

ON THE MEANING OF THE TERM "ALA PETRIANA."

READ SEPTEMBER, 1881, BY MR. R. CARR ELLISON.

THE fresh discovery of a sepulchral stone to the memory of a standard-bearer of the ALA PETRIANA at Hexham affords me an opportunity of laying before our Antiquarian Society the opinion to which former discoveries in connection with the same body of Roman cavalry have led me. These former discoveries have been made at Old Carlisle, Old Penrith, at Carlisle, and near to Lanercost. The authentic record concerning the Petrian Wing, or Regiment of Horse, is supplied by the well-known entry in the *Notitia*, where, after the mention of other Tribunes and Prefects, with the designations and nationalities of the cohorts or *alæ*, which they severally commanded at the period of its compilation, have been given, and the name of the station occupied by each respectively, we find the words PRÆFECTVS ALÆ PETRIANÆ PETRIANIS. Now, from this we may learn that the Petrianan cavalry was quartered at the Petrianan camps or cantonments; not, as has been supposed, at Petriana, for then the genitive Petrianæ would have been used. The cavalry was quartered *in petrianis, agris, locis, castris*. But if so, there must have been a population of Petriani, a set of people so denominated from their occupation or some like reason. But who then were the PETRIANI? I have no doubt that they were the workmen of the PETRÆ, the crags or quarries, so extensively wrought by the Romans. And these workmen were assuredly such as would require a strong force of armed and mounted police, placed in detachments at the different quarries where work was going on, to hold them in subjection. They would consist of military criminals of all the nationalities assembled

under the Roman standards in Britain,—Caledonian prisoners of war, and any number of British labourers retained under compulsion. These PETRIANI would have to be hutted and supplied with food and clothing in special cantonments or *castris petrianis*, the PETRIANIS of the *Notitia*, unless we accept the expression as equivalent to *fodinis petrianis*, the quarries themselves. Tacitus calls the same, or a similar force, *ala petrina*, which would bear the same signification; but whether we dignify the phrase with capital initials or not, it is clear, to my apprehension at least, that PETRINA or PETRIANA is not derived from any proper name, but is a simple Græce-Latin adjective. When Cœcina sent the ALA PETRINA, under his command, into Italy, he was stationed in Helvetia, in the midst of the great Alpine Roads constructed by the Romans with enormous labour. And I think we may expect to find records of detachments of the force in yet other localities near to ancient quarries. The name of the deceased standard-bearer interred at Hexham is Greek, and signifies swift-charger, ELAUNUS. If we thus construe the PETRIANIS of the *Notitia Imperii* strictly, it is vain to imagine that any one station was denominated substantively Petriana, and that it was next in position to Amboglanna.