XX.—*On Offa's Dyke.* By T. M'KENNY HUGHES, *Esq., M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A.*

Read January 28th, 1892.

THERE are few points in ancient history more interesting than an inquiry into the age and object of the great “dykes”; such as those of north Wiltshire, between central and southern England; those north of Cambridge, which bar the only access into East Anglia from the south; those which run from the estuary of the Dee to that of the Severn, cutting off the whole of Wales; or the great earthwork nearly parallel to the Roman wall which crossed the island from the Solway to the Tyne.

Were these the outcome of similar circumstances among various races and at many different times, or were those of even one district the work of the same age and of the same people, and if so whom were they thrown up to defend and whom to repel?

The object of this communication is to collect more evidence than has hitherto been put together with regard to the history and traditions respecting the earthworks referred to Offa; to criticise the value of that reference in the light of further observations along the boundary, and to suggest and commence an attempt at a more systematic grouping of the earthworks on the eastern frontiers of the Ordovices and Silures, with a view to the revision of Offa's boundary; and a determination of the ancient landmarks adopted and perhaps adapted by him, and possibly a recognition of prolongations made and gaps filled by him.

Dr. Guest has treated of the north Wiltshire dykes, which he refers to the advance of the Belgae. General Pitt-Rivers, however, informs me that he has ascertained that some of these belong to Roman times, as he has found Roman remains under the rampart.

Prof. Ridgeway^a has recently shown a reasonable probability that the East Anglian dykes may be those referred to by Tacitus in his account of how Ostorius,

^a *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vii. 200-207.

having stormed the first line of these *agrestes aggeres*, caught the Iceni tangled among their own earthworks and defeated them with great slaughter. I had previously^a added one to the number of these dykes by classing with them the earthwork known as the Roman road over the Gog Magogs.

The received notions with regard to the North British rampart too I have recently^b had an opportunity of criticising, and have endeavoured to show that the Picts wall or *vallum* is a much older work than the Roman wall or *murus*.

I have also already expressed doubts as to the age of Offa's Dyke, and to this question I would now return with additional evidence.

In the *Brut y Tywysogion* it is stated that Offa made the great dyke known as Offa's Dyke after Mercia had been laid waste by the Cymry in 765; that the men of Gwent and Morganwg destroyed Offa's dyke in 776, and that after a subsequent devastation by the Cymry in 784, Offa made another dyke nearer to him. In another *Brut*, which is said to be older and in which the chronology runs in decades, it is recorded that in the decade 770 to 780 there was a great destruction of the Southern British by Offa.^c Professor Rhys, however, tells me that the value of the Bruts as historical evidence is as yet but doubtful.

Asser Menevensis,^d A.D. 910, says that by the directions of Offa a great *vallum* was made from sea to sea between Britain and Mercia,^e and Simeon of Durham, whose chronicle ends in 1129,^f repeats this in the very same words.

Higden in his *Polychronicon* speaks of it as *fossa*,^g and says that it was *ad perpetuam Regnorum Angliae et Walliae distinctionem habendam*,^h but wrongly describes its course, probably because he did not distinguish between Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke, which is nearly parallel to Offa's Dyke, the distance between them varying from 500 yards to 3 miles, and which was often confounded with it by earlier writers, and is generally described as if it were part of it by later authors. Speed speaks of Offa's Dyke as a bound set to separate the Welsh from the English.

In the chronicle of Caradoc of Llangarvanⁱ referred to the twelfth century,

^a *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vi. 41-44.

^b *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vi. 355-361.

^c *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 3rd S. ii. 152-3.

^d De Rebus gestis Alfredi, in the *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, 471.

^e Wise, 10.

^f Ed. 1652, 118.

^g This is probably the origin of the name Force Ditch, applied to part of the southern end of the earthworks referred to Offa.

^h Cf. Gale, XV. *Scriptores*, i. 194.

ⁱ Reference in Ormerod, *Archaeologia*, xxix. 13, to Caradoc's *Welsh Chronicle*, ed. 1584, p. 19. Matt. Paris, *Vita Offæ Secundi*, ed. Wats. p. 27.

quoted in Dr. Powell's *History*,^a it is stated that, in consequence of the "deep ditch" called Offa's Dyke being made, the royal seat of the princes of Powys was moved from Shrewsbury (Pengwern) to Mathyraval in Montgomeryshire.

Pennant gives an account of Offa's Dyke,^b as does Hartshorne also in his *Salopia Antiqua*.^c Dr. Geo. Ormerod and Mr. Longueville Jones have published several valuable communications on Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke in the *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.^d

Dr. Ormerod^e has given references to the *Polychronicon*, as well as to Camden and other writers, respecting the date and extent of Offa's Dyke; and Milman^f refers to various documents in which the boundary between the Welsh and Saxons is mentioned. Wright^g suggests that the principal object of Offa's Dyke was to prevent cattle-lifting; but he does not even notice the difficulty that the steep side is next Wales, as if the Welsh had thrown it up to prevent the English carrying off their cattle. Prof. Earle, on the other hand, brings forward evidence from the Saxon chronicles to show that there was a regular patrol service along the Welsh border with stations at regular intervals, but implies that the dyke was rather a boundary line for them to guard from trespass than a fortification for them to defend.^h

Dr. Edwin Guest read a paper at Rhyl on the northern termination of Offa's Dyke, where he refers to the Book of Basingwerk, in which the word "terfyn" (*terminus*), a boundary, is frequently used for the dyke, and points out that it appears also in many local names.ⁱ

Similar dykes are found in other parts of England. For instance, Wan's Dyke, which runs from the neighbourhood of Andover, in Hampshire, across the centre of Wiltshire, and past Bath to Bristol, a distance of about 50 miles. This dyke is said to consist of a vallum and fosse, the fosse being on the north side; so that it was not likely that it could have been built by the Mercians, who were on the north side of it, if they also built Offa's Dyke which has the fosse, when there is one, on the Welsh or furthest side.^k

^a p. 20.

^c Q^{to} ed. ii. 273, see *Archaeologia*, xxix. 13.

^e *Archaeologia*, xxix. 13.

^g *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 3rd S. iii. 311.

^h Some notices of the dyke and protests against the destruction of parts of it will be found in the *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 3rd S. iii. 204, 397-8.

ⁱ *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 3rd S. iv. 335.

^k *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4th S. vi. 275.

^b *Tour in Wales*, i. 315, 351.

^d 3rd S. ii. 1-23, 151-4, 155; v. 317.

^f *Archaeologia*, xxxviii. 23.

With regard to the name, Skeat says "There is a place called Wansborough, in Wiltshire, which is spelt Wódensburh in old books; *i. e.*, Wodensborough. Similarly Wan's Dyke is clearly Woden's Dyke; merely named after him, just as we build a street, and call it Victoria Street."

Some curious facts in connection with the various names applied to Offa's Dyke may be found in the paper by Professor Earle, in *Archaeologia Cambrensis*.^a

He says that he found the dyke called Heyve Deyttch, Have Deytch, or Hof Deytch, which he thought might be only a corruption of Offa's dyke. While a friend of his suggested that the other forms might refer to its being the dyke which halves or divides the two countries. Dr. Hoopell informs me that Offa's Dyke at the southern end is locally called Off Ditch. Whatever may have been the original form, this suggests the idea of the off or far ditch, or that which formed the outside boundary. Professor Earle points out the rather remarkable coincidence of two parts of an extensive earthwork near Aynho, on the borders of Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire, being called the one Avesditch and the other Wattlebank. Corresponding to Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke.

In the south of Shropshire Offa's Dyke goes by the name of the Devil's Ditch.^b

There are plenty of examples of conspicuous or artificial objects being referred to well-known characters of a past time. A natural rock table on the corner between Dyffryn Aled and the Elwy is called Bwrdd Arthur, while numerous artificial earthworks of various kinds in Wales and England are referred to the same king. Caesar's camp at Folkestone has been shown by General Pitt-Rivers to be Norman. Cromwell gets credit for having thrown up innumerable British and Roman tumuli all over the country, in order from them to batter down some neighbouring church or castle. And, when local traditions do not suggest an earthly hero, bridges and dykes are referred to his satanic majesty's work; while natural hollows were his punch bowls, and queerly perched rocks offered him a seat. When the name of Offa became familiar, any earthwork which had a name of some similar sound might soon be called after Offa, and pedantic writers would invent a history in accord with the suggestion. Hwfa is a well-known Welsh name, and Careghofa was a strong castle near the dyke south of Oswestry.

It is not at all improbable that a pre-existing earthwork may have got called Offa's Dyke if it was fixed upon by Offa, or anywhere near Offa's time, as the boundary line between English and Welsh territory.

When a mountain tract is taken in under the Enclosures Act two things are done: the limits of common rights are defined, and a fence is put to keep the

^a 3rd S. iii. 197-209.

^b Parkins, *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4th S. vi. 275.

cattle and sheep from straying beyond it. One side may be cut up into small allotments, the other left open, and arrangements are made by which the labour or expense is divided among those concerned.

Having regard to the position and structure of Offa's Dyke, it is clear that much of it was well adapted for marking the territorial limits, and bounding the pasturage of a people who had flocks and herds which they wished to keep from straying beyond that limit. It would therefore be, at the time that name was given to it, a boundary to stop wandering, straying, or runaway cattle.

When inquiring about the age of the similar dykes on the other side of England, I asked Professor Skeat about the meaning of some of the names, Wat's Dyke and Fleam Dyke, for example; both of which he referred to Anglo-Saxon words meaning flight, wandering, straying. Wat as a man's name, he said, was only the short for Walter, and was Norman or Frankish and not Saxon at all; and yet if we insist that the whole of Offa's Dyke must have been thrown up by Offa, because of the name, we should also infer that Wat's Dyke was thrown up by some one of the name of Wat.

Mr. Hurrell tells me that the stream which runs from Chronicle Hills, near Triplow, was named Offa's Bourn; and that the bridge by which the high road near Foxton crosses it was known as Offa's Bridge: written Hoffer's Bridge on the Ordnance map. The Rev. E. Conybeare, of Barrington, while confirming the recollection of Mr. Hurrell as to the bridge having been formerly called Offa's Bridge, adds the curious fact that not long ago a farmer named Heffer took the adjoining farm, and that the bridge is now commonly called Heffer's Bridge.

Mr. Conybeare also mentions that in St. Ives there is a small street leading down to the river and now called Offa Lane, but that in old documents it is Offal Lane: which he interprets Off-fall from its position. Thus we find two sets of similar sounding words applied by the old English speaking people to dykes like Offa's Dyke in various parts of the country: Off Ditch, Hof Deytch, Have Deytch, Heyve Deytch, Avesditch; and Hwfa, Hofa, Hoffer, Offa, applied to various objects connected with them. In association with these we have Wat's Dyke, Wattlebank, Wan's Dyke, and may we add Watling Street.

If Offa, as recorded in the Brut,^a made another dyke nearer to him, *i.e.* Wat's Dyke, after the great devastation by the Cymry in 784, why was not the second one also traditionally connected with his name. Wan's Dyke, from the analogy of Wansburh, as shown by Skeat, is probably Woden's Dyke; and as we must

^a See above p. 2.

not infer that Woden made these, so we need not, on the strength of name, at any rate, infer that Offa made the others.

The traditional names do not therefore seem to go for much, and when the exact meaning and association of the words were lost, a similar sounding word, with an obvious meaning, was commonly adopted, as the name of the ship-of-war Bellerophon assumes in the mouths of sailors several forms having an obvious English meaning, or as the mottoes and signs over hostelrys have been modified into words more intelligible to their frequenters. It does seem, therefore, probable that these dykes were simply recognised by the early English folk as bounds beyond which cattle might not stray nor huntsmen wander; a view strengthened by the fact that Offa's Dyke was known in Wales as *terfyn*, the Welsh form of *terminus*.^a

It was not like a city boundary where people dwelt thickly on the inside of the walls. Probably there was no very dense population just along the dyke. Plenty of domestic cattle ranged over the low lands on the east and up the valleys on the west, where there were also rich hunting grounds. A strong fence to prevent the cattle straying beyond the limits arranged between two neighbouring clans, and a well-marked boundary to warn the eager huntsman off from the ground claimed by his powerful neighbour, would appear to have been a most natural thing to have made in any of these rough early ages, and most essential along a district which seems almost always to have been the border land between hostile races. The misunderstandings that might occur along a boundary not clearly marked by some obvious feature have been recently exemplified in the difficulties which have arisen between the French and Germans along their newly-defined boundary lines of Elsass Lothringen.

I endeavoured to make out the form of Offa's Dyke, which does not appear to have had much attention paid to it hitherto. It has been observed before that Wat's Dyke is a much stronger line of defence than Offa's Dyke, but what struck me most was that there is now no fosse at all along a great part of Offa's Dyke where it runs over rising ground. It seemed somewhat remarkable that if the line was in some places strengthened by a fosse, as if for defence, such an obvious addition would not have been made everywhere, especially when they were already digging earth to form the vallum, considering that all along the dykes of East Anglia, and in the case of most early earthworks there is a deep fosse, the earth from which, thrown up on the inside, forms the vallum, so that the

^a See Guest *op. cit. supra*, p. 4.

ditch was next the enemy. There are exceptions, as in the case of the Irish raths, where the earth often seems to have been thrown up from the inside, and in some of the circular earthworks of the Lake district.

Seeing, however, that the steep scarp was always turned towards Wales, and that, when there was a fosse, it also was on that side, I thought it possible that there may have been one along the whole line, but that it had got filled up by farming operations and nature; and therefore, with the permission and kind assistance of Sir George Osborne Morgan, I dug at the base of the vallum in one or two places near Brymbo, and examined it carefully in other parts of the line. I was unable to make out that there ever had been a fosse at the bottom of the vallum where I examined it, but the brow of the hill seems to have been simply cut down on the side next Wales, and the material to have been thrown up to form the vallum thus

Fig. 1.

where the dotted line represents the original form of the ground. It may be that the fosse was further out and the vallum cut back in recent times, so that where I dug (*) was in reality under the vallum, the dotted line in fig. 2 repre-

Fig. 2.

senting the original form of the dyke and the hard line the present form after the portion (α) had been thrown in to fill up the fosse (f), or perhaps spread over the land. But as far as I was able to go I found no traces of a fosse in those places where there is no fosse now seen.

Now let us see whether the form of the ground along which it has been carried will throw any light on the subject. We are at once met with the fact that no military engineer would have adopted such a line of defence, whether he held the east or the west side of the dyke. It is sometimes carried obliquely along the sides of the hills, so that, as it runs down the west flank, for instance, it is commanded by the hill above it on the east and, as it crosses the valley and runs obliquely up

the west of the valley and east slope of the hill beyond it, it is commanded from the west, as may be seen near Caergwrle. We must not, however, press this point too hard, as the ancient military engineers commonly carried their lines straight, but they generally strengthened the weaker places by double lines or outworks. The great length of the line to be defended, about one hundred miles from the mouth of the Dee to the estuary of the Severn, along which the dyke has been traced, though not continuously, for some seventy-five miles, is an objection to any of the explanations yet offered, but it presents greater difficulties in the way of our accepting the line-of-defence theory than any other. It would be impossible to man such a line, and if the English were scattered all along the line a compact body of Welsh could rush it anywhere. Besides, as has been shown, it is in many places more favourable to the Welsh than to the English. An earthwork like that, even with a pallisading on top, would, except where strongly defended, present no difficulty to men. And it would be easy enough to make a gap for cattle, especially if they were being driven from England into Wales.

It has always been taken for granted that Offa's Dyke was made by Offa and was not merely a series of pre-existing features selected by him and perhaps joined up to form the limit of his jurisdiction. Where the Wye formed the boundary no one says that he dug the channel of that river.

When the evidence of early writers that Offa made or fixed some kind of boundary along the whole Welsh frontier is admitted, it is assumed that it was probably continuous, and some similarity of design and strength is looked for along the whole line. But this is far from being the case, Offa's Dyke is not continuous, but occurs in long interrupted pieces, dying out just as do the East Anglian dykes. It does not run in a straight line along its whole course, but is made up of a number of more or less straight dykes inclined at various angles to one another, but all approximately coinciding with the boundaries of the lowlands and mountain lands.^a

It is curious to compare a small scale map of England and Wales having the line of Offa's Dyke traced on it with one on which the margin of the mountain land is indicated, or an agricultural map on which the arable districts are distinguished from the pastoral. The boundary agrees marvellously in all three, so it is likely to have coincided with the most ancient tribal divisions; and in fact we find that the strong portions of it do coincide with the frontiers of the Ordovices and Silures as far as their territories can be defined.

Milman^b in his paper on the *Political Geography of Wales* says, "The political

^a Cf. Fosbroke, *Gentleman's Magazine*, cii. 2, p. 500 *et seq.* ^b *Archaeologia*, xxxviii. 19.

boundary of Wales originally coincided with its physical or geological boundary as laid down by modern science—namely, the line of the rivers Severn and Dee. But this was soon overstepped by the Anglo-Saxon invaders, who gradually forced the Welsh further to the westward and established a new boundary at first indeterminate, but at length defined by Offa's Dyke," but, he remarks, "the records of the treaty under which, and of the extraordinary means by which, Offa's Dyke was constructed, have long since perished."

It does not appear that the dyke had been traced continuously from estuary to estuary by any of the earlier observers. From an examination of the ground we should infer that it never can have existed in many of the places through which it must have run on the supposition of there ever having been a continuous line of demarcation of uniform character and strength constructed by Offa. There is no reason why it should have been artificially removed and all traces of it destroyed, and there are no natural operations which can have obliterated it in most of the cases referred to. An immense earthwork cannot have been entirely destroyed in any incursion, and moreover the only historic notice of such a destruction refers it to the Southern Welsh^a and leaves unexplained the gaps in the northern part of the dyke. With regard to much of the ground we may safely say that if there are no traces there now the dyke never did run there.

Offa's Dyke cannot be followed to the sea at its northern extremity.^b A few remains of an ancient earthwork can be traced running in a south-easterly direction from half a mile to a mile along the south-west side of the road from Newmarket^c to Llynhelig, and the name of the nearest farm, Bryn terfyn (*terminus*),^d may refer to this boundary, but it is a very different thing from the great fosse and agger which no cultivation has obliterated along the borderland further south in Denbighshire and Shropshire.

The direction of this Newmarket boundary would take us by the entrenched position known as Bwrddyrhyfel (the Battle Board), and passing by many a tumulus would run on to Bryn-y-Cloddiau (the Hill of the Dykes), about one mile and a quarter north of Ysceifog.

Nothing is seen in the line of what is now called Offa's Dyke anywhere near the seaboard of Flintshire.^e Yet the country next north of where traces are last

^a See p. 2, *inf.* ^b 1 inch O.S. Map 79 N.W., 6 inch V.Va.

^c 1 inch 79 N.E., 1 inch 79 S.E.

^d Maesterfyn is, however, a long way from any dyke, and the word may mean the termination of a road or of anything.

^e 1-inch 79 S.E.

^e 6-inch Flint vi.

seen has not been subjected to much surface change by agricultural operations. I should infer, from an examination of the ground, that there never has been any important earthwork along that line of country. Traces of what is called Wat's Dyke, however, exist east of the Strand Fields at Holywell, and again in, and north-west of Wern Sirk. As a caution against inferring too much from such names as *clawdd* or *terfyn*, I may point out that Tyddyn Cloddiau is the name of a farm a mile east of these earthworks, and there is a doubt as to whether the word should be cloddiau or tlodion. Bryn-y-Cloddiau is another similar name about one mile and a third north of Ysceifiog. *Clawdd* is used for any fence, and *terfyn* for the termination of anything. Nant-y-Flint,^a and the ravines and escarpments by Bryngareg,^b seem to have been sufficient protection or mark without any earthworks, but about three miles and a-half to the south-east we again find traces. It is worth remark that, although the farm close to the Soughton turnpike is called Clawdd Offa, and on the same dyke about one mile and a-half still further south-east we have Bryn Offa, and, close by, Llwyn Offa; these are all on Wat's Dyke.

Wat's Dyke^c seems now to be better marked, and may be traced in a south-south-east direction about one mile and a-half east of Mold by Hope as far as Caergwrle.^d The brow of the wooded slope then served for and helped to obscure the line; but opposite Gwersyllt Park^e and by Bradley and Alwyn Bank^f it can be followed till it rests on the British camp in the bend of the Alyn;^g south of which on the other side of the river we pick it up again and trace it more or less continuously by Pentreclawdd near Rhuabon to Wynstay.

Curiously enough where we should expect the strongest defences, viz., the entrance to the fertile vale of Llangollen, we lose both dykes, and, when we find any dyke again, it looks like an independent earthwork flanking the strong entrenchments of Old Oswestry^h on the north and on the south for about two miles and a-half, after which we see no more earthworks that can be referred to this line of defence.

Thus we see that what we have been calling Wat's Dyke and Offa's Dyke both terminate on the same latitude of Trefonen,ⁱ and a single series of disconnected entrenchments referred to Offa runs from this south.

The earthworks to which the name of Offa's Dyke is generally applied are

^a 1-inch 79 S.E.

^c 1-inch 79 S.E.

^e Flint xiv.

^g 1-inch 74 N.E.

ⁱ Shropshire xix N.W.

^b 6-inch, Flint ix. Denbigh x.

^d 6-inch, Flint xiii. Denbigh xv.

^f Flint xvii, Denbigh xxi.

^h 6-inch, Shropshire xii N.W., xii S.W.

first seen as pointed out above (p. 9) near Newmarket,^a after which there is nothing that can with any certainty be referred to it for some fifteen miles to the south-east; but south of Treiddyn or Tryddyn a strong earthwork is seen, and from this point it can be traced by Nant-y-ffrith and over the hill west of Brymbo by Adwy'r Clawdd, between Minera and Wrexham,^b and thence more or less continuously by Tanyclawdd, close to the camp known as Y Gardden, and so on west of Rhuabon. We pick it up again south of the River Dee as it flows out of the Vale of Llangollen into the low lying coal country on the east, and trace it south by Chirk Castle and Penyclawdd.

From Chirk it may be followed south along the county boundary of Denbigh and Shropshire,^c south of Selattyn Hill, after which its course lies a little east of south through the Welsh part of Shropshire past Trefarclawdd to Trefonen. Then there is a gap of two miles defended by the camp near Whitehaven.^d On the south of the road to Llanyblodwel, on Crickheath Hill,^e another earthwork is seen running for about a mile south-south-west, and terminating in the strong entrenchments of Llanymynech Hill.

South of the River Vyrnwy^f a long continuous dyke runs southerly by Llandysilio Four Crosses to the River Severn, on the east of which we find the entrenchments of the Breidden.

South of the Breidden^g short interrupted banks are seen in the general line of Offa's Dyke; and, extending from Buttington along the east side of the Severn to Moel-y-Mab, near Leighton Hall,^h a longer earthwork which ends, as has been already shown to be frequently the case, in the entrenchments of that probably British fortified position. The next earthworks referred to Offa commence about a quarter of a mile further eastⁱ and can be traced south-south-west with little interruption to beyond the camp at Nant.^j

When we come down to the country about Montgomery,^k dotted with tumuli and bristling with camps, we might expect to find that Offa would, if any where, have made a strong rampart. There are traces of earthworks here on the line along

^a 6-inch, Flint xvii, Denbigh xxi.

^b 6-inch, Flint xxxv, Denbigh xxi, Denbigh xxxix, Denbigh xliii.

^c 6-inch, Shropshire Va. S.E., Shropshire xi N.E.

^d 6-inch, Shropshire xi S.E., Shropshire xviii N.E.

^e 1-inch 74 S.E.

^f 6-inch, Shropshire xxvi N.W., Montgomery xi N.W., xi S.W., xvi N.W.

^g Montgomery xvi S.W.

^h Montgomery xxxiii N.E., xxxiii S.E.

ⁱ Montgomery xxiv S.E.

^j Montgomery xxx N.E.

^k 1-inch 50 S.E.

which Offa is supposed to have drawn his boundary, but they are interrupted and obscure, and what is very important for the purposes of our enquiry there are here other similar earthworks quite off the line of Offa's Dyke. It is supposed to run from the great north road through Montgomery, passing about a mile east of the town by Brompton Ditches, the name denoting its occurrence here, and so two miles further to the south-south-east into the Cwm. But there it ends. Another dyke less than a mile in length runs across Edenhope Hill to Mainstone, and there are traces of another crossing the hill by the camp on Upper Knuck. South of which there is nothing that could be referred to Offa's Dyke for many a long mile.

We find in this district much evidence in support of the suggestion that Offa did not make the great dykes that ran along the eastern boundary of the country of the Ordovices, but that he only selected and appointed as limits these and other artificial and natural features which occur here and elsewhere at intervals along the borders of Wales, possibly joining them up by lighter structures. For there are similar dykes further west, such as the "upper short ditch" and the "lower short ditch" at either end of Bonc-y-Saeson on the north-western borders of the Clun Forest, in the midst of a country covered with British camps and tumuli. The name implies that this area was contested in Saxon or English times also, but it is quite out of the line of Offa's Dyke, and the country near Montgomery was evidently the scene of many a battle long before the time of Offa. The Marrington Dingle, the precipices of the Corndon Hills, and the ridges of the Longmynd offered such fastnesses one behind the other, that it was likely that some strong line of defence would be required between them and the hills at the back of Montgomery and the gap through which the Camlad flows into the valley of the Severn. The Romans recognised the importance of this position by throwing up their camp at Fflos.

When we have crossed the Camlad^a we find another bank passing Round Hill, which we follow south-south-east along the parliamentary boundary and on by Mellington Hall,^b and south and south-south-east to where it is interrupted by the stream at Upper Edenhope.^c Thence it runs past Mainstone,^d takes a curious twist under the tumulus on Hergan,^e and runs about one-third of a mile east^f of

^a Shropshire xxx S.E., xlv S.E.

^b Montgomery xxxvii N.E., Shropshire liii N.E.

^c Montgomery liii S.E., Shropshire liii S.E.

^d Montgomery xxxviii S.W., Shropshire liv S.W.

^e Shropshire lxii N.W., Montgomery xlv N.W.

^f Shropshire lxii S.W., Shropshire lxix N.W., Shropshire lxix S.W., Shropshire lxxvi N.W., Radnor xi N.W.

the camp at Fron over Llanfair Hill, more than 1,400 feet above sea level, to Cwm Sannan Hill where its course is curiously irregular and interrupted.

From this it runs down by Knighton,^a where its course is somewhat obscure, but we pick it up again on the south and trace it, interrupted at Rhosymeirch,^b but recognisable over Hawthorn Hill and Furrow Hill, and from this traces can be followed south-south-west making straight for the camp known as Castle Ring,^c opposite which it bends and runs across to the south-south-east so as to cover the low ground between the camp and east end of Evenjobb Hill;^d thence we have to travel half a mile south-west to pick it up again when we find it running in a south-easterly direction to the Burva Bank British Camp on the borders of Radnor and Herefordshire. Half a mile south of this is an earthwork running round the west and south of Herrock Hill, and this also is called Offa's Dyke. From this point, on the strength of some small banks here and there, it is supposed to run as far as Lyon's Hall,^e now taking an east-south-easterly course.^f

Milman,^g noticing the absence of any continuous rampart which could be referred to Offa at the southern end of the boundary between England and Wales, remarks that, "The southern portion of the dyke accompanies and sometimes seems to coincide with the lower course of the Wye."^h But the fortified positions along the east bank of the Wye from Tintern to Chepstow are, like those common all round the west coast, only defended promontories or slopes above a landing place, and have no connection with one another. No one would have thrown up such earthworks to repel the tribes on the other side of the Wye, who had the whole line of the river to choose from, but they might have been useful in conflicts between those who held the uplands and those who came up the river to attack them.

Ormerod,ⁱ speaking of the earthworks near the mouth of the Wye, says that, "There are other lines defending the area," enclosed by them, "namely, the lines of Offa's Dyke which skirt the Wye in Tidenham; which lines Mr. Fosbroke (varying from received opinion) has considered as communications between the Roman camps thrown out to check the Silures," which must have "guarded the Trajectus in a most powerful force, and almost invincibly have protected the passage of the Severn through the numerous

^a Shropshire lxxvi S.W., Radnor xi S.W.

^b Radnor xviii N.W., Radnor xviii S.W.

^c Hereford x N.W., Radnor xxv N.W.

^d Hereford x S.W., Radnor xxv S.W.

^e Hereford xvii N.E., xvii S.E., xviii S.W.

^f Cf. Meyrick, *Gentleman's Magazine*, ciii. 1, 504.

^g *Archaeologia*, xxxviii. 23.

^h See also Fosbroke, *Gentleman's Magazine*, ci.

ⁱ *Archaeologia*, xxix. 9.

garrisons which could have been collected against an enemy within a very few hours. A substructure by an earlier prince or nation is perfectly reconcilable with Offa's subsequent adaptation of these lines to his purposes; and the preceding observations tend, in some points, rather to confirm than otherwise this theory of a vast advanced position between the rivers. But it must be remembered that no Roman remains have been discovered here (except the uninscribed altar afterwards mentioned from Madgetts), and the difficulties arising from such want of authentication increase in proportion to the scale of the settlement or station which requires it. A Roman position defended on the sides towards the Wye by the lines attributed traditionally to Offa, and on the northern side by the earthworks at Madgetts and the Chase Hills would be nearly co-extensive with the entire parish of Tidenham, which contains about six thousand acres."

Those who support the view that the whole earthwork was constructed by Offa have to explain its unequal and interrupted character. It is not enough to say, in explanation, that it has been destroyed by agricultural operations or rased in some of the numerous incursions of the Welsh, for it is not so easy to obliterate all traces of an immense fosse and agger. It is still a strong line of defence in some places, while in other parts there is no evidence at all of the former existence of such a rampart. In the old tribal times a small encroachment on a neighbour's land was not worth while. There was plenty of room, and if they went to war it was for supremacy over a principedom. But when large alien races advanced towards the borders of Wales it might well be that some ruler would join up the disconnected entrenchments thrown up no one knows when, to check the border raids of the turbulent mountain tribes and to render cattle-lifting more difficult. What we have to do now is to try to work out the history of the successive earthwork builders; of those who strengthened a promontory by building a rampart across the isthmus; of those who protected a plateau by throwing up earthworks across the more accessible approaches; of those who fortified the whole of a hill top by running entrenchments all round, and doubling, trebling, or still further adding to them where the position was naturally less strong; of those who dug dykes across the whole front along which they considered themselves most open or liable to attack. What we have to ask now is whether a great part of the rampart attributed to Offa, the most important parts of which run along the eastern frontier of the Ordovices, might not have been constructed in the time of that powerful and warlike tribe. These portions were

^a *Gentleman's Magazine*, N.S. iii. 491.

lines of defence probably thrown up across those districts where attacks were most common and where the enemy could be conveniently watched and waited for. When, if ever, they were joined up and formed a continuous line from the estuary of the Dee to the Severn it could never have been intended to defend the whole line, but still it might be a well-marked and probably stockaded boundary, to cross which implied violence and was a *casus belli*.

Thus we see that the historical record of the dyke being the work of Offa is untrustworthy, the nomenclature doubtful, and the archaeological evidence *nil*.

Had the question been quite open we should probably have had ere this much evidence accumulated to show that the Romans made it, or the Romanised British, to keep off the turbulent hill tribes of Wales; or the early Britons themselves in some part of the long periods during which the stronger races as they pushed forward from the south and east were driving the weaker into the mountains, and the tribal divisions which Cæsar found here were being formed, consolidated, and defined. Archdeacon Williams^a long ago suggested that, whether the dyke were pre-Roman, Roman, or Saxon, might be proved by an examination of the places where the Roman roads cross the dyke, of which there were five or six, viz.: 1, near Caer Gwrle; 2, near Clawdd Coch, at the foot of Llanymynech Hill; 3, near Fordan; 4, near Kenchester (Magna); 5, near Chepstow; and 6, at the north end, where it crosses Sarn Hwlcin. But these Roman roads cross on low ground, where the dyke is generally absent; so that no satisfactory evidence has been obtained on this point.

Judging from the distribution of British and Roman camps, we should infer that it was along the line of Offa's Dyke that the strongest resistance had been offered to the advance of the Roman legions. "On the hill of Llanymynech, which adjoins the celebrated Offa's Dyke six miles south of Oswestry, the tide of Roman conquest had been stayed."^b In a paper on Saxon earthworks,^c by the late H. H. Lines, there are the following suggestive remarks:

Watt's Dyke commences north of the camp of Llanymynech, at two miles and a half east of Offa's Dyke, the great boundary of the kingdom of Mercia. It proceeds east of Oswestry to the great camp called Old Oswestry, or Hendinas. At Gobowen it passes between two small camps at Bryn-y-Castell, and crosses the Dee two miles below Ruabon, and one mile east of Offa's Dyke. It then passes through Wynnstay Park, and about one mile beyond there is a place on the dyke called Pentreclawdd; this is exactly opposite a small round fort called Pen-y-

^a *Archæologia Cambrensis*, 2nd S. i. 72.

^b *Montgomeryshire Collections*, vi. 377.

^c *Montgomeryshire Collections*, xxvi. 237.

Gardden, on Offa's Dyke. At this point Watt's Dyke begins to widen its space to two miles, as it passes just outside to the west of Wrexham, and continues to widen up to the river Alyn, near Gresford, where there is a small trenched fort on the dyke, and in the middle of the space between the dykes is another Gaer. It then passes between Caer Estyn and Caer Gwrle, which are not more than half a mile apart. Soon after it turns north-west to within a mile and a half of Mold on the west. Here it appears to overlap the termination of Offa's Dyke, and passing to the west of Northop it terminates at Basingwerk Abbey on the Dee near Holywell, about fourteen miles beyond where Offa's Dyke is lost, after having continued its course nearly parallel to that dyke nineteen miles. Thus the entire length of Watt's Dyke is twenty-three miles, while that of Offa is sixty-one miles; Offa's Dyke extending forty-two miles south of the termination of Watt's Dyke, giving to Offa a line of rampart of seventy-five miles.

On the east side and within a range of one day's march of these two Welsh dykes, we might expect to find, if anywhere, certain camps originating with the Saxon invaders. But, after a careful examination of the country in the east and south of the dykes—that is on the Saxon side—we find on the entire length of seventy-five miles, from Basingwerk on the Dee to Byford on Wye, nine Roman camps and ten others, which being without any indication of Roman work, may be set down to that British, or Silurian, or Ordovician army against which the nine Roman camps were required to act. There is the same proportional equality if we continue the examination south from Sutton Walls camp as far as the Doward on the Wye, where the Roman legions appear in the Silurian war to have entered on the real business of the campaign. In this southern division there are eight Roman and eight Silurian camps, with three undoubted Saxon camps, showing the characteristics of high castellated mounds. Of one of the above Silurian camps, that of Wall Hills, near Tedbury, there can be no doubt that it shows extensive Roman work; and this exactly equalises the relative number of camps, as Wall Hills must have belonged in turn to both contending powers. The result is that we find eighteen camps clearly may be allotted to each army. If there was this equality of power as indicated in these thirty-six camps, where shall we find the Mercian or Saxon strongholds which Offa would require to garrison those long dykes—seventy-five miles? Clearly he found them in the old Silurian camps ready to his hand, and thus utilised them, even after they had been occupied by the Romans.

If the author of that paper had not been hampered by the necessity of referring the construction of the great earthwork to Offa, how much simpler to have suggested in explanation that Offa found in the old Cambrian dykes a succession of boundaries ready to his hand, and utilised them as they may also have been utilised in the time of the Romans, whose camps, faced by British camps along the whole frontier, tell more clearly than history or tradition that there was something here which long held in check the military power of Rome.

Mr. W. Trevor Parkins read a paper at Wrexham on Offa's Dyke and Wat's Dyke in which he gives some further details and references to various notices of the dykes, and refers to the discovery at Nantyffrith of Roman remains con-

tiguous to Offa's Dyke, and in such a position that they must necessarily have been deposited there before it was constructed.^a These specimens have unfortunately got scattered and most of them lost, and it is now difficult to obtain any trustworthy information as to the exact position or the circumstances under which they were found.

I went to the spot and found the man who built the cottages close to the dyke, and with him and two other men dug in the gardens at the back where some of the material excavated in digging the foundations had been thrown, and I also examined the sides of the two streams which were cutting into another heap of rubbish from the same spot. There were great masses of concrete and Roman tiles and bricks. I saw no coins or any other objects that would exactly fix the date, and the evidence was altogether most unsatisfactory. Still I had no doubt that Roman remains had been dug up there, but I could not learn that any of these objects had been dug up under the rampart. On the contrary, all the evidence that I could collect on the spot went to show that they were found near or in the surface of the dyke but not under it. Just as in the case of the Devil's Dyke, which was cut through by the railway from Cambridge to Mildenhall, I saw the fresh cutting and noticed many Roman rubbish pits and interments along the top of cuttings adjoining the dyke, but though the original surface soil was clearly seen at the base of the artificial agger there were no Roman remains found along that line. A portion of an amphora and the bones of a horse were found at an inconsiderable depth from the surface of the dyke itself. These were probably buried in it, or thrown up with earth on to a pre-existing dyke to strengthen it in later, perhaps in Roman times. In this case the probability that these dykes were in existence when Ostorius marched against the Iceni in the third century A.D., has been well argued by Professor Ridgeway.^b Had the excavations been carried on in Cambridgeshire in the same way as were those at Nant-y-frith we should probably have had some story told of Roman remains under the original earthworks.^c

In the first half of the eighth century Procopius wrote his histories and incorporated such geographical information as he could gather. As there was considerable intercourse between Gaul and Britain he introduces some notice of that island in his work *de Bello Gothico*:^d

^a *Archaeologia Cambrensis*, 4th S. vi. 275.

^b *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vii. 200-207.

^c I have just received a letter from a Fellow of the Society, the Rev. Thos. Auden, written after he had received the notice of this meeting, informing me that he had a denarius of Vespasian which was picked up on Offa's Dyke, near to Llanymynech.

^d *Procopius de Bell. Goth.* iv. 20, Nieburh, 1833, p. 565.

The people who in old time lived in this island of Britain built a great wall which cut off a considerable portion of it. On either side of this wall the land, the climate, and everything are different. For the district to the east of the wall enjoys a healthy climate, changing with the seasons, being moderately warm in summer and cool in winter. It is thickly inhabited by people who live in the same way as other folk. Trees also flourish and bring forth their fruit in due season, and the field crops grow and are in no way inferior to those of other districts; moreover it appears that the district can boast of never failing springs.

But on the west of the wall everything is quite the opposite; so that, forsooth, it is impossible for a man to live there for half-an-hour. Vipers and snakes innumerable and every kind of wild beast share the possession of that country between them; and, what is most marvellous, the natives say that if any man crosses the wall and enters the district beyond it, he immediately dies, being quite unable to withstand the pestilential climate which prevails there, and that any beasts that wander in there straightway meet their death.

Whatever value we may attach to this description, we may, I think, assume that the geographer Procopius had heard a graphic account from merchants and travellers, probably mixed up with still extant accounts from the time of the Roman occupation, of some kind of wall forming a boundary between two very distinct and dissimilar parts of the island, and it is noteworthy that he refers it to an ancient prehistoric people, and says nothing about its running from sea to sea. Now, as we know that there are several dykes of unknown age in Britain, let us inquire to which of them his description will best apply, and whether the more fabulous parts of his story may not be explained by reference to local features and traditions.

No part of Offa's Dyke was then believed to be of earlier date than the time of Procopius. Procopius was therefore supposed to refer to the other wall which crosses the island from sea to sea, namely that known as the Wall of Severus, the more northern wall of Antoninus being out of the question, and no difference of date and origin having been yet suggested^a between the Picts' Wall or earthworks known as "the Vallum," between the Tyne and Solway, and the Roman Wall of masonry known as "the Murus," which runs nearly parallel to it along its whole length. Now Procopius speaks of the wall as running north and south. This is true of Offa's Dyke but not of any of the great northern dykes. And, even if we allow for such a difference of orientation in the ancient geographers as would make Scotland extend to the east of North Britain, that would place the wild or Caledonian side on the east of the wall and not, as Procopius says, on the west. Besides we must

^a *Cambridge Review*, ix. 195, 210, 227. *Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, vi. 355.

remember that we have little evidence of what even Ptolemy's own maps were like save some medieval sketches of what it was inferred from his statement of longitude, etc. they must have been. Perhaps this very description by Procopius helped to make the early geographers twist Caledonia round into an east and west position.

Procopius describes the country on one side of it as rich and well-watered, with crops and productive fruit trees, while that on the other side was just the contrary. There is no such difference between the districts on either side of the wall of Severus, which runs across an undulating country very similar along the whole line. But, if he is comparing the rich Cheshire plains and the fertile valley of the Severn on the east side with the rough scars and barren hills of Wales on the west, the description applies very well.

He says that the country on the east of the boundary wall was thickly inhabited by people who lived comfortably like the country folk with whom Procopius and his friends were familiar: there was nothing exceptional about their houses or them. But it was dangerous to cross the borders into the country of the Ordovices, or other fierce tribes of Wales. If he did so his life was not worth half an hour's purchase. Procopius having just said that the western area was full of wild beasts, then makes a quite contradictory statement about pestilential vapours which kill man or beast that ventures over the boundary. This could not apply to any of the dykes, nor indeed to any part of Britain, and may be much more easily explained by reference to the tradition that there was a well defined boundary between Wales and England, and that anyone who crossed that into the strangers' land was instantly put to death. In *Montgomeryshire Collections*^a we read, "Near to this site, and alongside of Offa's Dyke, is a field called 'Erw Brock Pen,' or the gallows field, where in Saxon times, the Englishman passing over the boundary line was hanged, and the Welshman committing the same offence was mercilessly deprived of his right hand;" and we read in Speed (Radnorshire), "By Egbert the monarch was a law made, that it should be present death for the Welsh to pass over Offa's Ditch." This tradition may be of any antiquity and have been incorporated into English history at any time, and it is probable enough that severe measures, more or less legalised, prevailed at many different periods along that fiercely contested frontier.

There is also an easy explanation of his statements as to the prevalence of wild beasts, vipers, etc.: for wolves and bears were driven into the hills by the advance of settled occupation of the lowlands. They held their own throughout

^a vi. 386.

^b Cf. Nicholson, *Cambrian Travellers' Guide*, p. 910.

Britain till long after the time of Procopius, but must have been always more numerous in the mountain districts. Beavers still lingered in Wales till the eleventh century. The story of the Afanc runs through all Welsh medieval legend. Vipers are still very common all along our west coasts, and on the warm limestone hills that bound the eastern margin of Wales and Devonshire. There seems therefore to be sufficient reason to ask for a re-consideration of the age of Offa's Dyke, to ask whether the evidence of Procopius is not as good as that of the Chronicles, whether the Roman and British camps marshalled along the frontier do not make it more probable that the long lines of earthwork, carried generally along the hill fronts and rarely across the valleys, belonged to the defensive systems of the Britons, or even of the Romans, or of the Romanised British, rather than that they were the work of the Saxons who, except in their cemeteries, have left hardly a wall or a potsherd to tell of their former existence.

This sketch, which is necessarily very incomplete, will, at any rate, I hope, throw sufficient doubt on the received theory to call for more careful examination of all the earthworks along the borders of Wales: not merely a search for traces of banks along the supposed line of Offa's Dyke, but an attempt to group the several parts of that which has been referred to Offa according to their construction and association with other similar works in each area; and further, to suggest the attempt to discriminate between the original earthworks thrown up for defensive purposes and banks which may have been thrown up in later times to connect those isolated entrenchments, and form a visible easily-defined boundary.