

# NOTES ABOUT NOTTS. :

A COLLECTION

OF

SINGULAR SAYINGS,

CURIOUS CUSTOMS, ECCENTRIC EPITAPHS,

AND

INTERESTING ITEMS,

HISTORICAL AND ANTIQUARIAN.

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NOTTINGHAM:

T. FORMAN AND SONS, LONG ROW.

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dition says a King Humber was drowned in it, but history is silent about such a king. It is an old tale, and is purely fabulous."

Dr. Deering affirms that Nottingham is a contraction of the Saxon word Snottingham. Blackner says the name of the town arose from the nutteries of the neighbourhood. Dr. Thoroton's opinion coincides to a great extent with that of the Rev. James Orange, both believing the name is derived from the Saxon *Snoden-gaham*—the former rendering *Snodenga* "caves," and *ham* a "dwelling;" and the latter *Snoden* a "covert," and *gaham* a "dwelling." The difficulties we meet here are, we have no proof of the name ever being spelt as *Snoden*, and there is no such word in the Anglo-Saxon language. Whatever may have been the exact derivation of the name, it may be taken as tolerably conclusive evidence of the great antiquity of the town. Both White and Stukely believe it to have been a British residence, and the enquiries we have made on the subject lead us without hesitation to confirm that opinion. Coming down a little to Roman times, we still find ourselves surrounded by the mist of conflicting testimony. The Rev. Dr. Gale, dean of York, believes Nottingham to have been the Roman *Causensis*, but William Baxter was led to conclude that *Causensis* is the modern Grantham. Deering, who goes very learnedly into this part of the question, draws a line between the two authorities, but comes closer to the view of Dr. Gale. He believes the Fosse Way was on the south side of the Trent, and that there was a Roman station where West Bridgford now stands. If the measure of miles be taken as a criterion, either Deering or the rev. doctor have doubtless hit upon the right locality, and the discovery of Roman coins, &c., about Bridgford would indicate that it had originally been a Roman dwelling. Mr. Stevenson says, "Since these writers 'Causennæ' is known to have been Ancaster, in Lincolnshire, and Bridgford, in Nottinghamshire, the 'Margidunum' of Antoninus. Nottingham was no doubt occupied and garrisoned by the Romans, but there is no evidence that it was ever an important station, not being in the line of any of their great roads."

Leaving these matters of conjecture we can advance on to more stable and reliable ground. There can be no question that during the Saxon Heptarchy the town had grown to be a place of importance. When the Danes, sweeping like

habitants of Nottingham. Continuing the good work whose foundation had been laid by his parent and predecessor, he was the first to assume the title "King of England," and in many respects he made good his claim to that exalted name. Aided by his sister, Ethelfleda, the "Lady of the Mercians," he succeeded in putting down all his opponents; and Nottingham must have shared largely in those benefits which were secured by his victories. Beginning the work in 919 and completing it in 924, he built Bridgford, "over against the old town of Nottingham," and simultaneously he constructed "a bridge over the Trent, between the two towns." In 920 he also built a wall round Nottingham. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that in 922 he took possession of Mercia, "and all the people there, as well Danish as English, submitted to him;" and the same authority asserts that in 924, the year preceding his death, this active and successful monarch built various forts, among the rest one in the Peak of Derbyshire, and one at Nottingham. The closing years of this king's life, when he was engaged in all these works at Nottingham, must have been peaceful and happy days for the Saxon inhabitants, so long exposed to the cruel persecution of the Danes. But with his death, there came once more a change; for it would appear that his successor, Athelstane, who began to reign in 925, had to contend with strenuous persistency against the Danes and their confederates, and amongst the places from which he was compelled to drive the Norsemen was Nottingham. By the interposition of this distinguished monarch, the Saxons were once more introduced to the town; and in many an instance it is probable that they entered into possession of vacant dwellings with which they were most familiar and from which they had themselves been driven forth with relentless fury by their imperious and bloody foes. But Nottingham was regarded by the Danes as one of the most important military stations which they possessed in the island. No sooner had they been expelled than they were back again in their old quarters. First of all they were driven, or rather called forth by Ethelred and Alfred. Then, Edward the Elder had to put them down. Next, Athelstane had to do the work over again. But straightway they returned to domineer over the poor Saxons within the walls of this much-tryed town of many masters. So it was after the death of Athelstane; for

support of the importance of this port or landing place, in early times, we may remark that in our ancient charter, granted by Henry II., in 1154, he decrees that the passage of the Trent to Nottingham ought to be free to all navigators, as far as one perch in breadth on either bank. Again, in 1313, Edward II. exempts the burgesses of Nottingham from payment of "King's" dues, payable for landing goods on any of the king's wharves or quays. In like manner as Nottingham was the extent of boat navigation, Gainsborough was the extent of ship navigation in the river. We will not further dwell upon the fact that all heavy goods from the south of Derbyshire, and north of Leicestershire, were conveyed by land to Nottingham, there to be forwarded by boat for shipment at Gainsborough to London and other towns situate on the banks of navigable rivers, but will simply note that at the limit of ships ascending rivers, bridges were generally erected. In these cases, one arch was made to open for boats of burden with fixed masts to pass through. Old London Bridge may be taken as an instance of this kind. On the other hand, where bridges were erected to mark the extent of boat navigation, the provision of arches opening was not made. Such was the case with the old bridge at Nottingham. We will now pass on to the consideration of the latter part of the name under notice. We may safely assert that ancient river bridges mark the sites of old shallow places in the river beds which were formerly used as fords, and as these grew into important passing places, they became the direct causes of the bridges being erected. That the old bridge marked the site of a shallow place in the river, formerly used as a ford, there cannot be the slightest doubt. The name of the adjoining village, "Bridgeford," is strongly in favour of this view. The nearest local connection I can trace to the word "*Beth*" is in 1411, when a William "*Bethwater*" was appointed one of the town bailiffs. Here is the singular fact of the word being again associated with water. I shall claim for this word a British origin, and submit it is a corruption of "*Wath*,"\* which means a shallow crossing or ford of a river. It occurs in Wath, near Ripon; in Aberystwith, in

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\* Since writing the above, this view is confirmed by the discovery that "*wath*" was applied to a crossing on the river Trent a few miles lower down. "*The Jury*," 15th Ed. II. (1822), found that "*Stainwath*" (stone-wath) was in Hoveringham and not in Gunthorpe. (Shilton's History of Southwell, p. 244.)