

COLD-HARBOUR.

The following letter on the meaning of this name, of which so many instances occur in this County, has been submitted to the Society by Archdeacon Bickersteth, to whom it was addressed by Admiral Smyth:—

"Athenaeum, November 11th, 1854.

"MY DEAR SIR,—Before leaving home, I directed another copy of my letter on the epithet 'Cold-Harbour' to be forwarded for your use in any way you may choose, — and I cannot but think that procuring a list of all the places so called in the County would be worthy of your Society, as an illustration of archaic geography, — especially as they seem so connected with the Roman roads and diverticula.

"Since my letter was written, I have had some communications on the subject; and the Rev. William Airy, of Keysoe in Bedfordshire, has added to my list. Among those he sent, he called my attention to 'Serpentine' Green, about a mile north of Yaxley, saying — 'This will amuse you; but it looked so like a translation of your origin of the name, (*Coluber*) that I could not help setting it down.'

"So derogatory an adjective as 'Cold,' in its usual signification, could hardly have been applied to some hundreds of places utterly unlike each other. It was, there-

fore, suggested to me that *Caula arva* — in British *Cobail* — meant enclosed or cleared spaces for cultivation among the woods and forests which formerly covered England. 'Herberwe,' from passages in Layamon, seems in his time to have signified a station where soldiers rested on a march; and Chaucer uses it as a place of shelter, thus —

' For by my troth, if that I shall not be,
I saw nat this yere swiche a campagnie
At ones in this herberwe as is now."

But these seem to be mere applications of a general designation. I, therefore, still think we must look to higher sources for the great prevalence of the term. At the early introduction of a true religion might the name be derived Coll-Arbor, or Collis Arborum, whereon the idol was buried when his sacred grove was cut down? This, which is a mere suggestion, is strongly countenanced in the immemorial 'folk-verses,' beginning with—

' Some say the Devil's dead,
And buried in Cold-Harbour.'

At all events, a collection of accurate details may lead to a satisfactory result, and clear away what must be considered a curious archaeological puzzle.

" Believe me, my dear Sir,

" Your's very truly,

"W. H. SMYTH.

" Ven. Archdeacon Bickersteth."

The other letter, to which Admiral Smyth refers, appears in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries for 1849. Having therein expressed his dissent from the opinion that *cold* was a colloquial form of *coal*, and that all the sites designated Cold-Harbour were coal-deposits, he continues —

"The first of these terms (*cold*) cannot be drawn from *kohle*, *carbo*, it perpetually occurring as a prefix to many localities close upon Roman roads without reference to fuel — as cold-blow, cold-broche, cold-camp, cold-comfort, *cold-end*, cold-ford, &c.; the second seems at first sight to be of Saxon derivation, from *hereberga*, a host-watch on a hill, *statio militaris*. From this, says Johnson, came our old word *harborough*, lodging; and from this usage of it, which obtained among the Germans also, the sense of it as an inn was adopted into several languages, as *auberge* by the French, *albergo* by the Italians, and *herberg* by the Dutch. Hence *cold-harbour* has been thought to mean any dwelling in an exposed

situation: but, from the great variety of sites on which these names are found, I cannot think that bleakness of situation is the whole cause of designation.

"The curious epithet in question is of a far wider application than is usually imagined, for the known and recorded instances in England amount to several hundreds; many of these are in valleys, and of ready accession the banks of rivers, though there are others close to bold escarpments on the summits of inland eminences. As specimens of the first class, those in the marshes near Kingston-upon-Hull, and in the valley of the Thames, may be instanced; while the sites at Wrotham, in Kent — Leith Hill, in Surrey — Trowbridge, in Wiltshire — and Marlow, in Buckinghamshire, illustrate the second. And thus near London, we have a *Cold-Harbour* on the high ground above New Cross, at Deptford, and a *Cold-Blow* farm on the flats below it; and I think there are two or three others in that vicinity. A noted manor at Camberwell has been successively *Colde-herbergh*, *Cold-abbey*, and *Cold-harbour*; and there is another equally noted two miles north of Ware, in Hertfordshire. At Woolwich, a place by the Roman road is thus designated; and a well-known house on the north bank of the river, opposite to Erith, has immemorially been *Cold-Harbour*. Sometimes this so-called spot is on the margin of the water; but even there it may only mark the *trajectus*, or ferry, as that on the turn of the great Ikenild Street, near *Venta Belgarum*, between Wherewell Woods and the Winchester Downs.

"Now it is not a little remarkable, that, though these places are found recurring along the line of the Chilterns, the Cotswolds, and other ridges yet they predominate on or near the old Roman roads, sometimes where there is a rise in the ground, and often in the very angle where a turn in the direction becomes necessary, not only in the occasional and forced deviations of the main *viaria*, but also in those which were made for forming *diverticula*, or cross communications. May not these ascents and winding turns therefore have been named after the significant tortuosities of the *coluber*? To be sure the word *fixus* was used by the old geographers, and that in question is nearly confined to Great Britain; but it may strengthen so obvious a suggestion to mention, that I well remember a trackway among the Gallura mountains, in Sardinia, having been called *Colivri*. And our own Calleva, the capital of the Atrebatas, by the allowable inversion of *b* and *v* almost *coluber*, marks a *diverticulum* where no fewer than four Roman roads form a junction. But in throwing out this notion, or rather reviving it, for I have somewhere met the idea before, I am aware of the perils and delusions of etymology, and that a mere literal or phonetic resemblance in words is no real evidence of similarity of origin; nor can any derivation be safely treated unless it can be at least *probably* traced to its source. The shade of *probability* is in favour of the conjecture; but it certainly is against it, though not conclusively so, that the expression is not met with in the Peutinger Map, or in the Itinerary of Antonius. Nor does Domesday Book approach it nearer than Colebi, Collebere, Colebi, and Collabero.

"Having been lately on a visit at *Bury Hill*, near Dorking, my friend Sir. Barclay described an adjacent spot where many Roman and other relics had been found; and it presents to the eye a well-defined camp. The site of this station is near a *Cold Harbour* on the opposite eminence of Box Hill, at a decided *diverticulum* of the old military causeway called Stane-street, which is traceable through the country at a much lower level. The term Bury or Berry is also exceedingly prevalent, there being three principal ones in Surrey, besides many others, of which one may be cited near Andover, one close to Mansfield, and that at Bicester. Now *herberga* was a hill-watch, whence *berga*, *burgh*, *bury*, may have been metaphorically used for watch-towers and stations on hills natural or artificial: thus Burgh Castle, on the brow of an elevated plateau in Suffolk, may be cited as one of the finest relics of Roman fortification in the Kingdom. The terms before us are sometimes juxta-posed: thus there is a place called *Cold Harbour* four miles below Swindon, near the turn which leads to the village of Broad Blunsdon, in the immediate vicinity of which is an ancient camp called 'Bury' Blunsdon. But there is no end of both designations, and they seem to admit of very semblable interpretation: yet even if we admit to cull cold from *kalda* — harbour from '*hereberga*' — and bury from '*burg*' — there is still a plausible claim for the Colubrine derivative on the ground of priority. At all events, it is palpably manifest that the coal-paradox is utterly inadmissible.*

"But having once stepped over the hot ashes of conjecture, a wide field is presented to the imagination. Although the Romans and Anglo-Romans may possibly have used the term *coluber* as we now apply the word *serpentine* to designate a peculiar deviation, I am inclined, for more reasons than I need now state, to think that a popular prevalence of the name, even then, would be only a mere vestige of the once almost universal Ophite worship, the accurate history of which still continues to be a desideratum in Archeology. The theory may be vague and disputable; but that this idolatry is of the highest antiquity, is proved by its being alluded to in the earlier Holy Scriptures; and it is known to have prevailed among the Chaldees, the Persians, and the Egyptians, as emblematic of the Sun, and Time, and Eternity. From the Orientals it descended to the Greeks, and from them to the Romans, among whom it became a type of Victory, Prosperity, and Health; and the Latin damsel who offered food to a serpent which he declined partaking of, was branded as unchaste, and underwent the ban of society. Time, however, wrought changes, and the serpent lost its divinity; but, though the actual system of worship fell off, the type and *prestige* remained, inso-much that the emblem appears constantly both in arts and letters. Thus

* About 60 years ago, one *Nugaculus* asked, in the Gentleman's Magazine, the meaning of the term Cold-Harbour? Some time afterwards, July 4th, 1793, he was answered by *Viator A.* who informed him of a small post-town in Suabia, called *Kalte Herberge*, the literal translation of which being *Cold Inn*, he considered that the inference was evident.

Tristan, the amiable *Sieur de St. Amand*, indignant on finding the reptile figured so frequently on the reverses of Imperial coins and medals, sagely imputes the practice to the time when the Devil had established his empire over men's minds, and artfully biassed them in a blind adoration of the demoniac serpent, — ' *Et persuada aux Gentils qu'il estoit le Genie de Felicite, de Sante, Salut, et de Victoire, qui appellerent en suite ces demons detestables.*'

"Under such views, I cannot but think that the term 'Cold Harbour,' and the prevalence of its English application, merit a fuller consideration than they have yet received."

[The Committee will be glad to receive information on every site bearing this or any similar designation.]