

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS ON CENTURIAL STONES. -

BY JOHN CLAYTON, ESQ.—READ 28TH JULY, 1880.

AT our meeting of the 26th of May last, a paper was read on the subject of Centurial Stones found on the Roman Wall. Some notice of that paper seems to have been carried across the Atlantic, and has produced a letter addressed to the Editor of the *Newcastle Journal*, dated from Toronto, and bearing the anonymous signature of "A Graduate," presumed to be of that university. That letter, so far as the matter it contains, would not have required or received our notice, but, as the writer professes to write with the authority of Dr. McCaul, the President of that University, our respect for that name forbids our allowing the letter in question to pass unnoticed.

It will be recollected that Dr. McCaul, in his book on "Britanno-Roman Inscriptions," when treating of the centurial stones found in the Roman Wall in Northumberland and Cumberland, places before the public two propositions—one of them affirmative and the other negative, to which, we are assured by the Graduate, Dr. McCaul still adheres.

The affirmative proposition is, "that the object of these stones is to mark the soldiers' quarters."

The negative proposition is, "that the inscriptions on these stones are not in honour or in memory of any one."

In support of the affirmative proposition, Dr. McCaul uses no argument, neither does the Graduate who addresses the Editor of the *Newcastle Journal*. Dr. McCaul has been informed, as is the fact, that these stones are, with a trifling exception, not found in stations or encampments but in the face of the open wall, and frequently in localities quite unfit for soldiers' quarters; and if he still adheres to this proposition, then, as there are now no Roman soldiers to be frozen to death in the quarters he allots to them, we must be content to leave the learned Doctor original and alone in the enjoyment of his theory, and proceed to

deal with the negative proposition—that these stones, each bearing the name of a Centurion, are in honour or memory of nobody. Assuming for a moment that this is the case, that they were erected in honour or memory of *nobody*, they must notwithstanding have been erected by *somebody*; but this the Graduate declines to admit unless we can show that the words *fecit* or *posuit*, or their initials, are inscribed on the stones, as well as the name of the Centurion. By a parity of reasoning Dr. McCaul would be deprived of the credit of being the author of the work bearing the title of “Britanno-Roman Inscriptions, with Critical Notes,” by the Rev. John McCall, LL.D., because the word “written.” is not interpolated. The Graduate also requires that the measurement in paces or feet of the work performed by the Centurion and his company should be inscribed on the stone, as essential to the expression of its purpose. By a parity of reasoning, when a monument shall be reared in honour or in memory of Dr. McCaul, in order to give effect to its object, the number of lectures delivered by the learned Doctor must be expressed on the face of the monument.

Ordinary mortals who have inspected these centurial stones, and the localities in which they have been found, believe they have been placed in the wall by the Centurion whose name they respectively bear in honour of himself, and that for that purpose it was quite superfluous to refer to the work done by the Centurion and his company—its extent or dimensions.

The Graduate of Toronto brings to our notice what Dr. McCaul calls in his book, the “astonishing expansions” by Horsley, of the inscriptions on the two centurial stones found at or near the Roman Mancunium in Lancashire, but he omits all reference to the still more astonishing expansions by Camden of those inscriptions. Camden was head master of Westminster School, and Clarencieux King-at-Arms in the Heralds’ College, and he wrote his “Britannia” in the sunshine of royal patronage. Horsley was a schoolmaster and Presbyterian minister at the small market town of Morpeth, where by the exercise of his talents and industry, and unaided by patrons or subscribers he achieved the composition of his immortal work, “Britannia-Romana.” It is obvious that Horsley has not read these two inscriptions correctly; but we can easily see how he was misled. No centurial stones found upon the Wall or in any part of England, having numerals upon them,

had, with the exception of these two, been discovered in his day. It was not surprising, therefore, that he thought the inscriptions to be sepulchral, the numerals expressing the number of years the individuals lived. If in any case his usual sagacity fails him, we may well apply to Horsley the language of the Latin critic, "*Aliquando bonus dormitat Homerus.*"

