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The Alpine Pass of Hannibal.

By DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD, SEC. R.G.S.

Map, p. 680.

SOME years ago I ventured, in disregard of Dr. Johnson's deprecation of any further mention of the Second Punic War, to discuss in detail in the 'Alpine Journal' (No. 82) the various theories put forward in the old-world controversy as to the Pass of Hannibal. I then stated the case for a track recognised by another great captain, Napoleon, as the most proper for a 'Route Impériale de l'Espagne en Italie,' the Col de l'Argentière, leading from Barcelonnette to Cuneo. A short summary of my argument, so short that I now venture to reprint it, was at the time published in these pages.

"If we trust Polybius alone, the Pass of Hannibal must be left an open question as between the Mont Cenis, the Mont Genève, and the Col de l'Argentière; if we take Livy into account, we are confined to the road up the Drac to Gap, and the passes leading from the Durance; and if we may believe the fragment of Varro preserved by Servius in his Commentaries on Virgil, which many critics have strangely pronounced unintelligible, we must decide for the Col de l'Argentière. Varro mentions five passes beginning at the sea and ending with the Graian Pass, and takes Hannibal over the second. These Passes are now represented by the five carriage-roads of the Cornice, the Col de l'Argentière, the Mont Genève, the Mont Cenis, and the Little St. Bernard. Proof is brought forward that the Argentière route was used by the Gauls and Romans, and the ground is said to be suited to the adventures attributed to the Carthaginian army. To these a parallel may be found in the difficulties encountered by French armies on the same route in 1515 and 1744. The loose and (had we not the original authorities) in some respects unintelligible narratives of the former campaign given by Sismondi and Michelet may further be compared with the narratives of Hannibal's march given by Polybius and Livy."

I did not then think it would be proper to encumber columns which have hardly space "to comprehend new things" with a lengthy lucubration on rusty antiquities. Nor do I now propose to go into the question in detail in a controversial spirit. But it seems to me that it may be interesting to many readers of the 'Proceedings' to be informed of the great change which has taken place recently in the position of this long-lived controversy, and to be furnished with a map which may show with tolerable clearness the main lines of march which have been put forward by more or less competent critics.

Two considerations chiefly moved me to join in the fray. The first was a strong sense that the character of Polybius as a topographer was frequently somewhat misunderstood, and that his claim to accuracy in details was being exaggerated. The second was the discovery that the case for the Little St. Bernard was being supported at an English university by statements not in accordance with physical facts, and that in all the arguments in its favour from the days of Brockedon and Dr. Arnold downwards there was a marked absence of any satisfactory answer to the great objection, the distance from the crest to the Italian plain, and the difficult character of the lower gorges of Val d'Aosta.

I am glad now to be able to show that in France, Germany, Switzerland, and England, there has been a contemporaneous reaction against the depreciation of Livy's narrative of the Second Punic War, and the exaggerated estimate of Polybius's claims as a geographer, and that consequently the prevailing opinion is now in favour of a route lying through the basin of the Durance, and the Little St. Bernard has lost,

both abroad and in England, the position of first favourite, which, mainly owing to Mommsen's influence, it had a few years ago attained.

I propose here, not to insist again on my own views (which may readily be studied elsewhere by any one who cares for them) but to summarise briefly the contributions of the most recent critics. I shall begin with that of Mr. T. W. Arnold, who in re-editing his grandfather's chapters on the Second Punic War, has recently taken occasion to treat the questions of the comparative geographical authority of Livy and Polybius, and of the Alpine Pass crossed by the Carthaginian army, in two notes of great clearness and ability, in which he has managed, as I think, to sift the wheat from the chaff of previous disputants (including myself) with singular success.

On the first point, Mr. Arnold quotes from Dr. Arnold's previously unpublished notes and letters the following expressions:—

"I have been working at Hannibal's passage of the Alps. How bad a geographer is Polybius, and how strange that he should be thought a good one." "Polybius is so very bad a writer."

In this unfavourable view, Dr. Arnold was, his grandson shows, at the time almost solitary. Niebuhr held the opposite opinion, and in our own day the weight of Freeman's, Capes's, Bosworth Smith's, and Mommsen's general approval, together with the uncompromising eulogy of Nissen, has been thrown into the favourable side of the scale. Now, however, the adverse view of Polybius as a topographer is no longer the eccentricity of a single historian, or the audacity of an Alpine traveller. Mr. Arnold quotes on this side from Bunbury, Droysen, Ihne, and Neumann. The last-mentioned writer, the author of "the most recent, full, and competent discussion of the whole period that has appeared in Germany, raises his conviction of Polybius's incapacity and untrustworthiness as a geographer almost to the level of an axiom." Mr. Arnold goes on: "The general tendency of modern criticism is undoubtedly towards Dr. Arnold's unfavourable view, which was a revolutionary heresy at the time it was expressed, but is now on its way to become a commonplace."

Mr. Arnold also confirms, on the authority of Nissen, the opinion I had formed independently, that the particular books of Livy that deal with Hannibal in Italy were composed not recklessly and loosely on the authority of previous compilers, but after a conscientious study of the chroniclers contemporary with the events.

This expression of opinion might be thought hardly necessary by one who has studied only Livy's own text, and found in it such expressions as, "Nihil auctum ex vano velim, quo nimis inclinant scribentium animi;" "Inter omnes constat." But one of Livy's most recent commentators in this country has gone out of his way to express disbelief, not only in the historical statements of his author, but also in those which Livy repeatedly makes with regard to the authorities he has referred to. Mr. Capes "thinks it is not unlikely" that Livy should have "freely used" the compiler Caelius Antipater, who lived a hundred years after the events, in preference to the contemporary annalists, "with little effort to hunt up his authorities or to compare the various sources fused into the current narrative." And a Swiss writer, Dr. Dübi, has also fallen into the same strange belief as to Livy's exclusive reliance on Caelius.

The importance to the geographical question at issue of our estimate of the relative authority of Polybius and Livy is obvious. The claims of the Little St. Bernard are based on a literal interpretation of two passages of Polybius, in which he says that from the confluence (of the Rhone and Isère) Hannibal marched *along the river* 800 stades, and that he fought a battle with the *Allobroges* at the entrance to the Alps. If in these two passages Polybius wrote with modern precision, it

is clear that Hannibal marched on up the Rhone and fought his first battle in the proper territory of the Allobroges north-west of the Isère. But if Polybius wrote loosely, if Rhone-country, Alps, and Po-country were three broad distinctions, to be translated Rhone basin, Po basin, Alpine region; if the word *Allobroges* was given by Roman authors (as Circassian has been by English) a very wide and often inaccurate extension, the basis of the whole controversy is shifted. In this case the groundwork of the Little St. Bernard theory is cut away, and little remains to support it, for Dr. Arnold, the champion of the St. Bernardites, himself makes his confession:—"I cannot trace those particular spots which De Luc and Cramer fancy they could recognise. I thought so on the spot when I crossed the Little St. Bernard in 1825 with Polybius in my hand, and I think so still."

Having cleared the ground on this point of literary criticism, I proceed to give the most recent opinions on the main geographical question at issue.

Mr. Arnold, while misdoubting my attempted reconciliation of the two authors, accepts the authority of Livy as against that of Polybius, and decisively rejects all the northern passes. "It remains," he writes, "to state briefly the case as between the Mont Genève and the Col d'Argentière. To some of Mr. Freshfield's arguments, particularly those relating to the supposed difficulty about the Insubrians, which I think Neumann has successfully shown to be no difficulty at all, I attach but slight importance." [As to the Insubrians, I had, before I read Mr. Arnold, committed to print my recantation. On further study I had arrived independently at the same conclusion as Neumann and Dübi.] "But the personal impressions of a man with Mr. Freshfield's knowledge of the Alps have their weight, and Mr. Freshfield says, 'So far as I can judge, after having made a personal inspection of the routes, the natural features of this pass and its approaches agree better than those of any other with the accounts given of Hannibal's march by Polybius and Livy.'*" His great argument, however, and a really strong one, is the passage which he quotes from Varro: '*Alpes quinque viis Varro dicit transiri posse: una quæ est juxta mare per Ligures; altera quæ Hannibal transiit; tertia quæ Pompeius ad Hispaniense bellum profectus est; quarta quæ Hasdrubal de Galliâ in Italiam venit; quinta quæ quondam a Græcis possessa est, quæ exinde Alpes Graiæ appellantur.*'† Now this list certainly appears to give the passes in their geographical order from south to north, and if this is so it is not easy to find a flaw in the interpretation of Mr. Freshfield who reads them off as follows:—(a) Cornice; (b) Argentière; (c) Genève; (d) Cenis; (e) Little St. Bernard.‡ In other words, an early and careful author like Varro expressly tells us that Hannibal crossed by the Col d'Argentière. A letter of Pompey, preserved by Sallust, also says that he (Pompey) took a different route from that of Hannibal, and one more convenient to the Romans (*nobis opportunius*). Hermann Schiller recognises the force of Freshfield's argument, but objects that the first of the passes mentioned by Varro may have been the Col di Tenda. This, however, would make no difference. The second pass to the northward would still be the Col d'Argentière. Nor will it do to make the Col di Tenda the second pass,

* Alp. J., xi. p. 290.

† "Preserved by Servius on Virg. *Æn.*, x. p. 13."

‡ "Hasdrubal seems to have made his way further north into Gaul than his brother, to judge from Livy, xxvii. p. 39: "*Non enim receperunt modo Arverni,*" &c., and would therefore naturally cross by one of the northerly passes. It is, perhaps, worth mentioning that Appian, whose authority, however, on any geographical point is null, says in contradiction to Varro, that Hasdrubal took the same pass as Hannibal: Appian, Hannibal, 52." (I may add that Hasdrubal passed the Pyrenees at their western extremity.—D. W. F.)

as it is altogether out of the question that it should have been the pass used by Hannibal. On the whole we must admit with Schiller 'that the chances of the Mont Genève and Col d'Argentiere have decidedly improved.' I should be disposed to go even further and to say that Mr. Freshfield, who has the advantage of being the last man to review the whole question in the light of his predecessors' labours and of his own personal experience—for I do not regard Colonel Perrin with his Col du Clapier as a serious rival—at present holds possession of the field."

So far Mr. Arnold, whose whole essay deserves careful consideration as a luminous summing-up of a wearisomely conducted discussion.

Dr. Dübi, the President of the Bern Section of the Swiss Alpine Club, has recently published, in the 'Jahrbücher' of his Society (vols. xvi., xvii., xix., and xx.), a series of interesting and instructive articles on the early history of the Alps. Beginning in 1882 with a collection of the references to the Alps in classical authors, he proceeded in the following year to a short summary of the Roman campaigns in the mountains. He is now engaged on the Roman roads in the Alps, and has in two papers completed his task so far as the Western or Gallic Alps are concerned. All who are interested in the subject will compare curiously the opinions arrived at by Dr. Dübi with those of other recent writers; for example, with the ingenious but somewhat fanciful views of Signor Vaccarone and the painstaking literary (but never local) researches of Herr Ehlmann.

Dr. Dübi commits himself to no decided opinion as to Hannibal's route from the confluence to the Durance. But he brings forward the opinion of the French Archæological Commission that the route up the Drac and over the Col Bayard was a Roman road, and one of those indicated in the Peutinger Tables. Here we have an important confirmation of the position I have asserted against many critics that this was one of the classical, as it is certainly one of the natural, routes between the Isère and the Durance.

I turn to the descent into Italy. On this question I think Dr. Dübi has thrown some valuable light; at any rate, he inclines me to follow him. He does not hold it by any means necessary, in order to satisfy the statement of Polybius, "that Hannibal, having crossed the Alps in fifteen days, descended boldly into the plains of the Po and the nation of the Insubrians," to believe that Hannibal met with Insubrians before he encountered the Taurini. Polybius, he considers, was looking forward, and writing in his broad manner passed over for the moment the fight with the Taurini. This very plausible conjecture, first put forward by Neumann, is consistent with the tendency I have previously noted in Polybius to take from time to time general views of the march.

Varro's catalogue of the passes naturally stands in Dr. Dübi's way. Like all critics who reject the Col de l'Argentière, he is bound to overthrow or disparage it. He does his best to this end in a lengthy and minute commentary, the conclusion of which is that the catalogue is 'only a literary product,' by which somewhat vague phrase I suppose him to mean that it stands in no close relation to physical and historical facts. I have endeavoured to give accurately the heads of Dr. Dübi's argument, with such running commentary of my own as it may seem to call for in Number 93 of the 'Alpine Journal.'

I couple with this notice of Dr. Dübi's paper a brief reference to a summary of recent contributions to the controversy in hand which has been furnished by Professor Schiller to the 'Berliner Philologische Wochenschrift.*' Professor Schiller

* June 7, 14, 21, 1881.

analyses my paper in the 'Alpine Journal' (No. 82), together with the works of the late Professor Neumann,* and two French officers—Perrin and Hennebert.†

Of these writers not one is in favour of the Little St. Bernard. Colonel Perrin is a partisan of the Mont Cenis with variations, or, to speak more precisely, of the Col du Clapier (8125 feet), a neighbouring bye-pass to which he has been reduced by the necessity he feels of finding a view of Italy. Like all Mont Cenisians, Colonel Perrin begins by throwing Livy overboard—a convenient but to my mind wholly illegitimate mode of simplifying the problem. Those, however, who can overlook this preliminary licence will find the task of fitting Polybius to the Arc valley worked out with great ingenuity and a thorough knowledge of the ground; and whatever influence it may have on the main question at issue, Colonel Perrin's book will doubtless be of value to students desirous to trace the old roads from the valley of the Arc to Italy. The line he selects for the Carthaginian army is by Aiguebelette and Montmélian to the Isère, thence across the hills by the Col de Montaudrey and Col du Pontet to the Arc at La Chambre, and up the right bank of the river through Villarey, Bourget, Amodon, and Aussois to his pass. His 'White Rock' is near the latter village. I agree with Mr. T. W. Arnold that "the only serious argument for the Col du Clapier is its view of Italy," and that this is not enough to counter-balance the many objections to it. "Colonel Perrin with his Col du Clapier I do not regard as a serious rival," adds Mr. Arnold, with my full assent.

Professor Neumann and Hennebert are both for the Mont Genève. The former brings forward many of the arguments already familiar in favour of a march through the valley of the Durance. The new suggestion he makes is his attempted reconciliation of Polybius and Livy as to the tribe among whom Hannibal descended.

He, with Dr. Dübi and Mr. T. W. Arnold, whom he anticipated, believes that Polybius when he stated that Hannibal descended "into the plains of the Po and the Insubrian nation," regarded his conflict with the Taurini as part of the passage of the Alps, and that Livy understood him in this sense.

Hennebert's peculiarity lies in the descent he adopts from the Mont Genève. He takes Hannibal over the Col de Sestrières and down the Clusone to Pignerol. The motives alleged for this fanciful route are the influence of the chieftain Magilus (identified as head of a tribe of Magali in the Clusone valley) and the desire to avoid debouching directly on an enemy's town—Turin.

I desire, in passing, to dispose of a misunderstanding of my German critic and to say that in my opinion—and here Mr. Bunbury agrees with me—exactness in distances has been made too much of in this discussion. An accurate measurement in a mountain country is a late result of civilisation, and rough estimates are, as a rule, exaggerated. So much for my own opinion of "the brilliant correspondences" on which Professor Schiller fancies I rely.

I would repeat that this caution may, in my judgment, be profitably extended to other incidents of the march. The pass to be looked for should not exactly correspond with, but be less difficult (to our eyes at least) than that described by the classical authors. In historical descriptions of mountain campaigns, no matter of what date, the difficulties of the ground are as a rule considerably exaggerated. Readers seriously interested in the question should study carefully the records of the campaigns of A.D. 1515 and 1744, in both of which the Col de l'Argentière was crossed by armies, whose adventures, particularly those of Francis I., run parallel,

* 'Das Zeitalter der Punischen Kriege,' Breslau, 1883.

† 'Marche d'Annibal des Pyrénées au Po.' (Privately printed at Grenoble, and practically unattainable.) 1883. 'Histoire d'Hannibal,' 1870-78, 2 vols.

altering only elephants to canons, in the most remarkable way with those of the Carthaginian host.

Professor Schiller's general conclusions are (to me) thoroughly satisfactory. He holds that the passes from the Durance are winning their way to acceptance; that the Little St. Bernard has been fairly disestablished; and that *if* the passage from Varro I quoted is genuine and trustworthy—a point he leaves open—the case for the Col de l'Argentière is made out.

After carefully considering these fresh contributions I still hold that as between the Mont Genèvre and the Col de l'Argentière the evidence, putting aside Varro, is very closely balanced, but that the scale inclines in favour of the southern pass. If we admit the passage from Varro, and assume that he was writing exactly, the question is, of course, solved. And Dr. Dübi's assault on Varro's statement appears to me singularly ineffectual; but on this point I am prepared to bow to more competent scholars than myself. For, while I protest with the most positive conviction against all the northern passes, I cannot work myself into more than an advocate's partiality for the Argentière over the Mont Genèvre. I fully admit that the sentence from Varro may be impugned, and that if it was once out of the way some stress might fairly be laid on the fact that the Mont Genèvre seems pre-eminently the Taurine Pass. To make this confession, however, I fear is to show that I do not possess the first qualification for a Hannibalian critic—a perfect belief in my own infallibility!

Before laying down my pen let me indicate in a final sentence the probable outlines of the story of the Durance Passes as they have presented themselves to me in the course of this inquiry.

The Keltic hordes poured down through Gaul till they came to lands already occupied, and ill-suited for pasture.* The fame of Italy led many of their tribes up the valley of the Durance. When they reached its angle, unwilling to turn their backs to the sun, they held straight on over the broad downs of the Col de Vars, and up to the gentle crest of the Argentière. For centuries this remained—it remains to this day—a natural and frequented highway for the people on either side of the chain. Then the Romans, masters of the valley of the Po, approached the eastern base of the Alps, and, no longer content with sailing over sea, sought a highway to the Province and Spain. The broad trench from which the Dora Riparia issues—next to Monte Viso the most conspicuous physical fact in the view from Turin—led their generals on to the discovery of the Mont Genèvre and, when they wanted to go north—to Gallia, and not to Hispania or the Provincia—of the Mont Cenis. The Argentière lost much of its importance after the opening of the Mont Genèvre, as the Great St. Bernard has lost its importance by the construction of the Simplon road. In mediæval history it flashed out again into temporary notice, and then its very existence was ignored by the Dryasdusts who construct orography in their cupboards. Yet military engineers are still alive to its importance, and every year hundreds of sturdy Piedmontese, descendants of the old Ligurian stock, pour backwards and forwards over it on their way to and from their winter work in the cities of Provence.

The only contestable indication in my map, I believe, is the position assigned to the Tricastini, between the Drôme and Isère. In this I follow Ptolemy, who places them east of Valence, and among the moderns Mr. Long and Herr Müller.†

Those who desire large-scale maps of the particular passes should procure the

* See Livy, v. p. 34.

† See also 'Alpine Journal,' xi. p. 272.

French *Carte Militaire de la Frontière* (2s. a sheet) and the new Italian Survey (1s. a sheet) at Stanford's.

The heights of the passes over the main chain referred to are, according to the official surveys: Col de l'Argentière, 6552 feet; * Mont Genève, 6082 feet; Petit Mont Cenis, 7220 feet; Col du Clapier, 8125 feet; Petit St. Bernard, 7180 feet. I append a list of the principal recent works cited above.†

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Geographical Results of the Afghan Frontier Commission.—The Indian Government, at the suggestion of the Secretary of State, have commissioned Major T. H. Holdich, R.E., of the Indian Survey Department, to prepare a special report on the explorations, surveys, and, generally speaking, on the geographical work of the Afghan Boundary Commission.

Exploration of the Central Caucasus.—Messrs. C. D. Dent and W. F. Donkin, two of the most active members of the Alpine Club, have this year spent their summer holiday in exploring, with Alpine guides, the central group of the Caucasus, the peaks and glaciers encircling Koshtantau, 17,096 feet. Although much harassed by almost uninterruptedly bad weather, they succeeded in ascending Tau Tetnuld, the Jungfrau of the Caucasus (figured in Mr. D. Freshfield's 'Central Caucasus,' p. 328), the height of which was found to be about 16,500 feet, and in making other glacier expeditions, which will necessitate the introduction of many and important corrections in the maps of the district. The Caucasian mountains struck the Alpine travellers as stupendous, and the Koshtantau chain as the grandest sight they had ever looked on. Mr. Donkin has brought home a number of photographs of the scenery and people, which, if they at all equal his well-known Swiss views, will be most valuable

* I have written Col de l'Argentière, not d'Argentière, because the hamlet on the Italian side of the pass is figured in all the Government maps prior to the new Italian survey as L'Argentière.

† Capes, *Livy*, Books xxi., xxii. Macmillan, 1883.

Dübi, *Die Römerstrassen in den Alpen*. Jahrbuch der Schweizer. Alpenklub, vols. xix. and xx. Bern, Dalp, 1884-5.

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Vaccarone, *Le Vie delle Alpi Occidentali*. Candeletti, Turin, 1880.