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CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

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**REV. WALTER W. SKEAT**

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BY THE

REV. WALTER W. SKEAT, Litt.D., D.C.L., LL.D., Ph.D.,  
ELBRINGTON AND BOSWORTH PROFESSOR OF ANGLO-SAXON  
AND FELLOW OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE.

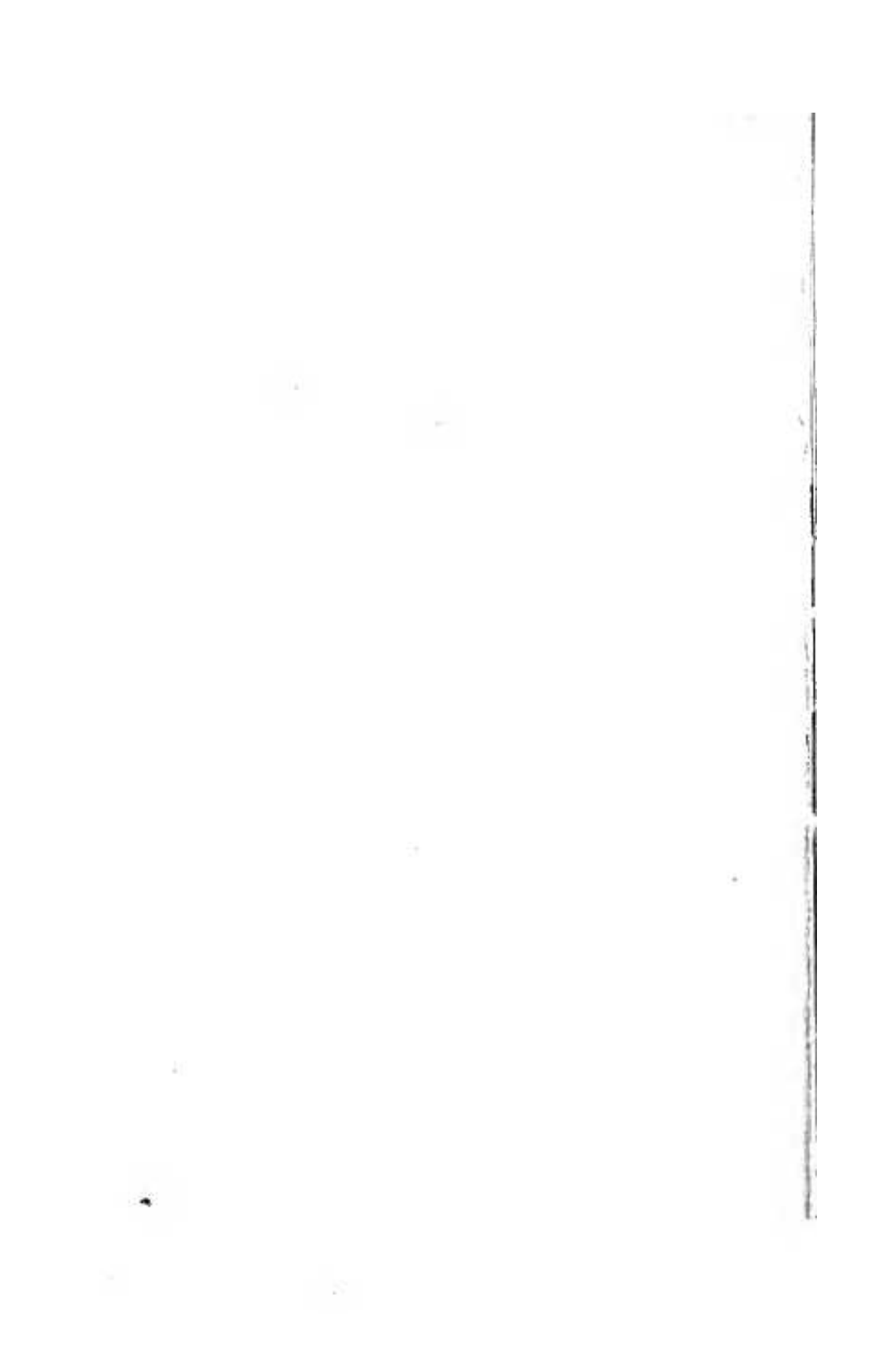


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## THE PLACE-NAMES OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

### § 1. PREPATORY REMARKS.

IN attempting to deal with some of the principal place-names in Cambridgeshire, with a view to obtaining some light upon their etymologies, I find myself at a disadvantage in one respect, but in another to have some hopes of partial success. The disadvantage is, that I have made no wide or extended study of English place-names in general; and it is obvious that, in many an instance, one place-name is likely to throw light upon another, though the places may be in different counties. On the other hand, I have had much experience in tracing the etymologies of most of the main words that occur in our English Dictionaries; and the phonetic laws that regulate place-names are precisely the same as those that regulate other native words that are in common use.

Perhaps there is no subject of study that is, generally speaking, in so neglected a state. The wild and ignorant guess-work of the eighteenth century, and even of the nineteenth, has filled our books of antiquities and our country histories with many misleading theories; and the results of these unconscionable inventions have not infrequently found their way even into the ordnance-maps. However, the principles of phonetics are beginning to make progress. It is now recognised that, if it is necessary to look to our spellings, it is still more necessary to know what those spellings mean, and not to talk at random about words until we have at least learnt how to *pronounce* them. For it is, after all, the spoken word that

matters; the spellings are merely symbols and guides, and will only guide those who understand them.

It is only of late years that the phonetic laws which govern the gradations and mutations of Anglo-Saxon words have been intelligently investigated; and hence it is that it is quite impossible for such as know nothing about such laws to realise their intricacy, and the certainty with which, in the hands of the student, they point to the original sounds. And there is yet another matter which is of vast importance and has nevertheless received far too little attention; viz the now well ascertained fact that many of our spellings are Norman or Anglo-French, and cannot be interpreted even by the student of Anglo-Saxon until he has further realised what such symbols mean. I beg leave to say that this is a point which I have carefully studied; and I have now in the press a fairly complete statement of the 16 Canons whereby the spelling of a Norman scribe is distinguished from that of a Saxon one. Many of those who have hitherto investigated the spellings of Domesday Book have sometimes, I fear, been in almost complete ignorance of the sounds which such spellings denote. Whilst I offer these remarks by way of showing that I have considered the matter seriously, and have avoided frivolous guesses, I by no means suppose that all the results here obtained are final. Some are obvious; others are reasonably certain; but some are doubtful. Which these are, I shall usually endeavour to indicate, by the introduction of such words as 'probably' and 'possibly,' and the like.

I wish to express my sincere thanks for help received. I do not think I should have undertaken the present task but for the kindness of Mr C. Sayle and Mr J. E. Foster. Mr Sayle supplied me with the alphabetical list of the principal place-names in the county, nearly all of which are here considered; whilst Mr J. E. Foster did me inestimable service by ascertaining the old spellings of our place-names as they are given in the Red Book of the Exchequer, the Ely Registers, the Feudal Aids, the Pipe Rolls, and the like, supplying in every case the exact reference, and (wherever it was possible) the exact date. Only the philologist wholly realises the helpfulness of such