

ART. II.—*Agricola's Line of March from Chester to the Solway.* By WM. JACKSON, ESQ.

Read at Wigton, August 31st, 1876.

WHEN, after having completed his conquest of North Wales, Agricola retired into winter quarters, most probably at Chester, it is natural to suppose that the period of enforced abstinence from military undertakings would be spent in arranging his plans and accumulating supplies for the future ; and, as we learn incidentally that he did not merely contemplate the conquest of a tribe, but the entire subjection of the whole island, it is evident that the preparations made during the winter of A.D. 78—9 would be of the most elaborate and extensive nature.

The pregnant words of Tacitus supply us with particulars which to me scarcely seem to be, even yet, correctly appreciated ; and it may well be that, owing to his ignorance of the country, some misconception of Agricola's notes of campaigns may have occurred, though suppositions of that nature should be carefully introduced, for the caution and attention to minutiae which were so conspicuous in Agricola's character as a commander, would, no doubt, be equally visible in his dispatches and the private memoranda of his campaigns, to both of which his son-in-law, the historian Tacitus, would have access.

It is no great assumption to suppose that Chester was the main point of departure, and it seems not unimportant, in certain considerations which present themselves, that it should have been a maritime rather than an inland city at which the preparations should have been made.

In considering the advance of Agricola, we must remember that it was not merely an expedition into a hostile country, but a permanent conquest that was contemplated ;

B

that

that at important points, as nearly as possible equi-distant from each other, *castella* had to be erected : that these had to be garrisoned and supplied with provisions for a whole year, and as each of these was only founded after a most careful survey of the whole district, so that each, at least, might be able to maintain communication with its immediate neighbour in advance and in the rear by beacons, it is evident that much time would be taken up in surveys ; and when we call to mind the assurance that none of these *castella* were ever taken, we cannot fail to be impressed with the circumspection and attention to minute detail that must have characterized the advance of this great Roman General.

In marching northwards through Lancashire, we may safely conclude the route chosen would be that by the centre of the county, and that one of the stations would be Ribchester. Even supposing the sea level in that day to have been the same as in our own, it is not at all probable that the invading army would have crossed the Ribble west of that point, for the district from Southport to Rufford would be little better than a desert of sand heaps and peat mosses, and, moreover, some concentration of troops marching from the south, would naturally take place in the region from Mancunium to Ribchester. Lancaster would be the next great central station, and here the route to be pursued northwards would necessarily be decided on, even if it had not been previously arranged, which, however, I should be disposed to think it was.

This portion of the advance of Agricola seems never to have had the advantage of being contemplated by one fully acquainted with the whole region, and has been, therefore, slurred over in a manner quite inadequate to its great importance ; and it is the object of the present paper, and ought to be the steady aim of our Society, at the boundary of whose district we now halt, to determine the route taken by the Invader.

Upon

Upon the whole, it seems almost tacitly to have been decided, though Horsley has sagaciously thought differently, that the district was pierced by an advance up the valley of the Lune; but I think the coast-line can show far superior claims to the, it may be, rather ambiguous distinction. But, before considering the probabilities as to which route the general was likely to have chosen, it may be well to quote the words of Tacitus in speaking of Agricola's care in selecting sites for the camps, —“*loca castris ipse capere, æstuarια ac silvas ipse prætentare.*” Now few, if any, writers have ever contended for a march up the coast line of Lancashire, and if the advance was up the valley of the Lune, the word, “*æstuarια*” would be meaningless, for certainly no *æstuaries* could be traversed on that line.

But, on all accounts, the coast-line is the most probable; the narrow gorge of the Lune was, in a military point of view, most dangerous; ranges of mountains abutting upon it on each side, the attacks would be incessant, and the communications would be continually in peril of being cut off.

On the other hand, the coast-line, besides exactly answering to the words of Tacitus, in being intersected by estuaries, presents remarkable advantages; in many places there is a tract of tolerably level ground between the mountains and the sea: the army would only be liable to attack on the right flank; and I cannot but think, though I am not unmindful of the words of Tacitus in his 25th chapter, that supplies were brought to the army in ships, which did not, however, advance *pari passu* with the army till a later period, when the coast, protected by the western islands and numerous promontories, would admit of this being done with comparative safety.

I am disposed to believe that we under-rate the general civilization of the Britons, and, consequently, the amount of commerce and communication on this, as on other
coasts

coasts of the island, at this early period. Harbours are by no means wanting, and pilots would not be difficult to procure.

The Roman roads would, I conceive, be originally on the lines of communication used by the Britains, though, doubtless, more and more adapted to their own ideas, and always intended or improved, like the Russian railways of the present day, with a special eye to military requirements.

The difficulty of tracing the early roads in this part of England is much enhanced by the, as yet, unsolved problem, when the sea receded, or began to recede, from the well-recognized mark of 25 ft. above the present level. It is impossible to go fully into the question in a paper of this kind, but when geologists have solved the problem as, no doubt, they will do at no distant date, sufficiently, at any rate, for our purpose, an element of uncertainty will be eliminated from our Roman researches. Mr. Stockdale, in his "Annales Caermolenses," gives good reason to believe that, supposing Hest Bank to have been the point of departure then, as now, in crossing the Morecambe estuary, the Wyke on the Cartmel shore would be the point of arrival. Hence by Pigeonhouse-lane, running close to the ancient Pele Tower of Wraysholme, once belonging to the Harringtons, there is an old road on which Roman remains have been discovered, which, again reaching the sands at Sandgate, has its point of arrival at Conishead Bank, near the ancient Priory, whence Red Lane, so called because once used for the cartage of the hematite of the district, but previous to that known as The Street, runs, *via* Dalton, to Ireleth Gate, on the bank of the Duddon estuary. The landing place on the opposite shore is curiously marked by the site of the gallows of the Lords of Millom, close to a lane conducting from the sands to the castle, whence there is a direct road to Silecroft.

Supposing,

Supposing, on the other hand, that the sea level were as much higher as I have indicated the possibility of, we have the old site of Hincaster, not far from the head of the Kent estuary, we have decided traces of the Romans in the discovery of coins at Castle Head, and again in Cartmel valley. For more minute details respecting this district, I refer to Mr. Stockdale's "Annales Caermolenses," and West's "Antiquities of Furness."

Starting on the borders of Lancashire and Cumberland, I should have been pleased to find indications of Roman presence at Broughton, at the head of the Duddon estuary; but, beyond the prefix Brough, which in its variations of Burgh, Borrow, Burrow, and Burrens, &c., always denotes a Roman site, I must confess I have been unable to learn if any remains of that people have ever been discovered there. It is almost certain that the Roman road over Hardknott and Wrynose would send an offshoot down the Duddon valley to this town, but I am at present without any confirmatory information. The first trace of anything Roman in the south-west of Cumberland that I have been able to discover, is to be found in the name of Street, given to the ancient road running at the foot of Black Comb, and applied to a portion extending from about Silecroft to the River Esk, and on this route are situated the three ancient parish churches of Whicham, Whitbeck, and Bootle, and the old nunnery of Seaton; and if the sea-level were the same as at the present day, travellers by this road would cross the Esk at the ford marked by the old church of Waberthwaite.

Immediately after passing the Esk, we find ourselves in a locality once noted for its Roman remains, but which of late years has ceased to furnish any further indications of its ancient occupants, and few know of the existence, even, of this encampment.

My first visit to the old ruin once known as Walls Castle, was on the 28th of July, 1873, and I was deeply
impressed

impressed with its very peculiar character, and felt quite unable to decide to what period it belonged, though, on careful consideration, I was disposed to believe that we had here, in this obscure corner of Cumberland, the remains of a Roman villa, in a much more perfect condition than were to be found elsewhere in England, if not in a wider district. Upon taking my friend Mr. Lees to examine it, he came, without any suggestion from me, to the same conclusion; and Canon Knowles, though on a first visit in our company he was very unwilling to adopt our theory, has finally yielded to the same conviction, and has embodied the results of several visits made by him and myself in a paper and a carefully drawn plan, which will be laid before you. I propose also to make the camp, and some very peculiar discoveries in connection with it, the subject of a special paper.

By what route the Roman advance was made northwards from this point I am unable to say. On all the earliest maps of our county there is laid down an ancient road running from Drigg to Calder Hall, and on this stands Seascale Hall, very near to the site of an old circle marked by a solitary stone, all the others having been buried at the commencement of this century. There are, I believe, indications that a road once traversed the Calder at this point, and, passing by Sella Park, was continued by existing roads to the venerable Church of St. Bridget, with its so-called Runic Cross, close to which, on an eminence over the Ehen, is a field called Castley, where old foundations have been discovered; whilst, on the other side of the river, is a gravelly eminence known as Burrough Hill, which the river is, and for years has been, undermining. Another prominent point of a ridge, abruptly cut off by the river's attrition, is called Warborough Nook, on which was lately found a stone celt or hammer.

The road from Braystones (Burrow-stones) by Saint Bees
runs

runs within half a mile of, and parallel to, the coast for the whole distance, and certainly is very ancient. Half a mile after passing Braystones, on the left hand, is a prominent eminence without earthworks, known as Maiden Castle; on the right, at a distance of about half a mile, was Ehen-side Tarn. In it were found, about seven or eight years ago, some interesting prehistoric remains, which formed the subject of a communication by Mr. Darbishire to the Antiquarian Society, printed in the 44th volume of the *Archaeologia*. Half a mile further to the right is the remarkable conical hill, artificially shaped, at any rate, called Coulderton Cop, a very prominent object, and one of the many cops which, together with Kinniside Cop, Catgill How, it may be Wotobank, and others around Egremont, gave origin to the ancient name of Copeland. Passing through Saint Bees, and reaching Whitehaven by way of Preston Hows and Monkway, thence climbing the hill of Bransty, the ancient road, now in part disused, commanded from the summit of that hill, a splendid view of the encampment at Moresby. From Moresby another ancient road passed through Harrington to Workington, and beyond the point of Burrow Walls it may be considered as settled that a road of Roman date, at the latest, was continued to the Solway, and at this point our district ceases, and we may fitly pass to others the task of further elucidating the subject.

The question of time taken by Agricola in his march to the north has been re-opened by the discovery (placed I understand from those best qualified to judge, beyond any doubt,) that the estuary hitherto called Taus in our printed copies of Tacitus's "Agricola," ought to be Tanaus; but which is the Tanaus none can tell. The Tweed and Tyne have both been named as competitors, but neither have, nor debouch into, estuaries. If we might suppose the Tanaus to be the Ituna of a later geography, the Solway Frith would be reached at the end of the first summer's march,

march, and the Clyde at the expiration of the second ; and considering the effectual manner in which the work was done, this is a more rapid advance than we could have anticipated.

. Mr. R. S. Ferguson, at the close of the paper, said in reference to the route taken by Agricola, Mr. Jackson and himself were quite in accord, and that he hoped to shortly lay before the Society a paper on the same subject. He referred to the existence of a Roman camp between Mowbray and Allonby, and another at Silloth, which had been destroyed by the sea, and stated they would find Old Carlisle the centre of a complete system of military roadways. He could not help thinking that the military power of the Romans was centered at one time in Old Carlisle, and that afterwards they found the present Carlisle a more suitable place, and removed their seat of government to that place, which was protected by troops at Stanwix. Old Carlisle appeared to be a centre of great importance in a strategic point of view, because from every point of it, like the spokes of a wheel, roads branched out, and at the end of every one of them was a camp.

Dr. Simpson and Professor Harkness both then suggested that, the subject being so important, the discussion should be adjourned to the Kendal meeting.
