

A Tradition about Oker Hill, Darley.

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ABOUT 1854 the late Mr. John Parkin, my wife's father, wrote and published anonymously a poem entitled *Classic Sheffield*. It deals to a great extent with the scenery in the neighbourhood, and on page 27 refers to "an isolated mount" called Oker Hill, at Darley Dale. Mr. Parkin writes:—

———Tradition still

Relates that here two brothers each a tree
Planted, but never more did other see ;
For, parting, each to go through life his way
No more they met—the trees grew up, and they
Each other close entwin'd as if in bond
of love.

This tradition is described by Wordsworth in his *Miscellaneous Sonnets*, No. xxii. Wordsworth, however, calls the place Oaken Hill, which is not correct, and neither he nor Mr. Parkin says what kind of trees were believed to have been planted. In White's *Directory, etc., of Derbyshire*, 1857, is this passage: "At Oker Hill are two sycamore trees, said to have been planted by two brothers, conditionally that they should part for ever after these trees were planted. Tradition states that this was the case, and each taking a different direction, never met again." This perversion of the story is hardly worth quoting, but the trees have been described as sycamores by one or two later writers.

A reference to the *Derbyshire Charters* edited by Mr. Jeayes will show that Oker is a shortened form of Oakover, just as Asher is a shortened form of Ashover. The tradition may

be as ancient as it is beautiful, and the very name of the place may be connected with the story. Old mythology has much to say about the oak, and a year or two ago I had occasion to mention in this *Journal* a place in Dronfield called Selioko, meaning "blessed oak."

In 1848 Mr. Thomas Bateman wrote: "Roman coins in third brass, of the Emperors Gallienus, Postumus, Tetricus, Claudius Gothicus, etc., have been discovered upon Oker Hill, also many other antiquities, both of British and Roman origin, have been brought to light upon the same ground. In 1846 a pig of lead of the Roman shape was dug up near some ancient mineral works on the hill."¹ The compiler of the *Directory* just quoted says that rents derived from Oker Hill "are, by Act of Parliament, applied to the poor rate." One would like to know more about this.

Tacitus² speaks of a Germanic people that worshipped in a grove young men who bore some resemblance to Castor and Pollux. It has been noted that in *Diodorus Siculus* (iv. 56) there is an allusion to Castor and Pollux as having been worshipped by the Celts near the ocean.

¹ *Vestiges*, p. 159.

² *Germania*, xliii.