

SAXON NAMES OF CERTAIN ROMAN ROADS.

 READ BY RALPH CARR ELLISON.—JULY 1880.

WAETLINGA-STRETE.—“GWATLING-STREET.”—WATLING-STREET.

As the understanding of some designations of Roman Roads is easily attained by Anglo-Saxon students, so that of Watling-Street is avowedly difficult. Yet, though we may have to leave it not fully determined, something will be gained if any new path of investigation can be indicated, and this I believe is not impossible with a sufficient knowledge of the mode in which the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary came to be largely augmented and enriched by continual translations from Latin authors, both classical and ecclesiastical, and of the modes in which many unwonted and often very complex terms and expressions were translated into Saxon, and therein naturalised by repeated use. Instead of importing Latin nouns, adjectives, and verbs into Anglo-Saxon, as they were afterwards introduced in crowds into English, our Saxon forefathers translated them into their own tongue, forming sometimes very uncouth vocables indeed. The copious vocabulary of the German language has been amplified by translation from Latin equivalents in the same manner, as every classical scholar accustomed to read German is well aware; and it is not from such men, or from Germans themselves, that my present reasoning needs fear either impatience or incredulity. It will, nevertheless, appear quite fantastical to those who have not applied themselves either to Anglo-Saxon or to German.

The Latin title of Consul is probably untranslatable by any real equivalent. The Saxons expressed it merely by the word for General—namely “heretog,” which corresponds to Dux. But they had no word that would convey also an idea of the civil functions and dignity of the great officers of State who bore that title. If, however, Consul could only be rendered by heretog, equivalent to Dux, it is obvious that the delicate distinctions of the high official titles of Consul, Prætor, Proprætor, could not be easily reproduced in Saxon. But there was

one attribute common to all of these, and even to the Vicarii and Præsides of the latest times. They all were distinguished by the presence of the lictors with the *fusces* and the insignia of the spear and the axe, borne therewith in solemn and conspicuous procession along the great roads of primary communication. Like the Consuls they were all *Viri fascigeri*, and in my opinion this last is the term of which Wætlingas and Gewætlingas is the Saxon translation and equivalent. The Wætlinga-stræte was the street or road of the men of consular dignity, whether entitled Prætors, or Proprætors, or otherwise; the road along which they made their solemn judicial progresses. And the sights which most struck the imagination of the provincial and Romanised Britons were the insignia of the spear and sword and axe of capital punishment; and the Fasces, scarcely less formidable to minor offenders, and which gave a name to these insignia collectively. From the Romanised Britons the Saxons would hear the term of *Via Fascigerorum*, *Via Consularium*, and would translate it for themselves.

My object in bringing this aspect of the question as regards the name of Watling-Street before our Society is to obtain for it the most thorough examination both by antiquaries in general and by Anglo-Saxon scholars. That the name imports "Roads of those concerned with rods, or bundles of rods, or woven rods," or the like, is certain. But the question is, In what sense? I have turned the question often over, in every way, to discover how such rods, or wicker-work, could come into prominent use in such a manner as to implant their character upon one of the greatest works of the Romans in Britain. It is now three years and more since I became convinced that we had to deal, not with rods or sheaves of rods in their humble natural meaning, but in their transitive and almost figurative sense of the Roman Fasces. Let any one try to translate Wætlinga-stræte into Latin, as I was doing when I stumbled upon my present interpretation, and how can he do it, except as "*Via virorum cum virgis, vel fascibus proficiscentium?*" But if so why not "*Via Virorum Consularium*"—the Consular Road?

MAIDEN-WAY.

In considering this expression we must remember that though to our present English acceptance it seems to mean either virgin-road, in the sense of newly-constructed and untravelled road; or again in the strange and unintelligible sense of *puellarum via*, that is, road of

maidens, whereas it was certainly a military highway. But besides signifying a maiden or daughter, *mægth* was used to express offspring generally, a family or tribe, as in *Mægth-laga*, a family law, and thence associated population, such as that of a province, or even a nation. By resorting to the dictionaries of Lye or Bosworth examples of such usage will be seen, such as "*Mægth West-Seaxna onfeng Godes word*"—the province of the West Saxons received God's word: "*Biscop Suth-Saxna-Mægthe*"—Bishop of the Province of the South Saxons, or Sussex. Hence we may perceive that *Mægthen-weg* in Anglo-Saxon would be understood just as *via provincialis* or *via provincialium* in Latin, and would be an obvious translation of such Latin, and signify a provincial or national highway, made and maintained at some time by the ruling authorities, whether Roman or Saxon. In the same way *Mægthen-Castel*, or Maiden castle, would simply mean the chief stronghold of the province, as the castle of Edinburgh for Lothian, and we need not inquire how it came to be Latinized by "*Castellum puellarum*," when we know that the original Anglo-Saxon speech and idiom were never consulted for information. We have likewise our own Maiden-castles in the North of England, whether by the side of a Maiden-way or not. They were certainly each a stronghold of the province or district in which they stood. The modern military use of the term "maiden fortress" or "virgin fort" in the wars of the 15th century, implying the invincibility of the place, as in the case of *Peronne-la-pucelle*, has of course nothing in common with the comparatively remote designations of Saxon times which we have been considering.

In reference to *Watling-Street*, the meeting of Antiquaries was reminded that the Saxons gave this name also to the *Via Lactea*, or Milky Way, in the starry heavens. They did so, in my opinion, because they likened it, in its direct course athwart the heavens, to the great processional road of the Roman Governors in Britain, traversing the island as it was seen to do. And there cannot be a stronger testimony to the admiration of the Saxons for this great work of Imperial Rome than that they should have transferred its popular Saxon designation to one of the sublimest objects in the celestial firmament, as if the latter seemed to their imaginations a stately line of inter-communication for the heavenly hierarchy.