NOTES ON LOCAL ETYMOLOGIES.

ABSTRACT OF PAPER BY MR. R. N. WORTH, F.G.S., HON. MEM.

(Read October 31st, 1878.)

THE oldest place names in Devon are Keltic in origin, and, following the usual rule, are those of the larger rivers. Of the smaller some are Keltic, some Teutonic, and a few are mixed. We are struck at the outset with a very remarkable group—the Tamar, Tavy, Taw, Torridge, and Teign. In each and all we find the same root, which appears in the names of the Thames, Tees, Tay, Tweed, Taff, and many other rivers, a generic Keltic word for water, which we may take as *ta* or *tau*. For want of recognizing this relationship there has been much confusion and inconsistency in the attempts to deal with these names. Tamar has been derived from the Gaelic *tamh*, "gentle." Treating the root-word as meaning simply "water," we find that the final syllables in Tamar, Tavy, and Torridge, are nothing more than distinctive suffixes in the later Keltic Cornish. The Cornish branch of the Kymry treated this *ta* and *tau* as a proper name, and proceeded to distinguish one *tau* from the other by suitable affixes. Ta-*mar* is simply Ta-*mawr*, the "big Ta," or "water;" Ta-*vy*, Ta-*veor*, the "little Ta." In the *Taw* we have the root untouched; but Tor-*ridge* is Ta-*rhyd*, the "ford Ta," from the ford, *rhyd*, by which it was crossed by the Romans, a little above the present Bideford bridge. The Teign may be the "icy" or "cold Ta," *eign* having that significance.

Every river within the Plymouth district has a name of Keltic origin. The Avon is from the root *afon*, "water," one of the commonest of Keltic river names. The Erme is doubtful; but Polwhele blundered sadly when he traced it to the East, and held it to be indicative of *Arme*nian colonization. Chapple's *iar*, "a river," and *am*, "water," though ingenious, is almost equally beside the mark.

The Yealm presents a curious example of reactionary corruption. It is without doubt from the Kornu *hayle*, "a river." The oldest recorded name is *Yale*. The modern name arose purely from the

fact of the Yale having given name to Yale-ham-tun, the "enclosed dwelling on the Yale," which we now call Yealmpton. The *ham* being lost in the contraction, the word has been read as "the tun of the Yealm." The same thing happened at Walkhampton, where a feeder of the Tavy is made to rejoice in the odd name of Walkham. The river is really the Walla, a common name for Dartmoor streams (perhaps from the Kornu *walla*, "lower," though Mr. C. Spence Bate, F.R.S., with more likelihood, takes it from the Kornu *wheala*, to "work"—*i.e.* in the tin streams), and its valley the Walla-*cwm*. The *tun* of the Walla-cwm became Walkhampton, and the river the Walkham.

"Plymouth" is, historically speaking, a very modern name; moreover, it is doubly corrupt. If there ever was a Keltic Plymouth even its name has passed away. There was once a Tamarworth, which may or may not have been the little seed which has grown to such respectable dimensions. *Worth* does not appear in the old couplet—

> "In ford, in ham, in ley, and tun,
> The most of Saxon surnames run;"

but it, and its derivative *worthy*, occupy a peculiarly important position in our Devon place names. It is diversely interpreted a possession, farm, court, place, fort, and isle. The latter is probably the meaning here, and if so, the chances are that Tamarworth was the Saxon name of Drake's Island. We have *worth* still at Inceworth, a reduplicant. *Ince* here, and in Ince Castle, is the Kornu *enys*, "an island," which the Saxons in the former case took for a proper name, and tacked on "worth" to it as a generic explicant. Sutton, by which name Plymouth undoubtedly was known for centuries, is pure Saxon—"South Town." Mr. Spence Bate's discovery of the Romano-British cemetery near Turnchapel proves the existence on the shores of the Sound of a large Keltic community. I do not think it altogether improbable that its site is pointed out by a still-existing name in the parish of Plymstock—Wixenford, near Laira Bridge, which we may derive from *gwicca hen*, the "old village," with "ford" added in later times.

There has been much controversy whether or no there is such a river as the Cad. I hold that the belief in the Cad has arisen purely from the corruption of Cadworthy Bridge into Cadover Bridge, then read naturally enough as a bridge over the Cad; whereas Cad here is merely the Kornu *coed*, a "wood," and has

nothing to do either with the river or with a battle presumed to have been fought upon its banks.

Nor do I believe in the Plym. The oldest form of the word is not Ply*m*, but Ply*n*, and "lin" is the Kornu *lyn*, a "lake" (not the Saxon *hlynn*, a "stream," which we have in the Lyn river). The estuary of the St. Germans river is the *Lyn-her*, or "long lake;" and the P in Plyn may stand for *pen*, and thus give us the "head lake," or "head of the lake," if, as is possible, Plympton is the older word. In Domesday we find "Plintona," not "Plymptona;" while Plymouth, then, had never been heard of. The oldest form of Plymouth is *Plin*mouth, a word which in the course of time would by necessity of speech be converted into *Plym*outh. That once done, and the older use of the name forgotten, the inference that Plymouth stood at the mouth of the *Plym* river and not at the mouth of the *Plin* estuary would be irresistible. We find both Pelyn and Pelynt actually in use in Cornwall at the present day, and both pronounced as monosyllables. Mr. J. Brooking Rowe, rightly arguing against the idea that the *river* as such gave name to Plympton, was inclined to regard the prefix as a clan name, and to find it also in *Plym*tree and allied names elsewhere. In Plymtree, however, I believe we have simply *Plum*tree; as we have "Longtree" in Langtree, "Appletree" in Appledore, "Crabtree" in Crabtree, "Hive" or "Hightree" in Heavitree. In neither of these cases is the "tree" the well-known Kornu particle, which is *never* used as a suffix.

What, then, is the original name of the Plym? I believe that Laira and Plym have been exchanged. It is quite true that *Llar* is "overspreading" in Kymric, which, with *wy* or *gy*, "water," would very well apply to the Laira as it is; or we may take the Kornu *le*, a "place," and *ryn*, a "channel." I have come to the conclusion, however, that the Laira is the true river name.

Chapple, nearly a century since, suggested that Meavy came from *mwy*, "enlarged or augmented water." *Mui* means "greater" in Kornu. The *y*, with which the names of so many of our smaller rivers end, may be either the Kymric *wy*, Kornu *gy*, or Saxon *ea* (whence "Yeo"), each of which simply means water. I do not regard it as a diminutive. Meavy thus would be "the greater water." What, then, is Laira? This is a very modern form of a word which first appears as Lery. *Le* is Kornu for "lesser;" and as Penlee is "the lesser headland" (Pryce) in contrast with the

Rame Head, so the Lery is the "lesser water" in contrast with the Meavy or Mewy.

But our Keltic names are not confined to our rivers. There can be no question that the derivation suggested by the Rev. W. Beal, for Kinterbury, is correct, and that we have here the word *ceann, cant*, "a headland," which gave name to Kent, and which occurs also elsewhere in the county; *i.e.* at Countisbury, and Kentisbury —other forms of Canterbury—and at Kentisbeare. Pennycomequick is with equal certainty "the head of the creek valley;" *Pen-y-cwm-cuick*. Pennycross = *Pen-y-craes*, "the head of the cross." Manaton = *Maen-y-dun*, "the stony hill." But I hesitate to accept Mr. Beal's ingenious suggestion that Knackersknowle should read *Na-caer-ill*, "the hill camp;" or, *Choc-cair-coill*, "the grove camp." Knowle is a good old Saxon word for a small rounded hill; and we have Honicknowle also to account for. Can these be two names of possession with a Keltic element? Dinnacombe, in Cornwood, gives us *dinas*, "a fortress." Goodameavy is "the wood of the Meavy"—*coed* = wood. We have Penquite in Modbury = *pen-coed*, "the head of the wood;" and Good-a-moor is either "the moorland wood," or "the great wood" if moor here = *mawr*. Fenton in Plympton is pure Kornu for "a spring" or well; and "Voss" in the same parish = Kornu for "maid." Goosewell seems so simple that one hesitates to suggest *gosys*, "bloody;" but we have often to distrust the very obvious. Pen Beacon everyone will recognize as Keltic in its first word. Shell Top was once called Pen Shiel; and here we have in addition to *pen*, the Norse *shiel*, "a shed or dwelling."

Whitsand = *White*-sand; but what of Cawsand and Kingsand where there is no sand, and Bovisand where there is scarce any? Sand in these cases probably stands for the Kornu *zawn*, "a little cove or creek." *Cors-zawn* would = "the creek by the moor;" *Cein-zawn*, "the creek by the ridge," if Kingsand is an old name, which is doubtful. And Bovisand?—*bod* is Kornu for house = "the creek of the house." Rame has been derived from a fancied resemblance to the head of a ram. Mr. Beal made it "the high projecting headland." There is a tempting derivation in the provincial use of the word *ream*, "to stretch." Cremyll, which Mr. Beal reads "the hill of Crom," I make "the crooked or bent hill;" *crom* = crooked. Bear in mind that the true Cremyll is on this side of the water, at the place we now call Devil's Point, from the old Huguenot

refugee Duval, who once dwelt there. Cotehele is *coed-hayle*, "the wood by the river." *Penhale* is "the head of the moor;" Tregantle, Pryce makes "the dwelling of danger." Thanckes, according to Polwhele, is "house of view." Jump was formerly called Trenaman's Jump; and *gump* is Kornu for "a plain;" while Trenaman signifies "the dwelling by the stone."

Saxon as it looks, I believe Keyham is Keltic. The oldest form is simply Caine = "a ridge." Hamoaze is very doubtful. Carew derives it from *ham* and *ose*, "according to the nature of the place." It has been read "the wet oozy habitation;" taken from the hamlets, *hamaue*, that were on its banks; traced to the fact (?) that a Dane called *Ham* was drowned there. Mr. Beal suggested the Gaelic *amus* = "protection, safety;" and Dr. Bannister made it "the water border," *hem-uisg*. To me the word seems neither Gaelic, Kornu, nor Phœnician—certainly it is not French—but I am not at all sure it is not Teutonic, and probably Norse. Ham may give us *holm*, "an island," and *oaze* may be the same word which we find in the river Ouse, which would equal "the island water," the water where the island, *i.e.* Drake's, is.

We now come to names of Saxon origin. The most distinctive feature of the Saxon water names current in this locality is the word *fleet*. It is always applied to a little stream having a tidal connection. Stonehouse Lake was once Stoke Damerel Fleet. There are Pomphlett on the Plym, Coffleet on the Yealm, Flete and Pamflete on the Erme. Pomphlett and Pamflete are from the Saxon *baum*, "a tree," whence we have beam; Coffleet is simply *Cove*-fleet.

Lake is used in a special sense as a channel, in which form it is applied to some of the Dartmoor streams. Millbrook Lake has no reference to "the lake-like expanse of the waters of the creek at high tide;" it is simply the channel that leads to Millbrook. Millbrook, of course, explains itself; the associated name of Dodbrook, now almost forgotten, is more difficult.

Dodda occurs as a personal name before the Conquest, and it may have originated from the water plant *dod*, which Verstegan says in his time was called by the boys "foxtail." It is more likely that Dodbrook came directly from the plant than immediately from the personal form, Dodda.

Ford is common. Radford is "the red ford," as any one may see.

Tun, "an enclosure," whence town, appears in a large number of our local names. We have it in the oldest recorded name of Plymouth—Sutton, in Plympton, Yealmpton, Tamerton, Newton, Weston, Ermington, Compton, and many others. It is very apt, however, to be confounded with *dun*, a "hill," which, like *cwm* and *combe* for valley, was used both by Kelt and Saxon. We have, for example, Staddon Heights, Langdon, Down Thomas, all applying to parts of the same hill range.

Stocks come next to tuns in importance. A *stock* or *stoke* was an enclosure defended by palisading, "stockaded." Plymstock, Revelstoke, Stoke Damerel, Tavistock, show that in this locality the need for such protection was specially felt. *Bury* or *borough* is a word of very similar meaning, so far as the idea of defence is concerned; but a *bury* properly is an earthen camp, and thus answers to the Kornu *caer* or *dinas*. Here again we find the need of defence indicated by the prevalence of words thus compounded, such words as Bigbury, Kinterbury, Modbury, Wembury, Roborough, Ugborough, Burrough.

Ham we have in many forms—simple as at Ham in Weston Peveril, and compounded in Langham and Lyneham. I am inclined to regard these as one—"the long dwelling." Langdon is "the long hill." Staddon may give us *stead*, a "place"—"the hill place." Saltram was originally Salterham. Willcove has been read as "the well cove;" and Freathy traced to *frith*, a "wattled hedge." Swilly is a doubtful name. *Sell* is a "cot," and *Sell-ley* would be the "cot-field." Mothecombe, "the mouth of the combe." Warleigh is *wearth* or *worth*leigh; and as one of the meanings of *worth* is "a land between two waters," we see how aptly descriptive this is. Shaugh is *sceacga*, "rough coppice;" and in Sampford Spiney we have the allied word *spinney*. Maristow is really *Martins-stow*—"Martin's place." *Wick*, "an abode," we have in Hurdwick.

Wabblewall, in the parish of Brixton, is very suggestive and pure Saxon. It is "the bubbling well;" for *wabble* means to "burst out—bubble." In Colebrook we have the Saxon *coln*, "a pebble," "the pebbly brook."

Hoe is a notable word, though simply one form of Saxon for high. We have it also in Hooe; and in North Devon it appears in Morthoe, Martinhoe, Trentishoe; at Dartmouth it once existed in Hawley's Hoe. Names and prefixes descriptive of situation are very common. Harford is "the higher ford;" Horrabridge, "the

higher bridge;" Whitchurch is "the white church." Many names are derived from rivers; several instances have already been given. Others follow trees. Bickleigh is "the beechleigh," or field. *Ing* is Saxon for a meadow, and is the *pratum* of Domesday as *ley* (leigh, lea) is the *pasture*. I do not think it is used as a clan affix in any Devon place-name. Ermington I read, "the tun of the meadow by the Erme."

But we have to deal with other than the Saxon branch of the Teutonic family. There is ample evidence that the mingled company of Scandinavians, commonly classed under the general name of Danes, had from time to time a great deal to do with this part of England; and that they not only made raids, but effected settlements. Such Norse forms as *beck* for "brook," and *gill* for "a ravine," occur in different parts of the county; and Mr. Spence Bate has shown that there are Scandinavian name-traces even on Dartmoor. Mr. Isaac Taylor would make this county very Danish indeed. The most noteworthy affix connected with that class of our place-names which has reference to trees is the constantly-recurring *beer*, which is found in the varying forms *bera*, *berah*, *beer*, *bear*, and *bere*. Mr. Taylor treats this as identical with the Danish test word *by*, which would make Devon rather more Danish than the counties of the Danelagh. It is not difficult to show the historic baselessness of the suggestion. Elaborate argument, however, is not needed. The word is the Saxon *beera*, "a grove," and its abundance is an indication of the wooded aspect of Devonshire in those distant days. The only *by* I know is Huckaby, in Lydford. Again there is the name of Wembury, which Mr. Taylor regards as connected with the ancient mythology, referring it to *Woden*, as he does Satterleigh to the god *Satere*.

It is singular that in both these names we should indeed have evidence of the Scandinavian, but in quite a different direction. While we have so good a Norse etymology as *seter*, "a dwelling, or seat," for Satterleigh there is no need to go further afield; and as for Wembury, instead of implying "the existence of a mound or other erection dedicated to Woden," it is one of our most interesting and valuable historical links. The oldest form of Wembury is Wicanbeorge. *Beorge*, of course, is "bury," and *Wican* is *wiceng*, or "viking." Here then we have "the Viking's earthwork," a distinct proof yet subsisting of the truth of the tradition that it was at Wembury that Ceorl, ealdorman of Devon,

defeated the Norsemen, in 851. And Revelstoke bears out this view if we may derive revel from *reafere*, a "rover, robber." *Reaful* = "rapacious." It is impossible to resist the conclusion that these two names are thus associated. Both the *bury* and the *stoke* speak of defensive works; both the *Wican* or Wem, and the *Revel*, connect these works with the visits of marauders.

What we are looking for, however, is the evidence of Norse settlement. An unmistakable proof of this is the occurrence all along the south coast of *ness* for "headland." Permanent names are not given to localities by casual visitors. We have "ness" within the limits of our own harbour. Ravenness Point is distinctly Norse in its character, though, as I am not prepared to say what its antiquity may be, it would be unwise to attach too much importance to it. There can be no doubt however that we have "ness" in Noss, the little village on the Revelstoke side of the Yealm inlet; and its antiquity is well attested by the fact that the village on the opposite side, which by the patronymic attached we can date back to Norman times, is in distinction called *Newton*.

But we need not stop here. We have in the name of our noble bay, and in that of one of its chief, and in early days its most important inlet, other evidence of the Norsemen. I do not say that *Sound* is distinctively Scandinavian. It occurs in Anglo-Saxon, as applied to a narrow arm of the sea; but it is more frequently used in this sense in the North, and is rarely employed in this country. Moreover there is some weight to be attached to the notable fact that here in Plymouth we have the Sound and the Cattewater, as in Denmark the Sound and Cattegat. Cattewater has always been one of the local difficulties; and has as many etymologies as Hamoaze. It has been associated with the chapel of St. Catherine; has been treated as the *Cad*water, after the non-existent river Cad. We find the word so far back as the fifteenth century, given as a borough boundary, as "the Catte of Hingston." This Hingston was what we now call Cattedown; and had its original name in all probability from a hanging stone or cromlech. Catte, I believe, is from a similar root to gut—Anglo-Saxon *gut*, *geotan*, "to pour, flow"—which is found in varied forms in the other Teutonic languages; or it may be connected with the Icelandic *gat*, "a hole," and our own gate, "a passage;" Cattegat gives both. In either case it would be equivalent to Hingston Straits, or something of that sort. When the original idea of gat as a narrow passage for

water was lost, and the hanging stone no longer existed, then the Catte of Hingston became Cattewater, and Hingston itself Cattedown.

The only trace of Roman influence in local names is in the well-known Ridgway, and the problematical Darscott Lane, which is at times called Dark *Street*, and treated as akin to Stratton.

Let us turn now to a few names of the most distinctly local type. Stonehouse carries us back to the days when the lord lived in his timbered strength and the vassals in their huts of mud and wattle, and a house of "stane and lime" was a thing that the ancient Captain Cuttles, "when found," most rigidly "made a note of." Devonport is of course "the port of Devon," a very much more important name than the purely subordinate one of Plymouth Dock, which is a contraction of the original phrase, "the dock at Plymouth," the village of Stoke being too insignificant to give name to anything bigger than itself.

Longroom takes name from the "long room" still extant, built there in the last century, when the gardens around were the local Ranelagh or Cremorne, and the resort of the beaux and belles of the Three Towns, who considered them quite in the country. Eastern and Western King have no meaning to us now except in their prefixes. King is clearly a corruption, and it may very well be of the Kornu *cein*, "a ridge." Millbay is one of our oldest local names. It dates back at least six hundred years; for in the twelfth century Ralph de Valletort gave the monks of Plympton a site on its banks for a mill-dam, and there stood the mills whence the bay took its name. They were often called Surpool or Sourpool mills, the waters that stretched far and wide over what is now Union Street and its adjuncts being then called Sur Pool, or "the Upper Pool," to distinguish it from Sutton, the Lower, Pool. Lambhay has been derived by Mr. Beal from *lamh*, Gaelic "hand," in reference to the strength shown by Corinæus when he hurled Gogmagog thence. Its oldest form is Lammy. Lamb*hay* would be merely "the lamb-field," a mode of expression very common in the east of the county. We have it as the Lammy, and Lammy Point, while now it is Lambay Hill. *Lam* may = *lan*, "an enclosure;" and Lan-hayle would be "the enclosure on the river," or estuary. But it is impossible to decide. Castle Street and the Barbican recall the days of the foundation of the strong "castel quadrate," of which one of the entrance works still exists, and

which was founded in the fourteenth century for the defence of the town against the French, who nevertheless not many years afterwards burnt the greater part. Of this event we had a memorial in the fine old historic name "Briton Side," which an ill-instructed corporation changed for the meaningless Exeter Street.

New Street in the process of time has become one of the oldest streets in the town; but it was new when Old Town Street was ancient. Yet no one had ever heard of Old Town Street sixty years ago. For centuries it had handed down under the name of "Old Town" simply, the memory of the parent community of which the Sutton of the Conquest was the offspring. Westwell and Finewell and Buckwell Streets help us to realize the days ere Drake "brought the water into Plymouth." Finewell may have been named from its quality. Buckwell was clearly the spot where the good housewives used to "buck" or wash their clothes. Blackfriars Lane for centuries preserved the memory of the house of the Dominicans, in the absence of all written record. Whitefriars Lane, Friary Court, and Friary Street, in like manner kept alive that of the settlement of the Carmelites. Catherine Street is so called because it led to the chapel of St. Catherine on the Hoe. Catte Street, which we may presume was somehow connected with Cattewater, has now given place to Stillman Street, which, however, like Bilbury Street and Whimple Street, is one of the oldest street names in the town. Frankfort Street is the sole memorial relic of the siege days, and indicates the site of Frankfort Gate.

Several names record the existence of old families. The Trevilles were notable merchants in the time of Elizabeth; Vintry Street was once called Foyne's Lane, after the still more notable Fowneses; Kinterbury Street was Colmer's Lane. Week Street and How's Lane are names of the same class.

Our personal place-names form an especially interesting group. They are mostly given for the direct purpose of distinction. The oldest in this locality is Brixton, given in Domesday as Brictricstun, or "the tun of Brictic." As a rule these personal distinctives date from Norman and indeed feudal times. Thus we have Newton Ferrers—"New-town" of the Ferrerses—in distinction to the many other Newtons of the county. Tamerton Foliott—"Tamar-town" of the Foliotts; Weston Peverill—"West-town" of the Peverills; Compton Gifford—"Combe or valley town" of the Giffards; Stoke Damerel—"Stockaded place" of the Damerels.

The two Plymptons are commonly distinguished by the dedications of their churches—Mary and Maurice; but Plympton *Erle* goes back to the days of the Redverses and its secular ownership as distinct from that of the monks. Ecclesiastical ownership is found indicated in many ways. Here we have Shaugh *Prior;* Buckland *Monachorum,* "the Monks' Buckland," a necessary distinction even if there had been no other *buck* or *boc* land—that is, "land held by deed or charter," about—than that of Egg Buckland, originally *aek* or "*oak*" Buckland. And the three Suttons which eventually merged into Plymouth, were respectively Sutton Prior, Sutton Valletort or Vautier, and Sutton Ralf. It is indeed remarkable to what an extent the old ownerships have left their mark. The Valletorts held Mount Edgcumbe long ere the Saxon Edgcumbes grafted the succession of that Norman race on to their own native stock; and Mount Edgcumbe is even yet the tithing of Vaulters Home, or "Valletort's ham." Mount Wise recalls the time when the Wises, who then owned Stoke Damerel, in rivalry of their neighbours built their barton house where the fort now crowns its rugged crest. Morice Town (New Passage when the first ferry was established between it and Torpoint) preserves the memory of the Morices, from whom the manor came to the St. Aubyns. Mount Batten takes its name from the old Parliamentary Admiral Batten, and before the Siege was known as Hoe Stert, or "tail," the same word we have in Start Point now, and in the name of the redstart. Mount Gold in likewise manner hands down the name of Colonel Gold, Roundhead governor of Plymouth, who died in harness. Fort Stamford recalls the luckless Parliamentary General, the Earl of Stamford, who was defeated at Stratton. I was once inclined to connect Prince Rock with Prince Maurice, but the name is centuries older than his time, and may record in its way the visits of the Black Prince. Tothill is undoubtedly from the Saxon *tot,* "an enclosure," and hill. Mutley is Magdalen. The old leper or Maudlyn house occupied very much the site of the Blind Institution, and the fields hard by were thence named the Maudlyn—Maudley—Mudley—Mutley—fields. This is not more singular than the derivation of Turnchapel from "St. Ann Chapel," then Tannchapel. The remains of the chapel may still be seen near Hooe. Oreston I take to be purely Saxon—"the tun on the shore"—*ora*—or perhaps "the shore-stone."