Ealdhelm,

First Bishop of Sherborne,

AND THE MEETING OF THE ENGLISH AND BRITONS, AND THEIR TWO CHURCHES IN WESSEX.

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THE few notes which I would cast into the increasing store of knowledge which is gathered by the Somerset Archæological Society, are not, in themselves, so truly history, as clues to a further insight into the meeting of the two races—Saxons and Britons, and, in later times, that of the two Churches—the Saxon and British Churches in Wessex.

The Anglo-Saxons came in on the Christian Britons as heathen, or "without Baptism," as Aneurin, the British bard, says of them, in scorn,[1] and the West-Saxons were first called by the Gospel, in the mission of St. Birinus in A.D. 634.

Under Ine, however, a Christian king of Wessex, the settlement of the West-Saxons seems to have fairly reached down to the river Parret; and it is very likely that, while, as yet, they had not settled on the lands below the Parret, they claimed them as their own, just as we have heretofore landed, and planted our flag on some lands of

(1). Gododin xii. 14.

so-called savages, and called forth to the winds that they thenceforth belonged to England; and they were at once our own.

About A. 705, King Ine cut off the western end of the over-wide bishoprick of Winchester, which was, indeed, the bishoprick of the whole of Wessex, of which Winchester was the thronestead, and so founded a new bishoprick, of which the bishopsettle was at Sherborne, and over which he set, as the first bishop, a friend and kinsman of his own, Ealdhelm. It is not easy to understand the line of the upper edge of Ealdhelm's bishoprick. The Saxon Chronicle says that he was bishop on the west of Selwood. "All to the east of Selwood," says a lately-printed outline of the history of the diocese, "remained in the diocese of Winchester. All to the west of Selwood was constituted into a separate diocese, the see of which was fixed at Sherborne." But we cannot hence mark the edge of Ealdhelm's diocese, unless we know whether it was west of the whole of Selwood, or west of the upper edge of it, or at what lines the wood itself was understood to end.

Asser, in his *Life of King Alfred*, gives the name of the wood as Selwood, in Latin Silva Magna, but in British, Coit Maur, or, in Welsh of our day, Coed Mawr—the Great Wood.

We should not readily believe that Selwood reached upward farther than to the unwoody chalk hills of Dorset or Wilts, though the "Stone of Egbert," where Alfred gathered his men against the Danes, is deemed by most writers to be Brixton Deverill. We may believe that it took in or touched Frome Selwood and Pen Zelwood or Selwood—in Somerset, if not Silton in Dorset; and the names of the parishes of Wooton Glanville (Wudu-tún or Wood-tún), and North Wootton, near Sherborne,

bespeak them as in Selwood, or in some other wood that reached onward from it.

A Topographical Directory (Capper's, 1808) says, under *Frome* and *Selwood*, that Frome Selwood was the chief town in Selwood, and that it began there, and reached about fifteen miles long and six broad. And where then was the end of it? As far as I can see by the map of the land, it must have been at some unmarked line, which, if it was the boundary of Selwood, was yet no ending of the woodiness of the ground; so that Selwood must in that case have ended in the midst of a wood.

It is likely that Selwood reached to the chalk downs which rise by Stourton and Mere, and which wind onward from Shaftesbury to Blandford, as the eastern edge of the Vale of Blackmore, and that it held the more latterly out-marked forests of Blackmore, or the White Hart, and Gillingham; and in that case "Egbright's Stone," or Brixton Deverill, would have been, as Asser puts it, on the eastern edge of Selwood; and Mere, close under the chalk downs, might have been the Mere or Mearc—edge or boundary of it; and Mere Woodlands, like Frome Woodlands, would have been within it. And we may believe that the Selwood reached down through the then woodlands in Somerset, and that Ealdhelm was bishop of *Selwudu-scir*—Selwoodshire, as Ethelwerd calls it, or the district which was below the chalk hills, and widely overspread with wood; and, indeed, that in the Saxon mind he was bishop of the whole of lower Wessex, down to Land's End, though, in Cornwall, the Britons were under the ministry of their own Church.

It is not likely that the woodlands ended at or near Sherborne, for Asser writes of King Alfred, as lingering for a time, with some of his followers, among the wood-

lands of still woody Somerset, near Athelney. Later writers have said that Ealdhelm's new bishoprick took in the counties of Dorset, Wilts, Devon, and Cornwall,[2] but it cannot be likely that the Selwood reached over the chalk downs of Wilts and Dorset, which could not have been, even in their wild state, a thickly-timbered land; and if Ealdhelm was bishop of Dorset and Wilts, how can it be that he was bishop of a diocese only on the west side of Selwood? It does not, therefore, seem to stand good that Ealdhelm himself was bishop over Wilts or eastern Dorset, or that his bishoprick reached eastward from Selwood; but it is likely that, after Archbishop Plegmund, under Edward the Elder, had consecrated some new bishops, and some of them for new bishopricks in lower Wessex, one in Somerset (Wells), and one in Devonshire (Crediton, afterwards Exeter), and one in Cornwall (St. Germain's), then Wilts and eastern Dorset were cut from the diocese of Winchester, and given to that of Sherborne, which lost its western end to the new bishoprick below it.

A full and good list of Ealdhelm's works is given in the new edition of Hutchins's *History of Dorset*, and some of them may afford matter of interest, and clues to some further historical truths. Ealdhelm was a well-schooled man, and must have been a steady reader, in Latin at least, and had won himself no little skill in the common lore of his time, as well as in Biblical and Church learning. His style, as Bede says, was clear, and he had bestowed no less of thought on Latin prosody than on syntax; and, indeed, the reader would sometimes be likely to take his verse as clearer than his prose. Among his main works are one in hexameter verse, and another of nearly the like matter, in prose, on celibacy, "*De Virginitate, or Unwedlock*," built

(2). Foot note to Dr. Giles's *Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, and *Canon of Wells*.

mainly of praise of unwedded labourers in God's work, whether patriarchs or prophets under the law, or apostles or other saints under the Gospel. Besides these pieces, and some letters and smaller bits, he wrote, also in hexameter verse, a poem on the *Eight Main Vices*, and about eighty riddles, or epigrams, of sundry lengths on sundry things, from the sea tides to a daddy-longlegs. Some of our readers may like to see the way in which, in the early times of less severe thought, he handled his subjects :—

ON THE RAINBOW :

"DE IRIDE VEL ARCU CELESTI.

Taumantis proles priscorum famine fingor,
Ast ego prima mei generis rudimenta retexam,
Sole rubro genitus sum partu nubis aquosae
Lustro polos passim solos non scando per austros."

ON SEA SALT :

"DE SALE.

Dudum lympha fui, squamoso pisce redundans ;
Sed natura novo fati discrimine cessit,
Torrida dum calidos patior tormenta per ignes,
Nam cineri facies nivibus que simillima fulget."

A PAIR OF BELLOWS :

"DE POLIADIS.

Flatibus alternis vexor cum fratre gemello.[3]
Non est vita mihi, cum sint spiracula vitae.
Ars mea gemmatis dedit ornamenta metallis ;
Gratia nulla datur mihi, sed capit alter honorem."

THE DIAMOND :

"DE ADAMANTE LAPIDE.

En ego non vereor rigidi discrimina ferri,
Flammarum nec torre cremor, sed sanguine capri,[4]
Virtus edomiti mollescit dura rigòris.
Sic cruor exsuperat, quod ferrea massa pavescit."

(3). This implies the old form of bellows, from which we have the wording "A *pair* of bellows," or blast-skins, of which one filled while the other blew, so as to keep up an on-holding blast.

(4). Whence could have first arisen this belief that the diamond melts in goat's blood ?

On turning over the leaves of an old Latin book of *Peripatetic Physiology*, by Johannis Magirus, M.D., and professor of the science at Marburgh, in Hesse, I found a slight handling of the question why warm goat's blood melts the diamond, but he answers it not. He says that Scaliger could not give the reason of it, and so it must be an "Occulta Causa." The belief is most likely given in Aristotle's *Physics*.

ON THE ORGAN—

As it must be, though it is headed

"DE BARBITO.

Qamvis aere cavo salpinctae classica clangant
Et cytherae crepitent, strepitu que tubae modulentur;
Centenos tamen eructant mea viscera cantûs,
Meque strepente stupent mox musica corda fibrarum."[5]

One on the silkworm, and others on the peacock and on the magnet, show that they were not unbe-known to Ealdhelm.

Ealdhelm writes a riddle on pepper, which, by whatever line of traffic it came into England, was then found on the English board :—

"DE PIPERE.

Sum niger exterius, rugoso cortice tectus
Sed tamen interius candentem gesto medullam
Delicias, epulas regum luxusque ciborum,
Jus simul et pulpas battutas condo culinae,
Sed me subnixum nullâ virtute videbis,
Viscera ni fuerint nitidis quassata medullis."

One riddle on a book-case, "De Arcâ Librariâ," seems to show that in Ealdhelm's mind it was a book-chest, or box. Whether like the Roman capsula, for rolls, or a chest for bound leaf-books. Our word book-case, instead of book-shelves, would seem to point to a case. He makes its contents to be mostly divinity; as he says,

"Tota que sacratos gestant praecordia biblos."

(5). As it has happened of late years in many of our churches, where the fiddle and bass viol have yielded to the organ.

In a riddle "De Mola," the mill-stones are given, saying,

"Nos sumus aequales communi sorte sorores."

And Fire says,

"Me pater et mater[6] gelido genuere rigore."

ON A DRINKING GLASS:

"CALIX VITREUS.

* * * * * *

Nempe volunt plures collum constringere dextrâ,
Et pulchre digitis lubricum comprendere corpus;
Sed mentes muto dum labris oscula trado
Dulcia, compressis impendens basia buccis
Atque pedum gressus titubantes sterno ruinâ."

Of the meeting of the Saxon and Celt in Wessex, it has been given as a truth in some of our histories that the Anglo-Saxons drove the Britons off the land, as clean as a man would drive a lot of stray sheep out of his field, and that they drove them into Brittany, and drove them into Wales. We may believe that many of them, and, above all, many who had holden land, and lost it, withdrew into Brittany, or Wales; but it is far less likely that they were driven or fled, in a body, out of the land, any more than we have driven the Neustrian kin out of the Channel Islands, or the Manx out of Man, or the Maltese out of Malta, or the Hindoos out of India, or the French kindred out of Lower Canada, or the Maories into another island. It may be said that the red men of America, and the men of Tasmania, and other tribes, have been driven out of their lands. It is true that they have, as tribes, more or less, nearly dwindled away, or died off; but it is not true that they have been driven, or fled into another land—for in what other land are they found? It, moreover, seems true that the rate at which one hitherto land-holding race may dwindle away before or under

(6). The flint and steel.

another land-seeking one, is quicker or slower, as the in-pushing race may be higher, or less high, above the land-holding race in the might of civilization. We should most likely make head in New Zealand less fast against a German power as Germans are, than against a power as that of the Maories, brave though they may be. And we should bear in mind that the Britons, at the time of the Saxon inroad, as a Christian people, with Church schools, and a national school of poetry and music, and much of Roman civilization, were not so far below the Anglo-Saxons (if they were not, at least, even with them) as are the red men or Maories below the English. The Saxons overcame the Britons by their brave hardihood, in which they had been long trained in their never-ending struggles againt the sea and foes on the shores of the north.[7]

The works of Ealdhelm, as well as the laws of King Ine, and other historical writings, will shew clearly that, in his time, and afterwards, Britons of sundry ranks were living in Wessex among the Saxons. For we find laws in the code of Ine for British men, as theows (serfs), and scotpayers, and men of one hide, and of five hides of land. Among the writings of Ealdhelm was a small book, though in Bede's opinion one of mark, which he wrote at the bidding of a Saxon synod, when he was a priest and abbot of Malmesbury. A book against the so-thought mistake of the Britons, in which, either they did not keep Easter at its true time, or did many other things which (in his opinion) were against the straightness and peace of the Church; and by the reading of it many of the Britons

(7). An old constitutional law of the Friesians, was that they should not be called out to war farther than on the east to the Weser, and on the west to the Flee, and on the south not farther than that they could come back in the evening to hold their land "toe-ienst weeter ende toe-ienst den heydens here"—against water, and against the heathen prince.

who were under the rule of the West-Saxons were brought to the keeping of the Roman Catholic Easter-tide. A proof that Christian Britons deemed worthy of his care were living under Saxon rule in Wessex. And hereon a matter worthy of attention has been put forth by Mr. Thomas Kerslake, of Bristol, in a paper on *The Celt and the Teuton at Exeter*, where, as he has shown, the Britons and Saxons were for a long while living side by side, in their two sundry quarters of the town, the church of St. Petroc, a British dedication, being in the British quarter. Mr. Kerslake seems to have opened a hitherto unseen door of historical discovery, which may be open to other antiquaries in old British towns.

In such of our towns as are known to have been British ones, we find, in written or unwritten tradition, or from shells, or pieces of walling, of old churches, that the towns, at some earlier time, had a great many churches; more, after the rate of their size and likely population, than had stood in towns which, though not of fewer houses, were at first purely Saxon ones, or only Roman *Castra*, but never British *Caerau*.

In seeking the British quarters of our old heretofore British towns for the furtherance of our knowledge of the meeting of the British and Saxon races, and their churches, we may hope to find a clue to the British side of the two-kinned population in the dedication of their churches, as St. Petroc's is a token of a British congregation at Exeter. Now, among dedications very likely to be British, or Celtic, is that of St. Michael. As that of St. Michael's churches on hills, in Cornwall, or at Glastonbury, and in Brittany; and of Welsh churches, of which many are of that dedication, which is also found in some of the towns of the British *Caerau*. St. Martin was a Gaulish, and so a

Celtic saint, and it is clear that British churches were dedicated to him before the coming of the English, for Bede [B. I. cxxvi.] says that there was on the east side of Canterbury, in Ethelbert's time, a church dedicated to the honor of St. Martin, built while the Romans were still in the island ; and among the southern Picts was a monastery dedicated to St. Martin [Bede, B. 3, iv.]. And Marianus Scotus says that the Irish monks at Colen in his time (A. 973), [Marianus Scotus, quoted by Lloyd], made St. Martin the patron of their monastery. Of the Scilly Islands, named as we may believe by the West Britons, the five inhabited ones are called St. Mary's, Tresco, Bryher, St. Agnes, and St. Martin's. So that St. Mary and St. Agnes, as well as St. Martin, are British dedications; though St. Mary's, as well as the Holy Trinity and All Hallows, may be a Catholic dedication, and either British or English, but is not uncommon in Wales or Cornwall. St. Stephen is honoured with British dedications; and Launceston is said to be a down-worn shape of Llanstephen. St. Cross (Llancroes) is found in Wales, and among Celtic people elsewhere. And the Welsh have (under the name Llanbadarn) at least four churches to St. Paternus, to whom, I believe, a church was dedicated at Malmesbury [Caer Caradóc?] The little town of Wareham, Dorset, which seems to be the Môrin (Little Sea of the Morini), or the Dwrin (Little water), which gave name to Dornsaet, now Dorset, had formerly eight churches, of which two are St. Mary's and St. Martin's ; and Shaftesbury, Dorset (Caer Paladr or Peledyr), has had twelve churches, and among them a St. Martin's Church [Hutchins's *History*]. Canterbury (Caer Gaint) has had more than twelve churches, and four or five dedicated to St. Mary, with dedications to St. Martin, St. George, and the

Holy Cross. Cirencester (Caer Coryn), the Coryn being the stream now called the Chern, had two churches which are now lost. Chester (Caerleon), among many churches, has a St. Michael's, St. Mary's, and St. Martin's. Chichester (Caer Cei) has eight churches, and among them St. Mary's and St. Andrews. Gloucester (Caerloew) had formerly eleven churches. Ilchester (Esc. Lat. Isca Belgarum) at the Norman inroad had several churches. Lincoln (Caerlwydcoed) had heretofore fifty-two churches, not without a St. Martin's, and more than one dedication to St. Mary and St. Peter. Norwich (Caer Cynnan) is said to have had twenty-five churches in the time of Edward the Confessor, and Broomfield's *History of Norfolk* says, "The churches are ancient buildings, and, till of late years, many of them were only thatched, one of them still remaining so."[8] Shrewsbury (Amwythóg), formerly the thronestead of the Princes of Powis, has had many churches, and among them dedications to St. Michael and St. Mary. Warwick (Caerwythelín) had formerly six churches, and Winchester (Caerwent), had many, and dedications to St. Martin and St. Michael. Worcester (Caerwyrangón) had formerly eleven churches and dedications to St. Martin, St. Peter, St. Andrew, St. Nicholas, St. Michael, and St. Alban, a Celtic Saint of Britain. York (Caer Efrawc) has had twenty-three churches, with at least two dedications to sundry saints, as St. Helen, St. Mary, St. Michael, and St. Martin. Bath and Bristol may not show strong tokens of a British quarter, as, most likely, the towns may not be on the ground of the British *Caerau*.

It is not unlikely that these very many old churches,

(8). Capper, quoting Broomfield in his *Topographical Dictionary*.

some of which were old beyond the backreach of our history, and the cases of two or three churches of the same dedication, in the same town, may give a clue to further knowledge of the meeting of the British and English races, with their two Churches, in Wessex, as far as those Churches may be tokens of the dwelling of a two-kinned population, for a while, in two quarters of the same town. The Saxons would not, as Christians, be in communion with the British Church, as long as they kept a sundry—the Roman, and not the British—Eastertide, and the later Roman rites; nor, if the British congregations dwindled from their churches, would their buildings, therefore, belong to the English, or be wanted by them, so that some of them might slowly have fallen to other, or out of all, uses. That the two races were closely mingled in lower Wessex in the tenth and eleventh centuries, or at and about the time of Edred and Edwy, is clear from deeds of manumission of theows (serfs), the names of whom, British and English, show that some Englishmen, as well as some Britons, were unfree. Such deeds of out-freeing are given in the *Codex Diplomaticus*, and some of them, for Somerset and Cornwall, are put by Kemble into an Appendix (c), vol. 1, p. 496, of his *Saxons in England*.

It may be thought that, though some of the Saxons were unfree, all the Britons were in bondage. But no. It was not so; for the deed of manumission was fulfilled openly, in the sight of witnesses, whose names the document often bears, and these witnesses were "good men" to the law; but as bondsmen were nobodies to the law, it is clear that the "good men," so called by the law, were free men, and men of higher rank than the serfs. And, indeed, some of them were priests, and men holding offices in the borough, and yet many Britons.

Some of the Church laws for the men of Wessex under King Ine and the Bishop Ealdhelm were :—Law (2). That a child should be baptized within thirty days of its birth, under a fine of thirty shillings. (3). If a theow man should work on a Sunday by his lord's bidding, he should be free, and his master should pay thirty shillings. And so after the rate for free men. (4). That people should pay their church scot (cyric sceat). The church scot being most likely the Easter offerings. (62). That a man should pay church scot for the home and hearth whereat he abode at Midwinter. And a godson and godfather were shielded by the law, (75) one for the sake of the other. So that if a man slew another's godson or godfather, he should pay *Bót* (amends) to the godfather for his godson, or to the godson for his godfather.