

**MURAL CONTROVERSY: THE QUESTION,
"WHO BUILT THE ROMAN WALL?"
ILLUSTRATED BY A CUMBRIAN, TO WHICH IS
APPENDED A REPLY TO DR. BRUCE'S TWO
PAPERS ON THE MURAL CONTROVERSY. A
MEMOIR ON THE ROMAN STATION AND
RUNIC CROSS AT BEWCASTLE**

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Mural Controversy: The Question, "Who Built the Roman Wall?" Illustrated by a Cumbrian, to Which Is Appended a Reply to Dr. Bruce's Two Papers on the Mural Controversy. A Memoir on the Roman Station and Runic Cross at Bewcastle by J. Maughan

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J. MAUGHAN

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Rev. J. Maughan.

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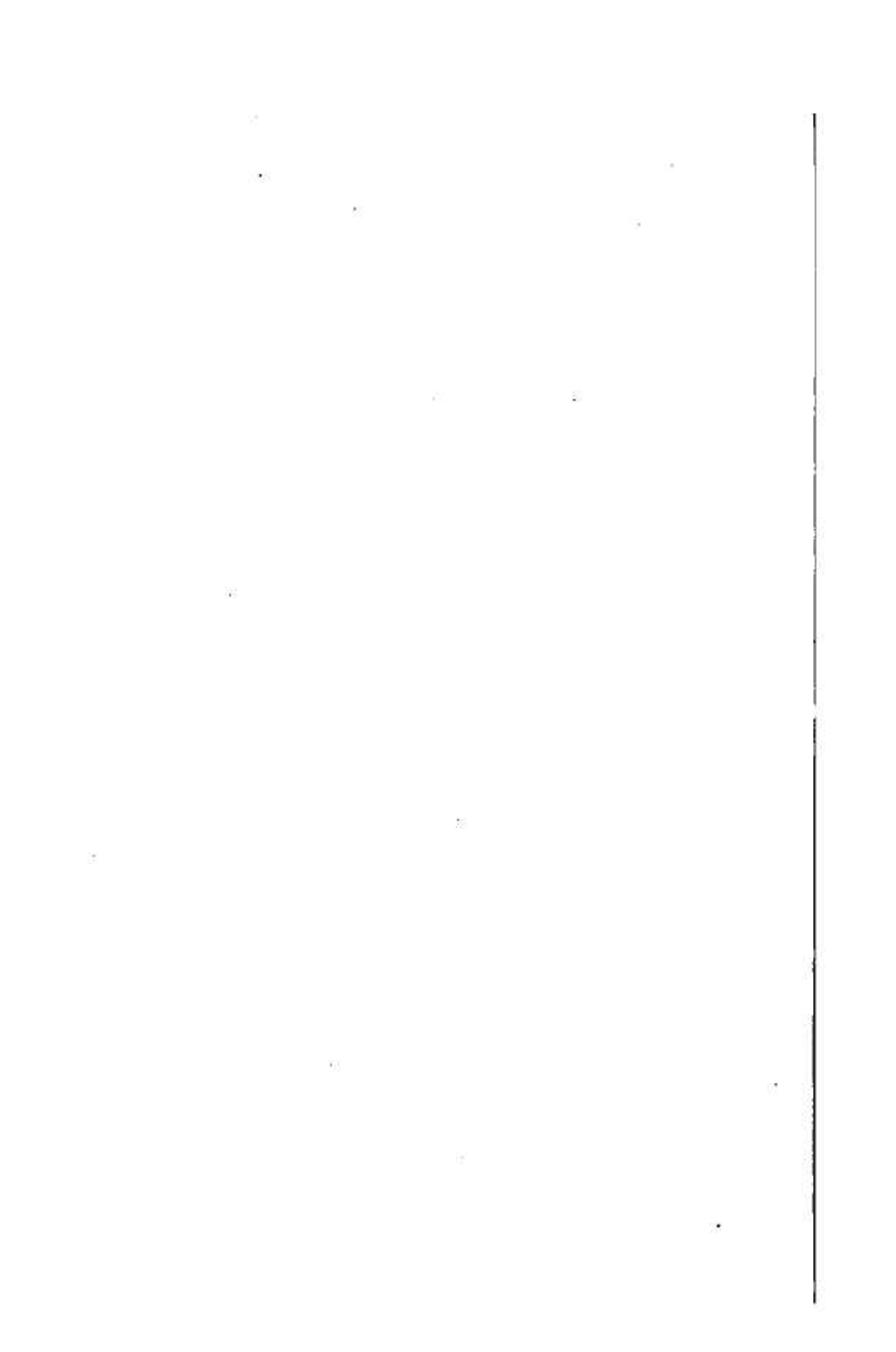
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MURAL CONTROVERSY:

THE QUESTION—"WHO BUILT THE ROMAN WALL?"

SECTION I.—INTRODUCTION.

In November, 1852, an "HISTORICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL DESCRIPTION OF THE ROMAN WALL," a work of considerable literary merit, was published by the Rev. Dr. Bruce, "One of the Council of the Society of Antiquaries, Newcastle-upon-Tyne."

The volume is a dumpy octavo, contains a large amount of statistical knowledge, and is printed in a nice old-woman's type. Its lively style, and graphic manner of treating the subject, sometimes render it highly interesting and important. It carries the witness within itself of the Doctor's zealous labours in exploring every point of "the mural region"—more especially the eastern portion of it, which was contiguous to the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway, and which was rendered easy of access through the liberality of the Directors, who gave the Doctor a free ticket for his excursions. The description, generally, is of a very comprehensive character; the narrative is carefully constructed; and, through the kind assistance and valuable contributions of many residents in the vicinity of the barrier, the work is replete with agreeable details. Successive changes of story are introduced with almost dramatic rapidity, and form picturesque groupings which render it attractive to persons acquainted with the scenes and places described therein. Through the munificent liberality of His Grace the Duke of Northumberland, and other generous friends and patrons who have shared in the cost, it is illustrated with numerous engravings, which appear to have been prepared with care and accuracy, and which present the reader with a faithful and correct idea of the present appearance of this "great military

structure." It is but the merest justice to artist, lithographer, engraver, publisher, and author, to bear this pleasing and grateful testimony to the value of the magnificent result of their combined efforts.

There appears, however, to be one drawback from the value of the work. The learned Doctor has permitted his imagination to be warped out of the proper track by a new-fangled theory, which, in the "plenitude" of his pride, he styles "THE ÆLIAN HYPOTHESIS." The Doctor *apparently* thinks, and *assuredly* tries to persuade his readers, that the wall was originally built by Hadrian, and not by Severus, as has been generally stated and believed; and he seizes upon every opportunity to introduce this great discovery. The volume, with prefaces, embraces 474 pages, and of these nearly *one hundred* (i. e. about one-fifth part of the work) are devoted to the diffusion of this new dogma: thus proving that whatever may be the real and candid opinions of the author on the subject, he has shown the utmost zeal in attempting to insert the point of his Hadrian wedge into the rich mine of human credulity.

If Dr. Bruce had only managed to steer his book clear of the rocks and shoals of this controversy, his flag might have been floating now, and for future ages, on one of the highest pinnacles of the Temple of History. But, alas for all human aspirations! The spectres of wasted time and misappropriated talents are the only ones that await the Doctor at Philippi. "Notoriety is easily earned, but it is not always of an enviable character,"—says Dr. Bruce, page 65 of "The Roman Wall." We would merely add—pen, ink, and paper, are of all betrayers the most subtle and the most dangerous. They certainly wear the very look of purity and innocence, and to all outward appearance are the most harmless things imaginable, and yet with their aid how soon may the best and the cleverest men spatter blots on their own reputation, and stitch the winding-sheet for their own self-slain honour and happiness!

In July, 1852, (at the time when the Doctor's work was in the hands of the publisher) a short but ably-written pamphlet issued from the pen of the late Mr. Robert Bell, of The Nook, Irthington, in which, in a clear, calm, dignified, argumentative, and well-digested manner, he attempted to "substantiate the claims of Severus to the authorship of the Roman Wall." This pamphlet appears to have been got up with much care, and jealous supervision every way. It bears marks of patient labour, extensive research, indefatigable inquiry, collective reading, and much actual literary toil. The style is singularly racy and terse, manly

and vigorous, and neither abusive nor acrimonious. The subject is handled with ability and tact. The work evinces the author's freedom from prejudices, and its execution exhibits the deep intuitions of a gifted mind. The excursive thoughts of the speculative theorist are corrected by the cautious observations of the practical thinker.

We have a steady conviction that the publication of an historical and controversial work ought to be a solemn act of the conscience, and we feel bound, in justice to Mr. Bell, to think that he executed his task with a due regard to sincerity and truth, exhibiting a strength of consistency, and a power of long-reaching forethought—and always bearing in mind that there is a wide difference between substantial fact and pretentious fudge, and that "out of nothing, nothing comes."

In December of the same year (1852), at least such are the dates given in the respective productions, Dr. Bruce, in the spirit of "aut Cæsar, aut nullus," launched forth what he designates "A TRACTATE," with the view of drawing the teeth and paring the claws of Mr. Bell.

The Doctor evidently wishes himself to be considered a victim, as dragged forth much against his will by a challenge received from Mr. Bell. The Doctor says—"In the view of the world of letters Mr. Bell has thrown down his gage, and I must take it up."....."No one who is acquainted with all the circumstances of the case can for a moment doubt that on me this duty peculiarly devolves." This, however, is nothing more than mere assumption on the Doctor's part—a mere excuse for the issuing of "The Tractate." In Mr. Bell's pamphlet there is no allusion whatever to Dr. Bruce as a person whom he was wishing to challenge to a tilt in mural controversy, and not the least trace of an intended provocation on the part of Mr. Bell. The Doctor, however, starts pelting him with a right good will, and with almost as much real effect as if he were whipping a fellow in armour.

Although this Tractate is by no means a work of small pretensions, yet its style is full of hazy logic, and confused nebulous notions; and reminds us of one of Don Quixote's tilts at the windmills. Its matter is upon the whole, rather chaotic, and sometimes even volcanic. It is characterized by a mixture of sophistry, audacious insolence of tone and manner, an utter disregard of the common conventionalities of place and position, and is too full of offensive personalities. It is peculiarly remarkable for the warmth of temper which the Doctor exhibits in maintaining his "Ælian