

ISIS

- Sister-wife of Osi'ris. The cow was sacred to her; and she is represented with two long horns from one stem at the top of her head. She is said to have invented spinning and weaving. (*Egyptian mythology.*)

*"Inventress of the woof, fair Lina [flax] flings
The flying shuttle thro' the dancing strings.
Taught by her labours, from the fertile soil
Immortal Isis clothed the banks of Nile."*

Darwin: Loves of the Plants, c. ii.

- Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, names Osiris, Isis, and Orus amongst the fallen angels (book i. 478).
- *Isis*, Herodotos thinks, is Deme'ter (Ce'rs).
- Diodo'ros confounds her with the Moon, Demeter, and Juno.
- Plutarch confounds her with Athe'na (Minerva), Perseph on (Proserpine), the Moon, and Te'thys.
- Apule'ius calls her the mother of the gods Minerva, Venus, Diana, Proserpine, Cers, Juno, Bello'na, Hecate, and Rhamnu'sia [Nem'esis].
- Some maintain that Isis was at one time the protectress of Paris, and that the word Paris is a contraction of the Greek *Para Isdos* (near the temple of Isis), the temple referred to being the Panthéon or church of St. Geneviève. We are told, moreover, that a statue of Isis was for a long time preserved in the church of St. Germain des Prés, but was broken to pieces by Cardinal Briçonnet because he saw certain women offering candles to it as to the Virgin.
- Lockyer says, "Isis represents the idea of rising or becoming visible, Osiris of disappearing." Thus the rising moon, a rising planet, the coming dawn, etc., is Isis; but the setting sun, the waning moon, a setting planet, evening, etc., is Osiris.

*"Now the bright moon beams kissed the water, and now the
mountain and valley, river and plain, were flooded with white
light, for mother Isis was arisen."*

Rider Haggard: Cleopatra, chap. iii.

THAMESIS

- The Latin *Thamesis* (the broad Isis, where *isis* is a mere variation of *esk*, *ouse*, *uisg*, etc., meaning water). The river Churn unites with the Thames at Cricklade, in Wiltshire, where it was at one time indifferently called the Thames, Isis, or Thamesis. Thus, in the Saxon Chronicle we are told the East Anglians “overran all the land of Mercia till they came to Cricklade, where they forded the Thames.”
- In Camden’s *Britannia* mention is made of Summerford, in Wiltshire, on the east bank of the “Isis” (*cujus vocabulum Temis juxta vadum, qui appellatur Summerford*). Canute also forded the Thames in 1016 in Wiltshire. Hence Thames is not a compound of the two rivers Thame and Isis at their junction, but of Thamesis. Tham is a variety of the Latin *amnis*, seen in such words as North-ampton, South-ampton, Tam-worth, etc. Pope perpetuates the notion that Thames = Thame and Isis in the lines—

*"Around his throne the sea-born brothers stood;
Who swell with tributary urns his flood:—
First the famed authors of his ancient name,
The winding Isis and the fruitful Thame!
The Kennet swift, for silver eels renowned;
The Loddou slow, with verdant alders crowned;
Cole, whose dark streams his flowery islands lave;
And chalky Wey that rolls a milky wave;
The blue transparent Vandalis appears;
The gulphy Lee his sedgy tresses rears;
And sullen Mole that hides his diving flood;
And silent Darent stained with Danish blood."*

Pope: Windsor Forest

He'll never set the Thames on fire. He'll never make any figure in the world; never plant his footsteps on the sands of time. The popular explanation is that the word *Thames* is a pun on the word *temse*, a corn-sieve; and that the parallel French locution *He will never set the Seine on fire* is a pun on *seine*, a drag-net; but these solutions are not tenable. There is a Latin saw, "*Tiberim accendre nequaquam potest*," which is probably the *fons et origo* of other parallel sayings. Then, long before our proverb, we had "To set the Rhine on fire" (*Den Rhein anzünden*), 1630, and *Er hat den Rhein und das Meer angezündet*, 1580.

There are numerous similar phrases: as "He will never set the Liffey on fire;" to "set the Trent on fire;" to "set the Humber on fire;" etc. Of course it is possible to set water on fire, but the scope of the proverb lies the other way, and it may take its place beside such sayings as "If the sky falls we may catch larks."

(Researched and written by Keith Ponsford)