

## THE MYTH OF BRUTUS THE TROJAN.

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(Read at Totnes, July, 1880.)

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BRUTUS, son of Sylvius, grandson of Æneas the Trojan, killed his father while hunting ; was expelled from Italy, and settled in Greece. Here the scattered Trojans, to the number of 7000, besides women and children, placed themselves under his command, and, led by him, defeated the Grecian King Pandrasus. The terms of peace were hard. Pandrasus gave Brutus his daughter Ignoge to wife, and provided 324 ships, laden with all kinds of provisions, in which the Trojan host sailed away to seek their fortune. An oracle of Diana directed them to an island in the Western Sea, beyond Gaul, "by giants once possessed." Voyaging amidst perils, upon the shores of the Tyrrhenian Sea they found four nations of Trojan descent, under the rule of Corinaeus, who afterwards became the Cornish folk. Uniting their forces the Trojans sailed to the Loire, where they defeated the Gauls and ravaged Aquitaine with fire and sword. Then Brutus "repaired to the fleet, and loading it with the riches and spoils he had taken, set sail with a fair wind towards the promised island, and arrived on the coast of Totnes. This island was then called Albion, and was inhabited by none but a few giants. Notwithstanding this, the pleasant situation of the places, the plenty of rivers abounding with fish, and the engaging prospect of its woods, made Brutus and his company very desirous to fix their habitation in it. They therefore passed through all the provinces, forced the giants to fly into the caves of the mountains, and divided the country among them, according to the directions of their commander. After this they began to till the ground and build houses, so that in a little time the country looked like a place that had been long inhabited. At last Brutus called the island after his own

name, Britain, and his companions Britains; for by these means he desired to perpetuate the memory of his name. From whence afterwards the language of the nation, which at first bore the name of Trojan, or rough Greek, was called British. But Corinæus, in imitation of his leader, called that part of the island which fell to his share, Corina, and his people Corineans, after his name; and though he had his choice of the provinces before all the rest, yet he preferred this county, which is now called in Latin Cornubia, either from its being in the shape of a horn (in Latin Cornu), or from the corruption of the same name. For it was a diversion to him to encounter the said giants, which were in greater numbers there than in all the other provinces that fell to the share of his companions. Among the rest was one detestable monster called Goemagot, in stature twelve cubits, and of such prodigious strength that at one stroke he pulled up an oak as if it had been a hazel wand. On a certain day, when Brutus was holding a solemn festival to the gods, in the port where they at first landed, this giant, with twenty more of his companions, came in upon the Britons, among whom he made a dreadful slaughter. But the Britons, at last assembling together in a body, put them to the rout, and killed them every one except Goemagot. Brutus had given orders to have him preserved alive out of a desire to see a combat between him and Corinæus, who took a great pleasure in such encounters. Corinæus, overjoyed at this, prepared himself, and, throwing aside his arms, challenged him to wrestle with him. At the beginning of the encounter Corinæus and the giant, standing front to front, held each other strongly in their arms, and panted aloud for breath; but Goemagot, presently grasping Corinæus with all his might, broke three of his ribs, two on his right side and one on his left. At which Corinæus, highly enraged, roused up his whole strength, and snatching him upon his shoulder ran with him, as fast as the weight would allow him, to the next shore, and there getting upon the top of a high rock hurled down the savage monster into the sea, where falling on the sides of craggy rocks he was torn to pieces, and coloured the waves with his blood. The place where he fell, taking its name from the giant's fall, is called Lam Goemagot, that is, Goemagot's Leap, to this day.\*

Such, in its complete form, is the Myth of Brutus the Trojan, as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth, sometime Bishop of St. Asaph, who professed, and probably with truth, to

\* GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH, *Giles's Translation*.



translate the British History of which it forms a part, from "a very ancient book in the British tongue," given to him by Walter Mapes, by whom it had been brought from Brittany. Geoffrey wrote in the earlier part of the twelfth century, and he does not indicate with more precision than the use of the term "very ancient" the date of his original.

If, however, we are to accept the writings of Nennius as they have been handed down, as substantially of the date assigned to them by the author—the middle of the ninth century, the legend of Brutus, though not in the full dimensions of the Geoffreian myth, was current at least a thousand years ago; and in two forms. In one account Nennius states that our island derives its name from Brutus, a Roman consul, grandson of Æneas, who shot his father with an arrow, and, being expelled from Italy, after sundry wanderings settled in Britain—a statement that agrees fairly well with that of Geoffrey. In the other account, which Nennius says he had learned from the ancient books of his ancestors, Brutus, though still through Rhea Silvia, his great grandmother, of Trojan descent, was grandson of Alanus, the first man who dwelt in Europe, twelfth in descent from Japhet in his Trojan genealogy, and twentieth on the side of his great grandfather, Fethuir. Alanus is a kind of European Noah, with three sons, Hisicion, Armenon, and Neugio; and all his grandsons are reputed to have founded nations—Francus, Romanus, Alamanus, Brutus, Gothus, Valagothus, Cibidus, Burgundus, Longobardus, Vandalus, Saxo, Boganus. He is wholly mythical.

Brutus here does not stand alone. He falls into place as part of a patriarchial tradition, assigning to each of the leading peoples of Europe an ancestor who had left them the heritage of his name. This one fact, to my mind, removes all suspicion of the genuineness of these passages of Nennius, which have been sometimes regarded as interpolations. With Geoffrey not only is the story greatly amplified, but it is detached from its relations, and is no longer part of what may fairly be called one organic whole. Nennius, therefore, gives us an earlier form of the myth than Geoffrey. I think, too, that the essential distinctions of the two accounts render it clear that the ancient authorities of Nennius and Geoffrey are not identical, from which we may infer that the original tradition is of far older date than either of these early recorders.

But we may go still further. Whether the legend of Brutus is still extant in an Armorican form I am not aware,



but it appears in Welsh MSS. of an early date; the "Brut Tysilio," and the "Brut Gr. ab Arthur," being the most important. It has been questioned whether, in effect, these are not translations of Geoffrey; but there seems no more reason for assuming this than for disbelieving the direct statement of Geoffrey himself that he obtained his materials from a Breton source. Bretons, Welsh, and Cornish, are not only kindred in blood and tongue, but, up to the time when the continuity of their later national or tribal life was rudely shattered, had a common history and tradition, which became the general heritage. If the story of Brutus has any relation to the early career of the British folk we should expect to discover traces of the legend wherever the Britons found their way. If this suggestion be correct; if Geoffrey drew from Armoric sources, and if the "Brut Tysilio," which is generally regarded as the oldest of the Welsh chronicles, represents an independent stream, the myth must be dated back far beyond even Nennius; as the common property of the Western Britons, ere, in the early part of the seventh century, the successes of the Saxons hemmed one section into Wales, another into Cornwall, and drove a third portion into exile with their kindred in Armorica. There is consequently good reason to believe that the tradition is as old as any other portion of our earliest recorded history, or quasi-history, and covers, at least, the whole of our historical period.

The narrative of Geoffrey does not give the myth in quite its fullest shape. For that we have to turn to local sources. Tradition has long connected the landing of Brutus with the good town of Totnes; the combat between Corinaeus and Goemagot with Plymouth Hoe. Like the bricks in the chimney called in to witness to the noble ancestry of Cade, has not Totnes its "Brutus stone"? and did not Plymouth have its "Goemagot"?

The whole history of the "Brutus stone" appears to be traditional, if not recent. My friend, Mr. Edward Windeatt, informs me that it is not mentioned anywhere in the records of the ancient borough of Totnes. I fail to find any trace of it in the pages of our local chroniclers, beyond the statement of Prince (*Worthies*) that "there is yet remaining towards the lower end of the town of Totnes, a certain rock called Brute's stone, which tradition here more pleasantly than positively says is that on which Brute first set his foot when he came ashore. The good people of Totnes, so it is said, have had it handed down to them by their fathers from a time beyond



the memory of man, that Brutus when he sailed up the Dart, which must consequently have been a river of notable pretensions, stepped ashore upon this stone, and exclaimed, with regal facility of evil rhyme—

“Here I stand, and here I rest,  
And this place shall be called Totnes !”

Why the name should be appropriate to the circumstances we might vainly strive to guess, did not Westcote and Risdon inform us that it was intended to represent *Tout al' aise* ! We need not be ashamed of adopting their incredulity, and of doubting with them whether Brutus spoke such good French, or indeed whether French was then spoken at all.

The stone itself affords no aid ; all mystery departed when it was recently lifted in the course of pavemental repairs, and found to be a boulder of no great dimensions, with a very modern looking bone lying below. However, it is the “ Brutus stone,” and I daresay will long be the object of a certain amount of popular faith.\*

But according to Geoffrey of Monmouth himself, Totnes town could not have been intended by him as the scene of the landing of Brutus. It was when Brutus was “holding a solemn festival to the gods, in the port where they had at first landed,” that he and his followers were attacked by Goemagot and his party. There it was that Goemagot and Corinæus had that famous wrestling bout, which ended in Corinæus running with his gigantic foe to the next shore, and throwing him off a rock into the sea. There is no sea at Totnes, no tall craggy cliff ; and for Corinæus to have run with his burden from Totnes to the nearest point of Start or Tor Bay, would have been a feat worthy even of a Hercules.

We are not surprised to find, therefore, that Totnes has her rivals—Dover, set up by the Kentish folk, and Plymouth,† each claiming to be the scene of the combat between Corinæus

\* I was unaware until the meeting of the Association, that an old inhabitant of Totnes named John Newland states that he and his father removed this stone from a well which they were digging about sixty years ago, and deposited it in its present position. The stone is precisely such a boulder as occurs in large numbers in the deposit left by the Dart on the further margin of the alluvial flat or “strath” at Totnes, and which is cut through by the tram-road to the quay, near the railway station. Popular opinion is in favour of the authenticity of the stone, but it can hardly have been the “rock” referred to by Prince, already cited, “towards the lower end of the town ;” and for my own part I am inclined to regard it as the “modern antique” Newland’s account would make it, to which the old tradition has been transferred. Moreover, there is yet current a local tradition that Brutus landed at Warland. If this is not held to dispose of the present “Brutus stone,” it certainly indicates an important divergence of authorities.

† Bridport also, on the ground of its etymology, Brute-port (!)



and Goemagot, and claiming therefore incidentally also to be the port in which Brutus landed. I do not know that we can trace either tradition very far into antiquity. They do not occur in the Chronicles, where indeed the very name of Plymouth is unknown. The earliest reference to that locality has been generally regarded as the Saxon Tamarworth. I am not at all sure, however, that Plymouth is not intended by Geoffrey's "Hamo's Port," which he assumes to be Southampton. Geoffrey indeed says that Southampton obtained the *ham* in its name from a crafty Roman named Hamo, killed there by Arviragus; but if the identification is no better than the etymology we may dismiss it altogether. On the other hand the name of the estuary of the Tamar is still the Hamoaze—a curious coincidence, if it goes no further. There is nothing in the story of Hamo itself to indicate Southampton or preclude Plymouth. Only a few references to Hamo's Port occur in Geoffrey. One of these, where Belinas is described as making a highway "over the breadth of the kingdom" from Menevia to Hamo's Port, may rather seem to point to Southampton; but there is no positive identification even if we assume the story to be true. Again, "Maximian the senator," when invited into Britain by Caradoc, Duke of Cornwall, to be king of Britain, lands at Hamo's Port; and here the inference would rather be that it was on Cornish territory. And so when Hoel sent 15,000 Armoricans to the help of Arthur, it was at Hamo's Port they landed. It was from Hamo's Port that Arthur is said to have set sail on his expedition against the Romans—a fabulous story indeed, but still helping to indicate the commodiousness and importance of the harbour intended. It was at Hamo's Port that Brian, nephew of Cadwalla, landed on his mission to kill the magician of Edwin the king, who dwelt at York, lest this magician might inform Edwin of Cadwalla's coming to the relief of the British. After he had killed Pellitus Brian called the Britons together at Exeter; and it would be fair to infer that the place where he landed was likely to be one where the Britons had some strength. Here again, whatever we may make of the history, it is Hamo's Port that is the fitting centre of some of the most stirring scenes in the traditional national life; and it is the Hamoaze that best suits the reference.

This legend of Brute the Trojan was firmly believed in, and associated with these Western shores, by the leading intellects of the Elizabethan day. Spencer refers to it in his *Faery Queene*.

"That well can witness yet unto this day  
The Western Hough besprinkled with the Gore  
Of mighty Goemot."

Drayton versifies the legend in his *Polyolbion*, and tells us how

"Upon that loftie place at *Plimmouth*, call'd the *Hoe*,  
Those mightie Wrastlers met."

and how that Gogmagog was by Corin

"Pitcht head-long from the hill; as when a man doth throw  
An Axtree, that with sleight deliurd from the Foe  
Rootes up the yeelding earth, so that his violent fall,  
Strooke *Neptune* with such strength, as shouldred him withall;  
That where the monstrous waues like Mountaines late did stand,  
They lea'pt out of the place, and left the bared sand  
To gaze vpon wide heauen."

And this article of faith had then long been popular. Carew, in his *Survey of Cornwall*, says: "Moreover vpon the Hawe at *Plymmouth*, there is cut out in the ground the pourtrayture of two men, the one bigger, the one lesser, with clubbes in their hands (whom they terme Gogmagog), and (as I have learned) it is renewed by order of the Townesmen when cause requireth, which should inferre the same to be a monument of some moment." Westcote, writing some half a century later, states of the Hoe, "in the side whereof is cut the portraiture of two men of the largest volume, yet the one surpassing the other every way; these they name to be Corinaeus and Gogmagog."

And there these figures remained until the Citadel was built in 1671; a remarkable witness of the local belief that Plymouth had played a prominent part in the affairs of Brutus and his fellows.

We know when these figures ceased to be. Can we form any idea as to when they originated? Their earliest extant mention occurs in the Receiver's Accounts of the borough of Plymouth under date 1494-5.

"It paid to Cotewyll for y<sup>e</sup> renewyng of y<sup>e</sup> pyctur of Gogmagog a pon y<sup>e</sup> howe. vij<sup>d</sup>."

Previous to this date there only remain complete accounts of two years, those for 1493-4, and those for 1486, with a few fragmentary entries; and as the Gogmagog did not come to be "renewed" every year, there are no conclusions to be drawn from the absence of earlier notices. The next entry is in 1500-1 when 8d. was paid for "makyng elene of gogmagog." In 1514-15 John Lucas, sergeant, had the like sum for "cuttyng of Gogmagog;" and in the following year we read



of its "new dyggyng." In 1526-7 the entry runs: "Itm p<sup>d</sup> for Clensyng & ryddyng of gogmagog a pon ye howe viij<sup>d</sup>;" and about this time it was renewed almost yearly. In 1541-2 the entry is, "Itm p<sup>d</sup> to William hawkyns baker [evidently to distinguish him from William Hawkyns, father of Sir John] for cuttyng of Gogmagog the pycture of the Gyaunt at hawe viij." In 1566-7 the price had gone up to twenty-pence. Probably this ancient monument had been neglected for some years before the last vestiges disappeared in 1671. It is not likely to have been renewed under the Commonwealth, nor do I think it was revived under the Restoration. It is noteworthy that the official entries apparently refer to one figure only, though we know from Carew and Westcote that there were two. Fourpence a day was about an average wage for labourers at Plymouth in the opening years of the sixteenth century, so that the "pyctur" probably took about two days to cleanse, and therefore must indeed have been of gigantic dimensions.

Some years ago I threw out the suggestion that, as Geoffrey made no allusion to these figures, "it must be assumed either that he did not know of their existence, or that they did not then exist." Believing the latter the more reasonable conclusion I suggested further, "that they were first cut in the latter half of the twelfth century, soon after Geoffrey's chronicle became current, or not long subsequently; unless, as is possible, they had a different origin, and were associated with the wrestling story in later days." Finally I put forward the hypothesis, "that the legend in the first place did refer to something that occurred in the fifth century at or near the Hoe, and with which the Armorican allies, whom Ambrosius called to his aid about the year 438, were associated; that the Armoricans, on their return to Brittany, carried the story with them; that in Brittany, between the fifth and twelfth centuries, under the mingled influence of half-understood classical history, and of religious sentiment working through the romantic mind, it developed into the full-blown myth of Brutus the Trojan; and that when it returned to England, and was made known under the auspices of Geoffrey of Monmouth, the Plymouthians of that day, to perpetuate the memory of what they undoubtedly believed to be sterling fact, cut the figures of the two champions on the greensward of the Hoe."

I am not inclined now to adopt this hypothesis so broadly as it was then suggested. Probably the story did take shape in Brittany in some such fashion, but I now believe we must



look far beyond the fifth century for its origin. There seems, however, little reason to doubt that the "Brutus stone" of Totnes, and the Gogmagog of Plymouth, originated, like the Gog and Magog of London city, in the popularity of Geoffrey's book. The name, of course, linked Totnes with the legend, but we have absolutely no knowledge whatever of the reason why Plymouth (any more than Dover) came into the story. Dover, indeed, has no case whatever; not even a "Gogmagog."

What, then, are the claims of Totnes?

Now as to Totnes it is important, in the first place, to observe that in all the early works, Totnes is generally alluded to as the name of a district and not of a town. For example, in the story of Brutus, as given by Geoffrey of Monmouth, his hero "set sail with a fair wind towards the promised island, and arrived on the *coast* of Totnes." Nennius does not mention any place of debarkation. Geoffrey makes Vespasian arrive at the *shore* of Totnes, and, in quoting Merlin's prophecy to Vortigern concerning his own fate, says of the threatened invasion of Aurelius Ambrosius, and Uther Pendragon, "to-morrow they will be on the *shore* of Totnes." Later in the same chronicle, the Saxons whom Arthur had allowed to depart, "tacked about again towards Britain, and went on shore at Totnes." Though the town seems rather to be indicated here, it is not necessarily so. However it is certain that we are to understand the landing to have taken place somewhere upon the south coast, for the invaders made an "utter devastation of the country as far as the Severn sea." Constantine is said to have landed at the *port* of Totnes, which again may mean a place so called, or the principal harbour of a district of that name. It is clear, then, all things considered, that we are not dealing in these older chronicles with the present Totnes—great as is its antiquity—though the "Brut Tysilio" does go so far as to specify the place of Constantine's landing as "Totnais in Loegria."\*

Now Mr. T. Kerslake, of Bristol, who has applied himself with singular acumen to the unravelling of sundry knotty points of our ancient history, is inclined to hold that the Totnes of the Chronicles was a distinct place; and he has pointed out that the Welch Chronicles contain "early forms of the names of this favourite British port that has got to be thus confounded with Totnes." In the "Brut Tysilio," for example, the place of the landing of Brutus is called "Talnas"

\* *A Primæval British Metropolis*, p. 48.



(at least this is the printed form given in the Myvyvian Archæology); "Brut Gr. ab. Arthur" reads "Totonys;" and in a third, the "Hafod Chronicle," we have "Twtneis." Mr. Kerslake, therefore, treats Talnas as the earliest form of the word, and thereon builds the hypothesis that "the name given by the British writers to their port would resolve itself into 't-Aln-as'; and if Christchurch Haven should be conceded to be Ptolemy's estuary of Alaunus, it would also be the port called by the Britons 'Aln' or 't-Aln-as,' from which Vespasian advanced up to Alauna Sylva, or Caer Pensauelcoit—the City in the Head of the High Wood."\*

There can be little doubt, I think, that Mr. Kerslake is right in regarding Penselwood as the site of Caer Pensauelcoit, given as Exeter by Geoffrey of Monmouth, not apparently on the authority of his British original, but, as in other cases, for his own gloss; and thenceforward cherished most fondly as one of the worthiest memories of the "ever faithful" city by its chief men and antiquaries. If it was at Totnes town, or in Torbay, into which some critics have expanded the idea of the "Totonesium littus," that Vespasian landed immediately before his siege of "Kairpen-Huelgoit," then there is considerable force in Geoffrey's comment, "quæ Exonia vocatur." If Penselwood, on the borders of Somerset, Dorset, and Wilts, were this "Primæval British Metropolis," then we must give up the idea that Vespasian landed at Totnes town, or anywhere in its vicinity. However, it by no means follows that there was such a place as Totnes in the Talnas sense, as localised by Mr. Kerslake. Talnas is the single exception, so far as I am aware, to an otherwise general concord of agreement in favour of Totnes, at a date when Totnes town had not yet risen into such prominence as to justify or explain its appropriation of this tradition. The general sense of the language used when Totnes and the Totnes shore are mentioned lead me, as I have already said, to the conclusion that it was rather the name of a district than of a town or port; and it was evidently understood in this sense by Higden, who in his Chronicle quotes the length of Britain as 800 miles, "a totonesio litore," rendered by Trevisa, "frome the clyf of Totonesse," which I take to be only another form of expression for the Land's End.

My suggestion is that what we may call the Older Totnes is really the ancient name for the south-western promontory of England, and perhaps may once have been a name for Britain itself, in which case we can understand somewhat of

\* *A Primæval British Metropolis*, p. 97.



the motive which led early etymologists to derive Britain from Brute or Brutus. The myth may be so far true that an elder name was supplanted by that which has survived, and that it lingered latest in this western promontory, perhaps as a name for the district occupied by the Kornu-British kingdom in its more extended form. Whether the modern Totnes is nominally the successor of the ancient title, the narrow area into which this vestige of far antiquity has shrunk may be doubtful; for the name is as capable of Teutonic derivation as of Keltic. In my "Notes on the Historical Connections of Devonshire Place-names," I pointed out that a Saxon derivation that "would fit Totnes *town* quite as well as any other would be from *Tot*, an 'enclosure, and *ey* an 'island'—Totaneys—allied to Tottenham, and associated with the island by the bridge, one of the Dart's most notable features."\* For the original Totnes I suggested "Perhaps instead of *ness*, a 'headland' [Scandinavian], we should read *enys*, an 'island'; and *Tot* may be equivalent to the *Dod* or *Dodi*, which we have in the *Dod* of the well-known Cornish headland, the *Dodman*. . . . Then we may read Totenys the 'projecting or prominent island'; or, if *Dod* is read as rocky, the 'rocky island.'" I am satisfied that it is somewhere in this direction we have to look for the origin of the name, which would seem however to be corrupted from its earliest form when we first light upon it, and which may indeed be a relic of the giant race whom the followers of Brutus extirpated.

The last sentence may sound somewhat strangely, but my inquiries into this curious story have led me to attach more importance to it than at first sight it seemed to deserve. Stripped of the dress in which it was decked out by Geoffrey, improving on his predecessors; deprived of its false lustre of classicism; cleared from the religious associations of a later day—the myth of Brutus the Trojan loses its personality, but becomes the traditionary record of the earliest invasion of this land by an historic people, who, in their assumed superiority dubbed the less cultivated possessors of the soil whose rights they invaded, "giants," and extirpated them as speedily as they knew how.

Moreover though Totnes town has to surrender its mythical hero, it preserves a record of an elder name for this England of ours than either the Britain of the later Kelts or the Albion of the Romans; and, if that name be indeed a survival from these early times, makes certain what the general aspect of the story renders highly probable—

\* *Trans. Dev. Assoc.*, vol. x. pp. 299-300.



that it was into this corner of Britain the pre-Keltic or Iberic inhabitants of our island first entered, and that it was here their rude predecessors—who to the diminutive Turanians might indeed appear as “giants”—made their final stand—just as in later days the non-Aryan invaders had to fly before the Kelt, and the Kelt in turn before the Saxon, until the corners of the island became the refuge not only of a gallant, but of a mingled race, with one language, one faith, and a common tradition.

Thus much indeed I think we may safely infer from the local associations of the story, supported as that inference is by the yet current traditions of the giant enemies of the Cornish folk.