

XXVI.—NOTE ON A FRAGMENT OF A ROMAN *LORICA*,
OR CUIRASS OF BRONZE SCALE-ARMOUR, FROM THE
WALL TURRET ON WALLTOWN CRAG.

BY THE REV. G. ROME HALL, F.S.A.

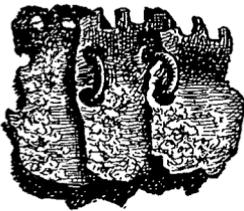
[Read on the 31st January, 1894.]

LAST summer, in the middle of July, when staying at Gilsland, I had the opportunity of again revisiting the important but now nearly obliterated Roman station of MAGNA (Caervoran), and the line of the Roman Wall along the picturesque 'Nine Nicks of Thirlwall.'

In the *Handbook of the Roman Wall* (3rd edition, page 185), it will be remembered that our late friend and venerated vice-president, Dr. Bruce, speaks of the interesting discovery, in the autumn of 1883, of a wall turret laid bare on the westernmost height of these great basaltic crags, not far from Caervoran. No trace of it, however, is now to be found, as it was soon after entirely demolished by the whinstone quarrymen. Dr. Bruce denounces in terms not too strong, we shall probably all admit, an act of vandalism which might easily have been avoided. 'As the quarry is an extensive one it was understood,' he writes, 'that the turret would be spared, and that other portions of the cliff would be submitted to the operations of the miner. Not so, however; this priceless memorial of our country's early history has been utterly destroyed. The discovery of this turret led to the enquiry as to whether there might not be some others to the east of it. Mr. Clayton sent his chief explorer Tailford to examine the cliff. He found two others. Seeing, however, the fate of this one, it will be well to let them enjoy the protection of the soil which now covers them, until England becomes an educated nation.'

At the monthly meeting of our Society in October, 1892, we had the pleasure of listening to our colleague Mr. J. P. Gibson's graphic and interesting lecture on his then recent excavation, under the auspices of our Society, of one of the turrets in question, and of the *murus* and *vallum* in its neighbourhood, excellently illustrated as it

was by a series of photographs. As it is presumed that the two wall turrets, one on the Walltown crag and the other on Mucklebank, the latter being the one excavated, were those which Tailford had found a few years earlier, we may hopefully conclude that the archaeological education of this northern portion at least of our country had considerably advanced in the interval. In passing along the rugged heights, crowned by well-preserved portions of the Roman Wall, as we were glad to see it on that lovely summer morning, we came to the turret a little distance westwards from the Walltown farmhouse. It was here, not on Mucklebank where the Roman centurial stone was discovered in the turret set like an eagle's eyrie on the almost inaccessible crag above 'King Arthur's Well,' that the rarely-found fragment of Roman scale-armour, which I now exhibit, was discovered. In the *débris* thrown out of the Wall turret by the quarrymen, in some *impromptu* diggings, on to the southern slope, it was only natural for a passing antiquary to search a little, especially as the winter frosts and rains had disintegrated the mass since the partial excavation had been effected in the previous summer. Of course, it was certain that hardly anything large or important could have escaped the vigilance of the self-appointed excavators;¹ but by the help of the only implement at hand, a walking-stick, a few small fragments of Roman pottery, 'smother-kiln' and other kinds (but no trace of Samian), soon appeared to view. Among these indications of ancient habitation and the use of *amphorae*, *mortaria*, and different fictile vessels, of which perhaps more and larger traces since taken away would be found in the year preceding, I noticed a tinge of green rust denoting the oxide of bronze. After a little care-



(Full size.)

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ful manipulation three scales or plates of a Roman *lorica* or cuirass came to light.

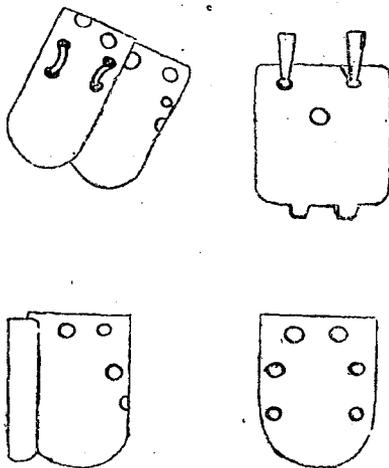
As you will perceive, they are fastened together securely by fine but strong bronze wire; and the holes for attachment to the leathern or linen tunic or lining, two on each scale, the first still perfect, those on the second and third

¹ I have not heard what they found here, if they indeed found anything which they would consider valuable. A careful excavation would probably be well rewarded.

broken at the top, are plainly visible. The thin plates of bronze or bell-metal slightly overlap as usual, and are of the normal size, seven-eighths of an inch in length and half an inch in width, each being rounded at the bottom.

It was only, I may here add, the colour of the bronze rust, the scales being small, which attracted my attention; in the same way as a tiny flake of the bronze-tipped sheath of a late Celtic (or perhaps early Saxon) long sword found in excavating an Ancient British circular dwelling in the Carry House camp, near Birtley, North Tynedale, many years since, led me to the discovery of the iron blade itself, lying broken in the hollow between the flagstones of the hut circle.²

A fortnight after the discovery of this fragment of Roman scale-mail I was able, being in London, to compare it with the two similar specimens in the British Museum. In the collection from the camp, called by Mr. Roach Smith 'a model of Roman castrametation,'³ at Hodhill, near Blandford, Dorsetshire, four scales (detached) appear on a card (No. 242), on which two, on the left hand, which for ornament are tinned at the top, are nearly facsimiles of these from the Walltown Crag turret as to shape, size, and perforations. Near it, on the right, is a single plate, of squarer form, of similar length, but nearly double the width. Below these are two others, narrower than the last described, but with two holes at each side as well as at the top.



(All full size.)

The only other specimen in the British museum is a larger fragment from a camp at Ham Hill, or Hamdon Hill,⁴ Somersetshire.

² *Archaeologia*, xlv. p. 358. 'An Account of Ancient Circular Dwellings, near Birtley, Northumberland,' by the writer.

³ *Proc. Somerset Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc.* vol. xxxii. p. 46.

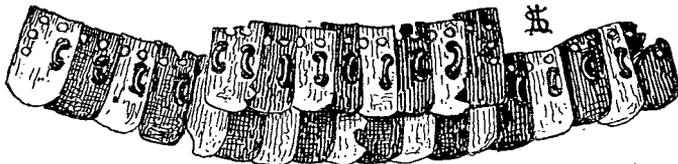
⁴ In the *Index* to the *Archaeologia*, vols. 1-50, p. 324, we find 'Hamden Hill, Somersetshire, antiquities found at, xxi. 39.'—Described by Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

Five of these scales only are there which are tinned alternately, and are very nearly of the same size as those exhibited here to-day. The original find consisted of two separate rows of bronze plates, the upper row not being as long as the attached lower row, the scales being eight and eighteen respectively in number, of which a photograph is shown in the same case. They were presented by Mr. Hugh Norris of South Petherton, local sec. Soc. Antiq. Lond., in 1886, to whose courtesy I am much indebted, and were described by him in the *Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society's Proceedings*,⁵ vol. xxxii. p. 82, the remaining portion being in the collection of Mr. W. W. Walter of Stoke-under-Ham.

Thus it appears that only two places, in the south and west of England, have furnished to our national museum examples of this kind; the proximity of the Devonshire and Cornish mines enabling the Romano-British or Roman armourer to add what must have been thought an additional ornament, not found in northern Britain as yet, so far as I am aware, to the cuirass, which would shine in its pristine brilliance with the silvery lustre of tin alternately with that of burnished bronze.

My attention has been further called by Mr. Blair to the few bronze links in the Black Gate museum from the Roman station at

⁵ Mr. Hugh Norris describes the Ham Hill camp as 'one of the largest, if not the very largest, in the country, its circumference being quite three miles, and its enclosed area comprising an extent of more than two hundred acres. He speaks of the 'numerous relics of the Pre-historic, old Celtic, and Romano-British inhabitants found here, bronze implements, and ancient British coins, etc.' and adds:—'Whilst of a later [Roman] date have been exhumed some very perfect and beautifully preserved fibulae, and an elegant little lamp of great rarity; also *the still rarer remains of a lorica or shirt of scale-armour*, and portions of a British chariot, all of bronze.'



(One half linear.)

'Near Montacute, in Somerset, on 'Ham Hill,' where are the remains of a Roman camp within the larger circuit of a still older British, an urn was found in 1882 filled with [Roman] coins, and another filled with medals. The whole find is above a hundred weight.' *Roman Britain*, chap. xix. p. 184, by the late Rev. Prebendary Scarth, M.A.

South Shields, portions of a Roman cuirass of chain-mail, which I have examined with much interest, and, in another case in the same museum, to a great mass of iron chain-mail from the same place. These, however, are examples from the region of the mural barrier of the *lorica catena*, of links not scales.

Both were in contemporary use as necessary parts of the ordinary defensive armour of the Roman *hastati*, whose offensive weapons were strong, double-edged, sharp-pointed swords and heavy javelins, these being the heavy-armed infantry of the legion. 'The greater number of the *Hastati*,' it is said, 'wore in front of their breast a brass plate nine inches square, which was called the heart-preserver (*καρδιοψύλαξ*); but those whose fortune exceed 100,000 asses (probably something over £200) had complete cuirasses of chain-armour (*lorica*).'

When we consider the thinness of the bronze plates of the Roman cuirass, such as I have shown, it might be deemed only an indifferent defence; but neither this scale-armour nor the chain-mail, in the opinion of high authorities, could be easily pierced by a sword-thrust. We may hope that the owner of this particular *lorica* (perchance the brave soldier of Hadrian or Severus), who kept watch and ward on the turret set on the bleak summit of the Walltown crag, lost this fragment before us by a simple accident or from the effects of use merely, and that it does not denote the loss of his life, 'though in armour clad,' in one of the sudden and over-powering onslaughts of the fierce Britons, Picts, or Scots, from regions beyond the Wall. (Compare *Roman Wall*, 3rd edit. pp. 200, 201.)

It would not be desirable, and I have no intention, to trace the early history of the *lorica*; this, as is well known, can be adequately done by referring, among other authors of repute on this subject, to Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick's *Critical Inquiry into Ancient Armour*, and to its excellent accompanying plates.⁶ The cuirass went through various evolutionary stages, being first of quilted linen, useful for hunters and Homer's light-armed warriors. Then the stronger material of horn came into use, which was cut into small pieces, planed, and polished and fastened, like feathers, upon linen shirts. These preceded the metallic scale-armour, the scales being sometimes

⁶ See *Archaeologia*, xix. pp. 120, 336, etc.

of iron or gold, as among the Persians (Herodotus, vii. 61 and ix. 22); but they were more commonly of bronze, like those before us (Virg. *Aen.* xi. 487, 'Rutulūm thoracā indūtus aenis'), and occasionally consisted of thin plates of iron and hard leather (Tacitus, *Hist.* i. 79). 'The basis of the cuirass was sometimes a skin or a piece of strong linen to which the metallic scales, or 'feathers,' as they are also called, were sewed.' (Virg. *Aen.* xi. 770, 771, 'clothed in a skin, clasped with gold, plumed with brazen scales.')

It may be worthy of remark, in conclusion, that in that very full description of the panoply of an ancient warrior of the eleventh century before Christ, in 1 *Samuel* xvii. 5, is the earliest mention of the *lorica*. The Philistine giant, Goliath of Gath, is described as wearing the Hebrew *shir-yōn*⁷ (rendered in the Septuagint by the Greek equivalent *θώραξ*, and in the Vulgate by the Latin *lorica*) a 'coat of mail,' literally a 'breastplate of scales,' being armour for defence, covering the body from the neck to the girdle or to the thighs in its fullest form. It is also an interesting fact that the ancient Roman *lorica* and the modern cuirass derive their name from the same material of which both were primarily made; the former of the twisted *lora* or cut thongs of leather, then of leather itself, forming a leathern corselet; the latter, cuirass, expressing its origin directly from the self-same source in the French *cuir*, leather, as in every other Romance language, all arising indirectly from the Latin word *corium*, meaning the skin or hide of animals.

It has been well remarked that the enumeration of the Roman soldier's panoply by St. Paul in *Ephesians* vi. (excepting only the spear) exactly coincides with the figures of the armed soldiers sculptured upon the arch of Septimius Severus at Rome. First, there is the body-armour, namely, the girdle, the breastplate or *lorica*, the Apostle gives its Christian significance as the 'breastplate of righteousness,'

⁷ This is the same as Sirion, the name given to Mount Hermon, in the north of Palestine, by the Sidonians (*Deut.* iii. 9), which appears to have been taken from its resemblance to a 'breastplate,' just like the Greek *θώραξ*, for the mountain, also called Sipylus in Magnesia; *i.e.* Lydia in Asia Minor (Gesenius's *Hebrew and Eng. Lexicon*, *sub voce*). Compare Smith's *Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. i. p. 111, *Arms*; and *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, 2nd ed. p. 711, *Lorica*, where is given an illustration of an Asiatic cuirass of scale-armour taken from Meyrick's *Critical Inquiry into Ancient Armour* (plate ii.); and a figure of a Roman imperial soldier so armed from Bartoli's *Arcus Triumphales*.

and the shoes; next, the defensive arms, the shield and the helmet; and lastly, the offensive weapon, the sword. This was the accoutrement which St. Paul had constantly before his eyes during his two years' (his first) imprisonment at Rome; when, though bound continually 'with a chain' to the soldier who kept him, a sentry who would often be relieved in his watch upon the prisoner, he was yet permitted to 'dwell in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him' (*Acts* xxviii. 16, 30).

XXVII.—A FORGOTTEN REFERENCE TO ROMAN MILE-CASTLES.

BY CADWALLADER J. BATES.

[Read on the 28th February, 1894.]

IN the very valuable but extremely complicated notes appended by the Rev. John Hodgson to the account of the Roman Wall in his *History of Northumberland*¹ is a passage said to be taken from a Treatise on the Art of War, written to Theodosius and his sons, which at first sight reminds us more of the line of mile-castles and turrets along the crags from Walltown to Sewingshields than does anything else to be found in classical literature.

'Among the advantages to the state,' it says, 'must be reckoned a care for frontiers on every side, whose security is best provided by a number of castles: so that they should be erected at the distance of every mile with a strong wall and stout towers, which fortifications the attention and care of the owners of the adjoining land will erect without charge to the public, keeping watch and ward of country people in them, that the repose of the provinces may remain secure within this circuit as it were of garrisons.'

It ought not perhaps to excite surprise that in the *cause célèbre* regarding the authorship of the Wall, the advocates of Hadrian and the advocates of Severus have not produced this passage in their more recent pleadings; but it is very strange that it should have been overlooked by the late Dean Merivale who so decidedly referred the construction of the Wall to the fourth century.

¹ II. iii. p. 278 n.; 1840.