

NOTICE OF THE BARRIER OF ANTONINUS PIUS.¹

IN this paper, I propose, first, Briefly to review the history of the ancient line of Roman fortification, across Scotland, commonly called the Antonine Wall ; secondly, To describe its present condition, and point out where the best-preserved specimens may yet be seen ; and thirdly, To notice some of the more interesting memorials, which have been discovered from time to time, along its course.

I. While in the East the Romans were engaged in the war with the Jews, which terminated in the final destruction of the Holy City, they were also pushing their conquests in the then "Far West," in regions hitherto little known. The south of Britain had felt the weight of the Roman arms sometime before, under Julius Cæsar and Claudius, but the northern portion, Caledonia, yet remained undisturbed, shrouded in the gloom of its huge forests. The conquests of the Roman generals at length carried them northward, to the threshold of this unexplored country. It was in the year 80 after Christ, that a Roman army, which had subdued most of the native tribes south of the modern Northumberland, prepared to penetrate the gloomy region in their front, called Caledonia, or "the Country of the Woods." The natives of this wild and forbidding land were divided into a number of tribes, very fierce, and almost always engaged in petty wars with each other. Numerous little hill-forts of the chiefs studded the country, and the natives lived on milk, berries, and the flesh of wild animals killed in the chase. They were scantily clad in the skins of these creatures, their bodies tattooed and painted, chiefly of a blue colour, from the juice of the woad-plant, while their long yellow hair streamed in the wind as they pursued with ardour through the dark forests, rank with jungle, and diversified with dismal swamps,

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the black bear, the wolf, the wild boar, and other denizens of the wilderness. They were now, however, destined to witness the approach of a foe, terrible in power, but whose desire it was, from policy, to implant among the conquered the seeds of civilisation, and thus mould them into peaceful, if not willing, subjects.

The army for the invasion of Caledonia consisted of three legions, viz., the Second (surnamed *Augusta*), the Ninth, which had suffered much in the south of Britain, and was weak in numbers, and the Twentieth, known by the title of *Valeria Victrix*. A large body of auxiliaries accompanied them. These were chiefly from the neighbourhood of the Rhine, hardy, warlike, and completely disciplined after the Roman fashion. If we estimate the Roman legion at its then average complement of 5000 men, probably the whole invading army amounted to about 20,000. The general, was the celebrated Julius Agricola, a favourite both of Vespasian, and of his son Titus, the conqueror of Jerusalem. With this force the Roman leader entered Caledonia. The weather is described as having been dreadful. During the laborious march, the light troops scoured the woods, skirmishing with the natives, who frequently attempted to cut them off in ambuscades; the numerous hill-forts on the route were stormed, and their defenders either were put to the sword, or, escaping, joined the sullen bands which slowly retired before the Roman light-infantry; while the pioneers hewed a passage through the woods for the main army, forming a road with the fallen trees. Every night an entrenched camp was formed, and sentinels carefully posted.

The course of this first Roman army is supposed to have been from the modern Carlisle northwards, through the eastern parts of Dumfries, and Lanark shires (the centre of the country); by Lockerbie, Crawford, Biggar, the neighbourhood of Lanark, and thence to Camelon, on the Water of Carron, where they wintered. Early antiquaries have traced along the greater part of this route, with sundry interruptions, the chain of night-camps which are supposed to have been then formed by Agricola.

At Camelon (long afterwards a Roman town), the invading army had arrived at the narrowest part of Britain. The neck of land, or isthmus, between the Clyde and the Forth, is only about thirty miles broad, and, as a military position,

was too important to escape the practised eye of Agricola, and his engineers. During the winter of the years 80—81, the general collected all possible information regarding the country, and resolved, during the following summer, to fortify this isthmus. Accordingly, he devoted the open part of 81 to constructing a chain of small forts or *Castella*, within short distances of each other, all the way from the one estuary to the other. These he placed with great judgment. The principal one appears to have been at Barhill (near the small town of Kirkintilloch), an elevated and commanding position, nearly in the centre of the isthmus, and from which an extensive range of country is seen. This row of forts formed the germ of the Antonine barrier, although in point of fact, that military work was not constructed for some time afterwards.

But while Agricola was thus consolidating his conquests, and imparting to those under his sway the arts of civilisation, he met with a severe loss in the death of his patron and steady friend, the emperor Titus, which affected him deeply. Domitian, the younger brother of the deceased emperor, succeeded,—dark, relentless, and cruel—a disgrace to the Roman name and to humanity. Agricola was allowed to hold his command in Britain four years longer, during which he carried his arms as far as the Grampian mountains, and sent a naval expedition to ascertain the direction and extent of the northern region. The fleet made a voyage round by the Pentland Frith, and ascertained, for the first time, the insular character of Britain. It is not necessary, for the history of the Antonine ramparts, to follow Agricola further in his northern campaigns. He was everywhere victorious, and at a great pitched battle with the confederated tribes, said to have been 30,000 strong, he completely defeated and dispersed them. The fame of his exploits, however, roused the jealousy of Domitian, who recalled him to Rome, but afraid to strike, suffered this brave man to pine out his days in ignoble retirement. His accomplished son-in-law left the Roman bar to soothe and comfort him, and beguiled the general's dreary days by writing an account of his British campaigns, drawing the information from Agricola himself, and from such of the officers as came to visit their old commander. *The Life of Agricola*, thus composed by Cornelius Tacitus, contains, probably, one of the most beautiful and

touching memorials of a virtuous but ill-requited man that is to be met with in the whole range of antiquity.

After the recall of Agricola we hear little regarding the northern portions of Britain during the reigns of Domitian and his successors Nerva, Trajan, and Hadrian, a space of about half a century. No doubt, however, many stirring events took place, of which the records are for ever lost. But there are incidental allusions made by some of the Roman authors to insurrections ; and we know that the warlike Hadrian came over in person, and examined the fortifications, so that he must have been in this district, in the course of his inspection of the forts on the isthmus, probably about the year 120. He brought over with him another legion, the Sixth, which thenceforth remained in Britain, with two of the original corps, the Second and Twentieth, till the Romans left the island, three centuries afterwards. The Ninth legion seems to have been withdrawn as too weak for this dangerous service.

Hadrian appears to have considered the frontier between the Clyde and the Forth too distant, and caused it to be carried back to the line of country between the Tyne and the Solway, where, as has been satisfactorily shown by Dr. Bruce, this emperor constructed the magnificent line of fortification which must now bear his name instead of that of Severus, too long and erroneously applied to it.

On the accession of Hadrian's successor, the wise and virtuous Antoninus Pius, in 138, an officer was sent over as governor of Britain, who equalled Agricola in talent, energy, and military skill ; this was Lollius Urbicus. He seems to have found the northern natives very troublesome, and determined to advance the frontier again to the line of the old *Castella* of Agricola, and to fortify thoroughly the isthmus between the Forth and the Clyde. He therefore repaired and enlarged these forts, and constructed a number of new ones between them, so that at every two miles there was a fort ; but instead of leaving the intervals open, without a military curtain, he caused the soldiers to dig an immense *fossa* or trench, the whole length of the isthmus, in a line with and connecting the *Castella*. This huge ditch was about twenty-seven miles long, forty feet wide, and twenty feet deep. It ran in an unbroken line, straight over hill and dale, generally, however, on the crest of a succession of rising

grounds, from the Clyde near Dumbarton, to Caeriden on the Forth, not far from the small town of Bo'ness, thus traversing part of the shires of Dumbarton, Stirling, and Linlithgow. With the earth dug out of this military trench, a rampart, twenty feet high and twenty-four feet thick, strengthened with stones and turf, was raised, close along the south or Roman side, the whole way, having a platform behind for the soldiers; to the south of all this was a military causeway, twenty feet broad, well compacted with stones in the durable Roman fashion. This road followed the line of fortification from one end to the other, and communicated with the other *viæ*, which traversed the Roman province.

The forts thus lining the rampart and *fossa* of Lollius Urbicus were eighteen in number, and, on an average, stood within about two miles of each other. Small bodies of troops, probably a centurion's guard, were posted in the minor forts; but the larger and more important were held by cohorts. They were mostly within view of each other on either side, and military signals could be promptly exchanged by trumpets and otherwise; while, in case of alarm, troops could be speedily moved along the causeway from the larger cantonments to any threatened point. The Roman names of these eighteen *Castella* have not been preserved to us, as in the case of those on the wall of Hadrian, otherwise it might have been curious to trace the Roman ideas of the different localities, &c., as probably embodied in the etymology.

The forts stood at the following places:—

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| 1. Old Kilpatrick (on the
brink of Clyde). | 10. Croy. |
| 2. Duntocher. | 11. Westerwood. |
| 3. Castlehill. | 12. Castlecarey. |
| 4. New Kilpatrick. | 13. Rough-Castle. |
| 5. Bemulie. | 14. Bantaskin. |
| 6. Cawder. | 15. Mumrills (near Falkirk). |
| 7. Kirkintilloch. | 16. Inveravon (near Polmont). |
| 8. Auchendavie. | 17. Kinniel. |
| 9. Barhill. | 18. Caeriden (on the shore of
the Forth). |

Of these, Nos. 2, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 13, and 16, were large and well garrisoned; and we know from inscriptions, that various corps of Gauls, Germans, and other foreigners in the Roman service, were stationed along the isthmus, besides the regular Roman forces.

Such was the Antonine barrier when fresh from the hands of its soldier-builders 1700 years ago ; now lonely and unheeded, but once the frontier of a mighty empire, which grasped the whole of southern Europe from the Rhine to the Danube, and sent ambassadors from its eastern limit on the Indus, to the court of the monarch of Hindostan.

The legions which constructed this formidable barrier were those already mentioned—the Second, Sixth, and Twentieth, assisted by the auxiliary cohorts. Each had a certain portion of the work assigned to it, and the working parties were protected by advanced guards from any sudden attack. The soldiers considered the formation of this fortification a meritorious undertaking, and were accustomed to erect at the end of their respective sections of the work, slabs, with inscriptions, recording the number and title of the legion they belonged to, and the quantity of work executed, which was generally a stretch of about three Roman miles. Most of these slabs were dedicated to the reigning emperor, Antoninus Pius, who was a favourite with the soldiery.

The rest of the history may be briefly told. Lollius Urbicus remained twenty years governor of the country, during which, we may well suppose, the Antonine barrier was firmly maintained against native assaults. He over-ran a large portion of the low country beyond, as far as the Moray Frith, intersecting it with roads and camps. Under his rule Roman power in Scotland attained its greatest development.

During the succeeding reigns of Marcus Aurelius and the profligate Commodus, down to A.D. 197, frequent insurrections of the natives took place ; and on one occasion the rampart was stormed, and a Roman general killed, but the insurgents were driven out of the province by a new governor hastily sent from Rome.

When the warlike Severus ascended the throne, the officer in command found everything in Caledonia so insecure, that he was obliged to write to the emperor either to come over himself or send more troops. Severus determined to visit the country in person, which he did, about A.D. 206, with a large army. Alarmed by his vast preparations, the natives sent ambassadors to sue for peace, which was sternly refused. The emperor, accompanied by his sons Geta and Caracalla, advanced in battle array, passing through the Antonine rampart

probably at Castlecarey, by the great central *Iter* from the south, which led north to Stirling and beyond, carrying everything before him. Determined to root out the fierce natives from their almost impenetrable fastnesses in the dismal wilderness outside the barrier, Severus caused whole forests to be cut down, morasses to be drained, bridges built, additional roads made, and other laborious operations executed.

By fatigue, disease, and other casualties, he lost more than one half of his army : but nothing could daunt him. Though old and labouring under disease, he was carried in a litter at the head of the legions, till at length he reached the northern shores of the island. Again the natives sued for peace, which was this time granted, after they had been made to feel the weight of his power. To this day quantities of felled trees are taken out of the bogs, bearing the marks of the Roman axe, and referable to this memorable expedition.

It is extremely probable that Severus maintained the Antonine barrier. Indeed, it seems quite inconsistent with the character of this resolute old warrior, that he, a conqueror, should voluntarily relinquish his Caledonian territory, abandon the fortified isthmus of the north, and, after the enormous labour which his much-diminished army had already undergone, carry back the Roman frontier eighty miles, and impose on his soldiers the additional toil of building such a huge line of fortification as the magnificent stone wall between the Tyne and the Solway must have been. He may have repaired, but assuredly he did not build, that gigantic barrier.

The peace which Severus had concluded, was soon broken by the natives, and the enraged emperor resolved, this time, to exterminate the whole race. But while maturing his plans death overtook him at York, A.D. 210.

During the next 150 years, embracing many troubled reigns, we know little respecting Roman affairs in this country. That the wild tribes living beyond the rampart of Antoninus made continued incursions into the Roman province, may be gleaned from casual allusions in some of the later classical authors. By the year 367, these disturbances had become so intolerable, that Valentinian, a man of great military talent, who was then endeavouring at the

head of his legions to repulse the swarm of barbarians hovering round the empire, sent over his distinguished general Theodosius, who cleared the province, between the wall of Hadrian and the Antonine barrier, of the invaders, and repaired and strengthened the latter fortification, naming the district *Valentia*, in honour of his imperial master. This kept the natives in check for some time ; but the empire was fast hastening to its fall. It was hemmed in on all sides by hosts of barbarians, including the tribes of our own wild north. Twice was the Antonine fortification again repaired and re-garrisoned, viz., about 395, and 422, in the reign of the feeble Honorius, but in vain ; it had become untenable. The last time we hear of the Romans having been there, was in the autumn of the last-mentioned year. A single legion, commanded by a skilful officer from Ravenna, came up through the country by hasty marches ; and unexpectedly appearing in the district fell upon the fierce natives laden with plunder from the Roman colonists, dispersing them with great slaughter, and pursuing them a long way north. But seeing the desperate condition of the Roman affairs, this officer recommended the colonists, many of whom were old soldiers who had probably received grants of land in *Valentia*, to retire within the massive wall of Hadrian, which was still garrisoned, and abandon all northwards to the barbarians. The Antonine rampart was left to its fate, and here the curtain falls on Roman Caledonia.

II. With regard to the present condition of this venerable bulwark, I am enabled to speak, having on more than one occasion walked along its whole course, from sea to sea, and noted its appearance. When Gordon surveyed it, about 1726, and General Roy a few years later, (the results of whose inspections are embodied in their curious volumes,) the Antonine barrier remained in good preservation, notwithstanding the lapse of so many centuries. But during the last hundred years, great changes have taken place on it. What time had touched with comparatively gentle decay, has in too many instances been destroyed by the ruthless hand of man. It is, however, fortunate for Archæology, that before so much injury was done, the barrier had been carefully surveyed, mapped, and described by such competent and enthusiastic antiquaries as those we have named ; for had Gordon and Roy not made their observations at the time they did,

much of what we now know about this ancient Roman work must have been utterly lost.

The rampart and the causeway have almost entirely disappeared: the great ditch alone remains, but even this is much injured; in the course of cultivating the land, great portions have been filled up. In fact, almost every year the work of destruction goes on. Starting from the river Clyde, hardly a vestige is to be seen for the first seven or eight miles, except a darker shade in the soil, visible only to the practised eye, aware of its course. Long intervals of this kind take place between the more distinct portions. In some places the ditch may be discovered in an old wood, entangled with briars and rank, wiry, greyish-coloured grass, which almost forbid the visitor's approach; while tall black trees throw a sombre shadow over the spot. A few miles farther on, the trench is probably met with again on a dreary track, its sides well clad with vigorous whins, difficult to thread; or passing a solitary cot, built of old-fashioned grey stones of brick-like shape, evidently brought from ancient ruins, the ditch skirts the cottager's little garden, wattled round, through which the white rose or the wallflower exhales its simple perfume. After another great interval, there may be observed, on a bleak hill-side, a huge seam, leading down to a lively rivulet, over which a few old trees creak to the blast, and where the plover with shrill cry starts from her hidden nest. Then again the trench is lost in cultivated fields, but still traceable by a deeper shade in the waving grain, or the sweetly scented clover, as if unwilling to relinquish till the very last its hold over that soil which has so long owned its sway.

The name by which the ditch is universally known among the peasantry, is "*Graham's Dyke*," or "*Graham's Sheugh*." They regard it with a certain air of mystery; it has been there, they say, time out of mind; it has outlived all local tradition; none amongst them can tell who the men were that dug it, where they came from, or for what use it was intended. It is looked upon by some of the older folks as "*uncanny*," the work of wizards, and in certain of its wildest and most "*eerie*" places, it is said to be haunted, rendering a visit to it in the gloaming, or after nightfall, a very undesirable, if not rash, step: strange unearthly cries and uncouth sounds, they say, are heard from it on stormy nights; nay, it

is confidently affirmed that those who have good eyes may see the Prince of Darkness flitting about "the Sheugh" in moonlight with some of his evil ones, in search of mischief, and ready to pounce upon the unwary.

Probably the best-preserved specimens on the whole line, are at Elf-Hill, on the moor of Bonnieside, about a mile and a half beyond Castlecarey, and in the enclosed grounds of Mr. Forbes of Callander.² But minor fragments, within a few miles of Glasgow, are to be seen on Fergustonmuir, on the road to Milngavie, about half-a-mile beyond Canniesburn toll-bar (which is the first distinct piece of the ditch that occurs, starting from the Clyde), at the farm of Bemulie (one of the wall-forts), on the estate of Cawder, belonging to Mr. Stirling, M.P. for Perthshire; at the Barhill; and on the eminence of Upper Croy, near the railway station of that name.

Of all the eighteen *Castella* scarcely a vestige remains. The only one worth noticing is at Kirkintilloch (No. 7 of the list), where two sides of the flanking-ditch exist, fully twelve feet deep, on the property called "The Peel" (an ancient name for a stronghold), belonging to Mr. Charles Stuart.

I have seen, with much regret, portions of the *via militaris* taken up at different points; and I observed that it was composed principally of small round stones, probably gathered off the adjoining ground, rammed compactly, within a border of larger ones deeply planted in the earth. The work-people had much difficulty in dislocating and rooting out these ancient fragments. A small piece exists on Mr. Haggart's property of Bantaskin, near Falkirk; and in the village of Laurieston, adjoining the latter place, the course of the *via* is indicated by a narrow street, called "Graham's Dyke-street."

III. But, while the line of this once-important fortification is so greatly destroyed, many memorials of its ancient builders survive in good preservation. In the course of ploughing and cultivating the land, numbers of the inscribed slabs before alluded to have been discovered, erected by the soldiers to record the quantity of work which they had executed. One of these has the name of Lollius Urbicus cut

² Near the town of Falkirk; and on the slopes at Inveravon, not far from the railway station of Polmont.

upon it. Altars have also been turned up, dedicated to Jupiter, Minerva, Mars, and Hercules ; to Mercury, the Patron of Highways and Messenger of Jove ; to Fortune, and Victory ; to the God of the Woods, the Genius of Britain, the Nymphs, and other deities of the Roman mythology. Sepulchral slabs to "the *Manes*" of soldiers slain in battle, have also been revealed ; and a place is pointed out near the great *Castellum* of the Barhill, where, in a deep hollow, the dead were deposited, as indicated by groups of small sepulchral slabs, well remembered by old people, but long ago torn up and dispersed. Discoveries have, moreover, been made of some of the heavy iron hammers used in breaking the stones, much battered ; soldiers' sandals ; groups of stone bullets, about the size of the modern six-pound shot, to be thrown by the military engines defending the rampart (these last were found carefully gathered in small conical heaps, like those of our artillery) ; great quantities of Roman pottery, finely glazed, and of beautiful colours, including vases, amphoræ, bowls, and lachrymatories, some of them with the makers' names upon them ; stones for grinding wheat : nay, large quantities of that grain itself, apparently charred, were found in what had been a subterranean granary, in one of the *Castella* (Castlecarey) ; hones, for sharpening the soldiers' knives, with a notch for the thumb, smooth as velvet and much worn ; a number of large iron nails, several inches in length, with broad heads, probably for securing the soldiers' tents, very much resembling those described by my friend Dr. Bruce as having been found at several places along the wall of Hadrian ; and an elongated slab, representing a Roman archer shooting a deer entangled by the horns in a thicket. Two of the wells that supplied the garrisons of the *Castella* at Cawder and Auchendavie, have preserved their stone frames and have water still in them. I am in possession of a variety of the memorials that have been rescued from destruction ; and amongst others of a very interesting one, a stone which had fallen probably from a Roman officer's finger-ring, representing a figure sacrificing at an altar, well cut, and still yielding a good impression in wax ; it was found in one of the *Castella*, beside the Roman bullets. Coins have also been discovered, at almost all the forts, of gold, silver, and brass, beginning with Vespasian, and ending with Honorius, though with gaps in the series.

Of all these curiosities, which are preserved partly in Glasgow College and partly in private collections, the inscriptions are the most interesting ; for, independent of what they record, we there see the Roman Alphabet precisely the same as that now used by ourselves—an imperishable legacy by old Rome to modern Europe, introduced into our native north for the first time by the soldier-builders of the Antonine wall.

Fourteen hundred years have since run their course ; and when we look back across that broad interval of dim time, how many vicissitudes have taken place in our native land ! But this ancient memorial of “the Masters of the World” still lingers there, a visible link between the present and the mighty past. Though now hoary with age, disguised under an uncouth name, and shrunken into the disjointed fragments above noticed,—the wonder of the ignorant peasant, and an object of attraction only to the curious,—this remnant of remote antiquity has a claim to national interest, not only as an important historical monument, but as marking the epoch when Caledonia first became known to the civilised world. The ravages of time have done much, but the ruthless hand of man continues to do more, towards hastening its destruction. But so long as it remains on the face of Scotland, its ancient renown will entwine the last crumbling vestige, and after all trace shall have utterly passed away, history will consecrate its track.

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