Scyldings and Shields

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In the September issue of *Names* Dr. Kemp Malone, whose word is law in all matters connected with Teutonic antiquity, has declared (p. 152) with the utmost consideration that he believes me wrong in a statement I made in our first number (p. 27): namely, that the Danish Scyldings got their name from their shields. The explanation which he proceeds to make in his interesting and scholarly article has, I confess, left me puzzled as to just where he considers me to be mistaken. He tells us, as of course Klaeber has correctly pointed out in his edition of *Beowulf,* that the Danes are repeatedly called Scyldings in the poem by extension of the name as applied to the royal family, for whom the name signified "descendants of Scyld," the traditional founder of the dynasty. But he goes on to say that King Scyld was merely a legendary figure, a creation of the poets, who gave him that ideal name, which of course means 'shield,' as an epithet signifying that he was the 'protector' of his people. So the tribal name does come from shield after all, although I was perhaps over-hasty in omitting certain steps in its semantic development.

What puzzles me is whether Dr. Malone blames me merely for omitting those semantic steps, or whether he thinks me wrong about the order of their development. Does he really believe that the mythical King Scyld first of all received his name from the poets, who then went on to call his dynasty, and finally his nation, after the ancestor they had invented—and that without giving a thought to the fitness of the name for their warlike people? That would imply, what I can hardly believe, that he rejects the usual explanation of all such unhistorical ancestors as eponyms.

The invention of eponyms, i.e., names for mythical personages from whom tribal names were quite mistakenly supposed to have been derived, whereas the reverse was actually the case, is a world-

wide phenomenon in the history of nomenclature. One thinks, among the Greeks, of Ion, alleged ancestor of the Ionians, Achaeus of the Acheans, Eolus of the Eolians; among the Romans, of Italus from the Italians; and in the Bible, of Heber from the Hebrews. Of course Ion derived his imaginary name from the Ionians, not the Ionians from Ion, and so for all the rest. In other words, the actual order of word-coinage was precisely the opposite of the semantic development assumed by the poets. Old King Scyld was surely an eponym if there ever was one. Doubtless the Danes, or their bards, devoutly believed that their name Scyldings was derived from his name, but in reality King Scyld's name must have been coined from the Scyldings.

So many Teutonic tribes are known to have derived their names from their weapons or their armor that one can hardly believe the Scyldings an exception. To the list I gave in my article of last March of the Saxons as 'Knife-Men,' the Angles as 'Lancers,' the Franks as (probably) 'Spear-Men,' and the Lombards as 'Ax-Men,' Dr. Malone has usefully added the Helmings, 'Sons of the Helmet,' and the Brondings, 'Sons of the Sword,' with their eponymous and obviously mythical ancestors Helm and Brond. Another example is supplied by the Æscings, the royal race of Kent, 'Sons of the Ashen Spear'—though the poets seem to have neglected to provide them with an ancestor known as King Ash. The Danes seem to have been particularly fond of such belligerent names. Their original name 'Dene' seems to have had the peaceful meaning, according to Klaeber, of 'Woodsmen' or perhaps 'Dwellers in the Valley.' But they were not satisfied with it. They, or their bards, adopted besides Scyldings such war-like extensions as 'Gar-Dene' (from 'gar,' spear) and Hring-Dene (from 'hring,' corslet).

All of these things are better known to Dr. Malone than they are to me. I did neglect in my first article to recapitulate all the intervening steps between shield and Scylding, and am glad to have this opportunity to repair the omission. Of course to supply all the intervening steps for any name or word back to its original etymon is a tedious and sometimes an endless process, like tracing a man's genealogy back to Adam. When we in Missouri are asked for the source of the name of our largest city, St. Louis, we are inclined to say merely that it was so named by its founder Laclede in 1764, in compliment to his royal master Louis XV of France. If the objec-

tion is raised that Louis XV would hardly have been called a saint even by his grossest flatterers, we must go on to explain that the French settlers felt it to be a more delicate compliment to name the place for the king's name-saint than for himself. So we can honestly say, especially before a Catholic audience, that the city was at least ostensibly named for the king's ancestor Louis IX, who really was a saint. If any of them are curious enough to ask where St. Louis got his name, we can of course go on to list all his ancestors, Capetian, Carolingian, and Merovingian, who bore the name back to Clovis who led his conquering Franks across the Rhine in 481. Then if any of the audience still remain awake, and particularly if any military men are present, we can proceed to explain that the name Clovis was merely the best the bewildered natives could make of the terrifying gutterals in his real Germanic name, which must have been something like Hludowigaz, and which had the very unsaintly signification of 'loud, or famous, in war.' Each one of the three explanations for the name of St. Louis is perfectly true—that it got its name from Louis XV, or from St. Louis, or from old Loud-in-War himself. But no one of them contains the whole truth. Life is too short for that.

When I was a student at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Malone's university, it was a tradition that the most interesting and eloquent lecturer on the staff was James Joseph Sylvester, Professor of Mathematics. Students from other departments used to visit his classes just to hear his fascinating lectures, even though they understood little of the recondite problems in higher mathematics that he was accustomed to demonstrate so convincingly. He would cover the blackboard with complicated equations, between no two of which his visitors could see the slightest connection. Then sometimes he would pause and remark: "Gentlemen, in order to make things perfectly clear, I am omitting today only three or four equations between each pair I have placed upon the board." Reassured, the class would follow him with perfect confidence and breathless attention until he reached his triumphant Q.E.D. at the end of the hour.

I may have been too presumptous in taking a leaf from Professor Sylvester's book when I wrote that the Scyldings got their names from their shields. But I still think the statement essentially correct, and I still believe that King Scyld was only a derivative eponym.