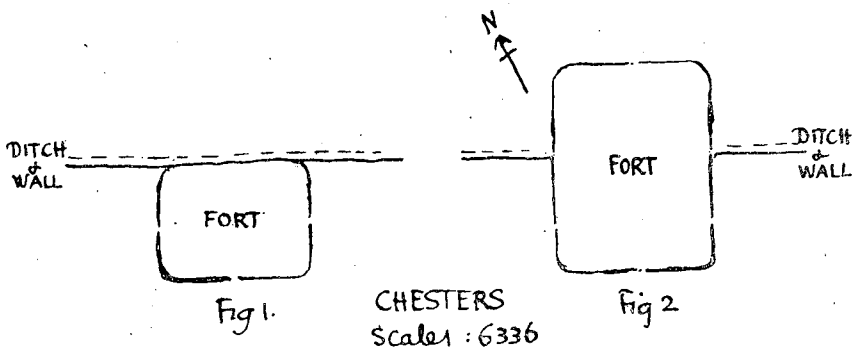


II.—EXCAVATIONS AT CHESTERS IN SEPTEMBER, 1900.

By F. HAVERFIELD, M.A., F.S.A.

[Read on the 31st October, 1900.]

The forts which guard the eastern portion of Hadrian's Wall have one very remarkable characteristic. They all or nearly all stand across the line of the Wall; their areas extend both north and south of it. On the central and western portions of the Wall this feature seems not to recur. Either the forts are detached from the Wall, as at Chesterholm, Carvoran and Castlesteads, or their northern ramparts coincide with the Wall, as at Carrawburgh, Housesteads, Great Chesters and Birdoswald. But Chesters, Halton, Rutchester, Benwell, Wallsend, and perhaps Newcastle, are different from these. Their areas reach out beyond the line of the Wall, and the Wall, instead of coinciding with their northern ramparts, meets some point in their eastern and western sides. The reason for this arrangement has often been discussed and especially in connexion with Chesters, which is by far the best known and the most frequently visited of the six forts. Among other guesses, the conjecture has been occasionally propounded that the northern part of the fort which projects beyond the Wall may be a later addition. According to this idea, the first position of things at Chesters, or any similar fort, would have been that shown in fig. 1; then the north wall of the fort would have



been pulled down, the ditch in front of it filled up, and the area of the fort extended out northwards as it appears in fig. 2, which shews

in outline the fort and the adjacent Wall as they now exist at Chesters.

The idea of such extension is not, in itself, improbable. We know that the Romans did enlarge forts when they thought fit. We know, too, that the vicinity of a fort, to the south of the Wall, was often occupied by buildings, so that an enlargement south of the Wall might in some cases have brought the ramparts inconveniently close to baths or temples, and, therefore an enlargement northwards would be preferable. Moreover, the excavations at Birdoswald, made in 1895-8, revealed one definite case of reconstruction, which, though not precisely parallel to the supposed enlargement of Chesters fort, is at least very striking. At Birdoswald (fig. 3) two distinct lines

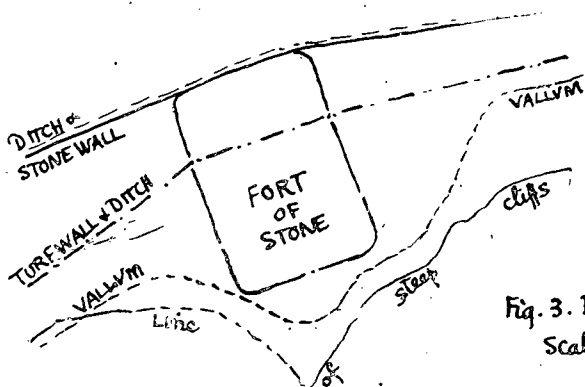


Fig. 3. BIRDOSWAD
Scale 1:6336

of defence were found to have existed, the one the stone wall, and the other, slightly south of it, a wall of turfs, each wall with a ditch in front. The turf wall is the earlier; its line crosses the area of the fort now visible at Birdoswald, and the spade has shown that the north guard-chamber of the north-east gate is planted on its ditch. When it was in use, the fort in its present shape was obviously not yet built, though possibly there existed, instead, a smaller fort with earthen ramparts. Subsequently the Romans destroyed this earlier line at Birdoswald and for a couple of miles near it. They substituted a new stone wall a little to the north of it and they erected a stone fort, the northern rampart of which coincides with the Wall. Whether the Vallum is contemporaneous with the first or the second of these two lines, is not

quite clear and fortunately does not now concern us. The important point is that two lines can be traced at Birdoswald. The one is an earlier wall of turf, and perhaps a fort, now recognizable only by excavation. The other is a wall and fort of stone which superseded the earlier work and can be seen above the surface.¹

With these facts in mind, I seized an opportunity which happened to offer itself last September, and carried out a small excavation at Chesters, in order to see if the spade would yield there, as at Birdoswald, any definite evidence about an earlier and a later line. Mrs. Clayton most kindly granted permission for the work and showed the excavators much kindness during it. We are also indebted to her tenant, Mr. Hall, for his consent. Mr. R. C. Bosanquet and Mr. T. Hesketh Hodgson, both of whom are familiar with the particular kind of excavation proposed, came to aid in the supervision and the verification of results, and Mr. Hodgson surveyed the ground. Both Mr. Bosanquet and Mr. Hodgson also revised these notes for printing.

The idea of the excavation was as follows :—If there is any sort of truth in the conjecture above mentioned, that the existing fort at Chesters (fig. 2) is a later construction, superseding an originally straight line, that original line ought to be discoverable by the spade. Its wall or rampart would, of course, have been totally destroyed, but the ditch in front, although filled up, ought to be recognizable with absolute certainty. For, be it observed, there is no more effective way of leaving your mark upon this earth than the very literal one of digging a hole or ditch. The ditch may be filled up, and the grass grow over it, and all visible traces disappear, and yet it will remain recognizable to the end of time. The 'forced soil' with which it has been filled is 'disturbed' or mixed in substance, and distinct in texture and coherence from the undisturbed sub-soil round it: it contains bits of freestone, for instance, where no freestone could come by nature, and, if human habitations be near, it may contain also bits of pottery and bones, and other traces of mankind. If, moreover, the ditch was open for any length of time,

¹ See the Reports of the Cumberland Excavation Committee in the *Transactions of the Cumb. and Westm. Arch. Society*, xiv. and xv.

vegetation will have sprung up along its bottom, and objects will have fallen in from above, and the excavator finds at the bottom of the forced soil a thin or thick layer of dark matter, which is decayed vegetation, with here and there an alien object in it. The precise features, of course, vary with the circumstances of each case, and their determination sometimes present considerable difficulties, demanding minute supervision and laborious observation of details. But there are always features of some sort wherever there has been a ditch, and we had, therefore, good reason to expect that we could prove whether there was or was not a buried ditch at Chesters. The line of the search was, of course, fixed for us. The points where the Wall meets the east and west sides of the fort have been laid bare in earlier excavations. These points are at the north-eastern and north-western gateways. The Wall itself comes up to the south guard-chamber of each gateway, and its ditch is slightly in advance of that. We had only to join these points, and trench across the line thus given. If we found undisturbed soil underneath, we should conclude that there was no earlier Wall and ditch running continuously straight across. If, on the other hand, we found disturbed soil and the resemblances of a ditch, we should conclude with equal confidence that there had been such an earlier line of defence.

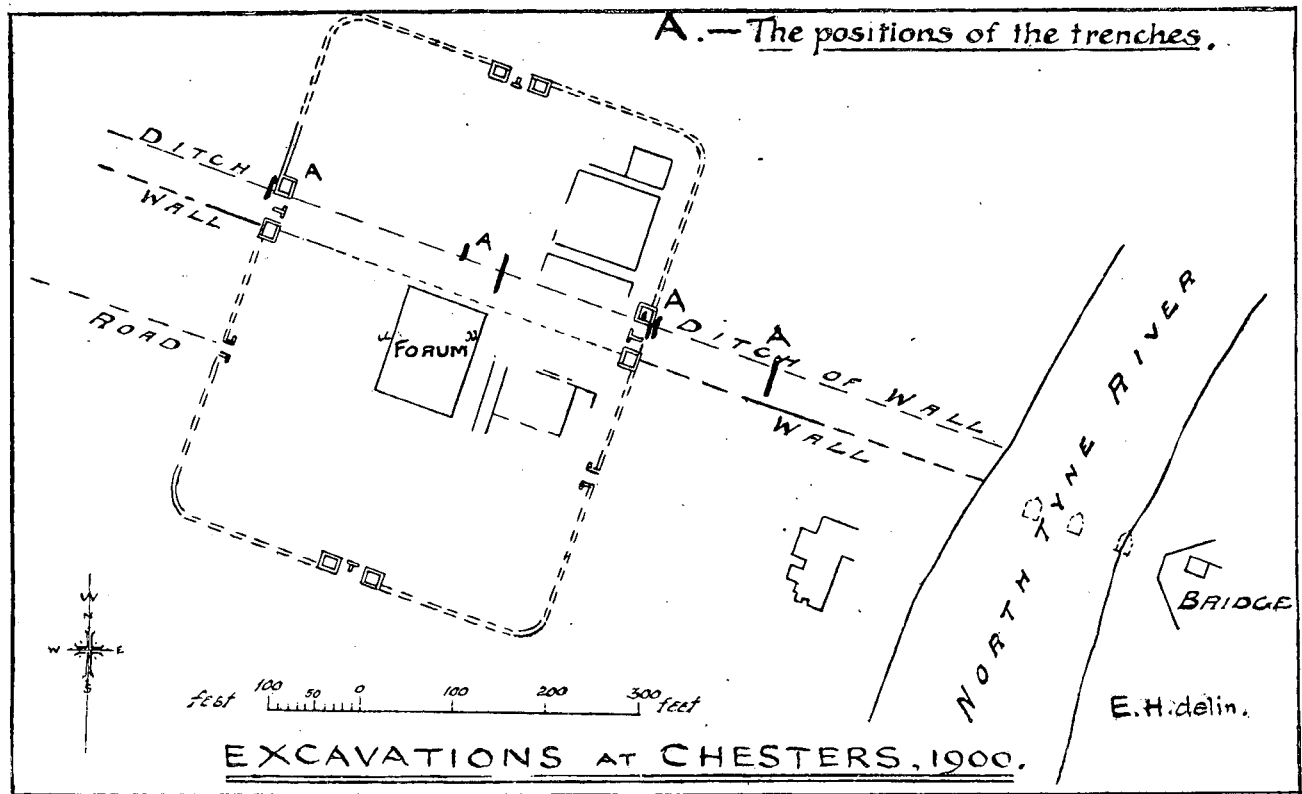
Our results may be briefly summarised at once, before proceeding to details. At both gateways, and at two points close to the 'forum' and the centre of the fort, we found clear evidence of an original depression, in all respects like a ditch, occupying exactly the line of the supposed ditch, dating from the Roman period, but unquestionably older than the existing fort. The width of this ditch, as we may confidently call it, was found to exceed twenty-seven feet from lip to lip, and its depth to exceed six feet, while in shape it resembles the ditches in front of the Birdoswald Turf Wall, of the Great Wall, and of the Vallum of Pius in Scotland. No serious doubt remains, I think, that the original line of defence at Chesters was continuously straight, and that the existing fort, which sits across that straight line, is of later date. That is, we have at Chesters, as at Birdoswald, an earlier and a later line. On the other hand, two points remain quite uncertain. We found no evidence to show whether the Wall of the earlier line was

constructed of earth or turf or stone. Nor did we find evidence to show whether an earlier fort existed at Chesters corresponding to the earlier line. There are *à priori* probabilities in both matters, which are fairly obvious, but we may add that we doubt whether anything but a lucky accident will ever give us direct evidence.

I pass on to the details of the excavation. Trenches were dug at five points indicated on the plan on the next page. I shall describe them from east to west, which is, in the main, the order in which they were dug.

(1) As a preliminary precaution we commenced a little distance outside the fort, at about fifty yards east of the north-east gate. Here we dug a trench to ascertain the exact position of the ditch, which, on any hypothesis, would necessarily be present in front of the wall outside the fort. The berm, that is, the level space between the wall and its ditch, was found to be about twenty-two feet wide. The scarp of the ditch, and the mixed soil filling it, were recognized with clearness, the mixed soil contained debris from the Wall and some bits of Roman pottery. The subsoil here is, as all our trenches proved, gravel, with much water flowing through it, and this, we were assured, is the general subsoil of the large field or park in which the fort stands.

(2) The position of the ditch indicated by the preceding trench would take it, if prolonged, through the north guard chamber of the north-east gateway. Accordingly we dug across the gateway and the face of the guard chamber. A small trench, right in front of the southern exit, showed undisturbed gravel at two feet below the present surface, and a second trench in front of the northern exit showed an appearance of disturbed soil suggesting the edge of the ditch, but inflow of water prevented our examining this and an attempt to sink a hole in the middle of the guard chamber was similarly frustrated. A large trench was dug at thirteen feet east of the guard chamber on the line of the ditch and, beneath much surface debris, revealed disturbed soil, mixed with freestone fragments, bones, and Roman pottery, and below that, eight feet under the present surface, the black matter which indicates vegetable growths. Water hindered us much, but it was plain that our trench went down into the middle of a filled-up ditch. This ditch cannot have been in use when the gate and guard



chamber were constructed. It would have blocked all access to the gate, and, even if it went no further west than our trench, it would have left the guard-chamber wall without its berm.

(3) We next dug a trench forty-one feet long across the line of the supposed ditch in the middle of the fort, just north of the north-east angle of the forum. Here the ground, to a depth of three or three-and-a-half feet, consists of broken stone and debris, and beneath that is the untouched gravel which represents approximately the old Roman level—though the actual grassy surface which the Romans found, would, of course, be some inches, or perhaps a foot, above this gravel subsoil. This undisturbed subsoil was apparent at either end of our trench, but in the middle we found a gap, twenty-seven feet wide from lip to lip, filled with mixed soil (fig. 4). Across the middle of this, resting on

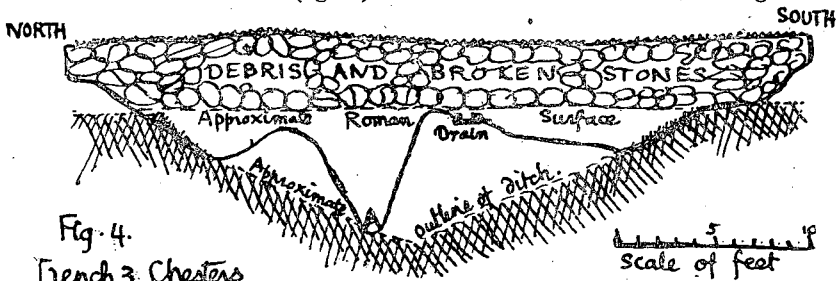


Fig. 4.
Trench 3. Chesters

The continuous black line shows the extent excavated. The part left blank is the ditch. The cross hatching shows the gravel subsoil which has never been disturbed. At A the leather, bones, heat etc. were found

the mixed soil at about the old Roman level, we found a Roman drain or gutter, lying *in situ*: its course is oblique to the streets of the fort and nearly parallel to its diagonal, being from south by east to north by west. On digging down into the mixed soil we were able to clear out the two slopes; the northern singularly clear and having a descent of rather more than 'one and a half upon one' (33°), the southern less well preserved but having apparently the same steepness. The mixed soil filling the gap between these slopes was mainly gravel till a depth of about six and a half feet below the present surface: below was a stratum of grey clay, and below that again, a substantial layer of moss,

peat and decayed vegetation, containing also evidence of man. The vegetation included decayed leaves and bits of alder and of birch, retaining still its silver bark and looking as if it had been cut by a knife: the evidences of man were a leather object which was probably a bag, a bronze nail, and some animal bones, including a deer's antler. It may seem strange at first sight that wood should have kept its bark and leather its shape ever since Roman days, but it is to be remembered that a damp soil, to which the air has no access, preserves such objects with great perfection. Roman objects of leather have often been dug up: in 1897 we found a Roman leather shoe in the buried ditch of the turf wall at Birdoswald and a branch of birch with its silver bark was discovered in the same year by the Scottish antiquaries under the earthen rampart of the Roman fort at Ardoch.² Beneath the peat, at the depth of nine feet from the present surface, we came to the ordinary gravel subsoil. The points thus ascertained gave us with sufficient accuracy the shape of the ditch (fig. 4). It was not a flat-bottomed ditch like that of the Vallum, but one of the kind called V-shaped—though, in fact, the name is misleading for the sides are never really so steep nor the angle so definite as in a V. The ditches of the turf wall, the stone wall, and the Scottish wall of Pius are all of this shape, and the steepness of their sides, so far as it has been measured, agrees with the slopes observed at Chesters, and mentioned above. When originally constructed, our ditch must have been at least twenty-seven feet in width from lip to lip, and probably more, for twenty-seven feet is the distance of the two edges of untouched subsoil, and, in Roman times, this subsoil must have been covered with mould and soil so that the actual lips of the ditch must have been higher and further apart. Similarly, its depth probably exceeded six feet. Our trench reached the bottom at about six feet below the Roman level as indicated by the gravel, but, as we have just said, this level is a little below the probable truth, and allowance must also be made for the fact that, owing to the existence of the drain *in situ*, which we did not wish needlessly to disturb, our trench did not perhaps reach the bottom of the ditch at quite its deepest part.

² *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, xxxii., 435.

The history of the whole is clear enough. The ditch was dug along this line, and while it was open, peaty vegetation grew in its damp bottom, and bits of wood, a leather bag, and other objects tumbled in. Probably it was open for some while—since the layer of peat is substantial. Finally it was filled in, principally with gravel of the spot, a new fort was built over it, and in particular a drain or gutter was taken at this point obliquely across it. One would like to know whence came the gravel with which it was filled. The most natural supposition is that it came from the early rampart behind it, which must have been demolished when it was filled up. In this case, that rampart was constructed in part at least of gravel. But it might also have come from the new ditch which had to be dug round the new northern face of the stone fort.

(4) A small trench, eight feet long, and eight feet deep at its deepest, was dug thirty-eight feet west of the large trench just described, in order to test the continuance of the ditch. The point selected was over the line of the north side of the ditch and the results were quite satisfactory. The north side of the ditch was easily distinguished by the difference between the bank of untouched gravel and the mixed soil lying against it. The mixed soil was principally gravel, and below the gravel, darker matter, as in No. 3, but the steepness of the slope seemed slightly greater. This, of course, may be an accident, due to a little of the original bank having fallen off.

(5) Finally, a hole was sunk immediately against the outer wall of the north guardchamber of the north-west gateway. This, like the corresponding guardchamber of the opposite gateway, mentioned above (No. 2), stands on the line of the supposed ditch. We found the face of the wall of the guardchamber piled up with large 'cobbles' to a depth of forty inches below the present surface. This present surface has been obtained by excavation, and is some inches apparently below the Roman surface. Similar cobbles were found also to underlie the stones of the wall, and the whole arrangement obviously represents the filling of a ditch across which heavy masonry was to be erected. We found almost exactly the same features at the guardchamber of Birdoswald which is built over the filled-up ditch of the turf

wall. A similar piece of work was found in 1897 at Carrawburgh, at the point where the east rampart of that fort crosses some sort of hole or depression.

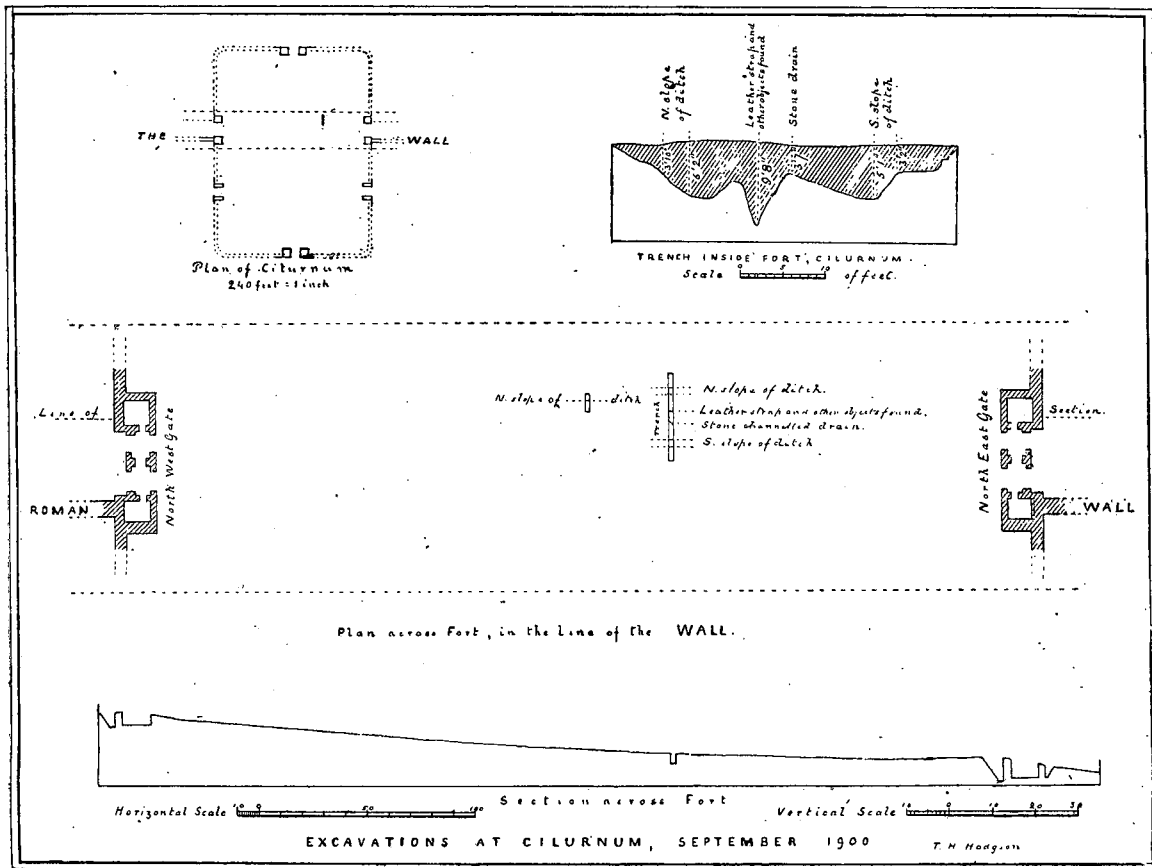
The net results of the work have already been summarized in a preceding paragraph. It remains to indicate a few possibilities or probabilities which it suggests in relation to the history of the Wall as a whole. I may premise that I have no new idea to promulgate or conjecture to sustain. During the course of protracted excavations on the Wall, I have seen too many ideas and conjectures destroyed by the spade to care very much about such things. But, if the problem of the Wall is ever to be solved, it is imperatively necessary that its students should eagerly note the indications provided by each new discovery, and deduce suggestions thence for fresh research. Such suggestions must not be mistaken for articles of faith: still less must they be called theories, which I find archaeologists apt to consider even more sacred than creeds themselves. They are simply clues towards the solution of a great difficulty, which no sensible man will neglect.

In the present case, it is important to note that we now possess definite evidence at Chesters of two periods, an earlier wall of unknown character (either stone or turf or earth), and a later wall of stone connected with the fort of stone. We meet precisely the same two periods at the North Tyne bridge, close by the fort of Chesters. There we find an earlier bridge and a later bridge, and the earlier bridge is earlier than the wall of stone, while the later bridge, if not demonstrably coeval, is at least in complete harmony with that later wall.³ We find two periods again at Birdoswald, an earlier wall of turf, and a later wall of stone with its own fort of stone. We find again a series of forts on the eastern part of the Wall, planted across it in precisely the same position at Chesters, and, perhaps, possessing the same history. These instances cannot be neglected. So long as Birdoswald stood alone, it was impossible to base upon it any sort of conclusions, however tentative. But we have now added to it one, and perhaps several other cases, and the idea that there were two walls, one before the other, becomes an idea of which the researcher may take note, as supported by real facts.

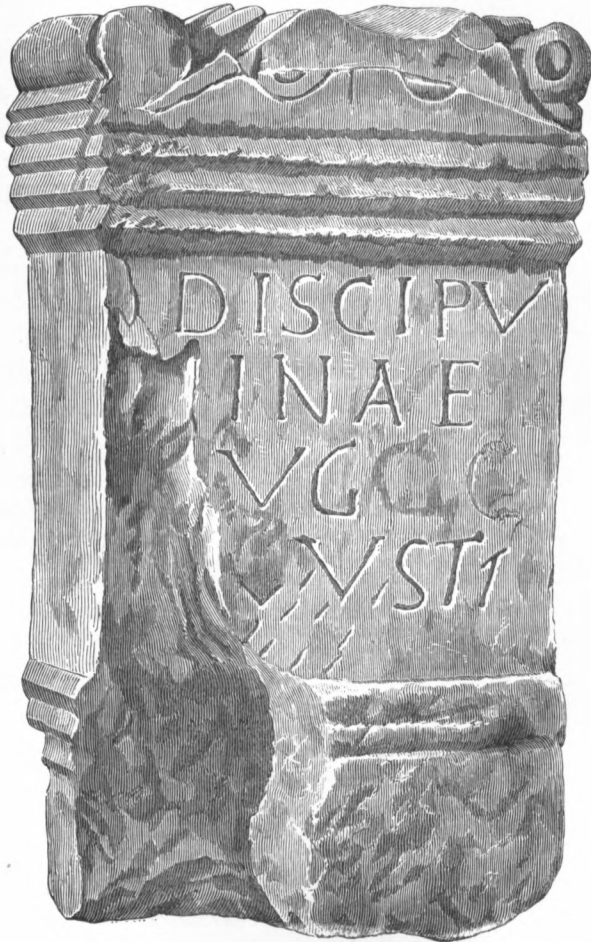
³ See the results of the latest examination of the bridge, described by the late Mr. Sheriton Holmes in this series, xvi., 328:338.

The problem of the Wall has, in short, changed considerably during the last six years' excavations. The old controversy concerned the Wall and the Vallum. Were they of the same date, men asked, or was the Vallum older than the Wall? Was the Vallum the work of Agricola, and the Wall the work of Hadrian; or the Vallum the work of Hadrian, and the Wall the work of Severus? But recent excavations have shown, with some approach to conclusiveness, that the Vallum and the Wall are coeval, as Hodgson and Bruce maintained. The controversy now concerns the Wall. We meet now some reasons to believe there were two walls, and we shall have to ask: Are these reasons conclusive? and if so, who built which wall? Did Agricola build the first and Hadrian the second, or Hadrian the first and Severus the second? I must confess that I find a difficulty myself in ascribing anything to Agricola on our existing evidence. It is likely enough that he held the country across which the Wall runs, and there is no inherent improbability in the idea that he built some of its forts, but direct proof is still wanting to connect him with either Wall or forts. The excavations and discoveries of the last ten years, much as they have contributed to illustrate the Wall, have thrown no light on Agricola, and this consistent absence of evidence is becoming a serious argument. One thing alone is plain: the testimony of ancient historians, and ancient coins and ancient inscriptions, combine to prove that Hadrian built a wall from Tyne to Solway. Amid all the mists and shifting lights of controversy, we may still continue to use that phrase.

By way of postscript, I desire to mention one point more. I have heard regrets expressed, and I share those regrets myself, that the trenches at Chesters could not have been kept open for the inspection of antiquaries who might wish to see them. But it is a matter which nature and not man decides. The subsoil at Chesters contains much water, which flowed into our trenches with great rapidity, and, where it did not wholly hinder our digging, obliterated in a very few hours the more important features, which were necessarily those at the bottom. Indeed, I fear that very little is to be gained in general by leaving open the trenches of excavations such as those which I have just described. Those who, from hour to hour, watch the actual



digging out of earth, may see the evidence produced before their eyes in the most definite and unmistakable fashion. But the colours of fresh soil soon lose their vividness, and the most striking proofs may easily be obscured by an inflow of subsoil water, or a passing shower of rain, or the careless footstep of a cow or an antiquary.



I have re-examined this inscription and have to confirm the reading of Bishop Bennet. The original inscription was DISCIPVLINAE AVGGG. Later AVGGG was altered to AVGVSTI. Probably therefore the stone was put up in A.D. 209-211 and altered in 212 A.D. [F.H.]

VII.—EXCAVATIONS AT CHESTERS IN SEPT. 1900.

By F. HAVERFIELD, F.S.A.

NOTE.

Since the notes on these excavations were written (p. 9), the Roumanian scholar and archaeologist, Prof. Tocilescu, has published an inscription which strikingly illustrates them. It was found in a Roman fort at Bumbeshti, near the south end of the Vulkan Pass over the Carpathians, and it testifies that this fort had in the second century ramparts of turves (*muri cespiticii*) but was rebuilt in stone A.D. 201 in the reign of Septimius Severus. When it was first erected we do not yet know, but it cannot be earlier than about A.D. 110, and there is some slight reason to ascribe it to about A.D. 138-140 (Hadrian or Pius). The inscription is as follows :—

Imp(erator) Caes(ar) L. Septimius Severus Pius Pertinax Augustus Arabic[us] Adiab(enicus) Parth(icus) maximus, pontifex maximus, trib. pot. viii, imp. xii, e[t] Imp(erator) Caes(ar) M. Aur(elius) Antoninus Pius felix Augustus trib. pot. iii, muros cesp[iticios] castro[rum]m coh. primae A[u]reliae Brittonum miliariae Antoniniana(e), vetust(ate) dila[psos], lapide eos restitue[r]unt per Octavianum Julianum leg(atum) ipso[rum] pr(o) pr(aetore).

Gr. G. Tocilescu, *Fouilles et recherches archéologiques* (Bucarest : Ispâsescu).