

XXXIII.—OBITUARY NOTICE OF THE REV. J. C. BRUCE,
LL.D., D.C.L., F.S.A., F.S.A. Scot., etc., a Vice-President of
the Society.

By THOMAS HODGKIN, D.C.L., F.S.A.

[Read on the 27th April, 1892.]

THE death of our venerable vice-president, Dr. Bruce, though not altogether unexpected, is the heaviest loss that could have befallen the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. The Nestor of British archaeology, known by his admirable treatise on the Roman Wall, wherever men take an interest in studying the records of the past. He was also in a pre-eminent degree the guide and counsellor of this society. He had been a member of it for nearly fifty years.¹ He contributed many papers of the highest value to its transactions. He acted for many years as one of its secretaries; and in his later days, as a vice-president, he was diligent in his attendance at its meetings, and presided with dignity, but with unflinching courtesy and geniality over its debates.

It is proper that a body such as ours, whose chief function is to transmit to future times the memorial of the generations that have passed or are passing away, should place upon record some of the main facts in the career of our deceased vice-president, however impossible it may be to do justice to a life of such long and varied usefulness within the limits of a paper such as the present.

John Collingwood Bruce was born at Albion place, Newcastle upon Tyne, in the year 1805. He was the eldest son of John Bruce, a very successful schoolmaster in our town, who, a year after the birth of his son, removed his establishment to Percy street. 'The Percy Street Academy' was for the first half of this century the leading school in Newcastle; many of whose best-known citizens received their education within its walls. The educational ideas of the elder John Bruce and his brother Edward (his partner in the academy)

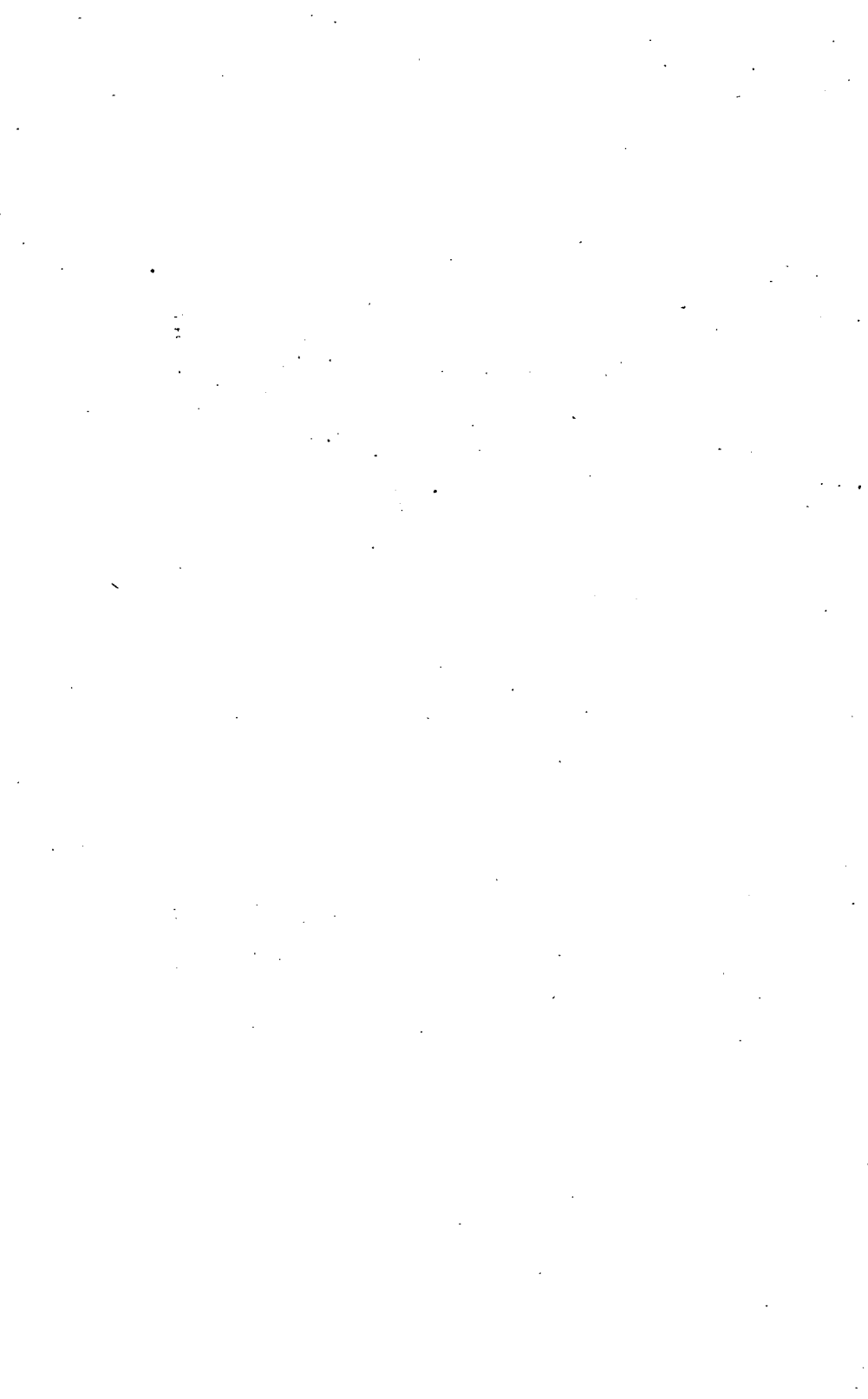
¹ Elected June 2nd, 1846. The Rev. E. H. Adamson—the father of the society—elected April 4th, 1843.



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*Yours faithfully
J. Collingwood Bruce*



seem to have been essentially modern, and their object was to add a knowledge of general history, geography, and natural science to the purely classical education which was then given at the ordinary grammar schools.

John Collingwood Bruce, at the age of fourteen, was sent away from his father's academy to Mill Hill, a well-known Nonconformist school in the south of England. Thence, in 1821, he passed on to the University of Glasgow, where he went through the full career of a divinity student, and even added to it some study of medical science, intending to qualify himself for the career of what is now termed 'a medical missionary.' Owing, however, to some failure in his health, neither this career nor that of a Presbyterian minister at home, which had been originally contemplated, was finally entered upon by him. He was throughout his life a highly-esteemed preacher in the Presbyterian church, but he never sought for, and therefore never obtained, that 'call' from a congregation which, under the Presbyterian system, is an indispensable preliminary to full ordination.

In the year 1831, finally renouncing the clerical vocation, he joined his father in the management of the Percy Street academy, of which, on the death of the elder John Bruce in 1834, he became sole proprietor. Under his energetic and successful management, the number of pupils increased from 140 to 230, of whom 35 were boarders in the master's house. He continued at the head of the school till 1863, when he retired in favour of his junior partner, the Rev. Gilbert Robertson.

To complete the history of his private life, it should be added that in 1833 he married Miss Charlotte Gainsford, who survives him, and by whom he had two sons and two daughters. The younger daughter Williamina married Mr. John Philipson (one of our vice-presidents), and died some years ago, leaving issue; the elder died in infancy. His sons, Mr. Gainsford Bruce, Q.C. and M.P., temporal chancellor of Durham and recorder of Bradford, and Mr. John Bruce, mining engineer, Port Mulgrave, both survive their father.

Of our deceased vice-president's manifold activity in civil and religious life this is not the place to speak. It is enough to mention that he was an industrious member of the committee of the Literary and Philosophical Society; the chief founder, and to the last an earnest

supporter, of the Young Men's Christian Association; and, above all, for a great number of years, chairman of the house committee of the Royal Infirmary in our city. His work in connection with the last named institution was emphatically a labour of love. He organized a voluntary choir, which, on a certain day in the week used to visit the wards, singing hymns and distributing flowers. Whatever other engagements he might make, his archaeological and literary friends soon found that it was useless to propose any committee or any excursion which would clash with this, almost the dearest and most sacred of his weekly duties.

We come to his labours in the field of archaeology, and we note with interest that it was through his enthusiasm as an educationalist that he caught the enthusiasm of the antiquary. His desire to give his lads a vivid insight into early English history led him to take up the subject of Saxon architecture. To bring home to their imaginations the scenes of the Norman conquest, he studied, described, and copied the Bayeux tapestry. The preface to the book gives us Dr. Bruce's reason for publishing it. He calls his work an *elucidation*, and says, 'When the Society of Antiquaries [of London] published the beautiful copy of the Bayeux Tapestry, made at their request by Mr. Charles Stothard, they testified the importance which they attached to the document. As yet they have published no explanation of it. The world still expects it at their hands. To supply, meanwhile, some little assistance to the students of history, this work is published. It was suggested by a holiday ramble in Normandy amidst the scenes rendered famous by the career of William the Conqueror.' When he had passed on from giving lessons to his boys to giving lectures to his fellow-townsmen, he learned—in order that he might explain—the principles of the castellated architecture of the middle ages, and thus at length he was led back from feudal castles to Roman 'chesters,' from the donjon keep of Henry Plantagenet to that great monument, the study of which was to be the crowning glory and happiness of his life, 'The Mural Barrier of the Lower Isthmus.'

He told us himself, four years ago, on the occasion of the presentation of his portrait, how the outbreak of revolution on the Continent prevented him from paying a long contemplated visit to Rome, and

how he solaced himself by surveying the work of the Roman legionary within a day's journey from his home. Admirable exchange for us! A mere tourist's visit to Rome, however delightful to himself, could hardly have yielded any lasting fruit to posterity, while the visit to *Cilurnum* and *Borcovicus*, repeated as it was many times a year over a space of more than forty years, was the means of procuring for us the admirable treatise on the Roman Wall, the *Wallet-Book*, and the *Lapidarium*. That year of revolutions, 1848, was one which those who lived through it will always remember, a year of wild hopes, of fast-following excitements, of bitter disappointments, and terrible despairs; but, as far as we are concerned, if it brought Mr. Bruce face to face with his life-work, *The Roman Wall*, we have no need to think of it with regret.

In the year 1850 he published the first edition of his book, which at once took rank as the most complete, and at the same time most popular, description of the Wall between the Tyne and the Solway that had yet appeared. Many learned societies, both in England and on the Continent, showed their appreciation of the book by sending diplomas of honorary membership to its author; and in 1853 the University of Glasgow conferred upon him the honorary degree of LL.D. About thirty years later he received the corresponding degree of D.C.L. from the University of Durham.

In his works relating to the Roman Wall Dr. Bruce (we may now speak of him by that familiar title) was mainly a popularizer. He brought to his task the capacity for much patient labour, and he acquired that true insight which patient and loving labour alone could give; but I do not think he would claim to have made great discoveries. In fact, the time for great discoveries in connection with the Roman Wall was probably ended when John Horsley, that worthy forerunner and in many respects prototype of Bruce, settled the names of the Roman stations eastwards from *Amboglanna*. In his theories as to the builder of the Wall and the manner of its construction, Dr. Bruce followed implicitly the guidance of the great historian of Northumberland, Hodgson; but his advocacy of Hodgson's great thesis, 'muris and vallum are the work of one builder, and that builder Hadrian,' lasted through so many years, and was supported by so many facts which Dr. Bruce had himself observed, that the theory

may almost be said to have become his own by virtue of his championship.

In some of the earlier volumes of our transactions will be found the records of the controversy which Dr. Bruce waged on behalf of the Hadrianic theory with the supporters of the claims of Severus, especially with the late Mr. Bell of Irthington. From catapult and balista the champions discharged their missiles at one another with considerable force, and perhaps with some appearance of fury, but 'no bones were broken,' and it is believed that the disputants were really excellent friends and remained so ever after, though like doughty antiquaries each retained his own opinion unaltered to the end.

In saying that Dr. Bruce's work in reference to the Roman Wall was that of a popularizer, I consider that we are in no way detracting from his merits, but rather enhancing them. Throughout, as I have already said, his stimulus to work was educational. He desired to increase his own knowledge that he might more freely impart it to others. He was not a miser, hoarding up his intellectual stores for his own selfish gratification, but a diligent acquirer and a generous distributor of antiquarian lore, and he had his reward in the visibly increased interest in his own favourite studies which, chiefly owing to his exertions, has prevailed in the north of England during the last quarter of a century.

In this connection we ought to remember his happy thought of organizing a 'pilgrimage' to the Roman Wall, and the zeal and success with which he twice (in 1851 and 1886) carried his project into execution. It was not my good fortune to be present on either of these occasions, but I well remember the genial enthusiasm which he exhibited when leading a party of British Association tourists over the camps at Chesterholm, Housesteads, and Chesters, in the year 1863. In those days of his vigour he was an ideal leader of such a party, seizing the salient points in each object that had to be explained, describing them with a force and a vivacity which imprinted them on the beholder's memory, and often adding little touches of humour, which made the youngest of his hearers feel that there was nothing necessarily dry in the study of archaeology. His powerful and resonant voice reached at that time to the outermost circle of his audience, and only one complaint, as I well remember, was made by his admiring

followers, that he bounded so lightly over fosse and wall, and moved so nimbly up our Northumbrian hills that sometimes they—

‘Like panting Time toiled after him in vain.’

Yet he was then fifty-eight years of age, so robust and vigorous that it is difficult to think of him as ever having suffered from feeble health. To those who met him on such occasions he always seemed to be a man of iron constitution.

Dr. Bruce’s work at the *Lapidarium Septentrionale*, that valuable treasure-house of the Roman inscriptions in the north of England, was very arduous, and I believe that, coming as it did at a later period of his life, it exhausted him more than his composition of *The Roman Wall*. This work was aided by the fourth duke of Northumberland, and that on the incised stones (or cup markings) of Northumberland, and some other counties of England and Scotland, was entirely produced at his expence. Any notice of Dr. Bruce’s life would be incomplete, which failed to commemorate the strong ties of friendship which bound him to two (nearly successive) lords of Alnwick, Algernon, the fourth duke, and the present holder of the title. A friendship of a similar kind existed between him and the late venerable John Clayton, in all of whose works of excavation at Chesters and other Roman camps on his estate, Dr. Bruce was of course keenly interested.

Of later years the subject of the old border minstrelsy of Northumberland attracted much of his attention. He re-awakened the interest of the public in the almost forgotten ‘small pipes,’ and his later efforts as a public lecturer were almost entirely confined to a description of this ancient musical instrument, and comments on the songs which were generally sung to its accompaniment.

In these varied occupations, archaeological, religious, and philanthropic, his old age passed happily away. Though he had long passed the age of four score there was no diminution of his interest in his old pursuits, and (except an occasional lapse of memory) no lessening of his mental powers. His last illness was short, and he was sustained throughout by the steady hope of the Christian. He died on the 5th of April, 1892, and was buried on the 8th of the same month at the Old Cemetery, Jesmond. The ceremony, in accordance with his own strongly expressed desire, was of a plain and unostentatious character,

but the attendance of his many friends and fellow-workers in the various undertakings in which he was interested gave it almost the character of a public funeral.

The public life of Newcastle has lost one of its best known and most familiar figures ; the city one of its most respected and beloved citizens ; but we, as members of the Society of Antiquaries, naturally feel our own loss the most. We shall no more see him entering with his plaid over his shoulder to take his place in the president's chair in this room. Our debates will never again be helped by his wise and courteous guidance, nor enlivened by his ready humour, nor enriched by the treasures which his memory had accumulated in half a century of archaeological study. We shall honour his memory most fittingly by endeavouring to keep alive the enthusiasm which he imparted to us for his own pursuits ; but we shall long feel that there is a painful gap left in our ranks by the removal of our honoured chief, John Collingwood Bruce.

XXXIV.—ROMAN VESSELS OF BRONZE.

IN addition to the bronze vessels of Roman date found in Northumberland and Durham, and described at pp. 162-166, there is in the South Shields Free Library museum the bottom, with the usual concentric circles on it, and part of the sides, of a saucepan, which was found on the Herd sand, at the mouth of the Tyne, near that town.

Three bronze cauldron-like vessels were found near Whitfield in Allendale about the year 1851. With them was found a well preserved colander or strainer four inches and three quarters diameter, with a horizontal handle projecting from one side six inches and a half long. All these vessels are now in the museum of the Society in the Black Gate. In the first edition of *The Roman Wall*, the smallest of the bronze cauldrons and the colander are shewn in Plate XVII., Figs. 1 and 3, and a note on them at p. 444.