A ROMAN CHARM FROM CIRENCESTER.

By F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A.

In some excavations near the Victoria Road at Ciren-
cester there was found in 1868 a fragment of painted
wall plaster, with the following letters scratched upon it
through the surface colouring. In order to ensure that
his letters should be even, the inscriber has drawn a
guiding line along the bottom of *Rotas*:

```
R O T A S
O P E R A
T E N E T
A R E P O
S A T O R
```

It is now in the Cirencester Museum, where I have
been able to examine it. The plaster on which the
letters are scratched seems certainly to be Roman, and
I am assured by Prof. A. H. Church that the circum-
stances under which the object was found preclude all
suspicion of forgery, as it was taken out of the ground
under the eyes of Captain Abbott, then curator of the
Museum, and no one benefited pecuniarily by the finding.
The letters, too, are such as would naturally be taken to
be Roman, notably, the letter A in four out of the five
lines. The accompanying plate shows it full size.

The combination of letters used for the inscription was
employed as a charm extremely often in the middle ages,
and is not uncommonly met with in modern times, but
in no instance does it seem to be earlier than the eighth or
ninth century. Mr. Heim, in the course of an exhaustive
article on Greek and Latin charms, quotes many parallels,
and assigns the inscription to some monkish rule. It is,
he says, SAT ORARE POTENter ET OPERAre RatiO TuA
Sit. This explanation is too subtle and far-fetched, and
it conflicts with the Roman origin which it seems natural
to assign to the Cirencester specimen. More probably the
charm was invented during, and perhaps in the last days

of, the Roman empire, and was then used to ward off
misfortune just as, in the last century at any rate, it was
used in Abyssinia and in Brazil against toothache or the
bite of a mad dog.   At the same time it must be re-
collected that this Cirencester fragment is the only known
instance in which this widespread charm can be attributed
to a Roman date.   The only other instance which has
been suggested to be Roman, is one found at Rochemaure
in the Rhone valley near Montélimar, in the south of
France.   This, however, though ascribed by French
writers to a Roman origin and by Hirschfeld to possibly
the seventh century, seems really to be mediæval.
According to a copy of it made by the Rev. T. V. Bayne,
Keeper of the Archives in the University of Oxford, and
Student of Christ Church, it is in full as follows :—

S	A	T	O	R
A	R	E	P	O
T	E	N	E	T
O	P	E	R	A
R	O	T	A	S

GIROV

VM
BERT

ME FECIT

It is, Mr. Bayne tells me, on a slab of terracotta over
the door of the choir in the chapel of St. Laurent, about
two kilometers west of Rochemaure.   The letters given
in Mr. Bayne's copy on the right hand side, which were
unrecorded by previous explorers, seem to prove that
this is one of the many mediæval instances of the puzzle.

Nor can I find any exact parallel to this puzzle among
objects of definitely Roman date.   The parallels some-
times quoted, such as,

G R A S
R O M A
A M O R
S A R G

are, I believe, all certainly mediæval, and the anagrams and "recurring" verses and the like, which were very common in the later empire, are not precise parallels. Such is, for instance, the pentameter,

Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor,

which reads the same way backwards and forwards. Such again is the elegiac couplet quoted by Apollinaris Sidonius, IX, 14, 4 :—

Præcipiti modo quod decurrit tramite flumen,
Tempore consumptum jam cito deficiet.

which if read backwards becomes :—

Deficiet cito jam consumptum tempore flumen,
Tramite decurrit quod modo præcipiti.

These have been quoted as parallels, but they are hardly close enough to throw any real light on the matter. More like are some of the "Palindromes" which occur on late pavements and in late poems. As, for instance, on two pavements at Orléansville in Algeria, on one of which is an inscription of which each outer side is AISELCECLESIA while the other has a similar square formed on its four outsides by the letters SODRECASA CERDOS. The former contains on its outside the word *Ecclesia*, and its inside (it is in all 169 letters) is constructed out of variations on "*Sancta Ecclesia*," with the curious provision that while *Ecclesia* appears in full, *Sancta* always wants its S. Similarly with the other ; on the outside *Sacerdos* is given in full, in the inside *Marinus Sacerdos*, but here again the first letter of Marinus is carefully omitted. The idea in each case, I suppose, must be in some way to make the thing more of a cryptogram. These seem to presuppose the existence of such shorter devices as that which we have been considering.

[The following references may be added :—R. Heim *Incantamenta magica græca et latina* in Fleckeisen's *Jahrbücher*, XIX Supplement, pp. 463–576 ; Schwartz, *Indogermanische Volksglaube*, p. 257 ; Kopp, *Beiträge zur griechischen Excerptenlitteratur*, p. 65 ; *Zeitschrift fur Ethnologie*, XIX (1887), p. 72 ; *Verhandlungen der Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie* in the just-mentioned Zeitschrift, 1880–4 ; *Corpus Inscr. Lat.*, VIII, 9710, 9711. Mr. James Hilton, F.S.A., has very kindly supplied me with a reference to the "Metametrica" of Jean de Lobkowitz Caramuel, Bishop of Vigevano, Section cccxiv,

where a seal is mentioned, inscribed with this charm. The "Metametrica," published at Rome in 1663, is a rare book, which appears to be neither in the British Museum nor in the Bodleian Library.

It will be noticed that I have said nothing above about the derivation of "Arepo." This is because I do not see that there is anything definite that can be said. The word has often been connected with the Gaulish *arepennis*, a measure of ground, a word itself connected with *arare*, to plough. If this be so *arepo* may mean the ploughman or the plough, and the charm may be of Celtic, that is, Gaulish or British, origin. The French scholar, Ernault, translates "the laborer, Arepo, holds the wheels with care," and if we substitute plough or ploughman for Arepo, we get a certain sense. But in devices of this sort, it is not in the least necessary that all the words should have sense. The fundamental idea in them is to arrange letters in such a way that certain combinations recur and recur, and it is not imperative that every recurrence should be intelligible.]

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

I have a record of the charm with the variation of TERET for TENET, but it is fifty years ago, and I have unfortunately not preserved the reference. About that time there were many similar things in *Notes and Queries* and in Willis's *Price Current*. This form would be fatal to Mr. Hein's interpretation. The recurring verse Mr. Haverfield quotes was given in Willis's *Price Current* of March, 1852, as the second of an elegiac,

> " Signa te, signa, temere me tangis et angis.
> Roma tibi subito motibus ibit amor."

Both read the same backwards and forwards. Again,

> " Sacrum pingue dabo, non macrum sacrificabo,"

is a hexmeter and refers to Abel's sacrifice. Reversed, it is a pentameter and refers to Cain's.

> " Sacrificabo macrum, non dabo pingue sacrum."

This was in *Notes and Queries*, xxxvi, p. 141.

Of palindromes, in the church of St. Salvador, Oviedo, on the tomb of one Silo, is a square inscription, where, beginning with the centre letter and working to any corner, you can read (it is said) 270 ways the legend: SILO PRINCEPS FECIT.

I suppose the first one Mr. Haverfield quotes was as

follows. If the centre letter was omitted, it is easily supplied.

A	I	S	E	L	C	E	C	L	E	S	I	A
I	S	E	L	C	E	A	E	C	L	E	S	I
S	E	L	C	E	A	T	A	E	C	L	E	S
E	L	C	E	A	T	C	T	A	E	C	L	E
L	C	E	A	T	C	N	C	T	A	E	C	L
C	E	A	T	C	N	A	N	C	T	A	E	C
E	A	T	C	N	A	**S**	A	N	C	T	A	E
C	E	A	T	C	N	A	N	C	T	A	E	C
L	C	E	A	T	C	N	C	T	A	E	C	L
E	L	C	E	A	T	C	T	A	E	C	L	E
S	E	L	C	E	A	T	A	E	C	L	E	S
I	S	E	L	C	E	A	E	C	L	E	S	I
A	I	S	E	L	C	E	C	L	E	S	I	A

Begin with the large S in the middle and go up or down, right or left, turning off at a right angle at any letter till you come to a corner A, it always reads SANCTA ECLESIA. It is very difficult to count the number of different ways, but they must be many more than 270.