

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Roman Remains in Lydney Park

by H. M. Scarth
1881-82, Vol. 6, 210-221

© The Society and the Author(s)

ROMAN REMAINS IN LYDNEY PARK,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.

By the Rev. CANON SCARTH, M.A.

No county in England is richer in Roman Remains than Gloucestershire.

It contains two well known Roman cities within it : *Glevum* (Gloucester), and *Corinium* (Cirencester.) These are united by a Roman Road, called Ermine Street, running in a direct line between them, and traversing a pastoral region, known as the Cotswold Hills.

From the two principal towns other Roman Roads branch out ; one from Gloucester keeps the western side of the Severn, and connects Glevum with Isca Silurum, or Caer Leon, and with Caerwent, both Roman towns in Monmouthshire, and noted for their Remains. This Road skirts the Forest of Dean, where are very extensive remains of Roman Iron Workings, and through which a Roman Road passes, many traces of which still remain in a very perfect condition. On the line of this road, and nearly midway between Glevum and Isca Silurum, are situated the Remains in Lydney Park, in the parish of Aylburton, distant about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the western branch of the estuary of the Severn, which seems in former times to have flowed nearer to the hills on which the Remains at Lydney are situated.

Lydney, though known, and portions of it excavated, more than a century ago, and a careful catalogue formed of the Roman Coins discovered, has not been described until recent times. The remains found have, however, for some years past, been carefully collected and preserved on the estate, and are now delineated in a work published in 1879, being a posthumous work by the late Rev. W. Hiley Bathurst, with notes by Mr. King, Senior Fellow of Trin. Coll., Cambridge.

Few owners of property have evinced such a desire to record and to preserve the ancient remains found on their estates. The volume issued under Mr. King's auspices, is one which not only manifests accurate research and scholarship, but adds much to our previous knowledge of the Roman occupation of Britain.

The position of Lydney commands a most striking view of the junction of the Severn and the Wye.

Mr. Bathurst observes that the Romans appear to have occupied the summits of two hills, now comprised within the park at Lydney. The larger of these, commonly called the "Camp Hill," has an area of 850 feet by 370; the smaller is nearly circular, and not above 60 yards in diameter. A deep valley, about 28 yards in width, runs between the two. The larger hill was known popularly as the "Dwarfs' Hill," from the notion that the buildings in it were the work of fairies.¹

When the estate was purchased by Mr. Benj. Bathurst in 1723, all this part of the present park was overgrown by brushwood, but there were walls belonging to the buildings, standing 3 feet above the ground. Many large coins and other antiquities were

¹ Both these hills are fortified with mounds and ditches, where most accessible. The smaller appears to have been an ancient British stronghold, probably occupied in pre-Roman times. The larger one has been fortified, for the better protection of the buildings erected on it. The entrenchments are very distinct, and are doubled at the most assailable point to N.W.

Prof. Hübner remarks that "A sight of the annexed plan shews how mistaken it is to suppose that Lydney was a Roman Camp;" and then observes that "the marks and signs of a Roman Camp are wanting;" but it is plain that the Professor, not having been over the ground himself, misapprehends the nature of the fortified enclosure, which is not given in the plan, as it only gives the walled area. It would have added greatly to the value of Mr. King's work, if it had contained a plan of the fortifications on both hills, whereas only a map of the country in the immediate neighbourhood is given, and a plan of the buildings within their walled enclosure, but not the earthen vallum surrounding the hill. It seems as if the lesson learned by the Romans at Camulodunum, by the entire destruction of the colony with its unfortified Temple, had not been forgotten, and that the Temple of Nodon was enclosed within a rampart, so as to be easily defensible, if necessary.

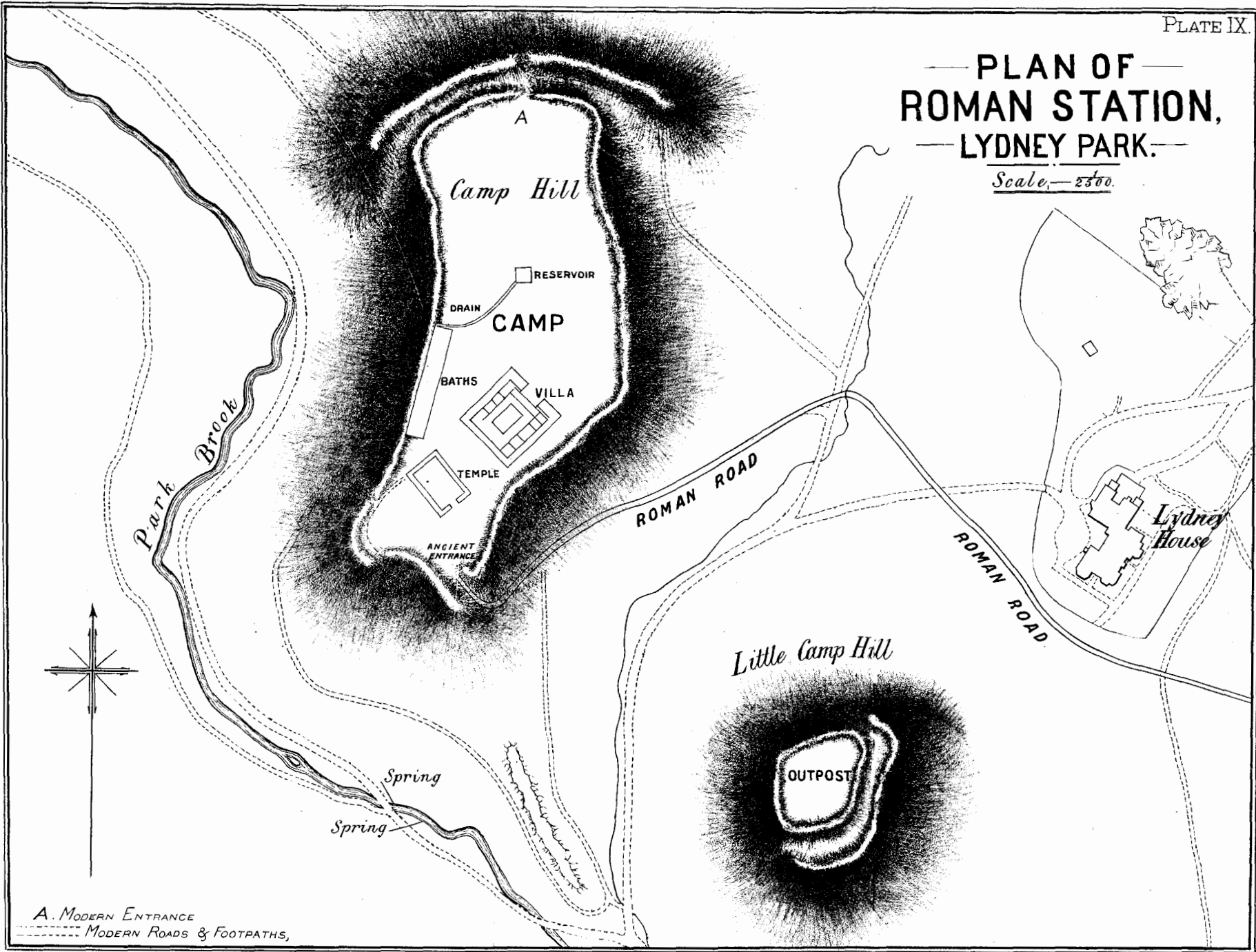
No excavations have been made on the smaller hill, where the entrenchments are very perfect, and where a small body of men have, apparently, acted as a guard. A search within the area of this Camp would probably reveal some traces of military occupation.

found, but in the year 1770 the walls had diminished to half their former height. Major Rooke published an account of the excavations, which he was allowed by the family to make, in the "Archæologia" (Vol. V., p. 207, A.D. 1777). Up to this period, the coins and other objects which had been found were taken away, and no record of them has been kept. Also the stone, being useful for walling, was carried away, and in this manner the foundations were grubbed up, and the floors injured. Excavations were also made in search of iron ore, and this, likewise, tended to the destruction of portions of the buildings.¹ It was not until 1805 that a regular investigation was made by the Right Hon. C. Bathurst, who caused the direction of the walls to be traced, and the form of the buildings to be made out. The work was carried on for many years, and every room was measured as it was brought to light, every pavement copied, and to this we owe the careful plan of the separate buildings, a reduction of which appears in Mr. King's book, and in Prof. Hübner's pamphlet on Lydney. In carrying on the work of excavation, it was discovered that alterations had been made in the buildings in Roman times. Happily a careful catalogue of all the coins that could be collected was made by a lady of the family; these are now published in Mr. King's volume, and comprise a period between Augustus and Arcadius, and thus embrace the whole period of Roman occupation. The spot on which the Roman buildings stood, formed part of a common, and was enclosed in the park about A.D. 1670. On referring to the plan (*Pl. IX.*), we see that it consisted of three distinct buildings, marked A, B, C. That marked A appears to be the oldest, and may be regarded as the principal residence. The length is 168 feet, N. and S., and 135 feet E. and W. The central space was the Atrium, 66 ft. by 63. This is surrounded by a crypto-porticus, a kind of Cloister, which, on one side, is double. The longer sides are 84 feet in length, the shorter 72, and the width 8 feet. These covered walks appear to have been floored with elegant Mosaic pavements, fragments of which have been

¹ About two miles from the site of this villa, and on the outskirts of the park, are the ancient workings called the Scowls, carried on by the Romans in the Forest of Dean. These may be seen to great advantage at Bream, and at Coleford, and at Symond's Yat.

— PLAN OF —
ROMAN STATION,
— LYDNEY PARK. —

Scale. — 2500.



A. MODERN ENTRANCE
--- MODERN ROADS & FOOTPATHS,

found in different parts. The chambers which surrounded this area were all, for the most part, of small size, like what are found in ancient Roman houses, and in many of these Mosaic floors were found. Careful drawings of them are given in Mr. King's book, from plans in possession of the family. It would be tedious to go further into the description of this building, which has been very minutely described by Mr. Bathurst, and an architect, or student of Roman house arrangement, could hardly wish for a better plan than that published.

The second building, marked B, contains the suspended floors, or Hypocausts. Most of this building seems to have been warmed with hot air, and the structure appears to be later than the other. The Pre-furnium, or "*fire-room*," is at one end of the building, and a flue conveyed the smoke by means of channels formed of flanged tiles, through other parts of the building. The floors were supported on pillars about 4 feet 7 inches high, constructed of bricks from 6 to 8 inches square, one and a half thick.

An outlying square building, with a projection from it, and a drain (as marked in the plan), running in the direction of the hot baths, may have served as a reservoir, and been connected with this portion of the building; the purpose, however, of the out-building, marked D on the plan, is not very well ascertained.

But the leading interest which attaches to this triple group of buildings, is the *third* portion, marked C on the plan. This is the remains of a Temple, and its purpose is clearly ascertained, not only from the *form*, but from Inscriptions and Votive Tablets found within, on which the name of the God of the Temple is inscribed, though in three different Tablets it is spelt in as many different ways: viz., Noden, Nudens, or Nodens. The floor of the central area was covered with a Mosaic Pavement, portions of which still remain. Two of the side chambers have also these ornamental floors. Temples have been rarely preserved in Britain, though they are well known to have existed, and the sites of churches occasionally occupy their places. Thus at Bath, Stall's Church is recorded to have replaced, and also embodied, a portion of an ancient Roman Temple, and it is stated also that the Abbey

Church of Bath, built in mediæval times, stands on the site of a Roman Temple.

The Inscriptions make us acquainted with a local divinity not known in Roman or Greek mythology—Nodon or Nodons, (a divinity like Sul, or Sul-Minerva, who was worshipped at Bath,) peculiar to the district. Many learned conjectures have been made, which are lucidly given by Mr. Bathurst, in his introductory treatise, and which may be seen p. 13 and following.

One supposes the name to be an epithet of Esculapius, the inventor of medicine, the assuager of pain, *αρωδυνος*, corrupted "*νωδυνος*"—Nodon; and this is supported by the supposed votive offerings found within the precinct, especially the images of dogs, and it is asserted that the deity owed his early preservation to the maternal care of one of these animals. The point, however, is not satisfactorily proved, and Mr. Bathurst's notice breaks off while engaged in attempting its elucidation.¹

Mr. King rather regards Nodens as the "God of the Abyss" or "God of the depths," a deity of the ancient Silurians. He considers the Sea Monster and the Salmon represented in the Pavement, as denoting the worship of a Marine Deity. The Temple being erected near the junction of the Severn and Wye, and on the borders of a large estuary, gives some countenance to this theory.²

The pavement of the Temple bears an inscription, which is unfortunately mutilated, and the reading is thus rendered uncertain, but it is, apparently, an Inscription to the God, and from it we

¹ The Rev. J. McCaul, late President of the University Coll., Toronto, in his valuable work on Britanno-Romano Inscriptions has made some remarks upon the god Nodons, Nodens, or Nudens, see p. 64 and following.

He observes that "it is not easy to arrive at any definite conclusion relative to his name. It seems not improbable that Nodon was a British Deity, such as Mapronus and Cocidius. He considers the different Inscriptions in which it occurs, and brings much learning to aid in their elucidation.

² This was also the opinion of Sir Sam. Meyrick (see Brit. Rom. Inscrip., p. 71). "Deus Nodens seems to be the 'God of the Abyss.'" In the original language it would be Deus Noddyns, or it may be 'God the preserver.'"

learn that the pavement was constructed by means of the offerings made at his shrine. Mr. King reads it as follows :

D[eo] M[aximo] IT[erum] FLAVIVS
 SENILIS PR[aces] REL[igionis]
 EX STIPIBVS POSSVIT
 O[pitu] LANTE VICTORINO INTER-
 [prete la]TINE.

And interprets it thus :

To the greatest God
 for the second time
 Flavius Senilis,
 Head of the Religion,
 has erected this
 from voluntary contributions.

The Director of the Works being Victorinus, Interpreter for the Latin Tongue.

Proof: Hübner's reading and translation differs from Mr. King's

D[eo] M[agno] N[odonti]
 T. FLAVIVS
 SENILIS PR[epositus] REL[iquationis]
 EX STIPIBVS POSSVIT
 O LANTE VICTORINO INTERTINE.

D · M · N · T. FLAVIVS SENILIS PR RIL EX STIPIBVS
 POSSVIT O LANTE VICTORINO INTER INE.

He leaves the word before "Flavius Senilis" doubtful, but would read: PR REL "Prepositus Reliquationis,"—after Mommsen—*i.e.*, Commander of a Detachment of the Fleet, which he supposes to have been stationed not far from Lydney, and in communication with the Roman Camp at Caerleon, where a portion of the Legio Secunda was stationed.

An inscribed stone, found at Misenum, bears the title, "Prepositus Reliquationis."

PRIMIPILARIS · M · VERECVNDVS · VERVS ·
 PRAEPOSITVS · RELIQUATIONIS CLASSIS
 PRAETORIAE MISENATIVM.

Translated: "Marius Verecundus Verus, Commander of detachment of the Pretorian Fleet of Misenum (See Corp. I. L. VII. 42, Eph. Epig. III. (1877), S. 311. Rom. Rem. of Lydney, by King, p. 25.)

Prof. Hübner states confidently that this is the only interpretation which the two abbreviations will bear, *PR. REL*, (See Das Heiligthum des Nodon 38) and adds, "The British fleet had a station at the mouth of the Severn. A centurion of the second Legion at Isca, was the Commander of the Fleet which lay off the coast. In the Lydney Inscription the letters REL, or RIL, are given, but the words, "Classis Britannicæ," either at length or in an abbreviated form, are omitted. Prepositus is the technical expression for such extraordinary commanders." The inscription states that the Commander of the Fleet had ornamented the temple out of the offerings, "ex stipibus." The words which ought to follow would be "operi instanto," or "curam agente," but the lettering will not favour this reading, and the Professor therefore supposes that the original work must have undergone reparation, and the lettering have been misplaced.

Can any proof be given of this? If not, Mr. King's reading must stand, however improbable it may appear to Prof. Hübner, Mr. King regards the Professor's explanation of the doubtful abbreviated words PR · REL,¹ as far fetched, and prefers the reading, "Præses Religionis," "Chief Priest," or "President of the Sacred Rites." Whichever way we take it (and I will not attempt to decide), the inscription itself is very interesting and suggestive. It marks the prominent position held by the Temple. It was either presided over by a Chief Priest, or erected, or ornamented, by an admiral, out of the offerings made at the shrine.

How sad it is that so many Roman inscriptions are only fragmentary, for they help greatly to elucidate the condition of the island in Roman times.² Here, at Lydney, we certainly have the

¹ These letters have also been read *PRETIO RELATO*, by a writer in the *Saturday Review*. (See Article on Roman Remains at Lydney).

² After reconsidering the lettering, I am inclined to take the following as the correct reading. It has been suggested to me by Mr. King, and proposed to him by Mr. Monro:

Remains of a Historical Monument, and must be thankful for its preservation and its elucidation, and for the careful collection of whatever has been found in later times. More may yet be discovered, and light may still be thrown upon the ancient occupiers of this very interesting district.

The Votive Tablets, found at Lydney, are of great interest, (see *R. Antiq.* at Lydney, plate XX., where three are engraved.) The most curious of these is No. 3 :

DIVO

NODENTI · SILVIANVS · ANILVM · PERDEDIT DEMEDIAM · PARTEM DONAVIT · NODENTI · INTER QVIBVS NOMEN SENICIANI · NOLLIS PETMITTAS · SANITATEM DONEC · PERFERAT VSQVE TEMPLVM NODENTIS.

The Inscription translated is this

To the God Nodens.

Silvianus (or Silulanus) has lost a ring. He has presented (or vowed as an offering) half its value to Nodon. Amongst all who bear the name of Sinicianus, refuse thou to grant health until he bring back the ring to the Temple of Noden.¹ (see Note at the end of this paper.)

Prof. Hübner instances a similar "defixio" engraved on a metal plate found at Cumæ in a grave, and another found at Capua, and now in the Berlin Museum ; also one, an "Imprecatio," or Defixio, addressed to the Divinity of the Lusitanian Turobriga.

"Dea Ataccina Turibrig(ensis) Proserpina per tuam majestatem te rogo, oro, obsecro, uti vindices quod mihi furti factum est.

D · M · T · FLAVIVS · SENILIS · PR · REL · EX · STIPIBVS · POSSVIT ·
[Opitu] LANTE · VICTORINO · INTERCATINE.

"To the great God. T. Flavius.

Senilis, head of the Religion, erected this from voluntary contributions. The director of the works being Victorinus of Intercatia."

Intercatia is a town of ancient Hispania, so that Victorinus was not a Briton, but a Spaniard by nation.

We know from Inscriptions found in Britain how many Spaniards were serving in this island.

¹ For Dr. Me Caul's explanation of this, see *B. R. Ins.*, p. 68. He regards it as the result of a wager.

Quis quis mihi imudavit involavit minusque fecit, ea(sres) q(uæ) i(nfra) s(criptæ) s(unt) Tunicas Sex (P)ænula, Lintea II. In(dus)ium, cujus (ego nomen) ignoro, tamen tu seis, in Eum jus vindictamque a te peto." Some one having the whole of their wardrobe stolen, probably a lady, turns trustingly to the Divinity, and asks to learn where it is, and to have the thief punished.

The Tablet being placed there would lead to the supposition that the prayer did not remain unanswered (see Prof. Hübner's Pamphlet on Lydney).

Mr. Newton in his *Essays on Art and Archæology*, p. 193, gives instances of what were called by the Romans "Devotiones," *consecrations*, or as we should say, *execrations*, and which are called by the Greek and by the western church, *anathemata*, in which the vengeance of the Deity was invoked against the offenders. "In order to make this curse more terrible and efficacious, it was drawn up in the form of a dedication, and engraved on marble or on metal tablets, At Knidos, within a sacred precinct dedicated to Demeter, Persephonè, Pluto, and other cognate Deities, (says he) I found a number of leaden tablets, on which were graven such *devotiones*. In these curious documents the person against whom the curse was directed, was always consigned to the vengeance of the two infernal Goddesses, Demeter and her daughter. May he or she never find Pesephonè propitious, is the constantly recurring formula; and in some cases the offender is duly consigned to eternal torments, besides being excommunicated in this world." The date of these tablets is probably about B.C. 150.

The late discovery of a Leaden Plate at Bath¹ containing an inscription apparently written backwards, and containing certain names, but not yet sufficiently decyphered, seems to certify a recovery by the use of the waters, though this has also been read as a "Defixio."² Another Leaden Plate, with characters not yet made out, has also been found.

That this custom of denouncing persons guilty of theft or other injustice, and imprecating calamity upon them, continued to a

¹ See Bath Herald, April 24th, 1880.

² See Bath Herald, March 19th, 1881.

very late period, is proved by the finding of the leaden plates on a heap of stones on Gatherley Moor, Yorkshire, containing an imprecation. A drawing of these is given in the History of Richmondshire, p. 195. The plates, when discovered, were supposed to be about 200 years old. This is inferred from the names mentioned on them.

It would take too much time to go carefully into the other inscriptions on the tablets, and to review all the reliques collected together in the Museum of the Mansion at Lydney, many of which are carefully drawn in Mr. King's book, which will delight every student of Roman Remains.

The remains at Lydney have attracted notice in Germany. To the Germans we owe the most complete classification and arrangement of Britanno-Roman Inscriptions. All the Inscriptions hitherto found in Britain have been faithfully noted and recorded in their great work, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Vol. VII. Such a work will greatly aid the student and give him a clearer insight into British history in Roman times, than any detailed account. But if we thank the chroniclers of these Records we must still more thank their careful preservers, and such thanks are pre-eminently due to the owners of Lydney Park.

The date of the Lydney Remains may be ascribed chiefly to the second and third centuries, when the Roman power was at its highest point in Britain, and therefore the work has been of a high order, but the super-structure and most of the columns, appear to have been of wood, probably oak, which grew abundantly in the forest, close at hand, though remains of stone columns of small size were found with part of a capital and some pinnacles of the villa. It would not be difficult to give an imaginary plan of the super-structure. We cannot but regret the loss of the stone carvings (a portion only of one remaining, and two or three pinnacles), but I am inclined to believe that they must have been, for the most part, of a perishable material, or more would have survived.

I will not attempt to decide the attributes of the God *Nodou*, though Prof. Hübner says that he leaves this to English anti-

quaries, and that there is not sufficient evidence to shew what kind of God Nodon was. Perhaps time may solve the difficulty, as more may yet be found at Lydney; and discoveries of Roman Remains both in Britain and on the continent, are daily coming to light.

From the metal engraved tablet found (see King, plate XIII. and p. 39), which has been adopted as an emblem on Mr. King's book, he may have been a Sun-God,¹ or a Sea-God, but, as Hübner observes, it is certain that the whole of Lydney Hill was consecrated to his honour. "Far from all town settlements, on a sunny hill near the river (Sabrina), this monument was raised by Roman Conquerors, to the honour of a domestic God, who was worshipped with the surroundings and accompaniments of Italian worship, and a building erected to his honour." The worship of this Divinity, unknown elsewhere, is a fresh contribution to our knowledge of the worship and religious life of the Roman province.

One or two practical reflections may not be out of place here.

We do not know who or what Divinity this God Nodons was. Yet he was manifestly worshipped with great reverence, and held in much veneration sixteen centuries ago. Yet now a few remnants of his temple and worship only remain. He has shared the fate of Sul-Minerva at Bath, nay of Zeus at Olympia, of Apollo at Dodona, of Minerva at Athens, and of Jupiter Capitolinus at Rome.

What a change has the promulgation of Christianity wrought among the nations. It is difficult, with all the light afforded by heathen historians and poets, to picture the state of society in those far off ages, but the examination of Remains like those at Lydney, help us greatly in these researches; and though works of art, like those at Olympia and Athens, are not found in Britain, yet we can realize as clearly the condition of a Roman province in the second and third centuries of our era, and can glance over the period intervening with as much certainty and truth, and see how

¹ See Hübner, p. 46. This is not at all probable, comparing this representation with that of Phœbus Apollo, preserved on the Metope of a Temple, to that God. Helios is not draped (see Dr. Schliemann's Troy and its Remains.)

wonderful has been the change in the aspect of society. We have no longer a rule based upon human strength and man's credulity, but rather a governing power based upon a true belief, and upon a sound conviction of right and justice—*Maneat Semper!*

NOTE.—Since the paper was drawn up, I have had the pleasure of hearing the remarks on the Roman Ring, named on the “*Defixio*,” or Votive Tablet, found at Lydney, made by the Rev. John James, and as his useful and interesting notice is published in the Society's Proceedings, it renders the omission of any further notice of it on my part more excusable, though I am well aware much that is interesting might have been added to the Notices of Roman Remains in this paper (See ante, p. 75).
