

WHY NO HISTORY OF WALES?

Sir,—As the inhabitants of the Principality seem more disposed to seek out or invent political grievances than to turn their attention to their historic shortcomings, I venture to address myself to the members of the Archæological Institute, which has always shewn an intelligent interest in its Celtic neighbours, and has, I think, on two occasions crossed the Dyke of Offa, and penetrated in the less known recesses of their country. Your Cambrian rival has accumulated in its two score and more volumes a vast quantity of valuable matter, and the present seems a proper time to draw from these and other stores such a connected narrative as may encourage the various attempts now making to bring Wales to the front of our mixed Empire, and to justify the name of "British," adopted, I believe, originally, in compliment to our greatest, and widely extended under our best, female Sovereign.

It is now above seven centuries since Caradoc of Llancarvan gave to his fellow countrymen a history which, with some moderate editorial additions, still remains, not only the best, but the only history, worthy the name, of the Principality. We have histories in abundance of England and Scotland, histories of Ireland, histories of Guernsey and Jersey, and even of the Isles of Man, of the Orkneys, and of Wight, but no one, competent to the task, has, since Caradoc, ventured upon that of Wales. It is true that the antecedents of Wales scarcely admit of what used to be called a philosophical history. Wales has never been a united state, has never possessed a capital, nor owned a representative council; has never peaceably obeyed any regular government of its own, or any single Prince, but nevertheless the materials for a very interesting history, formerly scanty, are now ample. It has not much early literature, but such as it has is very valuable, and has been collected, printed, and very ably criticised; notably by Stephens of Merthyr, and Skene. The light of comparative philology has been shed upon the language; much discreditable and boastful nonsense concerning its origin and connexion has been swept away, and the labours of Humphry Lloyd, Prichard, Guest, and Rhys have explained the growth of its dialects, its peculiarities and inflexions, and have established its Indo-European origin in a manner leaving little to be desired. Also a living scholar, Professor Rhys, has thrown light upon that very curious inquiry into the race who inhabited and possibly colonized Wales before the arrival of the Celtic Britons. The footsteps of the Roman invader have been traced, of late years, with industry and success. The invasions and fierce advances of the Anglo-Saxons, and their battles with the native race have been examined and treated of in

historical works of great merit, as have, though to a less extent, the establishment of the Norman lords upon the lands of the March. Nor is this all. Under the fostering care of the Keepers of the Records a vast mass of papers relating to the proceedings of Edward I. in North Wales and on the Cheshire borders have been brought to light and printed, and the records of the boundaries, privileges, and customs of the Marcher lands, whenever, by minorities or escheats, they fell into the hands of the Crown and took their place with the records of the realm, have been catalogued and made accessible. The Domestic State Papers, also fully and most judiciously calendared, exhibit, especially under the Princes of the House of Tudor, a good deal of curious matter concerning the irregular administrations of the English law in Wales, and the internal and social condition of the country, and the connexion of its maritime districts with the customs laws, the practices of Spanish and Moorish pirates, and the infant Mercantile Navy. The study of the statutes of the realm has recently been highly recommended from an Oxford professional chair, and this advice is peculiarly applicable to the statutes relating to Wales from the first Edward down to Elizabeth and even later. Add to these sources of information the various local descriptions and details scattered through the pages of the *Archæologia Cambrensis*, and the result will be a prodigious mass of material, requiring indeed a master hand to reduce it to order and to combine with general views and conclusions that knowledge of details which is both an accomplishment and a snare.

There remains, besides, one branch of enquiry which has not yet been followed up, but which, if duly studied, will supply evidence of almost equal value to the sources above indicated, and which it is within the scope of the newly awakened Welsh *Eistedfoddau* to supply, and to which they will do well to direct their attention. It has been the fashion of late to throw almost unmeasured blame on the Ordnance surveys, and no doubt in matters of lettering or nomenclature, though in that alone, the 25 inch map admits of improvement, but even this remark does not apply to the inch maps. These maps, as regards Wales, are most perfect in their kind. The mountains and hills are therein shaded with artistic effect; the streams and brooklets are traced out and laid down with extreme minuteness; and the nomenclature of the survey, speaking still of the one inch scale, has been ascertained with the assistance of the best local authorities. The earthworks, judicial or civil and military, the Roman roads and stations, are followed up and identified with great care, and the parish boundaries, usually of remote antiquity and preserved intact, thanks to modern statute law, have been, to the avoiding of crowding and confusion, laid down upon a separate series of maps. Now, all this has rendered not only possible, but easy, the collection of the description of evidence to which it is desired especially to call attention.

Wales has been invaded, probably in prehistoric times, but certainly at least thrice since the dawn of its history, by the Romans, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans, of which the several stages are well-known, though the details of the two former are obscure. Wales has also been attacked by the sea from Scandinavia, but the visits of those piratical seamen have been, as in the north of Scotland, confined to the ports, bays, headlands and islands of the southern coast, seldom extending far inland,

and never, so far as is known, giving birth to settlements or colonies, though leaving ample traces of their visits. The greater invaders all advanced from England, and entered Wales on its eastern frontier, and it is therefore on that side that traces of the invasions are to be mainly looked for. The frontier is marked by the course of the river Severn, from Gloucester upwards, to its reception of the Vyrnwy, and thence by the lower Dee to the Irish Sea. The western limit of these valleys, that upon which the Celts, first as Britons, and afterwards as Welsh, made a well-maintained stand, is marked by numerous earthworks, usually large enough to accommodate a whole tribe, and found on the crest and headlands of the Cotteswold, or the ridgeway above Worcester, on the Lickey and Clent hills, the Wrekin, Haughmond, and so on northwards, shewing that a bold stand was made along the line, probably against the Romans, and certainly against the Anglo-Saxons who succeeded them. No doubt the broad and fertile valleys of both Severn and Dee were worth fighting for, though finally relinquished, when a final and more successful stand was made on the stronger ground on the Welsh side of the rivers, the actual and proper frontier of Wales, as on the Malvern ridge, Abberley, the forest of Wyre, the Clee hills, Wenlock edge, and the still stronger ground west of the lower Dee and Chester. Scattered broadcast over these elevations through the border counties of Gloucester, Hereford, Salop, Montgomery, and Chester, are encampments, high in position and irregular in outline, denoting their Celtic origin, mixed with others, low in position, for the convenience of the baggage of an army, designed according to the well-known rules of castrametation, and connected by lines of road, often pitched, and carried straight across the country, and still to be recognised as Roman. Then again, quite distinct from, though sometimes superimposed upon these, are the Anglo-Saxon earthworks, usually of a domestic character, being a mound or Burh, table-topped, protected by a ditch and more or less environed with enclosures, also moated, upon and within which were the dwellings, always of timber, and protected by palisades of the same material. But besides and beyond these material remains, are others more frequent, more durable, and to be recognised with more certainty, though wholly of an immaterial character. These are the place names, so vocal to the instructed enquirer. Where British, these names are still borne by the mountains and rivers, the boundaries of tribes and the larger divisions of the island, the first to be given and the last to be lost. These, as in York, or Gloucester or Dover, or Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*), or *Caer Went* (*Venta Silurum*), or Canterbury, or London, are of British, rather than of Welsh origin, and have been preserved by being embodied in a Latin form, while others, as Bath, *Caerleon*, *Caistor*, are of purely Roman origin, and others again, as *Caertaff*, *Caermerdin*, *Caerdigan*, bear a Latin prefix combined with a British distinctive addition. In Wales proper the names are of course mostly in the tongue of the country, but along the borders and up the more accessible valleys are scattered, with more or less frequency, names shewing that the English invaders had established themselves, with something approaching to permanence, and earthworks of an Anglo-Saxon character, and villages with English names, are found mingled together along and often beyond the Dyke of Offa, the ecclesiastical divisions always the older, being almost always Welsh.

There is another not less important distinction between British, Roman-British, and Anglo-Saxon or English names. These latter are seldom of tribal or military origin, they indicate private or family property, and divisions of land connected with order, self-government, and law, the roots of a high civilisation. By close attention to these names, found in great numbers upon the Ordnance survey, a correct notion may be formed of the extent and character of the several invasions, and nowhere is there a richer field for such enquiries than upon the border land on either side of the Severn and the Dee, and especially along the former; that 'virgin daughter of Lochrine,' who, discreetly interrogated, will be found to possess the main characteristics of her sex.

The same enquiries, based upon the same excellent survey, may be directed along the course of the old Roman "Via maritima," which, commencing at Glevum or Gloucester, and receiving an important tributary at the mouth of the Wye from Bath, Bitton, and Abone, when as yet Bristol was not, is continued at no great distance from the sea by way of Caerwent and Caerleon, Caerdiff, Bovium, Nidum, and Caermarthen, until it is brought to an end at Octopitarum or St. David's Head. Here, in addition to the British or Welsh Churches and villages, are not a few of the latter, such as Chepstow, Port Skewit, Newport, or Bridgend, of Anglo-Saxon origin, and others again of a different character, as the Holms, Swansea, Wormshead, Skomer, Skokholm, Strumble, and Ramsay, very evidently Scandinavian. The Anglo-Saxon, and to some extent the Scandinavian names, have the interest of ancestry to the English, as the older and more frequent appellations have to the native Welsh, and both will do well to promote the proposed enquiries, without which no thorough or complete history of the Principality can ever be composed.

Neither can the contemplated historian afford to neglect a final and not unimportant wave of invasion, which, though of later date, and not materially affecting the nomenclature of the country, has left its marks upon the marches from Gloucester to Chester, between the Dyke of Offa, the Severn, and the Dee, and especially upon the maritime parts of Monmouth, Glamorgan, Caermarthen, and Pembroke, and even as far along the West coast as Aberystwith. The Norman tide, an advanced but solitary wavelet of which extended to Richard's Castle, in the reign of the Confessor, followed close upon that of the English Conquest, when the greater Lords, delighting in war, inspired by a lust of sway, and not unwilling to escape from the stern eye and iron hand of the Conqueror, established themselves upon the marches of Wales, founded the county Palatine of Chester, gave name, a solitary instance, to the whole county of Montgomery, converted the Saxon Hereford into a Norman Earldom, and a generation later, under the ill-regulated government of the Red King, established along the sea coast five or six quasi-independent principalities, and combined the rich heritage of the Saxon Brictric with the weak and ill-governed territories of the effete Princes of a by no means effete people.

The footsteps of the Normans, like their characters, were firmly planted, stoutly maintained and durable. They brought with them a sufficient number of followers to hold the plain county in something like security, and while leaving their native customs and estates to the inhabitants of the hills, they shared the plains among their own followers,

retaining to some considerable extent the lower class of natives. To these new estates they gave the attributes of manors, and introduced the feudal system with all its strictness as best suited to the newly settled provinces. Neither were they tardy nor illiberal in the foundation and endowment of monastic institutions, and finally they constructed those castles of which the ruins remain, some constructed for the protection of the whole territory, but the much larger number, placed upon private estates, were intended mainly for the protection of the local lord and his adjacent tenantry. The proceedings of these Lords' Marchers, of the powerful Earl of Chester in the north, of those of Montgomery and Shrewsbury and Hereford, in the Middle March, of the Earls Strongbow and of Gloucester, of de Braose, Marshall and Hastings in the south and west, form a part, and a very important part of the history of Wales, and one for which the materials in the north are ample, and in the south and west not inconsiderable, owing to the fact that these Lords also held large estates in England. Closely connected with this part of the history is the struggle between Edward the First and the Southern Marchers for the undoubted prerogatives of the Crown, the right of the reception of appeals from the Marcher Courts, and of the custody of the temporalities of the Episcopal Sees pending a vacancy. These most important and truly patriotic struggles to establish the unity of the Empire to which Britain owes so much of its greatness, have scarcely been touched upon by any regular historian any more than the position and power of the Marcher Lords, subjects which find no place in Blackstone nor in any other work upon English jurisdiction.

The extinction of these Marcher Lordships was followed, under the House of Tudor, by the establishment of the Council of Wales, and this, at its extinction under the Commonwealth, gave place, at a considerable interval, to the development of the mineral resources of the country, giving rise to a healthy industry and large wage-earning population, who, if they show occasional signs of discontent, do so, it is to be feared, from the sight of the wealth of others, and certainly not from any want of a sufficiency for themselves.

PSEUDO WALLENSIS.