

AN ESSAY
ON
THE ROMAN ROAD

IN
THE VICINITY OF BURY,
LANCASHIRE.

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Read April 2d, 1839.

What we see, and hear, and read, and experience, constitutes the sum total of our knowledge. Things which have been, and now are, we can compare; and the results of such comparisons we can store up as treasures for the mind, out of which our memories can draw whatever currency our intercourse with society demands, either for our own credit, or for the benefit and assistance of others. Of the long past, however, it is very little that we can know: the line which connects it with the present, becomes fainter and fainter as it recedes, until it

loses itself in the far distant horizon behind us. In the physical world things only *before* us we can see ; in the intellectual we note chiefly what is *behind* us ; the one is all *prospective*, the other *retrospective*. But retrospective impressions are weak in proportion to the remoteness of time, inasmuch as commonly every additional impression which the ever striking present presents us, tends to obliterate what has preceded, until numbers of impressions are defaced, and others so faint that it is difficult to trace the outline, and recollect what they once were. Time tries all things. It levels mountains as it rolls over the globe ; it crumbles pyramids as it wipes off the dust from their surface, every year that its wings sweep over them. Neither works of nature nor of art escape it. They become at length defunct ; and while it entombs their remains it spares not their histories, but either leaves their memories unsculptured, or fritters away the ciphers o'er their graves, till they become illegible and perish. "*Sic transit gloria mundi.*"

It is said that there is no rule without an exception, and that exception proves the rule. If, then, the saying be true, and what has just been read be the general rule, there will be an excep-

tion. All will not be obliterated. Fragments of antiquity will remain with fragments of their histories, to show what has been, and to tell their uses and purposes. Where arts and civilization have existed, a few scattered and imperfect specimens will be found to amuse and edify remote posterity, a tincture will diffuse itself to ameliorate the character of a long series of ages and generations still to be born.

But this is not the only way in which a civilized people confers benefits upon mankind ; they leave us correct histories of their own internal affairs, and they mingle with them all external ones which arise out of their foreign policy as regards other nations less civilized than themselves. To Greece we owe all we know of the ancient histories of the semi-barbarous East ; and in the pages of imperial Rome we read most of what we know of ancient Gaul, Kelt, or Kymenian. It is hence chiefly, in connexion with what remains of art, that we derive the materials for constructing the scanty fabric of the ancient history of our own country, now so superior in every respect to the haughty pretensions of the dictators and conquerors of the best part of the world then known.

We all know very well how the eagle of that empire, perching upon the palaces and temples of the eternal city, spread out its wings over Europe into Asia, from the western shores of our own Britain even to the Indus and central Asia ; and that for four hundred years its emblem on the banners of its legions was borne victorious from east to west, from south to north, over the major part of this island ; and we likewise know, wherever Romans trod they left not their footsteps in the perishable sand, but in their march, reared up monuments of labour almost as imperishable as their glory ; and though the greatness of Roman power has vanished, like all former greatness, yet its evident remains are still scattered over the lands which formerly beheld it, and added to its triumphs. And as the language of these masters of mankind—with which they dictated to the nations as to their slaves, and which far as possible, and almost beyond what is probable, they imposed everywhere—is that language which either formed the foundation or the corner stone of all our education in youth, and forms also the basis of many a language which we may have added as accomplishments since, as well as constitutes no inconsiderable portion of the polished and flexible part of our own, we cannot

well overlook any traces of a people who have thus become so interesting and useful to us, which may have survived the physical and artificial changes of fourteen centuries, and still be lingering in our very neighbourhood ; and over which we may be, and undoubtedly have been, many times, led, either by the avocations of business, or the promptings of pleasure.

The Romans first entered that part of Britain which now comprises the county of Lancaster, about the year 79. During the preceding summer Agricola, their general, had reduced the Ordovices, or the inhabitants on the Dee, in Cheshire and North Wales ; and in the summer of the year just mentioned, proceeded with his conquests northward to the Sistuntii, who inhabited Lancashire and the southern portion of Westmorland. As one object of this celebrated commander was to secure to the empire the countries which he subdued, his successes were followed up by the erection of such works as experience had shown to be capable of keeping the inhabitants under complete subjection. Tacitus informs us that Agricola built forts and placed garrisons within them throughout this district, which then was woody. The discipline of the

Roman legions was kept up by constant labour ; and as there needed communications between the several forts and garrisons which he erected and stationed, he, according to the Roman custom, then commenced the military ways which connect them. The British towns within the Sistuntian territory had, doubtlessly, their roads between them ; but such were not direct enough, nor suited from their kind and uses, for the purposes of warfare. The ways, therefore, which had been brought up to Deva or Chester, the preceding year, were extended, the woods cut through, and the principal forts erected within them, thus connected with those to the southward as well as one with another ; and these military ways served at once for the conveyance of baggage and military stores, and for ramparts, to protect the soldiers during their marches. The ways averaged seven yards in width, from one to one and a-half yard in elevation. Where the ground was lowest, the agger was generally elevated the highest ; and where the the ground was highest, the agger was lowest, being more calculated for giving the soldiery an advantage in case of attack during their marches, than merely for dryness and durability, as the historian of Manchester supposes. Their direction was in a straight line, laid out with the

nicest discrimination and knowledge of the country, *upon the highest ground*, and their surfaces were paved with large stones, to give firmness to the footing of the cavalry and beasts of burden as they passed, and to resist as little as possible the motion of the wheels of their waggons and vehicles, in which they transported from place to place their baggage. It is owing to this peculiarity of construction, that these mountainous roads may still be seen, as ridges intersecting parts of the country, or their remains traced out in elevations which they have left until the present day.

If Tacitus' account of Agricola's conquests in Britain, leads us to infer that Agricola constructed a military road throughout Lancashire, from the south of it to the north, a later account of the stations in Lancashire, either established by him or by his successors, is given us by another Roman, Antoninus, in his Itinerary of the kingdom. His Tenth Iter is considered to have been southward, from the county of Cumberland, through a part of Westmorland, and thence, through Lancashire, to this place, Manchester. His statement, according to the copies which have reached us, stands thus : From Alione to Galacum, 19 miles ; to Bremetonacæ,

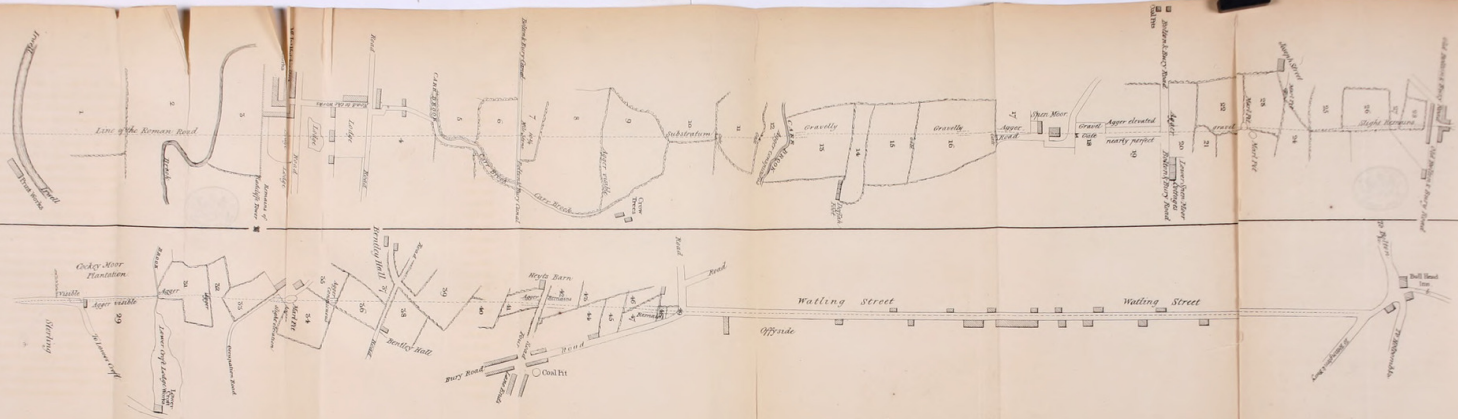
27 miles ; to Coccium 20 miles ; to Mancunium, 17 miles ; beginning at Brougham castle, according to some antiquaries, or at Whitley castle, according to Camden, and ending here. The distance, as given above, is 83 miles, and making the necessary allowance between the straight line of the Romans and the winding one of the present road from Penrith to Manchester, seems to be tolerably correct. The intermediate distances, however, are, if the intermediate stations be the same as Antonine visited, obviously incorrect. Supposing with Dr. Whitaker, Galacum to be the station at Boroughbridge, and Overborough, as is now generally agreed upon, to be Bremetonacæ, the distance between the two, as given by Antonine, and as they are separated at present, far from corresponds. Again, the distance between Bremetonacæ Overborough, and Coccium or Ribchester, as far exceeds what Antonine gives as the other exceeds the real distance. Much more is his statement inaccurate if Coccium be near Blackrode, where the Manchester historian would fix it. Besides, from Ribchester to Manchester is much beyond 17 Roman miles ; and if we obviate this error by stationing Coccium at Blackrode, we are no nearer, because we only increase the error elsewhere. There hence appears to be

an error in some of the particular distances, as given by Antonine, though the general distance may be nearly, if not altogether, correct. Now, not knowing the exact distances between Brougham or Whitley castles and Boroughbridge, nor being acquainted with any remains between them, I cannot say whether the error may have commenced there; but having inspected the remains at Boroughbridge, and knowing the distance thence to Overborough, I can take upon me to state, that the 19 miles written between Alione and Galacum to be about the exact distance, in Roman miles, between Boroughbridge and Overborough. Besides, as far as I can judge from a survey of the Roman road in the neighbourhood of Overborough towards Ribchester, and likewise from what I have seen of its remains in the neighbourhood of Ribchester, as well as by admeasurement on good maps, by transferring the 27 miles between Galacum and Bremetonacæ to the distance between Bremetonacæ and Coccium, we shall not fall far short of the real distance. But whether, by transferring 20 miles as the distance between Coccium and Mancunium, we should at all approximate to the real distance between Ribchester and Manchester, persons who are better acquainted with the localities of

the neighbourhood than myself can best judge, though, on the maps, it appears to be about the third of a degree.

Besides the Itinerary of Antonine, there is another account of the Roman stations and roads in Britain, compiled by Richard of Cirencester; whether there have been authentic documents for the compilation or not, it is not at present our object to inquire. However, it may not be amiss to quote the parallel account which he gives in his 10th Iter the latter part of which stands thus—"From Lugaballa to Brocavonacis 22 miles,—from Brocavonacis to Alauna—from Alauna to Coccium—from Coccium to Mancunium 18 miles." Dr. Stukely refers Brocavonacis to Brougham, and the Manchester historian brings the road of Richard along the present line from Penrith to Lancaster, which he asserts to be the just mentioned Alauna. Thence he follows the present road through Preston, Chorley, &c., until he comes to about 18 Roman miles from Manchester, to Blackrode, which is his Coccium. Now there is some singularity in Richards's 10th Iter being defective in distances just where the parallel in Antonine's is erroneous, not to mention Mr. Whitaker and himself both over-





looking and omitting a station Concanguim through which the Iter would pass had it been in that direction—or had not the Iter of Richard itself been suspicious in that part of it.

Having so far opened up the subject, we will now proceed to an account of the remains of the Roman road in the neighbourhood of Bury. From almost constant occupation of time, I have not yet had any opportunity of searching for remains between Manchester and the river Irwell in Radcliffe. At Radcliffe then we will commence. A little below the junction of the Roach and the Irwell, near the print works laid out on the sketch, the Roman road crossed the river; it then passed across the holm grounds belonging to Radcliffe Tower, which is about 150 yards to the right, passed through the print works now occupied by Mr. James Hutchinson and Sons, to the Bolton and Bury canal, the $10\frac{3}{4}$ mile stone on the bank of which stands on the very line. On the grounds so far, not the slightest trace is to be seen, but as the ground henceforward rises, a slight elevation is discernible, with a mixture of gravel in the ploughed grounds, until the line crosses Caw Brook; there a few yards of the agger remain of considerable height, showing

distinctly the width and form of the road. Slight elevations and slight admixtures of gravel with the soil mark the line thence until we arrive at Spen Moor; there the remains are very evident; and in the field next to the Bolton and Bury New Road, the agger runs boldly across, having suffered little from cultivation except the removal of the stratum of stones. Continuing the same straight line northward, past Joseph-street, we discern near the fences, close to Starling, traces of the agger. The road then falls in with the Lower Croft-road, remains of which may be seen on the Cockey Moor side, and passes through a garden and under a cottage at the angle of the present road, along the meadow beyond, where the line keeps a considerable elevation to the brook and lodge of the Lower Croft print works. In the corner of the field beyond, may be seen considerable remains, as well as near the fence on the opposite side. Again, in the same straight line in the fold of Meadow Croft, remains are visible, as likewise in the corner of the ground of the second field beyond the farm and premises; thence along till we climb the high ground to Heyts Barn, about 40 yards east of which a long agger points out the direction, and following the line as in the accompanying sketch, remains may be traced, till

the road falls in with that which passes through Offyside, and which retains the name of Watling-street until this day. Watling-street, or Raikes as it was also called, keeps an almost undeviating straight line for about a mile, until it reaches the Bull's Head Inn, towards Edgworth.

So far extends the sketch of the line and remains of the Roman road which accompany this paper, and which is intended to illustrate the preceding account, as well as to be a guide for any future investigator. Mere verbal accounts are of little use as directions, as I have found; besides there are oftentimes discrepancies which are apt to perplex and mislead. I now will give what corroborating testimony I have been able to pick up by inquiries, during my researches. They are traditionary in some instances, and therefore not wholly correct, for tradition, though originally truth, blends error, and exaggerations, and extraneous facts with it. First, then, when enquiring if any account of the line of the road had been preserved in Radcliffe, I was answered there was one in the plan of the print works occupied by Mr. James Hutchinson and Sons. I applied to one of the young gentlemen engaged in the works, and was very politely allowed to examine the plan.

A dotted line, with "Roman Road" written beside it, ran across the plan exactly through the lodges and under the building, as I had traced the line, and as it is laid down in the sketch. When the Bolton and Bury New road was being made, Mr. John Hall, a gentleman curious in collecting specimens of minerals, and investigating the nature and order of the strata in the coal districts around, observing large stones and much gravel removed from that portion where it crosses the Roman line, was informed that such were the remains of the Roman road, which ran along there. Next is Joseph Street, the name of a Farm through which the line runs. But whether the name "Street" has been given to the farm from the occupiers, or the occupiers have taken their name from the farm, is quite uncertain, as, when I asked for the name of the place, I was answered Joseph Street; and when I asked for the name of the family, I was answered Joseph Street; and when I asked whether such was the name of both, I was answered "yah." The first time I traced out the remains of the Roman road near Meadow Croft, a young man, seeing me with a book in my hand, into which I inserted remarks with a pencil as I went along, followed me and the gentleman who accompanied me, and after ascertaining that we

were neither surveying for a rail-road line, nor for levying any rate, but merely for a road that had been, he told us "Then owd felly's reet, for he used to sey ot Pack Horses com throo't fowt formerly." And who is the old man? we inquired. "Whoy he's me feyther, an' it wur his feyther, that's my gronfeyther, ot towd him horses com atween Blackburn and Manchester." And during the last fortnight I was informed by an old man at Meadow Croft, that in the time of his father, many portions of the agger of the Roman road were carted away; the stones for draining the meadow below, near the brook; and the gravel to the road which passes the premises. Likewise he said that he had been told, that that road was the oldest one in the country; that it came along by the Heyts in Offyside, went through Starling and crossed the ford of the Irwell, a little below the meeting of the waters of the Roach. To repeated questions what was the name of the road through Offyside, I was answered "Wadling Street, it's coen Street, fur it wur paved formerly."

Such are the scanty materials of the information which I have to lay before you at present, little, indeed, in comparison of what remains to be

gathered from this Iter, but which probably I may resume when leisure may permit. The confusion of the intermediate distances between the stations upon it, occasioned most likely by an error of some transcriber, has rendered the determination of the localities one of great difficulty. Whether the error now alluded to be confined solely to distances, or also to the names of the stations themselves, it may perhaps be presumptuous to hazard an opinion. Only it was a rule with the great Camden to seek for some similarity in sound in the modern names of places, or of the rivers on which they stood, with the sound of the Roman names, which he considered strong circumstantial evidence. And the authority of the father of Roman antiquities is not altogether to be despised, though he may have been laughed at for seeking the remains of Coccium upon Cockey Moor. Supposing then there be an error of the transcriber in names as well as the distances of Antonine's 10th Iter, may not the Station at Boroughbridge be the Alione of the text, for it is situated on the Lune, formerly written Lon. Overborough would thus become the site of Galacum, and it too is situated on the Leck-brook, formerly written Lac. Bremetonacæ would hence have to be removed to its belong-

ance elsewhere, and might be fixed at Brougham castle, and it would thus correspond with the Brocavonacis of Richard, which he may have so written from some other copy, or from mistake. This is but conjecture, and would require more extensive acquaintance with the line of the Roman road and the intermediate distances than I yet possess, to merit any consideration of importance. To whatever further extent I may carry sketches and researches, if they merit any notice from this Society they will be at its service whenever called for.

Rutland Arms, Bakewell,

April 2nd, 1839.



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