

THURSDAY, MARCH 30, 1882

ORIGINS OF ENGLISH HISTORY

Origins of English History. By Charles Elton. (London: Quaritch, 1882.)

MR ELTON'S work will at once take the place it deserves. It will be welcomed by the many students who have been long waiting for such a treatise on our country as it was during, the ages lying just outside the broad daylight of history. The subject, with all the new resources of archæology and philology which have been brought to bear upon it, still presents a set of problems full of doubt and difficulty; but it will be seen that Mr. Elton's task has been not merely to bring these problems into shape, but to advance them by investigations of his own.

In the introductory chapter, which deals with the knowledge of the ancients as to our part of the world, it is satisfactory to find the author bringing down to their real value the popular stories of Phœnicians in Britain. What is really recorded of the merchant-sailors of Carthage is their commerce with the tin-islands, but these Kassiterides, Cæstrymnides, or Hesperides, are set down in Ptolemy's map as being off North-Western Spain, and it was Camden and other moderns who identified them with the Scilly Islands, so bringing the Phœnician galleys up into the British Channel. In 1874, at the Congress of Prehistoric Archæology at Stockholm, Dr. Hildebrand read a paper on the Kassiterides, which Mr. Elton does not seem to have met with, but which tallies closely with his own argument that the ancient accounts of their situation point to the Spanish coast. Dr. Hildebrand supposes the so-called islands to be only the headlands of Galicia, where tin is still mined, while Mr. Elton suggests that they were the little islands about Vigo Bay, an idea which would be strengthened by proof of old tin-workings being found there. Kenrick's argument that the tin-islanders going to sea in boats of leather were ancient Cornishmen paddling across to Scilly in "the characteristic boat of Britain" is fairly met by Mr. Elton, who points out that the Iberians had coracles as well as the Britons. Thus it is to be feared that Cornish history must give up the picturesque scenes of black-cloaked Kelts crossing to St. Michael's Mount at low water to barter their tin for the purple and fine linen of the Phœnician merchants, and to learn from them the art of scalding "Cornish cream." More substantial records of early Britain are to be had from a source long discredited but now restored to credit. This is the famous voyage of Pytheas to Thule, where he saw the midnight sun, and by describing this and other wonders of the north made himself the reputation of an arch liar, till now, two thousand years afterwards, his townsmen the merchants of Marseilles have set up a statue to him as the leader of the first Arctic expedition. In working out the details of Pytheas's expedition, our author follows him up the Spanish and French coast, by the British Channel into the German Ocean, up to Lapland (which he takes to be Thule), and down the east coast of England, back to Bordeaux. He makes Pytheas, after leaving Cadiz, come to the tin-islands, but it is not plain whether there is some actual record of this visit, or whether

it is merely inferred that coasting up Spain above Cape St. Vincent must have brought him to the Kassiterides. The explorers passed the mouths of the Loire, and rounding Brittany, landed at Axantos (still Ushant), where they saw the temple and its nine priestesses keeping up the eternal fire. Not knowing how near he had come to the tin-districts of Cornwall, Pytheas sailed up Channel to the coast of Kent. Here he had reached the ordinary crossing place between Britain and Gaul, and here Mr. Elton places that much debated island which Timæus called Mictis, lying inwards six days' sail from Britain, in which the tin is found, and to which the Britons navigate in their coracles; while Posidonius describes it as an island lying off Britain, called Ictis, to which the miners of Cornwall carry their tin, taking it in carts across the intervening space which is left dry at ebb-tide, and there the merchants buy it and convey it across to Gaul, whence it is carried on pack-horses down to the Rhone. Mr. Elton's suggestion is that this Mictis, or Ictis, was the Isle of Thanet, six days' sail from the part of Britain where the tin comes from, and which, though now silted up almost close to the mainland, was even as late as the ninth century separated from it by a ferry half a mile wide. This is a very ingenious attempt to get over the difficulty in the ordinary theories, of putting St. Michael's Mount six days' sail from Britain, or of getting carts across to the Isle of Wight at low water. It has, however, its difficulties to meet, as the above extracts show, and Mr. Elton must be left to fight his own battle with the antiquaries.

Historians' ideas of the early inhabitants of Britain have changed curiously from those of a generation or two ago, when it was undisputed matter of fact that the Kelts were the aborigines of our islands, sprung from Gomer, son of Japhet, who colonised Gaul, and left his name to his descendants, the *Cymry*. Nowadays the Kelts have sunk into comparatively modern Aryan invaders, and the question is, How many peoples are to be traced before them? In the present state of the evidence, our author will hardly be found fault with for assuming three earlier races: first, the men of the Palæolithic or Mammoth period, who have not been proved to be connected with later inhabitants; second, the short, dark, narrow-skulled tribes who may be called Silurians, whose long-shaped burial-mounds contain stone weapons of Neolithic type, and whose descendants are to be recognised by their appearance, especially in South Wales and Ireland, though they now speak a Keltic tongue; third, a taller broad-skulled people seemingly of fair hair and complexion, and possibly allied to the modern Finns, who by their remains in the round barrows appear to have come hither armed with weapons of bronze, and encroached on and eventually mixed with their predecessors. After all these came in the invading Kelts, who were perhaps in the Bronze age when they landed on our shores, but who certainly possessed and worked iron long before the Roman Conquest. In Mr. Elton's good collection of passages relating to the Kelts, such terms as golden hair, milk-white necks, snowy arms, point to their being on the whole a fair race, which tells in favour of the idea just mentioned, that the dark complexion of so many modern Irishmen and Welshmen comes from an older Silurian ancestry. This ethnological speculation is doubtful

enough, but far more obscure is the question, who were this old dark-haired race of Silurians? The author, touching on the theory connecting them with Iberians or Basques, is quite alive to the slightness of the evidence pointing this way, and not less cautious as to the ancient words belonging to præ-Keltic tribes said to be preserved in Irish or Welsh.

Mr. Elton's department of original research lies especially in ancient legal customs, on which he has for years been the leading authority at the English Bar. Indeed the desire to get back to the historical meaning of customs which the law-books utterly fail to explain, is plainly the motive which has led him into the wider investigations embodied in this book. Naturally he is always on the look-out for legal relics of the earlier inhabitants, and for instance makes a striking remark on the succession of Pictish kings being not from father to son, but to the nearest male relative traced through the female line. This custom of kinship through the mother, which still marks many of the lower tribes of mankind, did not belong to the Kelts, who shared with other Aryans the rule of descent on the father's side, and it is fairly argued that the squalid tattooed Picts were of an older race, and kept up their ruder law of marriage. Again, the ancient custom still prevailing in many English districts, in the Vale of Taunton for instance, that the land goes not to the eldest but the youngest son, is here discussed more fully than it ever has been. The author's view is that whereas in the Aryan nations the eldest son's birthright was connected, as in India at this day, with the duty of keeping up the offerings to the divine ancestors, so the opposite custom of youngest-right may have come down from the religion of some ancient race in England, where, as among the Mongols still, the youngest son was the "fire-keeper" and inherited the home. In Germany, youngest-right is frequent and there it is on record that that quaint fetish or idol the mandrake root, dug up from under the gallows, half human in form and possessed by its familiar demon, used to descend at the house-father's death to the youngest son, on condition of his performing the pagan rite of burying bread and money in the grave. This is an interesting argument, though perhaps it may be answered that in new countries where the sons as they grow up go out and make homes of their own, the youngest son is the natural caretaker and heir of the parent's house and fields, and it is as likely that he performed the religious duties because living there made him the proper person, as that he became the heir because he had to perform the religious duties. How monuments and rites of older tribes find new and changed places in the religion of their conquerors, is here often brought into view. St. Boniface found the Frieslanders using as an altar a rude stone dolmen, probably a tomb built ages earlier by bronze-age inhabitants; the fierce Teutons would make a captive creep through the narrow opening of the upright stones, and then "sent him to Woden." After this, it does not seem surprising that our country folk should believe the rude stone dolmens on our hill-sides to have been altars for human sacrifice. Among earlier rites lasting on into Christianity, one of the most picturesque is that of Brighid the Keltic fire-god's daughter, who passed into St. Bridget, patron saint of Ireland and still name-giver to Biddy the typical Irish housemaid.

But St. Bridget held to her old goddess-nature, and till the suppression of the monasteries her everlasting fire was kept up at Kildare by her nineteen nuns, who might not defile by blowing with their breath the flame sacred to the "woman of the mighty roarings"; each nun tended the fire one night in turn, but on the twentieth she who went off duty said "Brigit! take care of your own fire, for this night belongs to you." We are puzzled by Mr. Elton's remarks on the worship of Mithra, that ancient Aryan solar deity whose Oriental worship became so popular in Britain during the Roman occupation. The usually-known evidence seems to imply that the Mithra-worshippers fixed his divine birthday, the "Dies Natalis invicti Solis," on December 25, because the sun's birth would naturally be at the winter solstice, while it was not till long afterwards that this appropriate date was adopted for the Christian Dies Natalis, Christmas Day. Mr. Elton appears to take it the other way, as though the Mithra-worshippers for the sake of popularity borrowed the festival from the Christians. If he has some new evidence in this direction, it ought to be carefully gone into, and at any rate it will be well to clear the point up in the next edition.

What has now been said will give an idea of the more special researches in this important work. Readers of this journal will not disapprove of our having passed over weighty but ordinary historical topics, such as the invasions of Britain by Romans and Saxons, in order to give space for tracing lines of beliefs and customs. Some of these may seem trifling, but in the scientific study of history every trifle tells which can show a line of continuity from age to age and from race to race.

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WORKS ON THE MICROSCOPE

The Microscope and its Revelations. By William B. Carpenter, M.D., LL.D., C.B., F.R.S. Sixth Edition. Illustrated by 500 Wood Engravings and Twenty-six Plates. (London: J. and A. Churchill, 1881.)

Practical Microscopy. By George E. Davis, F.R.M.S., &c. Illustrated with 257 Woodcuts and a Coloured Frontispiece. (London: David Bogue, 1882.)

DR. CARPENTER is to be congratulated on the recent publication of the sixth edition of his very useful work on the Microscope and its Revelations, the more especially as now having the command of his own time, this edition is not only the expression throughout of his own matured views, but also contains a large amount of new matter.

A work like this which has proved itself so great a favourite needs but a brief notice at our hands. It is without doubt the book for the English reader to buy, who wishes to work as an amateur with the microscope; and should any such proceed further with the study, and penetrate into the mysteries of animal or plant life, he will find himself none the worse, but a great deal the better for the lessons he will have learnt in these pages.

The general plan of Dr. Carpenter's book is good; it begins with a short chapter on the Optical Principles of the Microscope. The question of there being a limit to the magnifying powers of the object-glasses, or whether there is a minimum behind which nothing can be seen, is not entered upon. The next two chapters—on the Construc-