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The Antiquary.

JANUARY, 1881.

The Roman Villa near Brading.

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NOTHING could be farther from the facts now patent than the opinions held by the early historians of the Isle of Wight regarding the traces of the first inhabitants and immigrants in the island. These topographers could find only very few vestiges of antiquity, and no Roman remains! Sir Henry Englefield dogmatically asserts, "Of the Romans there is not a vestige in this island."* What is now revealed, however, completely reverses that judgment.

Vespasian is supposed to have occupied the Isle of Wight in the year A.D. 43, when the first colony in Britain (Camulodunum) was founded under the Emperor Claudius. Carisbrooke tells, by its Celtic name "Caer-is-byrg," and its elevated position, that it would be the first point seized by the Roman invader, and be held for central control, as the Capitolium of the island. Within 100 yards of that fortress a Roman villa was discovered in 1858, whose features have been already described. But that villa is dwarfed into insignificance by the remarkable discovery at Brading. The first and minor portion of the now famous Roman villa at Brading was revealed by Captain Thorpe and Mr. W. Munns, of Brading, in April, 1880, and since that time the major portion has been excavated under the superintendence of Mr. J. E. Price and Mr. F. G. H. Price. The utmost dimensions of the Carisbrooke villa are 118 feet by 49 feet, but its tessellated floors represent merely chequered work and ordinary patterns, with guilloche borders. The only other remark it is needful to make

* "Description of the Isle of Wight."

about this villa is, that coins of Gallienus have been found there, and coins of Gallienus are turning up at Brading, a circumstance which, with other considerations, lead to the inference that these structures are coeval in point of time, and belong to the reign of Gallienus, about A.D. 250-260.

The mythological groups, hereafter noticed, of Orpheus and other divinities, transferred from ancient Greece to Rome, seem to proclaim the era of the prevalence of the Orphic creeds in Italy, and correspond chronologically with the evidence of the coins, which (at present) range from A.D. 250 to 330. But with reference to coins it must be said that in several places on the island, and in two remarkable instances, currency coins have been found in heaps or "hutches"—in one place as many as would fill a gallon vessel—which suggests the idea that in the waning power of the Roman province, and towards the end of their stay here, the Romans had been disturbed in possession.

The Brading villa is situated on the lower slope of a chalk hill, which runs from east to west, having a southern sunny aspect overlooking an arm or inlet of the Solent, called Brading Harbour, where the Roman galleys could ride and anchor in perfect safety at the mouth of the *Yar*, which might then have been navigable up to Street End. It is on lands belonging to Lady Oglander and Mrs. Munns—some of the apartments being on one farm and some on the other. I must abstain at present from designating any of its halls and chambers. Only the principal apartments are yet brought to light, and the porta, or main entrance, the key which may unlock the arrangements of the rooms, is not yet discovered. A dozen entertaining rooms are disclosed in one suite of the buildings. One of these—it may have been a corridor, or colonnade—is sixty feet long. The grand double room, with most highly decorated floor, is forty feet long by eighteen wide. This one block measures fifty-two feet from east to west; and from south to north continuous walls run out to the hypocaust and furnace to the extent of two hundred feet. Several outer apartments, remote from the principal chambers, are partially disclosed. Some of these—as the walls,

even there, were stuccoed and painted—may have been appropriated to the female portion of the family, as was the custom at Pompeii (Gell's "*Pompeiana*," p. 101). Beyond these again, eastward, are the walls of several rooms, where the numerous retainers, servants, and slaves (the *familia rustica*) connected with the establishment dwelt apart from the proud patrician. These rooms may exceed in number all that are yet exposed to view, judging by the partially developed walls.

But the striking distinction of this villa, next to its ample dimensions, consists in the number and elegance of its mosaic pavements. There is nothing like this grouping in England, if elsewhere. What we will at present call the State apartment, forty feet long by eighteen feet wide, presents, from end to end, the features of a horizontal picture-gallery—a tessellated Pinacotheca. It is a double room, divided by an inlet of solid masonry, constructed apparently for the support of an architrave from which a curtain or screen depended. Broken pieces of stucco, painted in imitation of veined marble, show that dadoes of fresco ran round this and other chambers. A brief description of the several pictorial groups as they stand arranged may be here attempted, but only by way of suggestion; any authoritative dictum would be presumptive. Many of these groups are mutilated beyond recognition, and some are wholly effaced.

In the centre of the long sixty-foot room, which may have been a corridor or colonnade, is a circular medallion, four feet in diameter, representing Orpheus seated with his golden lyre, having by fascination brought to his side a monkey, a fox, a peacock and a chough, which are seen "dancing to the lute's fantastic law."

The eastern portion of the State apartment mentioned above—the Medusa end—contains a square of striking groups of figures. In the centre is a circular medallion, representing a fine head of Medusa, with her usual nimbus of snakes.* Radiating from this

* The general design of this quadrangle has its parallel in one of the tessellated floors of the Roman villa at Bramdean in Hampshire, figured and described in Mr. Roach Smith's popular "*Collectanea Antiqua*," vol. ii. plate 32.

centre are four medallions, containing two figures each, a male and female—1. Depicts Ceres, the goddess of harvests, offering to Triptolemus (the inventor of the plough) some seeds or corns of wheat. He receives the seeds with one hand, and with the other he holds a primitive single-shared plough. 2. Are supposed to be Arethusa and the river god Alpheus. She is in the act of fleeing from the god in terror, with her flowing garments torn almost entirely from her back. 3. Apparently intended for Hercules and Omphale, Queen of Lydia. He is, agreeably to the legend, giving the double-headed axe, which he had taken from the Amazons, to Omphale. 4. Male and female. The male in this group is conjectured to be Daphnis, with his Phrygian cap on, who holds in one hand the Pandean pipe which Pan taught him, and in the other hand a shepherd's crook, denoting the pastoral occupations which are ascribed to him. The female figure is most like Terpsichore, though she was little associated with Daphnis; and so, again, it may be his mistress Piplea, with whom he certainly was associated. She is exercised in dancing, and flourishes a tympanum or tambourine. Placed opposite to each other in this square are four heads of Mercury, each with his winged cap. Two of these are blowing a buccina or conch, and two are blowing straight trumpets.

Intermediately between the quadrangles of figures, east and west, seated all alone on an oblong panel, is the figure of a bearded astronomer, evidently meant for Hipparchus, "the father of astronomy and trigonometry." He has, placed by his side, the instruments of astronomy, which constitute the foundation of his fame—namely, a sun-dial raised on a tall pillar (an Analemma?); a terrestrial sphere, to which he is pointing with a wand in his right hand, as if triumphing over the determination of the latitudes and longitudes of the earth. A bason-shaped instrument is shown on the left, with a staff, pike, or finger in the middle, supposed to be a planisphere, gnomon, or horologium.* It will be noted that this historical personage is exceptionally placed among mythic subjects.

The pictorial square of the western half of

* See Horologium, in Smith's "*Roman and Greek Antiquities*."



CERES, GODDESS OF HARVESTS, OFFERING SEEDS OF WHEAT TO TRIPTOLEMUS.

this State apartment is less perfect than the eastern portion, but the hand and skill of the same artist are here, both in design and execution. Four heads are placed at the four angles of this square, appropriately adorned, representing the seasons of the year; and what is noticeable, as showing the nice observation of the designer, is the fact that winter is placed, as near as may be, on the north, summer to the south, spring to the east, and autumn to the west. Here, also, is a group of two figures, male and female, Perseus and Andromeda—Perseus holding at arm's length his trophy of the head of Medusa, and Andromeda by his side chained to the rock.

At the eastern and western extremities of this State apartment are two corresponding ornamented margins. The one at the east end represents a number of sea tritons and mermaids; the other at the west exhibits, in inch cones, all white, the Swastika of the Buddhists, or Greek archaic cross.

In a smaller room, between the fine apartment and the hypocaust, there is a half-circle pit, sunk below the present floor line, the sides of which are lined with stucco. This object has given rise to much speculation. It has been thought by some to be a sacrarium or temple, and by others a fountain; but Mr. C. Roach Smith has declared it to be a bath, and this designation is supported by similar-shaped and similar-sized baths at Hartlip and at Carisbrooke. It is seven feet ten inches long, four feet broad at the swell, and two feet deep, at present, but has been deeper, as the walls certify. At Carisbrooke the pillars of the hypocaust are seen beneath the broken floor of the bath, and the same feature may be disclosed at Brading when this bath is further excavated.

Beyond the range of apartments heretofore alluded to is the hypocaust or heating chamber, with the arch of the furnace. It contains fifty-four upright pillars of flat tiles, eight inches square and two-and-a-half feet high. The floor by which these pillars were supported is quite gone, but there is on one side a vertical flue *in situ*, which carried off the heated air into the adjoining apartments.

Returning to the entertaining rooms, we have to notice the groups and figures in a square apartment, being the first that was

discovered. Originally there were nine medallions on this floor, but four of these have perished—destroyed, one may believe they were—by the immigrants who succeeded the Roman occupation, for fires had been wantonly kindled on this and another adjacent floor. 1. The central figure here displays the head and face of a Bacchante, the face encircled with flowing curls that hang down to the neck. 2. An oblong medallion represents the Fox and Grapes; a vine, bearing four bunches of grapes, is trellised above the reach of the fox, and alongside is a dome-shaped building, supposed to be a wine-press. 3. The next, a square, exhibits a figure which has been designated a Bacchus, the staff, with a cross at the top of it, being mistaken perhaps for a thyrsus. He holds in his right hand, indicative of sovereignty, a sceptrum, such as was assigned to Jupiter, "the king of the gods," and other kings in power.* By this emblem we take the figure to be intended for Jupiter. 4. A gladiator, triumphing over a crouching figure. He handles a long pole, which is armed with a three-pronged spear (a tridens), and from which a net is suspended ready to entrap his prey. 5. Another and most striking medallion, oblong square, exhibits what we must call the enigmatical group. This consists of a composite creature, part man and part cock. It has a man's body, draped in a tunic, man's arms, hands, and legs, with the crested head of a cock, and cock's claws, armed with two long straight spurs. A building (house or temple?) is placed near, with a scala or movable staircase leading up to it. On the right of these are two winged griffins (*vigilans*), in juxtaposition.

Who can rightly decipher this incongruous man-cock and its surroundings? It has given rise to many conjectures, and is calculated to create many differences of opinion. Two hypotheses, not yet broached, are here put forth with great reserve, and only in obedience to what some may hold to be an obligation on me, in introducing the subject to public notice. Classical histories, legend, and heathen mythology, fail to furnish us with a satisfactory interpretation; the key

* This sceptrum, surmounted with a cross, is illustrated in Rich's "Dictionary," copied from the Virgil of the Vatican.

must therefore be sought in symbolism, to which the Roman artists frequently reverted. The Pagans openly ridiculed and insulted, by pen and pencil, the Christian religion after its introduction into Italy. The late Earl of Stanhope drew attention to this practice in a paper in the "Archeologia," (vol. xlv. p. 4), in which he commented on a passage in Juvenal's "Satires," and referred pointedly, by way of illustration, to a satirical caricature which was, and still is, exhibited on the plastered face of a wall in a military guard-house on the Palatine Hill. It represents the figure of a man with the head of an ass fastened to a cross, there being no doubt that it is designed for Christ and the Cross of Calvary; whilst a person stands before it in the act of adoration, the inscription "Alexamenos worships God" clearly describing the scene. De Rossi mentions other *graffiti* in Rome, designed, like this, to throw ridicule on Christianity, and refers them to the second or third century.* Following the lines of these caricatures, mocking the new religion, this incongruous human-cock may have been intended as a symbol of Christianity, the "new doctrine," as the heathens called it at the time; or, perhaps, may have been designed to represent St. Peter, personally symbolizing the "new doctrine," the spurs being intended to show antagonism to the Pagan worship, which Paganism is represented by the elevated temple alongside. If this be the true interpretation of the symbols, it may at least be said of it that the satire is more delicately conveyed than in the blasphemous caricature on the Palatine.

It may, however, be assumed that the aforesaid theory will be regarded by some as inadmissible. In that case another suggestion may be offered. It is conceivable that the proprietor of this villa, ordering its decorations, may have been a discontented Roman, or auxiliar of Rome, and chose to caricature† the then reigning Emperor, Gallienus, at a safe distance, by a pictorial pun and emblem of his name? Fosbroke says, symbols of names, both Grecian and Roman, by punning

figures as well as emblems of professions, were quite common. If this Gallic hypothesis have any cogency the decorations of the floors at Brading were probably executed towards the disastrous end of Gallienus, when he had become so justly and generally unpopular. He met his violent death, be it remembered, in Gallicia, which makes the cock proclaim a second pun. It has been suggested that this may be a transformation-scene—Alectryon transformed into a cock; and this hypothesis deserves consideration, especially as it proceeds from a celebrated authoress, Miss Frances Power Cobbe.

A road communicated between the station or villa at Carisbrooke and this at Brading. The route of this Vicinal Way I have traced by place-names and disjointed portions of a bridle-road which is still called (excellent authority) "the old road." It commenced south-east of the villa, in a field pertinently named Street End, a point which, there is no doubt, the tidal river Yar then reached, and where there might be a wharf or quay. It then proceeds under the slope of the continuous downs, by Adgestone (Agger-stone), Arreton Street, Standen, and Gatcombe, to Carisbrooke. Standen implies a portion of paved road; and Gatcombe an opening through the valley. At Standen, moreover, the ordnance surveyors discovered and defined *tumuli*; which may be of either British or Saxon origin. If British, then the Romans adopted a road in that locality, formed by their predecessors; a circumstance by no means singular.

Some pottery, a few coins, and one or two domestic utensils and articles of the toilet have turned up in the excavations; but these are of less importance than might have been expected. Further exploration may be attended with greater results.

As to the original owner and occupier of this magnificent villa, nothing will probably ever be known, but it would seem to have been the *villa rustica* of some noble or proconsul, or it might be the pro-prætor of the province himself. In addition to his rank and riches—evidenced by the style and decorations of his villa—he was also a person of great intelligence, acquainted with classical story and the sciences, and obviously a lover of the arts. He has left the impress of

* *Vide* "Roma Sotteranea," in the Appendix.

† The caricature nature of this figure is partly confirmed by the fact that the body is out of drawing, being almost as broad as long, whilst all the other figures are in perfect symmetry.

these attributes behind him at Brading, however long or short may have been his stay here. Without further inquiring into his history, we may feel intensely interested in his foot-prints.

What strikes almost all observers, now that a vista of the substructure of such extensive apartments lies before them, is the circumstance that these remains should have lain concealed "under the ribs of death" for sixteen centuries, within ten inches of the top soil, without being discovered. The ploughshare has gone over them thousands of times without disturbing their repose. And the probability is that there are other similar remains in the neighbourhood, and possibly in other parts of the island, which would yield to the axe and spade a rich archæological harvest. What is revealed, however, is an encouragement to future investigators, and it is only by such efforts that we can find how the proud conquerors of the world lived in the distant provinces subject to their sway.

Some Traditions and Superstitions connected with Buildings.

ONE of the most curious groups of popular traditions and superstitions in Britain is that connected with buildings. These traditions are mentioned in early chronicles, and they extend into nearly modern times. Dr. Tylor, too, has connected them with the existing customs of modern savages ("Primitive Culture," i. 94-97). This particular group of traditions has a somewhat special value in taking us back to the primitive times of British history; because, in the first place, I think we can trace out something like a line of development from the more ancient form mentioned in the chronicles to the generally current forms that are to be found in many parts of the land; and, in the second place, we can clearly identify the earliest form as belonging to primitive life. To put this shortly and clearly before the reader, I will examine, first, the more popular traditions existing in our modern

folk-lore, then the links by which these are connected with the more ancient form, and, lastly, the parallels in savage custom which take English folk-lore into the broad arena of primitive life.

Underlying the whole group of traditions, is the primitive conception of an agency more powerful than man's being concerned in the erection of buildings, and being resident within them after being erected. To the savage mind supernatural agency is nearly always present; what he cannot explain by his own mental capacity the savage explains by classifying it as beyond his reason, and so the stage is easily arrived at when supernatural agency is applied to almost all phases of social life.

Turning our attention first to traditions referring to the erection of buildings, the more modern forms invariably relate the destruction in the night time of what was built during the day. In Roby's "Traditions of Lancashire" (vol. i. p. 27, first series), there is a tale entitled "The Goblin Builders," showing how "Gamel the Saxon thane, lord of Recedham or Rached (now Rochdale), intended to build a chapel unto St. Chadde, nigh to the banks of the Rache or Roach." A level convenient spot was chosen for the site, but thrice were the foundations there laid and thrice were all the building materials conveyed by invisible agency from this flat spot to a more airy and elevated situation. At last the thane, ceasing to strive against fate, gave up his original design, and the present church was built upon the locality designated by these unseen workmen.* The parish church of Wendover stands half a mile from the town. . . It was to have been built upon a field adjoining the town, and there the building of it was begun, but the materials were all carried away by witches, or, as some relate, by fairies, and deposited where the church now stands. The field in which the church was to have been built is still called "Witches' Meadow."† At Alfriston, the foundations of the church were originally laid in a field on the west side of the town, and known as the Savyne Croft, but every night the stones that had been laid during the previous day were hurled by supernatural agency over the houses into a field called

* See "Choice Notes: Folklore," p. 4. † *Ibid.*