

VI.—“THE PFAHL-GRABEN,” IN A LETTER FROM THE REV.
JOSEPH HIRST, OF WADHURST, TO DR. HODGKIN, Secretary.

[Read on the 30th December, 1884.]

STRAUBING-ON-THE-DANUBE, 15th Sept., 1884.

DEAR DR. HODGKIN,—When I stood with you and Dr. Bruce on the Roman Wall, near Newcastle, during our Archæological Congress a short time ago, I hardly thought that, on that very day three weeks, I should be standing on the remains of the Roman Vallum just beyond the Danube. On my way out I read with much interest your excellent *Pfahl-Graben*,* and on arriving at Eichstädt, on August 31st, I determined next day to make an expedition to the neighbouring Roman border-line. My old friend and professor of twenty years ago, Canon Suttner, now Vicar-General of the diocese, and a great authority on all points of local history, assured me that the best place in the neighbourhood at which the Vallum could be seen was Pfahldorf, a village about ten miles distant. For the information of future explorers, let me state how easy of access this place is from England. I left London at half-past eight in the evening, *viâ* Queenborough and Flushing, and arrived at Frankfort within the twenty-four hours. Leaving that place next morning at eleven, Eichstädt is easily reached before the evening, *viâ* Würzburg and Gunzenhausen. The town of Eichstädt, hitherto almost unvisited by travellers, boasts a double-choired Gothic cathedral (not Romanesque, as stated by *Bradshaw*), with Norman or Roman porch and towers of 1060, west choir, 1269, east choir, 1359, nave and chief doorway, 1396, and a remarkable double cloister with some spiral columns, 1471-1496, while the sepulchral effigies here and in the cathedral, many from the hands of a local school of sculptors formed under the patronage of the Prince Bishops, deserve more than a passing attention. The drive down the Altmühl valley to Kelheim will well repay the lover of nature; while this latter place, remarkable for its

* *Archæologia Æliana*, Vol. ix., pp. 73-161.

beautiful Ruhmeshalle, is the nearest point to the most interesting portion of the Danube throughout its whole course. Steamers pass up and down daily, and a couple of hours up the stream takes you past all that is worth seeing. The founders of Eichstädt were the three children of a king of Wessex, SS. Willibald, Wunibald, and Walburga; and the English arms, still borne by the Chapter and neighbouring nunnery, can be seen over one of the cathedral doors. In Bavaria a carriage and pair of horses can be hired for fourteen marks a day, with *Trinkgeld*.

Leaving Eichstädt at noon, with my host, Canon Morgott, and the Vicar-General, we made straight for the high table-land on the north-east, and after a beautiful and bracing drive through woods of fir, pine, and beech, we arrived, within two hours, at the house of the parish priest of Pfahldorf, Herr Sirl, who kindly consented to become our guide. As is apparent, the name of this village comes from *Pfahlpalus*, stockade, or palisade, and *dorf*, the German for village. In Germany pfahlbürgen was the name given to those townsmen whose houses abutted on the city walls, and is now commonly given by writers to the lake-dwellers of prehistoric times who lived in huts raised on piles. Moreover, the name Pfahler and Pfaller is unusually common amongst families bordering on the Roman Vallum. Strange enough, the species of palisade used by the Romans against the Germans, such as it is seen on the Trajan column, is still the commonest fence hereabouts round farm-yards and gardens. Though one of the oldest villages of the Bishopric of Eichstädt, Pfahldorf (population in 1881, 384) was formed into an independent parish only in 1752, it having possessed hitherto only a chapel-of-ease. To the Vicar-General I am indebted for the following early notices of the name as belonging to this place. In 820, under Louis the Debonnaire, Sifridus, abbot of S. Emmeram's, in Ratisbon, gave to Bishop Baturicus of that city certain hereditary tenements in *Phaldorf*.* Again, in 895, King Arnulphus restored to a vassal of the Bishop of Eichstädt certain property of his in *Phaldorf*, which had been unjustly seized by a niece of

* Anno 820—anno Ludovic. imper. vii., indictionis xii., die Dominico iiii. Non. Dec. Sifridus Abbas ad S. Emmeramum Ratisbon. Episcopo Baturico ibid. donat bona haereditaria . . . ad Phaldorf.—Ried, *Codex. Diplom. Ratisbon.*, p. 18-22. NB. Donat ad Phaldorf casam cum curte et mancipia Waning, Radamr, Billuec, et Tafolchuni et item Folchuni.

the Emperor named Hildegard.* In these two documents the name appears without an initial *f*. In another document of King Arnulphus, bearing date 889, there is mention made of a frontier "from Biswangen on the *Phal*, and beyond the *Phal* to the east *usque ad communem Marcham Nordgaviensium*."†

A few miles before reaching Pfahldorf we crossed an old Roman road, still in use, running over the level table-land straight into a village on our left. In these parts the old Roman roads are often called Saustrasse, from the fact that they were the best means of communication existing in the Middle Ages between country places and the market towns; so that the swine-herds must needs have used them for their droves of swine, then the staple product of Lower Bavaria. Hence the easy transference of the name to the Pfahl-graben, the ditch and rampart of which served alternately in various places as the best available means of passage between one village and another. This is the origin of the name sometimes given to the Pfahl, *Saugraben*, *Schweinsgraben*. The so-called Ochsenstrasse between Straubing (*Serviodurum*) and Eining (*Abusina*), on the road to Augsburg (*Augusta Vindelicorum*), is, however, not derived from herds of oxen, but from the name of the Emperor Augustus, or from his successors in the Augustan line:—*cf.*, perhaps, Ochsen-Lech, in Augsburg itself.‡

Going out from the village in the opposite direction to that in which we had arrived, a ten minutes' walk brought us to an open sloping plain, with the Vallum Romanum stretching out before us on either side. There were, however, so many slight mounds, banks, or vallations, natural or artificial, running parallel with it, about a stone-throw's distance from one another, that I could not have discovered the actual Pfahlgraben but for the aid of our practised local guide. The place seemed well suited for a camp or entrenchment, and may have been such in either Roman or later times. Standing on the

* Anno 895, Tribur. Indict. xiii. año regni 8º, iii. Non. Maj. Arnulphus Rex Megingozzo, vasallo Episcopi Erkanboldi, restituit res suas in Phaldorf . . . eidem a nepte Imperatoris Hildegard injuste detractas.—Falkenstein, *Cod. Diplom.*, p. 16; *Monumenta Boica*, xxxi., i., p. 146. Tribur was an old Reichsstadt, just below Mainz, to the south.

† *Monumenta Boica* (Monuments of the Bavarian Nation), xxxi., i., p. 130; Falkenstein, *l. c.*, p. 14.

‡ Compare other corruptions of Augustus; in Zaragoza (Spain) from *Cæsar-Augusta*; Autun (France) from *Augustodunum*, and Aosta (Piedmont) from *Augusta Prætoria* or *Augusta Salasorum*.

rough farm-road by which we had come, I could distinctly trace the Vallum on the left almost as far as the eye could see. For a hundred paces or so it was clearly marked by the small white stones thrown on to it by the peasants while engaged in cultivating the neighbouring tillage land; and, where no hedges or walls were ever seen, it no doubt served as a boundary. In appearance it was like a belt of coarse grass gently rising from either side to a height of two feet in the middle, and though the plough, I am told, encroaches on it on either side, it still maintains a width of from ten to twelve feet. On the right hand side of the road, and at intervals on the left, the ground had been brought to an almost uniform level, and bore crops of various kinds. Unable, therefore, to pursue the laborious task of following up the Vallum on the right, in the direction of Kipfenberg, over the ploughed and roughly broken land, where crops of roots, peas, lentils, hemp, rye, and potatoes gave a patch-work appearance to the ground, we retraced our steps for a few hundred paces, and then proceeded over the waste, scrub, or meadow land, to the woods which hemmed in this great hillside clearing like a circle. Here the direct course of the Vallum was plainly discernible, and we had no difficulty in tracing it through the woods to within a hundred yards of the sharp edge of the declivity overhanging Kipfenberg; that is, for about three miles. In appearance, however, it was at intervals strangely diversified in its course. Now, it was so thickly overgrown with trees and brushwood as to be impassable; now, it ran for a considerable length like a clearing; while here and there, the woodcutter's cart-tracks ran with a deep rut straight through it, leaving its composition and manner of formation plainly visible in the cutting at the sides. At times the footpath went round about it, but very often it ran either along its summit or in the fosse below. In height it seemed uniformly not more than three feet, until, at a greater distance from the village of Pfahldorf, and on nearing its termination at the Altmühl valley, it sensibly increased to a height of from four to six feet, measuring from the bottom of the ditch, which here becomes deeper. This fosse, invariably accompanying the barrier, and evidently contemporary with it and incidental to its construction, had hitherto been only a foot deep, and in places scarcely discernible having evidently been filled up by the falling in of loose materials when the large stones were dug out from

the mound above and carried away by the peasants of later days. On the thickly wooded part, however, over against Kipfenberg, which lies on the opposite side of the valley, across the river Altmühl, the Vallum seems to be in an undisturbed state, and both ditch and mound may possess well nigh their original appearance. Pines and firs of a great height (I measured some two feet in diameter) here grow in thick profusion upon the wall or earthen barrier, amidst the great stones which here lie close to one another, the shining black surfaces of which continually peep out upon the top when not covered with thick coats of green moss. Some of these I lifted out of their soft beds and found them to be from 20 to 30 lbs. in weight. These are the hard irregular magnesian limestones of the Jura formation that have been so industriously quarried by the natives up to within quite a recent date. Old men remember how, in 1817, such stones were carried off from the Vallum Romanum to build the existing school in Pfahldorf. All the houses, however, of the village have been built with such stones, as no stone-quarries whatever are to be found in the neighbourhood. The Romans themselves will have come across these stones when they began to trench the ground, as they lie close to the surface. The only unusual depression of the soil I observed was in a space twelve feet square, just within the barrier, where formerly had stood one of the watch-towers or guard-houses such as are still to be seen represented on Trajan's column in Rome.

That building materials and objects for household purposes formerly used by the Romans were commonly found in the neighbourhood is shewn by the special formulary here in use in very early times for the blessing, or rather exorcising, of such articles, called in the phraseology of that day "*vasa arte fabricata gentilium.*" Thus it can be proved that, about 1070, Bishop Gundekar II. inserted in his Pontifical (this Eichstädt Pontifical is a monument of no mean historical and liturgical importance) a special *benedictio super vascula in antiquis locis reperia.*

The low wall and consequently weak palisade of this neighbourhood no doubt denote that the population hereabouts were more or less friendly to the Romans, or at least so sparsely scattered as not to be much feared by them. Thus the Limes Transdanubianus here partook of the nature more of a border-line than of a defence. Even now-

a-days the country is very thinly peopled; and if great hordes or any reckless onslaught of the barbarians had been feared; the Romans would not have tarried to make the tithe-paying population within their borders furnish muscle and material for the building of a stouter barrier.

On descending from the high table-land down the steep and sharp declivity (up which no Roman or other road ever went) into the valley below, the level course of which is only a few hundred yards in width, no trace whatever of the Vallum Romanum can be discovered. If there ever was an earthen barrier across the valley it has long since been razed to the ground by the frequent overflowings of the Altmühl. But the Roman encampment on the opposite table-land, from its lofty perch, high above the mediæval keep of Kipfenberg, together with the Roman fortification at Arnsberg, a little lower down the valley to the south, commanded the passage in such a way as to render such a defence unnecessary. No doubt the rich and fertile vale would be used right and left as a secure and well-watched pasture, and for purposes of forage for man and beast. Here the tethered horses of the legionary or auxiliary cavalry would browse in peace under the eyes of their riders, who, from many a vantage point, kept eye upon them.

At Pfahldorf we had sent the carriage on by the road to wait for us at Kipfenberg, and leaving the latter place at six, we reached Eichstädt by the level ground, along the Altmühl valley, past the Arnsberg tower, and many a frowning ruin of mediæval castles darkly set amidst the snow-white crags and pinnacles that make this district so picturesque, at half-past eight in the evening.

Here in Straubing (the Roman *Serviodurum*), since my visit of three years ago, some excavations have been conducted under the eye of my friend Herr Adalbert Ebner, on the site of the old Roman camp existing on the former bank of the Danube, a stone's throw beyond the church of St. Peter, which was built between 1160 and 1180 in Romanesque style, in the old part of the town, on the site of a *tête-du-pont*, or Roman fortification, which very probably took the place of an old Celtic settlement. Amongst the *débris* at the far end of the camp my friend and myself had no difficulty in poking out with our umbrellas numerous bits of Samian ware, some fragments of black pottery, marked, amongst other ways, with an ornament which may be either

a Greek omega, a crescent, or a horse-shoe (like the *Murex* ornament of Phœnician and early Greek times), pieces of a gray or commoner sort of ware, and a respectable fragment of a bowl with rough inside, used by the Roman soldiers for grinding corn. Two Roman iron nails were also amongst the objects I carried away. Here I may say that, for any one who is so minded, there is nothing to prevent him hiring a labourer to excavate in this place without let or hindrance from the municipal authorities, to whom it belongs, and who look on properly conducted excavations with favour. During the past two years thin Roman bricks have been here unearthed, bearing the inscriptions of three military bodies that hitherto were not known to have been stationed here. These are the Legio III. Italica, the Cohors II. Raetorum, and the Cohors I. Canathenorum, which latter body took its name from the town of Canatha in Coelosyria. Thus for the first time was discovered the name of the station occupied by the 2nd Rhaetian Cohort in Rhaetia. Straubing is situated, according to the *Tabula Peutingerana*, 28 millia passuum from Ratisbon and 50 millia passuum from Passau. Standing on a slight eminence overlooking the broad but not over deep sweep of the Danube, and commanding a view of the well-wooded hills on the other side of the river, whence their barbarian foes used to issue, it was a point of some strategic importance. Hence it was closely connected with another Roman camp, necessitated by an inward bend of the river at Oeberau, only three miles distant to the north-west; with another marvellously preserved Roman camp at Wischelburg, twelve miles further down the river to the east; and, thirdly, with the camp that, in all probability, appears to have existed four miles off inland to the west at Rinkam, which was the junction of the so-called Ochsenstrasse with the road to Ratisbon.

On visiting Oeberau I found it to consist of a small camp only one and one-fifth of an English acre in extent, or eighty yards across from gate to gate (the Porta Principalis Dextra facing Straubing), while in its greatest length, one hundred and forty yards, no opening existed in the place of the Decumana or of the Porta Praetoria, which latter side looked on to the river. The whole camp is surrounded by a high mound, some ten feet high, in which we discovered only some bits of mediæval pottery protruding on the outer side. Around the mound was a rather wide ditch, which could easily be filled with water from

the Danube, which in early spring often overflows all the neighbouring plain, and would then cut this outlying station off from Serviodurum. This post is only two miles, as the crow flies, from the old Roman camp at Straubing, though about four by what appears to be the old Roman road called Hochstrasse, running as straight as possible at a little distance from the Danube, with the ground falling away from it on either side.

On reaching Wischelburg I found it to be a well-preserved Roman camp, four hundred paces square, and possessing two entries, due north and south, the Porta Prætoria and Decumana. The German name is supposed to be derived from its Latin predecessor, *Castra Vitellia*. The Romans here seem to have taken advantage of an eminence formed by the bank of the old bed of the Danube, which here approaches the river and rises to a height of about thirty feet, while an old bay in the river, by breaking into the bank, makes two sides of a quadrangle ready to hand. Into this wide bay, into which poured the tributary stream that now turns a mill nestling underneath the steep embankment, the Romans, it is supposed, brought their ships in winter. The two sides of the rampart looking north and west are entirely natural, save that the sides have been made steeper by the formation of an esplanade from ten to forty feet wide half way down, and at the western end a rampart ten feet high has been superadded. On the south side the bank or cliff may have been merely brought into shape and straightened, while on the eastern side, where the ground falls, an artificial rampart has been erected some thirty feet high, except at the north-east corner, where it reaches forty feet, and thus corresponds with the north-west corner. It has, moreover, been strengthened by a ditch, the bank of which, on the opposite side, may be fifteen feet high. This is still so steep that only in one place has it been brought into ridges for cultivation. All these embankments are covered with grass, and in clear-cut shape seem fresh from the hands of the workmen. The four corners of the camp are rounded off, and the old Roman street, running from gate to gate, is lined by some twenty farm houses, forming the present hamlet. The top of the rampart will have been crowned by a strong palisade, of which we are reminded by the wattled palisade fence that runs along the topmost barrier on the south-west. As at Oeberau, no excavations have yet been made here.

Lower down the Danube—which is here, at the present day, some 1,400 feet wide,—at a distance of four miles, is another still untouched Roman camp at Sternkirchen, where coins of Maximinus and fragments of Roman urns have been found, while only twelve miles distant was the Roman station of *Quintana*, the present Künzing, after which came Passau (*Castra Batava*). . Straubing itself, where Captain Wimmer is now conducting excavations, may be proved to have existed as a Roman station in the first century from the small characters of the inscriptions on the bricks hitherto found which belong to that date (the 2nd Rhætian Cohort is mentioned in both the Weissenburg and Ratisbon military diplomas as having seen twenty-five years' service in these parts—A.D. 107, and again in 166), while the coins so far found belong to Otho, Trajan, Nerva, and Faustina wife of M. Aurelius. Thus Serviodurum appears to be an older station than Ratisbon (the Roman *Regino*, where the first historical monument is the inscription of A.D. 179, in which M. Aurelius and his son Commodus order the place to be fortified), a theory which is confirmed by the fact of the great Roman road running direct from Serviodurum to Abusina without passing through Ratisbon.

Yours faithfully,

JOSEPH HIRST.