In reference to The Sarsens or Greywether-sandstones at Staple Fitzpaine, near Taunton.

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ONTOLOGY or SAXOLOGY.—By the side of the main road from Taunton to Chard, and just out of Staple Fitzpaine, there lies a large weather-beaten sarsen-stone, locally known as "Devil's Stone," and engraved on the 6in. ordnance map. Its dimensions above the natural soil of the ground are 6ft. by 5ft. 4in. by 5ft. The stone is a hard sandstone or grit, unlike in texture and colour any rock of the surrounding formations. It is of irregular shape, somewhat hollowed out on its sides, and partly smoothed and rounded at top. There are several holes or cavities worn away in it on its upper side—whether natural or artificial I cannot say.

I was told on the spot by an intelligent native of the neighbouring parish of Curland, that "Owd Nick himself put his hands in the holes when he gripped the stone and flung it there," intending no doubt to damage the church, which stands near. Another and a longer tale is: "The devil having knowledge of the intended building of a church there, gathered a few rocks as he came thither, but getting tired, slept on the bank until he woke in the morning, and to his astonishment saw the fine tower of the church already up and finished. In

his hurry to get up, his satchel broke, the stones fell out, and one in particular remains there now."[1]

The material composing the Devil's Stone is quartz-sand, grains of quartz of various sizes in a siliceous cement, the silica having been held in solution by percolating water and deposited among the grains. Smaller-sized blocks of the same sort of stone and evidently brought from the fields around are to be seen at the road-crossing in the village and at field gates, as boundary stones and the like. Several slabs and blocks lie alongside the new road leading out of the village towards Staple Fitzpaine farm that were excavated when the road was being made. Quartz pebbles and small stones occur in these specimens but not in sufficient quantity to form breccia or conglomerate.

Altogether there are about a dozen sarsen-stones at Fitzpaine ; but there may be more which have escaped observation, hidden by the grass which has grown over them.

The following are occurrences of sarsen-stones which were probably brought from Fitzpaine. Two or three lie where the Thurlbear and Fitzpaine parish boundaries cross the main road just south of Badger Street, as the hamlet is called. One, 3ft. 10ins. by 3ft. by 2ft. 2ins., rests by the corner of Broughton lane, close to the second milestone from Taunton to Staple Fitzpaine.

A sarsen-stone well known to this Society to have come from Fitzpaine, is set up in the historic grounds of Taunton Castle. A tablet affixed to it records that the Castle Grounds were purchased by the friends of the late W. A. Jones, M.A., for twenty years Honorary Secretary to the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society, as a tribute to his memory and esteem for his talents. There is also this inscription : "This stone was brought from Staple Fitzpaine."

1. It is interesting to record here that Mrs. Marler, Almshouses, Magdalene Lane, Taunton, now (1908) 98 years of age, says : "The stone was in her younger days called 'the Double Stone,' and she believes there were then *two* stones."—Communicated by Mr. C. Tite.

There is a great cuboidal block of this kind of stone, 3ft. 7in. by 3ft. 4in. by 2ft., in the yard at Stone, or Stone's Farm, Corfe. It is massive and noticeably square-shaped and possibly may have been roughly dressed for building purposes. Such stones are well known to have been used in the building of churches, castles, and houses, being almost indestructible to weather.[2] Much of Windsor Castle is built of sarsen-sandstone.

Geology.—These phenomena are of great geological interest, and to that science we must turn for an answer to the questions as to what these Staple Fitzpaine boulders are, and whence they came? The material composing them must have existed somewhere at a time when the whole physical geography of this district was different. They are considered to be consolidated portions of Bagshot sand, or of sand of the Reading beds, both belonging to the Eocene deposits—but our local greywethers probably belong to the Bagshot beds, which once spread with the chalk over the greensand of the Blackdown Hills.[3] They are the relics of Tertiary beds, which as the tableland was intersected and slowly receded through the denudation of rivers, streams, and the disrupting frosts of many centuries, gradually subsided to lower levels, in some cases being found in the valley bottoms, as in the New Red Marl Valley of Corfe. They therefore testify to the recession of the escarpment and to the former extension both of the Cretaceous and Eocene over the Taunton area. So far from these stones having come from off the Blackdown Hills—as might fairly be supposed—it is the Blackdowns which have receded from the Taunton plain and from the lias escarpment of Staple Fitzpaine and left the stones behind because of their indestructible composition and of their bulk which prevented a distant transport.

In Galmington village, a mile west of Taunton, there are

2. Whitaker, *Mem. Geol. Survey*, Vol. I, p. 500, Geology, London.
3. Woodward, "Geology of England and Wales," p. 449.

two boulder stones. One is a small, rounded sarsen sandstone; the other, a large slab-like block, thirteen inches thick, consists of coarse, pebbly sandstone, with pebbles and fragments (some of large size) of white quartz and fibrous vein-quartz. It is slightly calcareous, effervescing feebly with acids. It does good service in the village as a marginal stone, though too bulky, seemingly, for man to have brought it for any purpose into Galmington. It may have come from the calcareous grit which occurs at the base of the Lower Chalk of East Devon and now reaches nearly to Sidmouth on the coast.[4] This grit, with the greensand and the chalk, and also the Eocene, must originally have spread over the Blackdown Hills, and must all have extended over this village.

It would be difficult to conjure romance from objects so familiar to us, yet in viewing our sarsens, subsided where they lie, they become invested with unusual interest. Are they not very lasting memorials in the changing conditions of time—recalling in our minds those deposits which once completely covered our district, but have long since gone away—and these blocks alone remain to tell the tale.

The history of the sarsens generally has been pretty well written by Prof. T. Rupert Jones, in the *Geological Magazine* for 1901.[5] Therein he refers to these particular stones near Taunton.

Philology.—As to the origin of the word "sarsen," there are various conjectures. The most probable solution is from *saresyn* (saracen), the Saxon designation for heathens, or pagans, the presumptive argument (according to the Rev. J. Adams) being that "as the principal specimens of these blocks were perceived to be congregated into temples, popularly attributed to heathen worship, it naturally came to pass that

4. Jukes-Browne, "Cretaceous Rocks, Great Britain," Vol. I, p. 203.

5. "Geol. Mag.," 1901, pp. 54-115. "Wilts Arch. Mag.," Vol. XXIII, p. 123.

the entire formation acquired the distinctive appellation of saresyn, or heathen-stones."[6]

The fact that in Scotland the Banff people call such isolated stones *heathens*,[7] seems a strong argument in favour of sarsen being a corruption of "saresyn," meaning heathen, or pagan.

There is still another derivation offered for the word sarsen, one that seems probable to the Rev. J. Adams, as given in his paper quoted above, on the "Sarsen-stones of Wiltshire and Berks."[8]

Commenting on the very sore and troublesome work it must have been breaking up and clearing away such impediments to the plough, when the downs were first brought under cultivation, he observed: "The Saxon word for troublesome, grevious, is *sar*, best expressed in the Scotch by the word 'sair,' meaning *painful*. Likewise in the Saxon a stone is *stan*, and in pronunciation they would naturally become sarsen[9] or sassen."

Some writers, however, consider the word to be derived from *sesan*, or *sesen*, meaning "rocks" (Anglo-Saxon plural of *ses*, a rock). In support of this opinion, sarsen is said to be pronounced *sasen*, or *sassens* (without the *r*) by the country people in Wiltshire and Berks, where on the chalk downs these particular stones abound.[10]

Where many of these stones are congregated together—and they lie together in scores on the chalk downs—they look at a distance like a flock of sheep lying down. Because of this resemblance, sarsens are more frequently called greywether-sandstones, or simply greywethers.

The larger stones used in the building of Stonehenge are sarsens or greywether-sandstone, as are also the prehistoric

6. Rev. J. Adams, "Geol. Mag.," 1873, p. 198.

7. I am indebted to Mr. Ledingham, Schoolhouse, Boyndie, Banff, and Dr. John Mill, of Aberdeen, for information on this subject.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

9. The Scotch "stane," meaning stone, is not likely to have been corrupted into "sen."

10. *Ibid.*, 1874, p. 96.

remains of Avebury.[11] Other examples are Kit's Coty House, the cromlech between Maidstone and Rochester, in Kent, and those circles of great stones in the centre of the parish of Stanton Drew, in Somerset.

Though we can trace the source from whence these great stones came the wonder remains how they were moved and set up in the vast downland! What tales they could tell if they could speak!

Mythology.—For want of other records to tell, the untutored Saxon reads in relics such as these the work only of the malicious or evil genius, the pagan, or heathen. In the judgment of the people of a thousand years ago epithets such as these had much the same meaning as diabolic, or belonging to the devil.[12] Supernatural, moreover, must have appeared many remarkable natural phenomena, familiar to us as undoubted results of natural causes—as for instance many great fragments of rocks left in unusual or isolated positions.

Agglestonology.—One of the best examples is afforded in the famous "Agglestone Rock," on Agglestone Heath, in Dorset, and not far from Studland—about a mile to the north. There in the heart of a moorland waste, overshadowed by the Purbeck hills, this immense mass of rock—it is 18ft. high—stands sentinel on the top of a conical hill, or knoll, which rises sheer to an elevation of some ninety feet. In shape, it is roughly like an inverted cone—that is to say it rises from a narrow neck, or base, and regularly enlarges (with rather a jagged outline) to a great circumference at top. The outside is ferruginous sand-rock, but it is quite possible that the centre is true greywether or sarsen-sandstone.

It is thought to have been an idol or rock-deity.[13] It is not a mass set up by man, nor is it an erratic block, but a consoli-

11. Reid, "Geology of Salisbury," 1903, p. 69.

12. Holmes, "Essex Naturalist," Vol. XIII, p. 197.

13. Hutchins' "History of Dorset," 1774, Vol. I, p. 217. The origin of the word Agglestone, or Haggerstone, has been referred to the Saxon *haelig*, meaning "holy." Hence *haelig-stone*, or "holy-stone."

dated mass of Lower Bagshot sand, the loose material around having been removed. Mr. C. Reid, who examined that ground for the Geological Survey, is of opinion that the Agglestone is actually in place, although it may have settled a little. Similarily to the Agglestone, there is reason to believe that the adjacent mounds of greywether blocks, known as "Stoney-barrowe" and the "Puckstone," are not detached from the principal mass below them—merely that the loose sand has been denuded and one or more of the blocks have toppled and fallen.