

## ON THE LOCAL TERM "FRITH."

THE upper part of Teesdale, extending from Newbiggin to the head of the valley, and comprising Langdon and Harwood, with a large portion of the Parish of Middleton, is called "The Forest and Frith" of Teesdale : giving name to a Township.

The upper part of Weardale, comprising the Western portion of the Parish of Stanhope, is also called "The Forest." The name still designates a Township. Weardale had formerly its Frith, but the locality and the name are, alike, lost sight of.

Though Harwood and Langdon have long ceased to be wooded, the designation "Forest" points to a state of things once existing in the valley when it was really what its name betokened.

The adjunct "Frith" is less intelligible. The name subsists, though all trace of its local meaning has long been lost. As its being coupled with Forest would indicate a connection of some kind, an enquiry into the meaning of the term may not be useless.

The shape of the word with its open termination—a sound not now easily attained out of Great Britain—is Saxon.

The Anglo Saxon *Frith* has several meanings, but (according to Bosworth) none of them sylvan.

It corresponds with the German *Friede* (peace).

Leo (*Angel-sächsische sprach proben*), with some definitions analogous to *Pax*, of Frith gives a compound *Frith-us*, and renders it *Zu fluchts-ort* (an asylum or place of refuge.)

Meidinger (*Dictionnaire des Langues Teuto Gothiques*) compares *Friede* with its Swedish, Danish, Icelandic, and other Teutonic synonymes, assigning to all no other meaning than *peace*, except in the North, where he says the further signification of *Tower, rampart*, or place of refuge, obtains.

Dr. Grieb, of Stutgardt, a comprehensive modern philologist, after giving German equivalents for the marine meaning of Frith, adds *das unter-holz* (underwood or coppice) *Geholz* (thicket) *kleine eingezante Felde* (a small enclosed field, answering to our close or garth).

In Coleridge's "Alphabetical Inventory of words occurring in the literature of the thirteenth century," Frith is simply rendered a *wood*, derived from the low Latin *fretum*.

That obviously falls short of the meaning. Mere synonymes would hardly have been strung together,—Frith added to Forest.

Equally insufficient appear Drayton and Minot's definitions, and those of some of the old Ballads, a *high wood*, as well as some provincialisms representing *hedges*, *hedgewood*, *underwood*, *brushwood*, &c.

In some early poems, Frith and Wood are distinguished as separate terms, neither, however, being clearly defined.

The "corn" specified in the "Noble Art of Venerie," as one of the indications of a Fell, in contradistinction to a Frith, would not be found in the upper part of Teesdale.

In its limited sylvan sense, Frith is stated to have been introduced by Chaucer; but it has not been found. Spencer is not known to have used it, nor Shakespeare.

In Blunt's *Glossographia*, 1656, "interpreting all such hard words, whether (*inter alia*) Teutonick, Belgick, British, or Saxon, as are now used in our refined English tongue," Frith does not appear.

Spelman does not seem to have been aware of Frith possessing any sylvan meaning. He translates it, *Aestuarium*, though he follows with the compound *Frith-brich*, as *Pacis violatio*. Out of his list of sixty-eight ancient English forests, six are in Yorkshire, two in Cumberland, two in Westmoreland, and none in Durham.

Evelyn, in his *Sylva*, has a dissertation upon Sacred Groves, but does not bring it down to Saxon times. Frith appears to have been a word unknown to him.

Noah Bailey preserved more old fashioned words and provincial terms than Dr. Johnson, whose classical turn did not favour Saxon-isms.

Bailey renders Frith by a *wood*, citing Chaucer, and says that the Saxons held several woods to be sacred, and made them sanctuaries.

Grose considered Frith as a West of England word, signifying *underwood fit for hurdles or hedges*.

The use in this country of the term Frith being almost exclusively sylvan, one would expect in any treatise of such subjects to find it explained.

Manwood, the great legal authority upon Forest Law, whilst carefully defining Forest Chases and Warrens, and prescribing the nature of Drifts of the Forest, never mentions such an accessory as a Frith. It may be questionable whether he had ever heard the word, for his illustrations are mostly taken from Southern and Midland Counties. Lancaster and Pickering seem his extreme northern points.

Lord Bacon's *Sylva Sylvarum* has, except in name, nothing to do with woods.

Coke, a Norfolk man and co-temporary of Manwood, and who only

treats of Forests incidentally, whilst the other discussed them specially, says (L. I. C. I. 56):—"Frythe is a plaine between woods, and so is Lawnd or Lound." He afterwards explains words so thoroughly local as *Comb*, *Hope*, *Dene*, *Glyn*, and *Haugh*—terms quite out of the way of an East Anglian, and not likely then to be met with in books. Except he had ridden the Northern Circuit, how could that profound and crabbed Lawyer have picked up these names.

It might have been expected that a Local Historian of the County would have explained the parochial subdivisions of his own valley, and their names; but, beyond stating that the Baliols had an ancient Forest in the Parish of Middleton, subsequently disforested, and naming the township as to land-tax and county-rates, Hutchinson makes no allusion to Forest and Frith—an odd omission for a resident at Barnard Castle.

Surtees unfortunately left Stanhope and Middleton untouched, otherwise we should have had the history of each Parish fully elucidated.

Brockett, in his *Glossary of North Country Words*, does not give Frith. Had it been a common expression he would hardly have overlooked it. Probably it does not exist at all in Northumberland or Cumberland, nor in Durham, except Teesdale—in Weardale it has long been obsolete.

In the *Teesdale Glossary*, 1849, the word is not given. The author perhaps regarded it rather in the light of a proper name. Marwood Chase, which he describes, would otherwise have suggested some allusion to the Forest of Upper Teesdale. Upon the whole, Coke's interpretation seems nearest the mark, and best adapted to the local circumstances of Teesdale and Weardale. The Frith or clearing in the Forest of Weardale would probably be earlier made and much wider than that of Teesdale, as the population and cultivation of Upper Teesdale bear no proportion to those of the Park and Forest Quarters of Stanhope.

The deer in Teesdale Forest must have been well preserved for 400 to perish in the snow in 1673. A century before they were becoming scarce in Weardale through the advance of cultivation and the encroachments of the Dalesmen.

The destruction in Teesdale, in 1673, seems to have been great. Sir W. Bowes, when appointed Chief Ranger in 1685, covenanted, among other things, to replenish the Forest and Chase with Deer.

Whether any then existed in Weardale is doubtful, for in 1595 only forty head were officially reported to remain.

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