

ART. XVII.—*The Brough Inscription.* From the *Athenæum*, of Nov. 22, 1884.

THE inscription from Brough, in Westmoreland, which has recently been purchased for the Fitzwilliam Museum, is the longest and by far the most interesting of the four or five Greek inscriptions which have hitherto been found in Britain. Brough-under-Stainmore, as it is called to distinguish it from Brough in Yorkshire, occupies, as the name implies, the site of ancient earthworks, now crowned by the ruins of a mediæval castle, well described in Mr. Clark's recent work on English castles. Brough commands the fertile valley of the Eden, and has been identified with the Roman station of Verteræ on the Roman road which led from the south to Appleby and Carlisle. In 1879, when the church was restored, a number of sculptured slabs were discovered built into the walls and foundations of the porch. One was a Latin inscription containing the name of Septimius Severus; another was a thick slab of coarse-grained carboniferous sandstone, apparently obtained from a neighbouring quarry, 23 in. in length and 12½ in. in width. It bore an inscription in twelve lines, in parts somewhat damaged, owing seemingly to the slab having at some period formed part of the pavement of the porch. The writing was considered by local antiquaries to be Runic, and casts were sent to Prof. Stephens, of Copenhagen, in 1880. He doubted the Runic character of the inscription, and submitted it to his colleague, the Professor of Greek, who after a fortnight's examination, gave it as his opinion that it was in no classical language or alphabet. It was also submitted, we believe, to Profs. Mommsen, Hübner, and Kaibel, the highest epigraphic authorities in Germany, who

who failed to decipher it. Prof. Stephens then attempted to read it as a Runic inscription, and dealt with it as such at great length in the third volume of his "Runic Monuments."* He pronounced it to contain unique forms of the Runic letters, the language being a peculiar Anglian dialect, otherwise unknown. His translation, a wonderful *tour de force*, consisting, however, largely of strange proper names, made the inscription to be the gravestone of an early Christian martyr. That such a reading should have been possible may be accounted for by Mr. Isaac Taylor's recent discovery of the Greek origin of the Runic letters. On the publication of Prof. Stephens's engraving, several scholars, including Prof. Sayce, Mr. G. F. Browne, and Mr. Isaac Taylor to whom Prof. Stephens had sent early copies of his book, came independently to the conclusion that the inscription was not in Runes, but in uncial Greek characters. By the united efforts of the above mentioned scholars, aided by Profs. Rhys, Ridgeway, and Hort, Messrs. E. B. Nicholson, Bradley, Arthur Evans, and Hicks—some of whom took the trouble of a journey into Westmorland in order personally to examine the readings—the inscription has at last been satisfactorily deciphered and interpreted, though not till several months of eager discussion.

It proves to consist of five very fair Greek hexameters, perpetuating the memory of one Hermes of Commagene, a Syrian youth who, at the age of sixteen, lost either his life or his liberty in an expedition against the Cimmerians—an expedition which may very possibly be identified with the Caledonian campaign of Septimius Severus in 209 A.D. The Latin inscription at Brough written in the reign of this emperor, and the peculiar forms of several letters, especially the *omega*, in the Greek inscription, are in favour of

* This reading first appeared in the Transactions of this Society vol. v., p. 291, having been laid before the meeting at Penrith on January 19th, 1881.

this

this conjectural date. Now that the original stone has been made accessible to scholars by its removal to the Fitzwilliam Museum, it may be expected that the few remaining doubts as to the correct reading will be speedily cleared up.

NOTE BY THE EDITOR.—This Society in its next issue of Transactions hopes to give the Greek version, but defers until the “few remaining doubts” are cleared up. It will probably take an opportunity of expressing its opinion upon the illegal removal of the stone from Brough-under-Stainmore to the Fitzwilliams Museum at Cambridge.