

XIX.—*Observations on the Details of Vespasian's first Campaign in Britain.*
By CHARLES WARNE, Esq., F.S.A.

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WHILST the progress of Cæsar from the shores of Gaul to the place of his landing in Britain, and his subsequent advance into the interior of the country, are regarded as subjects worthy of the attention of men of the highest eminence in antiquarian and classical science, it may seem somewhat strange that their researches should have stopped there, and that comparatively little consideration has been bestowed on the progress of those military expeditions which ultimately led to the subjugation of the whole of Britain, and its incorporation with the great Roman Empire.

It seems that by tacit consent antiquaries are content to rest satisfied with the few brief notices of very important facts that have been handed down in the pages of history, without taking the trouble to verify them by the light of actual investigation.

Under a conviction of what may be achieved by this method of inquiry, it is my object in this essay to invite attention, for the first time I believe, to a remarkable series of earthworks in Dorsetshire, which, in my opinion, is intimately related to those military operations which were undertaken by one of Rome's most successful generals in carrying out the great scheme of the invasion of Britain.

That general will be at once recognised as Vespasian. At the period when Claudius was making his attempt on Britain, Vespasian held a command in Germany; but, being called upon to take part in the enterprise, he brought over with him the "Legio Secunda" or "Augusta," of which he was legate, and seems to have taken up his position at Vectis.

This occurrence is thus alluded to by Suetonius; "Claudio principe, Narcissi gratiâ, legatus legionis in Germaniam missus est (Vespasianus), inde Britan-

niam translatus, tricies cum hoste confluxit. Duas validissimas gentes, superque viginti oppida, et insulam Vectem, Britanniae proximam, in ditionem redegit.”^a

And briefly Eutropius; “Vespasianus huic (Vitellio) successit, privata vita illustris, ut qui a Claudio in Germaniam, deinde in Britanniam missus, tricies et bis cum hoste conflixerit, duas validissimas gentes, xx oppida, insulam Vectem, Britanniae proximam, imperio Romano adjicerit.”^b

Seldom have fewer words comprised more important facts, and we may well deplore the brevity of narratives which veils a transaction whose details, pregnant with history, would have been for us subjects of the most stirring interest.

Imagination may supply much that is wanting, and convert many a lofty height, many a wide-spread plain, and many a quiet valley into historic sites as scenes of heroic deeds, where the brave but undisciplined Briton fell in the unequal struggle, and left nothing but the mounds that hide his ashes to tell the touching story of his patriotic resistance.

We have no means of knowing whether Vespasian, following in the footsteps of his great predecessor Cæsar, landed on the shores of Kent and fought his way through the south-eastern territory (which, be it remembered, was at that time one vast primæval forest known as that of Anderida,) to the coast, whence he would pass by a narrow channel to the Isle of Wight.

Rather may we suppose Cæsar’s footsteps to have been followed by Claudius himself, and that Vespasian directed his course from Germany straight to the Island Vectis, with the intention of making it the base of his future operations.

As regards myself, I believe his object was, after obtaining possession of that island, to proceed to the subjugation of the Durotriges.

To trace the progress of his arms does not lie within the scope of the historian, for history has afforded no landmarks for his guidance; but it is the labour of the antiquary, who may appeal to certain evidences stamped upon the soil itself, which, upon careful study, will resolve themselves into a well-connected series of facts that gives a high degree of probability, if not of proof, to the reality of his conjectures.

Being established then at Vectis, Vespasian’s next step seems to have been taken with the view of rendering himself master of the coast-line to the west, before he carried his arms into the interior; and, on taking a general survey of his position, the opposite shores of Purbeck were the point to which his attention would be naturally directed.

^a Sueton. de T. Fl. Vesp. cap. iv.

^b Eutrop. lib. vii. cap. xix. edit. Virheyk, 1762.

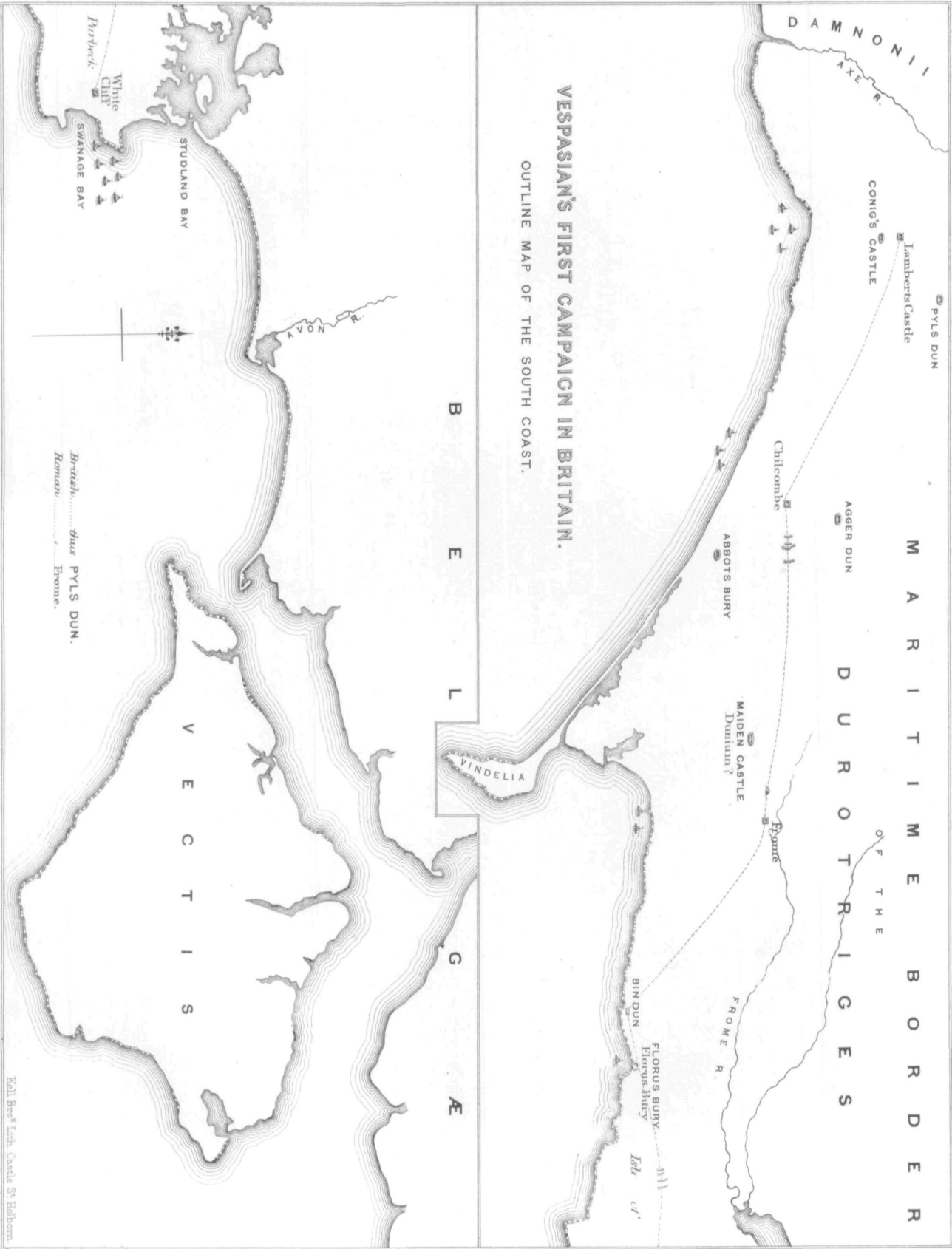
This point is not so far distant but that, taking advantage of a moderate breeze at the ebb of the tide, his galleys would in a few hours find anchorage in Studland or Swanwich Bay, where, the sandy nature of the shore and the low elevation of the coast being favourable circumstances, he would be enabled speedily to disembark his forces, and place them at once on an equality with the enemy.

This invasion of the country of the Durotriges must have been undertaken under circumstances more favourable for its success than was the expedition of Cæsar, for it is manifest, from the plan of this campaign, that the character of the country in a strategic point of view was thoroughly understood; and we do not find the Roman general marching at once into the interior, as that would probably have brought disaster to his army, forasmuch as the coast-line was guarded by a series of imposing fortresses, which, if left undisturbed, would have operated on his rear. Hence it became of paramount necessity to dispose of them at the outset. Another reason that might weigh with him in taking the route through Purbeck—and a most important consideration too—would be, that his army would have its transports always at hand, parallel to his line of march, from which to draw supplies, or to fall back upon in the event of defeat.

The route of a Roman expeditionary army is generally indicated by a series of *castra*, which they were accustomed to throw up hastily at their several halting-places and termination of the day's march; but, as such *castra* were works of a temporary character, they often became obliterated by the lapse of time, so that it is only under somewhat rare and exceptional circumstances that they can now be distinctly recognised.

Some such work must have been constructed in the vicinity of the disembarkation in Swanwich Bay. Now, although I am unable to point with confidence to the discovery, nevertheless I can affirm that there are vestiges of earthworks in its neighbourhood that may, with great probability, be thought to bear this significance.*

* Not far from the Eastern shore of the Isle of Purbeck, where the disembarkation of the Roman army is considered to have been effected, is an old manor house known as White Cliff, adjoining which are some low rectangular embankments of very remote origin, as they are intruded upon by the house, gardens, and other inclosures; these embankments are sufficiently characteristic to favour the conclusion that they are as likely to be the vestiges of a Roman expeditionary camp, as remains of agricultural inclosures of an age anterior to that of the house, as has already been shown. The house is reputed to have been a hunting lodge of King John, the Isle of Purbeck being known by historical evidence to have abounded with deer down to the seventeenth century. This tradition is very probable as regards that King, whose restless character is sufficiently well known by his progresses, but its application to the building must be referred to one



VESPASIAN'S FIRST CAMPAIGN IN BRITAIN.
 OUTLINE MAP OF THE SOUTH COAST.

M A R I T I M E B O R D E R
 O F T H E
 D U R O T R I G E S

British..... thus PYLS DUN.
 Roman..... Frome.

Published by the Society of Antiquaries of London, 1868.

Kell Bros' Lith. Castle St. Hoborn

Near at hand is the eastern terminus of the ridgeway, which, with few interruptions, follows nearly the entire coast-line of the Durotriges, and leads direct to their principal stronghold. Lofty, commanding, and comparatively free from impediments, it marks the direction of ancient intercourse; nor can we err in assuming that it formed the line of the Roman advance, for we shall find it intersected by a system of short cross-dykes,* thrown up by the Britons to impede the progress of the invaders, or by the Romans for the purpose of protecting their rear from a hostile attack.

On this ridgeway, and at the distance of one day's march from the landing-place, stands the first stronghold of the Britons; like all their other fortresses, in an almost impregnable position, raised on the verge of a perpendicular cliff, whose base, hundreds of feet below, is lashed by the waves, and overlooking in another direction a vast expanse of wild heath-land, where treacherous bogs and broken ground would render the approach of an attacking force difficult, if not altogether impossible.

The only practicable route, therefore, lay along the ridgeway, and would conduct the invaders to the eastern entrance (its only accessible approach), and there, no doubt, all the resources of its occupants would be brought into requisition for the purpose of repelling the attack.

But, in the absence of details, we can simply deal with results; consequently we can only infer that, how strenuous soever that opposition might have been, it

which doubtless preceded the present manor house. Another tradition, however, and more to our purpose, still lingers in, and is attached to, this place, to the effect that White Cliff was the scene of a terrible fight, in which nine kings were slain, all of whom were buried in a group of tumuli on Nine Barrow Down, a portion of the ridgeway between White Cliff and Corfe Castle. Without for a moment placing implicit faith in tradition, which we all know is more or less a perversion of acts and facts whose origin is obscured in the mist of time; still, in the present instance, this well merits our attention from its allusion to a great battle, which may be reasonably applied to that which must have taken place on the landing of the Romans. On such an event the whole "posse comitatus" of the native tribes under the conduct of their several chieftains (or kings, as says the tradition) would be assembled to oppose the invaders, when many of the native leaders fell; and this is rendered more probable from the significant (we would almost say fact) traditional interment of the nine chieftains or kings under tumuli.

* Cross dykes are mentioned by Cæsar, De Bello Gallico, ii. 8. He says, "Ubi nostros non esse inferiores intellexit, loco pro castris ad aciem instruendam naturâ opportuno atque idoneo (quod is collis, ubi castra posita erant, paululum ex planitie editus, tantum adversus in latitudinem patebat, quantum loci acies instructa occupare poterat, atque ex utrâque parte lateris dejectus habebat, et in frontem leniter fastigatus, paulatim ad planitiem redibat,) ab utroque latere ejus collis transversam fossam obduxit circiter passuum CD; et ad extremas fossas castella constituit, ibique tormenta collocavit, ne, quum aciem instruxisset, hostes (quod tantum multitudine poterant) ab lateribus pugnantibus suos circumvenire possent."

failed to arrest the progress of the invaders, who not only dislodged the gallant defenders, but probably occupied their position for a brief period before they resumed their march.

This view is greatly confirmed in my own mind by the fact that, long before I entertained the remotest conception on this subject, I had the impression that a portion of these earthworks had been strengthened; for an antiquary of any experience could not fail to have observed an extensive restoration of the inner vallum by an addition to its height and breadth, while the irregularities of surface at the base show whence the soil was procured for that purpose.

This Celtic stronghold is known by the name of Flowers or Florus Bury. Opposite to it on the west, and separated by a very broad and deep ravine, stands the equally high and precipitous hill-city of Bindun, which we may fairly assume to have been the retreat of the discomfited Britons, for no other stronghold in this district possesses the same natural capabilities for defence and protection. It is even superior in some respects to the fortress whence they had been expelled, for its north side, where only it is accessible and that by a steep ascent, was defended by a wall of Cyclopean masonry, the other sides being secure from assault in beetling cliffs and frowning precipices.

But not even obstacles such as these could daunt the victorious Romans, and we may picture in our minds the continuance of the strife and siege until the Britons were finally driven out of their "city of refuge." And we may further conceive that the powerful resistance encountered at Bindun necessitated a brief occupation of the entrenched camp and the restoration of the ramparts of Florus Bury, in the name of which we can recognise at this day the memorial of some valiant Roman whose prowess, perhaps, was identified with its capture.

With the fall of Bindun the Roman army would, after the delay necessary for securing its conquests, be again on its march towards the stupendous stronghold of Dunium, the capital of the Durotriges, now known as Maiden Castle, by far the most important and colossal of all the military works of this ancient people, if not of any of the Celtic works in Britain.

We may be sure that the disastrous tidings of the loss of Florus Bury and the sacking of Bindun quickly sped to the remotest boundary of the ill-fated territory, rousing the energies of its native population to resist the further progress of the invader, to rally round their chiefs, and avert, if possible, that dire calamity which was gradually stealing upon them.

Although the probability of their fate may have been foreseen by them for many years, it would still seem that its approach had not been expected from

the quarter whence it was actually coming,—the evidence of which is derived from the incomplete and unfinished state of the defences of this important stronghold on its south side, or that which is towards the coast. The attack, therefore, when it came, seems to have been somewhat of the nature of a surprise, as it found the ramparts of their citadel in an unfinished state, which must have greatly favoured the tactics of Vespasian.

The ability displayed in the construction of a defensive work of such vast extent and strength as this of Dunium indicates the possession of great strategic skill, a numerous population, and the lapse of a lengthened period of time, and it was doubtlessly intended, like other great Celtic fortresses, to receive the surrounding inhabitants, with their flocks and herds, on the alarm of an invasion; but none had ever threatened it yet with a danger like the present.

I may remark that the existing features of the camp carry with them traces of original form, and subsequent adaptation and enlargement. This is seen in the remains of a worn-down vallum and choked fosse running across the area, apparently marking the extent of a moderately-sized oppidum, which was converted into a stupendous stronghold, with numerous and lofty ramparts of circumvallation.

To return to Vespasian. At the distance of twelve miles or thereabouts, a day's march from Bindun, we find situated on elevated ground immediately overlooking the River Frome, one mile east of Dorchester (the Roman Durnovaria), and near to a large tumulus known as "Conquer Barrow" (significant name!); the vestiges of a large rectangular entrenchment, which I hold to have been Vespasian's Camp, thrown up and occupied by him preparatory to his advance on the fortified heights of Dunium.

The besiegers and the besieged were separated by a wide and fertile plain, which was greatly in favour of the Britons, who doubtlessly were superior in numbers to their better disciplined enemy, and aided by those war-chariots of which Cæsar has given us such a graphic description.

But all in vain! For neither numerical advantage nor valour and patriotism could avail against the superior military skill and persevering energy of the Roman Legionaries, who, after it may be many a sanguinary conflict and many an episode of individual heroism on either side, the details of which are shrouded in oblivion, added this desirable position to the other trophies of their victorious general.

The obvious result of this great achievement would be to dishearten the Britons, and thereby materially facilitate the further progress of Vespasian's arms.

His first care would naturally be to secure the peaceful tenure of his new acquisition by demanding hostages from the subjugated tribes. After that he would again turn his face westward, and pursue his original plan of reducing the Celtic strongholds *seriatim*, so as to form a base line for his future operations in the interior. In accordance with this plan he would still follow the line of the ridgeway, which commands on the one hand an extensive sea view, and on the other a wide expanse of the territory then occupied by the Durotriges.

Pursuing the same track, we notice at the distance of some miles from Maiden Castle a series of intersecting dykes similar to those before spoken of on the ridgeway leading to Florus Bury, and evidently intended for the same purpose.

Soon after these are passed, and at the limit of a day's march from Dunium, we come upon a rectangular entrenched work at Chilcombe, a most valuable example of the Roman expeditionary camp. Its low vallum and shallow fosse are unbroken and unimpaired, a circumstance of the rarest occurrence as regards this description of ancient military work; and in this instance the immunity is entirely owing to the nature of the ground, which the plough has not as yet desecrated.

Here is still the virgin sword which has remained inviolate since the close of that day's march when the castrum was staked out, and its vallum raised around an area which held within its limit a father and son destined to become not only the rulers of the great Roman Empire, but the conquerors of Jerusalem itself.

The position of this castrum was judiciously selected on open elevated land, midway between the Celtic strongholds of Aggerdun on the north and Abbot's Bury on the south, but distant at least four miles from each.

From the fact of no other Roman camp being found in the vicinity of these fortresses, I am inclined to think that Chilcombe was thrown up with an especial reference to them; and further, although Aggerdun was of much greater extent than Abbot's Bury, whilst both possessed great natural and artificial strength, that still the victorious Romans experienced but little if any serious opposition from either of these sources.

The fall of Dunium, together with earlier defeats, had caused the greatest consternation among a people individually brave but unskilful in war, as compared with the well-disciplined troops of imperial Rome, and were in consequence induced to lay down their arms, and purchase peace by the cession of these places of defence.

We are now approaching the close of our subject; still there were yet two more considerable strongholds to be reduced before Vespasian could be said to have completed the work delegated to him, the subjugation of the Durotriges.

Those two were the heights known as Conig's Castle^a and Pylsdun ; the latter a lofty hill encircled with a triple line of ramparts, the former an isolated hill strongly entrenched with a single vallum and fosse.

Between them, and, be it remarked, one day's march from Chilcombe, we find on a plateau of land another rectangular Roman castrum known as Lambert's Castle, which I take to be the last of Vespasian's camps in the dominion of the Durotriges.

These last works are situated near the boundary of the Damnonii, whose territory on account of its natural conformation would render the further progress of Vespasian matter of greater difficulty than any he had hitherto contended with.

This circumstance, taken in connection with the proximity of the two fastnesses of Conig's Castle and Pylsdun, each occupying commanding positions, may possibly account for the greater strength of the entrenchments of the Roman castrum, for it would be a necessary part of his strategy to make himself fully master of this position before he advanced into the territory of the Damnonii.

The strength of Lambert's Castle may be accepted as a measure of the difficulties he encountered and the resistance he experienced in this quarter ; but we have no reason to doubt that the same triumphant success attended him as in the former stages of his progress.

Having thus tracked Vespasian in his course through the kingdom of the Durotriges, and seen the whole of its seaboard reduced, we will compare a summary of the events we have conjecturally described with the statement of Suetonius.

Thus of the "*viginti oppida*" related by him as Vespasian's trophies : we have first Florus Bury closely followed by Bindon ; next the grand hill fortress of Dunium ; then Abbot's Bury and Aggerdun ; and, lastly, Conig's Castle and Pylsdun ; so that we can claim seven, at least, of the twenty hill-cities of Suetonius as appertaining to the kingdom of the Durotriges.

Of the thirty battles ("*trices cum hoste confluxit*") we cannot speak so confidently ; nevertheless, by taking the number of the "*oppida*" as a guide, we may safely assume they could hardly have been fewer than one-third of the number stated by the historian.

Vespasian without doubt provided for the security of his conquests by entering into compact with the Britons, and requiring from them the surrender of their

^a Conig's Castle, a British camp, and occupied by Egbert, A.D. 833, then in the West, to resist a landing of the Danes at Charmouth ; hence the name it bears.

vanquished chieftains as hostages for the due observance of treaties; and we may reasonably conceive that many of the defeated warriors would voluntarily take service under the standard of so invincible a leader, and thus help him to achieve the further conquest of their own countrymen.

In conclusion, I may observe that it may be objected to my views of the sequence of Vespasian's victories, as noticed in the beginning of this essay, that the language of Suetonius implies the conquest of Vectis to have followed, not preceded, that of the *duas validissimas gentes*, the Durotriges and Damnonii. I reply, that the intention of the historian was to give an epitome of results, rather than an accurate sequence of events; and that these important records, brief as they are, do not debar us from exercising an independent judgment.

The probabilities in favour of the views herein expressed are corroborated by the fact that if we take a survey of the south coast, from Sussex to Devon inclusively, we shall nowhere find a chain of Roman castra similar to those referred to in this paper as existing in Dorset. These latter are linked together, without a break, and that equidistantly, with the precise interval which classical writers on Roman military affairs mention as the regular day's march of a Roman army.

A subject like the present must necessarily involve a considerable amount of conjecture, owing to the deficiency of historical light; and my endeavour has been, in the absence of direct proof, to assume no more than may be reasonably inferred from presumptive evidence,—a privilege universally accorded, and not in this instance, I hope, abused. If, indeed, no theory were to be accepted unless it were capable of a rigid demonstration, history would be shorn of much of its interest and value, and the archæologist might lay down his pen in despair.

MEM.—The further progress of Vespasian must be sought in the north-eastern corner of the Damnonii, and thence in the adjoining portions of the Belgæ. It is a matter of regret to me that my health prevents my undertaking such an agreeable task.—C. W.

In the accompanying outline-map (Pl. XVII.), reduced from my map of "Dorsetshire, its Celtic, Roman, Saxon, and Danish Vestiges," a fleet and consecutive series of Roman galleys are to be seen laid down on the seacoast; these all bear reference to the foregoing essay. Thus the fleet is intended to point out the place of Vespasian's landing in Swanwich and Studland bays, near White Cliff, and opposite to the Isle of Wight.

The galleys in the offing, and in numerical sequence, indicate respective day's marches, the *castra* occupied, and the Celtic camps taken by him.

The single galley points to Florus Bury and Bindun, the first positions obtained.

Two galleys, the *castrum* raised by him preparatory to his attack on Dunium or Maiden Castle.

Three galleys, the expeditionary *castrum* at Chilcombe and the Celtic camps of Agger Dun and Abbot's Bury; and, lastly,

The four galleys refer to his position (*castrum*) on Lambert's Castle, with the Celtic fortresses of Conig's Castle and Pylsdun, one on either hand.
