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On the Anthropology of Gloucestershire

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ON THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

BY

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The Anthropological history of Gloucestershire does not go quite so far back as that of some other parts of England. No river-bed or early troglodyte skulls, so far as I know, have ever been found in Gloucestershire, and the earliest osseous remains with the existence of which I am acquainted are those of the neolithic period found in long-chambered barrows, such as that at Uley.

These barrows have yielded to Thurnam and others the relics of a race of small or moderate stature, having long heads, narrow and ovoid, with prominent occiputs, and rather short faces with pretty good features and orthognathic profiles, *i.e.* without any protrusion of muzzle. Such heads may probably enough have belonged to the old Dobuni or Boduni, the earliest historical inhabitants; the prevailing opinion at present seems to be that of Thurnam and Huxley, that the type is Iberian rather than Celtic. It is true that there is a certain resemblance between these long skulls from our long barrows and a type which my illustrious friend M. Broca has demonstrated to be very prevalent in Biscay. It is also true that specimens of the type, generally however a little modified in the direction of less length or greater breadth, occur pretty frequently among the modern inhabitants of South-Eastern Wales, the supposed descendants of those Silurians, whose dark complexions and curly hair reminded Tacitus of the Iberians. But whether the Boduni were really an Iberian tribe, or a mixed breed of Iberians, Ligurians and Celts, or consisted of a lower stratum of Iberians ruled by a Celtic or Belgic aristocracy, is not as yet quite clear. I may mention as a curious coincidence, that the only man from Uley whom I ever had the opportunity of subjecting to the callipers, had a head of singular length and narrowness,

appropriate to a possible descendant of the inhabitants of the prehistoric Uley, in the days when the great long-barrow was erected. The Roman occupation of Britain did not probably very much modify the anthropological types of the natives, generally speaking. The colonists would not be very numerous except in particular localities, and they would be by no means generally Roman or even Italian, but a heterogeneous mixture from all parts of the Empire. Such a mixture has notoriously little chance of perpetuating its types when brought into contact with a purer breed. At the same time it must be allowed that some traces of such colonization are more likely to be found in Gloucestershire than in many other counties, the number of Roman towns and villas having been above the average. The Saxon colonization was, however, of a different character, and in the eastern and southern parts of the county must have profoundly modified the breed of man. The conquest of Ceawlin, which was, as pointed out by Guest and Freeman, a heathen conquest, may probably have been attended with great destruction of the British inhabitants; and as Oxfordshire and Wiltshire, from which the military colonization of the Cotswolds must have been effected, had been pretty thoroughly Saxonized, no doubt that of our hill country was little less complete. Whether Ceawlin's conquest really extended along the Severn valley to Shropshire, I do not undertake to say; but looking at it from my own point of view, which is that of a naturalist or anthropologist rather than a historian, I find some reason for thinking that East Worcestershire is rather Saxon than Anglian, and more Saxon or Anglian than the county of Warwick which lies to the east of it. So far as it goes, this opinion of mine rather favors the theory that Ceawlin, after his victory at Dyrham, did really overrun the whole vale of Severn to or beyond Shrewsbury, and *a fortiori* that he conquered the whole vale country of Gloucester, as well as the immediate vicinity of the city. The date of the conquest of the Forest cannot be fixed. The settlement of Englishmen in the region about May Hill, who were known as Magesætan, was pretty

early; but their tenure was doubtless very insecure. Though central and eastern Herefordshire may have been English possessions for some generations before Offa, they were always liable to the incursions of the Welsh until after the Norman Conquest. At the date of the Conquest Archenfield, *i.e.* Herefordshire beyond the Wye, a district in actual contact with the Forest of Dean, was still Welsh, not only in language and race, but even in land-tenure: most of it seems to have been held under William the Conqueror by free Welshmen, who paid rents in honey, or perhaps did not always pay them at all. At least one palpable Welshman held an estate in the Forest district when Domesday was compiled. On the whole, I should suppose that the Forest, between the seventh and the eleventh centuries, was somewhat in the position of Pembroke-shire during the twelfth and thirteenth; that is to say, that a constant oscillation of Teutons and Welshmen went on, with the ultimate result of making the country English in language, whatever it might be in blood. Tho' during the period of Danish invasions this country suffered incursions repeatedly, and though an active commerce went on between the Dano-Irish towns and Bristol, it is not likely that the population was modified appreciably in consequence. Nearly the same may be said of the Norman Conquest and its results, though they were not quite so unimportant. Some infusion of Norman and French blood no doubt took place, especially into the cities and towns of Bristol, Gloucester, and Cirencester, but it was smaller, I believe, than that which occurred in many parts of the south and east of England. Later immigrations, of Huguenots for example, and very recent ones of Irishmen and Scotchmen, have been trivial: even in Bristol the Irish colony is quite a small one, in spite of the ready access from Cork, Wexford and Waterford. By far the most important change during the last three or four centuries, has been the gradual reflux of Welshmen into our towns and villages, where they have slowly mingled and melted away, leaving no very obvious trace of themselves

except their patronymics, but adding somewhat to the Celtic or Celtiberian element in the population.

In describing the ethnology of Gloucestershire at the present time, it may be well to make use once more of the customary divisions of Hill, Vale, and Forest. The Hill region is occupied by a breed of men much resembling the people of Oxfordshire and North Wilts, and in whom on the whole Saxon or Frisian types may be said to predominate, with smooth features and lightish brown hair. In the valleys of the western slope of the Cotswolds, and in the Vale country generally, the Welsh element (perhaps it is better to say Welsh than Celtic) gains strength somewhat, and in the cities of Bristol and Gloucester still more, owing partly to the gradual immigration from the west of which I have just been speaking. There are considerable local differences in sundry districts of the Vale. But on the whole the Severn is the most distinct boundary of race-types. Beyond the river the people resemble those of Herefordshire and of Eastern Monmouthshire a good deal, and in the Forest proper are perhaps less Saxonized in physical character than in some districts further west. The compact frame, broad cheek-bones, high-arched eyebrows, and almond-shaped eyes which seem to have been Silurian, are very common, and occur in fair as well as in dark people. The portrait of Whitson, the old Bristol Philanthropist, who was a native of the Forest, exhibits several of the points I have mentioned. The stature of the Gloucestershire peasantry, at least in the Vale, respecting which division I have much more information than the others, is not above, probably scarcely equal to, the average of England. But the men generally weigh well, and are not deficient in bone and muscle. This may be mentioned in connection with the fact that wages have never been very low in the district, and that, according to the enquiries of the late Edward Smith, the peasantry are pretty well fed. Formerly their dietary was much improved throughout the dairy district by the addition of some forms of milk-food. I am afraid this is ceasing to be the case, and I regret it very much.