Gyfla.

BY THOMAS KERSLAKE.

A VERY early catalogue of above thirty Anglo-Saxon settlements in the southern half of this island has long engaged the attention of our political antiquaries. It consists entirely of Teutonic names, or of names which had already fallen into Teutonic forms or usage; but it shares with the earlier Celtic list of British cities, usually printed with Nennius, in that, whilst the majority of the names in both are the merest riddles as to what places are meant, a small number in each can be fairly guessed, and a few can be positively recognised.

This Anglo-Saxon list has been several times printed, from more or less corrupted copies; by Sir Henry Spelman, in his *Glossarium;*[1] in Gale and Fell's *Scriptores;*[2] and by Mr. Kemble.[3] But a much earlier and evidently a more accurate copy was lately discovered by Mr. W. De Gray Birch, and printed in his *Cartularium Saxonicum* (No. 297); also, supplemented by an exposition attempting to localise the names, in the *Journal of the British Archæological Association.*[4] Mr. Birch attributes the writing of this copy to the tenth or eleventh century, but justly considers it to represent a document of an earlier date, and we shall presently see an additional reason to consider it to have been derived from a record of the early part of the eighth century, by an example of what must have been the condition at that time of one of the territories mentioned, to qualify it for a place in such a contemporary catalogue.

Among the names in this Teutonic list is one which can not

(1). *Voc. Hida.* (2). Vol. iii. p. 743.
(3). *Saxons in England,* vol. i. p. 81. (4). Vol. xl. p. 28.

only be recognised with certainty, but of which I believe I am able to fairly indicate the extent of the district intended. This is "Gifla," numbered fifteen by Mr. Birch. Spelman prints it "Eyfla;" Gale and Fell print "Cifla," but suggest "Gyfla;" but they all confess no knowledge of the place meant. Mr. Kemble prints "Eysla," but three other manuscripts printed by Mr. Birch read "Gyfla," which is no doubt the true reading. The name had already otherwise been well known, as "Gifle," from that gazeteer of old Wessex topography, King Alfred's will; but this both Mr. Kemble and Mr. Thorp had previously explained as "Gidley," and so the real rendering had been hitherto diverted and lost from general knowledge.

Mr. Birch, however, comes nearer home, when he suggests "Yeovil." But when he goes on to call it "the supposed Roman station Velox," he seems rather to have meant the town of Ilchester or Ivelchester, and we shall see that it does mean a large pagus or tract of country in which both these places are situated. In either case he appears to forget that this Teutonic list is not, like the older Celtic one, a list of cities or towns, but of districts; Sir H. Spelman calls them "regiunculæ." Mr. Kemble includes the list in his chapter, "The Gá or Scír." "Gá" is probably one of his German importations. The only resting-place for this word in any English record is this very list; in which six of the names end with "*ga*." But there is no reason to value this as a significant annexed word at all, but simply an ordinary termination. Fifteen other names end in "*na*." All end in "*a*;" so that all that is peculiar to the six that end in "*ga*" is that "*g*" happens to be the penultimate letter, which is "*n*" in fifteen other names, and other consonants in the rest.

If, however, we had found the other word, "Scir," in any title or rubric of this Anglo-Saxon list, we need not have been surprised, for this would have been at home in an English record. But, even with respect to this word, it has been con-

tended that our word "Shire" is distinctive of those English counties that had not been original territories or "regiunculæ," afterwards constituents of larger territories or kingdoms; but that it indicates later divisions or *shares* of such larger territories that had been already established. Long before our constitution of shires there is reason to believe that "scirs" had a different and independent existence. Shearings off they may have been, but from the possessions of the invaded Celtic peoples—colonies, conquests, or encroachments; not always even hostile, though afterwards aggregated by the advance of the Anglo-Saxon aggressive central powers, incited by the imperial instinct. Hallamshire is one of the many examples of the survival in local usages of the names of some territorial arrangements older than our divisions of greater centralisations into our shires. Another example is the name "Triconscir," in King Alfred's will. In printed books this has always been interpreted as meaning "Cornwall;" but it only means that part or "scir" of Cornwall which had been inherited by Alfred, of which the name still remains, in a reduced form, in the name of the two hundreds of "Trigg." It is remarkable that this is the very part of Cornwall which had long been exceptionally English; having, as I have elsewhere shown,[1] been *sheared* off from Celtic Damnonia, by Æthelbald of Mercia, A.D. 743; and this, perhaps, accounts of Alfred's possession of it, by heritage, under the West-Saxon absorption of the territories and royalties of Mercia.

At all events, this is a list of this sort of "scirs," or insulated colonies or first settlements of the Teutonic invaders or immigrants among the hitherto partially subjugated Britons. Our immediate concern is with the one of its recorded districts which appears as "Gifla" in the more ancient copy; and it is here selected for notice because it is believed that the first Saxon occupation of the territory so named can be actually dated, A.D. 658.

(1). *Vestiges of the Supremacy of Mercia*, 1879, pp. 15—19.

In the Anglo-Saxon chronicle is this annal:

> "An. DCLVIII. In this year Cenwalh" (or Kenwalch) "fought æt Peonnum with the Wealas" (Damnonian Britons), "and made them fly as far as Pedrida" (the river Parret).

All preceding writers, who have attempted to place this "Peon," have at once jumped at a guess at some one of the many places which have retained the Celtic name of "Pen." But it is most unlikely that the Saxons should have converted this short *e* into a diphthong. They were not in the habit so to treat the British "Pen," in names wherein they found and adopted it. They also had more substantial uses for diphthongs than to waste them where they were not due. I have already, in a treatise, formerly under the notice of this Society,[1] shown good reasons, now somewhat strengthened by this mention of the district of Gyfla among the Saxon colonies, that the "Peon" of the battle was Poinington Down, north of Sherborne, the last natural fastness, westward, of the high range of hills that divides our Dorset, already occupied by the West-Saxon invaders for a hundred years, and our Somerset, which by this battle they penetrated for the first time. This eminence looks down, westward, upon the extensive valley through which flows the river Yeovil, Ivel, or Yeo, and including the towns of Yeovil, of Ivelchester, Yeovilton, and one or two other places in which the river-name may be traced. But near the mouth of the valley the river Yeovil joins the river Parret, near Langport; so that the fugitives here first encountered that river, and it is here that the pursuit was checked, and that day converted the district of the Yeo valley from a British possession to the West-Saxon colony of "Gyfla."

The flight and pursuit must have been for about twelve or fifteen miles, and the valley in which the pursuers now found themselves is one of those which are so characteristic of Somerset: a long and broad alluvial level, or drained estuary

(1). *A Primæval British Metropolis*, pp. 45—64.

or frith, confined by semi-mountainous ranges of hills, admirably suited for such an intended colony. Having expelled the occupants, the continued occupation of such a region was the obvious sequel. Not only was the capacious basin in which they found themselves all that could be desired, but any of you who may now make the short journey from Yeovil to Sherborne, even by the present capital oblique road, may have some experience of the greater difficulty of the retreat than what the precipitate advance had been. At the eastern end of the basin the steep western escarpment is crowned by the plain which had been the battle field; at the western extremity was the contingency of the Parret to which the chronicle assigns the cessation of the pursuit. I will not here enter upon the proof of the enormous errors of ethnology and history that have been repeated from each other, until they have become textual, by all established writers, and which arose out of a wrong understanding of this mention of the river Parret. I have to some extent done this in the treatise already referred to.[1]

It has been said above that, by this conquest of A.D. 658, Somerset was "penetrated for the first time." It is, indeed, the first Teutonic occupancy of any part of Somerset proper. It is true, the earlier conquest of the Gloucestershire Cotswolds, by Ceawlin, A.D. 577, included Bath; and as Bath is placed in Somersetshire in modern *Gazeteers*, even the older school of "best authorities"—such, for instance, as Mr. Sharon Turner—had, for the sake of the turn of a sentence, included "a part of Somerset" in that conquest. The late learned and ingenious Dr. Edwin Guest, without any warrant or justification from the original authority, the annal in the chronicle, or any other, extended the conquest, spite of the Avon, of Wansdike, and the mountain group of the Mendips, beyond all these formidable barriers and impediments, to include the part—probably about one-third—of the present

(1). *Primæval British Metropolis*, p. 62.

county which lies north of the small North-Somerset Axe; and his premature extension has since passed without question into all the received histories of England. But the conquest on the Gloucestershire Cotswold range had for an incidental result the pillage of the three Roman cities—Bath, Cirencester, and Gloucester—which lay at three of its feet, and does not indicate any extent of the territorial annexation. But that Bath—which is alone by itself north of the Avon, and always racially distinct from the south of that river—is included in the Somerset of our day is an accident, probably arising in the eleventh century, out of changes in Church territory, and in direct violation of both natural and ethnic frontier. I have shown, at the place last cited, that this northern part of Somerset has distinct traces of a late continuance of Celtic Christianity, and your own Society lately produced another striking one, that the *alias* of "Lantocai" for Leigh-upon-Mendip is still in use. There are several names of British saints quite likely to have passed into "Tocai;" but the prefix "Lan," is at any rate an indisputable mark.

There are also similar indications that Dr. Guest has exceeded his authorities in extending the Cotswold conquest westward to the angle of Gloucestershire that lies between the Severn and Avon. This is a quite separate high range of limestone table-land, divided from the Cotswolds by the wide forest bottom, since known as Kingswood Forest. In the times concerned, a forest must have been one of the most effectual of natural checks to an invader. Every tree must have been a fortress, even when garrisoned by only one or two defenders. This part of Gloucestershire must have continued Celtic until included in the advance to the Avon, of Mercia against Wessex, above a hundred years later. Of the late Celtic occupation of this region, besides some hagiographical traces in dedications, the charters of Worcester show the Mercians dealing with the whole of it as conquerors deal with newly appropriated lands, and some of these charters of this

eastern shore are remarkable examples of the peculiar rentals in kind, which have been noticed by Mr. Seebohm at Tickenham, on the Welsh side of the Severn.

Just beyond the confluence of the Yeo with the Parret is the Isle of Athelney, which, not until more than two hundred years later than the time upon which we have been engaged, earned its greater renown under King Alfred. Cenwalh has the reputation of having founded Sherborne monastery, close to Poinington, where the battle had been fought. There is also some reason to suspect that he founded a religious college of some sort at Athelney, where the conquest ended, since forgotten by eclipse of later events. William of Malmesbury[1] superciliously notes that, even as late as the twelfth century, there were a few poor monks at Athelney, who still continued to sing to the stars the praises of St. Eielwin, their patron, whose still continued endowments they counted, instead of sanctity: and that it was believed that he was the brother of Cenwalh. Was Eielwin the Atheling of Athelinga-ey? Alfred found the name already there, so that the name cannot have arisen from his own Athelings.

The realising of the date of the settlement of an English people in a particular locality may have other subordinate points of importance. For example, within this region of Gyfla is a place, the name of which includes the constituent "*ing*," about which Mr. Seebohm says the last word has not yet been said. This sort of historical contribution may therefore be valuable even to the positivisms of philology, for within this colony is a "Lymington," of which a most learned etymologist[2] lately said, "As to Lymington, it is the town of Lymings, a tribe also commemorated by the village of Lyminge, in Kent." For this to be true, it would be necessary that this tribe should have been common to the Jutish settlers of the fifth century and the Gewissæ of the seventh. I have

(1). *G. Pontificum,* Rolls edition, p. 199.

(2). *Notes and Quœries,* 6th series, vol. viii. p. 113.

already contended[1] that the "*-ing*" of English names is most often an adoption of the Celtic "*ynys*" or "*inch,*" found already on any spot so named, as being a river island or peninsular shore; and I think Lymington on the Yeo fairly satisfies this condition. Lymington is the place where Wolsey is said to have sown his wild-oats, and to have consequently watched his vigil in the "enchanted castle" of Sir Hudibras. This Yeo valley also produced another celebrity: Thomas Coryat, "the Odcombian leg-stretcher," who walked through Europe to China, and back, with a single pair of shoes. The shoes were said to have been hung as a memorial trophy in the church of Odcombe. I once performed a "leg-stretching" pilgrimage to that fane, but failed to see or hear of the shoes. In Coryat's work he always names Yeovil "Evil."

(1). *Notes and Quœries*, April 21, 1883.