

I.

AGRICOLA AND THE ANTONINE WALL. BY PROFESSOR HAVERFIELD,
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A brief remark of Tacitus, in his biography of his father-in-law, Agricola (ch. xxiii.), records that that Roman general about A.D. 80 constructed a line of forts across the isthmus, some 35 miles wide, which separates the Forth from the Clyde; and the excavations which Scottish antiquaries carried out some ten to twenty years ago have confirmed the remark, and have provided clues to the actual sites of some of these forts. The object of the excavations was, indeed, to explore the Antonine Wall and its defending forts which the Emperor Pius, about A.D. 140-145, built across this isthmus. But, before these excavations had been carried very far, it became clear that some, at least, of the forts of Pius stood on sites which had been fortified by Agricola sixty years earlier.

Agricola, according to Tacitus, had singular skill in choosing strong situations for his forts (ch. xxii.). This was recognised not only by his (sometimes partial) biographer, who, after all, neither was nor professed to be a strategist, but also by the expert judgment of military men two generations later, who, for the new series of forts, adopted sites already occupied by Agricola, and thus confirmed the eulogy of Tacitus. Whether all the forts which were built about A.D. 140 along the Antonine Wall stand on Agricolan sites, cannot yet be said, and perhaps will never be clear. The excavations above mentioned were, indeed, carried out with inadequate appreciation of the chronological value of certain evidences, and of the possibility of assigning, with their aid, the occupation of this or that particular site to a particular period. From this point of view, it must be admitted that some of these excavations ought, whenever circumstances allow, to be repeated, or, at least, to be carried further—though, at the moment, the outlook of excavations for the next many years is a poor one, since war has spent the capital which might otherwise have gone to the increase of knowledge.

However, historians owe much to these excavations, and much also to the researches of our Fellow, Dr G. Macdonald, and of others, who have elicited from the ascertained facts more than, at first sight, they seemed able to tell. Thus, it has been long clear that certain sites, namely, those of the five following forts (i.-v.) were first selected by Agricola, and that new forts were placed on precisely the same sites sixty years later; something has been learnt, too, about the characteristics of Agricola's forts.

(i.) *At Barhill*, about 10 miles east of the centre of Glasgow, traces

of an Agricolan fort were detected in the excavations of 1902-1903, underlying the later structures of a fort datable to Pius. Of the earlier (Agricolan) fort only the ditches were found (fig. 1); its ramparts and its internal buildings—probably earthen ramparts and wooden buildings, such as were usual in Britain during the Flavian age—had no doubt been levelled away when the later fort was built, and in 1902 were no

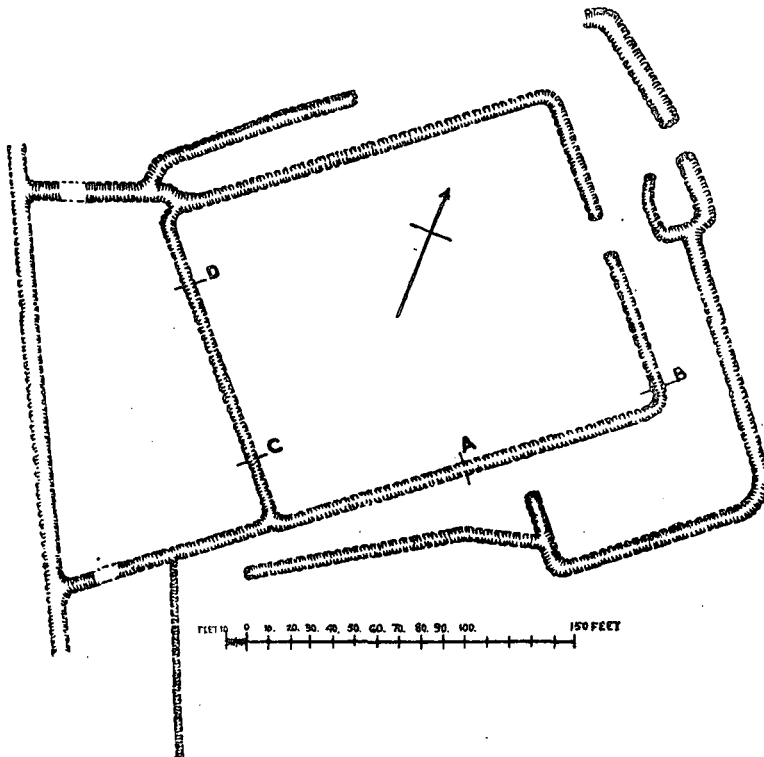


Fig. 1. Early Fort Plan at Barhill.

longer distinguishable, save that the lines, etc., of the ditches indicate plainly those of the ramparts. This Agricolan fort¹ was apparently (fig. 1) a very small rectangular *castellum*, with an internal area of about 143 by 180 feet—not quite two-thirds of an acre, and barely one-sixth of the area of the fort of Pius; it was defended by easily traceable and somewhat intricate ditches, which suggest that it had round it large and complicated ramparts and ravelins, like those of Rough Castle or of Ardoch.

¹ Full report in *Proceedings*, vol. xl. pp. 403-546, from which fig. 1 is reproduced above.

(ii.) *At Rough Castle*, near Falkirk, excavations in 1903¹ showed, just north of the fort, a group of small pits (fig. 2), each pit about 7 feet long, 3 feet wide, and 2½ feet deep; the group covered in all one-fifth of an acre (50 feet by 200 feet); the pits were clearly meant as obstacles to an enemy charge. As I ventured to point out when they were found, they recall the "lilia" with which, in B.C. 52, Caesar (*de Bello Gallico*, vii. 73) strengthened his blockading lines round Alesia in Central Gaul. Like those, they were probably equipped inside with sharpened stakes to impale fallen enemies—very similar pits were used in 1904 in the siege of Port Arthur. It is true that no actual traces of stakes were noted by the excavators, but the wood may well have perished in eighteen centuries—or its vestiges may have been overlooked in excavation. Even without stakes, the pits would serve their purpose well. "Camouflaged" by a covering of straw or of heather, like Bruce's pits at Bannockburn, they would effectively break the impetuosity and impact of a Highland charge, which, as many remains in Scotland and in northern England show, the Romans especially dreaded.² In the Roman age the barbarian offensives naturally took the form of heavy massed attacks, and owing to the reckless courage and the vast numbers of the barbarian assailants, and owing also to the scanty knowledge of chemistry possessed by the whole ancient world, barbarian massed attacks had real chance of success. From Barhill, we can see (as, indeed, can be guessed from continental evidence) that some of Agricola's forts were, probably, much smaller than the forts used forty years later for the Wall of Hadrian, which itself was built about A.D. 120, or for the Wall of Pius, built twenty years later still (A.D. 140).³ We may even conceive "journalists" in Hadrian's reign looking back to Agricola, and styling the larger forts of their own time "*super-castella*." We may infer that the Agricolan garrisons were correspondingly small, and though, as at Barhill, they had small areas to defend, and short ramparts to man, they none the less needed special defences when confronted with the vastly superior forces of barbarian assailants. Such a special defence was the "lily-bed" at Rough Castle: No remains as yet found inside its pits have yielded any clue to its precise date, beyond the fact that it is

¹ Full report in *Proceedings*, vol. xxxix. pp. 442-449.

² The "multiple ditches" which defended many Roman forts in Scotland and in north England are uncommon in southern England and on the Continent—at least, in the same form and in equal elaboration. It is fair to suppose that they were devised against some peculiarly dangerous attacks, such as Highland charges have throughout history been.

³ The Roman castella in the second century varied a good deal in area, as was inevitable, when the garrisons varied from a minimum of 500 infantry to 1000 horse (at Newstead perhaps more). One may take 3-4 or 3-5 acres as a rough average. Nineteen forts on Hadrian's Wall (the fort at Newcastle is wholly doubtful) seem to have averaged in area 3½ acres. The areas of the forts along the Antonine Wall are still very imperfectly known, but seem to have been in general somewhat smaller than those on Hadrian's Wall; owing to the fact that they were mostly provided with annexes, their internal areas would anyhow be difficult to calculate with precision.

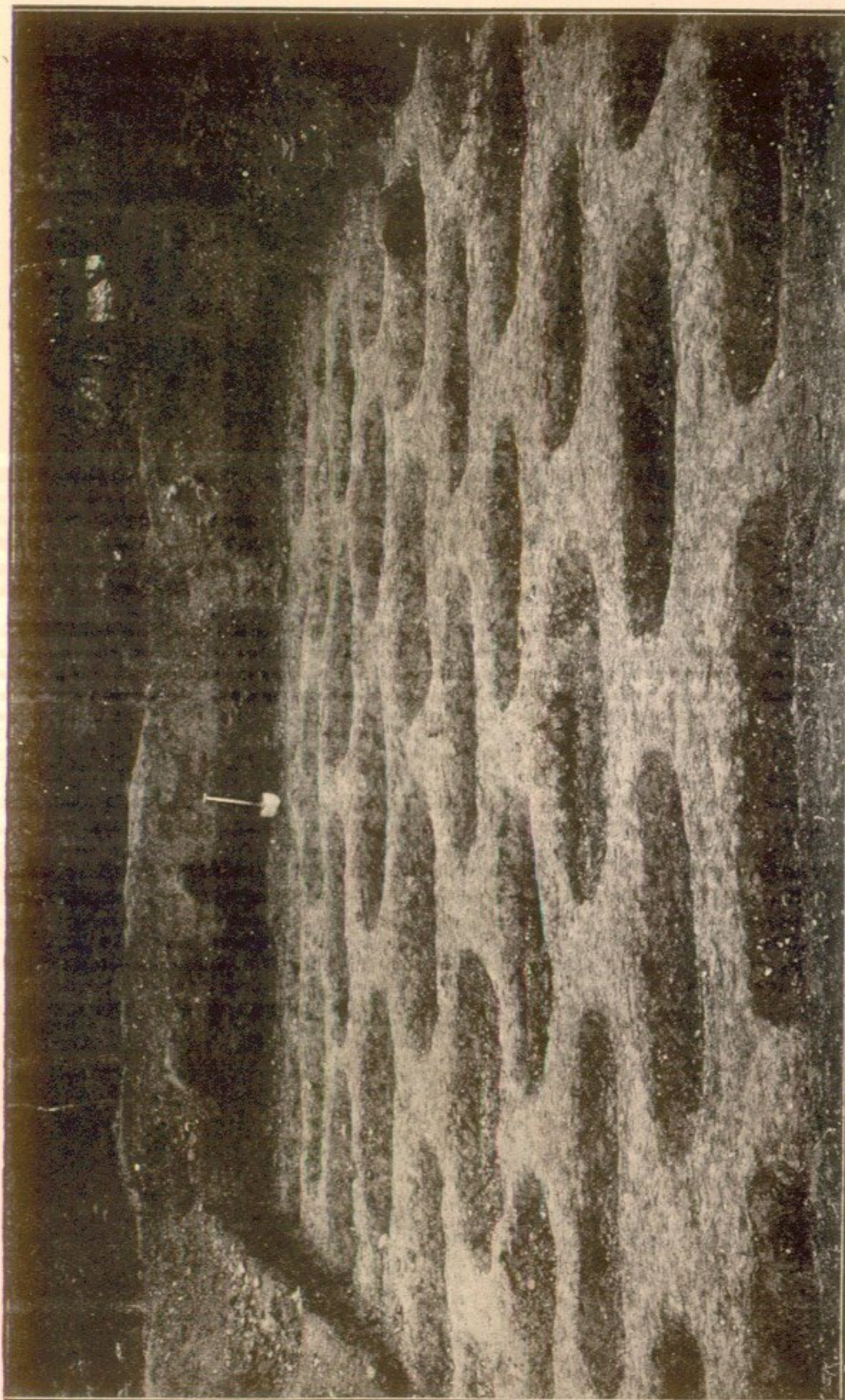


Fig. 2. The Pits (Lilia) to north-west of north gate of Rough Castle Fort.

Roman work. Perhaps fresh digging will some day, at trifling cost, furnish the needful evidence, now that the excavators know better what to look for than was known in 1903. However, Dr Macdonald (*Roman Wall*, p. 231 f.) has pretty well proved that these Rough Castle pits date from Agricola, while an inscription found there connects the adjacent fort with the reign of Pius (*Eph. epigr.*, ix. 1241).

(iii.) At *Camelon*, near Falkirk, excavations in 1899 yielded potsherds of Agricolan date, although those who reported on these diggings in our *Proceedings* were unduly sceptical.¹ One might connect with these Flavian potsherds a *Camelon* inscription mentioning the *legio ii Adiu-trix pia fidelis*, but I believe this to be a modern forgery.²

(iv.) At *Castle Cary*, near the middle of the isthmus, pottery was found³ which belongs to the age of Agricola; it combines with other indications noted at this fort, to suggest that Agricola was the first builder of a fort on this hill-top, and that Pius reconstructed it (Macdonald, *Roman Wall*, p. 374). The site, near the middle of the isthmus, is of strategic value as well as tactically strong, and it would naturally attract attention when the isthmus was being fortified, either by Agricola or by Pius.

Thus it appears that a considerable proportion of the forts on the Wall, which have been lately investigated with the spade, were first established by Agricola, and the remark of Tacitus is confirmed that the isthmus between Forth and Clyde was by him garrisoned by a row of detached forts, forming almost a wall, and very probably connected together by a road, as the Wall of Pius was.

(v.) I desire to quote one more piece of evidence, which, though not unpublished, has not been published in this country, and may be new to most readers of our *Proceedings*. I came upon it after Dr Macdonald's *Roman Wall* was issued. It adds the fort of *Cadder* to the list of places where the footprints of Agricola, or of his age, can be detected. According to Camden, there existed in Scotland, apparently between 1607 and the year of his death, 1633, an altar of which nothing has since been seen inscribed:—

DEO
SILVANO
L TANICVS
VERVS
5. PRAEF VSLLM

¹ Vol. xxxv. pp. 329-427; see esp. pp. 380, 392.

² *Eph. epigr.*, ix. 1367; *Classical Review*, 1904, p. 461. There is no reason to doubt that this legion came to Britain about A.D. 70, and was removed about A.D. 85. The inscription, if genuine, would be no later than Agricola, and could hardly be earlier than about A.D. 80, because, before that time, no Roman troops had reached the neighbourhood of Falkirk.

³ Report of excavations, *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvii. pp. 271-346; the pottery was not noticed till later.

“To the god Silvanus, L. Tanicus Verus, prefect (of a cohort, presumably), pays his vow.”

It has generally been recognised that this copy is probably in one item incorrect; the name of the prefect, L. Tanicus, must be a misreading; otherwise the inscription might pass as one of the many set up by soldiers on the Wall of Pius, which, as must be confessed, add little to our knowledge. However, the Bodleian Library in Oxford contains a number of papers, mostly relating to Camden, known as “MSS. Smith.”¹

coronam

DEO
SILVANO
L. TANICIUS
VERUS
PRAEF V S L L M

Fig. 3. Inscription from Cadder. In autograph of Camden, *Britannia*, ed. 1607, p. 699, Bodl. Lib.²

No. 1 in the Smith collection (MS. Smith 1) is a copy of Camden's *Britannia* (ed. 1607), with marginal notes by Camden; on the margin of p. 699 he has written in his own hand a copy of our inscription; he does not give any specific provenance for the stone, but his note is so placed that it can only refer to Cadder. The text which he sets out differs by only one letter from the commonly received text (fig. 3). It has “L. Tanicus” instead of “L. Tanicus.” Small as the variation is, it is important. Tanicus is an exceedingly rare Roman *nomen*, of which I find only one other example.

¹ Dr Thomas Smith, 1638-1710, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, edited Camden's Correspondence in 1691.

² Camden seems to have written first “Tanisius,” and then corrected that to “Tanicus.” “Tanisius” is a very rare *nomen*, no doubt a by-form of the much commoner “Tanusius.” But it is pretty plain that here Camden meant to set down “Tanicus.”

That is in a long and well-attested inscription of a soldier with precisely the same names as our præfect—L. Tanicius Verus; I imagine one may conclude that he was either the same man (the most natural assumption) or a close relative, and a man of the same period. Now, this other Tanicius Verus, according to his inscription (found in Upper Egypt) was born at Vienna in Gaul, now Vienne, on the Rhone, a little south of Lyon, and reached the rank of centurion in "Legio iii Cyrenaica" (CIL. iii. 34). It further records that he was stationed in Upper Egypt, and there, like many Romans in the Empire, went to hear the sunrise song of the vocal statue of Memnon, much as a modern soldier at Bulford might last June, 23rd-24th, have gone to see sunrise at Stonehenge; indeed, so impressed was Verus, that, while in Upper Egypt, he went to hear it thirteen times. The stone gives the dates of his thirteen visits—the first on 7th November 80 A.D., the last on 2nd June 81; after that, the visits stopped, and we may assume that he was transferred from Egypt, or at any rate from anywhere near the statue of Memnon (at Carnac, the Egyptian Thebes, in Upper Egypt). It would seem that actually he was transferred to North Britain and to the command of an auxiliary cohort there.¹ As he was at Thebes in June 81, he would reach Britain towards the second half of Agricola's governorship, just after Domitian had (in September 81) succeeded to Titus. It was about that time that the building of the forts on the Clyde-Forth isthmus began (*Agr.*, ch. xxii.).² One of these forts clearly was Cadder, if (as I do not see cause to doubt) Camden was right in assigning the altar to that place.

I note in this connection that it seems to have been the middle of the isthmus of which Agricola took firmest hold. The easternmost of the five forts in question was Camelon; there Agricola seized the point from which by far the best natural route led north from the isthmus to the Highlands. By way of the rock of Stirling, which old Hector Boece not unnaturally thought Agricola to have fortified, an easy route from the Forth leads along the banks of Allan Water and the north face of the Ochils into the Earn valley and to Perth. From that strategic centre, further valleys lead north-eastwards through Strathmore, between the foothills of the eastern Grampians and the Sidlaws, to Forfar and to the east coast of Scotland near Montrose; hence an intermittent coastal strip of lowland leads on to and even beyond Aberdeen, whilst the

¹ According to A. von Domaszewski (*Rangordnung des römischen Heeres*, p. 108) the promotion of a "centurio legionis" to the post of "præfectus cohortis" was in the earlier empire quite ordinary. So we put Verus in Egypt first, and in Britain afterwards, not *vice versa*.

² Or in 80. It is uncertain whether Agricola came to Britain in 77 or 78. I rather incline to 77; if so, the building of the forts began in 80. For our purpose the point is of no great moment. But if it began in 81, we might ascribe the idea of fort-building to Domitian's initiative, which Tacitus would naturally not emphasise.

valleys which reach the coast near that city afford a not difficult means of entry thence into and north of the interior uplands. This is the route by which an army-leader, wishing to deal with the Grampian *massif*, must inevitably advance from a base on or near the Forth, and it is likely that Agricola took this line, however far he finally penetrated into Scotland. But that raises problems as difficult as the Grampians to negotiate, and I have not the time at the moment to entangle myself in them.

I add, by way of illustration, another case of a homonym. An altar, found about 100 years ago at Croyhill, names an officer "Fabius Liberalis" (Macdonald, *Roman Wall*, p. 341). An officer of the same name occurs on an altar found in a fort on the "Limes" in Germany, at Stockstadt near Aschaffenburg. But the German altar is ascribed by the latest German writer on it¹ to the third century A.D. He seems to have thought that there may be some identity of men. But he has overlooked the fact that the Wall of Pius was abandoned by the Romans about A.D. 180, so that the Croyhill Fabius belonged practically to the generation before the Stockstadt Fabius. There is thus an appreciable difference in time between the dates of the Stockstadt and the Croyhill officers, which makes their identity *a priori* unlikely. Had the names "Fabius" and "Liberalis" been less common, probabilities would of course be different, but there seems to be known only one other Tanicius in the wide Roman world, while "Fabii," and men with the cognomen "Liberalis" abound. The case, therefore, for identifying our Tanicius Verus with the only other known Tanicius, who is also Verus, is far stronger than the case for identifying the two (if they be two) men called "Fabius Liberalis." Moreover, the latter identification involves (as I have said), a plain difficulty in dates, which does not arise in relation to Tanicius Verus.

¹ Drexel, *ORL.*, xxxiii. (1910), p. 96.