

The Sequel to the Battle of Edington, A.D. 878.

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

AFTER the famous Battle of Edington which Somerset archæologists generally assume to have been fought on the Poldens (*Proceedings* of the Somerset Arch. Soc., vol. xxi), King Alfred, in the words of the historian Asser, "pursued the fugitives to their fort, and all that he found outside the fort, men and horses and cattle, he cut off, killing the men forthwith. Then with the whole of his army he boldly pitched his camp before the gates of the Pagan fortress. And when he had remained there fourteen days, the Pagans (*i.e.* the Danes), overcome by hunger, cold and fear, driven at last to despair, sued for peace," etc. The Peace was that of Wedmore a place close to the Poldens and within sight of them. But where was the fortress? It is distinctly implied that this "Paganica Arx" was *on a plain* and had gates. This description does not suit Bratton Castle near Westbury in Wilts, sometimes said to have been the fortress to which Guthrum fled. The Saxon word used for it is a "Geweorc," *i.e.* a work or fortified place. Bishop Clifford, casting about for a likely refuge near the Polden Edington, thought that possibly it might have been "Brugie" or "Bruge," *i.e.* Bridgwater (the Bruge de Walter de Douai, the Domesday owner) and argues that "as in later times Bridgwater possessed a castle, so it was probably a fortified place even in the days of Alfred." This is professedly a hypothesis only. But, surely, the more likely site for this "Paganica

Arx " and its gates is at Downend in Puriton Manor and at the foot of the Polden hills, as it fulfils the conditions of lying in a plain and also of being nearer the field of battle. Here, too, at "Downend pulle" was an ancient landing-place where ships coming up the river Parret used to anchor, and, altogether, a spot likely to attract the Danes carrying on a campaign by sea and land against King Alfred in North Petherton. Formerly there was a loop of the river Parret at the very end of the Polden ridge, and if we take the "Doneham" of Domesday to be a "Ham" close to Downend, the geographical description of land given in Domesday as lying "inter duas aquas" *i.e.* within both arms of the Parret, can easily be understood. This "loop" can still be clearly seen on maps drawn as late as 1723. (Gough MSS., Somerset, *Bodleian*, No. 18,217). In Domesday the extract with regard to Doneham runs thus: "Walter de Dowai (the same man who held Brugie *i.e.* Bridgwater) holds one Virgate of land which is called Doneham. Algar held it in the time of King Edward (the Confessor). This is of that land which the king gave to him between the two waters. It is worth 12 denarii."

As this plot of land was practically islanded off by the curve of the Parret and was close to the anchorage and fortress of Downend it was exactly the place where the Danes could collect all their booty with comparative safety. Could Doneham be simply Dane ham? It is, and probably always was, a rich grazing ground. At any rate, King Alfred, after driving the Danes down the ridge of Polden in a running fight, "the shouts and clashing of arms being heard over a wide space," as it certainly would on that particular hill that lies like a narrow back or "dorsum" along the moors, penned them into the fort below. John Wallingford, in his excerpt from the Life of St. Neot, describes how King Alfred "anticipavit montem (the Polden ridge?) hostibus nimis aptum, si præcavissent." Elsewhere in the Life of St. Neot, "depositâ seriatim acie." The king anticipated "proximum promontorium," the word

“promontory” being peculiarly applicable to the Poldens then, a long ridge running down to the Parret between flooded regions.

Nothing now remains of this supposed “*Arx paganica*.” There is a field called “Baily” or “Bally Field,” with a well of water near, reminiscent of a Castle or “*Geweore*,” and the word “Castle” is still applied to the place by the inhabitants. Moreover, there are ample signs of the delver’s hand. But the G. W. Railway sweeps through the very site at Dunball Station, and the face of the little hill has been much altered and disfigured by modern Cement works. The canal below is also a new work. We have to rely mainly upon early documents for proof of its importance. Puriton Manor was always part of the old Barony of Nether Stowey, and, in the years immediately following the Norman Conquest, was probably regarded as the “*Caput Baronix*.” In the Pipe Rolls, 7 Henry II, etc., Philip de Columbers, lord also of Nether Stowey, owed “*xjs. in Burghriht*.” Here, at Downend was his Burgh. It could not have been at Nether Stowey because this place did not become a Borough till 32 Edward I. It was called in the Somerset Placita “*The Burgh de Capite Montis*” (S.R.S. vol. ii). As editor of these Placita, Mr. Chadwyck Healey has a note on the place, as follows :

“This ancient Borough is mentioned under the French form of *Chel delmunt*, and is probably Doneham of Domesday and, almost certainly, the modern Downend. There was a Serjeant or Bailiff for Chedesmund, mentioned as a hamlet in 1280 (*Placita de Quo Warranto*, p. 690).” In the Athelney Cartulary (S.R.S., xiv, 163) Philip de Columbers granted a messuage (c. 1216 ?) in the “*Ville de Capite Montis*” to a Philip de Hokeburn. In the Inq. p.m. of John, Lord Audley, the successor of the Columbers, Barons at Nether Stowey, (12 Nov. 6 Henry VII) it is recorded how he held, in Somerset, “the manor of Nether Stowey, 40 marcs ; Manor of Downend worth 60s. ; Manor of Puryton worth £20, held of the King by

service of the moiety of a Barony." It is curious how Downend and Chel delmunt have been forgotten. In Saxton's old map (*temp.* Queen Elizabeth) the place is marked "Chies chettle of ye Mount, alias Downend." Later still it has been called "Chisley Mount." A very old man, speaking simply from hearsay, once told the writer that "they of Athelney fought here." If Downend with its neighbouring island and paddock of Doneham was really the "Arx Paganica" of Asser, (and its distance is not great from the Polden Edington), here is a strange bit of corroborative evidence. Apart from this, however, the place is well worth a closer investigation. The composite word "Chies chettel" seems to be made up partly of the Norman chastel (castellum), which took the place of the Danish "Geweore." It may be noted that "Chazchettle" or "chat chateau" is a well-known expression in early Norman military architecture, (*Viollet le Duc*) and means a wooden contrivance built for purposes of assault and wheeled up to the walls and entrenchments of the fortress assailed. Whether Saxton's "Chies chettle" has anything to do with this is another thing, but the similarity of the words is striking.

Although Downend Pill was on the river Parret, and therefore in communication with the Severn Sea, it was of little use to the Danes in 878, as their base this year lay far away at Chippenham, and they had been defeated just previously at Cynwyt or Cynuit (*Asser*), which I take to be Comwich, anciently written Cynyz or Cumwyz (*Som. Pleas*, Edw. III), on the Parret. Downend was a Danish rendezvous and looting station, and King Alfred getting astride the Polden Hills cut off their retreat. He had halted at Egerley, the Æglea of the Chronicle, close to Glastonbury (pronounced locally as a dissyllable), the day before the notable attack at Edington.

It may be added that at Domesday the Parish Church of Puriton was the possession of St. Peter's at Rome. Shortly after this it appears to have changed hands, and the Nether Stowey Barons gave it, together with Churches of Caerleon-

on-Usk, to the Priory of Goldeliff in Monmouth, arguing a Norman conquest (c. 1120) of South Wales from the Burgh de Capite Montis, conducted oversea. Puriton appears in the *Nomina Villarum* as a Free Manor together with Huntspill, (S.R.S., vol. iii, p. 60). For "Chisley Mount" there is a reference in the *Proceedings* of the Society, vol. xxiii, i, p. 35, where there is an allusion to a sketch shown by Mr. Bull of the fort and entrenchments.