THE FAMILY OF GALPIN
OF
STAFFORDSHIRE & DORSET

DERIVATION AND ORIGIN OF THE NAME OF GALPIN

A NUMBER of derivations have been found for the name of Galpin, none of which is quite satisfactory. Several have been taken from a Latin source which is quite improbable. The best of these is from Galbinus (that is Galbin), a Roman Senator who lived in the time of Cicero, but the resemblance is only accidental excepting that, although separated by so many centuries both may be derived from places with similar names and meanings. Another Latin derivation is from *galea pennata*, plumed helm (abbreviated to *gal. pen.*), which might be considered satisfactory for heraldic purposes but is otherwise absurd. There can be no doubt that it is a place name, as is the case with most names that have no obvious meaning, the names of places and especially of the natural features of a country such as mountains and rivers being often of great antiquity, generally prehistoric and having a Celtic, Saxon, or other archaic derivation the meaning of which has become lost.

There is a small village in Belgium, once a part of Gaul, named Galpen or Galpenberg, and there can be no doubt that the first possessor of the name came from that village, the name being " like many another that seemed to defy all explanation and is found to be that of some obscure village " (as Barber in his *British Family Names* remarks). The name is equivalent to Mount Pleasant or Fair Mount (Vermont), Belmont, Montebello, Schonberg, and occurs in many languages. Gal and Gol signify beautiful (compare Gold) and pen being hill, as in

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Penzance (supposed to mean Saint's hill or head) and Cockpen, red hill, and Alp or Albpen, white hill. Berg being also hill is tautological and has been added afterwards in another language when the meaning of the old name had become forgotten through the country being occupied by people of a different nationality. At any rate, the addition of " berg " shows that the village stands on a hill and that " pen " is used in the sense of hill.

The name of Galpin is now more common in France than in England, and about the middle of last century George Gaspard Galpin was president of the French Senate.

The earliest mention of the name occurs in Normandy, before the Conquest, as Johannes de Galpenberg or de Monte-galpino at Evreux. Some years later it is met with as Galopin and occurs repeatedly in that form in the early Norman annals. There can be no doubt that one of that name came over to England at the Conquest and probably all the Galpins in England are descended from that one individual. There is no mention of the name in England before that date, nor did any Galpin come over in more recent times, among the Huguenot immigrants, for instance, as far as I have been able to ascertain.

About a century after the Conquest the name occurs in Staffordshire, Dorset, and Westmorland, and a little later in the neighbourhood of London, Surrey, etc. The most numerous group at an early date appears in Staffordshire, where they continued to prosper for more than 300 years until the time of the Wars of the Roses, during which the whole family disappeared from that neighbourhood without leaving a trace. Another branch a little later went to the north and the name there took the form of Gilpin, first mentioned in the time of King John—Richard de Gilpin of Scaleby, Cumberland, and Westmorland. What might be considered an intermediate form, " Gelpin," also occurs about the same date. The author of *The Norman People* considers that the two names are identical on heraldic grounds, the arms being:

> Galpin or, a bear passant, sable.
> Gilpin or, a boar passant, sable.
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> —(See Robson's *Heraldry, etc.*)

The two descriptions of the arms differ like the names by only a single letter.

It is interesting to compare also the arms of the old Dorset family of Gollop of Strode and Bowood (near Bridport):

Gollop, gules, on a bend *or* a lion *passant* guardant *sable*.

The similarity of names and arms can hardly be accidental. The Galpin arms appear to be the earliest, as having a definite meaning, being a play on the name, while the others imitate them. The *crests* of Galpin and Gilpin are both a play on the second syllable of the name, pen and pine, viz., a plume of feathers proper, and a pine-branch, vert (or, more modern, a pineapple). Crests being of later origin than escutcheons are not of so much significance.

A number of other names are also derived from Galpin, and when the ingenuity that has been shown in spelling a name of six letters in nearly 100 different ways is considered it is remarkable that some branches of the family have still maintained it in its original form.

Another group settled at an early date in the south-west of England, the first mention I have come across in that neighbourhood being at Mosterton on the Dorset and Somerset borders, where Thomas Galpin gave land to the church of Mosterton (Dorset) A.D. 1218.

The name here is spelt Gaiperinus, Gaipinus, and Garpinus, all referring to the said Thomas.

About seventy years later they appear in the Bridport records and must gradually have spread over the two counties, but mostly in Dorset. Much about the same time the name occurs in Surrey and Suffolk, so that by the year 1300 the descendants of probably one man had spread all over England. This is nothing remarkable when compared with the way in which in modern times our colonial families have multiplied and dispersed themselves over vast continents. Later on most of these families seem to have died out or altered their names excepting in Dorsetshire, the name becoming distinctly a Dorsetshire one. About the year 1350 the Black Death or plague carried off a large part of the population of Europe, the mortality being estimated at two-thirds or three-fourths and even more in England, which might account for the disappearance of the name in part as entire families were wiped out, but I think the disappearance is greatly due to it being altered out of all recognition into such names as Kilpin, Gollop,

Galvin, Gape, and many others which would appear to be entirely different names were they not often applied in several variations of this kind to the same individual even in one document. To show how a name can become altered there was a place in Hertfordshire in the fifteenth century called Galpyns. This appears to be the place marked on some maps as Callipers. In an illiterate age a name that conveyed no obvious meaning and was uncommon very easily got altered, and so it happened that in isolated cases the name got changed, but this was not so likely to occur when several families kept together and the name was well known. Even recently and in London I have known the well-known name Crawford turned into Crowsfoot among uneducated people.

Surnames were not in use in England and Scotland before the Norman Conquest, and the earliest are found in Domesday Book, mostly derived from Normandy. Many surnames which are " accounted names of great antiquity " were first assumed at the time of the Conquest. The employment of a second name, a custom introduced by the Normans, who themselves had not long before adopted it, became a mark of gentle blood, and it was deemed " a disgrace for a gentleman to have but one single name, as the meaner sort had." It was not until the reign of Edward II that the practice became general among the common people.

Coming to the origin of surnames in England we learn from Camden that those most ancient and of best account were derived from places in Normandy, or in neighbouring parts, and that in fact there was no village in Normandy that gave not its name to some family in England, but at a later date a far greater number of family names originated from the names of places in England. Camden observes scarcely a town, village, hamlet, or place in England which has not afforded names to families. It was usual for a man to take the name of the village or hamlet where he had been born or from which he had come. The place-names were often preceded by a *de*, but such great changes have many surnames undergone, at the hands of their often illiterate possessors, that it is frequently very difficult and not uncommonly impossible to trace their origin. In the great majority of instances, as Camden well remarks, the *place* bore its name before the family did its *sur-name*, and it is a mistake for them to think that their ancestors

gave names to places. It was not until the thirteenth century that family names began to be permanent; previously they had varied according to the Christian name of the father. The surnames of the mass of the people were frequently changed. Many dropped the father's surname for the name of the occupation they had chosen and became Taylors, Bakers, Smiths, etc. There can be no doubt that in later centuries when surnames were permanently appropriated by a family and neither changed by occupation nor at each new generation, they were still subjected to great variations at the hands of our illiterate forefathers. The causes of these variations are principally to be found in the circumstance that the orthography of a name was considered to be of slight importance and was often decided by the clerk of a county parish, who exercised his own judgement as to how the name should be spelt even when the correct name was known by the possessor, as is shown by its return to its correct form after wandering through many extraordinary variations.

Galpenberg, a Commune and Village of Belgium in the Province of East Flanders, department of Ophasselt. Population, 220.—*Universal Gazetteer* (1870).

There is also a river and village of Gulpen in the Duchy of Limbourg.

Pen signifies Hill or Head in the Cymro-Celtic language and is common all over Western Europe from the *A*pennines to the *Pen*nine Hills. Pen, a hill in Staffordshire. Pen-carrig, rocky hill. Pen-y-craig, the head of the rock. Pen-hill in Somerset is tautological like Gal*penberg*. Penzance, formerly Pensans, is called the Saint's headland from a head of St. John the Baptist (the town's arms), but Camden thinks it might mean the head of the sands.—Vide *Dict. of Place Names*, by C. Blackie.

Gald or gold (also Geld and Gild) = valere, to be valuable, worthy, beautiful; Gal also signifies bright; Birin, bear (Old Gothic); Galdpirin, Goldpirin, noble bear.—Vide *Surnames as a Science*, by Robert Ferguson, F.S.A.

The name Galpin appears frequently in documents in forms such as Galpin, Garpin or Gaiperin (Dorset, A.D. 1218),