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## The Welsh and their Literature by George Borrow

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The Welsh style themselves Cymry or Cumry, a word which, in their language, means a number of people associated together. [20] They were the second mass of population which moved from Asia into Europe. They followed and pushed forward the Gael or Gauls; were themselves impelled onward by the Slowaks or Sclavonians, who were themselves hunted, goaded, and pestered by a wild, waspish race of people, whom, for want of a better name, we will call Tatars or Tartars. The Cymry have left their name behind them in various regions far eastward of the one where they now sojourn. The most easterly countries which still bear their name, or modifications thereof, are Cambia, 'which is two dayes journey from the head of the great river Bruapo,' and the Cryme or Crimea. In those parts, and 'where Constantinople now is,' they tarried a considerable time, and increased and multiplied marvellously: and it was whilst tarrying in those regions, which they called collectively Gwlad yr Haf, or the summer country, that an extraordinary man was born amongst them, who was called by Greeks and Romans, hundreds of years after his death, Hesus, but whom the Cymry called, and still do call, Hu or Hee, with the surname of Cadarn, or the Mighty. This Hu or Hesus taught his countrymen the use of the plough, and to a certain extent civilized them. Finding eventually that the summer country was becoming over-populated, he placed himself at the head of a vast multitude and set off towards the west. Hu and his people fought or negotiated their way through various countries possessed by the Gael, till they came to the shore of the sea which separates the great isle of the west from the continent. Hearing that it was only thinly peopled they determined to pass over to it; and put their determination into execution, crossing 'the hazy sea,' at present termed the German Ocean, in boats made of wicker work and skins, similar to but larger than the coracles which the Cymry always carried with them in their long expeditions.

This great island was called Alban, Albyn, or Albion. Alban is a Gaelic or Gaulic word, signifying properly a hill-region. It is to be found under various modifications in different parts of the world, but only where the Gaulic race have at some time sojourned. The word Afghan is merely a

modification of Alban, or Alpan; so is Armenia; so is Alp; so is of course Albania. The term was given to the island simply because the cliffs which fronted the continent, where the sea between the two lands was narrowest, were very high and towering. The island at the time of the arrival of the Cymry had, as has already been intimated, a scanty population. This population consisted of Gael or Gauls, a people of cognate race to the Cymry, and speaking a language much the same as theirs, differing from it, however, in some respects. Hu and his people took possession of the best parts of the island, either driving the few Gaels to other districts or admitting them to their confederacy. As the country was in a very wild state, much overgrown with forests in which bears and wolves wandered, and abounding with deep stagnant pools, which were the haunts of the avanc or crocodile, Hu forthwith set about clearing it of some of its horrors, and making it more fit to be the abiding place of civilized beings. He made his people cut down woods and forests, and destroy, as far as was possible, wild beasts and crocodiles. He himself went to a gloomy pool, the haunt of the king of the efync, baited a huge hook attached to a cable, filing it into the pool, and when the monster had gorged the snare drew him out by means of certain gigantic oxen, [21a] which he had tamed to the plough, and burnt his horrid, wet, scaly carcass on a fire. He then caused enclosures to be made, fields to be ploughed and sown, pleasant wooden houses to be built, bees to be sheltered and encouraged, and schools to be erected where song and music were taught. O, a truly great man was Hu Gadarn! though a warrior, he preferred the sickle and pruning-hook to the sword, and the sound of the song and lute to the hoarse blast of the buffalo's horn:—

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The mighty Hu with mead would pay  
The bard for his melodious lay;  
The Emperor of land and sea  
And of all livings things was he. [21b]

For many years after the death of Hu the Cymry retrograded instead of advancing in civilization; they ceased to be a united people; plunder and devastation were of daily occurrence among them; every one did as he pleased, as far as in his power lay; there was no law, but the law of the strongest; and no justice, save that which was obtained from clemency and courtesy. At length one Prydain arose, who, either from ambition or a nobler motive, determined to introduce a system of government amongst them. By strength of arm and character he induced the Cymry of the lower country to acknowledge him for their head, and to obey certain laws which he enacted for the regulation of conduct. But neither his sovereignty nor his laws were regarded by the Cymry of the hilly regions. Prydain was the first king amongst the Cymry; and from his time the island was called Britain, which is a modification of his name, and the inhabitants Britons. The independent Cymry, however, disdained to call themselves or their districts after him, but still styled themselves Cymry, and their districts Cumrie-land and Cumberland; whilst the Gael of the North, who never submitted to his sway, and who knew little about him, still called themselves Gael, and their country Caledon and Alban.

Various kings succeeded Prydain, during whose reigns the Britons continued in much the same state as that in which he had left them; on the coming of one Dyfnwal Moelmud, however, to the throne, a mighty improvement was effected in their condition. This prince was the great lawgiver of the Britons, and the greatest benefactor which the race had known since the days of Hu Gadarn. Tradition differs as to his exact origin, but there is ground for believing that he was the chief of a Cornish tribe, and that he was elected to the throne on account of his wisdom and virtue. He gave a regular system of laws and a constitution to the kingdom, and appointed magistrates in every place, whose duty it was to administer justice without respect of persons in all disputes, and whenever the law had been violated. This great and good man is believed to have lived about 400 years before the Christian era.

After the Cymric or British race had been established in the island about 1300 years, they were invaded by the Romans, under Julius Cæsar. The king, who at that time ruled in Britain, was called Caswallon; he was a great warrior and much beloved by his subjects. In him and his Britons the Romans found their match and more, for after a month's hard fighting and skirmishing, they were compelled to betake themselves to Gaul, the country from which they had come.

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Mighty was the triumph in Britain, says an old chronicler, on the retreat of the redoubted foe; and Caswallon gave a grand festival at Caer Lud, or London, which was reckoned in after times one of the three grand festivals of Britain. A grand festival indeed it must have been, if, as an ancient bard says,

'Full twenty thousand beeves and deer  
Were slain to find the guests with cheer.'

Britain was not subdued by the Romans till the time of Claudius Cæsar. When conquered it was still permitted to possess a king of its own, on condition that he should acknowledge the authority of Rome, and pay tribute to her. The first king in the world to confess the faith of Christ was a British king, tributary to Rome. This king, whose name was Lles ap Coel, made his confession as early as the year 160. The Christian faith is supposed by some to have been first preached in Britain by Joseph of Arimathea; by others, by St. Paul himself. After remaining several centuries under the sway of Rome, the Britons again became independent, the Roman legions being withdrawn from the island for the defence of their own country, threatened by barbarian hordes. They did not, however, enjoy their independence long; a ferocious race, of mysterious origin, whom they called Gwyddelian Fichti, invaded them, and filled their country with horror and

devastation. Unable to offer any effectual opposition to these invaders, they called to their assistance, from the neighbourhood of the mouth of the Elbe, the Saxons or *men of the knives*, a bold and adventurous, but treacherous and bloody people, who at first fought stoutly for them, but soon turned against them, and eventually all but extirpated them from Southern Britain:—

‘A serpent that coils,  
And with fury boils,  
From Germany coming with arm’d wings spread,  
Shall subdue and enthrall  
The broad Britain all  
From the Lochlin ocean to Severn’s bed;  
  
And British men  
Shall be captives then  
To strangers from Saxonia’s strand;  
They shall praise their God, and hold  
Their language, as of old,  
But except wild Wales they shall lose their land.’ [22]

*Taliesin.*

Yes; the Cymric or British race were dispossessed of Britain with the exception of that part which they still emphatically call Cumrie, but which by other people is called Wales. There they remained independent for a long time, governed by their own princes; and there, though now under the sway of England, they still preserve their venerable language, the oldest in the world, with perhaps the exception of the Gaulic or Irish, with which it is closely connected. Wales is not a Cymric but a Saxon or Teutonic word, bestowed on the land of the Cymry by the seed of Hengist. Like the Gaelic word Alban, it means a hilly or mountainous region, and is connected with wall, wold, and wood. The Germans, from very early times, have called the Cymry Welsh or Waldenses, and the country where they happened to be, Welschland. They still apply to Italy the name of Welschland, a name bestowed upon it by their ancestors, because it was originally principally peopled by the Cymry, whom the Germans called Welsh from the circumstance of their inhabiting some mountainous or forest country in the far East, when they first came in contact with them.

We now proceed to give some account of the literature of the Cymry. We commence with their poetry, and from a very early period, quoting from a Cymric Triad:—‘These are the three artificers of poetry and record amongst the nation of the Cymry: Gwyddon Ganhebon, who first in the world invented vocal song; and Hu the Mighty, who first invented the means of recording and preserving vocal song; and Tydan, the father of the muse, who first gave rules to vocal song and a system to recording. From what these three men effected Bards and Bardism were derived; the dignities and customs pertaining to which were arranged systematically by the three original bards, Plenydd, Alon, and Gwbon.’ Three ranks or orders constituted what was called barddas, or bardism; that of bard or poet, that of ovydd or philosopher, and that of druid or instructor. The motto of this institution was—‘Y Gwir yn erbyn y byd,’ or The Truth against the world; from which it would appear that bardism was instituted for the purpose of propagating truth. Bardism, or as it is generally though improperly styled, druidism, was the fount of instruction, moral and religious, in Britain and in Gaul. The vehicle by which instruction, or, as it was probably termed, truth, was propagated, was poetry. The bard wrought the philosophy of the ovydd into song, and the druid or instructor, who was also minister of such religion as the Celts and Cymry possessed, whatever that was, communicated to his pupils the result of the labours of the bard and ovydd. The Druidical verses then probably constituted the most ancient poetry of Britain. These verses were communicated orally, and were never written down whilst bardism or druidism lasted, though the bards and druids at a very early period were acquainted with the use of letters. Whether any genuine bardic poetry has been preserved, it is impossible to say; it is the opinion, however, of Cymric scholars of reputation, that certain ancient strains which the Welsh possess, which are composed in a measure called Englyn milwr, are either druidical strains or imitations of such. Each of these compositions is in three lines; the entire pith however of the triplet, generally consisting of a moral adage or a piece of wholesome advice, lies in the third line, the two first being composed of trivial and unconnected expressions. Many of these stanzas are called the stanzas of ‘The Mountain Snow,’ from the circumstance of their commencing with ‘Eiry Mynydd,’ which has that signification. The three lines rhyme together at their terminations; and a species of alliteration is observable throughout. A word or two here on Cymric rhyme and measures.

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In Welsh poetry rhyme is found in a twofold shape: there is alliteration, that is rhyme produced by the same letters following each other at certain distances in the body of the line, then there is the common rhyme, produced by two or more lines terminating with the same letters. In the older Welsh poetry, by which we mean that composed before the termination of the first millennium, both rhyme and alliteration are employed, but in a less remarkable manner than in the bardic effusions of comparatively modern times. The extent to which the bards of the middle ages, and those of one or two subsequent centuries, carried rhyme and alliteration seems marvellous to the English versifier. We English think we have accomplished a great feat in rhyme when we have made three lines consonant in their terminations; but Dafydd Benfras, or David of the Thick Head, would make fifty lines rhyme together, and not think that he had accomplished anything remarkable in rhyming either. Our English alliterative triumph is the following line, composed by a young lady in the year 1800, on the occasion of a gentleman of the

name of Lee planting a lane with lilacs:—

‘Let lovely lilacs line Lee’s lonely lane!’

in which not only every word, but every syllable commences with the same letter—*l*.

But what is this English alliterative triumph of the young lady compared with the Welsh alliterative triumph of Dafydd Nanmawr, who wrote a poem of twelve lines, every syllable of which commences with the letter *g*, with the exception of the last, which begins with *n*?

The earliest Cymric or British metre seems to have been a tribran or triplet, in each line of which there were in general six syllables. The bards of the sixth, seventh, and several succeeding centuries used this metre, and likewise others, invented by themselves, in which the lines are of various length. There was no regular system of prosody till the year 1120, when one was established under the auspices of Gruffydd ap Cynan, prince of Gwynedd. This Ap Cynan, who, though of Welsh origin, was born in Dublin, and educated at the Danish Irish court, was passionately fond of poetry, and was not only well acquainted with that of the British bards, but with the strains of the Icelandic skalds and Irish fileas. Shortly after his accession to the throne of Gwynedd, of which he was the rightful heir, he proclaimed an eisteddfod, or poetical sessions. At this eisteddfod, which was numerously attended by poets of various nations, a system of prosody was drawn up by competent persons, at his instigation, for the use of the Welsh, and established by his authority. This system, in which Cymric, Icelandic, and Irish forms of verse are blended and amalgamated, has with a few unimportant variations maintained its ground to the present time. It contains three primary measures, termed respectively, englyn, cywydd, and awdl. Of the englyn, there are five kinds; of the cywydd, four; and of the awdl, fifteen. Each particular species of englyn, cywydd, and awdl has its appropriate name, which it is needless to give here. These three primary metres, with their modifications, make together twenty-four measures, which embrace the whole system of Welsh versification, in which, as somebody has observed, each line, word, and letter, are so harmonized by consonancy, chained so accurately, woven so closely and correctly, that it is impossible to extract one word or even letter without causing a hideous gap. Whoever has ventured to compose out of these measures, since the time of their establishment, has been considered by the Welsh scholar as unworthy of the name of poet.

The earliest recorded poet of the Cymry, after the days of Gwyddon Ganhebon and the other personages mentioned with him in the triad, is Merddin, Beirdd Emrys Wledig, or Merddin, Bard of Prince Emrys. He flourished about the middle of the fifth century, the period when the Saxons arrived in Britain, under the command of Hengist and Horsa. Besides poetry he was skilled in mathematics, and is said by the Welsh to have been the architect of Stonehenge. He has been surnamed Ambrosius, which is the Latin modification of the name of his patron Emrys. He is the Merddin, or Merlin, who has had to father so many of the prophecies which since his death have been produced. None of his poems are extant.

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During the period which elapsed between the first coming of the Saxons, and the expulsion of the British from the Southern and Eastern parts of the island, lived Aneurin, Taliesin, Llewarch Hen, and Merddin, surnamed Wylt or the Wild, all celebrated poets, the latter of whom has generally been confounded with Merddin Ambrosius. Aneurin was a chief of the Ottadinian Britons, and his principal poem is the one styled Gododin, a word which probably means that which relates to the Ottadini. It is descriptive of the battle of Cattraeth, fought between the Britons and the Saxons, in which the former were so completely worsted that only three, amongst whom was Aneurin himself, escaped with their lives. The poem is composed in lines remarkably short, consisting in general of only six syllables. Aneurin was the Gildas of ecclesiastical history, and the name of Gildas is merely a Saxon translation of Aneurin, which signifies golden grove. Taliesin Ben Beirdd, or Taliesin Prince of Bards, was a North Welshman, but was educated at Llanreithin, in Glamorgan, under Catwg, celebrated for his aphorisms, who kept a school of philosophy there. He was called Prince of Bards because he excelled all his contemporaries in the poetic art. Many of his pieces are extant; amongst them is an awdl or ode, containing an abridgment of the history of the world, in which there is a stanza with regard to the destiny of the ancient Britons as sublime as it is true:—

‘Their Lord they shall praise,  
Their language they shall keep,  
Their land they shall lose  
Except wild Wales.’

Llewarch Hen, or Llewarch the aged, was a prince of Cumberland. Driven from his domain by the Saxons, he sought a refuge at the place which is now called Shrewsbury, and subsequently on the shore of the lake of Bala, a beautiful sheet of water in Merionethshire, overlooked on the south by the great mountain Arran. There he died at the age of one hundred and fifty years. His poems consist chiefly of elegies on his sons, twenty-four in number, all of whom perished in battle, and on his slaughtered friends. They are composed in triplets, and abound with simplicity and pathos. Myrddin Wylt, or Myrddin the Wild, was a Briton of the Scottish border. Having killed the son of his sister, he was so stung with remorse that he determined to renounce the society of men, and accordingly retired to a forest in Scotland, called Celydon, where he was frequently seized with howling madness. Owing to his sylvan life and his attacks of lunacy, he was called Merddyn Wylt, or the Wild. He composed poetry in his lucid intervals. Six of his pieces have been preserved: they are chiefly on historical subjects. The most remarkable of them is an address to his pig, in which he tells the woes and disasters which are to happen to Britain: it

consists of twenty-five stanzas or sections. In all of them a kind of alliteration is observable, and in each, with one or two exceptions, the first line rhymes with all the rest. Each commences with 'Oian a phorchellan'—listen, little porker! The commencement of one of these stanzas might be used in these lowering days by many a grey-headed yeoman to his best friend:—

'Oian a phorchellan: mawr eryssi  
A fydd ym Mhrydan, ac nim dorbi.

Listen, little porker! mighty wonders  
Shall occur in Britain, which shall not con me.'

Many and great poets flourished in the times of the Welsh princes: the three greatest were Meilyr, Gwalchmai, and Dafydd Benfras. Meilyr was bard of Gruffudd ap Cynan, prince of Gwynedd or North Wales, who died in 1137. He sang the praises of his master, who was a celebrated warrior and a bountiful patron of the muse, in whose time and under whose sanction those forms of composition, generally called the twenty four measures, were invented and promulgated. Gwalchmai lived in the time of Owain, prince of Gwynedd, about whom he sang a piece which is to a certain extent known to the English public by a paraphrase made by Gray, which bears the title of 'The Triumphs of Owain.' Dafydd Benfras was domestic bard of Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, also prince of Gwynedd and titular king of Wales, who flourished during the first half of the thirteenth century. In one of his odes addressed to his patron, there is an animated description of a battle won by Llywelyn over King John:

'Llywelyn of the potent hand oft wrought  
Trouble upon the kings and consternation;  
When he with the Lloegrain monarch fought,  
Whose cry was "Devastation!"  
Forward impetuously his squadrons ran;  
Great was the tumult ere the shoot began;  
Proud was the hero of his reeking glaive,  
Proud of their numbers were his followers brave. [25a]  
O then were heard resounding o'er the fields  
The clash of faulchions and the crash of shields!  
Many the wounds in yonder fight receiv'd!  
Many the warriors of their lives bereaved!  
The battle rages till our foes recoil  
Behind the Dike which Offa built with toil.  
Bloody their foreheads, gash'd with many a blow,  
Blood streaming down their quaking knees below.  
Llywelyn we as our high chief obey,  
To fair Porth Ysgewin extends his sway;  
For regal virtues and for princely line  
He towers above imperial Constantine.'

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Dafydd ab Gwilym was born at Bro Gynan, in Cardiganshire, in 1293, about forty years after the whole of Wales had been subjected to the sway of England. He was the Ovid of Wales, the poet of love and nature. In his early years he was very dissipated, but towards the latter part of his life became religious. He died at the age of sixty-three, and was buried within the precincts of the great monastery of Strata Florida. [25b] Such was the power of his genius, that the generality of the poets who succeeded him for the next four hundred years were more or less his imitators. Iolo Goch, or Red Julius, whose real name was Llwyd, was the bard of Owen Glendower, and, amongst other pieces, composed a graphic ode on his patron's mansion at Sycharth, and the manner of life there:—

'Its likeness now I'll limn you out:  
'Tis water-girdled wide about;  
It shows a wide and stately door,  
Reach'd by a bridge the water o'er;  
'Tis formed of buildings coupled fair—  
Coupled is every couple there;  
Within a quadrate structure tall  
Muster the merry pleasures all;  
Conjointly are the angles bound,  
No flaw in all the place is found.  
Structures in contact meet the eye  
Upon the hillock's top on high;  
Into each other fasten'd they  
The form of a hard knot display.  
There dwells the chief we all extol  
In timber house on lightsome knoll;  
Upon four wooden columns proud  
Mounteth his mansion to the cloud.  
Each column's thick and firmly bas'd,  
And upon each a loft is plac'd;  
In those four lofts, which coupled stand,  
Repose at night the minstrel band.

Four lofts they were in pristine state,  
But now partition'd form they eight.  
Tiled is the roof. On each house-top  
Rise smoke-ejecting chimneys up.  
All of one form there are nine halls,  
Each with nine wardrobes in its walls,  
With linen white as well supplied  
As fairest shops of fam'd Cheapside.

\* \* \* \* \*

What luxury doth this hall adorn,  
Showing of cost a sovereign scorn!  
His ale from Shrewsbury town he brings;  
His usquebaugh is drink for kings.  
Bragget he keeps, bread white of look,  
And, bless the mark, a bustling cook.  
His mansion is the minstrels' home,  
You'll find them there whene'er you come.  
Of all her sex his wife's the best,  
The household through her care is blest;  
She's scion of a knightly tree,  
She's dignified, she's kind and free.  
His bairns approach me, pair by pair,  
O what a nest of chieftains fair!  
Here difficult it is to catch  
A sight of either bolt or latch;  
The porter's place here none will fill;  
Here largess shall be lavish'd still,  
And ne'er shall thirst or hunger rude  
In Sycharth venture to intrude.'

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Iolo composed this ode two years before the great Welsh insurrection, when he was more than a hundred years old. To his own great grief he survived his patron, and all hopes of Welsh independence. An englyn, which he composed a few days before his death, commemorates the year of the rising of Glendower, and also the year to which the chieftain lived:—

'One thousand four hundred, no less and no more,  
Was the date of the rising of Owen Glendower;  
Till fifteen were added with courage ne'er cold  
Liv'd Owen, though latterly Owen was old.'

Glendower died at the age of sixty-seven: Iolo, when he called him old, was one hundred and eighteen.

Gwilym ap Ieuan Hen flourished about 1450. He was bard to Griffith ap Nicholas, chieftain of Dinefor, in whose praise he wrote an ode, commencing with lines to the following effect:—

'Griffith ap Nicholas! who like thee  
For wealth and power and majesty?  
Which most abound—I cannot say—  
On either side of Towey gay,  
From hence to where it meets the brine,  
Trees or stately towers of thine?'

Griffith ap Nicholas was a powerful chieftain of South Wales, something of a poet and a great patron of bards. Seeing with regret that there was much dissension amongst the bardic order, and that the rules of bardism were nearly forgotten, he held a bardic congress at Carmarthen, with the view of reviving bardic enthusiasm and re-establishing bardic discipline. The result of this meeting—the only one of the kind which had been held in Wales since the days of the Welsh princes—to a certain extent corresponded with his wish. In the wars of the Roses he sided with York, chiefly out of hatred to Jasper Earl of Pembroke, half-brother of Henry VI. He was mortally wounded at the battle of Mortimer's Cross, which was gained for Edward IV. by a desperate charge made by Griffith and his Welshmen at Pembroke's Banner, when the rest of the Yorkists were wavering. His last words were: 'Welcome death! since honour and victorie makes for us!'

Dafydd ab Edmund was born at Pwll Gweptra, in the parish of Hanmer, in Flintshire. He was the most skilful versifier of his time. He attended the Eisteddfod, or congress, at Carmarthen, held under the auspices of Griffith ap Nicholas, and not only carried off the prize, but induced the congress to sanction certain alterations in the poetical canons of Gruffudd ab Cynan, which he had very much at heart. There is a tradition that Griffith ap Nicholas commenced the business of the congress by the following question: 'What is the cause, nature, and end of an Eisteddfod?' No one appearing ready with an answer, Griffith said: 'Let the little man in the grey coat answer;' whereupon Dafydd made the following reply: 'To remember what has been—to think of what is—and to judge about what shall be.'

Lewis Glyn Cothi lived during the wars of the Roses. He was bard to Jasper Earl of Pembroke, son of Owen Tudor and Catharine of France, and brother uterine of Henry VI. He followed his



patron to the fatal battle of Mortimer's Cross as a captain of foot. His pieces are mostly on the events of his time, and are full of curious historical information.

Ieuan Deulwyn was bard and friend of Ryce ap Thomas, to whom he addressed a remarkable ode in stanzas of four lines on the principle of counter-change, by which any line in the quatrain may begin it. His friend and patron Ryce ap Thomas was the grandson of that Griffith ap Nicholas who perished at the battle of Mortimer's Cross, fighting against Lancaster. Ryce, however, when Richmond, the last hope of Lancaster, landed at Milford Haven, joined him at the head of 'all the Ryces,' and was the main cause of his eventually winning the crown. He was loaded with riches and honours by Henry VII., and was an especial favourite with Henry VIII., who used to call him Father Preecc, my trusty Welshman. He was a great warrior, a consummate courtier, and a very wise man; for whatever harm he might do to people, he never spoke ill of anybody. His tomb, bearing the sculptured figures of himself and wife, may be seen in the church of St. Peter, at Carmarthen.

Sion Tudor was born about the middle of the sixteenth century. He had much wit and humour, but was very satirical. He wrote a bitter epigram on London, in which city, by the bye, he had been most unmercifully fleeced. William Middleton was one of the sea captains of Queen Elizabeth; he translated the Psalms into several of the four-and-twenty measures whilst commanding a ship of war in the West Indian seas. Twm Sion Cati lived in the days of James I.: he was a sweet poet, but—start not, gentle reader! a ferocious robber. His cave amidst the wild hills between Tregaron and Brecknock is still pointed out by the neighbouring rustics. In the middle of the seventeenth century was produced a singular little piece, author unknown: it is an englyn or epigram of four lines on a spider, all in vowels:—

'O'i wiw wy i weu e â,—o'i au,  
O'i wyau y weua;  
E wywa ei we' aua,'  
A'i weuai yw ieuau ia.'

A proest, or kind of counterchange, was eventually added to it by one Gronwy Owen, so that the Welsh now can say, what perhaps no other nation can, that they have a poem of eight lines in their language, in which there is not a single consonant. It is however necessary to state, that in the Welsh language there are seven vowels, both w and y being considered and sounded as such. The two parts may be thus rendered into English:

'From out its womb it weaves with care  
Its web beneath the roof;  
Its wintry web it spreadeth there—  
Wires of ice its woof.

And doth it weave against the wall  
Thin ropes of ice on high?  
And must its little liver all  
The wondrous stuff supply?'

Huw Morris was born in the year 1622, and died in 1709, having lived in six reigns. The place of his birth was Pont y Meibion, in the valley of Ceiriog, in Denbighshire. He was a writer of songs, carols, and elegies, and was generally termed Eos Ceiriog, or the Nightingale of Ceiriog, a title which he occasionally well deserved, for some of his pieces, especially his elegies, are of great beauty and sweetness. Not unfrequently, however, the title of Dylluan Ceiriog, or the Owl of Ceiriog, would be far more applicable, for whenever he thought fit he could screech and hoot most fearfully. He was a loyalist, and some of his strains against the Roundheads are fraught with the bitterest satire. His dirge on Oliver and his men, composed shortly after Monk had declared for Charles II., is a piece quite unique in its way. He lies buried in the graveyard of the beautiful church of Llan Silien, in Denbighshire. The stone which covers his remains is yet to be seen just outside the southern wall, near the porch. The last great poet of Wales was a little swarthy curate;—but this child of immortality, for such he is, must not be disposed of in half a dozen lines. The following account of him is extracted from an unpublished work, called 'Wild Wales,' by the author of 'The Bible in Spain':—

'Goronwy, or Gronwy, Owen was born in the year 1722, at a place called Llanfair Mathafrn Eithaf, in Anglesea. He was the eldest of three children. His parents were peasants and so exceedingly poor that they were unable to send him to school. Even, however, when an unlettered child he gave indications that he was visited by the awen or muse. At length the celebrated Lewis Morris chancing to be at Llanfair, became acquainted with the boy, and, struck with its natural talents, determined that he should have all the benefit which education could bestow. He accordingly, at his own expense, sent him to school at Beaumaris, where he displayed a remarkable aptitude for the acquisition of learning. He subsequently sent him to Jesus College, Oxford, and supported him there whilst studying for the Church. At Jesus, Gronwy distinguished himself as a Greek and Latin scholar, and gave proofs of such poetical talent in his native language that he was looked upon by his countrymen of that Welsh college as the rising bard of the age. After completing his collegiate course, he returned to Wales, where he was ordained a minister of the Church in the year 1745. The next seven years of his life were a series of cruel disappointments and pecuniary embarrassments. The grand wish of his heart was to obtain a curacy, and to settle down in Wales. Certainly a

very reasonable wish, for, to say nothing of his being a great genius, he was eloquent, highly learned, modest, meek, and of irreproachable morals; yet Gronwy Owen could obtain no Welsh curacy, nor could his friend Lewis Morris, though he exerted himself to the utmost, procure one for him. It was true that he was told that he might go to Llanfair, his native place, and officiate there at a time when the curacy happened to be vacant, and thither he went, glad at heart to get back amongst his old friends, who enthusiastically welcomed him; yet scarcely had he been there three weeks when he received notice from the chaplain of the Bishop of Bangor that he must vacate Llanfair in order to make room for a Mr. John Ellis, a young clergyman of large independent fortune, who was wishing for a curacy under the Bishop of Bangor, Doctor Hutton. So poor Gronwy, the eloquent, the learned, the meek, was obliged to vacate the pulpit of his native place to make room for the rich young clergyman, who wished to be within dining distance of the palace of Bangor. Truly in this world the full shall be crammed, and those who have little shall have the little which they have taken away from them. Unable to obtain employment in Wales, Gronwy sought for it in England, and after some time procured the curacy of Oswestry, in Shropshire, where he married a respectable young woman, who eventually brought him two sons and a daughter. From Oswestry he went to Donnington, near Shrewsbury, where, under a certain Scotchman named Douglas, who was an absentee, and who died Bishop of Salisbury, he officiated as curate and master of a grammar school for a stipend—always grudgingly and contumeliously paid—of three-and-twenty pounds a year. From Donnington he removed to Walton in Cheshire, where he lost his daughter, who was carried off by a fever. His next removal was to Northolt, a pleasant village in the neighbourhood of London. He held none of his curacies long, either losing them from the caprice of his principals, or being compelled to resign them from the parsimony which they practised towards him. In the year 1756 he was living in a garret in London, vainly soliciting employment in his sacred calling, and undergoing with his family the greatest privations. At length his friend Lewis Morris, who had always assisted him to the utmost of his ability, procured him the mastership of a Government school at New Brunswick, in North America, with a salary of three hundred pounds a year. Thither he went with his wife and family, and there he died some time about the year 1780.

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‘He was the last of the great poets of Cambria, and with the exception of Ab Gwilym, the greatest which she has produced. His poems, which for a long time had circulated through Wales in manuscript, were first printed in the year 1819. They are composed in the ancient bardic measures, and were, with one exception, namely, an elegy on the death of his benefactor, Lewis Morris, which was transmitted from the New World, written before he had attained the age of thirty-five. All his pieces are excellent, but his master-work is decidedly the *Cywydd y Farn*, or Day of Judgment. This poem, which is generally considered by the Welsh as the brightest ornament of their ancient language, was composed at Donnington, a small hamlet in Shropshire, on the north-west spur of the Wrekin, at which place, as has been already said, Gronwy toiled as schoolmaster and curate under Douglas the Scot, for a stipend of three-and-twenty pounds a year.’ [28]

The prose literature of Wales is by no means so extensive as the poetical; it, however, comprises much that is valuable and curious on historical, biographical, romantic and moral subjects. The most ancient Welsh prose may probably be found in certain brief compositions, called Triads, which are said to be of Druidic origin. The Triad was used for the commemoration of historical facts or the inculcation of moral duties. It has its name because in it three events are commemorated, or three persons mentioned, if it be historical; three things or three actions recommended or denounced, if it be moral. To give the reader at once a tolerable conception of what the Triad is, we subjoin two or three specimens of this kind of composition. We commence with the historical Triad:—

‘These are the three pillars of the race of the isle of Britain: First, Hu the Mighty, who conducted the nation of the Cumry from the summer country to the island of Britain (bringing them from the continent) across the hazy sea (German Ocean). Second, Prydain, son of Aedd Mawr, the founder of government and rule in the isle of Britain, before whose time there was no such thing as justice except what was obtained by courtesy, nor any law save that of the strongest. Third, Dyfnwal Moelmud, who first reduced to a system the laws, customs, and privileges of his country and nation.

‘The three intruding tribes into the island of Britain are the following: First, the Corranians, who came from the country of Pwyl. Second, the Gwyddelian (silvan, Irish) Fichti (Picts), who came to Alban across the sea of Lochlin (Northern Ocean), and who still exist in Alban by the shore of the sea of Lochlin (from Inverness to Thursoe). Third, the Saxons . . . ’

So much for the historical Triad: now for the moral. The following are selected from a curious collection of admonitory sayings, called the ‘Triads of the Cumro, or Welshman:’—

‘Three things should a Cumro always bear in mind lest he dishonour them: his father, his country, and his name of Cumro.

‘There are three things for which a Cumro should be willing to die: his country, his



good name, and the truth wherever it be.

'Three things are highly disgraceful to a Cumro: to look with one eye, to listen with one ear, and to defend with one hand.

'Three things it especially behoves a Cumro to choose from his own country: his king, his wife, and his friend.'

After the Triads, the following are the principal prose works of the Welsh:—

1. 'The Chronicle of the Kings of the Isle of Britain;' supposed to have been written by Tysilio, in the seventh century. This work, or rather a Latin paraphrase of it by Geoffrey of Monmouth, has supplied our early English historians with materials for those parts of their works which are devoted to the subject of ancient Britain. It brings down British history to the year 660.

2. A continuation of the same to the year 1152, by Caradawg of Llancarvan. It begins thus: "In the year of Christ 660, died Cadwallawn ab Cadfan, King of the Britons, and Cadwaladr his son became king in his place; and, after ten years of peace, the great sickness, which is called the Yellow Plague, came over the whole isle of Britain."

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3. The 'Code of Howel Da;' a book consisting of laws, partly framed, partly compiled, by Howel Da, or the Good, who began to reign in the year 940. It is divided into three parts, and contains laws relating to the government of the palace and the family of the prince, laws concerning private property, and laws which relate to private rights and privileges. It is a code which displays much acuteness, good sense, and not a little oddity. Many of Howel's laws prevailed in Wales as far down as the time of Henry VII.

4. 'The Life or Biography of Gruffydd ap Cynan.' This Gruffydd, of whom we have had more than once occasion to speak already, was born in Dublin about the year 1075. He was the son of Cynan, an expatriated prince of Gwynedd, by Raguel, daughter of Anlaf or Olafr, Dano-Irish king of Dublin and the fifth part of Ireland. After a series of the strangest adventures he succeeded in regaining his father's throne, on which he died after a glorious reign of fifty years. He was the father of Owen Gwynedd, one of the most warlike of the Welsh princes, and was grandsire of that Madoc who, there is considerable reason for supposing, was the first discoverer of the great land in the West. A truly remarkable book is the one above mentioned, which narrates his life. It does full justice to the subject, being written in a style not unworthy of Snorre Sturlesen, or the man who wrote the history of King Sverrer and the Birkebeiners, in the latter part of the Heimskringla. It is a composition of the fifteenth century, but the author is unknown.

5. The Mabinogion, or Juvenile Diversions, a collection of Cumric legends, in substance of unknown antiquity, but in the dress in which they have been handed down to us scarcely older than the fourteenth century. In interest they almost vie with the 'Arabian Nights,' with which, however, they have nothing else in common, notwithstanding that all other European tales—those of Russia not excepted—are evidently modifications of, or derived from the same source as the Arabian stories. Of these Cumric legends two translations exist: the first, which was never published, made towards the concluding part of the last century by William Owen, who eventually assumed the name of Owen Pugh, the writer of the immortal Welsh and English Dictionary, and the translator into Welsh of 'Paradise Lost;' the second by the fair and talented Lady Charlotte Guest, which first made these strange, glorious stories known to England and all the world.

The sixth and last grand prose work of the Welsh is the 'Sleeping Bard,' a moral allegory, written about the beginning of the last century by Elis Wyn, a High-Church Welsh clergyman, a translation of which, by George Borrow, is now before us:—

'The following translation of the Sleeping Bard,' says Mr. Borrow, in his preface, 'has long existed in manuscript. It was made by the writer of these lines in the year 1830, at the request of a little Welsh bookseller of his acquaintance, who resided in the rather unfashionable neighbourhood of Smithfield, and who entertained an opinion that a translation of the work of Elis Wyn would enjoy a great sale, both in England and Wales. On the eve of committing it to the press, however, the Cambrian Briton felt his small heart give way within him: "Were I to print it," said he, "I should be ruined. The terrible descriptions of vice and torment would frighten the genteel part of the English public out of its wits, and I should to a certainty be prosecuted by Sir James Scarlett. I am much obliged to you for the trouble you have given yourself on my account—but myn Diawl! I had no idea, till I had read him in English, that Elis Wyn had been such a terrible fellow."

'Yet there is no harm in the book. It is true that the author is anything but mincing in his expressions and descriptions, but there is nothing in the Sleeping Bard which can give offence to any but the over fastidious. There is a great deal of squeamish nonsense in the world; let us hope, however, that there is not so much as there was. Indeed, can we doubt that such folly is on the decline, when we find Albemarle Street in '60 willing to publish a harmless but plain-speaking book which Smithfield shrank from in '80?'

The work is divided into three parts, devoted to three separate and distinct visions, which the Bard pretends to have seen at three different times in his sleep. In assuming the title of 'Sleeping Bard' Elis Wyn committed a kind of plagiarism, as it originated with a certain poet who

flourished in the time of the Welsh princes, some nine hundred years before he himself was born, and to this plagiarism he humorously alludes in one of his visions. The visions are described in prose, but each is followed by a piece of poetry containing a short gloss or comment. The prose is graphic and vigorous, almost beyond conception; the poetry wild and singular, each piece composed in a particular measure. Of the measures, two are quite original, to be found nowhere else. The first vision is the Vision of the World. The object of the Bard is to describe the follies, vices, and crimes of the human race, more especially those of the natives of the British Isles. In his sleep he imagines that he is carried away by fairies, and is in danger of perishing owing to their malice, but is rescued by an angel, who informs him that he has been sent by the Almighty with orders to give him a distinct view of the world. The angel, after a little time, presents him with a telescope, through which he sees a city of a monstrous size, with thousands of cities and kingdoms within it; and the great ocean, like a moat, around it; and other seas, like rivers, intersecting it.

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This city is, of course, the world. It is divided into three magnificent streets. These streets are called respectively the streets of Pride, Pleasure, and Lucre. In the distance is a cross street, little and mean in comparison with the others, but clean and neat, and on a higher foundation than the other streets, running upwards towards the east, whilst they all sink downwards towards the north. This street is the street of True Religion. The angel conducts him down the three principal streets, and procures him glances into the inside of various houses. The following scene in a cellar of what is called the street of Pleasure, goes far to show that the pen of Elis Wyn, at low description, was not inferior to the pencil of Hogarth:—

‘From thence we went to a place where we heard a terrible noise, a medley of striking, jabbering, crying and laughing, shooting and singing. “Here’s Bedlam, doubtless,” said I. By the time we entered the den the brawling had ceased. Of the company, one was on the ground insensible; another was in a yet more deplorable condition; another was nodding over a hearthful of battered pots, pieces of pipes, and oozings of ale. And what was all this, upon inquiry, but a carousal of seven thirsty neighbours,—a goldsmith, a pilot, a smith, a miner, a chimney-sweeper, a poet, and a parson who had come to preach sobriety, and to exhibit in himself what a disgusting thing drunkenness is! The origin of the last squabble was a dispute which had arisen among them about which of the seven loved a pipe and flagon best. The poet had carried the day over all the rest, with the exception of the parson, who, out of respect for his cloth, had the most votes, being placed at the head of the jolly companions, the poet singing:—

‘O where are there seven beneath the sky  
Who with these seven for thirst can vie?  
But the best for good ale these seven among  
Are the jolly divine and the son of song.’

After showing the Bard what is going on in the interior of the houses of the various streets, and in the streets themselves, the angel conducts him to the various churches of the City of Perdition: to the temple of Paganism, to the mosque of the Turk, and to the synagogue of the Jews; showing and explaining to him what is going on within them. He then takes him to the church of the Papists, which the angel calls, very properly, ‘the church which deceiveth nations.’ Some frightful examples are given of the depravity and cruelty of monks and friars. The dialogue between the confessor and the portly female who had murdered her husband, who was a member of the Church of England, is horrible, but quite in keeping with the principles of Popery; also the discourse which the same confessor holds with the young girl who had killed her child, whose father was a member of the monastery to which the monk belonged. From the Church of Rome they go to the Church of England. It is lamentable to observe what an attached minister of the Church of England describes as going on within the walls of a Church of England temple a hundred and fifty years ago. Would that the description could be called wholly inapplicable at the present time!

“Whereupon he carried me to the gallery of one of the churches in Wales, the people being in the midst of the service, and lo! some were whispering, talking, and laughing, some were looking upon the pretty women, others were examining the dress of their neighbours from top to toe; some were pushing themselves forward and snarling at one another about rank, some were dozing, others were busily engaged in their devotions, but many of these were playing a hypocritical part.”

The angel finally conducts the Bard to the small cross street, that of True Religion, where, of course, everything is widely different from what is found in any of the other streets. In that street there was no fear but of incensing the King, who was ever more ready to forgive than be angry with his subjects, and no sound but that of psalms of praise to the Almighty.

The second section is a Vision of Death in his palace below. The author’s aim in this vision is less apparent than in the preceding one. Perhaps, however, he wished to impress upon people’s minds the awfulness of dying in an unrepentant state, from the certainty, in that event, of the human soul being forthwith cast headlong down the precipice of destruction. The Bard is carried away by sleep to chambers where some people are crying, others screaming, some talking deliriously, some uttering blasphemies in a feeble tone, others lying in great agony with all the signs of dying men, and some yielding up the ghost after uttering ‘a mighty shout.’ He is then conducted to a kind of limbo or Hades, where he meets with his prototype the Sleeping Bard of

old and two other Welsh poets, one of whom is Taliesin, who is represented as watching the caldron of the witch Cridwen, even as he watched it in his boyhood. From thence he is hurried to the palace of Death, where he sees the King of Terrors swallowing flesh and blood, who, after a time, places himself on a terrific throne, and proceeds to pass judgment on various prisoners newly arrived. They are dealt with in an awful but very summary manner. It is to be remarked that all the souls introduced in this vision are those of bad people, with the exception of those of the poets which the Bard meets in limbo. A dark intimation, however, is given that there is another court or palace, where Death presides under a far different form, and where he pronounces judgment over the souls of the good. There is much in this vision which it is very difficult to understand. The gloss, or commentary, called 'Death the Great,' abounds with very fine poetry.

The last Vision, that of Hell, is the longest of the three. The Bard is carried in his sleep by the same angel who in his first vision had shown him the madness and vanity of the world, to the regions of eternal horror and woe, where he beholds the lost undergoing tortures proportionate to the crimes which they had committed on earth. After wandering from nook to nook, the Bard and his guide at last come to the court before the palace of the hellish regions, where, amidst thousands of horrible objects, the Bard perceives two feet of enormous magnitude, reaching to the roof of the whole infernal firmament, and inquires of his companion what those horrible things may be, but is told to be quiet for the present, as on his return he will obtain a full view of the monster to whom they belong, and is then conducted into the palace of Lucifer, who is about to hold a grand council. The Arch-Fiend is described as seated on a burning throne in a vast hall, the roof of which is of glowing steel. Around him are his potentates on thrones of fire, and above his head is a huge fist, holding a very frightful thunderbolt, towards which he occasionally casts uneasy glances. In the midst of the palace is a gulf, of yet more horrible and frightful aspect than hell itself, which is continually opening and closing, and which, the angel says, is the month of 'Unknown' or extremest hell, to which the devils and the damned are to be hurled for ever on the last day. The council is held in order to devise measures for the farther extension of the kingdom of Lucifer. The Arch-Fiend, in a speech which he makes, boasts that three parts of the world have already been brought to acknowledge his sway, chiefly through the instrumentality of his three daughters—Pleasure, Pride, and Lucre; and he hopes that eventually the whole world will be brought to do the same. He is particularly desirous that Britain should be subject to him, and requests the advice of his counsellors as to the best means to be employed in order to accomplish his wish. Various infernal potentates then arise and give him their advice, each of whom is a personification of some crime, vice, or folly. The debate is frequently interrupted by the sound of war; for, as the angel observes, there is continual war in hell. There is at one time a terrible disturbance and outbreak, arising from a dispute between the Papists, the Mahometans, and the bloody-minded Roundheads, as to which has done most service to the cause of hell,—the Koran, the Creed of Rome, or the Solemn League and Covenant. Lucifer is only able to quell this disturbance—during which Mahomet and Pope Julius assault each other tooth and nail—by causing his old picked soldiers, the champions of hell, to tear the combatants from each other. Amidst interruptions like these the debate proceeds. Each of the personified crimes and vices in succession—amongst whom are Mammon, Pride, Inconsiderateness, Wantonness, and the Demon of *Tobacco*—offers to go to Britain and do his best to further the views of his master. Lucifer, however, after listening to them all and acknowledging the peculiar merit of each, says that none of them is of sufficient power to be relied upon in the present emergency, but that he has a darling friend, who, with their co-operation, is equal to the enterprise. The friend turns out to be Ease—pleasant Ease—on whose merits he expatiates with great eloquence, and with whom he requests them to co-operate. 'Go with her,' says he, 'and keep everybody in his sleep and his rest, in prosperity and comfort, abundance and carelessness, and then you will see the poor honest man, as soon as he shall drink of the alluring cup of Ease, become a perverse, proud, untractable churl; the industrious labourer change into a careless waggish rattler; and every other person become just as you would desire him . . . Follow her to Britain,' he says in conclusion, 'and be as obedient to her as to our own royal Majesty'!

Then comes the finale:—

'At this moment the huge bolt was shaken, and Lucifer and his chief counsellors were struck to the vortex of extremest hell, and oh! how horrible it was to see the throat of Unknown opening to receive them! "Well!" said the Angel, "we will now return; but you have not seen anything in comparison with the whole which is within the bounds of Destruction, and if you had seen the whole, it is nothing to the inexpressible misery which exists in Unknown, for it is not possible to form an idea of the world in extremest hell." And at that word the celestial messenger snatched me up to the firmament of the accursed kingdom of darkness by a way I had not seen, whence I obtained, from the palace along all the firmament of the black and hot *Destruction*, and the whole land of forgetfulness, even to the walls of the city of Destruction, a full view of the accursed monster of a giantess, whose feet I had seen before. I do not possess words to describe her figure. But I can tell you that she was a triple-faced giantess, having one very atrocious countenance turned towards the heavens, barking, snorting, and vomiting accursed abomination against the celestial King; another countenance, very fair, towards the earth, to entice men to tarry in her shadow; and another, the most frightful countenance of all, turned towards Hell to torment it to all eternity. She is larger than the entire earth, and is yet daily increasing, and a hundred times more frightful than the whole of hell. She caused hell to be made, and it is she who fills it with inhabitants. If she were removed from hell, hell would become paradise; and if she were removed from the earth, the little world would become heaven; and if she were to go to heaven, she would change the regions of bliss into utter hell.

There is nothing in all the universe, except herself, that God did not create. She is the mother of the four female deceivers of the city of Destruction; she is the mother of Death; she is the mother of every evil and misery; and she has a fearful hold on every living man: her name is Sin. "*He who escapes from her hook, for ever blessed is he,*" said the angel. Thereupon he departed, and I could hear his voice saying, "*Write down what thou hast seen, and he who shall read it carefully, shall never have reason to repent.*"

The above is an outline of the work of Elis Wyn—an extraordinary work it is. In it there is a singular mixture of the sublime and the coarse, of the terrible and ludicrous, of religion and levity, of the styles of Milton, of Bunyan, and of Quevedo. There is also much in it that is Welsh, and much that may be said emphatically to belong to Elis Wyn alone. The book is written in the purest Cambrian, and from the time of its publication has enjoyed extensive popularity in Wales. It is, however, said that the perusal of it has not unfrequently driven people mad, especially those of a serious and religious turn. The same thing is said in Spain of the 'Life of Ignatius Loyola.' Peter Williams, in 'Lavengro,' the Welsh preacher who was haunted with the idea that he had committed the sin against the Holy Ghost, is frequently mentioning the work of Elis Wyn. Amongst other things, he says that he took particular delight in its descriptions of the torments of hell. We have no doubt that many an Englishman, of honest Welsh Peter's gloomy temperament, when he reads the work in its present dress will experience the same kind of fearful joy.

The translation is accompanied by notes explanatory of certain passages of the original beyond the comprehension of the common reader. These notes are good, as far as they go, but they are not sufficiently numerous, as many passages relating to ancient manners and customs—perfectly intelligible, no doubt, to the translator—must, for want of proper notes, remain dark and mysterious to his readers. In the Vision of Hell, a devil, who returns from the world to which he has been despatched, and who gives an account of his mission, says that he had visited two young maidens in Wales who were engaged in turning the shift. Not a few people—ladies, amongst the rest—will be disposed to ask what is meant by turning the shift. Mr. Borrow gives elsewhere the following explanation: 'It was the custom in Britain in ancient times for the young maiden who wished to see her future lover to sit up by herself at Hallowmass Eve, wash out her smock, shift, or chemise, call it which of the three you please, place it on a linen-horse before the fire, and watch it whilst drying, leaving the door of the room open, in the belief that exactly as the clock began to strike twelve the future bridegroom would look in at the door, and remain visible till the twelfth stroke had ceased to sound.'

Of the notes which Mr. Borrow has given, the most important is certainly that which relates to Taliesin, who, in the Vision of Death, is described as sitting in Hades, watching a caldron which is hanging over a fire, and is continually going bubble, bubble. We give it nearly entire:—

"Taliesin lived in the sixth century. He was a foundling, discovered in his infancy lying in a coracle on a salmon weir, in the domain of Elphin, a prince of North Wales, who became his patron. During his life he arrogated to himself a supernatural descent and understanding, and for at least a thousand years after his death he was regarded by the descendants of the ancient Britons as a prophet or something more. The poems which he produced procured for him the title of "Bardic King." They display much that is vigorous and original, but are disfigured by mysticism and extravagant metaphor. When Elis Wyn represents him as sitting by a cauldron in Hades, he alludes to a wild legend concerning him, to the effect that he imbibed awen or poetical genius whilst employed in watching "the seething pot" of the sorceress Cridwen, which legend has much in common with one of the Irish legends about Fin Macoul, which is itself nearly identical with one in the Edda describing the manner in which Sigurd Fafnir became possessed of supernatural wisdom.'

It is curious enough that the legend about deriving wisdom from *sucking the scalded finger* should be found in Wales, Ireland, and Scandinavia. But so it is, and Mr. Borrow is clearly entitled to the credit of having been the first to point out to the world this remarkable fact. In his work called the 'Romany Rye,' published some years ago, a story is related containing parts of the early history of the Irish mythic hero Fion Mac Comhail, [33] or Fin Mac Coul, in which there is an account of his burning his thumb whilst smoothing the skin of a fairy salmon which is broiling over a fire, and deriving supernatural knowledge from thrusting his thumb into his mouth and sucking it; and Mr. Borrow tells the relater of that legend, his amusing acquaintance Murtagh, that the same tale is told in the Edda of Sigurd, the Serpent-Killer, with the difference that Sigurd burns his finger, not whilst superintending the broiling of a salmon, but whilst roasting the heart of Fafnir, the man-serpent, whom he had slain.

Here, in his note on Taliesin, he shows that the same thing in substance is said of the ancient Welsh bard. Of the three versions of the legend, the one of which Sigurd Fafnir is the hero is probably the most original, and is decidedly the most poetical.

## Footnotes

[20] It is but right to state that the learned are divided with respect to the meaning of 'Cumro,' and that many believe it to denote *an original inhabitant*.

[21a] Yehen banog: humped or bunched oxen, probably buffaloes. Banog is derived from ban—a prominence, protuberance, or peak.

[21b] Above we have given what we believe to be a plain and fair history of Hu Gadarn; but it is necessary to state, that after his death he was deified, and was confounded with the Creator, the vivifying power and the sun, and mixed up with all kinds of myths and legends. Many of the professedly Christian Welsh bards when speaking of the Deity have called Him Hu, and ascribed to the Creator the actions of the creature. Their doing so, however, can cause us but little surprise when we reflect that the bards down to a very late period cherished a great many druidical and heathen notions, and frequently comported themselves in a manner more becoming heathens than Christian men. Of the confounding of what is heavenly with what is earthly we have a remarkable instance in the ode of Iolo Goch to the ploughman, four lines of which, slightly modified, we have given above. In that ode the ploughman is confounded with the Eternal, and the plough with the rainbow:—

‘The Mighty Hu who reigns for ever,  
Of mead and song to men the giver,  
The emperor of land and sea  
And of all things which living be,  
Did hold a plough with his good hand,  
Soon as the deluge left the land,  
To show to men, both strong and weak,  
The haughty hearted and the meek,  
There is no trade the heaven below  
So noble as to guide the plough.’

To the Deity under the name of Hu there are some lines by one Rhys, a Welsh bard of the time of Queen Elizabeth, though they are perhaps more applicable to the Universal Pan or Nature than to the God of the Christians:—

‘If with small things we Hu compare,  
No smaller thing than Hu is there,  
Yet greatest of the great is He,  
Our Lord, our God of Mystery;  
How swift he moves! a lucid ray,  
A sunbeam wafts him on his way;  
He’s great on land, and great on ocean,  
Of one more great I have no notion;  
I dread lest I should underrate  
This being, infinitely great.’

[22] The poetical translations in this notice are taken from Borrow’s ‘Songs of Europe.’

[25a]

‘Oedd balch gwalch golchiad ei lain,  
Oedd beilch gweilch gweled ei werin.’

In this couplet there is three-fold rhyme. We have the alliteration of *lch* in the first line:—

‘*balch gwalch golchiad;*’

and of the *w* in the second:—

‘*gweilch gweled werin;*’

secondly, we have the rhymes of *balch* and *gwalch*; and thirdly, the rhyming at the lines’ ends.

[25b] Of this celebrated place we are permitted to extract the following account from Mr. Borrow’s unpublished work, ‘Celtic Bards, Chiefs, and Kings’:—

‘After wandering for many miles towards the south, over a bleak moory country, you come to a place called Ffair Rhos, or something similar, a miserable village consisting of a few half-ruined cottages, situated on the top of a hill. From the hill you look down on a wide valley of a russet colour, along which a river runs towards the south. The whole scene is cheerless; sullen hills are all around. Descending the hill you enter a large village divided into two by the river, which here runs from east to west, but presently takes a turn. There is much mire in the street; immense swine lie in the mire, who turn up their snouts at you as you pass. Women in Welsh hats stand in the mire, along with men without any hats at all, but with short pipes in their mouths. They are talking together; as you pass, however, they hold their tongues, the women leering contemptuously at you, the men glaring sullenly at you, and causing tobacco-smoke to curl in your face. On your taking off your hat, however, and inquiring the way to the Monachlog, everybody is civil enough, and twenty voices tell you the way to the monastery. You ask the name of the river: “The Teivi, Sir, the Teivi.” The name of the bridge: “Pont y Rhyd Fendigaid—the Bridge of the Blessed Ford, Sir!” You cross the bridge of the Blessed Ford, and presently leaving the main road you turn to the east, by a dunghill, up a narrow lane, parallel with the river. After proceeding a mile up the lane amidst trees and copses, and crossing a little brook which runs into the Teivi, out of which you drink, you see before you in the midst of a field, in which are tombstones

and broken ruins, a rustic-looking church; a farmhouse is near it, in the garden of which stands the framework of a large gateway. You cross over into the churchyard, stand on a green mound and look about you. You are now in the very midst of the Monachlog Ystrad Flur, the celebrated monastery of Strata Florida, to which in old times popish pilgrims from all parts of the world repaired. The scene is solemn and impressive. On the north side of the river a large bulky hill, called Bunk Pen Bannedd, looks down upon the ruins and the church; and on the south side, some way behind the farmhouse, is another hill which does the same. Rugged mountains form the background of the valley to the east, down from which comes murmuring the fleet but shallow Teivi. Such is the scenery which surrounds what remains of Strata Florida; those scanty broken ruins compose all that remains of that celebrated monastery in which kings, saints, and mitred abbots were buried, and in which, or in whose precincts, was buried Dafydd ab Gwilym, the greatest genius of the Cimbric race, and one of the first poets of the world.'

[28] It must be mentioned, however, in justice to Douglas, that in the autobiography of Dr. Carlyle, lately published, we find that 'John Douglas, who has for some time been Bishop of Salisbury, and who is one of the most able and learned men on that bench, had at this time (1758, some years after Gronwy had left him) but small preferment.'

[33] In a late number of the Transactions of the Dublin Ossianic Society—a most admirable institution—there is an account of the early life of Fin ma Coul, in which the burnt finger is mentioned; but that number did not appear till more than a year subsequent to the publication of the 'Romany Rye,' and contains not the slightest allusion either to Fafnisbane, *i.e.* the slayer of Fafnir, or Taliesin—to the Eddacal or the Cumric legend.

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