MEMORIALS OF THE WASH.

THE littoral changes produced by the retreat of the sea, and still in progress through the whole circuit of our island, merit a more attentive survey than has hitherto been bestowed on them. As the latest of all geological operations, and open to daily inspection, they constitute the first link in a chain of inductive research by which we may ascend to a solution of the earlier phenomena in the structure of our planet: among these alluvial formations none are so extensive and worthy of notice as those in the districts bordering on the Wash. This is the remaining portion of a once extensive estuary, which, interspersed with numerous islands and divided into many branches, covered a considerable part of the present county of Lincoln, and spread into the adjacent shires of Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge, Huntingdon and Northampton. It reached Louth in the north and Cambridge in the south, making its length 75 miles; and its breadth was 40, from Brandon in the east to Peterborough in the west. It is now reduced to an arm of the sea, filling at high water a space of about 250 square miles. The vast level which it has abandoned is brought into cultivation, or affords pasturage to innumerable herds and flocks; railways traverse it in all directions, and on every side new dwellings arise for a busy and thriving population. These are so fast obliterating the traces and memory of its pristine condition, that many will be interested by a review of the facts which mark the successive stages of the change.

The only ancient notice of the entrance to this wilderness of waters is very scanty. It occurs in the Geography of Ptolemy, who, following his nautical guide along the eastern coast of Britain, places the estuary *Metaris* between the outlets of the Yare (*Garruenos*), and the Humber (*Avon*), and thus clearly identifies it with the Wash of the present day. The name is probably a corrupt Hellenized form given by the mariners of Alexandria to some British term. Its resemblance to the *Metaurus*, which designated two Keltic streams in Italy, seems to denote a common origin. Camden calls it *Maltraith*, for which, however, he assigns neither authority nor meaning. In this absence of ampler positive information, we must draw the best inferences we can from the records of nature, and such facts as can be gleaned in the narrow field of contemporary history.

Throughout this wide plain the lands are generally formed of mud, ooze, and decayed vegetable substances, resting on a substratum of silt or sea-sand. In the third volume of the Geological Transactions they are described near Louth as "consisting principally of unstratified clay, with mixtures of sand and various marine depositions, which tend to prove that this mass of earth has been left by the sea." In 1826 the excavators of Eau Brink Cut, near Lynn Regis, found at some distance below the surface a bed of shingle intermixed with various kinds of marine shells. Similar deposits are at the present day left by every ebbing tide on the shores of the Wash, especially at Hunstanton, where the shells are so abundant that they are collected by the neighbouring farmers and carried away in cart-loads to manure the fields. As the lands of this district, with the exception of its former islands, all lie on one continuous level, the residence of the sea at these two points indicates that its tides must at the same period have overflowed the whole plain. Such was probably its state when Britain was a Roman

province. This will assist in elucidating some passages in the Latin writers, and in deciding the as yet unknown situations of some towns of that time. The Nen (*Auvona* or *Antona*), one of the rivers which now flow into the estuary, must have been then a much wider stream than it now is, since Tacitus informs us that the proprætor, Ostorius Scapula, made it part of his barrier for the protection of his conquests in the south and east (A.D. 50) against the tumultuary and yet unsubdued northern tribes. This accounts for the numerous traces of Roman towns and camps along its course, and is explained by the waters of the ocean entering the valley at the point where Peterborough now stands, and filling its entire breadth, so as to make it impassable to hostile assailants.

Ptolemy, whose information respecting our maritime districts is generally correct, places in the country of the Cattieuchlani, between the Coritani of Lincolnshire and the Simeni (Iceni) of Norfolk, a station which he calls *Salenæ*. The proper name was undoubtedly *Salinæ*, and denoted a place where the manufacture of salt was carried on. We know from Livy that in the reign of Ancus Martius (B.C. 640) the Romans were acquainted with the art of preparing this commodity from the brine of the sea, and Pliny the Elder describes the process as it was performed seven centuries later. They cannot have failed to instruct the conquered province in this useful operation, and traces of such works are found in the higher grounds near the Wash. Roman coins, urns, and armour point out the constructors of the cisterns discovered at Spalding, and of the clay-pipes, fitting into each other, found at Whaplode, all of which were adapted to such a purpose. The ocean-tides then reached these points, undiluted by fresh water, and the square inclosures on the range of sand-hills about Holbeach and Gedney were probably the pans in which they were retained to be desiccated into salt. The sandy rising grounds near Sutterton are still denominated salt-hills; and at Denton, an ancient Roman road, of which there appears to be a continuation at Moulton, Spalding, and Gedney, has at present the name of the Salters' Road. We are therefore fully justified in placing Ptolemy's *Salinæ* here, rather than at Sandy, in Bedfordshire, which is so unaccountably fixed on as its site by Camden and other antiquaries who follow him. The name was never given except where salt-works existed; it was borne formerly by the Droitwich and Namptwich of the present day, and was common to many of the most celebrated mines and springs on the continent. In no shape whatever can Sandy have furnished materials for the production of this article.

The *Camboritum* of the third *Iter* of Antoninus is supposed by some to have been Chesterton, on the northern side of Cambridge, while others fix its site at Chesterford, by Saffron Walden. The later change of the Welsh *Cymri* into the Latin *Cambria* is so familiar to us that we may without difficulty believe *Camboritum* to have been a similar transformation of the British *Cummor-ruith*, or *Kymmer-ruith*, the Passage at the Meeting of Waters. This would correctly designate the situation of Chesterton at the point where the inland rivers, the Cam or Granta, with its tributaries, and perhaps the Ouse, brought down their streams to mingle with the ocean tides. Every name has its meaning, which, if correctly elicited, is a monument of the past. In all the countries occupied primævally by Keltic nations, they have left many memorials like this of their early settlements in angles, where meeting waters afforded them fertile meadows and secure abodes; however distorted by the various tongues which have used them, they penetrate through the disguise and proclaim their origin.

The early visits of the Saxons to these parts are attested by the numerous villages whose names terminate in *by*. Our antiquaries and glossarists all concur in asserting that this final syllable denoted 'a dwelling;' but they do not inform us how it obtained that signification. No northern language has a primitive term from which it can have come forth direct in that sense. Its only root is the Gothic *buga*, 'to bend,' which the Saxons formed into *bygan*, with the substantive *byge*, a bending, curve, or bay. The pirate chieftain, whose proper home was on the waves, selected for his winter repose some sheltered recess or bay (*byge*), where he repaired his ciuli, arms and nets, and awaited impatiently the return of spring to renew his adventurous courses. He gave his name to the bay, of which, owing no allegiance to any superior, he styled himself the king, *kyning*, and thus by the common change of *b* into *v*, he and his brother pirates became the celebrated *vikingr*, 'bay-kings,' of Northern song. When the failing energies of the Western empire left Britain unprotected, the Saxon rovers made the same use of the inner bights and coves of the Metaris. In time they established permanent settlements there; each *byge* was distinguished by the name of its chieftain, and was made his *dwelling*, in which sense the term thus became vernacular, and was used in forming the names of new inland communities, as in the cases of Derby, Rugby, and other places, when the kingdom of Mercia stretched beyond its marshland cradle into wider districts. A good map of the former fen-plain of Lincolnshire will shew how its villages were planted on the bendings which indented the shore of the ancient Metaris.

This estuary was the western boundary of the Saxon kingdom of East Anglia, and by separating it from the interior, as lately shewn by one of our contemporaries, gave it the character of that *East Engaland*, 'Eastern Narrow-land,' which monkish writers, ignorant of its import, fashioned into its still current designation. It cannot have been so named from the Baltic *Angeln*, the supposed fatherland of its settlers, relative to which its position was not eastern, but western. This small state was surrounded by the sea and waters, then impassable, except at its south-western corner, where an isthmus, a few miles wide, intervened between the river Stour, a broader stream at that time, and the Metaris. To guard this space, successive lines of defence were drawn across it at uncertain periods and by unknown hands; the largest of them, called the Devil's Dyke, may still be seen near Newmarket; its northern termination, near Burwell, marks the shore-line, to which the estuary then extended.

After the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, the secluded islands of the Metaris were, in the seventh century, the resort of hermits, anchorites, and monks. These humble but hallowed retreats of devotion afforded sometimes an asylum to royal fugitives, who, when restored to their thrones, raised stately monuments of their gratitude on the spots which sheltered them in adversity; or daughters of princes employed the wealth of their sires and husbands to purchase from pious pens an immortality of fame for the mistaken merit of raising sacred fanes and retiring into them from the duties of life. Facility of access for ships freighted with stone from foreign quarries promoted these works; and thus the wandering Anglo-Saxon ceorl saw minsters and monasteries, like the domes of Venice and the minarets of Egypt, "rise and glitter o'er the ambient tide." Ely, by far the largest of these islands, had a population of six hundred families in Bede's time, A.D. 730, and is described by him as being then completely isolated. Its abbey and minster were first founded in 673, by Etheldrida,

daughter of Anna, king of East-Anglia; her second husband, Egfrid, king of Northumberland, allowed her to retire into this solitude, and after her death she was canonized for her good work. She had reposed sixteen years in her grave, when her body was disinterred; the monks proceeded in 695 by ship (*ascensa navi*) to the ruins of Grantchester, rifled a Roman cemetery, and bore away a marble sarcophagus to serve as a shrine for their saint. This incident shews that the tract between Ely and Cambridge, over which thousands of travellers are now daily conveyed on the Eastern Counties Railway, was then an expanse of navigable waters; we may also infer that Chesterton, where many stone coffins have been since discovered, was the burial-place from which the prize was obtained; that this hamlet and the present Grantchester were both included in the ancient *Camboritum*, and obtained their separate names when the new town of Cambridge arose between them.

But this open approach from the sea exposed these religious institutions, as well as those of the surrounding mainland, to the ravages of another set of pirates, who, under the names of Danes and Northmen, were for the next three centuries the terror of every civilised maritime tract. In 838 they began their depredations in these parts by attacking Lindesey, the northern section of Lincolnshire; Ely was destroyed by them in 868, Bardney, Crowland, and Medehamstede (Peterborough) in the following year; Thetford in 870; Coldingham and Cambridge in 875; Lindesey was again laid waste in 993; and their molesting visitations repeated in 1010 at Thetford and Cambridge. Many of these monasteries were desolated and abandoned by their surviving inmates, till the accession of Canute put an end to this predatory warfare; restored by his prudence, by the piety of Edward the Confessor, or the superstitious zeal of more tranquil post-Conquest times, they were replaced by sumptuous edifices, some of which are the cathedrals and parish churches of the present age, while others are yet venerable in tottering decay.

At some remote points of the estuary the subsidence of its waters began to be manifest early in the eleventh century. Between Peterborough and Ramsey they had left a swamp which no boat could penetrate or foot-traveller pass over; to restore the communication Canute constructed, in 1029, the causeway, ten miles in length, now known as the King's Delf; but Ely still retained its insular character. In 1036 Alfred the Etheling having landed at Sandwich with a body of Normans to assert his claim to the crown, was taken prisoner by Earl Godwin, and sent thence by sea to Ely. On arriving there (*ut ad terram navis applicuit*) he was deprived of his sight, before being conveyed to the shore, and afterwards put to death. Edwin and Morcar, the rebel earls of Northumberland, fled thither, as to a place of security, in 1071; William the Conqueror pursued them, and by surrounding the island with his fleet reduced them to submission. Domesday Book affords curious evidence of the salt-tides having pervaded the great Lincolnshire portion of the estuary in 1086. Most of the villages bordering on it had, among the property described in the Survey, many *salinæ*, or salt-works. Fleet had eleven, Thoresby sixteen, Frampton fifteen, Kirkton eleven, Bicker twenty, Gosberton eleven, Maplethorp twenty, and others similar numbers; in all of which this necessary of life was then prepared from the brine of the ocean, as we have seen that it had been nine centuries before by the Romans on the same coast.

Ely was first connected with the mainland about the year 1110, when its Bishop, Hervæus, constructed a road to it from Exning, near Newmarket.

The whole of this highway passed over uplands till immediately before the city of Ely, where it was carried across the narrowest branch of the estuary, through which the old Ouse, after receiving the stream of the Cam, now has its course. Henry of Huntingdon has left a description of the southern part of this inland sea, as he saw it, towards the close of the twelfth century; he calls it *palus latissima et visu decora*, extending from St. Ives to Spalding and Thetford, and adorned with many islands, among which he enumerates Ely, Crowland, Ramsey, Thorney, and Chatteris, all heightening the interest of the scene by the Gothic grandeur of their religious edifices. His phrase, *multis fluviis decurrentibus*, "many rivers flowing from it," can have no other meaning than that the flood-tide then ran from it up the channels of the Ouse, Cam, Welland and Nen.

Early in the thirteenth century the sinking surface of the waters began to approach the ground beneath them, and their depression became more evident. Successive lines of embankment, called Roman sea-banks, but probably of later origin, still exist at various points along the coast, which the highest tides now never reach; they attest the gradual retreat of the sea. At this time the sands between Norfolk and Lincolnshire were left dry by the ebbing tide, but covered again by the returning influx. Their unsolid superficies concealed fathomless gulphs, which were often fatal to those who ventured on them. The disaster of King John, when attempting to cross them in 1216, is so notorious a matter of historic record, that it requires only to be called to mind on account of the contrast which it affords with the present state of the same district. In 1267, however, the isle of Ely was still difficult of access; the barons who had rebelled against Henry III. sought safety in it after their defeat at Evesham, and made another stand, till they were compelled to submission by his son Prince Edward.

After this, the wide bed of the ancient Metaris being in that transition state in which it was "neither sea nor good dry land," presents no events to serve as time-marks of its change. During the reign of Elizabeth the tract since known as the Bedford Level had become a marsh of 400,000 acres, extending from Stoke in Norfolk and Brandon in Suffolk, to St. Ives in Huntingdonshire and Chesterton near Cambridge. The practicability of draining it was canvassed by her ministers, and in 1578 a commission of investigation was issued, without leading to any result. It engaged the attention of James I., but a great incursion of the sea in 1614 discouraged the attempt, and the project slumbered till Cornelius Vermuyden, a Dutchman, experienced in such undertakings, revived it by a plan which he submitted to Charles I. His offer was rejected; but Francis, Earl of Bedford, received a grant of nearly a fourth part of the entire district for himself, on condition of his accomplishing the drainage of the whole. The work which he commenced was suspended by his death in 1641, and the years of civil war which followed. In 1649 his son and successor, William, obtained from the Long Parliament an Act confirming the former grant, and authorizing him to continue the enterprise. During this period, the waters of the Ouse were diverted from their circuitous course into the artificial channels of the Old and New Bedford rivers, which conveyed them in direct lines from Erith to Denver; the inland floods, which had before stagnated on the plain, were thus carried off, and the lands, advanced to a comparative degree of firmness, were called the Bedford Level. After the Restoration the magnitude of the scheme occupied the attention of the Legislature, and in 1663 an Act was passed creating the Corporation, by which it was afterwards conducted to maturity; in 1697 the lands were divided and apportioned to their owners.

In Lincolnshire similar works proceeded on a more limited scale and precarious tenure: as the fens became practicable, the gosherd conducted to the softer soils his flocks, whose quills and down were a lucrative branch of trade; on firmer lands the shepherd tended his charge, whose long-haired fleeces supplied materials for the manufacturers of Norfolk and Suffolk; while the most solid grounds were appropriated to the grazing of heavier cattle. But wet seasons often caused a rot among the sheep, by which thousands perished; and, from the proximity of the sea, the swelling waves, during extraordinary tides or furious gales, broke through the rampart raised against them, re-asserted their ancient dominion over the amphibious realm, and destroyed the work of years in a single night. These visitations have of late been less frequent; the last of any importance occurred in 1810, since which time the progress of change has been rapid. In 1814 many grazing lands were opened by the plough-share, and luxuriant crops of oats covered the rich fields. Before the construction of railways a winter's journey along the bank between Wisbeach and Peterborough had ceased to be a formidable adventure; travellers were conveyed on safe roads where their grandfathers dreaded the treacherous quicksand, hiding in its depths the grave of the unwary, and crossed in every state of the tide by strong bridges over streams once dangerously fordable only at low water. Next the railway awakened life and animation in the deepest solitudes of remote moors; agriculture commenced the improvement of the neglected waste; the peaty surface, pared off, was collected into heaps, and when reduced to ashes fertilized the new farm-lands: the midnight passenger beheld with wonder the blazing mounds, spread over the immeasurable plain, as far as eye could reach, like the watch-fires of an immense bivouacking army. Nor is the revolution likely to terminate here: a project has been started for embanking and inclosing the rest of the estuary, the completion of which the continual retreat of the sea will probably in time facilitate, when the ancient Metaris and the modern Wash will have left behind them only the shadow of an historic name. To investigate the cause of an operation of nature thus consummated by human skill belongs to another province of inquiry; the antiquarian collects facts, the natural philosopher must reason upon and explain them.

THE ILLUSTRIOUS HENRIES[a].

If we were to compare the merits of princes with the number of their panegyrists, we should probably find that at all times the weakest and the worst have received the largest share of contemporary praise. For the middle ages, this, in one point of view, receives an easy explanation, for weak and even bad kings sought to cover their imbecilities or their vices by buying the personal friendship of the Church, and most of the chroniclers and panegyrists of the middle ages were ecclesiastics. Certainly but

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[a] "*Johannis Capgrave Liber de Illustribus Henricis.* Edited by the Rev. Francis Charles Hingeston, M.A., of Exeter College, Oxford. Published by the Authority of the Lords Commissioners of Her Majesty's Treasury, under the Direction of the Master of the Rolls." (8vo., 1858.)

"The Book of the Illustrious Henries. By John Capgrave. Translated from the Latin by the Rev. Francis Charles Hingeston, M.A." (London, 1858. 8vo.)