

ART. XXI.—*Who was King Eveling of Ravenglass?* By
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CAMDEN, coming into Cumberland in 1599, seems to have heard a good deal more than he thought necessary to repeat. About Ravenglass especially he is really tantalizing. He says (in Philemon Holland's translation, published in 1610) "They talke much of King Eveling that heere had his court and roiall palace" and passes on, his antiquarian dignity unconcerned with old wives' fables. Folklore was not then supposed to be worth the attention of a scholar, but many of us have wished to hear what it was they told him about King Eveling, and who King Eveling can possibly have been, in history or in romance.

At the same time John Denton, whose book is dated 1610, was collecting details about Cumberland, and one bit of information he found was this :—

Waldeive the son of Gospatrick Earl of Dunbar . . . gave to the priory [of Carlisle] . . . a mansion near St. Cuthbert's church where at that time stood an antient building called Arthur's chamber taken to be part of the mansion house of King Arthur the son of Uterpendragon . . . Waldeive also gave other antient buildings called Lyons Yards often remembered in that history of Arthur written by a monk, the ruins whereof are yet to be seen, as it is thought, at Ravenglass distant from Carliell according to that author 50 miles placed near the sea and not without reason thought therefore to be the same.

Our member Mr. C. W. James has kindly looked up the parallel passage in the Earl of Leicester's MS. of Denton at Holkham, and finds that "Yards" is represented by "gard," though "Lyons" is written "Poyons." It is

fairly obvious that, in this context, "Lyons Garde" is meant, and that the reference is to the castle of Liones which Malory (*Morte d'Arthur* vii, 26) identified with "Castle Perilous beside the Isle of Avilion."

What charter or which version of the Arthurian story was quoted by Denton is not clear, but there was certainly the famous legendary Lady Liones. In her name, the termination is only the Norman-French nominative in *-es*, so that the word is to be pronounced *Li-on*, though when the grammar had been forgotten many writers made the *-es* a separate syllable, whence "Lyonnesse." She was the Lady of the Fountain, sister of Linet, and in the older forms of the tale she was won for his wife by Owein ab Urian. This legend is as old as the Mabinogion and probably it is bit of primitive Celtic mythology. The late Sir John Rhys (*Studies in the Arthurian Legend*, 361) collected data which seem to show that Lion[es] represents the Welsh Llion, earlier Livan, the Maid of the Fountain, about whom it was said that she allowed her spring to burst out and form Llyn Llion (on a tributary of the Severn) and that her neglect caused the overflowing of "Lyonnesse," out to the sea on the western coast. In Irish legend she was Liban, sister of Fand, the water nymph who captured the affection of Cuchullain, Owein's parallel. We might add our North British well-goddesses, Coventina and her sisters, and note the wide extension of this early cult, for the submerged land "Lyonnesse" was variously placed in legend (*a*) off the western coast of Cornwall, (*b*) north-west of Aberystwyth and at other points on the Welsh coast. And there are rivers now named Llivon after this Lady of the Fountain both in Anglesey and in Carnarvonshire. It would be not at all surprising to find her again on the West Cumberland coast, for she was a myth common to all Britons.

Her castle was near the Isle of Avallon or Avilion. According to Dr. Armitage Robinson, Dean of Wells, in

a paper read November 1922 to the Society of Antiquaries, it was only about 1191, and not earlier, that Arthur's tomb was identified with Glastonbury, but there may have been earlier folklore, equating the tumulus-like tor of Glastonbury with *regnum Avallonis*. Giraldus Cambrensis and William of Malmesbury both thought the name was given from an earlier legendary king, Avallo, genitive Avallonis, in Latin, or Avalloc in British. He is said to have lived there in peace and plenty with his wife, the fairy Morgan (the "sea-born," another water goddess) and his daughters, who tended Arthur after his last battle. As an alternative derivation the medieval chroniclers suggested the British word for appletree or orchard, a natural guess when the more ancient myth was forgotten. Some traditions made Owein himself the son of Aballac, who was son of Beli, the great head of the British pedigrees (additions to *Nennius, Chron. Picts and Scots*, 16). And Avallach or Abloyc was the name given to one of the sons of Cunedda, who may be historical. But King Avalloc or Evelac was, in Celtic mythology, a kind of Pluto, whose realm was in the land of Hades, where the dead went on living, and in the medieval form of the myth he is a figure in the Grail romances (such as those given in the *E.E.T.S.* vol. 44, and Malory). They said he was a Syrian, who had been converted by Joseph of Arimathea and followed him and the Holy Grail to Britain. To him it was prophesied that his brother's descendant should "achieve" the Grail, and after three hundred years he was found by Percival, bedridden, still awaiting Galahad. His name and quasi-immortality shew him to be the same as the king of Avallon, Hades or fairyland.

Now Avallon was close to Lyons Garde, by all the old stories; and when we find that King Eveling had his court and royal palace at Ravenglass, where also was Lyons Garde, it looks as though we had an ancient localization of both the ancient British legends. Eveling must

be Evelac, Avallach, as it was spoken by the Ravenglass or Muncaster people who told the tale to Camden in the days of Queen Elizabeth; and this identification is supported by Denton's story, which joins with Camden's in showing that there was a very ancient tradition about the place, and that this tradition was connected with the British myths which, elsewhere, were worked up into the Arthurian cycle. When we remember that, close at hand there was a place called Birkby, anciently Bretby, the Norse *Breta býr*, meaning a settlement of Britons or Welsh, found by the Norsemen when they arrived before the middle of the tenth century, we can understand how such a tradition was possible and how it could have survived the Anglian and Norse invasions.

One question is sure to arise : why do we not find these legends reflected in the Roman place-names? If the Romano-British thought that King Aballo lived at Ravenglass, why was it called *Clanoventa* (as is now believed) and not *Aballava*, which as proved by two inscriptions of A.D. 241 and 282 was the name of Papcastle? The answer is that the local Britons were probably driven away from this particular bit of country, too exposed, by its fine harbour, to Scottish raids from Ireland. The fact that Walls Castle, the Roman bath-house, was left standing and habitable in the twelfth century, when it is said that the first Penningtons of Muncaster lived there, suggests that Ravenglass was not the scene of much life in the post-Roman period. One can imagine it deserted, rarely visited, and yet in the sixth and seventh centuries thought a wonderful and haunted place, fit for the localization of a legend when all its real history had passed out of mind. And so Ravenglass used to be fairyland!