

XI.—THE WALL AND VALLUM OF HADRIAN; by R. S. FERGUSON, F.S.A., Chancellor of Carlisle, in a letter to Dr. Bruce, V.P.

[Read on the 28th March, 1888.]

CARLISLE, FEB. 25TH, 1888.

MY DEAR DR. BRUCE,

In December last I addressed a letter to you upon 'The Wall and Vallum of Hadrian,' in which I advanced certain views as to the respective uses of the Wall and the Vallum. These views so far received the approval of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne as to have the honour of a place in the *Archæologia Aeliana*.\* I concluded by saying, 'I am glad that the idea I have put forth makes Wall and Vallum the work of one mind carried on simultaneously'. Since writing these words my attention has been called to a meeting of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, at which Professor Hughes, F.S.A., advanced the following propositions:—

- (1) That the distribution of the Roman Camps suggests that there was a system of defensive works held by the British approximately along the line of the 'Vallum'.
- (2) That the 'Vallum' must have been a source of danger, not of strength, to the Roman 'Wall'.
- (3) That in character the 'Vallum' resembles British rather than Roman work.
- (4) That the position and arrangement of the lines of the 'Vallum' are inconsistent with the hypothesis that it was constructed at the same time as the Roman 'Wall'.
- (5) That the 'Vallum' should be regarded as the *Picts' Wall* afterwards enclosed within the lines of the *Roman Wall*.

\* Page 85.

And my attention has been also drawn to an account of 'Our Trip along the Roman Wall',\* in which similar views are put into the mouth of 'Geologist', whom we may take to be identical with Professor Hughes.

Professor Hughes states of the Vallum, which he considers pre-Roman, that 'it was, he thought, a boundary and line of defence of a northern tribe against their southern enemy—perhaps a fence against cattle lifting as well; in which case it is not clear whether it was thrown up against the northern or southern tribes'. I think if the Professor will look into the matter he will find the line of tribal division to have run north and south, and not east and west; but I am not now going into that question.

Let us see how the Professor's theories work out along the Wall and Vallum to the west of Carlisle, for of course, if the Vallum is pre-Roman to the east of Carlisle, it must also be pre-Roman to the west of it. After the Wall crosses the river Eden at Carlisle, the north ditch disappears, or rather the Eden takes its place, the Wall runs as far as Beaumont (a distance of four miles) on the top of the high cliffs which then formed (and now in part form) the southern bank of the river Eden; the Vallum pursues its course at no great distance south of the Wall, but on lower ground, so that from it the river, though close at hand, cannot readily be seen.

Let us carry our minds back to pre-Roman days, obliterate the Wall, and leave the Vallum standing alone, as the Professor suggests it did. Is it 'a defence against cattle lifting'? Surely no pre-Roman Briton would, to prevent cattle lifting, pile up four miles of heavy earthworks, parallel to and within a few yards of a deep and rapid river, fordable only within those four miles at some three well-known and easily defended waths! The notion is absurd. Is it a boundary and line of defence of a northern tribe against their southern enemy? Surely no! A northern tribe would have adhered to the line of cliffs on the northern bank of the Eden. Had they wished to have included

\* *The Cambridge Review*, Feb. 15, 22, etc. See also an account of the same trip by the Bishop of Carlisle in *Murray's Magazine*, Vol. II., p. 822. From the *Cambridge Review* it appears that the trippers discussed the question of the respective dates of the Wall and Vallum after one day's experience thereof. Some of the party had visited the Wall and Vallum on previous occasions; but none of them had ever seen more than the show bits; none of them, for instance, had seen and studied the Wall between Castlesteads and the Solway.

territory to the south of the Eden, they would not have taken a mere strip a few yards wide, but would have gone a mile or two more to the south, to the defensible line on the high ground through Kirkbampton. It is equally unlikely to be the boundary and line of defence of a southern tribe against a northern enemy; a southern tribe would never have drawn their boundary line a few yards to the south of the river Eden, and in such a position that their sentries could not see the river.

Between Carlisle and Beaumont the Vallum, by itself, would be a piece of folly of which even a pre-Roman Briton could not be guilty; but, on the hypothesis advanced by me in my last letter,\* the Vallum, taken with the Wall, and as a part of one and the same great engineering work as the Wall, fulfils, not only between Beaumont and Carlisle, but everywhere between the Solway and the Tyne, a most important function. The Professor's theories, based on what he has seen between Tyne and Lanercost, are killed by what he has not seen between Carlisle and Beaumont.

Let us now deal with the Professor another way; let us examine the arguments he draws from that portion of the Wall he has seen. We need hardly dwell on his argument that in places the Wall and Vallum are so close that there is no room 'to allow cattle to graze, to deploy troops, and hardly to run a road between them'. The road exists; troops usually deploy parallel to their front, and not perpendicular to it as the Professor seems to think, and the whole brigade of H.M. Guards could be deployed anywhere along the Great Barrier between the Wall and the Vallum; the grazing of cattle is hardly worth consideration. His main argument is that the Vallum would be a source of danger rather than of strength to the Wall, and that where it was far from the Wall it would weaken the defence of the Wall, by drawing men from it to guard the Vallum. The very contrary would be the case. Suppose the Vallum obliterated, then the guards and sentries on the Wall, whose 'front' was towards Scotland, would have their rear exposed to the attack of any *guerillas*, *banditti*, and *dacoits* that might be lurking in the 'scrub' to the rear. They would require to be covered by sentries, guards, and patrols that would absorb more men than the Wall itself, for they would not have the

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assistance and help of ramparts and guard houses. Again, in the absence of the Vallum the communications between the camps would, by night and in foggy weather, require to be kept open by strong patrols. It is matter of certainty that the Vallum added enormously to the military strength of the Great Barrier, and effected an immense economy both in the number of men actually required to guard the Barrier and in the number of those required to do night duty. Further, in the event of an attack on the Wall, a commanding officer must have felt his responsibilities much lightened by the knowledge that his rear was covered against attack.

The Professor makes a great point that one of the lines of the Vallum actually runs (as he says) into the Wall at Wall Bowers. He is here in error; the ditch running into the Wall at that place is not one of the lines of the Vallum, but an extra ditch, found only here, and running on the north side of the Vallum, and parallel thereto\*.

The Professor's remaining argument, that the long earthworks of the Vallum resemble British earthworks, is confuted by his own statement, that they also resemble those of the *Pfahlgraben*.

I remain, Yours truly,

RICHARD S. FERGUSON.

\* There are several theories about the extra ditch; I refrain from adding another until I have again visited the place. But see MacLauchlan's *Memoir*, p. 57.



ROMAN PURSE OF BRONZE.