

THE BATTLE OF OCKLEY, A.D. 852.

IT has always been taken for granted that this great defeat of the Danes by Ethelwulf took place at Ockley, below Leith Hill. Very likely it was so, but I venture to suggest for those interested a possible theory of another place. I may say that I am by no means prepared to assert positively the usual view to be mistaken, but the evidence for and against is worth consideration. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle says that the battle was at *Aclea*, and in Surrey. Asser says that it was at *Aclea*, which he explains "*in campanulo quercus.*" Ethelwerd says that it was *iuxta silvam quae Aclea nuncupatur*. Florence of Worcester, Simeon of Durham, Henry of Huntingdon, copy one or more of these accounts, but give no further guidance as to the exact place. They all say or imply that it was in Surrey. There was an *Aclea* where an ecclesiastical Synod was held in the eighth century which probably was another place in the north of England. Furthermore, there has been for a hundred years at least a local tradition in Ockley parish that the battle was there. Ancient sepulchral remains of bodies, which might be the bodies of the slain on the victorious side, were found in 1882 between Ockley Village and Leith Hill, but were not scientifically recorded at the time. Lastly Leland, I believe for the first time, distinctly places the battle at this village of Ockley. The Roman road through Ockley offers a basis for a scientific explanation of the possible presence of the contending armies on this spot, and the identification has been accepted ever since. I submit, however, that the local tradition is

incapable of verification beyond a recent date. If an antiquary once fixed the battle in Ockley parish, the inhabitants, if they heard the story, would gladly annex the claim to local distinction, and hand it on. Moreover, it is not certain that the Anglo-Saxon name of Ockley was *Aclea*, which Asser correctly translates as the Oak-lea. The *Domesday* form is Hoclei, and Okeley, Occele, Okeleigh, and so on, are later Mediæval forms. I should have expected Aclei in *Domesday* as the spelling, as Acstede for Oxted, had the English been *Aclea*. Hard by is Okewood, which, in spite of the modern spelling Oakwood and of the number of oak trees about, so common that a name from them would not be distinctive, is almost certainly named from the little river Oke or Ock, which comes from Ockley Green. This is an ancient name for a stream, there are a dozen in England, and it is possible that Ockley is the meadow by the Oke river, as Okewood was the wood by it. The 13th century Oke bridge over the river testifies to its name being ancient. The derivations of Okewood and of Ockley do not necessarily stand or fall together, but if Ockley is not *Aclea* it is not the site of the battle.

If it were not fought here, where was the battle fought? It was in Surrey. In Merstham parish is a hamlet called Ockley, and a wood called Ockley Wood. In the same parish of Merstham now, not far distant, is a place called Battle Bridge. It used to be in Gatton, but was transferred lately to Merstham. Here Manning and Bray (II, 227) say that there was traditionally a great slaughter of the Danes. The antiquity of the tradition cannot be proved, and the name *Battle* has not descended from 852 A.D., for people did not talk French then. Moreover, Manning and Bray give an alternative name, Batley Bridge, and the corruption of this name may have originated the story. Still, there is the tradition, for as little as it is worth. These same authors refer also to a story that Timberham Bridge in Charlwood used to be called Kill-man-bridge, and that it, and

Slaughterwyck and Slaughterford in Leigh, were all named from a slaughter of the Danes. There seems to be no documentary evidence for the extremely improbable name, Kill-man-bridge (V. C. H. Surrey, III, 183), but here are the stories of a somewhat scattered slaughter of Danes, not many miles from Ockley Wood in Merstham. But all these places, south-west and south of Ockley Wood, do not seem to lie in the right direction for the flight of an enemy who had come from the neighbourhood of London, and whose conquerors had probably come from the south coast or from Winchester. There were however roads in this neighbourhood by which the armies might have been operating. The west and east track, known now as the Pilgrims' Way, ran by Gatton Park and Merstham near Ockley Wood, and there was probably a north and south road. Gatwick, Reigate, Gatton, and Gatewick Heath now enclosed upon the existing road in Chipsted, are very suggestive of a "Gate" from Anstey Cross, *i. e.*, the High Way Cross, in Sussex, and of course from the coast, towards the Thames Valley. I do not, as I said before, consider that the prettiest Village Green in Surrey is necessarily to be deprived of its traditional glory as a great battlefield; but is there not a case for argument in favour of Ockley Wood, Merstham, being the wood "*quae Aclea nuncupatur*"? But as an assailer of sacred traditions I will only subscribe myself at present

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