

VARIOUS

NOTES AND QUERIES,
NUMBER 39, JULY 27,
1850

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NOTES

ETYMOLOGY OF "WHITSUNTIDE" AND "MASS"

Perhaps the following Note and Query on the much-disputed origin of the word *Whitsunday*, as used in our Liturgy, may find a place in your Journal. None of the etymologies of this word at present in vogue is at all satisfactory. They are—

I. *White Sunday*: and this, either—

1. From the garments of *white linen*, in which those who were at that season admitted to the rite of holy baptism were clothed; (as typical of the spiritual purity therein obtained:) or,—

2. From the glorious light of heaven, sent down from the father of Lights on the day of Pentecost: and "those vast diffusions of light and knowledge, which were then shed upon the Apostles, in order to the enlightening of the world." (Wheatley.) Or,—

3. From the custom of the rich bestowing on this day all the milk of their kine, then called *white meat*, on the poor. (Wheatley, from Gerard Langbain.)

II. *Huict Sunday*: from the French, *huit*, eight; *i.e.* the eighth Sunday from Easter. (L'Estrange, *Alliance Div. Off.*)

III. There are others who see that neither of these explanations can stand; because the ancient mode of spelling the word was not *Whit*-sunday, but *Wit*-sonday (as in Wickliff), or *Wite*-sonday (which is as old as *Robert of Gloucester*, c. A.D. 1270). Hence,—

1. Versteran's explanation:—That it is *Wied* Sunday, *i.e.* *Sacred Sunday* (from Saxon, *wied*, or *wihed*, a word I do not find in Bosworth's *A.-S. Dict.*; but so written in Brady's *Clovis Calendaria*, as below). But why should this day be distinguished as sacred beyond all other Sundays in the year?

2. In *Clavis Calendaria*, by John Brady (2 vols. 8vo. 1815), I find, vol. i. p. 378., "Other authorities contend," he does not say who those authorities are, "that the original name of this season of the year was *Wittentide*; or the time of choosing the *wits*, or wise men, to the *Wittenagemote*."

Now this last, though evidently an etymology inadequate to the importance of the festival, appears to me to furnish the right clue. The day of Pentecost was the day of the outpouring of the Divine Wisdom and Knowledge on the Apostles; the day on which was given to them that HOLY SPIRIT, by which was "revealed" to them "*The wisdom of God ... even the hidden*"

wisdom, which GOD ordained before the world." 1 Cor. ii. 7.¹ It was the day on which was fulfilled the promise made to them by CHRIST that "The Comforter, which is the HOLY GHOST, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall *teach you all things*, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." John, xiv. 26. When "He, the Spirit of Truth, came, who should *guide them into all truth*." John xvi. 13. And the consequence of this "unction from the Holy One" was, that they "knew all things," and "needed not that any man should teach them." 1 John, ii. 20. 27.

Whit-sonday was, therefore, the day on which the Apostles were endued by God with *wisdom* and knowledge: and my Query is, whether the root of the word may not be found in the Anglo-Saxon verb,—

Witan, to know, understand (whence our *wit*, in its old meaning of good sense, or cleverness and the expression "having one's *wits* about one," &c.); or else, perhaps, from—

Wisian, to instruct, show, inform; (Ger. *weisen*). Not being an Anglo-Saxon scholar, I am unable of myself to trace the formation of the word *witson* from either of these roots: and I should feel greatly obliged to any of your correspondents who might be able and willing to inform me, whether that form is deduceable from either of the above verbs; and if so, what sense it

¹ The places in the New Testament, where Divine Wisdom and Knowledge are referred to the outpouring of God's Spirit, are numberless. Cf. Acts, vi. 3., 1 Cor. xii. 8., Eph. i. 8, 9., Col. i. 9., &c. &c.

would bear in our present language. I am convinced, that *wisdom day*, or *teaching day*, would afford a very far better reason for the name now applied to Pentecost, than any of the reasons commonly given. I should observe, that I think it incorrect to say Whit-Sunday. It should be Whitsun (Witesone) Day. If it is Whit Sunday, why do we say Easter Day, and not Easter Sunday? Why do we say Whitsun-Tide? Why does our Prayer Book say Monday and Tuesday in Whitsun-week (just as before, Monday and Tuesday in Easter-week)? And why do the lower classes, whose "vulgarisms" are, in nine cases out of ten, more correct than our refinements, still talk about Whitsun Monday and Whitsun Tuesday, where the more polite say, Whit Monday and Tuesday?

Query II. As I am upon etymologies, let me ask, may not the word *Mass*, used for the Lord's Supper—which Baronius derives from the Hebrew *missach*, an oblation, and which is commonly derived from the "missa missorum"—be nothing more nor less than *mess* (*mes*, old French), the meal, the repast, the supper? We have it still lingering in the phrase, "an officers' mess;" *i.e.* a meal taken in common at the same table; and so, "to mess together," "messmate," and so on. Compare the Moeso-Gothic *mats*, food: and *maz*, which Bosworth says (*A.-S. Dic.* sub voc. *Mete*) is used for bread, food, in Otfrid's poetical paraphrase of the Gospels, in Alemannic or High German, published by Graff, Königsberg, 1831.

H.T.G.

Clapton.

FOLK LORE

Sympathetic Cures.—Possibly the following excerpt may enable some of your readers and Folklore collectors to testify to the yet lingering existence, in localities still unvisited by the "iron horse," of a superstition similar to the one referred to below. I transcribe it from a curious, though not very rare volume in duodecimo, entitled *Choice and Experimental Receipts in Physick and Chirurgery, as also Cordial and Distilled Waters and Spirits, Perfumes, and other Curiosities*. Collected by the Honourable and truly learned Sir Kenelm Digby, Kt., Chancellour to Her Majesty the Queen Mother. London: Printed for H. Brome, at the Star in Little Britain, 1668.

"*A Sympathetic Cure for the Tooth-ach.*—With an iron nail raise and cut the gum from about the teeth till it bleed, and that some of the blood stick upon the nail, then drive it into a wooden beam up to the head; after this is done you never shall have the toothach in all your life." The author naively adds "But whether the man used any spell, or said any words while he drove the nail, I know not; only I saw done all that is said above. This is used by severall certain persons."

Amongst other "choice and experimental receipts" and "curiosities" which in this little tome are recommended for the cure of some of the "ills which flesh is heir to," one directs the

patient to

"Take two parts of the moss growing on the skull of a dead man (pulled as small as you can with the fingers)."

Another enlarges on the virtue of

"A little bag containing some powder of toads calcined, so that the bag lay always upon the pit of the stomach next the skin, and presently it took away all pain as long as it hung there but if you left off the bag the pain returned. A bag continueth in force but a month after so long time you must wear a fresh one."

This, he says, a "person of credit" told him.

HENRY CAMPKIN.

Reform Club, June 21. 1850.

Cure for Ague.—One of my parishioners, suffering from ague, was advised to catch a large spider and shut him up in a box. As he pines away, the disease is supposed to wear itself out.

B.

L— Rectory, Somerset, July 8. 1850.

Eating Snakes a Charm for growing young.—I send you the following illustrations of this curious receipt for growing young. Perhaps some of your correspondents will furnish me with some others, and some additional light on the subject. Fuller says,—

"A gentlewoman told an ancient batchelour, who looked *very young*, that she thought *he had eaten a snake*: 'No, mistris,' (said he), 'it is because I never meddled with any

snakes which maketh me look so young."—*Holy State*,
1642, p. 36.

He hath left off o' late to *feed on snakes*;
His beard's turned white again.

Massinger, Old Law, Act v. Sc. 1.

"He is your loving brother, sir, and will tell nobody
But all he meets, that you have eat a *snake*,
And are grown young, gamesome, and rampant."

Ibid, Elder Brother, Act iv. Sc. 4.

JARLTZBERG.

LONG MEG OF WESTMINSTER

Mr. Cunningham, in his *Handbook of London* (2nd edition, p. 540.), has the following passage, under the head of "Westminster Abbey:"

"*Observe.*—Effigies in south cloister of several of the early abbots; large blue stone, uninscribed, (south cloister), marking the grave of Long Meg of Westminster, a noted virago of the reign of Henry VIII."

This amazon is often alluded to by our old writers. Her life was printed in 1582; and she was the heroine of a play noticed in Henslowe's *Diary*, under the date February 14, 1594. She also figured in a ballad entered on the Stationers' books in that year. In *Holland's Leaguer*, 1632, mention is made of a house kept by Long Meg in Southwark:—

"It was out of the citie, yet in the view of the citie, only divided by a delicate river: there was many handsome buildings, and many hearty neighbours, yet at the first foundation it was renowned for nothing so much as for the memory of that famous amazon *Longa Margarita*, who had there for many yeeres kept a famous *infamous* house of open hospitality."

According to Vaughan's *Golden Grove*, 1608,—

"Long Meg of Westminster kept alwaies twenty courtizans in her house, whom, by their pictures, she sold

to all commers."

From these extracts the occupation of Long Meg may be readily guessed at. Is it then likely that such a detestable character would have been buried amongst "goodly friars" and "holy abbots" in the cloisters of our venerable abbey? I think not: but I leave considerable doubts as to whether Meg was a real personage.—Query. Is she not akin to Tom Thumb, Jack the Giant-killer, Doctor Rat, and a host of others of the same type?

The stone in question is, I know, on account of its great size, jokingly called "Long Meg, of Westminster" by the vulgar; but no one, surely, before Mr. Cunningham, ever *seriously* supposed it to be her burying-place. Henry Keefe, in his *Monumenta Westmonasteriensa*, 1682, gives the following account of this monument:—

"That large and stately plain black marble stone (which is vulgarly known by the name of *Long Meg of Westminster*) on the north side of *Laurentius* the abbot, was placed there for *Gervasius de Blois*, another abbot of this monastery, who was base son to King Stephen, and by him placed as a monk here, and afterwards made abbot, who died *anno* 1160, and was buried under this stone, having this distich formerly thereon:

"De regnum genere pater hic Gervasius ecce
Monstrat defunctus, mors rapit omne genus."

Felix Summerly, in his *Handbook for Westminster Abbey*, p. 29., noticing the cloisters and the effigies of the abbots, says,—

"Towards this end there lies a large slab of blue marble, which is called 'Long Meg' of Westminster. Though it is inscribed to Gervasius de Blois, abbot, 1160 natural son of King Stephen, he is said to have been buried under a small stone, and tradition assigns 'Long Meg' as the gravestone of twenty-six monks, who were carried off by the plague in 1349, and buried together in one grave."

The tradition here recorded may be correct. At any rate, it carries with it more plausibility than that recorded by Mr. Cunningham.

EDWARD F. RIMIBAULT.

[Some additional and curious allusions to this probably mythic virago are recorded in Mr. Halliwell's *Descriptive Notices of Popular English Histories*, printed for the Percy Society.]

A NOTE ON SPELLING. —"SANATORY," "CONNECTION."

I trust that "NOTES AND QUERIES" may, among many other benefits, improve spelling by example as well as precept. Let me make a note on two words that I find in No. 37.: *sanatory*, p. 99., and *connection*, p. 98.

Why "*sanatory* laws?" *Sanare* is *to cure*, and a curing-place is, if you like, properly called *sanatorium*. But the Latin for *health* is *sanitas*, and the laws which relate to health should be called *sanitary*.

Analogy leads us to *connexion*, not *connection*; *plecto*, *plexus*, *complexion*; *flecto*, *flexus*, *inflexion*; *necto*, *nexus*, *connexion*, &c.; while the termination *ction* belongs to words derived from Latin verbs whose passive participles end in *ctus* as *lego*, *lectus*, *collection*; *injecio*, *injectus*, *injection*; *seco*, *sectus*, *section*, &c.

CH.

Minor Notes

Pasquinade on Leo XII.—The Query put to a Pope (Vol. ii., p. 104.), which it is difficult to believe could be put orally, reminds me of Pope Leo XII., who was reported, whether truly or not, to have been the reverse of scrupulous in the earlier part of his life, but was remarkably strict after he became Pope, and was much disliked at Rome, perhaps because, by his maintenance of strict discipline, he abridged the amusements and questionable indulgences of the people. On account of his death, which took place just before the time of the carnival in 1829, the usual festivities were omitted, which gave occasion to the following pasquinade, which was much, though privately, circulated—

"Tre cose mat fecesti, O Padre santo:
Accettar il papato,
Viver tanto,
Morir di Carnivale
Per destar pianto."

J. Mn.

Shakspeare a Brass-rubber.—I am desirous to notice, if no commentator has forestalled me, that Shakspeare, among his many accomplishments, was sufficiently beyond his age to be a brass-rubber:

"What's on this tomb

I cannot read; the character I'll take with *wax*."

Timon of Athens, v. 4.

From the "soft impression," however, alluded to in the next scene, his "wax" appears rather to have been the forerunner of *gutta percha* than of *heel-ball*.

T.S. LAWRENCE.

California.—In the *Voyage round the World*, by Captain George Shelvocke, begun Feb. 1719, he says of California (*Harris's Collection*, vol. i. p. 233.):—

"The soil about Puerto, Seguro, and very likely in most of the valleys, is a rich black mould, which, as you turn it fresh up to the sun, appears as if intermingled with gold dust; some of which we endeavoured to purify and wash from the dirt; but though we were a little prejudiced against the thoughts that it could be possible that this metal should be so promiscuously and universally mingled with common earth, yet we endeavoured to cleanse and wash the earth from some of it; and the more we did the more it appeared like gold. In order to be further satisfied I brought away some of it, which we lost in our confusion in China."

How an accident prevented the discovery, more than a century back, of the golden harvest now gathering in California!

E.N.W.

Southwark.

Mayor of Misrule and Masters of the Pastimes.—the word *Maior* of Misrule appears in the Harl. MSS. 2129. as having been on glass in the year 1591, in Denbigh Church.

"5 Edw. VI., a gentleman (Geo. Ferrars), lawyer, poet, and historian, appointed by the Council, and being of better calling than commonly his predecessors, received his commission by the name of 'Master of the King's Pastimes.'"—*Strutt's Sports and Pastimes*, 340.

"1578. Edward Baygine, cursitor, clerk for writing and passing the Queen's leases, 'Comptroller of the Queen's pastimes and revels,' clerk comptroller of her tents and pavilions, commissioner of sewers, burgess in Parliament."—Gwillim, *Heraldry*, 1724 edit.

A.C.

Roland and Oliver.—Canciani says there is a figure in the church porch at Verona which, from being in the same place with *Roland*, and manifestly of the same age, he supposes may be *Oliver*, armed with a spiked ball fastened by a chain to a staff of about three feet in length. *Who are Roland and Oliver?* There is the following derivation of the saying "a Roland for your Oliver," without any reference or authority attached, in my note-book:—

"—Charlemagne, in his expedition against the Saracens, was accompanied by two '*steeds*,' some writers say 'pages,' named Roland and Oliver, who were so excellent and so equally matched, that the equality became proverbial—"I'll give you a Roland for your Oliver" being, the same as the vulgar saying, 'I'll give you tit for tat,' *i.e.* 'I'll give you the

same (whether in a good or bad sense) as you give me."

JARLTZBERG.

QUERIES

THE STORY OF THE THREE MEN AND THEIR BAG OF MONEY

Lord Campbell, in his *Lives of the Chancellors*, relates, in connection with Queen Elizabeth's Lord Keeper Ellesmere, a very common story, of which I am surprised he did not at once discern the falsehood. It is that of a widow, who having a sum of money entrusted to her by three men, which she was on no account to return except to the joint demand of the three, is afterwards artfully persuaded by one of them to give it up to him. Being afterwards sued by the other two, she is successfully defended by a young lawyer, who puts in the plea that she is not bound to give up the money at the demand of *only* two of the parties. In this case this ingenious gentleman is the future chancellor. The story is told of the Attorney-General Noy, and of an Italian advocate, in the notes to Rogers' *Italy*. It is likewise the subject of one of the smaller tales in Lane's *Arabian Nights*; but here I must remark, that the Eastern version is decidedly more ingenious than the later ones, inasmuch as it exculpates the keeper of the deposit from the "laches" of which in the other cases she was decidedly guilty. Three men enter a bath,

and entrust their bag of money to the keeper with the usual conditions. While bathing, one feigns to go to ask for a comb (if I remember right), but in reality demands the money. The keeper properly refuses, when he calls out to his companions within, "He won't give it me." They unwittingly respond, "Give it him," and he accordingly walks off with the money. I think your readers will agree with me that the tale has suffered considerably in its progress westward.

My object in troubling you with this, is to ask whether any of your subscribers can furnish me with any other versions of this popular story, either Oriental or otherwise.

BRACKLEY.

Putney, July 17.

THE GEOMETRICAL FOOT

In several different places I have discussed the existence and length of what the mathematicians of the sixteenth century *used*, and those of the seventeenth *talked about*, under the name of the *geometrical foot*, of four palms and sixteen digits. (See the *Philosophical Magazine* from December 1841 to May 1842; the *Penny Cyclopædia*, "Weights and Measures," pp. 197, 198; and *Arthmetical Books, &c.*, pp. 5-9.) Various works give a figured length of this foot, whole, or in halves, according as the page will permit; usually making it (before the shrinking of the paper is allowed for) a very little less than 9-3/4 inches English. The works in which I have as yet found it are Reisch, *Margarita Philosophica*, 1508; Stöffler's *Elucidatio Astrolabii*, 1524; Fernel's *Monolosphærium*, 1526; Köbel, *Astrolabii Declaratio*, 1552; Ramus, *Geometricæ*, 1621. Query. In what other works of the sixteenth, or early in the seventeenth century is this foot of palms and digits to be found, figured in length? What are their titles? What the several lengths of the foot, half foot, or palm, within the twentieth of an inch? Are the divisions into palms or digits given; and, if so, are they accurate subdivisions? Of the six names above mentioned, the three who are by far the best known are Stöffler, Fernel, and Ramus; and it so happens that their subdivisions are *much*

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