

## THE LAST DAYS OF THE ROMAN WALL.<sup>1</sup>

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The following paper is an attempt to trace the history of the Roman north frontier in Britain during the last century of the Roman occupation, and to arrive at the date when Hadrian's wall and the camps situated on it from the Tyne to the Solway ceased to be garrisoned by a frontier force. Any such attempt must not only traverse well-known ground, but must at the same time be open to criticism; yet a hypothetical treatment of the subject from the historical point of view may serve to direct attention to various problems awaiting solution, and to useful fields of archaeological enquiry, even if it fails to furnish a satisfactory explanation of all the archaeological and literary data that we have as yet at our command.

Inscriptions enable one to construct in outline the earlier history of the frontier, and to advance with comparative assurance down to the reign of Gordian III (A.D. 238-243). In that reign not only was the wall still held, but outposts to the north of it, at Woodburn and High Rochester on the line of Dere street, were occupied by a frontier-force. North of Carlisle lay Netherby, held at least as late as the reign of Severus Alexander (222-234) and Birrens, of which the occupation also extends into the third century. The few coins discovered at Woodburn and High Rochester carry on the occupation of those forts with certainty to Claudius Gothicus (268-270), and include one coin of Carausius (287-293).<sup>2</sup> Evidently from the time of Severus's British expedition (208-211) till some date well on in the third century, the country north

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Institute, 8th March, 1911.

<sup>2</sup> *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 1st ser. vol. iii, pp. 155-156; 2nd ser. vol. i, p. 83; Bruce, *Roman Wall*, 3rd ed. p. 338.

of the wall up to the Cheviots was patrolled by Roman troops; Rome had her outposts thrown out beyond her main line of defence, and, in all probability, guarded the passes of the Cheviots.

Whether the withdrawal of these outposts was due to the disturbed state of the empire under Gallienus and the Gallic usurpers, or whether it formed part of a scheme of reorganisation and concentration carried out by Diocletian and Constantius Chlorus after Britain had been re-united to the empire in 296, it is as yet impossible to determine. The slight evidence which we possess seems to point to a change of system, and thereby to favour the later date. The fourth century gives no trace of settled garrisons north of the wall; but in place of the 'exploratores' or scouts (probably local levies) who had garrisoned High Rochester and Woodburn, we find, as early as 343, a native Celtic corps named Arcani or Areani employed to patrol the country north of the wall, and to give information of the enemy's movements.<sup>1</sup> The system of holding the passes by means of outlying forts seems to have been abandoned in favour of entrusting to friendly tribes a general supervision of the debatable land up to the Cheviots.

One may attribute with greater certainty to Diocletian the formation of the 'ala prima Herculea' which occurs in the *Notitia* as stationed at Olenacum, probably also that of the 'cohors prima Cornoviorum,' which garrisoned Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Alone among the troops that lined the wall, the Cornovii were British provincials, and their appearance marks a departure from the principle of garrisoning the frontier by continental troops which was acted upon during the second and greater part of the third century. The 'numerus Maurorum Aurelianorum' was also a lately-raised corps, taking its name from the emperor Aurelian (270-275), and dating from a time when the term 'numerus' was beginning to lose its earlier restricted sense of a body of irregulars or light horse, and was beginning to be applied to any body of troops, in place of the older terms 'cohors' and 'ala.'

The names of the troops above mentioned are not

<sup>1</sup> Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xxviii, cap. 3.

known to us from any inscription, but are recorded in the *Notitia Dignitatum utriusque Imperii*, a mixture of Statesman's year-book and Army-list drawn up in the reign of Honorius (c. 410). The fortieth chapter of the western section of that work gives a list of the troops commanded by the 'dux Britanniarum,' a military officer whose headquarters were with the sixth legion at York, and commences with a succession of cavalry and infantry regiments ('equites' and 'numeri'), unknown to us from third-century inscriptions, whose uncouth names proclaim them to belong to the fourth century. This is followed by a catalogue of troops on the wall and on the coast of Cumberland, headed 'item per lineam valli.' In turning to it, one cannot but be at once struck with a marked difference in the character of the troops named. They represent the old classification of auxiliaries into cohorts and 'alae,' and though this is not in itself a strong argument for an early date, since in some parts of the empire the old auxiliary forces, under the title of 'limitanei' or borderers, continued to be enrolled in cohorts and 'alae' as late as the reign of Theodosius (379-395), it is more remarkable that the troops occupy posts which inscriptions show many of them to have garrisoned in the first half of the third century. It seems inconceivable that all the hard fighting on the border, which, as we shall presently see, characterised the fourth century, should have left these troops unshaken, not only unmoved, but presenting a greater fixity than any other body of troops in the empire.

This is not the place for a critical examination of the *Notitia*. Let it suffice to say that that work bears traces in many of its chapters of having been amplified from earlier regimental lists, the chief of these being the 'minor laterculus' of the Asiatic provinces. The view of the 'per lineam valli' section here taken is that which has already been put forward by Mommsen and by Seeck. The former accepts the passage without question as being pre-Diocletian in date.<sup>1</sup> Seeck is fuller in his criticism:

"Here"—that is, under the 'dux Britanniarum'—"we find just the same troops, and, for the most part, in the same stations, as appear in the inscriptions of the third century: since the time of Constantine the Great

<sup>1</sup> *Hermes*, xxiv, 204, n.

practically nothing seems to have changed. This cannot possibly represent the actual situation of the fifth century in which the *Notitia Dignitatum* was brought to completion. For in the fourth century, and in the beginning of the fifth the island has been on several occasions the starting-point of usurpations, and those who were created emperors, when they crossed over to the continent, certainly took with them a portion of the British troops. That all these, after the usurpers had been overcome, were taken back to their old quarters is more than improbable. One must therefore suppose that the changes which had preceded in that remotest of all provinces were not simultaneously entered in the state calendar; and therefore this preserves for us a picture of British affairs which was in reality by that time long obsolete."<sup>1</sup>

We have seen that the raising of the first Herculean 'ala' must be attributed to Diocletian, and the inclusion of that corps in the frontier force serves to date the 'per lineam valli' section not earlier than the very close of the third or the commencement of the fourth century. The close parallelism between this list and the known arrangements of the early third century, taken in conjunction with the slight traces that it yields of the new army-system evolved by Diocletian and by Constantine, assigns it to an early stage in the transition from the old army-system to the new. Probably one would be not far wrong in dating it to about the year 300. It cannot be taken as evidence for the state of the frontier a hundred years later.

That Constantine did effect a reorganisation of the British frontier-force seems not improbable. Slight evidence of activity on the Border is furnished by the milestones bearing the names of Diocletian, Constantine as Caesar (A.D. 305-306), and Maximinus Daza,<sup>2</sup> which are the latest dated inscriptions extant in that part of the island. More definite conclusions are, perhaps, to be derived from two recently-excavated milecastles on the line of the wall, the one at Poltross Burn, the other on Winshields. Four milecastles lay between each of the camps that occurred at intervals along the wall, but few of them have yet been examined, and only the two mentioned above have produced coins in sufficient numbers to allow a guess to be hazarded as to the duration of their occupation. In both these milecastles the latest coin was

<sup>1</sup> Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopadie*, iv, 640.

<sup>2</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vii, 1188, 1190, 1350; cf. 1176 and 1177.

one of Constantine the Great, minted between the years 317 and 324. Moreover, five out of the sixteen coins found at Poltross Burn, and three out of the nine from Winshields are *folles*, that is, they belong to the heavy copper currency introduced by Diocletian in 296.<sup>1</sup> The proportion is remarkably high, since the *folles* seems on most Roman sites to have been quickly driven out of circulation by the depreciation of the currency, which began in 314 and continued during the next twenty years. Hence it seems probable that both these milecastles, though remote from one another, shared the same fate, and ceased to be occupied in the latter part of Constantine's reign, probably between the years 320 and 330. If that conclusion be accepted, one may go a step further, and argue that at this period some change of the frontier system supervened, involving the disuse of all milecastles.

The Constantinian era seems on the whole to have been a period of widespread prosperity in Britain. Only in 343, when the emperor Constans led in person a military expedition into Britain, does one get the first whisper of the storm that was rapidly blowing up from the north. During the next twenty years, in spite of the silence of the chroniclers, Britain seems to have been in a state of ferment. The active support given by the province to Magnentius, himself a Briton, who usurped the throne of the western empire in 350, is not the only symptom of unrest. To his reign (350–353) or to the years immediately preceding it must be assigned the burning, not only of unprotected villas throughout the country, but of the town of Corstopitum (Corbridge), which lay only two miles behind the wall, and might have presumed on protection from the neighbouring garrisons. The reign of Magnentius is further marked by the concealment of hoards of money, a phenomenon that is not peculiar to any one part of the island, but betokens a general feeling of insecurity prevailing throughout Britain.<sup>2</sup> Despite the fact that in 358 British merchants were free to transport their grain to the garrisons on the Rhine frontier, the

<sup>1</sup> *Trans. Cumberland and Westmorland Archaeol. Soc.* n.s. xi, p. 437; xiii, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup> e.g. the Croydon hoard, *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th ser. v, p. 36.

defence of the province was already being subjected to a strain under which it was shortly to break down.

In 360 Ammianus Marcellinus tells of trouble from the Picts and Scots, who had broken the treaty that bound them to peace (conditions probably imposed upon them by Constans in 343), and were ravaging the country near the frontier.<sup>1</sup> Military reinforcements from Gaul were sent to Britain by Julian under the command of Lupicinus. Lupicinus returned to the continent after a few months, but the trouble continued. When Valentinian became emperor in 364, not only was the Pictish war still in progress, but the Saxons had commenced those attacks on the seaboard that were to give them, in the end, complete mastery of the country.

By the year 367 the situation had become sufficiently serious for the emperor to proceed to Amiens, to supervise in person the defence of the northern frontiers of the empire. Thence he proceeded to Trier, where he received news of tragic disaster. Under the new military system, which dates back to Constantine or at earliest to Diocletian, the forces in Britain had been placed under the command of two generals, the duke of the Britains and the count of the Saxon shore, each with an army-corps and possessed of distinct spheres of authority. One of these had now been killed; the other was a captive in the hands of the enemy. Even so the news was serious, but the narrative of subsequent events, as given by Ammianus, enables one to read more into it; the loss of the line of the wall, the overthrow and dispersal of both army-corps, the laying waste of the whole island.

First one general was sent over to Britain to save what he could and stem the tide of invasion; then another, who reported, on his arrival, that he could do nothing without a large army, and that this was urgently needed. Valentinian accordingly sent his best general, the count Theodosius, at the head, it seems, of more than one legion,<sup>2</sup> as well as of auxiliaries from Gaul and contingents from

<sup>1</sup> "Cum Scottorum Pictorumque gentium ferarum excursus, rupta quiete conducta, loca limitibus vicina vastarent:" Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xx, cap. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Adscita animosa legionum et cohortium pube:" *ibid.* xxvii, cap. 8.

the imperial guards. Landing at Richborough in 368, he found the entire island unprotected. Even on his march through Kent upon London, he met bands of marauders in the act of driving off their prisoners and herds of cattle. The remnants of the Roman army of occupation had, in all probability, been withdrawn into the chief towns of the province; London at least was holding out. Many disbanded soldiers seem to have themselves turned freebooters. These Theodosius was able to recall to the standard by a series of judicious proclamations. He occupied London, and appointed a new 'vicarius' or civil governor, and a new duke of the Britains, retaining for himself, perhaps, the higher post of count of the Saxon shore.

Making London his base in the new campaign, which we may refer to the following year (369), Theodosius succeeded in clearing the country of its barbarian invaders. Ammianus has not preserved for us any details of the campaign, and one is thrown back upon such vague information as is contained in the poems addressed by Claudian thirty years later to Theodosius's grandson, the emperor Honorius. There emerges from them one solid historical fact, which the exaggerations of a poet and a courtier fail to conceal entirely. Theodosius's chief victories were sea-fights. It is as 'debellator Britannii litoris' (perhaps with a side-glance at Theodosius's post of 'comes litoris Saxonici') that the general is chiefly signalised.<sup>1</sup> Saxons and Scots, it seems, had proved themselves more dangerous enemies than the Picts; and it may be guessed that the wall had been outflanked by naval attacks of the Saxons on the east coast, and of the Scots upon the west. If this conclusion is accepted, it is of considerable significance, since such an event must have produced an adaptation of the frontier system to meet altered conditions.

The policy of Theodosius as military governor of Britain can be traced in its general outlines, in spite of an unfortunate lacuna in the text of Ammianus at this point.<sup>2</sup> It was a policy of recovery, restoration, and reorganisation.

<sup>1</sup> Claudian, *de Quarto Consulatu Honorii*, v, 28 : cf. Pacatus, *Panegyric*, c. 5 : "Saxo consumptus bellis navalibus."

<sup>2</sup> "... haec etiam praecipua:" Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xxviii, cap. 3.



(1) He has often been credited, on the strength of the passage about to be quoted, with having extended Roman rule and carried back the northern line of defence to the Antonine wall between Forth and Clyde. "He restored to its former condition," writes Ammianus, "the province which had come into the hands of the enemy, and which he now recovered; so it again had a lawfully constituted governor, and was henceforth, at the emperor's desire, called Valentia."<sup>1</sup> The theory that Valentia was southern Scotland has its origin in the forged work of Richard of Cirencester, and not only misinterprets the text, but is unsupported by the existence of any fourth-century Roman remains in Scotland. It follows that, if Valentia was not a new conquest, but a territory lately wrested from Roman rule, and more completely occupied by the barbarians than was the rest of the island, its erection into a province must have involved a partitioning of one of the four British provinces already in existence. Its governor was a 'consularis.' Possibly Theodosius may also be credited with the raising of the rank of the governor of Maxima Caesariensis from that of 'praeses' to the more exalted position of 'consularis,' as shown by the *Notitia*.<sup>2</sup>

(2) If it is right to assume that the creation of the province of Valentia implies no extension of territory, but that the frontier was re-established on the old line between Tyne and Solway, then it is safe to assume that the force that guarded the wall had been broken and swept aside and its forts reduced to ruin. Forts and towns had alike been destroyed, and were now repaired and put into a state of defence by Theodosius.<sup>3</sup> Probably the fourth-century walls of many Romano-British towns may be assigned to this period. But Theodosius's chief work may be looked for upon the exposed northern frontier.

Archaeological evidence here comes to our assistance. The excavations now in progress at Corstopitum (Cor-

<sup>1</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> In the *Laterculus Veronensis* (circa. 297) Maxima Caesariensis comes third in order of precedence, and its governor cannot, therefore, have held higher rank than those of Britannia Prima and Britannia Secunda,

who appear in the *Notitia* as 'praesides': see Mommsen, *Gesammelte Schriften*. v, 581.

<sup>3</sup> "In integrum restituit civitates et castra multiplicibus quidem damnis adflata, sed ad quietem temporis longi fundata:" Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xxviii, cap. 3.



bridge), on the river Tyne, have already yielded data sufficiently accurate to construct a rough chronology for the fourth century. In the camps on the wall itself traces are found of successive destructions and reoccupations, including a final rebuilding, in which one or more of the gateways of each camp was walled up, and the coin-evidence shows that occupation lasted on into the reigns of Valentinian and Gratian; but it has not been found possible to establish a date for the penultimate destruction or for the final restoration, although it seems probable that these belonged to the fourth century.

The main buildings of Corstopitum belong to the Antonine period, although the site first came to be occupied in the reign of Domitian. Their level corresponds with the lowest level of the main street that runs through the centre of the town, and gives access to them. At a later period the level of the street was raised. Corresponding changes are found in the buildings which faced on to the street. Finally the street-level was again raised, each of the three levels being clearly marked by its gutter. The road (Dere street) which led up from the Tyne bridge into the town also shows three levels. Moreover, the southern courts of the great store-house, which occupies the centre of the town and may be dated about A.D. 150, have two later floors superimposed over the original floor-level.

Thus three successive occupations, of which the first is Antonine, are clearly marked. Wherever the three levels are distinct, the coin evidence is equally positive. The lowest level produces coins of the end of the first and of the second centuries; the second gives coins of the third and first half of the fourth centuries; the coins found on the third or top level belong to the second half of the fourth century. The different strata are frequently separated by layers of burnt matter. On the second-period street, and again between the second and third floors of the southern courts of the store-house, there have been found several masses or heaps of small copper coins, heated and fused together by fire. These burnt hoards, though almost entirely composed of Constantinian types anterior to A.D. 340, and base imitations of Constantinian money, have produced at least one coin of

Magnentius (350-353), similarly burnt; and in one instance a coin of Magnentius was found in a chamber under an intact floor of undoubted Roman workmanship, which covered the burnt stratum and made it impossible for later coins to work down to the lower level. At least a thousand of these burnt Constantinian coins have been found at Corstopitum, and in every case they have been found lying on floors or paving of the second period, or in the débris between the levels of the second and third periods. They have their parallel in the find of some three hundred fourth-century coins, chiefly of Constantius II and Magnentius, made in one of the towers of Vindolana; which stands on the Stanegate some miles west of Corstopitum.<sup>1</sup>

The third period of occupation at Corstopitum is marked by very indifferent workmanship, an absence of ashlar-work and of dressed stone, and the wholesale use of architectural fragments taken from ruined buildings of an earlier date. Columns, cornices, altars, bas-reliefs, have been broken up and used as building-stone for the ramshackle walls of the houses of this period. Even the magnificent blocks that formed the walls of the great store-house have been cut into gutter-stones for the principal street. Only the main road shows signs of careful construction, a fact indicating that its repair was a military measure, carried out by Roman soldiers. It was essential that Dere street, the 'great north road' of Roman times, should remain in good condition, since this was the line of communication between the troops upon the wall and the military base at York.

Taken as a whole, the evidence derived from Corstopitum suggests a total and complete destruction subsequent to A.D. 350, followed at a later date by a hurried and inferior restoration. And it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the disaster of which we here have visual proof is that which we know from literary sources to have overtaken Britain shortly before the expedition of Theodosius, and that the restoration is the work of that general, carried out in or about the year 369.

Further examination of the camps on the wall is

<sup>1</sup> Hodgson, *Northumberland*, pt. II, vol. iii, p. 196.

necessary before definite features in them can be classed as Theodosian. A series of forts along the Yorkshire coast may, however, be attributed with some measure of certainty to this period. Of twenty-five coins found in the recently-excavated fort of Huntcliff only two were anterior to the reigns of Valentinian I and Valens, and the three latest coins bear the VICTORIA AVGGG reverse struck about A.D. 388-392. The period during which the fort was occupied was evidently short: it seems to have been built about the year 370, and there is no evidence that it was occupied much later than A.D. 390.<sup>1</sup>

(3) If the frontier defences were to be re-established, it was necessary not only to rebuild the forts on the line of the wall, but to provide them with fresh garrisons. A complete loss of the frontier must have involved the destruction of the old garrison army, and have necessitated the substitution of new troops and of a new system of frontier-defence. Ammianus Marcellinus alludes to the renewal of the garrisons effected by Theodosius, without giving details as to their composition.<sup>2</sup> The only detail which has come down to us is the disbanding of the native corps of Arcani, which had been found unreliable. Ammianus employs the general terms 'vigiliae' and 'praetenturae' in writing of the new troops. It seems on other grounds extremely improbable that the antiquated system of cohorts and 'alae' should have been restored; neither do these expressions warrant such a supposition. Theodosius's new regiments were probably of the same character as fourth-century regiments in other parts of the empire. We have then to imagine the wall as defended, between the years 369 and 385, by a new frontier-force, of which the *Notitia* contains no mention.

How long did the Theodosian occupation last? There is ample evidence from coin-finds as to the occupation of the camps on the wall during the joint reigns of Valentinian I, Valens, and Gratian, e.g. at Housesteads and Coventina's well at Procolitia, where the coin-series end with Gratian (d. 383); and yet, apart from a single coin of Arcadius from Heddon-on-the-wall, there is no certain instance of

<sup>1</sup> *Journal of Roman Studies*, ii, pp. 201, 224.

<sup>2</sup> "Instaurabat urbes et praesidiaria,

ut diximus, castra, limitesque vigiliis tuebatur et praetenturis:" Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. xxviii, cap. 3.

the discovery, on the line of the wall itself, of any coin later than Gratian.<sup>1</sup> More specific data are supplied by the hoard of late fourth-century Roman gold coins found at Corstopitum in 1908. The coins were: Valentinian I, 4; Valens, 2; Gratian, 16; Valentinian II, 8; Theodosius, 5; Magnus Maximus, 13. The coins and a gold ring had been wrapped up in a roll of lead and purposely placed in concealment, presumably in a time of disturbance; and the importance of their discovery lies in the fact that the hoard can be dated and assigned approximately to the year 385.<sup>2</sup>

It cannot be doubted that in 383 Maximus transferred to Gaul a considerable portion of the British army, and that it was with Romano-British troops that he met and overthrew the lawful emperor Gratian. For this event we have the authoritative statements of Zosimus (whose account is possibly derived from the lost contemporary chronicle of Eunapius) and Sozomen.<sup>3</sup> It figures with greater prominence in the narratives of the later and less trustworthy writers, Gildas and Nennius. Gildas wrote within 160 years of the event, and the early existence of the tradition, together with the important place assigned to Maximus in early Celtic literature, justify the assumption that the withdrawal of troops was carried out on a very considerable scale.

Both Gildas and Nennius make Maximus's revolt the beginning of the end, the date at which Britain began to be the prey of barbarian invasions.<sup>4</sup> Their statements are of little value in themselves, but derive support from an entry in Prosper Tiro's chronicle recording an inroad made by the Picts and Scots, and a victory gained over them by Maximus immediately before his departure from Britain,<sup>5</sup> as well as from a casual reference by St. Ambrose in a contemporary letter to defeats inflicted by the Saxons

<sup>1</sup> For a note of late Roman coins found in the mural district, see *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 3rd ser. v, 356, n.

<sup>2</sup> The hoard has been catalogued in *Arch. Ael.* 3rd ser. v, 351, f; *Numismatic Chronicle*, 4th ser. xii, 309; xiii, 31.

<sup>3</sup> Zosimus, iv, cap. 35; Sozomen, vii, cap. 13.

<sup>4</sup> "Exin Britannia, omni armato milite, militariisque copiis, rectoribus linquitur

immanibus, ingenti iuventute spoliata, quae comitata vestigiis supradicti tyranni [Maximi] domum numquam ultra rediit, et omnis belli usus ignara penitus, duabus primum gentibus transmarinis vehementer saevis, Scotorum a circione, Pictorum ab aquilone, calcabilis, multos stupet gemitque per annos:" Gildas, § 14.

<sup>5</sup> "Gratiani iv, incursantes Pictos et Scotos Maximus strenue superavit."

upon Maximus or his officers.<sup>1</sup> Maximus's action must necessarily have weakened the northern frontier at a time when Britain was exposed to the attacks of barbarians, and the question suggests itself whether it was not in fact accompanied by an evacuation of the camps on the line of the wall.

It is true that Gildas has given a detailed narrative of successive military expeditions and fortifications of the frontier up to and after the final evacuation of the island by the Romans. But inasmuch as he dates the building of the turf wall after the revolt of Maximus, and ascribes to the late fourth or early fifth century the undoubted work of Hadrian, his narrative is so conclusively out in its chronology that it ceases to be credible. The fact remains that the camps and milecastles upon the wall have not hitherto yielded any evidence of occupation after the reign of Gratian.

Whether or not the actual line of the wall continued to be held, it seems certain that the frontier extended to the Tyne and Solway for a few years to come. A coin of Honorius in the Tullie-house museum at Carlisle may be presumed to have been found in that city. The Roman fort of South Shields, at the mouth of the Tyne, has produced coins of Theodosius, Flavius Victor, Arcadius and Honorius. But the most definite evidence is that produced by the excavations at Corstopitum.<sup>2</sup> The following are the latest copper coins which have been found at that station :

Reverse type.	emperor.	number of specimens.	date of issue.
SPES ROMANORVM ..	Maximus ..	2 ..	383-388
VICTORIA AVGGG ..	Valentinian II ..	1 ..	388-392
VICTORIA AVGGG ..	Theodosius ..	4 ..	388-392
VICTORIA AVGGG ..	Arcadius ..	5 ..	388-392
SALVS REIPVBLICAE ..	Arcadius ..	4 ..	392-395

So far as coins are concerned, and coin-finds are the sole archaeological data available, it is possible to reach certain definite conclusions. The Corbridge gold hoard

<sup>1</sup> "Ille igitur a Francis, a Saxonum gente, in Sicilia, Sisciae, Petavione, ubique terrarum victus est : " Ambrose, *Epistolae*, lib. i, ep. 40.

<sup>2</sup> See generally the discussion of the evidence in *Arch. Ael.* 3rd ser. viii, 237, f.

furnishes evidence of disturbances following shortly upon the revolt of Maximus. But these did not produce an immediate evacuation of the mural district. Although proof of later occupation of the camps upon the wall is wanting, the fort of South Shields continued to guard the mouth of the Tyne; Corstopitum, the *tête-de-pont* on the Roman great north road, still protected the bridge across the Tyne; Carlisle may yet have been occupied; and we are thus enabled to extend the occupation of this district for another ten years, and to carry it down to within twelve or fourteen years of the final departure of Roman troops from Britain under Constantine III.

It must be confessed that it is easier to show that occupation extended to a certain date than to prove that it did not continue beyond that date. In this late period coin-evidence becomes so scanty that it cannot be too implicitly relied upon to prove a negative, and it must be remembered that, after the year 395, the regular issue of copper money ceased, and the western empire virtually ceased to have a copper coinage. At the same time the difficulty which attends a negative argument is a weak basis for a positive conclusion to the contrary. Archaeology gives no support to the theory that the frontier-line of Tyne and Solway was held after 395.

The statements of Gildas and the list of troops 'per lineam valli' given in the *Notitia* have been commonly taken as proving that the wall continued to be held into the fifth century, and that the province of Britain was still intact when, with Constantine's departure in 407, it severed its connexion with the empire. But it has already been pointed out in this paper that Gildas is so wholly at fault in such of his statements regarding the wall as can be tested, that no reliance can be placed on that portion of his narrative; and that the 'per lineam valli' section of the *Notitia* dates itself to about A.D. 300, just a hundred years earlier than the main portion of the work, and is consequently no evidence for the frontier-force of the early fifth century. The valuable but loose statements of the poet Claudian have been used to support the accepted theory, but, as will be seen below, they are capable of a different interpretation.

From the revolt of Maximus in 383 to the overthrow

of Eugenius in 394 the history of this island is obscure. It seems clear, however, that the provincial troops left by Maximus had to conduct as best they could the protection of the island from the continuous inroads of Picts, Scots and Saxons, and that the successive emperors, Maximus, the boy Valentinian II, and the usurper Eugenius, were too much occupied in maintaining their seats upon the throne, and in holding the Rhine frontier against the Franks, to trouble themselves with Britain.

The next great name in British history is that of Stilicho. In his panegyric upon Stilicho's consulship Claudian puts into the mouth of the province of Britain the following well-known lines: "Me too Stilicho fortified when I was perishing at the hands of neighbouring peoples, when the Scot stirred all Ireland, and ocean foamed under the enemy's oar. By his care it is that I do not fear Scottish spears, or tremble at the Pict, or look forth along my whole coast-line to see the Saxon coming with veering sails."<sup>1</sup>

Claudian wrote his poem in the year of Stilicho's consulship, and consequently it cannot be dated later than January, 400. The events to which it refers cannot have occurred earlier than the autumn of 394, when the overthrow of Eugenius gave to Stilicho's master, Theodosius, control of the western empire. The passage has been frequently taken to imply an expedition personally led by Stilicho into Britain, and has even been forced into the framework of Gildas's chronology. But it is impossible to find room for a British campaign in Stilicho's crowded career. The words of Claudian<sup>2</sup> have not necessarily reference to anything more specific than to Stilicho's general administration as commander-in-chief of the western provinces; they do imply a reorganisation of the defence of this island carried out in the years 395-399, a reorganisation not necessarily on the old lines, or involving a retention of the wall.

Saxon attacks upon Britain, commencing in the latter part of the third century, had prompted a fortification of the eastern coast against their piratical excursions,

<sup>1</sup> Claudian, *de Consulatu Stilichonis*, ii, 250.

<sup>2</sup> "Illius effectum curis."



probably in the early years of the fourth century; and this strip of territory, with the forts upon it, had been put under the charge of a special officer designated 'comes littoris Saxonici.' That the forts of the Saxon shore were strengthened at some time between the years 395-407 seems proved by the recent discovery of tiles inscribed HON(orius) AVG(ustus) in the Roman fort of Pevensey, and by an uncouth and almost unintelligible inscription from Peak near Robin Hood's bay, recording the building of that fort by Justinian the prefect. This officer may be identified with the Justinian whom the British usurper, Constantine III, placed in command of the troops which he took over to the continent in 407.<sup>1</sup> Taken together, the inscriptions furnish a useful commentary upon the words of Claudian. They suggest a refortification of the eastern coast, which may have been part of a larger scheme of military defence carried out under Stilicho's direction.

Turning to the twenty-eighth and fortieth chapters of the *Notitia* we find an account of the military establishment in Britain which must have been drawn up before, but apparently not long before, the loss of that province in 407. The fortieth chapter incorporates a list of troops stationed on the wall and in Cumberland which, as has been explained at the beginning of this paper, dates to the reign of Diocletian. The inclusion of this earlier regimental list is not likely to have occurred if information had been available as to the troops garrisoning the same forts at the later period; and the most obvious cause for such information not being available is that the wall and the forts on the north-west coast were no longer held, and that the frontier had been withdrawn southward.

A new scheme of things is mirrored in these chapters. We find the 'comes littoris Saxonici' having under him the old second legion, which has been transported across England from Caerleon-on-Usk to Richborough; the first cohort of the Baetasii, which has been brought down from Maryport on the Cumberland coast to Reculver on the Thames estuary; and seven troops of the new forma-

<sup>1</sup> *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, vii, 268; *Epibemeris Epigr.* ix, 1281; Haverfield in *Journal of Roman Studies*, ii, 210-214.

tion, namely, five of infantry and two of cavalry. These guard the coast, from the Wash, round the Foreland, probably to the Solent.

His colleague, the 'dux Britanniarum,' has an army-corps consisting of the sixth legion, still in its old quarters at York, and thirteen regiments of the new formation, namely, ten of infantry and three of cavalry. The omission of the 'per lineam valli' section leaves the 'dux' with an army not greatly outnumbering that of his superior officer, the 'comes,' garrisoning a district practically equivalent to Yorkshire, of which the civil and military centre was York, as the civil capital of the province of the 'comes' was London. Unfortunately few of the military stations can be identified with certainty. We can fix one of them, however, at Doncaster, and three more on the route leading through the Pennines from near Barnard Castle on the Tees across to Penrith; while two (Derventio and Praetorium) can be placed, by help of the first *iter* of the Antonine Itinerary, on one of the roads leading south from York, and were probably in the neighbourhood of the Humber. The Pennine range on the west, and perhaps the Tees on the north, may have formed at this period the Roman military frontier; and some weight is given to this hypothesis by the fact that Bowes, one of the three forts on the Pennine pass, is garrisoned by scouts ('exploratores'), a class of troops employed in the third century solely to garrison outposts north of the wall, Habitancum, Bremenium and Netherby.<sup>1</sup>

Such a disposition of troops in northern Britain can only have been made after A.D. 392-395, when Corstopitum and South Shields, and consequently the whole country as far as the Tyne, were still in Roman occupation. There is, therefore, a presumption that the lists in the *Notitia* represent a new defensive system which it is natural to associate with Stilicho. It follows on that line of argument that the lists are later than 395, and, for reasons about to

<sup>1</sup> The 'comes Britanniarum,' whose staff is set out in the twenty-ninth chapter, and who is given in the seventh chapter as commanding a small army corps, was not the military governor of the province, but, as Mommsen has pointed out (*Gesammelte Schriften*, iv, p. 214, n.), commanded a

division of the field-army. Seeck conjectures that the office was temporarily created by Aetius with a view to the recovery of the island (Pauly-Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie*, iv, 641). There certainly seems no place to be found for him in the Roman province of Britain prior to its abandonment.

be given, it is probable that they were drawn up before 402.

In the latter year, when Alaric the Goth was threatening Rome itself, Stilicho recalled from Britain one of the legions stationed in the province. "There came," says the poet Claudian, "the legion that protects the further Britains, the legion that curbs the fierce Scot and scans the patterns tattooed on the dying Pict." The legion recalled has been identified by Dr. Hodgkin with the twentieth, formerly stationed at Chester, on the ground that the twentieth legion does not form part of the military establishment of Britain recorded in the *Notitia*. But had the twentieth legion been removed to Italy or another province of the empire, it could hardly have missed inclusion in some other section of the *Notitia*. It seems more reasonable to suppose that the twentieth legion had been struck off the muster-roll of the empire at some date anterior to 402, and before the composition of the *Notitia* lists. It may, for example, have perished in the débâcle of 368, or it may have followed Maximus to Gaul in 383 and been afterwards disbanded. Assuming that the fortieth chapter of the *Notitia* is to be dated before A.D. 402, two legions only were in Britain when Stilicho gathered his forces against Alaric. The sixth legion, under the command of the duke of the Britains, was stationed at York; and the second legion was under the control of the count of the Saxon shore, and was quartered at Richborough. There seems no reason why Claudian's words should not be literally construed, and, if any definite meaning is to be attached to them, there can be no doubt that the legion now removed from Britain was the sixth. Its departure would leave northern Britain unprotected, and reduce the area of Roman military occupation to the south-eastern shores of the island.

To the second legion may be ascribed the revolt of 406, when Marcus, Gratian and Constantine III were successively raised to the purple. The last-named usurper followed the example set by Maximus, carrying off with him to Gaul in 407 such troops as he could to win himself an empire there. That the second legion now crossed over to Gaul with Constantine is made probable by the fact that we find it there in the fifth and seventh chapters

of the *Notitia*, which may be dated approximately A.D. 430.

This paper has for its sole object the elucidation of the history of the northern frontier during the fourth century; it aims at an examination of the literary and archaeological evidence bearing upon the military occupation of the north of Britain, and is an attempt to frame the results of criticism and excavation in an historical setting. If that setting is hypothetical it may at least have its use in facilitating surer hypotheses. In dealing with obscure periods of history like the fourth century in Britain, where the literary authorities are few and leave ample room for conjecture, and where archaeological research gives promise of leading to definite historical results, it is essential from time to time to take an impartial stock of facts, to ascertain the extent to which archaeology has added to our knowledge of events, how far it requires a revision of views based upon written records, and what kinds of evidence have still to be looked for if history is to be made complete. Synthesis and hypothesis are necessary for the advancement of knowledge, and prompt the discoveries that supersede them.

To some extent, it is true, the history of the loss of the wall is the history of the loss of Britain, and the fortunes of the north of the island cannot be detached from those of the west. In the latter quarter the excavations, and particularly the coin-results of Uriconium, may be expected to give additional information of the end of Roman rule. The latest coins, not of Uriconium alone, but of Caerleon and of the west generally, require to be carefully studied. An examination of the Irish annalists may yet furnish facts as to the inroads of the Scots, and other methods of enquiry will doubtless suggest themselves. The question raised by the present paper is briefly this: does not the transference of the second legion from Caerleon to Richborough mark the loss of the west, and was not the entire west of England, as well as the northern border, lost to Rome before the commencement of the fifth century?

Upon the theory here set forward the final departure of the legions in 407 was the last step in a series of events commencing with the departure of Maximus in 383. Pict, Scot and Saxon were pressing home their attacks,

and it is possible that historians have been led by later events to pay too great attention to Teutonic settlements on the east and south-east coast, and to give too little weight to settlements made by Irish-Scots on the west<sup>1</sup> and by the non-Celtic races of Scotland, the Gaels or Goidels of Aberdeen, and the non-Romanised Britons of the lowlands (all included under the general designation of Picts), who poured in from the north. Picts and Scots were as dangerous enemies to Rome as were the Saxons of the Elbe, and it is unlikely that their attacks ceased with the departure of Roman troops, or that the advent of Teutonic settlers forced them at once into alliance with the Romanised provincials. The utter disappearance of civilised life in Britain in the fifth century cannot be wholly accounted for by a spontaneous Celtic revival. The supposition that Roman civilisation sat so lightly upon the British peasantry is inconsistent with what is known of the Romanisation of Roman Britain. Rather may it be believed that the situation of A.D. 368 was speedily reproduced, and that, when no organised military defence was left, the municipalities were unable to check Celtic or Teutonic inroads, and so all forms of Roman civilised life perished.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Evidence regarding these has been adduced by Prof. Kuno Meyer in *Cymmrodorion*, 1895-1896, pp. 55, f. The date of the death of Niall, king paramount of Ireland, who was slain off the Isle of Wight, is fixed by the Irish Annals as A.D. 405, two years before the departure of Constantine. Numerous hoards of coins dating from the last twenty years of the fourth century, found in Somerset and Wiltshire, point in the same direction:

Prof. Haverfield in *Victoria County History of Somerset*, vol. i, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup> It is useful to compare the situation on the Danube frontier as recorded in Eugippius' life of Severinus, cap. xx: "Per idem tempus quo Romanorum constabat imperium, multorum milites oppidorum pro custodia limitis publicis stipendiis alebantur; qua consuetudine desinente simul militares turmae sunt deletae cum limite."