

Why the French built the Maginot Line of Forts and are reinforcing it to-day

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WHY THE FRENCH BUILT THE MAGINOT LINE OF FORTS AND ARE REINFORCING IT TO-DAY.

Why Switzerland is fortifying the Rhine.

Translation of an article in the "Swiss Observer" of the 17th April, 1937.

One of the causes of the collapse of the Roman Empire was the invasion by the barbarian hordes of the Alemans. The druidism of the Celts, on the other hand, accommodated itself fairly quietly to the spread of Christianity.

First of all, the Roman Emperors overthrew Jerusalem, dispersed the people over the whole world and deprived the highly cultivated priesthood of the Druids of all their influence by decrees, by force and by proscription. (Süton: Claudius, chapter 25).

In the third and fourth century A.D., the barbarians broke the Devil's Wall Limes Transhrenanus twice. After crossing the Rhine they subjected Gaul and Italy to their domination. The Emperor Constantine won, however, in A.D. 303 the battle of Lingonen (Langres) and killed there 60,000 Alemans. Soon after he nearly exterminated them at Vindonissa.

These events led to the establishment and fortifying of the Colonia Constantia on the Lake of Constance and to the construction of the Castrum Robur in A.D. 374, on the site of the present Münsterplatz in Basle, by the Emperor Valentinian I.

There was no lack of other fortified camps for the protection of the collapsing Roman Empire from the barbarians; but all this protection proved to be in vain. As far back as A.D. 395, the Alemans recrossed the Rhine, fell on Augusta Rauracorum, the Rauracian Colony and destroyed this Roman-Celtic town, which had hardly recovered from the former invasions—a town that even then prided itself in having a Christian community and in being the seat of a bishop.

A year later, that is to say about A.D. 396, Stilicho built Castrum Rauracense (Kaiseraugst), from the ruins of Augusta Rauracorum, so it is alleged.

With the same object of holding back the Alemanic hordes, a fortified Roman camp, laid out in the form of a square, was established at about the same time (A.D. 396) at Vicus Solodorum, which had been previously attacked on various occasions. The same was done at Altreva and Ultinum.

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Vindonissa, which was also a powerful Roman fortress, fell to the power of the Alemans on several occasions in the fourth century. From its ruins, rose in A.D. 394, the Castrum Vindonissense. The first bishop on record was Bubulcus; he signed the findings of the Synod at Epaon on the Rhodanus in A.D. 519. But even before that time, various bishops must have held the see of Vindonissa, in Vindonissa, Avendicum and Raurica.

There was a common belief, ever since the foundation of Rome, the eternal city (Urbs Aeterna), in 753 B.C., that the Roman world domination would be limited to twelve centuries. This was based on the prophecies of Etruscan wise men of the time of Romulus.

As it is, on the 31st December of the year A.D. 406, the Romans lost their last hold on the Rhine. This was also the last day of the Celtic culture and of Christian civilisation that had been flourishing for about 300 years in Helvetia, and the last day of the higher standards of development such as attained, which were now obliterated by the barbarians of the north, only to be revived much later on in a new era on Celtic classical and Christian foundations.

Honorius, the son of Theodosius reigned over the Western part of the Roman Empire from A.D. 395 to 423. In A.D. 395, Stilicho concluded a Treaty on the Rhine with the wild hordes. He, however, committed the grave error of putting his trust in this Treaty and of withdrawing his legions from the borders. The barbarians rose, broke through the defences at several points, and as mentioned before crossed the Rhine on the last day of A.D. 406, and committed endless atrocities and devastated the country for fully ten years.

Saint Hieronymus, a contemporary living formerly in Treviri, with a mastery both of the Celtic and Roman language (see Heronymi Epistola 91, ad Ageruchiam, IVth Vol. of his Works, Paris, p. 748) has given an account of the events which freely translated, reads as follows:

"Numerous barbarian peoples occupied the whole of Gaul. The country lying between the Alps and the Pyrenees was devastated by the Sueves, Vandals, Sarmates, Alans, Alemans, etc. Moguntiacum, formerly a rich town was sacked; many thousand Christians were murdered in the churches. Vangiones (Worms) was destroyed after a long siege. The large city of Remi (Rheims), also Ambiani (Amiens), Altrebatae (Arras) and the more distant town of Morini (in Flanders), as well as Tornacus (Tournai), Nemetaee (Spiers) and Argentoratus were germanised. The province of Aquitania, the country between the Garonne and the Pyrenees, the districts of Lugdun and Narbo have been laid bare except in the case of a few towns which are besieged and in a state of starvation, etc."

Another eye witness writes in approximately these terms (Bouquet Script. Rerum Gallic I. p. 777 — Opera S. Prosperi 1711, p. 786):—

"If the sea had flooded the land, more would have been left to us. We have lost the cattle, the seeds, the fruit; nowhere is there any place for growing vine or oil plants. The houses have been destroyed by water and fire."

The priest Salvianus, later bishop of Massilia, born at Treviri or in the neighbourhood, witnessed the de-

vastation and described it in the following striking terms (Dei-Gubernatione Dei):

"Before these times, all the Provinces of the Roman Empire were prosperous. The townsmen were wealthy and lived in plenty. Now, however, all prosperity has disappeared, we have been reduced to a state of poverty. Mainz has been destroyed and Cologne is in the hands of the enemy. The capital of Gaul, the rich city of Trier, has been several times stormed and is now destroyed. The same has happened to the other towns of Gaul. Those who have not been killed by the enemy in the invasion have miserably succumbed in the devastation that has followed. Many have died of a slow death; others have suffered burns, starvation and exposures. All around the towns dead of both sexes have been lying naked and covered with wounds, devoured by birds of prey and dogs; the stench of the corpses has polluted the air for the living. All this I have seen and lived through myself. Such inhabitants as have survived the ordeal have been reduced to destitution and misery, so that it is difficult to say which fate was the worse, that of the dead or that of the living."

What had happened in the meantime to the Christian settlements in Helvetia? Castrum Robur in Basela was razed. Christian relics of the period show that this settlement did not last more than about 20 years.

Castrum Rauricense (Kaiseraugst) was built afresh in A.D. 395, from the ruins of Rauricas, and destroyed likewise.

The See of Raurica probably came to an end as early as A.D. 395. Its revival dates from the eighth century and is linked with the rise of Basela (Cointus, Annal. Eccles. ad. ann. 748 No. 105, etc.).

Raurica itself did not last longer; it would appear to have had a period of life of hardly 12 years, from A.D. 395 to 407. Castrum Vindonissense had an existence of equally short duration.

Maximus, the last bishop of Vindonissa was the first bishop of Constantia, about the year A.D. 560.

The remains of Solodorum and the newly built fortified camp there were also completely destroyed. It may be mentioned that attempts have been made to link the market tower of Solothurn with the Roman times; this tower is, however, of Burgundian origin and dates from the tenth century. Certain finds that have been made show that Christianity was established at Solothurn, as far back as the fourth century. There are, however, no records to indicate whether this town was the seat of a bishop.

Aventicum, like Raurica, Vindonissa, Altreva and Solodorum was laid waste in the same manner and at about the same time. The last record of this city appears in the Notitia Provinciarum which was written about A.D. 400 in the reign of Honorius. At that time, that is to say, four years after Raurica had been reduced to a fortified camp, the name of the city was "Civitas Elvetiorum Aventicus" (Haller, I. p. 330).

It may be of interest to note here that in the sixth century B.C., a cultured Greek people, the Phocaens, from Asia Minor, escaped the power of the Persian Emperor Cyrus and penetrated inland from the south coast of Gaul, infusing Greek culture into the customs and culture of the native Celts. It was also 700 years later that Greeks from Asia Minor set foot on the same coast and brought Christianity to the Gauls and Celts.

Another point that may be mentioned is that

Christianity at its very inception in Helvetia, at the beginning of the fifth century, was swept away by the northern barbarians. Later, in the sixth century, it was brought back, from the Celtic lands of Ireland and Great Britain by Gallus and Columba, which owed their bringing up to the druidic city of Bangor in Ireland.

A characteristic that has been rightly ascribed to the Celts is a love for individual and communal liberty, regulated nevertheless by laws. For this very reason, there were, in Celtic lands, no rulers for life and no dynasties. The people chose their administrators and military chiefs. Sovereignty of the people and liberty based on law, regulated communal relations and individual right of property were the creeds tenaciously defended by the Helvetians from the very beginning. Even the Romans were unable, in the long run, to modify this outlook, while the Gauls after experimenting for centuries with Kings and Emperors finally reverted to the state of true republicans.

At the present day, the Gauls now the French, are building the Maginot line of forts, reinforcing it and extending it. The Helvetians now the Swiss, are fortifying the region of the Rhine and other districts, and spending millions on armaments, in order to be able to resist successfully any invasion..

The same is happening again as was necessitated in the second half of the fourth century for the protection of the Gauls and the Helvetians against the German hordes.

Fortunately, the present will to defend the country has not been shaken by false professions of peace, which might have resulted in the work being left unfinished, as occurred in the time of Stilicho, in the year A.D. 395.

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In the above historical sketch, no claim is made to originality. On the contrary, abundant use has been made of the Works of Diessenbach, J. Grimm, Körner, Ritter, Joh. Müller, Neugart, de Rivaz, von Arx, Scherer, Brosi, Burckhardt and others, to which must be added the sources already mentioned in the text.

G.W.

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