

# **The Description of Wales**

Geraldus Cambrensis

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# The Description of Wales

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This etext was prepared by David Price

## FIRST PREFACE to Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury

I, who, at the expense of three years' labour, arranged, a short time ago, in three parts, the Topography of Ireland, with a description of its natural curiosities, and who afterwards, by two years' study, completed in two parts the Vaticinal History of its Conquest; and who, by publishing the Itinerary of the Holy Man (Baldwin) through Cambria, prevented his laborious mission from perishing in obscurity, do now propose, in the present little work, to give some account of this my native country, and to describe the genius of its inhabitants, so entirely distinct from that of other nations. And this production of my industry I have determined to dedicate to you, illustrious Stephen, archbishop of Canterbury, as I before ascribed to you my Itinerary; considering you as a man no less distinguished by your piety, than conspicuous for your learning; though so humble an offering may possibly be unworthy the acceptance of a personage who, from his eminence, deserves to be presented with works of the greatest merit.

Some, indeed, object to this my undertaking, and, apparently from motives of affection, compare me to a painter, who, rich in colours, and like another Zeuxis, eminent in his art, is endeavouring with all his skill and industry to give celebrity to a cottage, or to some other contemptible object, whilst the world is anxiously expecting from his hand a temple or a palace. Thus they wonder that I, amidst the many great and striking subjects which the world presents, should choose to describe and to adorn, with all the graces of composition, such remote corners of the earth as Ireland and Wales.

Others again, reproaching me with greater severity, say, that the gifts which have been bestowed upon me from above, ought not to be wasted upon these insignificant objects, nor lavished in a vain display of learning on the commendation of princes, who, from their ignorance and want of liberality, have neither taste to appreciate, nor hearts to remunerate literary excellence. And they further add, that every faculty which emanates from the Deity, ought rather to be applied to the illustration of celestial objects, and to the exultation of his glory, from whose abundance all our talents have been received; every faculty (say they) ought to be employed in praising him from whom, as from a perennial source, every perfect gift is derived, and from whose bounty everything which is offered with sincerity obtains an ample reward. But since excellent histories of other countries have been composed and published by writers of eminence, I have been induced, by the love I bear to my country and to posterity, to believe that I should perform neither an useless nor an unacceptable service, were I to unfold the hidden merits of my native land; to rescue from obscurity those glorious actions which have been hitherto imperfectly described, and to bring into repute, by my method of treating it, a subject till now regarded as contemptible.

What indeed could my feeble and unexercised efforts add to the histories of the destruction of Troy, Thebes, or Athens, or to the conquest of the shores of Latium? Besides, to do what has been already done, is, in fact, to be doing nothing; I have, therefore, thought it more eligible to apply my industry to the arrangement of the history of my native country, hitherto almost wholly overlooked by strangers; but interesting to my relations and countrymen; and from these small beginnings to aspire by degrees to works of a nobler cast. From these inconsiderable attempts, some idea may be formed with what success, should Fortune afford an opportunity, I am likely to treat matters of greater importance. For although some things should be made our principal objects, whilst others ought not to be wholly neglected, I may surely be allowed to exercise the powers of my youth, as yet untaught and unexperienced, in pursuits of this latter nature, lest by habit I should feel a pleasure in indolence and in sloth, the parent of vice.

I have therefore employed these studies as a kind of introduction to the glorious treasures of that most excellent of the sciences, which alone deserves the name of science; which alone can render us wise to rule and to instruct mankind; which alone the other sciences follow, as attendants do their queen. Laying therefore in my youth the foundations of so noble a structure, it is my intention, if God will assist me and prolong my life, to reserve my maturer years for composing a treatise upon so perfect, so sacred a subject: for according to the poet,

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"Ardua quippe fides robustos exigit annos;"

"The important concerns of faith require a mind in its full vigour;"

I may be permitted to indulge myself for a short time in other pursuits; but in this I should wish not only to continue, but to die.

But before I enter on this important subject, I demand a short interval, to enable me to lay before the public my Treatise on the Instruction of a Prince, which has been so frequently promised, as well as the Description of Wales, which is now before me, and the Topography of Britain.

Of all the British writers, Gildas alone appears to me (as often as the course of my subject leads me to consult him) worthy of imitation; for by committing to paper the things which he himself saw and knew, and by declaring rather than describing the desolation of his country, he has compiled a history more remarkable for its truth than for its elegance.

Giraldus therefore follows Gildas, whom he wishes he could copy in his life and manners; becoming an imitator of his wisdom rather than of his eloquence – of his mind rather than of his writings – of his zeal rather than of his style – of his life rather than of his language.

### **SECOND PREFACE to the same**

When, amidst various literary pursuits, I first applied my mind to the compilation of history, I determined, lest I should appear ungrateful to my native land, to describe, to the best of my abilities, my own country and its adjoining regions; and afterwards, under God's guidance, to proceed to a description of more distant territories. But since some leading men (whom we have both seen and known) show so great a contempt for literature, that they immediately shut up within their book-cases the excellent works with which they are presented, and thus doom them, as it were, to a perpetual imprisonment; I entreat you, illustrious Prelate, to prevent the present little work, which will shortly be delivered to you, from perishing in obscurity. And because this, as well as my former productions, though of no transcendent merit, may hereafter prove to many a source of entertainment and instruction, I entreat you generously to order it to be made public, by which it will acquire reputation. And I shall consider myself sufficiently rewarded for my trouble, if, withdrawing for a while from your religious and secular occupations, you would kindly condescend to peruse this book, or, at least, give it an attentive hearing; for in times like these, when no one remunerates literary productions, I neither desire nor expect any other recompense. Not that it would appear in any way inconsistent, however there exists among men of rank a kind of conspiracy against authors, if a prelate so eminently conspicuous for his virtues, for his abilities, both natural and acquired, for irreproachable morals, and for munificence, should distinguish himself likewise by becoming the generous and sole patron of literature. To comprise your merits in a few words, the lines of Martial addressed to Trajan, whilst serving under Dioclesian, may be deservedly applied to you:

"Laudari debes quoniam sub principe duro,  
Temporibusque malis, ausus es esse bonus."

And those also of Virgil to Mecaenas, which extol the humanity of that great man:

"Omnia cum possis tanto tam clarus amico,  
Te sensit nemo posse nocere tamen."

Many indeed remonstrate against my proceedings, and those particularly who call themselves my friends insist that, in consequence of my violent attachment to study, I pay no attention to the concerns of the world, or to the interests of my family; and that, on this account, I shall experience a delay in my promotion to worldly dignities; that the influence of authors, both poets and historians, has long since ceased; that the respect paid to literature

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vanished with literary princes; and that in these degenerate days very different paths lead to honours and opulence. I allow all this, I readily allow it, and acquiesce in the truth. For the unprincipled and covetous attach themselves to the court, the churchmen to their books, and the ambitious to the public offices, but as every man is under the influence of some darling passion, so the love of letters and the study of eloquence have from my infancy had for me peculiar charms of attraction. Impelled by this thirst for knowledge, I have carried my researches into the mysterious works of nature farther than the generality of my contemporaries, and for the benefit of posterity have rescued from oblivion the remarkable events of my own times. But this object was not to be secured without an indefatigable, though at the same time an agreeable, exertion; for an accurate investigation of every particular is attended with much difficulty. It is difficult to produce an orderly account of the investigation and discovery of truth; it is difficult to preserve from the beginning to the end a connected relation unbroken by irrelevant matter; and it is difficult to render the narration no less elegant in the diction, than instructive in its matter, for in prosecuting the series of events, the choice of happy expressions is equally perplexing, as the search after them painful. Whatever is written requires the most intense thought, and every expression should be carefully polished before it be submitted to the public eye; for, by exposing itself to the examination of the present and of future ages, it must necessarily undergo the criticism not only of the acute, but also of the dissatisfied, reader. Words merely uttered are soon forgotten, and the admiration or disgust which they occasioned is no more; but writings once published are never lost, and remain as lasting memorials either of the glory or of the disgrace of the author. Hence the observation of Seneca, that the malicious attention of the envious reader dwells with no less satisfaction on a faulty than on an elegant expression, and is as anxious to discover what it may ridicule, as what it may commend; as the poet also observes:

"Discit enim citius meminitque libentius illud  
Quod quis deridet, quam quod probat et veneratur."

Among the pursuits, therefore, most worthy of commendation, this holds by no means the lowest rank; for history, as the moral philosopher declares, "is the record of antiquity, the testimony of ages, the light of truth, the soul of memory, the mistress of conduct, and the herald of ancient times."

This study is the more delightful, as it is more honourable to produce works worthy of being quoted than to quote the works of others; as it is more desirable to be the author of compositions which deserve to be admired than to be esteemed a good judge of the writings of other men; as it is more meritorious to be the just object of other men's commendations than to be considered an adept in pointing out the merits of others. On these pleasing reflections I feed and regale myself; for I would rather resemble Jerome than Croesus, and I prefer to riches themselves the man who is capable of despising them. With these gratifying ideas I rest contented and delighted, valuing moderation more than intemperance, and an honourable sufficiency more than superfluity; for intemperance and superfluity produce their own destruction, but their opposite virtues never perish; the former vanish, but the latter, like eternity, remain for ever; in short, I prefer praise to lucre, and reputation to riches.

## BOOK I

### CHAPTER I

Of the length and breadth of Wales, the nature of its soil, and the three remaining tribes of Britons

Cambria, which, by a corrupt and common term, though less proper, is in modern times called Wales, is about two hundred miles long and one hundred broad. The length from Port Gordber (1) in Anglesey to Port Eskewin (2) in Monmouthshire is eight days' journey in extent; the breadth from Porth Mawr, (3) or the great Port of St. David's, to Ryd-helic, (4) which in Latin means VADUM SALICIS, or the Ford of the Willow, and in English is called Willow-forde, is four days' journey. It is a country very strongly defended by high mountains, deep valleys, extensive woods, rivers, and marshes; insomuch that from the time the Saxons took possession of the

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island the remnants of the Britons, retiring into these regions, could never be entirely subdued either by the English or by the Normans. Those who inhabited the southern angle of the island, which took its name from the chieftain Corinaeus, (5) made less resistance, as their country was more defenceless. The third division of the Britons, who obtained a part of Britany in Gaul, were transported thither, not after the defeat of their nation, but long before, by king Maximus, and, in consequence of the hard and continued warfare which they underwent with him, were rewarded by the royal munificence with those districts in France.

### CHAPTER II

Of the ancient division of Wales into three parts

Wales was in ancient times divided into three parts nearly equal, consideration having been paid, in this division, more to the value than to the just quantity or proportion of territory. They were Venedotia, now called North Wales; Demetia, or South Wales, which in British is called Deheubarth, that is, the southern part; and Powys, the middle or eastern district. Roderic the Great, or Rhodri Mawr, who was king over all Wales, was the cause of this division. He had three sons, Mervin, Anarawt, and Cadell, amongst whom he partitioned the whole principality. North Wales fell to the lot of Mervin; Powys to Anarawt; and Cadell received the portion of South Wales, together with the general good wishes of his brothers and the people; for although this district greatly exceeded the others in quantity, it was the least desirable from the number of noble chiefs, or Uchelwyr, (6) men of a superior rank, who inhabited it, and were often rebellious to their lords, and impatient of control. But Cadell, on the death of his brothers, obtained the entire dominion of Wales, (7) as did his successors till the time of Tewdwr, whose descendants, Rhys, son of Tewdwr, Gruffydd, son of Rhys, and Rhys, son of Gruffydd, the ruling prince in our time, enjoyed only (like the father) the sovereignty over South Wales.

### CHAPTER III

Genealogy of the Princes of Wales

The following is the generation of princes of South Wales: Rhys, son of Gruffydd; Gruffydd, son of Rhys; Rhys, son of Tewdwr; Tewdwr, son of Eineon; Eineon, son of Owen; Owen, son of Howel Dda, or Howel the Good; Howel, son of Cadell, son of Roderic the Great. Thus the princes of South Wales derived their origin from Cadell, son of Roderic the Great. The princes of North Wales descended from Mervin in this manner: Llewelyn, son of Iorwerth; Iorwerth, son of Owen; Owen, son of Gruffydd; Gruffydd, son of Conan; Conan, son of Iago; Iago, son of Edoual; Edoual, son of Meyric; Meyric, son of Anarawt (Anandhrec); Anarawt, son of Mervin, son of Roderic the Great. Anarawt leaving no issue, the princes of Powys have their own particular descent.

It is worthy of remark, that the Welsh bards and singers, or reciters, have the genealogies of the aforesaid princes, written in the Welsh language, in their ancient and authentic books; and also retain them in their memory from Roderic the Great to B.M.; (8) and from thence to Sylvius, Ascanius, and AEneas; and from the latter produce the genealogical series in a lineal descent, even to Adam.

But as an account of such long and remote genealogies may appear to many persons trifling rather than historical, we have purposely omitted them in our compendium.

### CHAPTER IV

How many cantreds, royal palaces, and cathedrals there are in Wales

South Wales contains twenty-nine cantreds; North Wales, twelve; Powys, six: many of which are at this time in the possession of the English and Franks. For the country now called Shropshire formerly belonged to Powys, and

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the place where the castle of Shrewsbury stands bore the name of Pengwern, or the head of the Alder Grove. There were three royal seats in South Wales: Dinevor, in South Wales, removed from Caerleon; Aberfraw, (9) in North Wales; and Pengwern, in Powys.

Wales contains in all fifty-four cantreds. The word CANTREF is derived from CANT, a hundred, and TREF, a village; and means in the British and Irish languages such a portion of land as contains a hundred vills.

There are four cathedral churches in Wales: St. David's, upon the Irish sea, David the archbishop being its patron: it was in ancient times the metropolitan church, and the district only contained twenty-four cantreds, though at this time only twenty-three; for Ergengl, in English called Urchenfeld, (10) is said to have been formerly within the diocese of St. David's, and sometimes was placed within that of Landaff. The see of St. David's had twenty-five successive archbishops; and from the time of the removal of the pall into France, to this day, twenty-two bishops; whose names and series, as well as the cause of the removal of the archiepiscopal pall, may be seen in our Itinerary. (11)

In South Wales also is situated the bishopric of Landaff, near the Severn sea, and near the noble castle of Caerdyf; bishop Teilo being its patron. It contains five cantreds, and the fourth part of another, namely, Senghennyd.

In North Wales, between Anglesey and the Eryri mountains, is the see of Bangor, under the patronage of Daniel, the abbot; it contains about nine cantreds.

In North Wales also is the poor little cathedral of Llan-Elwy, or St. Asaph, containing about six cantreds, to which Powys is subject.

## CHAPTER V

Of the two mountains from which the noble rivers which divide Wales spring

Wales is divided and distinguished by noble rivers, which derive their source from two ranges of mountains, the Ellennith, in South Wales, which the English call Moruge, as being the heads of moors, or bogs; and Eryri, in North Wales, which they call Snowdon, or mountains of snow; the latter of which are said to be of so great an extent, that if all the herds in Wales were collected together, they would supply them with pasture for a considerable time. Upon them are two lakes, one of which has a floating island; and the other contains fish having only one eye, as we have related in our Itinerary.

We must also here remark, that at two places in Scotland, one on the eastern, and the other on the western ocean, the sea-fish called mulvelli (mulletts) have only the right eye.

The noble river Severn takes its rise from the Ellennith mountains, and flowing by the castles of Shrewsbury and Bridgenorth, through the city of Worcester, and that of Gloucester, celebrated for its iron manufactories, falls into the sea a few miles from the latter place, and gives its name to the Severn Sea. This river was for many years the boundary between Cambria and Loegria, or Wales and England; it was called in British Hafren, from the daughter of Locrinus, who was drowned in it by her step-mother; the aspirate being changed, according to the Latin idiom, into S, as is usual in words derived from the Greek, it was termed Sarina, as hal becomes SAL; hemi, SEMI; hepta, SEPTEM.

The river Wye rises in the same mountains of Ellennith, and flows by the castles of Hay and Clifford, through the city of Hereford, by the castles of Wilton and Goodrich, through the forest of Dean, abounding with iron and deer, and proceeds to Strigul castle, below which it empties itself into the sea, and forms in modern times the boundary between England and Wales. The Usk does not derive its origin from these mountains, but from those of Cantref

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Bachan; it flows by the castle of Brecheinoc, or Aberhodni, that is, the fall of the river Hodni into the Usk (for Aber, in the British language, signifies every place where two rivers unite their streams); by the castles of Abergeveni and Usk, through the ancient city of Legions, and discharges itself into the Severn Sea, not far from Newport.

The river Remni flows towards the sea from the mountains of Brecheinoc, having passed the castle and bridge of Remni. From the same range of mountains springs the Taf, which pursues its course to the episcopal see of Landaf (to which it gives its name), and falls into the sea below the castle of Caerdyf. The river Avon rushes impetuously from the mountains of Glamorgan, between the celebrated Cistercian monasteries of Margan and Neth; and the river Neth, descending from the mountains of Brecheinoc, unites itself with the sea, at no great distance from the castle of Neth; each of these rivers forming a long tract of dangerous quicksands. From the same mountains of Brecheinoc the river Tawe flows down to Abertawe, called in English Swainsey. The Lochor joins the sea near the castle of the same name; and the Wendraeth has its confluence near Cydweli. The Tywy, another noble river, rises in the Ellennith mountains, and separating the Cantref Mawr from the Cantref Bachan, passes by the castle of Llanymddyfri, and the royal palace and castle of Dinevor, strongly situated in the deep recesses of its woods, by the noble castle of Caermarddin, where Merlin was found, and from whom the city received its name, and runs into the sea near the castle of Lhanstephan. The river Taf rises in the Presseleu mountains, not far from the monastery of Whitland, and passing by the castle of St. Clare, falls into the sea near Abercorran and Talacharn. From the same mountains flow the rivers Cleddau, encompassing the province of Daugleddeu, and giving it their name one passes by the castle of Lahaden, and the other by Haverford, to the sea; and in the British language they bear the name of Daugleddeu, or two swords.

The noble river Teivi springs from the Ellennith mountains, in the upper part of the Cantref Mawr and Caerdigan, not far from the pastures and excellent monastery of Stratflur, forming a boundary between Demetia and Caerdigan down to the Irish channel; this is the only river in Wales that produces beavers, an account of which is given in our Itinerary; and also exceeds every other river in the abundance and delicacy of its salmon. But as this book may fall into the hands of many persons who will not meet with the other, I have thought it right here to insert many curious and particular qualities relating to the nature of these animals, how they convey their materials from the woods to the river, with what skill they employ these materials in constructing places of safety in the middle of the stream, how artfully they defend themselves against the attack of the hunters on the eastern and how on the western side; the singularity of their tails, which partake more of the nature of fish than flesh. For further particulars see the Itinerary. (12)

From the same mountains issues the Ystuyth, and flowing through the upper parts of Penwedic, in Cardiganshire, falls into the sea near the castle of Aberystuyth. From the snowy mountains of Eryri flows the noble river Devi, (13) dividing for a great distance North and South Wales; and from the same mountains also the large river Maw, (14) forming by its course the greater and smaller tract of sands called the Traeth Mawr and the Traeth Bachan. The Dissennith also, and the Arthro, flow through Merionethshire and the land of Conan. The Conwy, springing from the northern side of the Eryri mountains, unites its waters with the sea under the noble castle of Deganwy. The Cloyd rises from another side of the same mountain, and passes by the castle of Ruthlan to the sea. The Doverdwy, called by the English Dee, draws its source from the lake of Penmelesmere, and runs through Chester, leaving the wood of Coleshulle, Basinwerk, and a rich vein of silver in its neighbourhood, far to the right, and by the influx of the sea forming a very dangerous quicksand; thus the Dee makes the northern, and the river Wye the southern boundary of Wales.

## CHAPTER VI

Concerning the pleasantness and fertility of Wales

As the southern part of Wales near Cardiganshire, but particularly Pembrokeshire, is much pleasanter, on account

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of its plains and sea-coast, so North Wales is better defended by nature, is more productive of men distinguished for bodily strength, and more fertile in the nature of its soil; for, as the mountains of Eryri (Snowdon) could supply pasturage for all the herds of cattle in Wales, if collected together, so could the Isle of Mona (Anglesey) provide a requisite quantity of corn for all the inhabitants: on which account there is an old British proverb, "MON MAM CYMBRY," that is, "Mona is the mother of Wales." Merionyth, and the land of Conan, is the rudest and least cultivated region, and the least accessible. The natives of that part of Wales excel in the use of long lances, as those of Monmouthshire are distinguished for their management of the bow. It is to be observed, that the British language is more delicate and richer in North Wales, that country being less intermixed with foreigners. Many, however, assert that the language of Cardiganshire, in South Wales, placed as it were in the middle and heart of Cambria, is the most refined.

The people of Cornwall and the Armoricans speak a language similar to that of the Britons; and from its origin and near resemblance, it is intelligible to the Welsh in many instances, and almost in all; and although less delicate and methodical, yet it approaches, as I judge, more to the ancient British idiom. As in the southern parts of England, and particularly in Devonshire, the English language seems less agreeable, yet it bears more marks of antiquity (the northern parts being much corrupted by the irruptions of the Danes and Norwegians), and adheres more strictly to the original language and ancient mode of speaking; a positive proof of which may be deduced from all the English works of Bede, Rhabanus, and king Alfred, being written according to this idiom.

## CHAPTER VII

Origin of the names Cambria and Wales

Cambria was so called from Camber, son of Brutus, for Brutus, descending from the Trojans, by his grandfather, Ascanius, and father, Silvius, led the remnant of the Trojans, who had long been detained in Greece, into this western isle; and having reigned many years, and given his name to the country and people, at his death divided the kingdom of Wales between his three sons. To his eldest son, Locrinus, he gave that part of the island which lies between the rivers Humber and Severn, and which from him was called Loegria. To his second son, Albanactus, he gave the lands beyond the Humber, which took from him the name of Albania. But to his youngest son, Camber, he bequeathed all that region which lies beyond the Severn, and is called after him Cambria; hence the country is properly and truly called Cambria, and its inhabitants Cambrians, or Cambrenses. Some assert that their name was derived from CAM and GRAECO, that is, distorted Greek, on account of the affinity of their languages, contracted by their long residence in Greece; but this conjecture, though plausible, is not well founded on truth.

The name of Wales was not derived from Wallo, a general, or Wandolena, the queen, as the fabulous history of Geoffrey Arthurius (15) falsely maintains, because neither of these personages are to be found amongst the Welsh; but it arose from a barbarian appellation. The Saxons, when they seized upon Britain, called this nation, as they did all foreigners, Wallenses; and thus the barbarous name remains to the people and their country. (16)

Having discoursed upon the quality and quantity of the land, the genealogies of the princes, the sources of the rivers, and the derivation of the names of this country, we shall now consider the nature and character of the nation.

## CHAPTER VIII

Concerning the nature, manners, and dress, the boldness, agility, and courage, of this nation

This people is light and active, hardy rather than strong, and entirely bred up to the use of arms; for not only the nobles, but all the people are trained to war, and when the trumpet sounds the alarm, the husbandman rushes as

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eagerly from his plough as the courtier from his court; for here it is not found that, as in other places,

"Agricolis labor actus in orbem,"

returns; for in the months of March and April only the soil is once ploughed for oats, and again in the summer a third time, and in winter for wheat. Almost all the people live upon the produce of their herds, with oats, milk, cheese, and butter; eating flesh in larger proportions than bread. They pay no attention to commerce, shipping, or manufactures, and suffer no interruption but by martial exercises. They anxiously study the defence of their country and their liberty; for these they fight, for these they undergo hardships, and for these willingly sacrifice their lives; they esteem it a disgrace to die in bed, an honour to die in the field of battle; using the poet's expressions, –

"Procul hinc avertite pacem, Nobilitas cum pace perit."

Nor is it wonderful if it degenerates, for the ancestors of these men, the Aeneadae, rushed to arms in the cause of liberty. It is remarkable that this people, though unarmed, dares attack an armed foe; the infantry defy the cavalry, and by their activity and courage generally prove victors. They resemble in disposition and situation those conquerors whom the poet Lucan mentions:

– "Populi quos despicit Arctos,  
Felices errore suo, quos ille timorum  
Maximus haud urget leti metus, inde ruendi  
In ferrum, mens prona viris, amimaeque capaces,  
Mortis et ignavum rediturae parsere vitae."

They make use of light arms, which do not impede their agility, small coats of mail, bundles of arrows, and long lances, helmets and shields, and more rarely greaves plated with iron. The higher class go to battle mounted on swift and generous steeds, which their country produces; but the greater part of the people fight on foot, on account of the marshy nature and unevenness of the soil. The horsemen as their situation or occasion requires, willingly serve as infantry, in attacking or retreating; and they either walk bare-footed, or make use of high shoes, roughly constructed with untanned leather. In time of peace, the young men, by penetrating the deep recesses of the woods, and climbing the tops of mountains, learn by practice to endure fatigue through day and night; and as they meditate on war during peace, they acquire the art of fighting by accustoming themselves to the use of the lance, and by inuring themselves to hard exercise.

In our time, king Henry II., in reply to the inquiries of Emanuel, emperor of Constantinople, concerning the situation, nature, and striking peculiarities of the British island, among other remarkable circumstances mentioned the following: "That in a certain part of the island there was a people, called Welsh, so bold and ferocious that, when unarmed, they did not fear to encounter an armed force; being ready to shed their blood in defence of their country, and to sacrifice their lives for renown; which is the more surprising, as the beasts of the field over the whole face of the island became gentle, but these desperate men could not be tamed. The wild animals, and particularly the stags and hinds, are so abundant, owing to the little molestation they receive, that in our time, in the northern parts of the island towards the Peak, (17) when pursued by the hounds and hunters, they contributed, by their numbers, to their own destruction."

## CHAPTER IX

Of their sober supper and frugality

Not addicted to gluttony or drunkenness, this people who incur no expense in food or dress, and whose minds are always bent upon the defence of their country, and on the means of plunder, are wholly employed in the care of their horses and furniture. Accustomed to fast from morning till evening, and trusting to the care of Providence,

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they dedicate the whole day to business, and in the evening partake of a moderate meal; and even if they have none, or only a very scanty one, they patiently wait till the next evening; and, neither deterred by cold nor hunger, they employ the dark and stormy nights in watching the hostile motions of their enemies.

### CHAPTER X

Of their hospitality and liberality

No one of this nation ever begs, for the houses of all are common to all; and they consider liberality and hospitality amongst the first virtues. So much does hospitality here rejoice in communication, that it is neither offered nor requested by travellers, who, on entering any house, only deliver up their arms. When water is offered to them, if they suffer their feet to be washed, they are received as guests; for the offer of water to wash the feet is with this nation an hospitable invitation. But if they refuse the proffered service, they only wish for morning refreshment, not lodging. The young men move about in troops and families under the direction of a chosen leader. Attached only to arms and ease, and ever ready to stand forth in defence of their country, they have free admittance into every house as if it were their own.

Those who arrive in the morning are entertained till evening with the conversation of young women, and the music of the harp; for each house has its young women and harps allotted to this purpose. Two circumstances here deserve notice: that as no nation labours more under the vice of jealousy than the Irish, so none is more free from it than the Welsh: and in each family the art of playing on the harp is held preferable to any other learning. In the evening, when no more guests are expected, the meal is prepared according to the number and dignity of the persons assembled, and according to the wealth of the family who entertains. The kitchen does not supply many dishes, nor high-seasoned incitements to eating. The house is not furnished with tables, cloths, or napkins. They study nature more than splendour, for which reason, the guests being seated in threes, instead of couples as elsewhere, (18) they place the dishes before them all at once upon rushes and fresh grass, in large platters or trenchers. They also make use of a thin and broad cake of bread, baked every day, such as in old writings was called LAGANA; (19) and they sometimes add chopped meat, with broth. Such a repast was formerly used by the noble youth, from whom this nation boasts its descent, and whose manners it still partly imitates, according to the word of the poet:

"Heu! mensas consumimus, inquit Iulus."

While the family is engaged in waiting on the guests, the host and hostess stand up, paying unremitting attention to everything, and take no food till all the company are satisfied; that in case of any deficiency, it may fall upon them. A bed made of rushes, and covered with a coarse kind of cloth manufactured in the country, called BRYCHAN, (20) is then placed along the side of the room, and they all in common lie down to sleep; nor is their dress at night different from that by day, for at all seasons they defend themselves from the cold only by a thin cloak and tunic. The fire continues to burn by night as well as by day, at their feet, and they receive much comfort from the natural heat of the persons lying near them; but when the under side begins to be tired with the hardness of the bed, or the upper one to suffer from cold, they immediately leap up, and go to the fire, which soon relieves them from both inconveniences; and then returning to their couch, they expose alternately their sides to the cold, and to the hardness of the bed.

### CHAPTER XI

Concerning their cutting of their hair, their care of their teeth, and shaving of their beard

The men and women cut their hair close round to the ears and eyes. The women, after the manner of the Parthians, cover their heads with a large white veil, folded together in the form of a crown.

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Both sexes exceed any other nation in attention to their teeth, which they render like ivory, by constantly rubbing them with green hazel and wiping with a woollen cloth. For their better preservation, they abstain from hot meats, and eat only such as are cold, warm, or temperate. The men shave all their beard except the moustaches (GERNOBODA). This custom is not recent, but was observed in ancient and remote ages, as we find in the works of Julius Caesar, who says, (21) "The Britons shave every part of their body except their head and upper lip;" and to render themselves more active, and avoid the fate of Absalon in their excursions through the woods, they are accustomed to cut even the hair from their heads; so that this nation more than any other shaves off all pilosity. Julius also adds, that the Britons, previous to an engagement, anointed their faces with a nitrous ointment, which gave them so ghastly and shining an appearance, that the enemy could scarcely bear to look at them, particularly if the rays of the sun were reflected on them.

## CHAPTER XII

Of their quickness and sharpness of understanding

These people being of a sharp and acute intellect, and gifted with a rich and powerful understanding, excel in whatever studies they pursue, and are more quick and cunning than the other inhabitants of a western clime.

Their musical instruments charm and delight the ear with their sweetness, are borne along by such celerity and delicacy of modulation, producing such a consonance from the rapidity of seemingly discordant touches, that I shall briefly repeat what is set forth in our Irish Topography on the subject of the musical instruments of the three nations. It is astonishing that in so complex and rapid a movement of the fingers, the musical proportions can be preserved, and that throughout the difficult modulations on their various instruments, the harmony is completed with such a sweet velocity, so unequal an equality, so discordant a concord, as if the chords sounded together fourths or fifths. They always begin from B flat, and return to the same, that the whole may be completed under the sweetness of a pleasing sound. They enter into a movement, and conclude it in so delicate a manner, and play the little notes so sportively under the blunter sounds of the base strings, enlivening with wanton levity, or communicating a deeper internal sensation of pleasure, so that the perfection of their art appears in the concealment of it:

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"Si lateat, prosit;  
-- ferat ars deprensa pudorem."  
"Art profits when concealed,  
Disgraces when revealed."
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From this cause, those very strains which afford deep and unspeakable mental delight to those who have skilfully penetrated into the mysteries of the art, fatigue rather than gratify the ears of others, who seeing, do not perceive, and hearing, do not understand; and by whom the finest music is esteemed no better than a confused and disorderly noise, and will be heard with unwillingness and disgust.

They make use of three instruments, the harp, the pipe, and the crwth or crowd (CHORUS). (22)

They omit no part of natural rhetoric in the management of civil actions, in quickness of invention, disposition, refutation, and confirmation. In their rhymed songs and set speeches they are so subtle and ingenious, that they produce, in their native tongue, ornaments of wonderful and exquisite invention both in the words and sentences. Hence arise those poets whom they call Bards, of whom you will find many in this nation, endowed with the above faculty, according to the poet's observation:

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"Plurima concreti fuderunt carmina Bardii."
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But they make use of alliteration (ANOMINATIONE) in preference to all other ornaments of rhetoric, and that

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particular kind which joins by consonancy the first letters or syllables of words. So much do the English and Welsh nations employ this ornament of words in all exquisite composition, that no sentence is esteemed to be elegantly spoken, no oration to be otherwise than uncouth and unrefined, unless it be fully polished with the file of this figure. Thus in the British tongue:

"Digawn Duw da i unic."  
"Wrth bob crybwyll rhaid pwyll parawd." (23)

And in English,

"God is together gammen and wisdom."

The same ornament of speech is also frequent in the Latin language. Virgil says,

"Tales casus Cassandra canebat."

And again, in his address to Augustus,

"Dum dubitet natura marem, faceretve puellam,  
Natus es, o pulcher, pene puella, puer."

This ornament occurs not in any language we know so frequently as in the two first; it is, indeed, surprising that the French, in other respects so ornamented, should be entirely ignorant of this verbal elegance so much adopted in other languages. Nor can I believe that the English and Welsh, so different and adverse to each other, could designedly have agreed in the usage of this figure; but I should rather suppose that it had grown habitual to both by long custom, as it pleases the ear by a transition from similar to similar sounds. Cicero, in his book "On Elocution," observes of such who know the practice, not the art, "Other persons when they read good orations or poems, approve of the orators or poets, not understanding the reason why, being affected, they approve; because they cannot know in what place, of what nature, nor how that effect is caused which so highly delights them."

## CHAPTER XIII

Of their symphonies and songs

In their musical concerts they do not sing in unison like the inhabitants of other countries, but in many different parts; so that in a company of singers, which one very frequently meets with in Wales, you will hear as many different parts and voices as there are performers, who all at length unite, with organic melody, in one consonance and the soft sweetness of B flat. In the northern district of Britain, beyond the Humber, and on the borders of Yorkshire, the inhabitants make use of the same kind of symphonious harmony, but with less variety; singing only in two parts, one murmuring in the base, the other warbling in the acute or treble. Neither of the two nations has acquired this peculiarity by art, but by long habit, which has rendered it natural and familiar; and the practice is now so firmly rooted in them, that it is unusual to hear a simple and single melody well sung; and, what is still more wonderful, the children, even from their infancy, sing in the same manner. As the English in general do not adopt this mode of singing, but only those of the northern countries, I believe that it was from the Danes and Norwegians, by whom these parts of the island were more frequently invaded, and held longer under their dominion, that the natives contracted their mode of singing as well as speaking.

## CHAPTER XIV

Their wit and pleasantry

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The heads of different families, in order to excite the laughter of their guests, and gain credit by their sayings, make use of great facetiousness in their conversation; at one time uttering their jokes in a light, easy manner, at another time, under the disguise of equivocation, passing the severest censures. For the sake of explanation I shall here subjoin a few examples. Tegeingl is the name of a province in North Wales, over which David, son of Owen, had dominion, and which had once been in the possession of his brother. The same word also was the name of a certain woman with whom, it was said, each brother had an intrigue, from which circumstance arose this term of reproach, "To have Tegeingl, after Tegeingl had been in possession of his brother."

At another time, when Rhys, son of Gruffydd, prince of South Wales, accompanied by a multitude of his people, devoutly entered the church of St. David's, previous to an intended journey, the oblations having been made, and mass solemnised, a young man came to him in the church, and publicly declared himself to be his son, threw himself at his feet, and with tears humbly requested that the truth of this assertion might be ascertained by the trial of the burning iron. Intelligence of this circumstance being conveyed to his family and his two sons, who had just gone out of the church, a youth who was present made this remark: "This is not wonderful; some have brought gold, and others silver, as offerings; but this man, who had neither, brought what he had, namely, iron;" thus taunting him with his poverty. On mentioning a certain house that was strongly built and almost impregnable, one of the company said, "This house indeed is strong, for if it should contain food it could never be got at," thus alluding both to the food and to the house. In like manner, a person, wishing to hint at the avaricious disposition of the mistress of a house, said, "I only find fault with our hostess for putting too little butter to her salt," whereas the accessory should be put to the principal; thus, by a subtle transposition of the words, converting the accessory into the principal, by making it appear to abound in quantity. Many similar sayings of great men and philosophers are recorded in the Saturnalia of Macrobius. When Cicero saw his son-in-law, Lentulus, a man of small stature, with a long sword by his side: "Who," says he, "has girded my son-in-law to that sword?" thus changing the accessory into the principal. The same person, on seeing the half-length portrait of his brother Quintus Cicero, drawn with very large features and an immense shield, exclaimed, "Half of my brother is greater than the whole!" When the sister of Faustus had an intrigue with a fuller, "Is it strange," says he, "that my sister has a spot, when she is connected with a fuller?" When Antiochus showed Hannibal his army, and the great warlike preparations he had made against the Romans, and asked him, "Thinkest thou, O Hannibal, that these are sufficient for the Romans?" Hannibal, ridiculing the unmilitary appearance of the soldiers, wittily and severely replied, "I certainly think them sufficient for the Romans, however greedy;" Antiochus asking his opinion about the military preparations, and Hannibal alluding to them as becoming a prey to the Romans.

## CHAPTER XV

Their boldness and confidence in speaking

Nature hath given not only to the highest, but also to the inferior, classes of the people of this nation, a boldness and confidence in speaking and answering, even in the presence of their princes and chieftains. The Romans and Franks had the same faculty; but neither the English, nor the Saxons and Germans, from whom they are descended, had it. It is in vain urged, that this defect may arise from the state of servitude which the English endured; for the Saxons and Germans, who enjoy their liberty, have the same failing, and derive this natural coldness of disposition from the frozen region they inhabit; the English also, although placed in a distant climate, still retain the exterior fairness of complexion and inward coldness of disposition, as inseparable from their original and natural character. The Britons, on the contrary, transplanted from the hot and parched regions of Dardania into these more temperate districts, as

"Coelum non animum mutant qui trans mare currunt,"

still retain their brown complexion and that natural warmth of temper from which their confidence is derived. For three nations, remnants of the Greeks after the destruction of Troy, fled from Asia into different parts of Europe,

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the Romans under AENEAS, the Franks under Antenor, and the Britons under Brutus; and from thence arose that courage, that nobleness of mind, that ancient dignity, that acuteness of understanding, and confidence of speech, for which these three nations are so highly distinguished. But the Britons, from having been detained longer in Greece than the other two nations, after the destruction of their country, and having migrated at a later period into the western parts of Europe, retained in a greater degree the primitive words and phrases of their native language. You will find amongst them the names Oenus, Resus, AENEAS, Hector, Achilles, Heliodorus, Theodorus, Ajax, Evander, Uliex, Anianus, Elisa, Guendolena, and many others, bearing marks of their antiquity. It is also to be observed, that almost all words in the British language correspond either with the Greek or Latin, as [Greek text which cannot be reproduced], water, is called in British, dwr; [Greek text], salt, in British, halen; [Greek text], eno, a name; [Greek text], pump, five; [Greek text], deg, ten. The Latins also use the words fraenum, tripes, gladius, lorica; the Britons, froyn (ffrwyn), trepet (tribedd), cleddyf, and lluric (llurig); unicus is made unic (unig); canis, can (cwn); and belua, beleu.

## CHAPTER XVI

Concerning the soothsayers of this nation, and persons as it were possessed

There are certain persons in Cambria, whom you will find nowhere else, called Awenddyon, (24) or people inspired; when consulted upon any doubtful event, they roar out violently, are rendered beside themselves, and become, as it were, possessed by a spirit. They do not deliver the answer to what is required in a connected manner; but the person who skilfully observes them, will find, after many preambles, and many nugatory and incoherent, though ornamented speeches, the desired explanation conveyed in some turn of a word: they are then roused from their ecstasy, as from a deep sleep, and, as it were, by violence compelled to return to their proper senses. After having answered the questions, they do not recover till violently shaken by other people; nor can they remember the replies they have given. If consulted a second or third time upon the same point, they will make use of expressions totally different; perhaps they speak by the means of fanatic and ignorant spirits. These gifts are usually conferred upon them in dreams: some seem to have sweet milk or honey poured on their lips; others fancy that a written schedule is applied to their mouths and on awaking they publicly declare that they have received this gift. Such is the saying of Esdras, "The Lord said unto me, open thy mouth, and I opened my mouth, and behold a cup full of water, whose colour was like fire; and when I had drank it, my heart brought forth understanding, and wisdom entered into my breast." They invoke, during their prophecies, the true and living God, and the Holy Trinity, and pray that they may not by their sins be prevented from finding the truth. These prophets are only found among the Britons descended from the Trojans. For Calchas and Cassandra, endowed with the spirit of prophecy, openly foretold, during the siege of Troy, the destruction of that fine city; on which account the high priest, Helenus, influenced by the prophetic books of Calchas, and of others who had long before predicted the ruin of their country, in the first year went over to the Greeks with the sons of Priam (to whom he was high priest), and was afterwards rewarded in Greece. Cassandra, daughter of king Priam, every day foretold the overthrow of the city; but the pride and presumption of the Trojans prevented them from believing her word. Even on the very night that the city was betrayed, she clearly described the treachery and the method of it:

" - tales casus Cassandra canebat, "

as in the same manner, during the existence of the kingdom of the Britons, both Merlin Caledonius and Ambrosius are said to have foretold the destruction of their nation, as well as the coming of the Saxons, and afterwards that of the Normans; and I think a circumstance related by Aulus Gellius worth inserting in this place. On the day that Caius Caesar and Cneius Pompey, during the civil war, fought a pitched battle in Thessalia, a memorable event occurred in that part of Italy situated beyond the river Po. A priest named Cornelius, honourable from his rank, venerable for his religion, and holy in his manners, in an inspired moment proclaimed, "Caesar has conquered," and named the day, the events, the mutual attack, and the conflicts of the two armies. Whether such things are exhibited by the spirit, let the reader more particularly inquire; I do not assert they are the acts of a Pythonic or a diabolic spirit; for as foreknowledge is the property of God alone, so is it in his power to confer

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knowledge of future events. There are differences of gifts, says the Apostle, but one and the same spirit; whence Peter, in his second Epistle, writes, "For the prophecy came not in the old time by the will of man, but men spake as if they were inspired by the Holy Ghost:" to the same effect did the Chaldeans answer king Nebuchadonazar on the interpretation of his dream, which he wished to extort from them. "There is not," say they, "a man upon earth who can, O king, satisfactorily answer your question; let no king therefore, however great or potent, make a similar request to any magician, astrologer, or Chaldean; for it is a rare thing that the king requireth, and there is none other that can shew it before the king, except the Gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh." On this passage Jerome remarks, "The diviners and all the learned of this world confess, that the prescience of future events belongs to God alone; the prophets therefore, who foretold things to come, spake by the spirit of God. Hence some persons object, that, if they were under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they would sometimes premise, "Thus saith the Lord God," or make use of some expression in the prophetic style; and as such a mode of prophesying is not taken notice of by Merlin, and no mention is made of his sanctity, devotion, or faith, many think that he spake by a Pythonic spirit. To which I answer, that the spirit of prophecy was given not only to the holy, but sometimes to unbelievers and Gentiles, to Baal, to the sibyls, and even to bad people, as to Caiaphas and Bela. On which occasion Origen says: "Do not wonder, if he whom ye have mentioned declares that the Scribes and Pharisees and doctors amongst the Jews prophesied concerning Christ; for Caiaphas said: "It is expedient for us that one man die for the people:" but asserts at the same time, that because he was high priest for that year, he prophesied. Let no man therefore be lifted up, if he prophesies, if he merits prescience; for prophecies shall fail, tongues shall cease, knowledge shall vanish away; and now abideth, faith, hope, and charity: these three; but the greatest of these is Charity, which never faileth. But these bad men not only prophesied, but sometimes performed great miracles, which others could not accomplish. John the Baptist, who was so great a personage, performed no miracle, as John the Evangelist testifies: "And many came to Jesus and said, Because John wrought no signs," etc. Nor do we hear that the mother of God performed any miracle; we read in the Acts of the Apostles, that the sons of Sheva cast out devils in the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached; and in Matthew and Luke we may find these words: "Many shall say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? and then I will profess unto them, I never knew you." And in another place, John says: "Master, we saw a certain man casting out devils in thy name, and forbade him, because he followeth not with us." But Jesus said: "Forbid him not; no man can do a miracle in my name, and speak evil of me; for whoever is not against me, is for me."

Alexander of Macedon, a gentile, traversed the Caspian mountains, and miraculously confined ten tribes within their promontories, where they still remain, and will continue until the coming of Elias and Enoch. We read, indeed, the prophecies of Merlin, but hear nothing either of his sanctity or his miracles. Some say, that the prophets, when they prophesied, did not become frantic, as it is affirmed of Merlin Silvestris, and others possessed, whom we have before mentioned. Some prophesied by dreams, visions, and enigmatical sayings, as Ezechiel and Daniel; others by acts and words, as Noah, in the construction of the ark, alluded to the church; Abraham, in the slaying of his son, to the passion of Christ; and Moses by his speech, when he said, "A prophet shall the Lord God raise up to you of your brethren; hear him;" meaning Christ. Others have prophesied in a more excellent way by the internal revelation and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as David did when persecuted by Saul: "When Saul heard that David had fled to Naioth (which is a hill in Ramah, and the seat of the prophets), he sent messengers to take him; and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing at their head, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied; and he sent messengers a second and again a third time, and they also prophesied. And Saul enraged went thither also; and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied until he came to Naioth, and he stripped off his royal vestments, and prophesied with the rest for all that day and all that night; whilst David and Samuel secretly observed what passed." Nor is it wonderful that those persons who suddenly receive the Spirit of God, and so signal a mark of grace, should for a time seem alienated from their earthly state of mind.

## CHAPTER XVII

Their love of high birth and ancient genealogy

The Welsh esteem noble birth and generous descent above all things, (25) and are, therefore, more desirous of marrying into noble than rich families. Even the common people retain their genealogy, and can not only readily recount the names of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, but even refer back to the sixth or seventh generation, or beyond them, in this manner: Rhys, son of Gruffydd, son of Rhys, son of Tewdwr, son of Eineon, son of Owen, son of Howel, son of Cadell, son of Roderic Mawr, and so on.

Being particularly attached to family descent, they revenge with vehemence the injuries which may tend to the disgrace of their blood; and being naturally of a vindictive and passionate disposition, they are ever ready to avenge not only recent but ancient affronts; they neither inhabit towns, villages, nor castles, but lead a solitary life in the woods, on the borders of which they do not erect sumptuous palaces, nor lofty stone buildings, but content themselves with small huts made of the boughs of trees twisted together, constructed with little labour and expense, and sufficient to endure throughout the year. They have neither orchards nor gardens, but gladly eat the fruit of both when given to them. The greater part of their land is laid down to pasturage; little is cultivated, a very small quantity is ornamented with flowers, and a still smaller is sown. They seldom yoke less than four oxen to their ploughs; the driver walks before, but backwards, and when he falls down, is frequently exposed to danger from the refractory oxen. Instead of small sickles in mowing, they make use of a moderate-sized piece of iron formed like a knife, with two pieces of wood fixed loosely and flexibly to the head, which they think a more expeditious instrument; but since

"Segnius irritant animos demissa per aures, Quam quae sunt oculis subjecta fidelibus,"

their mode of using it will be better known by inspection than by any description. The boats (26) which they employ in fishing or in crossing the rivers are made of twigs, not oblong nor pointed, but almost round, or rather triangular, covered both within and without with raw hides. When a salmon thrown into one of these boats strikes it hard with his tail, he often oversets it, and endangers both the vessel and its navigator. The fishermen, according to the custom of the country, in going to and from the rivers, carry these boats on their shoulders; on which occasion that famous dealer in fables, Bleddercus, who lived a little before our time, thus mysteriously said: "There is amongst us a people who, when they go out in search of prey, carry their horses on their backs to the place of plunder; in order to catch their prey, they leap upon their horses, and when it is taken, carry their horses home again upon their shoulders."

## CHAPTER XVIII

Of the antiquity of their faith, their love of Christianity and devotion

In ancient times, and about two hundred years before the overthrow of Britain, the Welsh were instructed and confirmed in the faith by Faganus and Damianus, sent into the island at the request of king Lucius by pope Eleutherius, and from that period when Germanus of Auxerre, and Lupus of Troyes, came over on account of the corruption which had crept into the island by the invasion of the Saxons, but particularly with a view of expelling the Pelagian heresy, nothing heretical or contrary to the true faith was to be found amongst the natives. But it is said that some parts of the ardent doctrines are still retained. They give the first piece broken off from every loaf of bread to the poor; they sit down to dinner by three to a dish, in honour of the Trinity. With extended arms and bowing head, they ask a blessing of every monk or priest, or of every person wearing a religious habit. But they desire, above all other nations, the episcopal ordination and unction, by which the grace of the spirit is given. They give a tenth of all their property, animals, cattle, and sheep, either when they marry, or go on a pilgrimage, or, by the counsel of the church, are persuaded to amend their lives. This partition of their effects they call the

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great tithe, two parts of which they give to the church where they were baptised, and the third to the bishop of the diocese. But of all pilgrimages they prefer that to Rome, where they pay the most fervent adoration to the apostolic see. We observe that they show a greater respect than other nations to churches and ecclesiastical persons, to the relics of saints, bells, holy books, and the cross, which they devoutly revere; and hence their churches enjoy more than common tranquillity. For peace is not only preserved towards all animals feeding in churchyards, but at a great distance beyond them, where certain boundaries and ditches have been appointed by the bishops, in order to maintain the security of the sanctuary. But the principal churches to which antiquity has annexed the greater reverence extend their protection to the herds as far as they can go to feed in the morning and return at night. If, therefore, any person has incurred the enmity of his prince, on applying to the church for protection, he and his family will continue to live unmolested; but many persons abuse this indemnity, far exceeding the indulgence of the canon, which in such cases grants only personal safety; and from the places of refuge even make hostile irruptions, and more severely harass the country than the prince himself. Hermits and anchorites more strictly abstinent and more spiritual can nowhere be found; for this nation is earnest in all its pursuits, and neither worse men than the bad, nor better than the good, can be met with.

Happy and fortunate indeed would this nation be, nay, completely blessed, if it had good prelates and pastors, and but one prince, and that prince a good one.

## **BOOK II**

### **PREFACE**

Having in the former book clearly set forth the character, manners, and customs of the British nation, and having collected and explained everything which could redound to its credit or glory; an attention to order now requires that, in this second part, we should employ our pen in pointing out those particulars in which it seems to transgress the line of virtue and commendation; having first obtained leave to speak the truth, without which history not only loses its authority, but becomes undeserving of its very name. For the painter who professes to imitate nature, loses his reputation, if, by indulging his fancy, he represents only those parts of the subject which best suit him.

Since, therefore, no man is born without faults, and he is esteemed the best whose errors are the least, let the wise man consider everything human as connected with himself; for in worldly affairs there is no perfect happiness under heaven. Evil borders upon good, and vices are confounded with virtues; as the report of good qualities is delightful to a well-disposed mind, so the relation of the contrary should not be offensive. The natural disposition of this nation might have been corrupted and perverted by long exile and poverty; for as poverty extinguisheth many faults, so it often generates failings that are contrary to virtue.

### **CHAPTER I**

Of the inconstancy and instability of this nation, and their want of reverence for good faith and oaths

These people are no less light in mind than in body, and are by no means to be relied upon. They are easily urged to undertake any action, and are as easily checked from prosecuting it – a people quick in action, but more stubborn in a bad than in a good cause, and constant only in acts of inconstancy. They pay no respect to oaths, faith, or truth; and so lightly do they esteem the covenant of faith, held so inviolable by other nations, that it is usual to sacrifice their faith for nothing, by holding forth the right hand, not only in serious and important concerns, but even on every trifling occasion, and for the confirmation of almost every common assertion. They never scruple at taking a false oath for the sake of any temporary emolument or advantage; so that in civil and ecclesiastical causes, each party, being ready to swear whatever seems expedient to its purpose, endeavours both to prove and defend, although the venerable laws, by which oaths are deemed sacred, and truth is honoured and

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respected, by favouring the accused and throwing an odium upon the accuser, impose the burden of bringing proofs upon the latter. But to a people so cunning and crafty, this yoke is pleasant, and this burden is light.

### CHAPTER II

Their living by plunder, and disregard of the bonds of peace and friendship

This nation conceives it right to commit acts of plunder, theft, and robbery, not only against foreigners and hostile nations, but even against their own countrymen. When an opportunity of attacking the enemy with advantage occurs, they respect not the leagues of peace and friendship, preferring base lucre to the solemn obligations of oaths and good faith; to which circumstance Gildas alludes in his book concerning the overthrow of the Britons, actuated by the love of truth, and according to the rules of history, not suppressing the vices of his countrymen. "They are neither brave in war, nor faithful in peace." But when Julius Caesar, great as the world itself,

"Territa quaesitis ostendit terga Britannis,"

were they not brave under their leader Cassivellaunus? And when Belinus and Brennus added the Roman empire to their conquests? What were they in the time of Constantine, son of our Helen? What, in the reign of Aurelius Ambrosius, whom even Eutropius commends? What were they in the time of our famous prince Arthur? I will not say fabulous. On the contrary, they, who were almost subdued by the Scots and Picts, often harassed with success the auxiliary Roman legions, and exclaimed, as we learn from Gildas, "The barbarians drove us to the sea, the sea drove us again back to the barbarians; on one side we were subdued, on the other drowned, and here we were put to death. Were they not," says he, "at that time brave and praiseworthy?" When attacked and conquered by the Saxons, who originally had been called in as stipendiaries to their assistance, were they not brave? But the strongest argument made use of by those who accuse this nation of cowardice, is, that Gildas, a holy man, and a Briton by birth, has handed down to posterity nothing remarkable concerning them, in any of his historical works. We promise, however, a solution of the contrary in our British Topography, if God grants us a continuance of life.

As a further proof, it may be necessary to add, that from the time when that illustrious prince of the Britons, mentioned at the beginning of this book, totally exhausted the strength of the country, by transporting the whole armed force beyond the seas; that island, which had before been so highly illustrious for its incomparable valour, remained for many subsequent years destitute of men and arms, and exposed to the predatory attacks of pirates and robbers. So distinguished, indeed, were the natives of this island for their bravery, that, by their prowess, that king subdued almost all Cisalpine Gaul, and dared even to make an attack on the Roman empire.

In process of time, the Britons, recovering their long-lost population and knowledge of the use of arms, re-acquired their high and ancient character. Let the different aeras be therefore marked, and the historical accounts will accord. With regard to Gildas, who inveighs so bitterly against his own nation, the Britons affirm that, highly irritated at the death of his brother, the prince of Albania, whom king Arthur had slain, he wrote these invectives, and upon the same occasion threw into the sea many excellent books, in which he had described the actions of Arthur, and the celebrated deeds of his countrymen; from which cause it arises, that no authentic account of so great a prince is any where to be found.

### CHAPTER III

Of their deficiency in battle, and base and dishonourable flight

In war this nation is very severe in the first attack, terrible by their clamour and looks, filling the air with horrid shouts and the deep-toned clangour of very long trumpets; swift and rapid in their advances and frequent throwing of darts. Bold in the first onset, they cannot bear a repulse, being easily thrown into confusion as soon as

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they turn their backs; and they trust to flight for safety, without attempting to rally, which the poet thought reprehensible in martial conflicts:

"Ignavum scelus est tantum fuga;"

and elsewhere –

"In vitium culpae ducit fuga, si caret arte."

The character given to the Teutones in the Roman History, may be applied to this people. "In their first attack they are more than men, in the second, less than women." Their courage manifests itself chiefly in the retreat, when they frequently return, and, like the Parthians, shoot their arrows behind them; and, as after success and victory in battle, even cowards boast of their courage, so, after a reverse of fortune, even the bravest men are not allowed their due claims of merit. Their mode of fighting consists in chasing the enemy or in retreating. This light-armed people, relying more on their activity than on their strength, cannot struggle for the field of battle, enter into close engagement, or endure long and severe actions, such as the poet describes:

"Jam clypeo clypeus, umbone repellitur umbo,  
Ense minax ensis, pede pes, et cuspide cuspis."

Though defeated and put to flight on one day, they are ready to resume the combat on the next, neither dejected by their loss, nor by their dishonour; and although, perhaps, they do not display great fortitude in open engagements and regular conflicts, yet they harass the enemy by ambuscades and nightly sallies. Hence, neither oppressed by hunger or cold, nor fatigued by martial labours, nor despondent in adversity, but ready, after a defeat, to return immediately to action, and again endure the dangers of war; they are as easy to overcome in a single battle, as difficult to subdue in a protracted war. The poet Claudian thus speaks of a people similar in disposition:–

"Dum percunt, meminere mali: si corda parumper Respirare sinas, nullo tot funera censu Praetercunt, tantique levis jactura cruoris."

## CHAPTER IV

Their ambitious seizure of lands, and dissensions among brothers

This nation is, above all others, addicted to the digging up of boundary ditches, removing the limits, transgressing landmarks, and extending their territory by every possible means. So great is their disposition towards this common violence, that they scruple not to claim as their hereditary right, those lands which are held under lease, or at will, on condition of planting, or by any other title, even although indemnity had been publicly secured on oath to the tenant by the lord proprietor of the soil. Hence arise suits and contentions, murders and conflagrations, and frequent fratricides, increased, perhaps, by the ancient national custom of brothers dividing their property amongst each other. Another heavy grievance also prevails; the princes entrust the education of their children to the care of the principal men of their country, each of whom, after the death of his father, endeavours, by every possible means, to exalt his own charge above his neighbours. From which cause great disturbances have frequently arisen amongst brothers, and terminated in the most cruel and unjust murders; and on which account friendships are found to be more sincere between foster- brothers, than between those who are connected by the natural ties of brotherhood. It is also remarkable, that brothers shew more affection to one another when dead, than when living; for they persecute the living even unto death, but revenge the deceased with all their power.

## CHAPTER V

Their great exaction, and want of moderation

Where they find plenty, and can exercise their power, they levy the most unjust exactions. Immoderate in their love of food and intoxicating drink, they say with the Apostle, "We are instructed both to abound, and to suffer need;" but do not add with him, "becoming all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." As in times of scarcity their abstinence and parsimony are too severe, so, when seated at another man's table, after a long fasting, (like wolves and eagles, who, like them, live by plunder, and are rarely satisfied,) their appetite is immoderate. They are therefore penurious in times of scarcity, and extravagant in times of plenty; but no man, as in England, mortgages his property for the gluttonous gratification of his own appetite. They wish, however, that all people would join with them in their bad habits and expenses; as the commission of crimes reduces to a level all those who are concerned in the perpetration of them.

## CHAPTER VI

Concerning the crime of incest, and the abuse of churches by succession and participation

The crime of incest hath so much prevailed, not only among the higher, but among the lower orders of this people, that, not having the fear of God before their eyes, they are not ashamed of intermarrying with their relations, even in the third degree of consanguinity. They generally abuse these dispensations with a view of appeasing those enmities which so often subsist between them, because "their feet are swift to shed blood;" and from their love of high descent, which they so ardently affect and covet, they unite themselves to their own people, refusing to intermarry with strangers, and arrogantly presuming on their own superiority of blood and family. They do not engage in marriage, until they have tried, by previous cohabitation, the disposition, and particularly the fecundity, of the person with whom they are engaged. An ancient custom also prevails of hiring girls from their parents at a certain price, and a stipulated penalty, in case of relinquishing their connection.

Their churches have almost as many parsons and sharers as there are principal men in the parish. The sons, after the decease of their fathers, succeed to the ecclesiastical benefices, not by election, but by hereditary right possessing and polluting the sanctuary of God. And if a prelate should by chance presume to appoint or institute any other person, the people would certainly revenge the injury upon the institutor and the instituted. With respect to these two excesses of incest and succession, which took root formerly in Armorica, and are not yet eradicated, Ildebert, bishop of Le Mans, in one of his epistles, says, "that he was present with a British priest at a council summoned with a view of putting an end to the enormities of this nation:" hence it appears that these vices have for a long time prevailed both in Britany and Britain. The words of the Psalmist may not inaptly be applied to them; "They are corrupt and become abominable in their doings, there is none that doeth good, no, not one: they are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become abominable," etc.

## CHAPTER VII

Of their sins, and the consequent loss of Britain and of Troy

Moreover, through their sins, and particularly that detestable and wicked vice of Sodom, as well as by divine vengeance, they lost Britain as they formerly lost Troy. For we read in the Roman history, that the emperor Constantine having resigned the city and the Western empire to the blessed Sylvester and his successors, with an intention of rebuilding Troy, and there establishing the chief seat of the Eastern Empire, heard a voice, saying, "Dost thou go to rebuild Sodom?" upon which, he altered his intention, turned his ships and standards towards Byzantium, and there fixing his seat of empire, gave his own propitious name to the city. The British history informs us, that Mailgon, king of the Britons, and many others, were addicted to this vice; that enormity,

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however, had entirely ceased for so long a time, that the recollection of it was nearly worn out. But since that, as if the time of repentance was almost expired, and because the nation, by its warlike successes and acquisition of territory, has in our times unusually increased in population and strength, they boast in their turn, and most confidently and unanimously affirm, that in a short time their countrymen shall return to the island, and, according to the prophecies of Merlin, the nation, and even the name, of foreigners, shall be extinguished in the island, and the Britons shall exult again in their ancient name and privileges. But to me it appears far otherwise; for since

"Luxuriant animi rebus plerumque secundis, Nec facile est aequa commoda mente pati;"

And because

"Non habet unde suum paupertas pascat amorem, . . . Divitiis alitur luxuriosus amor."

So that their abstinence from that vice, which in their prosperity they could not resist, may be attributed more justly to their poverty and state of exile than to their sense of virtue. For they cannot be said to have repented, when we see them involved in such an abyss of vices, perjury, theft, robbery, rapine, murders, fratricides, adultery, and incest, and become every day more entangled and ensnared in evil-doing; so that the words of the prophet Hosea may be truly applied to them, "There is no truth, nor mercy," etc.

Other matters of which they boast are more properly to be attributed to the diligence and activity of the Norman kings than to their own merits or power. For previous to the coming of the Normans, when the English kings contented themselves with the sovereignty of Britain alone, and employed their whole military force in the subjugation of this people, they almost wholly extirpated them; as did king Offa, who by a long and extensive dyke separated the British from the English; Ethelfrid also, who demolished the noble city of Legions, (27) and put to death the monks of the celebrated monastery at Banchor, who had been called in to promote the success of the Britons by their prayers; and lastly Harold, who himself on foot, with an army of light-armed infantry, and conforming to the customary diet of the country, so bravely penetrated through every part of Wales, that he scarcely left a man alive in it; and as a memorial of his signal victories many stones may be found in Wales bearing this inscription:— "HIC VICTOR FUIT HAROLDUS" — "HERE HAROLD CONQUERED." (28)

To these bloody and recent victories of the English may be attributed the peaceable state of Wales during the reigns of the three first Norman kings; when the nation increased in population, and being taught the use of arms and the management of horses by the English and Normans (with whom they had much intercourse, by following the court, or by being sent as hostages), took advantage of the necessary attention which the three succeeding kings were obliged to pay to their foreign possessions, and once more lifting up their crests, recovered their lands, and spurned the yoke that had formerly been imposed upon them.

## CHAPTER VIII

In what manner this nation is to be overcome

The prince who would wish to subdue this nation, and govern it peaceably, must use this method. He must be determined to apply a diligent and constant attention to this purpose for one year at least; for a people who with a collected force will not openly attack the enemy in the field, nor wait to be besieged in castles, is not to be overcome at the first onset, but to be worn out by prudent delay and patience. Let him divide their strength, and by bribes and promises endeavour to stir up one against the other, knowing the spirit of hatred and envy which generally prevails amongst them; and in the autumn let not only the marches, but also the interior part of the country be strongly fortified with castles, provisions, and confidential families. In the meantime the purchase of corn, cloth, and salt, with which they are usually supplied from England, should be strictly interdicted; and well—

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manned ships placed as a guard on the coast, to prevent their importation of these articles from Ireland or the Severn sea, and to facilitate the supply of his own army. Afterwards, when the severity of winter approaches, when the trees are void of leaves, and the mountains no longer afford pasturage – when they are deprived of any hopes of plunder, and harassed on every side by the repeated attacks of the enemy – let a body of light-armed infantry penetrate into their woody and mountainous retreats, and let these troops be supported and relieved by others; and thus by frequent changes, and replacing the men who are either fatigued or slain in battle, this nation may be ultimately subdued; nor can it be overcome without the above precautions, nor without great danger and loss of men. Though many of the English hired troops may perish in a day of battle, money will procure as many or more on the morrow for the same service; but to the Welsh, who have neither foreign nor stipendiary troops, the loss is for the time irreparable. In these matters, therefore, as an artificer is to be trusted in his trade, so attention is to be paid to the counsel of those who, having been long conversant in similar concerns, are become acquainted with the manners and customs of their country, and whom it greatly interests, that an enemy, for whom during long and frequent conflicts they have contracted an implacable hatred, should by their assistance be either weakened or destroyed. Happy should I have termed the borders of Wales inhabited by the English, if their kings, in the government of these parts, and in their military operations against the enemy, had rather employed the marchers and barons of the country, than adopted the counsels and policy of the people of Anjou and the Normans. In this, as well as in every other military expedition, either in Ireland or in Wales, the natives of the marches, from the constant state of warfare in which they are engaged, and whose manners are formed from the habits of war, are bold and active, skilful on horseback, quick on foot, not nice as to their diet, and ever prepared when necessity requires to abstain both from corn and wine. By such men were the first hostile attacks made upon Wales as well as Ireland, and by such men alone can their final conquest be accomplished. For the Flemings, Normans, Coterells, and Bragmans, are good and well-disciplined soldiers in their own country; but the Gallic soldiery is known to differ much from the Welsh and Irish. In their country the battle is on level, here on rough ground; there in an open field, here in forests; there they consider their armour as an honour, here as a burden; there soldiers are taken prisoners, here they are beheaded; there they are ransomed, here they are put to death. Where, therefore, the armies engage in a flat country, a heavy and complex armour, made of cloth and iron, both protects and decorates the soldier; but when the engagement is in narrow defiles, in woods or marshes, where the infantry have the advantage over the cavalry, a light armour is preferable. For light arms afford sufficient protection against unarmed men, by whom victory is either lost or won at the first onset; where it is necessary that an active and retreating enemy should be overcome by a certain proportional quantity of moderate armour; whereas with a more complex sort, and with high and curved saddles, it is difficult to dismount, more so to mount, and with the greatest difficulty can such troops march, if required, with the infantry. In order, therefore, that

"Singula quaeque locum teneant sortita decenter,"

we maintain it is necessary to employ heavy-armed and strong troops against men heavily armed, depending entirely upon their natural strength, and accustomed to fight in an open plain; but against light-armed and active troops, who prefer rough ground, men accustomed to such conflicts, and armed in a similar manner, must be employed. But let the cities and fortresses on the Severn, and the whole territory on its western banks towards Wales, occupied by the English, as well as the provinces of Shropshire and Cheshire, which are protected by powerful armies, or by any other special privileges and honourable independence, rejoice in the provident bounty of their prince. There should be a yearly examination of the warlike stores, of the arms, and horses, by good and discreet men deputed for that purpose, and who, not intent on its plunder and ruin, interest themselves in the defence and protection of their country. By these salutary measures, the soldiers, citizens, and the whole mass of the people, being instructed and accustomed to the use of arms, liberty may be opposed by liberty, and pride be checked by pride. For the Welsh, who are neither worn out by laborious burdens, nor molested by the exactions of their lords, are ever prompt to avenge an injury. Hence arise their distinguished bravery in the defence of their country; hence their readiness to take up arms and to rebel. Nothing so much excites, encourages, and invites the hearts of men to probity as the cheerfulness of liberty; nothing so much dejects and dispirits them as the oppression of servitude. This portion of the kingdom, protected by arms and courage, might be of great use to the

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prince, not only in these or the adjacent parts, but, if necessity required, in more remote regions; and although the public treasury might receive a smaller annual revenue from these provinces, yet the deficiency would be abundantly compensated by the peace of the kingdom and the honour of its sovereign; especially as the heavy and dangerous expenses of one military expedition into Wales usually amount to the whole income among from the revenues of the province.

### CHAPTER IX

In what manner Wales, when conquered, should be governed

As therefore this nation is to be subdued by resolution in the manner proposed, so when subdued, its government must be directed by moderation, according to the following plan. Let the care of it be committed to a man of a firm and determined mind; who during the time of peace, by paying due obedience to the laws, and respect to the government, may render it firm and stable. For like other nations in a barbarous state, this people, although they are strangers to the principles of honour, yet above all things desire to be honoured; and approve and respect in others that truth which they themselves do not profess. Whenever the natural inconstancy of their indisposition shall induce them to revolt, let punishment instantly follow the offence; but when they shall have submitted themselves again to order, and made proper amends for their faults (as it is the custom of bad men to remember wrath after quarrels), let their former transgression be overlooked, and let them enjoy security and respect, as long as they continue faithful. Thus, by mild treatment they will be invited to obedience and the love of peace, and the thought of certain punishment will deter them from rash attempts. We have often observed persons who, confounding these matters, by complaining of faults, depressing for services, flattering in war, plundering in peace, despoiling the weak, paying respect to revolters, by thus rendering all things confused, have at length been confounded themselves. Besides, as circumstances which are foreseen do less mischief, and as that state is happy which thinks of war in the time of peace, let the wise man be upon his guard, and prepared against the approaching inconveniences of war, by the construction of forts, the widening of passes through woods, and the providing of a trusty household. For those who are cherished and sustained during the time of peace, are more ready to come forward in times of danger, and are more confidently to be depended upon; and as a nation unsubdued ever meditates plots under the disguise of friendship, let not the prince or his governor entrust the protection of his camp or capital to their fidelity. By the examples of many remarkable men, some of whom have been cruelly put to death, and others deprived of their castles and dignities, through their own neglect and want of care, we may see, that the artifices of a crafty and subdued nation are much more to be dreaded than their open warfare; their good-will than their anger, their honey than their gall, their malice than their attack, their treachery than their aggression, and their pretended friendship more than their open enmity. A prudent and provident man therefore should contemplate in the misfortune of others what he ought himself to avoid; correction taught by example is harmless, as Ennodius (29) says: "The ruin of predecessors instructs those who succeed; and a former miscarriage becomes a future caution." If a well-disposed prince should wish these great designs to be accomplished without the effusion of blood, the marches, as we before mentioned, must be put into a state of defence on all sides, and all intercourse by sea and land interdicted; some of the Welsh may be stirred up to deadly feuds, by means of stipends, and by transferring the property of one person to another; and thus worn out with hunger, and a want of the necessaries of life, and harassed by frequent murders and implacable enmities, they will at last be compelled to surrender.

There are three things which ruin this nation, and prevent its enjoying the satisfaction of a fruitful progeny. First, because both the natural and legitimate sons endeavour to divide the paternal inheritance amongst themselves; from which cause, as we have before observed, continual fratricides take place. Secondly, because the education of their sons is committed to the care of the high-born people of the country, who, on the death of their fathers, endeavour by all possible means to exalt their pupil; from whence arise murders, conflagrations, and almost a total destruction of the country. And, thirdly, because from the pride and obstinacy of their disposition, they will not (like other nations) subject themselves to the dominion of one lord and king.

## CHAPTER X

In what manner this nation may resist and revolt

Having hitherto so partially and elaborately spoken in favour of the English, and being equally connected by birth with each nation, justice demands that we should argue on both sides; let us therefore, at the close of our work, turn our attention towards the Welsh, and briefly, but effectually, instruct them in the art of resistance. If the Welsh were more commonly accustomed to the Gallic mode of arming, and depended more on steady fighting than on their agility; if their princes were unanimous and inseparable in their defence; or rather, if they had only one prince, and that a good one; this nation situated in so powerful, strong, and inaccessible a country, could hardly ever be completely overcome. If, therefore, they would be inseparable, they would become insuperable, being assisted by these three circumstances; a country well defended by nature, a people both contented and accustomed to live upon little, a community whose nobles as well as privates are instructed in the use of arms; and especially as the English fight for power, the Welsh for liberty; the one to procure gain, the other to avoid loss; the English hirelings for money, the Welsh patriots for their country. The English, I say, fight in order to expel the natural inhabitants from the island, and secure to themselves the possession of the whole; but the Welsh maintain the conflict, that they, who have so long enjoyed the sovereignty of the whole kingdom, may at least find a hiding place in the worst corner of it, amongst woods and marshes; and, banished, as it were, for their offences, may there in a state of poverty, for a limited time, perform penance for the excesses they committed in the days of their prosperity. For the perpetual remembrance of their former greatness, the recollection of their Trojan descent, and the high and continued majesty of the kingdom of Britain, may draw forth many a latent spark of animosity, and encourage the daring spirit of rebellion. Hence during the military expedition which king Henry II. made in our days against South Wales, an old Welshman at Pencadair, who had faithfully adhered to him, being desired to give his opinion about the royal army, and whether he thought that of the rebels would make resistance, and what would be the final event of this war, replied, "This nation, O king, may now, as in former times, be harassed, and in a great measure weakened and destroyed by your and other powers, and it will often prevail by its laudable exertions; but it can never be totally subdued through the wrath of man, unless the wrath of God shall concur. Nor do I think, that any other nation than this of Wales, or any other language, whatever may hereafter come to pass, shall, in the day of severe examination before the Supreme Judge, answer for this corner of the earth."