OBSERVATIONS ON CENTURIAL STONES FOUND ON THE ROMAN WALL, NORTHUMBERLAND AND CUMBERLAND.

By John Clayton, Esq.—Read 26th May, 1880.

Early in the month of March last, in removing from the south face of the Wall of Hadrian (usually called the Roman Wall)* a mass of soil and *debris*, the accumulation of centuries, there was found in the face of the wall, in the third course of stones from its base, a centurial stone, a copy of the inscription of which was laid before our monthly meeting on the 31st day of that month.

At that meeting the writer of this article mentioned that erroneous opinions on the subject of centurial stones were entertained by some antiquaries outside of our Society, and that as this centurial stone was probably the last that would be found in the Wall of Hadrian, he was collecting materials for a paper on this class of inscribed stones, which he probably might be able to submit to a future meeting of the Society.

The precise locality in which this discovery was made is about half-a-mile east of the station of Cilurnum, and within thirty yards of a turret in the wall, similar to those described by Gordon and Horsley, as existing early in the last century, and similar to that now existing on the farm of Blackcarts, between the stations of Cilurnum and Procolitia, described in the seventh volume of the "Archæologia Æliana," page 256. This newly-discovered turret had been partially exhumed more than a year before; and the operations of the spade which have produced to us this centurial stone *in sitû* had the object of com-

* The Roman Wall of the Lower Isthmus may be considered as comprehending the lines of fortification across the island, extending from the Tyne on the east to the Solway Firth on the west. In early times a portion of these works, that is to say, the stone wall, with its ditch to the north, was ascribed to the Emperor Severus, whilst the earthen rampart and its ditches were treated as a previous erection by the Emperor Hadrian. But antiquaries are now agreed, with considerable unanimity, that both the works are to be ascribed to the Emperor Hadrian, and that they were executed simultaneously.

pleting the exhumation of the turret and bringing to light the remains of the Wall of Hadrian existing in its vicinity. An engraving of the stone is here introduced.

COH · IX ɔ
PAV · APRI.

The inscription, being expanded, is read *Cohortis nonæ Centuria Pauli Apri.*

The cohort to which the company of the Centurion Paulus Aper belonged was without doubt a legionary cohort. Had it been an auxiliary cohort its nationality would have been expressed. Probably this cohort was a cohort of the sixth legion, one of the three legions employed by Hadrian in the construction of the Wall, which legion has left many traces of its presence in the neighbourhood.

The centurial stones which have been found in the four northern counties,—Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, and Westmorland, up to the year 1875, are described in the "Lapidarium Septentrionale," published by this Society in that year. Since that time one more centurial stone has been found besides the stone above described; it was found amongst the *debris* on the south side of Hadrian's Wall, at a high elevation, near the Limestone-corner, between the stations of Cilurnum and Procolitia. The letters upon it are confined to the name of the centurion.

An engraving of the stone is here introduced, which being expanded, reads Centuria Helleni.

The name Helenus, spelt with a single "l" (as is the Helenus Priamides of Virgil), occurs frequently in Gruter.

The present seems a fitting occasion for placing on record the views of our Society on the subject of Centurial stones, found on the Roman Wall.

The centurial stones which have been found on the Roman Wall in Northumberland and Cumberland, according to our views, were placed in the courses of masonry both of the wall and the stations, on their original construction under the direction of the centurion whose company was employed in that portion of the work. The object of the centurion was to record his own name, as that of an individual who had taken a part in the great work, hence the particular cohort to which the centurion belonged, or the extent of the work done, is rarely recorded on the stone. In each of these inscriptions the name of the centurion, is preceded by the centurial mark, resembling an inverted "C," which represents a twig of vine, the official badge of a Roman centurion. The name of the centurion is for the most part in the genitive case, as in the two inscriptions before us. When in the genitive case the centurial mark must be read "centuria." It sometimes happens that the name of the centurion is converted into an adjective, agreeing with and used as an epithet to centuria, as in centuria THRUPONIANA inscribed on a stone found in a wall of a balistarium on the western rampart of Procolitia, an engraving of which is here introduced. (*Vide* "Lapidarium Septentrionale," No. 932.)*

* This stone and the stone of Paulus Aper, above described, were found by the writer of this article in the face of the wall in which each had originally been placed, and were taken out and removed to Cilurnum for protection against damage by weather or mischievous hands. Their vacant places were filled up by stones found among the *debris*, and which had fallen from the upper courses of the wall.

According to Horsley, the name of the centurion is sometimes in the nominative case, and the centurial mark must be read centurio. As an example of this Horsley gives us a plate of a centurial stone, which had been taken from the face of the Roman Wall, but was then built into an interior wall of the cottage of Towertay, and was partially concealed by a weaver's loom. Upwards of fifty years ago this cottage was pulled down, and, under the guidance of the information given by Horsley, the stone was found in the interior wall of the cottage, and was carefully removed and deposited at Cilurnum, where, in the year 1866, it was inspected by the learned Dr. Emil Hubner, and was afterwards drawn and engraved for the "Lapidarium Septentrionale" of our Society. The engraving of it is No. 130 of the "Lapidarium Septentrionale" here represented.

The last letter of the second line would seem to have escaped the eye of Horsley, and probably the inscription is rightly described by Dr. Hübner, in Vol. VII. of the great German work, "Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum," and by us in the "Lapidarium Septentrionale," as representing the name of the centurion in the genitive case.

We have no reason to doubt the soundness of these our views; but they are not universally accepted, and other views are propounded by other antiquaries. We need not notice the twinkling of the "*Minora sidera*;" but as the expression of erroneous opinions by men of high reputation may lead to the propagation of error, we must test the opinions of Mr. Henry Charles Coote, a learned and laborious Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and of Dr. McCaul, the distinguished President of University College, Toronto, who each of them differs from the other, and both differ from us.

In 1867, Mr. Coote communicated to the Society of Antiquaries of London. a very comprehensive essay, under the title of "The Centuriation of Roman Britain."

The learned writer gives in detail an account of the Roman system of colonization on the continent, and tells us that in the vocabulary of the Roman Agrimensores the word "centuria" means a fundus or farm of one hundred acres, and that centurial stones are land marks which the writer divides into three categories. We need not notice the first and second categories, but confine ourselves to the third, which Mr. Coote expressly applies to the centurial stones on the Roman Wall.

The learned writer then gives expression to his views with respect to the stones included in his third category in the following terms—"The stones which illustrate my third division are comparatively plentiful. Gough's "Camden" supplies many of them, which, being found in Northumberland and Cumberland, will, like Dr. Bruce's specimens, belong to the territories of the various stations. Though Gough's invaluable work is readily accessible, I do not hesitate to transfer those inscriptions to these pages, because the reader will then have the evidence in one context before him."

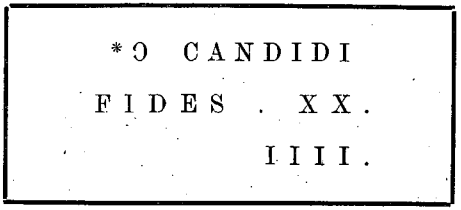
This passage, and the circumstance that Mr. Coote takes all his examples from Camden and Gough, might possibly produce an impression that Camden or his translator Gough countenanced the theory of Mr. Coote, that the centurial stones found in the Wall of Hadrian were landmarks; for this supposition there is not the slightest foundation, as will be shown by tracing the origin and progress of the knowledge of centurial stones.

The edition ot Camden's "Britannia," published A.D. 1600, immediately after his visit to the Roman Wall in company with Sir Robert Cotton, contains no mention of a centurial stone or anything to indicate that Camden had any knowledge of the centurial mark. He probably afterwards acquired that knowledge from Gruter, with whom both he and Sir Robert Cotton were personally acquainted. Gruter published his great work, the "Inscriptiones Antiquæ totius Orbis Romani" in 1601, in which he acknowledges his obligations to Camden and Sir Robert Cotton for Latin inscriptions in England communicated to him.

In the folio edition of Camden, published in 1607, page 611

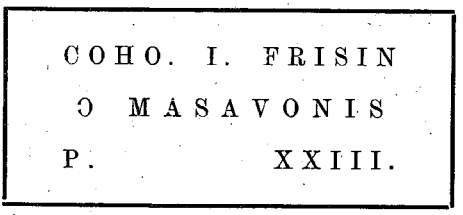
Camden describes two centurial stones found near Manchester, one of which he misreads, and both of which he misunderstands.

The first of these stones he describes as having been seen by himself near to a square fort in a park belonging to the Earl of Derby, which he took to be the Roman Mancunium. The following is a fac simile of Camden's drawing of it :—



* Centurionis.

the centurial mark being expanded by Camden as "centurionis." The other stone was found in the same place, and a copy was supplied to Camden by Mr. John Dee, Warden of Manchester College, of which the following is a fac simile :—



and Camden gives his description of these stones in these words :—

> "Posita videantur centurionibus illis ob fidem et probitatem tot annos spectatam."

Thus translated by Philemon Holland, the friend and contemporary of Camden :—

> "Both of which may seem erected in honor of those centurions for their loyalty and honesty so many years approved."

In the first of these inscriptions the word Fides was obviously read in mistake for Pedes, and the centurial mark is expanded by Camden

"centurionis," so that Camden cannot be legitimately quoted as an authority for Mr. Coote's view of the centurial mark, as representing a farm of one hundred acres.

The reading and meaning of both these inscriptions are sufficiently clear. They are as follows, the concluding figures in each case representing the extent of the work done by the century:—

1.—Centuria Candidi—Pedes xxiiii.

2.—Cohortis primæ Frisiavonum.*
Centuria Masavonis.
Pedes xxiii.

In the first case clearly we have the name of the centurion in the genitive, and probably also in the second.

On those centurial stones found on the Roman Wall in which the extent of the work done by the century or company is defined, the figures are preceded by the letter "P," which may be expanded *passus* if the stone is in the Wall itself, and *pedes* if it is in the walls of fortresses or stations.

Both these stones appear to have come from the ruins of the Roman fortress or station of Mancunium, and the initial "P" is properly expanded as Pedes.

The learned writer, Mr. Coote, then gives us the following singular interpretation of the first of these inscriptions:—

"This is an inscription of extraordinary interest. FIDES is indubitably a bad reading. This however, is of less consequence, as it in no way disguises the character of the stone or interferes with its attribution. It is a stone showing the *numerus limitum*." (viz., the decumanal and cardinal limes of road by which the estate was bounded). "The xx express the number of decumanal *limes*, as the IIII is the number of the cardinal *limes*, upon which severally the centuria" (viz., the Fundus, a farm of one hundred acres) "of Candidus was situate."

It is remarkable that a simple memorial of a centurion, and of the work performed by the troops under his command, should afford materials for lucubrations such as these.

If the learned writer had transferred to his pages the second centurial

* Horsley refers to this inscription, and also to an inscription of the Cohors quarta Frisonum, and suggests that both should be read Frisiorum. *Vide* Brit. Rom., p. 90.

inscription described by Camden, as well as the first, he would have probably been sensible of the fallacy of the above-quoted passage, and escaped the error into which he has fallen in using the first in support of his theory.

There are also two centurial stones which will be found under the head of Monmouthshire in the edition of Camden's "Britannia" of the year 1607, and which are described as being found at Caerleon, the Isca Silurum of the Romans. One of them as expanded by Camden is read Centurio Veciliana, but when properly expanded will be read Centuria Veciliana.

This is an example of the conversion of the name of the centurion into an adjective agreeing with the substantive Centuria.

The other of these stones contains the number of the cohort to which the century belonged, together with the centurial mark ⊳ and the name of the centurion. It is thus given (the letters COH in the first line being obviously erased from the stone or omitted in the transcript) :—

VIII
⊳ VALER
MAXSIMI

which, being properly expanded, is read Centuria Valerii Maxsimi.*

The edition of 1607 was the last edition of Camden's "Britannia," which was published in his lifetime, and it seems to be abundantly proved that Camden must be acquitted of all complicity in misleading Mr. Coote.

Before we consider how far his translator, Mr. Gough, was guilty of misleading Mr. Coote, we must further pursue the history of the knowledge of centurial inscriptions on the Roman Wall.

In the twenty-third volume of the Philosophical Transactions, No. 278, A.D. 1702, Dr. Christopher Hunter describes several centurial inscriptions which he copied from the face of the Roman Wall between the stations of Cilurnum and Procolitia, but he does not express any opinion upon them.

Bishop Gibson, the next translator of Camden, interpolates very

* Mr. Lee, the able and accurate expositor of the remains of "Isca Silurum," supplies descriptions of some additional centurial stones which have since been found at Carleon, which he reads precisely as we would read them. (*Vide* "Isca Silurum." By John Edward Lee, F.S.A., F.G.S. 1862.)

largely, and copiously introduces new matter. His lordship, living a century later than Camden, had access to those parts of the country from which Camden was excluded by a well-founded dread of the predatory habits of its inhabitants. The new matter interpolated by the Bishop in the text of Camden is not of an instructive or reliable character. In his progress along the Wall from the west he came upon the ruins of the mediæval castle of Sewing Shields, known as the castle of the "Seven Shields," which he suggests was derived from "Ala Saviniana," and on that ground pronounces the mediæval castle of Sewing Shields to be the Roman station of Hunnum, the 5th per lineam valli, where the Ala Saviniana was in garrison! The Bishop copies the two inscriptions on the stones of the Centurions Candidus and Masavonis, and suggests no alteration in the reading of Camden or in the translation of Holland, but in substance adopts both.

The Scottish antiquarian, Alexander Gordon, familiarly known to us as "Sandie Gordon" through Sir Walter Scott's novel of "The Antiquary," published in 1726 his "Itinerarium Septentrionale," in which he gives a detailed account of the Roman Wall and its inscriptions, but does not give us a copy of a single centurial stone, nor make any mention of that class of inscriptions.

We are indebted to that sagacious and laborious Northumbrian, John Horsley, for the brightest light which has been thrown upon the subject of centurial stones on the Roman Wall. In his "Britannia Romana," published in 1732, after adverting to stones of a similar character on the Antonine Wall between the Firth of Forth and the Firth of Clyde, on which are inscribed the name of the emperor, and the extent of the work executed by the troops employed in it, Horsley proceeds to state that, in his opinion, the inscriptions found on the Roman Wall, which he has called centurial, had been erected upon the same occasion as the inscriptions in Scotland and to the same purpose, though they were not so full and pompous.*

* There was found on the Antonine Wall in Scotland, A.D. 1841, a centurial stone precisely similar to those found in the Roman Wall in Northumberland:—

CHO VI
ƆANTO
ARATI

which inscription is expanded COHORTIS . SEXTÆ . CENTURIA . ANTONII . ARATI. Antonius Aratus might have been a centurion employed twenty years before on the Wall of Hadrian. (*Vide* "Archæology of Scotland." By Daniel Wilson.)

Horsley adds that the centurial inscriptions were found in the face of the Roman Wall and seldom in the stations, and as far as he could learn were upon stones of the same shape and size as the facing stones of the Wall. These inscriptions, he adds, were doubtless inserted in the face of the Wall when it was built, and were in all probability erected by those centuries or cohorts who built that part of the Wall where they are found, or by their commanders.

The author then proceeds to take a general view of all the stones of this description which he had been able to discover on the Wall or near to it, including twenty in his own possession, and he begins at the east end of the Wall and ends at Carlisle, and he states that the greatest number of these inscriptions that anywhere occur together had been found about half-way between Walwick and Carrawbrugh near to a cottage called Towertay. He uniformly reads the centurial marks "centuria" when the centurion's name is in the genitive case, and as "centurio" when he supposes the centurion's name is in the nominative case.

Towertay, near to which Horsley describes the greatest number of centurial stones to have been found, is about midway between the stations of Cilurnum and Procolitia.*

Gough, the latest translator of Camden's "Britannia," (to whose invaluable work Mr. Coote refers) places before his readers a collection of centurial inscriptions which have been gathered from Horsley and other sources, and amongst them an example of the name of the centurion being converted into an adjective and used as an epithet to centuria, which Gough seems not to have understood, as he appends to the inscription the monosyllable "*sic*" as if he suspected the accuracy of the version from which he was taking his transcript.

Mr. Gough makes no comment of his own upon any of these inscriptions, and none of them afford the slightest countenance to the theory of Mr. Coote that the centurial stones found in the Roman Wall and its fortresses are land marks; and we necessarily arrive at the conclusion that Gough is as guiltless as his principal Camden of misleading Mr. Coote. That gentleman, therefore, must be regarded as the originator of the theory which rests on his sole authority.

* *Vide* Horsley's "Britannia Romana," page 127, 128, and 129, and "Collection of Roman Inscriptions and Sculptures in Northumberland and Cumberland."

Pursuing the history of the progress of the knowledge of centurial stones between the time of the publication of the "Britannia Romana" of Horsley, A.D. 1732, and the "History of Northumberland" by the Rev. John Hodgson, A.D. 1840, we do not find that the subject of centurial stones of the class of those of the Roman Wall has been treated by any writer of authority.

The Rev. John Hodgson, one of the founders of our Society (of whose diligence, sagacity, and genial nature we cherish a fond recollection) concurred entirely in the view of Horsley, and he was followed by our learned colleague Dr. Bruce, who published his first edition of the "Roman Wall" in 1852, and having before him all that had been previously said or written on the subject, and aided by his own great experience, arrived at the same conclusion which Horsley had arrived at more than one hundred years before, and which every subsequent discovery had tended to confirm.

The publication in 1873 of the seventh volume of the great German work, "Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum," containing the Latin inscriptions in Britain, enables us to refer for a confirmation of our view to Dr. Emil Hübner, of Berlin, one of those distinguished scholars selected for the compilation of the work. We have the satisfaction of knowing that his views on the subject of the centurial stones found in the Roman Wall are entirely in concurrence with our own.

We cheerfully acknowledge the learning and industry of Mr. Coote, and do not question his knowledge of the centuriation of the Roman colonies and agricultural districts, but he must excuse us when we say that we cannot consider his authority on any questions of Roman military centuriation of any weight. His theory must, therefore, rest solely on its own merits, and we must proceed to consider whether it be probable or possible that the centurial stones found on the face of the Roman Wall and of its fortresses are land marks of farms of one hundred acres, that the names inscribed on them are the names of the possessors of those farms, and, in every case in which numerals are added, they represent "the *numerus limitum*, viz., the numbers of the decumanal and cardinal lines of road by which the estate was bounded."

Mr. Coote must also excuse our taking the liberty of observing, that it would have been prudent on his part to have placed more reliance upon

the researches of other learned men than he has done; if he had consulted Smith's "Dictionary of Roman Antiquities" he would have been aware of the difference between the military and the civil centuria of the Romans.* The attention of antiquaries of Europe has since the commencement of its publication been directed to the great German work, "The Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum," the Latin inscriptions of the world. Those of Italy are described by the distinguished scholar, Dr. Mommsen, in the first volume, published in 1863. This volume contains inscriptions existing on pillars of stone, which had been used as landmarks to define the Agri allotted by Gracchus and his associates to the Roman plebs, and they bear upon their vertical faces the names of Gracchus and his colleagues. In addition to this they have upon the horizontal plane on their tops curious incised markings consisting of convergent lines, forming probably a kind of ground plan or *forma* of the limits of each *ager*, and to these are appended some letters much defaced and difficult to read. It is scarcely necessary to point out how totally different these inscriptions are from those of the Centurial Stones on the Roman Wall.† If any similar stones had existed in Britain they would probably have been found in the lands belonging to the Roman Colonia of Camelodunum (Colchester) or Eboracum (York).

The locality described by Horsley as having been the most productive of centurial stones has continued to be so up to the present time, probably arising from the exceptionally heavy character of the works, which would lead to the employment of a larger force than was required for other portions of the line, and perhaps also from the circumstance of the Roman Wall in that space having remained undisturbed to a later period than in other parts. According to Gordon, writing in 1726, for three miles west of Walwick the Roman works "are to be seen in greater perfection and magnificence than upon any other track from one sea to the other."

This locality is described by Horsley as extending between Walwick and Carrawbrugh, a distance of about three miles. For one-half of this space the lines of fortification, the Murus and the Vallum,

* *Vide* pages 30 and 504 of Smith's "Dictionary of Roman Antiquities," 2nd Edition, 1851.

† See Numbers 552 to 556 inclusive. Vol. 1. "Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum."

are within ten yards of each other, and for the rest of the distance they are not more than one hundred yards apart. Yet within this space at least twenty centurial stones can be traced to have been found. The whole space between the lines of fortification would be required for military purposes, the lands north of the lines of fortification would be open to the raids of the Caledonians, and the lands south of the half-subdued Britons. If, then (according to Mr. Coote) the names inscribed on the centurial stones are the names of the possessors of farms of one hundred acres each, where are those farms to be found? And, further, if these stones were land marks is it not probable that the possessors of the land would have placed them on the land and not in the face of the wall of a fortress?

As much as is necessary has been said on the subject of the theory of Mr. Henry Charles Coote, and the theory of Dr. McCaul must now be considered. Dr. McCaul has for many years been in the habit of communicating to the Canadian public through the "Canadian Journal" articles under the designation of "Notes on Latin Inscriptions found in Britain."

In the year 1863 these notes, with many more which had not previously appeared in print, were collected and published in one volume, under the title of "Britanno-Roman Inscriptions, with Critical Notes." Through this publication Dr. McCaul's views, which were for the most part very creditable to him as a man of sense and a scholar, were first circulated in Europe. Dr. McCaul's views on the subject of centurial inscriptions on the Wall of Hadrian, as enunciated in this publication, must, however, be admitted to have no other merit than that of originality.

On this subject the learned president of University College, Toronto, expresses himself in the following terms:—

"For my part I have no doubt there was not one of such inscriptions that was 'in honour' or 'in memory' of any one, and that the meaning of the centurial mark, under other circumstances often used for 'centurion,' stands in all such inscriptions for 'century.'"*

"The true explanation of such inscriptions, as, I think, is, that they were intended to mark the space set apart for quarters in an encampment, *id est*, to define the *pedatura*, not in the sense in which it is used by Vegetius in the passage cited by Horsley, but in that in which Hyginus employs it."†

* *Vide* page 114. † *Vide* page 117.

We have before us one of the stones, which is inscribed Centuria Heleni. This stone does not record to what cohort the century belonged; was obviously placed in the Wall in honour or memory of the centurion Helenus, and as a record of the fact that the centurion Helenus had taken a part in so great a work as the Wall of Hadrian. This is the sole purpose of the inscription, and there is no mention of the number of "passus" or "pedes" of the work which had been executed under command of centurion Helenus. Hundreds of centurions have along the whole length of the Wall sought in the same form to commemorate their names, and if any oracular sage of their time had—like Dr. McCaul—pronounced the dictum—"For my part I have no doubt there was not one of those inscriptions that was in honor or in memory of any one," not one of these officers would have lost a particle of his self-esteem, or lost any confidence in the permanency of the memorial of himself inserted in the Wall.

Dr. McCaul having told us what these inscriptions *are not*, proceeds to tell us what *they are*. He says :—

"That the true nature of these inscriptions is to mark the space for quarters in an encampment." If such were the case, the quarters of the centurion Helenus must have been the reverse of comfortable—his foot would be on the bare heath, his couch would be rocked by the winds and sheltered by the snow drift. Helenus has placed his stone where he had done his work on the Wall, which happens to be at a very high point—about a thousand feet above the level of the sea, and more than a mile distant from any station or permanent encampment. It is somewhat remarkable that the space in which the greatest number of centurial stones has been found is a high ridge of land distant from station or encampment.

The soldiers' quarters on the Wall are not on these stormy heights, but in comfortable camps or fortresses, in which all possible care has been taken to mitigate the severities of a Northumbrian climate; the floors of the rooms are laid on pillars, and under those floors are hot air passages communicating with the rooms.

On the grounds which have been stated, we arrive at the inevitable conclusion that the theories of Mr. Henry Charles Coote and Dr. McCaul, with respect to the centurial stones found on the Roman Wall, are equally untenable. Both these theories have been extant for more

than a dozen years, and we do not find that they have been retracted or qualified by their authors—on the contrary (at least in the case of Mr. Coote), there has been an expressed persistence in error. Antiquaries in general have regarded both theories with indifference, relying on the authorities of Gruter, Horsley, Hodgson, Bruce, and Hübner, and undisturbed by the dicta of Coote and McCaul.

Within our Society there has never existed a shadow of donbt or a symptom of hesitation on the subject, and we have been strengthened in our course by the concurrence of our distinguished colleague, Mr. Charles Roach Smith, whose connection with antiquarian bodies on the Continent as well as in Britain, and whose large experience both at home and abroad, entitle his opinion to special weight.

It may be deemed presumptuous on the part of an individual holding no position in antiquarian lore to have dealt so freely with the opinions of professed and acknowledged antiquaries; but that individual has one advantage over those learned men—he has passed a long life a resident on the Roman Wall, and in close proximity to that part of it where the greatest number of centurial stones has been found, and who has in his possession the largest collection of those stones that anywhere exists, and who is satisfied that if Mr. Coote and Dr. McCaul had spent one day on the Roman Wall, they would not have remained for one hour unconvinced of the error into which they have respectively fallen.