidiau, who maintained the conflict for forty-six days after their lord was slain, and would not desist from battle and conflict until they should revenge his death.

In the triad of the three men who wore beards, that achieved the three good assassinations of the Isle of Britain, the first was Gall son of Dysgyvedawg, who killed the two brown birds of Gwenddolau, son of Ceidio, that had a yoke of gold about them, and devoured daily two bodies of the Cymry at their dinner, and two at their supper.

And in the triad of the three bulls of battle of the Isle of Britain, the second is Gwenddolau ab Ceidio.

There is a curious poem in the black book of Caermarthen, a MS. of the 12th century, which evidently relates to this battle. It is in the form of a dialogue between Taliessin and Myrdin, and is so curious a specimen of these old Welsh poems, that I may give it entire.

It is also curious, from containing a mention of Nemhtur, the mysterious tower, which was the birth place of St Patrick.

How sad to me, how sad,
Is it come to an end with Kedwy and Cadvan.
Glaring and tumultuous was the slaughter,
The shield was battered thro' and perforated.

TALIESSIN.

It was Maelgwn that I saw combating,
His household before the tumult will not be silent.

MERDIN.

Before two men in Nevtur they will land ;
Before a passing object, and an apparition on a pale horse.
The slender bay will bear them.
Soon is seen his retinue with Elgan.
Alas for their slaughter, a great journey they came.

TALIESSIN.

Rhys the one-toothed, a span was his shield ;
Even to thee he came a perfect prosperity.
Kyndur was slain ; beyond measure they deplore.
The generous ones were slain right speedily,
Three men of note, great their fame.

MERDIN.

Through and through, in excess and excess they came ;
Beyond and beyond, there came Bran and Melgan,
They slew Dinel in their last conflict,
The son of Erbin, and his retinue.

TALIESSIN.

The host of Maelgwn, it was fortunate they came,
Slaughtering men of battle, penetrating the gory plain.
Even the battle of Ardderyd,
When will be its use,
Continually his hero they will prepare.

MERDIN

A host of flying darts, reeking with blood was the plain,
A host of wounded warriors, frail they were,
A host, when wounds are given,
A host, when put to flight.
A host is overturned
In their combat.

TALIESSIN.

The seven sons of Eliffer,
 Heroes when put to proof,
 Avoid not the seven spears,
 In their seven stations.

MERDIN.

Seven blazing fires,
 Seven in front of battle,
 The seventh is Cynvelyn,
 In every chief assault.

TALIESSIN.

Seven spears that shall pierce,
 Seven river fulls
 Of blood of chieftains,
 They shall fill.

MERDIN

Seven score generous ones,
 Become ghosts,
 In the wood of Celyddon,
 They came to an end.

Since I am Merdin,
 After Taliessin,
 Let my prophecy,
 Be made known.

The battle of Arderyth, is also frequently alluded to in the poems attributed to Myrddin. In his Avallenau he says:—

Alas Gwendydd, loves me not, greets me not,
 I am hated by the chiefs of Rhydderch,
 For after Gwenddolau no princes honor me
 Yet in the battle of Ardderyd, I wore golden torques.

Again,

I have been here so long, that sprites do not shock me,
 And I tremble not at the dragon
 Of my Lord Gwenddolau and his brethren,
 Who have bred a pestilence in the woods of Celyddon.

and in the Cyvoesi Myrddin, which is in the form of a dialogue between him and his sister Gwendydd, he calls it Gweith Arderyd ac Erydon,

that is, the battle of Ardderyd and Erydon, and says of it, "as Gwendolau was slain in the blood-fray of Ardderyd."

Finally, in the metrical life of Merlin, we are told that this battle was fought between Peredwr, leader of the North Welsh, and Gwenddoleu who governed kingdoms in Scotland; that Merlin went to the battle with Peredwr, and that Rodarcus or Rydderch, king of the Cumbri, also was there, and that Merlin fled to the woods after the battle.

This completes the traditionary accounts of Ardderyd as a mythic battle, but we can see that, concealed under these extravagant fables, are the outlines of one of those great historical struggles which altered the fate of a country. Rydderch was a Christian king; he restored Kentigern to his bishopric; was in communication with St Columba, and received a visit from him. Aedan was solemnly inaugurated as king by St Columba. They were the leaders of the Christian party. On the other hand, Gwendolau, with his sacred fire, and his birds who devoured men, was surely the type of the old paganism of the country. He is said to have been slain in the battle. Rydderch and Aedan became established in their respective Christian kingdoms. It was, in short, a great struggle between the supporters of the advancing Christianity and the departing paganism, in which the former were victorious. That it was an historical event, and that this was its character, appears from this, that it occurs in the "Annales Cambriæ," as a real event about the year 573; "Bellum Armterid inter filios Elifer et Gwendoleu filium Keidiau in quo bello Gwendoleu cecidit. Merlinus insanus effectus est," and that 573 is the first year of the reign of Rhydderch over Strathclyde, and of Aidan over Dalriada.

Where, then, was this battle fought? We ought, in the first place, to look for it in one of the great passes into the country; and a curious passage in Fordun first gave me a clue to the probable situation. In his notice of St Kentigern, he describes, evidently from some older authority, his meeting in the desert a wild man, who informs him that his name was Merlin, and that he had lost his reason, and roamed in these solitudes because he had been the cause of the slaughter of so many men: "*qui interfecti sunt in bello, cunctis in hac patria constitutis satis moto, quod erat in campo inter Lidel et Carwanolow situato.*"

Liddel, as is well known, is the name of the river which flows west-

ward through Liddesdale, and joins the Esk about nine miles north of Carlisle. Near the junction is the border between England and Scotland, and from thence the flat and mossy district, called the Debateable Lands, bounded on the east by the Esk, extends to the Solway Firth.

Now, I find among the baronies which formed part of the great possessions of Ranulph de Meschines, in the reign of Henry the First, was the Barony of *Lyddale*, and that it consisted of the lands of Esk, *Arthuret*, Stubhill, *Carwindlaw*, Speersykes, Randslington, Eitin, Nicol Forest, and the English part of the Debateable Lands. This barony afterwards reverted to the Crown, and was granted by James I. to George, Earl of Cumberland, under the name of the Lordships of Arthureth, Liddel, and Randslington, within the Forest of Nicholl; and from Francis Earl of Cumberland passed to the Grahams of Netherby.

I consider that Arthuret or Arthureth is the same word as Ardderyd or Arderit, double *d* in Welsh being equivalent to *th*, and Carwindlaw is evidently the Carwanolow of Fordun.

It is here, then, that the site of the battle should be looked for; and I resolved to inspect the ground personally.

I took the railway to Hawick, and from thence I proceeded by rail up the Valley of the Slitrig, across the Catrail, and through the Maiden Paps by a tunnel, from which we emerged into Liddesdale, along which we rattled, sweeping past what proved afterwards to be the site in question, and past the junction of the Liddel with the Esk, till we came to Longtown, where I stopped, resolving to make it the point from which I should search for the site.

Longtown, the first stage on the great north road from Carlisle to Edinburgh and Glasgow, and formerly a bustling coaching little town, was now deserted and quiet, like a city of the dead; and I found the great coaching inn shut up, and an old mail-coach guard living with his wife and family in a corner of the deserted house. Though the sign of the Graham Arms was still hung, the landlady was so astonished at the sight of a traveller actually proposing to stay there for a day, that she hardly knew how to receive me. I found, however, that they kept an old dog-cart and a horse or two, which they hired occasionally; and, fortunately, the old retired guard was a native of the district, and knew the localities well. The poor people soon became reconciled to their

unexpected guest, and did everything in their power to make me comfortable, and to assist me in visiting the localities in the neighbourhood.

About a mile south from Longtown is the church and rectory of Arthuret, situated on a raised platform on the west side of the river Esk; which flows past them at a lower level; and south of the church and parsonage there rise from this platform two small hills covered with wood, called the Arthuret knowes. The top of the highest, which overhangs the river, is fortified by a small earthen rampart, enclosing a space nearly square, and measuring about 16 yards square. On returning to Longtown, I asked the old guard whether he knew of any place called Carwandlow. He said that Carwinelow was the name of a stream which flowed into the Esk from the west about three miles north of Longtown, and also of a mill situated on it, and that beyond it was a place called the Roman Camp. I asked him to drive me there, which he did. Proceeding north from Longtown, we passed Netherby, the seat of the Grahams, and then came to a ravine through which the burn of Carwhinelow flows from Nicholl Forest about six miles into the Esk. Here the road dipped down into the hollow, passed through the village and over the bridge of Carwhinelow, and rose on the other side, where we passed the farms of Lower and Upper Moat; the latter exactly at the junction of the Liddel and the Esk. Proceeding half a mile up the south bank of the Liddel we came to what is called the Roman Camp, and which, I found, was known by no other name in the country, though it is called in the "Statistical Account" the Moat of Liddel. It is situated on the top of a high bank overhanging the river. On the north side, the rock goes sheer down to the river. The highest point is about 160 feet above the river. On the other side it is defended by prodigious earthen ramparts, which rise from the field to a height of nearly 30 feet. The space enclosed by the great rampart measured about 38 yards from east to west, by about 55 yards from north to south. There is a small inner citadel measuring 13 yards by 9, and also a well in the enclosure, and on the west side there is a second great rampart.

I am sorry that I am not a draughtsman, and cannot lay before you a plan or sketch of this magnificent fort. It is obviously a native strength, and would well repay a visit. The view from it is magnificent.

Standing on the highest point and looking north, the river Liddel and the railway winds at the base of the rock under your feet. Looking north-east, the beautifully wooded vale of the Esk opens out before you, up which the eye carries you almost as far as Langholm, and the bare and pastoral valley of Liddesdale extends to the north-west. In the horizon, the top of Birrenswork hill, notable for its Roman camps, is most prominent. On the west the Solway Firth stretches before you; and looking due south, the eye rests upon the Arthuret knowes, and beyond them the chain of the Cumberland hills bounds the horizon.

On the east side of the fort the ground slopes down till it comes to the level of the river at a place called Ridding, not quite half a mile off. Between the fort and Carwhinelow is a field extending to the ridge along Carwhinelow, which is about half a mile off. This is the site indicated by Fordun, viz., the ground between Liddel and Carwhinelow. The old farmer of the Upper Moat, who accompanied us, informed me that the tradition of the country was that a great battle was fought here between the Romans, and the Picts who held the camp, in which the Romans were victorious; that the camp was defended by 300 men, who surrendered it, and were all put to the sword and buried in the orchard of the Upper Moat, at a place which he showed me. This part of the tradition is curious, as the Triads mention the Gosgord of Drywon-ap-Nudd at Arderyth which consisted of 300 men.

In the fortified know of Arthuret, I recognised the place called Ardderyd. The name of Erydon, which Merlin attaches to it as a name for the battle, probably remains in Ridding at the foot of the fort, and I have no doubt that the name Carwhinelow is a corruption of Caerwenddolew, the caer or city of Gwenddolew, and thus the topography supports the tradition.