Glaston, Glastonia, Glastonbury.

BY THE REV. W. H. P. GRESWELL, F.R.G.S.

A RE we quite sure that we have solved the question of the derivation of Glastonbury as a place-name? May I quote three solutions already made?

1. Giraldus Cambrensis (XII Century) says: "That place which is now called Glastonia was of old called Insula Avalonia. For it is an Island beset by marshes, whence, in the British tongue, it has been called Inis-Avalon, *i.e.*, an apple-bearing island. For this place used formerly to abound in apples, which, in the British tongue, are called aval. . . . An old name was also Inis-witrin in the British tongue, *i.e.*, Insula Vitrea. From which word the Saxons coming afterwards used to call the place Glastingeburi. For 'Glas' is in their tongue, 'vitrum' and 'Bury' a Castle or City."

2. Dr. Edwin Guest, in his "Origines Celticæ" (vol. ii, p. 65), has the following conjecture: "Glastonbury was called by the Welsh as early as the VI Century Ynis Wytrin (Malmesbury Gesta, i, 27), that is, the Glass Island; and its Anglo-Saxon name was Glæstinga byrig, *i.e.*, the Burgh of the Glæstings. The compound glæs-tings was probably formed on the same model as our modern hus-tings, the latter element of which is the plural of the Anglo-Saxon *thing*, a council, a place of meeting: the glæstings may have been buildings used for public purposes, whose walls were vitrified (vitrum) like those of Gatacre Hall. Perhaps, also,

the story of the "glass tower in the midst of the sea" which figures so prominently in the older Irish legends (Nennius, ch. 7), may have originated in circumstances of the like kind. Though I know of no well-authenticated instance, it is certainly possible that remains of such vitrified walls may be still extant."

3. More recently, Canon Scott Holmes writes, in his "Wells and Glastonbury," p. 183 (Ancient City Series):— "Westward, thought the heathen Celt, were the souls of the departed (*e.g.*, King Arthur), borne by mysterious ferrymen to the Island near the setting of the Sun. It was the Island of Glast, or of Aval or Avallac, for such were the names of the gods who held sway in those regions of darkness and of mystery. They thought that in that distant isle there was a mysterious cauldron of regeneration into which the souls of heroes were dipped and whence they sprang into a new life, healed of all their wounds, in the shadowy regions of the grave. . . . How was this connected with Glastonbury ? . . . As they looked across from the highlands of Wiltshire and saw the Island peak raise itself above the fogs that hung over the swamp, it was an Island of the Western Sea, and such an Island was the home of those who had died. Surely, there was the realm of Glast and thither was the abode of Avallac."

Some of these derivations strike one as fanciful. The "Insula Vitrea" was probably a descriptive term, and as "Vitrum" means woad as well as glass (Forcellinus), there is no reason why the Island may have not been so called from the woad that grew there. Or it might have struck the eye as being of a woad colour : "Hoc est hyalino seu viridi colore." The uplifted grassy "Tor" looks green enough at times, and it was a wonderful landmark always.

However this may be, I think we must get rid of the idea and associations of Glass or of vitrified walls. I do not think any excavations in the neighbourhood of the great Abbey

have revealed any " Vitreous " fragments that would have satisfied Dr. Guest.

May I suggest a simpler and more direct derivation, and this, to follow the analogy of the Welsh " Glasbury "—surely a kindred form of " Glaston "—and I would refer the reader to Professor Lloyd's explanation of the place-name Glasbury (History of Wales, vol. i, p. 272). " In Brycheiniog or Brecon (the Kingdom of Brychan) was Y Clas ar Wy, the 'clas' or monastery on the Wye, which the English call Glasbury." In early Welsh history the word " Class " is constantly used thus, *e.g.*, in the account of Cambro-British Saints there was Sanctus Kenider de Glesburi ; in Rhygyfarch's Life of St. David, " Monastica Classis," is found, and means a corpus or collegium ; there is Clas Garmon and Clas Bangor. The Welsh " Clas " hived off many kindred communities. So did Glaston. There were the Seven Islands, and the Seven Churches, and the Seven Sisters of Polden. But the magic of the old " Clas " bound them together in obedience to the little Chapel of St. Joseph.

The Satellite Islands were (1) Bekaria, called Parva Hibernia, whither Irish pilgrims turned their steps ; (2) Ferramere with Westie, *i.e.*, West Island, now corrupted into West Hay ; (3) Padnebeorge or Pathenesburg, a vine-growing Island ; (4) Andredesey (Ylond or Nilond), so called from the Ecclesiola of S. Andrew ; (5) Martinesei, from the Ecclesiola of St. Martin ; (6) Godnei or Godney—each island, in its way, a sanctuary of the Faith and the abode of Saints. But they circled round their " Delos," which was the ancient " Clas " under the shadow of the Tor.

Professor Lloyd (i, 205) remarks further that the Welsh " Clas " was a very important and responsible body in the early Welsh Church. It received the half of all payments made to the Church ; it succeeded to the moveable property of the Abbot when he died, and decided finally all disputes arising amongst its members. Though the Claswyr are not

termed monks, but canons, the title of their chief officer, the Abbot, and the manner in which they consumed in common the revenues of the Church, afford strong evidence that the " Clas " was at first a monastery carrying on the tradition of the Saints as at Llanwit in Glamorgan. It may be noted that the over-sea connection between Glaston and Llanwit was a very frequent one in early days, and that one " Clas " may have influenced the other. This upper stretch of the Severn Sea was the well-known region of the Celtic Sailor Saints. (See Greswell's " Chapters on the Early History of Glastonbury.")

Professor Lloyd (i, 275) says of Llanilltud : " It may well have been a Royal burying-place, for its Abbot was one of the three great Ecclesiastics of the Diocese of Llandaff, and the revenues of its ' clas ' were drawn from many a manor of Morgannwg. Across the Thaw was the Cantref of Penychen, extending as far as the Taff. This also contained two ecclesiastical centres of first rank, the one the seat of the Bishop of Morgannwg, the other at Nant Carfan (corruptly Llancarfan), the principal ' Clas ' of St. Cadog, and a match in affluence to Llaniltud Fawr. The Abbot of Llancarfan ruled over thirty-six canons, . . . nothing essentially different from the organisation of the Cathedral Church of Llandaff. The place of the Abbot was taken by the Bishop . . . a priest of Teilo represented the later Dean : twenty-four canons formed the ' Clas ' or household of the Saint."

Elsewhere, Professor Lloyd (i, 278) notes that the Church of Gwynllyn (now St. Woollas), was served by a " Clas." St. Tathan was head of a studium or college of the same monastic type as that of Illtud. He founded a " clas ' of first rank, of which the Abbot had the direction ; the men of Gwent looked on him as a father. The Latin words—classis, studium, sacerdos, familia, magister, doctor, and even confessor, as applied to the early Welsh Saints, are worth noting. Surely these words point to early influence, and to the lan-⌋

guage and civil system of Rome, long before the coming of the Benedictine monks, indeed to a long and somewhat obscured chapter of pre-Augustinian Christianity in this land.

What is more natural than that the Anglo-Saxons should describe Glaston as really the " ton " of a monastic classis already existing ?

Although the church is described as *Glastingberiensis* in Domesday, it is curious to note how little this spelling stereotyped the name. The commonest adjective is Glastoniensis, the commonest substantive Glastonia. (See John of Glaston and William of Malmesbury). Bishop Savaric is Bishop of Bath and Glaston (Report of MSS. of Wells, 1885). Glaston and Glastonia occur in Kirby's Quest and the Exchequer Lay Subsidies, whilst " Glaston xii Hides " survives as a descriptive title to the present day. It would seem to be really more correct to speak and write of the great monastery as " Glaston " always.

For those who lay emphasis upon the very ancient history of Glaston, a derivation which links it with Welsh and British Christianity opens up many points of interest. The Benedictines desired of course to blot out those triumphs of conversion which could not be attributed directly to Rome. In " Classis " we see of course a Roman word, a bequest of the Roman occupation, but not a Roman ecclesiastical expression.

It is curious to notice how in much later times (1647-8) the word "classis" was adopted under the Presbyterian system, and how the various English counties were divided into " Classes," with power of ordination (" A History of the English Church," by William A. Shaw). Under the "Classis of Wells and Bruton" came Glaston, and John Luffe was " Minister of the two Churches in the Town of Glaston" (so spelt). But neither John Luffe nor the authors of the " classical system " realised the old significance of the " Clas " of the Welsh or British Church.

The above derivation of Glaston on the analogy of Glas-bury links the history of the island monastery with Llaniltud and South Wales, which is only natural. One rumour says that the Glaston monks tended a primitive lighthouse on one of the Holms islands ("Cambria Sacra," by Louis Nedelec, p. 285). If so the journeyings backwards and forwards must have been frequent. St. Gildas and St. Cadocus were known in South Wales and North Somerset. Was not St. Gildas the reputed occupant of the Steep Holm together with his "familia" or collegium of monks, before he retired to Glaston, the "Tumulus Sanctorum"? And was not St. Cadocus con-nected with the Flat Holm? Island stepping-stones across the Severn Sea.