

Somerset.

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THE word *Somer*, in *Somerset*, is not of clear meaning, as it does not show whether it means the *summer* season or aught else than summer, since it is not clear why *Somerset* is more a land of *summer* than Devon or Dorset, but I think we may get an insight into its meaning and use from the old British speech, the Welsh.

The Welsh call Somerset, *y Gwlad yr Hâf*—the District of *Hâf*; but the primary meaning of *Hâf* is fullness—as of good, or of the produce of the earth for men and cattle, or of cattle for men, or fertility and fullness. Then again Summer is called *y Pryd yr Hâf*—the season of fullness, or in short, *yr Hâf*. Now I think that *Gwlad yr Hâf* should be taken in its first meaning—as the land of fertility rather than the land of *summer*, and that it was called Somerset from a taking of the wrong, instead of the true, one of the two meanings of the word *Hâf*. The Severn is, in British, the *Hâfren*, which might be *Hâfrîn*, the stream of fertility or fertile land. It may, however, be that *Somerset* may have taken its name from *Somerton*, the place of its old Shiremore, and that, as it has been hinted by Mr. John Price of Long Ashton, in a paper which he

has shown me, the element *Somer* may bear the same meaning (whatever it may be) as *Somer* in *Somery* (Somerea?) (Leicester); *Somerby*, *Somercoats*, (Lincoln); *Somerford*, (Cheshire and Wilts); *Somerleyton*, (Suffolk); and *Somerton*, (Norfolk and Oxford). The word *Somer*, *Sumor*, *Sumur*, *Summer*, is unknown otherwise than as the name of the *soft* season of the year, in the Saxon English that has come down to us.

To the inquiry, whence sprang the Somerset-people, we shall find from the history of the Saxon-English settlements, that, as far as they are of the old Holstein and Sleswick stock, they would have sprung from the settlement of the West Saxons, which began on the shore of Hampshire, under the leaders, Cerdic and Cynric, in 495, and spread slowly down through Hants, Wiltshire, and Dorset, into Somerset, and for some years, if not generations, stayed still at the rivers Parret, and the Upper Ax, which were an understood boundary between the Saxon-English and the British races.

Now, in the seeking of historical light from the British tongue, we must bear in mind that the British spoken here was less the speech-form of the Welsh of our time than that of the Britons of Cornwall, the *Cornoak*, in which, happily, we have some writings in a few old miracle plays; and the *Cornoak* differs from Welsh, as Somerset may differ from Book-English or the Yorkshire folk-speech.

The river-name *Ax* is the British *Esc*—water or a stream—though the Saxons put the *c* before the *s*, and of *esc* made *ecs*. The name of the Parret, I take it, was bestowed on it as the *Boundary* stream; and I think that before the Saxon incoming it was called the *Ton*, a name now left on a branch of it, for the word *Ton* means a wave; and if a Welshman were now to see the *Bore* or tide-wave riding

up the Parret he might cry out, "Wele Ton, Ton fawr." "See a wave, a great wave." And when that part of the *Avon y ton*, the Wave or Bore river, became the partition between the two races, the British might have called it *y Parwet* or *Parwyd*, the partition or boundary.

The Saxon Chronicle calls the Parret or Perret the *Pedred* or *Pedreda*, with a *d* before the *r*, and that still points to the same meaning, as we find that the Cornoak often put a *d*, where the Welsh does not, before a liquid, and said *Pedn* for *Pen*, *Badn* for *Ban*, and so *Pedret* for *Peret*.

In Somerset men, as men of Wessex, there may be a little British blood, though I believe there may be less of it in Somerset than in Dorset. In the little code of King Ina's laws for Wessex, are some for Britons of sundry ranks, and the British names of places in Somerset must have been taken by the Saxons from British lips: whether *Avon*, *Avon*, the river; the *Brue*, *Briw*, the cut or channel; *Pen*, *Pen*, a head—hill-head, as in *Pen Zillwood*, *Pen Domer*: *Pill*, a little creek—inlet, as in *Pill*, near *Bristol*, *Huntspill*. Of *Glastonbury* the names and early history are all British, as *Ynys Glas*, the Green-island; *Ynys Gwydwr*, the Island of the Flowing Water. *Ynys Avallon*, or in a couplet which must I think be as old as the time when it was in British hands, *Ynys Avallach*, the Island of Apple Trees,

"Ynys Fôn sydd bywiach

Felly Ynys Avallach."

"The Isle of Anglesea is healthy,

So also is Glastonbury."

Then another proof that Somerset people are children of the West-Saxon settlers, is that they have, down to the *Ax*, the Wessex folk-speech, for Somerset differs from

Dorset only a little in vowel sounds, while in grammatical form and words it is the same. Below Axminster and the Parret, however, I understand that we should begin to find the Devon folk-speech which, in many points, leaves the old Wessex tongue. But here arises a question, whether the old Somerset people have Belgic blood in their veins. Cæsar tells us that Gaul was holden by three sets of men—the Belgæ, Aquitani, and Galli or Celtæ, and that they differed in speech, ways of life, and laws; and he says that the shore of Britain was holden by incomers from the Belgæ;—and Ptolemy places the Belgæ to the east and north-west of the Durotriges of Dorset, and says that their main towns were *Ischalis* (Ilchester), so called from *Esc*, water or stream; *Hydata Therma*, the hot waters or Bath; and *Wenta* or *Caer Went*, which would be Winchester, the Roman *Venta Belgarum*. Thence we may begin to take the Somerset people as being more or less of Belgic blood. But were the Belgæ Teutonic or Celtic? and were they or were they not off driven along with the Britons? If the Saxons had found here in Somerset a people of Teutonic speech, like the Flemish, and at that time almost Saxon, they would surely have found their coming on a body of Teutonic brethren, worthy of a place in their chronicles; whereas they write only that their fights, in West Britain, were with the *Wealas*, or Foreigners, as they mostly called the Britons; and the names of places over the land holden by the Belgæ, seem to have been only pure Celtic and British.

Again, the homeland of the Belgæ or the *Belgium* of Cæsar's time, was that of the Walloons of our time, and the Walloons hold, on good grounds, that they are the Belgæ of the old Romans; and I have had from Belgium a Grammar and Word-book of the Walloon speech, that I

might see what grounds it affords for making the Belgæ Teutonic or Celtic, and they show that the Walloons are surely not Teutonic, but their speech is one of those forms of folk-speech which were formed of a mingling of a Celtic with the Latin tongue, and I infer that the old Belgæ were Walloons, and, in the main, Celtic, and that in Britain they soon melted into the British race, and were overcome as British before the Saxon settlers, and that the Somerset people are no more Belgic than they are Britons.

The Walloons with their speech hold most of the provinces of Hainault, Namur, Liege, and Luxembourg, all Belgium that is not Flemish. I at one time thought that the softer Z and V for the Book-English S and F might be tokens of the early Belgic as a Flemish speech, but no, it is shown by the Prick of Conscience "Ayenbite of Inwyt" written in 1340, in the Kentish folk-speech, that those clippings belong to the old Saxon of the true Saxon settlements, as they differed from the English ones of the Angles.

The names given by Ptolemy as those of the main towns of the Belgæ are Celtic, and Welsh names; as Wenta, *Caer-went* now Winchester, and there is now a *Caer-went* in Wales: *Ischalis*, *Caer-Esc*, or *Escor*, the Watery or River Fastness, and *Hydata Therma*, which was *Caer Badon*, and we shall find British Celtic names peeping up over the same land in the Roman Itinerary, and in the map of the West of England at this day, as well as in the Welsh names of some West English towns: *Salisbury*, *Caer-sallog*; *Ambesbury*, *Caer-Caradog*; *Bristol*, *Caerodor*, (*Godor* breach or split in the rock at Clifton).

Names heard by the Saxons from the lips of the Britons, *Avon*, the river; *Briw*, a cut, channel; *Creech*, *Cruc*, *Crug*, a high mound or hillock; *Cadbury*, *Cad*, *Cat*, a

battle, or stronghold, or keep, from *Cadw*, *Catw*, to hold, keep, strive or fight ; Maesbury, *Maes*, a field, or flat ground ; *Caer ar y maes*, the stronghold on the field ground, not *ar y mynydd*, on a hill ridge.

Somersetshire, as there is good ground for believing, had the honor of the first Christian Church in Britain, and it seems most likely that the first Christian Mission was settled at Glastonbury, which became to the British a most hallowed spot, and among those who sent hither that Mission was, I believe, a British lady, Claudia Rufina. St. Paul in his First Epistle to Timothy, iv 21, says, "Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia," which Claudia was a British lady, a niece or kinswoman of Caractacus, with whom she went to Rome, and was there wedded to a Roman nobleman Pudens. That she was British we are told by Martial, Lib. xi, Epigram 53.

Claudia caeruleis cum sit Rufina Brittannis,

Edita, cur Latiae pectora plebis habes ?

Quale decus formae ! Romanam credere matres

Italides possunt, Atthides esse suam.

"Since it happens that thou Claudia hast sprung from skinstained Britons, why holdest thou the heart of the Latins? What comeliness of form! Roman mothers may believe thee to be Roman, and Greece to be hers."

The Welsh writings give her name as *Gwladys Ruffydd*, of which the Romans made *Claudia Rufina*, and who should be *Linus*, whose name is put by St. Paul between those of the husband and wife, but their son? and Linus was the first or as good as the first, bishop of Rome, and it is very likely that he and his mother *Gwladys* were promoters of the sending of a Mission to Britain, and no place in Britain would seem to have a better

claim to the first Missionary station than Glastonbury.

It may be asked, is it not much more likely that the first Mission would, like that of Augustine to the English, have begun their work on the eastern shore than down on the west? to which I answer Yes, with nothing to send them to the west. But Caractacus was Tywysog, or Prince of Cornwall, or West Britain, and so Gwladys was a West English lady, and Gwladys might have wished to send the Mission to her own (Gwlad) land.

Of the Somerset folk-speech I would not say much, as it has been handled as well as any man in Somerset or England can treat it by Mr. T. S. Baynes, in a paper which was, I think, written for your Society, and printed in the *Taunton Courier* of Jan. 23, and Jan. 27, 1856; and from thence taken and printed by H. R. H. Prince Lucien Buonaparte as one of his samples of the sundry forms of English folk-speech. His Highness printed only a few copies of it, and it would be well worthy of a place in your transactions if it is not already preserved in print for your members and county people.

I would touch on a point which as it was interesting to Mr. Jennings, who some years ago wrote a word-book of the folk-speech of Somerset, and some poems in that form of West English, would, I think, still be interesting to the Somerset antiquary, namely:—The outgoing of Somerset and Devon men into Ireland as soldiers, and afterwards settlers in the time of Strongbow or Henry II.

General Vallancy had printed in vol. II of the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, a paper on the old speech of the Baronies of Forth and Bargy in Wexford, Ireland, and Mr. Jennings, as some of you may know, has given in his notes some verses of a Forth song which he

had found in General Vallancy's book, and which he has shown to have a strong tinge of West English, upon which he thought that the English settlers of the Baronies might have been Wessex men of Somerset and Devon, as I can give further proof that many of them were. I conceived from Mr. Jennings's notes a yearning of mind for more knowledge of the Forth people and their speech, and it became stronger as a late friend, Mr. William Tanner of Bristol, had told me that on his reading of some West English Poems in a village of Somerset, an Irish gentleman told him that he understood them, as he knew something of a like folk-speech in Forth in the county of Wexford. I wished Mr. Tanner to make a summer trip over to Forth, but as he could not then leave home, he wrote to a friend in Ireland, Mr. Webb of Dublin, and so as it happened, to the man whose uncle Mr. Poole from about 1824 to 1825 had gathered a wordstore of the Forth speech, and left it among his other papers. It was sent to me and I have printed it through Mr. J. R. Smith, 36, Soho Square. This Glossary, with General Vallancy's song and some others, would show Mr. Jennings to be right in his opinion that the many men of the Strongbow colony were Wessex men, as we should deem them to have been, inasmuch as the Irish King Dermot Mac Merogh, when he was seeking a force of Englishmen to help him to his throne, stayed some time at Bristol with Strongbow, and there, as we may believe, gathered men of Somerset and Devon, if not Dorset, and to them as to some others elsewhere, Dermot most likely gave lands in Forth and Bargy.

The Forth folk-speech has taken the augment to the past participle, and the soft Z for the book-English S. as "Platheares ee-zet in a row," Platters set in a row.

The numerals are :—Oan, Twye, Dhree, Voure, Veeve Zeese, Zeven, Ayght, Neen, Dhen.

The pronouns give a touch of Devon speech as :—'Cham, I am ; 'Chull, I will ; 'Chood, I would.

And many of the words are quite of the West English form : Brazon, Bold ; Brekvast, Breakfast ; Drashel, Threshold ; Koaver, Coffe ; Lear, Empty.

Many of the old Forth surnames were West English ones as :—Carew, Russell, Sutton, Stafford, Rossiter, Turner, Lamport, an old pronunciation of Langport.

T H E E N D