



ROMAN RAVENGLASS.

Plate I.—“Walls Castle,” General View from the North.

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*Photo. by Miss M. C. Fair, 1927.*

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ART. XX.—*Roman Ravenglass*. By R. G. COLLINGWOOD.

*Read at the site, Sept. 15th, 1927.*

THE Roman fort whose foundations, cut through by the railway and covered with shrubberies, lie on the edge of Ravenglass harbour,\* has long been an object of interest on account of the magnificent remains of its bath-buildings; but no attempt has ever been made to collect all the available information about it and to reconstruct its history. That is the purpose of the present paper. Any such reconstruction must be tentative, pending proper excavation; but the fact that a site has not been excavated is no excuse for neglecting to find out what we can about it in the mean time. The photographs illustrating this paper have been very kindly specially taken for it by Miss Fair.

## I. THE REMAINS.

### THE FORT.

Mutilated and overgrown though it is, the fort is plainly recognisable on the ground and the greater part of its outline is visible. On the east, the rampart is to be seen for its whole length, about 140 yards, as a well-defined bank running parallel to the drive which leads to Walls.

\* There has been some unnecessary confusion in the past about its exact position. The Ordnance Survey, in a recent revision, shifted it to a place a mile or so away among the sandhills of Eskmeals, where no Roman site ever did or ever could exist. The explanation seems to be that Hutchinson (*Cumberland*, vol. i, p. 561) speaks of a site at Eskmeals where Roman coins were frequently found, and Roman altars, broken, with imperfect inscriptions. He obviously refers to Ravenglass fort, which has no fixed modern name, but has at various times been called Ravenglass, Muncaster, and Eskmeals. I propose that the name Ravenglass be used, not only because it is in general local usage, but because, as I argue in this paper, the Roman fort, like Ravenglass village, is essentially a seaport and is conditioned by Ravenglass harbour. At Eskmeals itself a single Roman coin has been found (1837).

This bank stands between 3 and 5 feet high, and outside it—east of it, that is—lies a double ditch. The outer ditch is partly filled up, and the drive runs along its outer edge; the inner ditch is visible for its whole length, and is here and there wet enough to grow rushes.

The western or seaward part of the fort is crossed diagonally by the main line of the Furness Railway, which here runs in a cutting deep enough to have destroyed all the inhabited strata in its track; but the south side of the fort is still in existence for about 112 yards, and the north side for about 60 yards, starting from the south-east and north-east corners respectively, before the railway cuts them. The southern side shows a very clear and sharp rampart, falling to a flattish strip of ground beyond which is a little ravine with a stream at the bottom. Surface indications show no ditch; I imagine that, if there was one, it was quite small, the neighbourhood of the ravine making it practically useless. On the northern side, the rampart is again clear enough. Outside it is a single ditch, the two eastern ditches having run together into one at the north-east corner; this ditch gets deeper as it travels westward and develops into a ravine about 20 ft. deep. Thus one seems to see that the Roman engineers chose for their fort a bit of flat ground raised well above the harbour, bounded to westward by a cliff falling sharply into the harbour itself and to north and south by little ravines; it became a fortified site through the simple process of digging a ditch across the neck of flat ground which alone remained to eastward.

The portion west of the railway line is a slender triangle, 20 yards across at widest, now under grass. Its outer or western edge is not the edge of the fort; the cliff has suffered erosion, and the whole of the western rampart has perished. This is seen by the fact that at two points, if not more, Roman occupation-levels are visible in section

in the face of the cliff, with pottery, tiles and charcoal\* exposed to view. When one reflects on the general plan of the site it becomes clear that these levels must lie inside the fort; if they represent external buildings, the fort would be not only a very curious shape but also a very inadequate size. How much of the fort has perished we cannot say; if only a little, the fort was a square one like Hardknot, but larger, measuring three acres and three-quarters, an acre more than Hardknot, when allowance has been made for the earth bank† of the latter. This would make it about the size and shape of Maryport; and it is worth remembering that Watercrock, an intermediate fort on the road whose terminus is Ravenglass, is another example of the same size and shape. If on the other hand a good deal has been lost by erosion, the fort was an oblong one of four and a half acres—the size and shape of Old Carlisle or Chesters or Housesteads—with its longer axis pointing seaward. The former alternative is the likelier, and would allow ample room for a garrison of 500 men.‡

Though the outline of the fort is largely visible, there are no traces of internal buildings, or even of gateways. Mr. W. Jackson in 1876§ said that there were traces of round towers at the two eastern angles; but his very words betray him, for the towers at the angles must, on analogy, have been square, and if they looked round, that only shows that he could not see them very well. He added, however, that there were even then no indications of other buildings on the site. Camden referred to the site as one where Roman inscriptions were said to be visible;

\* One stratum which might be taken for an occupation-level is a bed of gravel including much water-worn coal, overlying the boulder clay. This is, however, a purely natural formation and lies lower than the Roman levels.

† Hardknot is given by Dymond as 3a. or. 3p. Its earth bank would take up at least  $\frac{1}{2}$  acre, so its effective area may be given as 2 $\frac{3}{4}$  acres, or a little less.

‡ The inscriptions at Maryport suggest that there accommodation was to be had for a *cohors quingenaria equitata*.

§ *The Camp at Muncaster*, these *Trans.*, O.S., iii, p. 17.

Hutchinson speaks of broken battle axes of flint, arrow heads, and coins of different peoples, many of them Roman and some Saxon, which shows that he had seen a miscellaneous collection of prehistoric and other antiquities from the neighbourhood; but we nowhere hear anything of internal buildings except in the record of discoveries made during the construction of the railway in 1850. On that occasion (says Mr. Jackson, quoting Mr. Tomlinson of Whitehaven) workmen in the cutting, 150 yards south-west of Walls Castle, found

“ three remarkable constructions about 20 yards apart from each other. The openings had been about two feet below the present surface: the shape excavated was a cone or sugar loaf say fifteen feet deep, and ten to twelve feet diameter at the bottom. The bottom had been flagged, the sides wooded round, in a square of seven or eight feet, with the trunks of trees of 14 inches girth, laid horizontally one on the other, and filled up between them and the soil with stones, and so continued up, gradually lessening the size to about sixteen inches, over which a slab of stone was placed. The inside was filled with a dark, peaty matter, which on being excavated, contained many various bones, and many human bones and skulls of various sizes, but so decayed as to be beyond preservation. There were two oak clubs found in one of the structures, and a skin covering for the leg, with thongs attached. The workmen opened one of them down to the flagged bottom, under the expectation of finding it an underground passage to Walls Castle; but no coins or implements were found.”

When Mr. Tomlinson saw the pits, they were in a state of great confusion, with bones, skulls, horns, oak leaves, etc., thrown about by the excavators.

Underground chambers are not infrequently reported at Roman sites. Often they are hypocausts, but here the good and careful description makes that impossible, and we are reminded of Stukeley's “subterraneous vault, floored with large slabs of freestone,” at Papcastle (these *Trans. N.S.*, xiii, p. 132). Our hon. member Sir George Macdonald tells me that there is a story that plunderers at Birrens about 1816 found “a cart-load of wheat” in



ROMAN RAVENGLASS.

Plate II. "Walls Castle"—Flat relieving arch above lintel (removed) of doorway.

*Photo. by Miss M. C. Fair, 1927.*

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“ an arched cellar,” which gives us another example of the same thing—something quite different from either a well or a rubbish-pit—and shows that we have to do with underground storage chambers.

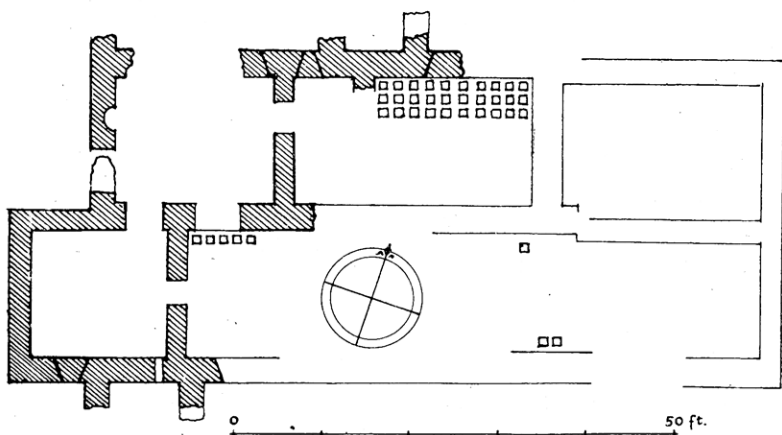
Excavations inside the fort were undertaken by Lord Muncaster in 1886, but the results were so disappointing that work was stopped at the suggestion of Chancellor Ferguson and Dr. Bruce. It was found that “ almost every stone available for building purposes had been carried away, the walls internal and external, having been robbed down, in most places, to the very foundations” (R. S. Ferguson, *History of Cumberland*, p. 64; *Proc. Soc. Ant.*, ser. 2, vol. xi, p. 210, which gives the date). Nowadays we are accustomed to working among walls that have been robbed to the foundations; but in the then state of archæological knowledge the excavators were quite right to stop. Where they were not quite right was in failing to exercise any sort of supervision. Had they merely collected the pottery in a sack, we could have formed an idea of the length of time during which the fort was occupied; and it is hard to hear without impatience that an inscribed stone was found but thrown into the sea by the workman who found it, because, the letters on it being English letters, it could be of no value (Ferguson *op. cit.* p. 65). So ended the only attempt to dig this fort. Since then the planting of the shrubbery has made future work far harder; but even now it would certainly be well worth doing.

Outside the fort there was, as usual, a civil settlement. Miss Fair, whose devoted labours have done a great deal to increase our knowledge of Roman Eskdale, has located the surface finds belonging to this settlement over an area equal to that of the fort itself and lying north of it. She has searched the ground minutely for traces of a rampart and ditch such as might have surrounded an annexe, but

nothing has come to light except the relics of later fencing and draining.

### THE BATH.

"Walls Castle," the bath-building of Ravenglass fort, is the best-preserved Roman building in the north of England. Nowhere else in the north is there a Roman house standing the full height of its walls; and the instances in all England are exceedingly rare. The bath-house at Chesters, the only northern rival of Walls Castle, falls far short of it in height, though it has many more rooms.



**"WALLS CASTLE": ROMAN BATH-HOUSE, RAVENGLASS.**

The remains now standing above ground form an irregular block about 50 ft. long by 40 ft. wide, consisting of two rooms and various projecting fragments of wall. One room is 15 ft. 11 in. by 14 ft. 7 in., the other 18 ft. 9 in. by 14 ft. 5 in. The two south-western corners seem to be true external angles, but everywhere else are broken ends of walls whose continuation is lost. In 1876 our members Canon Knowles and Mr. W. Jackson surveyed the remains and printed an excellent architectural description



of them in our *Transactions* (O.S. iii, p. 23); they noted that the remains, though measuring 52 by 43 feet, were only a fragment; that they were built in good red freestone, regularly coursed, with very hard mortar, and that internally at least the walls were rendered with pink cement; that the height was 12 ft. 6 inches; that the doorways have had arches 9 feet from the ground, with lintels below, nicked to receive timber door-frames, and that, in addition to traces of 5 windows with sills 4 feet from the ground, there was in one place a semi-cylindrical round-headed niche 3 ft. 6 in. high, 2 ft. 10½ in. broad, and 1 ft. 6 in. deep.

In 1881, excavations were put in hand in order to recover the plan of the missing portion. It was found that the walls extended a considerable distance to eastward. East of the larger room, which seems to have had a solid floor, was a small room 15 ft. by 7 ft 2 in., and then an almost square room with a hypocaust; beyond that again was another larger room. The smaller of the two rooms now standing had a solid floor, but a hypocaust arch led into it from the south, which shows that it once had a hypocaust, but that this had been removed at a later, but apparently still Roman period.\* East of this was a very long heated room running apparently the whole length of the building. That may mean only that the excavators missed the cross-walls. To northward and southward it does not appear that they even tried to complete the plan.

That we have here a specimen of the ordinary regimental bath-house is clear. But it differs very much from the example which we saw this morning at Hardknot. There it was reduced to a bare minimum—the three necessary rooms, with an external *laconicum*. Here, the hypocausted floor-space was at least twice as great as at Hardknot, and

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\* Roman, because the arch had been blocked up purposely, and because ordinary Roman conical tile water pipes were found on the solid floor.

may have been more; and in the absence of a complete plan we cannot assign the various rooms their functions with any degree of certainty. The room with the niche, whose floor seems to have been solid, suggests an entrance-hall or *apodyterium*; in that case the south room, with its separate furnace just beyond it, may be a *laconicum*, in this case square. Beyond that, nothing is certain. One can only say that a little digging, which would be very easy to do, would suffice to follow up the walls not traced in 1881, and complete the plan of this remarkable building.

## II. HISTORY OF THE SITE.

A dozen years ago our then President, the late Professor Haverfield, published a paper on *The Romano-British Names of Ravenglass and Borran*s, (in *Archæol. Journ.*, 1915, pp. 77-84), in which he proposed to identify Ravenglass, Ambleside and Watercrook with Clanovenia, Galava, and Alone, the first three stations of the Tenth Antonine Itinerary. Since then, so far as I know, no effective criticism of this view has been put forward. Our contributor, Mr. J. B. Bailey, it is true, maintains that the Iter begins at Maryport and runs through the centre of the Lake District to Ambleside; but in spite of the great store which I set by Mr. Bailey's contributions to our knowledge of Roman Cumberland, I am unconvinced by his theory, chiefly because it demands the existence of a Roman fort and many miles of Roman road in a district where no Roman fort or road has ever been identified, though, had they been there, they ought to have been visible enough.\* Haverfield's view, on the contrary, is confronted by no difficulties except slight discrepancies in distance such as frequently occur in itineraries whose identification is certain. The present situation, therefore,

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\* These *Trans. N.S.*, xxiii, p. 143.



ROMAN RAVENGLASS.

Plate III, "Walls Castle"—Doorway, showing relieving arch above removed lintel and wall-face rendered in pink cement.

*Photo. by Miss Mary C. Fair, Eskdale.*

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ROMAN RAVENGLASS.

Plate IV, A.—“ Walls Castle ”—Niche.

*Photo. by Miss M. C. Fair, 1927.*

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is that Haverfield's view, though it is not definitely proved, holds the field; and I hope to show that it receives confirmation from a fact not quoted in this connexion by its author.

When was Ravenglass fort built? The only evidence at present available is circumstantial. Reconsideration of the early pottery and other finds at Ambleside, in comparison with the Hardknot material, seems to confirm the view that the early fort at Ambleside is Flavian, and may well date from Agricola. Now one cannot conceive any Roman officer planting a fort at Ambleside except in order to guard a road running through the Lake District mountains. What was this road? Anyone familiar with the ground, will say "the Wrynose road," remembering how Ambleside fort is placed so as to command a view of Wrynose pass. Nor is any other answer possible. Unless and until some confirmation is produced for Mr Bailey's conjectural fort at Keswick and road thence to Ambleside, no alternative continuation is open to us except High Street, which is a mere loop line leading back into the main road near Penrith.

Ambleside then presupposes a road, which can only be the Wrynose road; and the Wrynose road must have led somewhere, and can only have led to Ravenglass. Therefore Ravenglass, like Ambleside, is a Flavian and probably an Agricolan site. That Ravenglass was Agricolan was the opinion of antiquaries fifty years ago; but they had no reasons for it, beyond empty speculations as to Agricola's "line of march." Valid reasons, even for so tentative a conclusion, only came into existence when Ambleside was dug.

If Ravenglass is Agricolan, what follows? Tacitus (*Agricola* ch. 24, § 1) tells us that in the campaign of A.D. 81 or 82—the exact year is a matter of dispute—his father-in-law "placed troops in that part of Britain which faces Ireland, with a view to hope [of invading it] rather

than through fear [of Irish raids], because Ireland, lying midway between Britain and Spain, and within easy reach of the Gaulish sea, would unite the most flourishing regions of the Empire with great advantage to each" (*eamque partem Britanniae quae Hiberniam aspicit copiis instruxit, in spem magis quam ob formidinem, si quidem Hibernia medio inter Britanniam et Hispaniam sita et Gallico quoque mari opportuna valentissimam partem imperii magnis in vicem usibus miscuerit*). Agricola had received an Irish "kinglet," banished from his throne by civil war, and kept him in case he might be of use when the projected invasion was carried into effect; and, says Tacitus, "I have often heard him say that Ireland could be conquered and held with one legion and a reasonable force of auxiliaries" (*ibid.* 24 § 3).

Agricola may have been right or wrong in his forecast. Opinion as to his military capacity has altered a good deal in late years, since Sir George Macdonald's treatment of his Caledonian conquests; and for my own part I am disposed to think that he could have completed the annexation of the British Isles—with what far-reaching historical consequences!—if he had been allowed. But the invasion of Ireland never took place.\* Yet it was, if we may trust Tacitus, intended; and a base from which it might start seems to have been established in "that part of Britain which faces Ireland."

Several parts of Britain face Ireland: Galloway, Cumberland, Lancashire, Wales, even Cornwall, might be described in such a phrase. Haverfield (*English Hist. Rev.*, Jan., 1913, p. 7), once wrote that the place "might be either Wales or the Cumberland coast, or possibly Wigtown and Galloway, but here remains of Roman forts are entirely absent, and even Roman smaller objects are

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\* German scholars have thought that it did; but the view is not tenable. For references, see Professor Anderson's edition of Tacitus's *Agricola*, p. lix, note 2.

very rare." In an article *Hibernia* in Pauly-Wissowa's *Realencyclopädie* he rules out the latter alternative more emphatically, and tacitly discards Wales: "Lancashire und Cumberland oder vielleicht Wigtown und Galloway (wo aber römische Ueberreste vollständig fehlen.)" Professor Anderson (*Agricola cit.*, p. lviii) says not Wigtown and Galloway but "rather the Cumberland coast (Maryport) or possibly North Wales; in the *Annals* [xii, 32, 3] Tacitus applies the same phrase to the sea off Flintshire, *mare quod Hiberniam insulam aspectat.*"

Wigtown and Galloway may be ruled out at once. No Roman armies ever, so far as we know, went there. Cornwall may be ruled out even more confidently (see *Victoria County History* of Cornwall for the known history of Roman Cornwall, which excludes any such hypothesis). North Wales is ruled out by the fact that its forts are inland facing forts: even Segontium, the Roman Carnarvon, is plainly not designed to command the sea; and when it became necessary to use it for that purpose, the old fort on the hill was supplemented by a new fort nearer the sea (Wheeler, *Segontium and the Roman Occupation of Wales*, pp. 95, *seqq.*). Holyhead, a natural starting-point for Ireland, has only a late Roman fort, if Dr. Wheeler's explanation of Caer Gybi (*ibid.* p. 98) is correct. Lancashire is ruled out by the fact that none of its Roman sites is on the coast; and Lancaster, which might at a pinch serve for a seaport, would hardly be designed by any sane man as a naval base.

Agricola's naval base was therefore in Cumberland. Mr. Bailey thought some years ago that he detected traces of an Agricolan port at the mouth of the Ellen (these *Trans. N.S.*, xxiii, 146; xxvi, 415-418); but there is no evidence that the walls and cobble pavements which he describes are Roman, not a single potsherd or other Roman relic being associated with them; and we have no reason to think that Roman Maryport was ever situated

elsewhere than on the hill-top where the visible fort lies, some distance away from the river-mouth, and no proof that its life began as early as Agricola.

In order to find Agricola's naval base, we must look for a fort, preferably with proofs of early date, situated not on a cliff-top above an open coast, but by the water's edge at a commodious harbour facing Ireland. These conditions are satisfied at Ravenglass and nowhere else. How good the harbour must have been in Agricola's time is proved by the Rev. Caesar Caine's statements concerning its modern use (*The Port of Ravenglass*, these *Trans.* N.S., xxii), considered in the light of the fact that it is simply a natural landlocked tidal creek, which has been silting up ever since.

Tacitus's sentence thus seems to contain a more than possible reference to the building of Ravenglass fort. If that is so, the Kendal-Ravenglass road acquires a new significance. It was no mere mountain trail, piercing a piece of wild country, intended to assist in patrolling it and subduing its inhabitants. As I have pointed out in this volume, in connexion with Hardknot, there is no reason to think that the Lake District was so thickly inhabited as to make that necessary. The road is, rather, the way to Ravenglass. That harbour having been selected as a base for the invasion of Ireland, the road was built so as to connect it in the directest possible way with army headquarters at York and Chester. And this, again, throws a new light on the Tenth Iter. Why, it may be asked, should an obscure mountain track leading through desolate hills to a lonely coastal fort be thus immortalised in the Antonine road-book? On the view here put forward, the answer is plain and satisfying: Because it had been Agricola's strategic road to Ireland.

Hope of conquest, says Tacitus, was Agricola's motive, rather than fear of raids. That may be construed into an admission that the latter motive was not wholly absent.





ROMAN RAVENGLASS.

Plate IV, B.—“Walls Castle” Window from inside,  
showing subsequent blocking.

*Photo. by Miss M. C. Fair, 1927.*

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If this suspicion is correct, it is easy to see why Ravenglass was still garrisoned after the project of invasion was given up, and why, as stated elsewhere in this volume, it was reinforced by Hardknot some twenty years or more after its foundation. Even after the Wall was built, Ravenglass was still held; partly perhaps as a port of call for coastwise traffic, partly as an outlying stronghold on the westernmost extremity of the fortified line marked by the Wall.

The identification of Clanoventa with Ravenglass is thus highly probable. It is rendered still more probable by the fact that "Glannibanta" in the *Notitia Dignitatum*—obviously the same place—was garrisoned by the First Cohort of Morini, a seafaring people from the extreme north of France. What could be more proper than to bring men from the tidal creeks of the Pas-de-Calais and place them here at the mouth of the Esk? That Agricola placed the Morini at Ravenglass we do not know; but they were in Britain at least by A.D. 103, and analogy shows that the stations assigned to units by the *Notitia* were often those which they had occupied from a very early period.

It is just possible that among the earliest troops at Ravenglass was another unit, whose adventures form the most dramatic episode in Tacitus's *Agricola*. In 82 or 83, a cohort of Usipi, raised in Germany, was sent to Britain. It mutinied, killed the centurion and privates who were engaged in training it, seized three light galleys, and sailed round Britain, blindfold and starving, to a landfall somewhere in the Low Countries. The narrative (*Agr.* ch. 28), suggests that the Usipi were quartered on the west coast; clearly, too, they were quartered at or near a harbour. It has often and reasonably enough been conjectured that the scene of their mutiny was somewhere on the coast "facing Ireland" which had been fortified in the previous year; and in that case, it is more likely to have been at Raven-

glass than anywhere else. But the vagueness of Tacitus's geographical statements forbids us to regard that as more than a guess.\*

The evidence of the *Notitia*, in spite of the obscurity which surrounds the British, and in particular the *per lineam valli*, section of that document, proves that Ravenglass was held until a late period in the Roman occupation. And, as we see, its bath-house stood, at least in part, even afterwards. In the middle ages, according to the county historians, it was used as a dwelling by the Peningtons; and at some time legends of a stranger inhabitation became current. "They speak much," says Camden, "of king Eveling, who had his palace hereabout"; and our President† has shown that by tales told in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the ruined Roman bath-house was identified as the Castle Perilous beside the Isle of Avilion, the place where the Lady of the Fountain lived, the home of king Avalloc and his wife the sea-fairy Morgan le Fay. Nor is it inconsistent with this that the Isle of Avilion is also shown elsewhere. Fairyland has the power of being in many places at once; Ravenglass, it seems, is one of them.

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\* The incident has been much discussed: cf. Anderson's *Agricola*, *ad loc.* (pp. 116 *seqq.*, 169 *seqq.*), for an account of the discussion. But Tacitus scorns exact topographical information, and we shall never really know whence the Usipi sailed or where they went.

† *Who was king Eveling of Ravenglass?* in these *Trans.*, N.S. xxiv.