

SOUTH WALES AND THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS.

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Much has recently been said and written about the religious life of Wales, especially of South Wales, and it seems hardly possible to say anything on the subject that is not a twice-told tale. Yet there are some things connected with the history of the dealings between England and Wales in ecclesiastical matters deserving notice, which are usually either designedly or through ignorance wholly ignored. These matters are far removed from all present questions and disputes, and, none the less, for this reason possibly all the more, deserve the attention of students of history. Not the least interesting of these is the rise and progress of the religious orders in South Wales.

The monastic orders were introduced into that country, almost if not exclusively, by the Anglo-Norman conquerors. In all other parts of Europe such orders, on their first introduction into a locality, were a great success. In Wales for some years following their establishment they were a complete failure. Why was Wales an exception to the rest of Europe? In other places after a time the influence of the monastic orders declined. In Wales after a time some of the orders achieved success. What were the reasons for this failure, and for this success? They form a very interesting and instructive chapter in the history of Wales, not the least interesting being the probable reasons for success.

First as to the failure of the Latin religious orders in Wales on their introduction into the country. The chief cause was that while in other countries when the religious orders were introduced, they were a novelty, nothing like them having previously existed. Wales had possessed for some centuries her own monastic system, which the Anglo-Normans sought to supplant, or rather

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to root out as an unclean thing. Hence the introduction of the Latin religious orders was not here as elsewhere the introduction of a new system, but the supplanting an existing system which, with all its faults, was suited to the ideas, the manners, and the habits of the Welsh.

That the Norman Church should try to suppress the Welsh system was only to be expected. It rested on ideas quite irreconcilable with those of any religious order known to the Latin Church. The basis of the Welsh monastic system was the tribe. From very early times not merely the Welsh but all Celtic tribes consisted of two branches, the civil and the ecclesiastical, or, as they were called, "the tribe of the land" and the "tribe of the saint." Both were descended from a legendary ancestor, the original founder certainly of the lay and presumably of the saint's tribe. The great chief of his time, even if he had shown no signs of saintliness, became a saint in the Welsh sense of the word, that is, the most powerful magician connected with the tribe. For his alleged magical or miraculous powers he became venerated, and to win his favour and support, gifts both of lands and goods were made to him. If the expression may be used, the saint associated other persons with him in the gifts, they became joint grantees, and the gifts thus belonged not to any one person, but were the joint property of the druids or priests; these were regarded as having the sole charge and custody of the religious rites and ceremonies of the tribe, the guardians of its sacrifices, the custodians of its traditions. They dwelt apart, forming a separate community with their own property and possessions. If it is not an abuse of terms to say so, their village was their monastery, in which dwelt all those who belonged to the tribe of the saint—men, women and children. The tie, the only tie, that bound them together was descent real or artificial from the common ancestor, the mythical saint. Among the Latin religious orders such a state of things was unheard of, and unholy. They utterly ignored the tie of relationship, their communities were united by voluntary adhesion to certain definite rules framed for accomplishing a definite object. The tie in the Latin brotherhood was the common object to be achieved in the future, the tie

in the Welsh the common descent which sprang from the past.

One great point of interest as to the Welsh communities is the amount of paganism they retained, the little Christianity they absorbed into their heathendom on their conversion, while as to the Latin orders the interest is to see how much heathendom the Latin monks were willing to recognise among the Welsh who called themselves Christian.

The history of the religious orders in South Wales is, therefore, the account of how far the members of those orders were willing to go in the direction of compromise in a very distant part of the world to secure the triumph of Latin Christianity. To the credit of the first comers, the Benedictines, they were not disposed to make any departure from their rule. This was the great cause of their failure.

The eleventh century is the starting point. Before the Norman conquest of England it does not appear that any attempt had been made to break up the Welsh monastic system, or if any had been made its effects had been very slight. No outside religious orders had been introduced or attempted to be introduced. This work was left for the conqueror and his followers. The fact that the Normans came as conquerors, both of the national and of the religious life of Wales, was another cause of the failure of the monastic orders. The hatred with which the Welsh regarded any change the Normans introduced was not so much hatred of the change itself, but of the Norman who proposed it. Not the least unpopular of these was the change from the Welsh ideal of a monastery to monasteries of the order of St. Benedict, which the Normans were desirous of establishing as the religious order in Wales. The establishment of the Benedictine monks in England had been no easy task: the old Saxon system had died hard, witness Oswald's work at Worcester. The opposition there was as nothing to the resistance the Benedictines met with in setting up their order in South Wales.

Nor was this to be wondered at. Under whatever form or in whatever circumstances the rule of St. Benedict had been presented to the Welsh, its establishment

would have been bitterly opposed. The special way in which it was presented, a badge of the Norman conquest, made it doubly objectionable. The Welsh did not love the English, but they hated the Normans; the introduction of the rule of St. Benedict into South Wales by the Normans seemed to the Welsh to emphasize the fact that they and their country were now conquered.

There was another reason in which piety, pride, and possibly prudence had place. In the first half of the eleventh century the Norman barons became in Normandy lavish founders of monasteries, and continued this practice when they came over here. In Normandy most of the Conqueror's barons had a religious house either on their own land or on land under their protection. To such houses they gave lands and goods with no niggard hand. When they had obtained lands in England by the power of their swords, they either established cells to their own Norman monasteries on their English lands or else granted some of the lands as endowments to the Norman house, thus establishing in England settlements or cells of Norman religious houses. When the Normans obtained grants of land in Wales, they continued this practice to such an extent that by the end of the eleventh century all the regular monasteries that had been formed in Wales were cells of Norman houses either on the continent or in England. Six cells were founded in South Wales, all were Benedictine, no less than four were cells to monasteries on the continent. To such of us as are interested in the history of Wales this system had its advantages, for by it we are able to trace the situation and extent of the possessions of the different Norman conquerors of Wales. Each had his own special religious house which he or his family had founded, so the existence of a cell to that house in Wales is strong presumptive evidence of the fact that the land on which it stood was the property of the patron of the Norman house. Thus a cell to Cormeilles marks the property of William Fitz-Osborne. Cells of the abbey of Lyra show the lands of the Lacys: cells of the abbey of Bec those of the family of Chandos, while cells to the English abbeys of Gloucester or

Tewkesbury point to the presence of the Clares. Thus the fact of a religious house being a cell to a Norman or English abbey marks the locality of the possessions of the Norman who was the patron of that abbey.

The three important points for the invasion of South and Mid Wales were Hereford, Shrewsbury, and Worcester. Hereford commanded the valley of the Wye: Worcester the middle, and Shrewsbury the upper Severn. Worcester also formed the base for any attack on South or Mid Wales. These points the Conqueror desired to place in safe hands. To an ecclesiastic, the bishop of Worcester, he gave that city; to the joint marshals of England he gave the two striking points; to Roger of Montgomery, Shrewsbury; to William Fitz-Osborne, Hereford. Earl William tried to secure his position by lavish gifts of lands to Cormeilles, the Norman house he had founded. To it he gave lands in Worcestershire, Herefordshire, and Gloucestershire, the boundaries of his gifts being marked by Tenbury on the east and Chepstow on the west. Earl William died in 1071. His son Roger who succeeded him was also a benefactor to Cormeilles, but as he took part in the rising of 1074 his estates were forfeited. This made Montgomery sole marshal of England, so it became his duty to follow the king on any expedition to Wales. In 1093 he marched with Rufus across South Wales from Brecon to Cardigan, and was rewarded for his services by a grant of lands at Pembroke. On his lands at Seez in Normandy he had founded a Benedictine house. He now gave to that abbey part of the lands he had obtained, founded a religious house upon them, a cell to Seez, a house which developed into the priory of Monkton or Pembroke. The Clares became possessed of Glamorganshire, so at Cardiff there sprang up a cell to Tewkesbury.

Other instances might be given such as the conquest of Cardiganshire, the building of the castle of Cilgerran as the civil fort to garrison that district, the building of the priory of Cardigan, a cell to the abbey of Chertsey as the ecclesiastical fort. It is not necessary to pursue the subject, it will suffice to say that in the six modern counties that make up South Wales one result of the

Norman conquest, its outward and visible sign, was the establishment of fifteen Benedictine houses, all cells to abbeys either in England or on the continent, all founded as part of the system of setting up garrisons, all hated, if it were possible, more than even the castles and their garrisons. It is obvious that even if the Benedictines had been angels, the circumstances connected with their foundations had rendered them so distasteful to the Welsh that they never could have become popular or national. The very reasons for their existence prevented them making any concession to the conquered, and led to their remaining separate and apart.

Whatever may have been the virtues of the Benedictines in Wales, a belief sprung up on the continent that if the order was to maintain its standard of holiness some reforms in it were required. In their services, their devotions, their ritual, they still maintained the rule that had originally been laid down by their founder. A proposal that they should incorporate in their practice any of the ideas or ritual of the Welsh would have been indignantly rejected. They would rather have renounced the Welsh and all their works. To the idea of meeting them in religious matters they would have returned a rigid *non possumus*. The result was that they made no progress in Wales; they began as strangers, they remained strangers "in race, in language, and in religion." In consequence of this attitude the numerous attempts to reform the Benedictine order, to bring it up to a higher level of holiness, had no effect in Wales. Considerable success attended those reforms both on the continent and in England, but not in Wales: there the reformed or unreformed Benedictines were treated alike as aliens and enemies.

The first reformed order of Benedictine, that of Odo of Cluny, the Cluniacs, met with no success. Three houses of the order were founded in South Wales, none of them prospered; as to one of the three, St. Clears in Carmarthenshire, a cell to the great house of St. Martin des Champs in Paris, the visitors report that the result of their visitation was to find "that divine service had utterly ceased and the greater part of the property of the house alienated."

The reforms Stephen d'Auvergne introduced into the Benedictines and his order who adopted them, the Grandmontines, only reached the Welsh border and never actually entered Wales. Another reformed order of Benedictines called, from Tiron in the diocese of Chartres, Tironian Benedictines, who carried out the reforms of Bernard d'Abbeville, had a cell at St. Dogmaels near Cardigan, founded by a Norman, Robert FitzMartin. For some reason they appear to have been for a time the most prosperous of the Benedictine houses in Wales, for they founded two cells, one on Caldey Island and one at Pill. This last however soon found the reforms too much for them, and relapsed into the unreformed rule of St. Benedict.

Three-quarters of a century had now elapsed since the Normans had begun setting up Benedictine houses in South Wales, and the result had been a failure. The strict orthodoxy of the Benedictines had not assimilated Welsh ideas. No real progress had been made. The religious house might flourish on the territory of its founder, but once outside that territory, among the people of the district it counted as nothing. If the "Monks of the West" were to make any real progress in Wales a system with a lower standard of orthodoxy, a greater power of assimilating native and local ideas was required. Another religious order learnt this lesson and practised it.

In 1061 pope Alexander II. constituted an order of regular canons under the rule of St. Augustine. They came to England about 1075 and settled at Canterbury. Hugh de Lacey, who had found that the Benedictine houses in Wales were not as successful as he had hoped, determined to try if this order would do better, and so founded in 1108 a house at Llanthony close to the Breconshire border. It failed more utterly than the Benedictine: they at least had among their virtues, courage, and, when once established, "held the fort"; the canons did not possess even this virtue, but abandoned Llanthony and retired first to Hereford, then to Gloucester. Whether it was that the canons learnt wisdom by experience, or what was the reason for their action, is not clear, but on their reintroduction into Wales they acted

differently. A new house of this order was founded at Carmarthen about 1140, and they at once relaxed the rule of no intercourse with the Welsh. In some way either by missionary work round Carmarthen, or by receiving Welshmen into their house, they so far gained the confidence of the Welsh that they were able to collect and write down the legends and folk lore then current in the district. This is shown by the fact that in this house of the Black Canons of Carmarthen about the middle of the twelfth century a manuscript was compiled, fragments of which have come down to us and are known by the name of the "Black Book of Carmarthen."¹

This most important manuscript marks the new departure in the relation between the Latin monks and the Welsh. It shows that the Canons were willing to regard the local legends and beliefs as worthy of consideration, to treat the Welsh theology as something not wholly heretical, to consider Welsh history as matter at least worth recording. This manuscript is the earliest coming from a Latin house which records Welsh ideas. It is therefore deserving of most careful study, and not the least interesting point in connection with it is that it was written by monks who, on their first introduction into Wales, had tried the old rule of isolation and failed miserably, but who on their second introduction tried the policy of assimilation with success. This gives the key to the method that was afterwards followed with such perseverance as practically to transform a Latin monastic order into what became in effect the national order of Wales. The manuscript proves that there must have been considerable intercourse between the religious house and the people of the district, that in all probability it was written if not composed by a Welsh monk who was a Carmarthenshire man. This Dr. Gwenogvryn Evans, in his edition of this book, shows from internal evidence to be the case. The monkish writer was not acquainted with Welsh places outside the district round Carmarthen. He was quite ignorant of North Wales. There is a place there called, *Caer Seon*: the writer, never having

¹ For text, see Skene's *Four Ancient Books of Wales* for a translation of the *Black Book of Carmarthen* reproduced

and edited by Dr. Gwenogvryn Evans, 1906.

heard of it but being well up in his scripture, wrote it "Caer Zion." The name occurs in a passage in which a horseman is recounting who he was, and where he was coming from, he says that he is returning from a bardic contest at Caer Seon¹; by misreading the word "Seon" he wrote "Zion," the scribe's idea being centred on Palestine, a modern commentator makes out from this slip that the horseman was returning from Zion from fighting the Jews!

The Black Book of Carmarthen marks an epoch in the history of Wales, it shows when the wall of partition between the monk and the Welsh was broken down, that it took about a century for the Norman monks to become really acclimatized in Wales. Important as this fact is, another fact is still more so, the nature of the contents of the Black Book. So far as Wales is concerned it is the first example of any Welsh theology emerging from a Latin monastery. From any orthodox point of view much of this theology is heresy, to use Dr. Evans words,² "the theology is not infrequently merged in the older mythology." The important point is therefore to see what parts of the old local mythology the Black Canons of the twelfth century were willing to admit into a theological treatise composed in their house. Time had brought about the exact converse of the old state of things in Wales. In the early Celtic Church the point was how little Christianity was necessary for the converts to add to their pagan beliefs to become Christian. Now it was, how much paganism could the canons admit into their book and yet still call it Christian. The compromise between the Celtic and the Latin churches which the Black Book proves to have been arrived at in the middle of the twelfth century is of considerable importance. It shows the time, the place, and the means, by which all early Welsh history has been preserved, and which but for some such compromise would have been lost. The strict orthodoxy of the Benedictines had failed to secure the sympathy of the people, with the necessary consequence that the Benedictines could never learn their legends and beliefs. If Wales had

¹ xvii, *op. cit.*

² viii, *op. cit.*

been left to the Benedictines much if not all of the old legends and mythology would have perished. Possibly by accident the Austin Canons found a way to win the national sympathy, with the result that they were told the national legends which they fortunately had the good sense to commit to writing. The Austin Canons therefore furnish the link between the Benedictines and the next order of monks.

A few years before the foundation of the Carmarthen house of Black Canons a new reformed order of Benedictines made their appearance in Wales, whatever else may be said of them, their reforms were thorough and radical to the extent that, practically, they were a new monastic order, the Cistercians. They came to Wales in 1130, and settled at Neath. In most cases their founders were Anglo-Norman, but in two cases, Strata-Florida and Abbey Cwmhir, the founders were probably Welsh. The question who had founded their houses was not one that greatly affected the Cistercians. Their great object was success, not merely in spiritual but also in carnal things, and they were early professors of the doctrine that the end justified the means. The Cistercians saw that the Benedictine policy was a failure, that success could only be achieved by something quite different. There is no evidence that they were aware of the action of the Carmarthen house but they adopted a similar policy, they played to the people, and they had their reward. Various considerations may have led the Cistercians to this policy. The Anglo-Normans had ceased to be as generous to the Welsh cells as they had once been. They considered they had done their share and were disinclined to do more. The Welsh chiefs were more promising subjects: they had so far done little or nothing in the way of endowing religious houses, if properly approached they might be induced to do much. This was the Cistercians' opportunity. The experiment of a national policy for Wales which might be made into a successful line for a religious house to follow also occurred to the Cistercians, and the order adopted the idea. Several reasons possibly led them to do this. First the rivalry between the Benedictines and Cistercians: the two orders hated each other with a holy hatred, and

the Cistercians would not be slow to perceive the advantage of having the Welsh on their side in any contest that might spring up. Secondly, the Welsh chiefs might also be useful from another point of view: the Cistercians were the great sheep farmers of the day, it was from the Welsh more than the Normans that the monks received great advantages both as to sheep, sheep-pasturage, and wool.

It might also be that the Welsh would meet the Cistercian half way, as they would be glad in their contest with the Anglo-Norman monks to have on their side men who were ready and willing to fight and could turn their foes' weapons against the common adversary. The Cistercians possessed another important advantage: they and their houses were exempt from all episcopal visitation and authority, and so could defy the Anglo-Norman bishops who then held the Welsh sees, and whom the Welsh so bitterly hated. Protected by the Cistercians, a Welsh chief could resist and resist successfully the authority and power of a Norman prelate. These and other reasons combined to secure for the Cistercian different treatment than that accorded to other religious orders. The Cistercians were not slow to avail themselves of their advantages, and to conciliate the Welsh. What possibly appealed most strongly to the latter was the Cistercian assumption of superior holiness, which in Welsh eyes meant superior power. The Cistercian told all other religious orders to stand back on the ground that his was the holiest of any. At all times in Celtic history the assumption of superior power has had a great effect on the Celtic mind. It was the assumption by Patrick that he possessed mightier power than the combined force of the druids that gave him his victory at Tara; it was the assumption by David that he could work miracles at Llanddewibrefi that is said to have won over the synod to his views. So now the assumption by the Cistercians that they possessed greater holiness than the Benedictines, that is greater power, led the Welsh to follow them, as they would, in an earlier age, have followed the most powerful magician or miracle worker. The Cistercian told the Benedictine to stand back and give place, the

Welsh believed in the Cistercian claim and accepted him at his own value.

There were probably other considerations, but those already-mentioned will account for the rapid popularity which the Cistercian order acquired in Wales. As the only order of regulars that found favour in Welsh eyes they soon became their adopted order. Within a century of the introduction of the Cistercians into Wales one of their houses, Strata Florida, became the burial place of the Welsh chieftains, the *campo santo* of South Wales, the place where her National Council met. When the last native Prince of Wales was killed at Cilmeri it was a Cistercian monk who bent over him to receive his confession, it was to a Cistercian house that his body was borne. This ascendancy once obtained, the Cistercian never lost. In the final revolt of Owen Glendower it was the Cistercian abbey of Strata Florida that Henry IV. garrisoned to keep down the nationalism of Wales. It was to the same Cistercian house that his son sent a garrison when he was on the point of setting out on his French expedition. The Cistercians received into their houses Welshmen as monks who, when educated, acted as scribes, with the result that in the scriptorium of the various houses of this order the bulk of the manuscripts were written that have preserved to us the history of Wales. The manuscripts that the Cistercians prepared give us not merely the history, but practically all we know of early Welsh mythology, theology, folklore, and genealogy. Whatever we may think of the action of the Cistercians we are under an enormous debt to them, for without them the materials we have for early Welsh history would, even if existent, be very much less than they are.

The Cistercians carried out the policy of the Black Canons and went beyond it. The manuscripts which Dr. Gwenogvryn Evans has catalogued for the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts enable an opinion to be expressed on their contents. Roughly they consist first of the earlier texts, that is thirteenth century manuscripts, and secondly of the transcripts of those early texts in whole or part. The first class may be sub-divided into five headings: theology, history, law, poetry, heraldry

and genealogy, and in this class come eight manuscripts which represent the early texts. These are :—

1. The Black Book of Carmarthen, twelfth century.¹
2. The Book of Taliessin, thirteenth century.²
3. The White Book of Roderick (part in thirteenth century).³
4. Peniarth Fragments of the Mabinogion, thirteenth century.⁴
5. Geoffrey of Monmouth, Peniarth MSS. thirteenth century.⁵
6. Lord's Prayer and Creed, thirteenth century.⁶
7. Life of Griffith ap Kynan, thirteenth century.⁷
8. Brut y Brenhenoedd, fourteenth century.⁸

Of these eight the first and most important is the product of the Black Canons, but most of the rest are believed to come from Cistercian houses. If this is so, it goes a long way to prove the statement already made that it is to the Cistercians we owe the materials for Welsh history.

The manuscripts themselves are of interest as showing how the method of the canons respecting Welsh legends grew and increased. If the "White Book of Roderick" is taken as an instance, a manuscript which Dr. Evans calls "one of the most important and valuable in the Welsh language,"⁹ it will be seen how the system of the Canons lent itself to expansion.

The White Book is a composition of several periods, part belongs to the thirteenth century, part to the fourteenth. It begins with what may be called the Welsh part, the Mabinogion, a collection of Welsh legendary stories. These are instances of the current legends the monks took down and preserved. No one could call them Christian legends, although they were doubtless the popular and national legends of a so-called Christian people. The fact that they could have been collected and transcribed in a monastic house, shows conclusively that the monks of the house must have been on the best terms with the Welsh. It is not

¹ Peniarth, I, 297.

² *Ibid.* II, 300.

³ *Ibid.* IV and V, 305.

⁴ *Ibid.* VI, 316.

⁵ *Ibid.* XLII, 377.

⁶ Peniarth, XVI, 337.

⁷ *Ibid.* XVII, 339.

⁸ *Ibid.* XVIII, 341.

⁹ Hist. MSS. Comm. Report on MSS. in Welsh language Pt. II, 305.

an uninteresting fact, that the earliest part of the manuscript is the mythological, which shows how soon the Cistercians were able to collect and transcribe the local history. The next part is the theological. It consists of the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, the story of the Crucifixion, a translation from the vulgate of chapter xxvi, 2, to chapter xxviii, 7, of St. Matthew's gospel into Welsh, Helena's finding the cross, the histories of Pilate and Judas Iscariot, the fifteen signs of the day of judgment, the prophecy of Sybil the Wise, the gospel of the pseudo Mathew, the Creed, the lives of St. Catharine, St. Margaret, and St. Mary of Egypt, the trial of our Lord before Pilate, an account of Nathan's mission to Rome to give the story of the Crucifixion. The creed of St. Athanasius translated into Welsh for Eva the daughter of Meredith, the first verses of the gospel of St. John, and the purgatory of Patrick. Then comes a third part, partly historical, partly mythological, an account of Charlemagne's expedition to Spain, the French version of the romance of Otinel in Welsh, the adventure with Hu Gadarn, the romance of Bown of Hampton.

From this summary of the contents it will be seen that first there are the local, the Welsh legends, then scripture and legend mixed, stories which had been obviously imported into Wales, probably by the monks, and then a collection of legends, partly Welsh and partly eastern, which have a strong appearance of monkish editing. It is not at all easy to say what was the object of the compilation of the book, whether it was merely a common place book, or whether it was a book for reading at meals. But whatever its object, it has a very special interest as showing how the method of the Austin Canons was developed by the Cistercians. The Austin Canons had confined themselves to local legends, the Cistercians added eastern legends, or rather legends that were popular in the Latin Church, and also legends that had a continental colour. The whole forms a *melange* that probably furnishes a key to the source from which some of the incidents, added by Latin writers, to the lives of the Welsh Saints were drawn. Another point should be noticed as it has a slight bearing on a very old

controversy. All the quotations from the Bible in these legends are translations from the vulgate; this is what would be expected in a manuscript coming from a house which would use the vulgate, but it also points to this, that the vulgate was the version of the Bible in use in Wales, and any scripture in Welsh is merely a translation from it. The opinion so long and so strenuously urged by some writers, that there was a version of the Bible in Welsh preceding the vulgate, gains no support from these legends and quotations. It is not very likely that the scribe would take the trouble to edit the legends and extracts, and if he found the latter taken from an old Welsh version, substitute that of St. Jerome.

The White Book of Roderick is also of interest as it shows the high-water mark of this kind of literature, and gives the amount of legend and scripture that the Cistercians were prepared to sanction to gain the affections of the Welsh. This may have been due to two causes, (1) that they had established their position and did not find it necessary to make further deviations from orthodoxy, or (2) because another body had arisen who were preaching against the religious orders and their teaching, alleging they had degenerated from "the faith once delivered to the saints."

It is very difficult to offer any opinion except in the most tentative way, as there are so many manuscripts which are copies made at various times, often at long intervals, the contents of which are very mixed, but it seems that after the thirteenth century there is a dividing line. There are manuscripts with Welsh legends and scripture, usually copies of earlier manuscripts, there are manuscripts with eastern legends and scripture, but the combination of Welsh legends, scripture, and eastern legends, if it does not cease with the "White Book of Roderick," only occurs in copies of older manuscripts, not in original manuscripts. After the thirteenth century new manuscripts with new legends are of very rare occurrence. From this it may be argued that as the Latin Church became stronger she threw off the local legends, they being no longer of use to her, and of doubtful theological value. At all events about the early part of the fourteenth century an attempt was made to set

up a very dogmatic form of teaching Latin theology by a translation into Welsh of a catechism in the form of question and answer, between a scholar and his master on various of the more disputed points of mediaeval theology. One of the manuscripts has an English version which begins—

“Myn owne dere maister in wey of informacyon y beseche you that ye well awnswere to me all suche questions as y shall aske you in whiche questions y am yet fer from the very trew way of understanding, and my furst question shall be this. Hit is said no man can tell what is God.”¹

This catechism is the well-known *Elucidarium*, or to give it its full title, “*Elucidarium sive dialogus de summa totius christianae theologiae.*” There has been considerable discussion as to who was its author. For a long time it was ascribed to Lanfranc, and it is still printed in many collections of his works. In the Benedictine history of French Literature² it is said to be his on the strength of a French manuscript, in the Oxford edition by Giles in 1844 it is included among Lanfranc’s works. If this is the case it gives a clue as to how this book might have come to South Wales. Lanfranc was Abbot of the great Norman Abbey of Bec, and Robert de Chandos had founded a cell to Bec at Goldcliff in Monmouthshire. Modern writers however doubt the authorship of Lanfranc, and another way in which it may have come to South Wales can be suggested. In the library of Jesus College, Oxford, is a volume of eastern legends in Welsh with the *Elucidarium*.³ It is dated 1346 and is most probably not a translation from the Latin but a copy from some other existing Welsh text, an earlier translation. It has a peculiar interest from its scribe. It is stated on the manuscript that

Gryffudd ap Llywelyn ap Phylip ap Trahaearn of Cantref Mawr caused this book to be written by the hand of a friend of his, that is the man who was the hermit at this time at Llanddewibrefi.

At this time there was at Llanddewibrefi a college for priests founded in 1287 by the then bishop of St. David’s, Thomas Bec; who the hermit was, there is nothing to show, but the words “*amser hunu,*” “at that time,” may be read as meaning that there was always a hermit there,

¹ Hengwrt, XII, 323.

² *Ibid.*, XII, 168.

³ Hist. MSS. Comm. Report on Welsh MSS. Vol. II, 30 MS. 2.

that the position was in the nature of an office or recognised officer, and the translator held the office in 1346. It is quite possible he was a chantry priest and filled up his leisure time by acting as scribe to the college, and that the treatise was written for teaching the priests of Llanddewibrefi the right views on questions of scholastic theology. Yet another view may be put forward that the *Elucidarium* represented the views which the friars' preachers circulated as orthodox. An Irish friar, Geoffry of Waterford, is said to have been the author. The manuscript of the Llanddewibrefi Hermit contains besides the *Elucidarium* various other legends and pieces, some sixteen in number, all of the eastern class, and possibly such as the Dominicans considered harmless or possibly profitable. From its contents the *Elucidarium* may be taken as a denunciation of the monks by the friars. For instance this passage as to the future state has a strong ring of the friars' preachers. The scholar is asking the teacher on the prospects of the different classes of person at the day of judgment.

What, he says, will be the fate of priests ?

If, it is answered, they have lived a good life and used orthodox teaching they will be as the salt of the world.

What will be the fate of the monks and others wearing the religious habit ?

If they have lived according to their rule they will be judges with the Lord, if not they will go down quick into the pit.

What as to soldiers ?

There are few good men, they live by plunder and clothe themselves by robbery.

What hope is there for merchants ?

Very little, they acquire their wealth by fraud and perjury.

What about workmen ?

Nearly all will perish as they practise fraud.

Have the poets any hope ?

None whatever, they are Ministers of Satan.¹

One can almost hear an eloquent Dominican turning these replies into a burning discourse, denouncing the sins, the follies, and the wickedness of the fourteenth century, and especially the sins of those monks who relaxed their orthodoxy to win over the Welsh.

There is in addition evidence that the Dominicans did

¹ *Book of the Hermit of Llanddewibrefi*, Jones and Rhys, Oxford, 1894, 89 and 202.

use in their manuals some of the eastern legends and some of the legends which appear in the Book of the hermit of Llanddewibrefi. In the Shrewsbury school library¹ there is a manuscript which contains a number of these legends and also the "little office of the Virgin," there is a similar MS. at Peniarth² which has the same office with legends, and one in the Free Library, Cardiff.³ As the Shrewsbury is the most perfect Welsh office of the fourteenth century extant, it is, of itself, of considerable interest. On obtaining a copy I hoped it would turn out to be the use, the peculiar use, of some Welsh diocese: I could make nothing of it, so I asked for the help of Mr. Dewick, and he tells me that it is the Dominican form of the office translated into Welsh. At matins, the greater part of both are the same, the only difference being in the invitatory and the lessons which in the Shrewsbury manuscript are taken from the Advent office of the Roman use. For the other hours the resemblance is still closer. All the psalms are the same except at vespers when the Dominicans have an additional psalm, the 127th, "*Nisi Dominus Aedificat*"; the anthems, hymns, and little chapters, are all identical.

The Shrewsbury manuscript is in the dialect of South Wales, the Peniarth in that of North Wales, a proof of the care the Dominicans took in fitting out their men for the work in hand.

This Shrewsbury manuscript brings out that the Dominicans while they did not despise the use of legends only used the legends of the Latin Church and did not employ the local stories. It is only an inference from finding no local legends in the Book of the Hermit except those of the Latin Church, that that book as well as the Shrewsbury manuscript represent the Dominican teaching, and shows an attempt to bring back the Welsh to the standard of orthodoxy. At any rate it seems to point to a reaction against the length to which the Cistercians had gone in local legend.

The points that I have ventured to put forward and which seem to me to be of considerable interest and importance are these,

¹ MS. III, 48.

² Hengwrt No. 344.

³ MS. XXIII, Hi.t. MSS. Comm. Welsh MSS. II, 333.

1. That the attempt of the Norman Conqueror to set up Benedictine houses in South Wales was a failure.
2. That the Black Canons by admitting Welsh monks and recording Welsh legends took the first steps towards success.
3. That the Cistercians by carrying out this policy made themselves the national order of Wales.
4. That after the policy reached a certain point a reaction set in, the local legends were neglected, and the legends of the Latin church encouraged.
5. That this reaction was probably due to the preaching of the Dominicans.

It is quite true that the evidence put forward in support of these views is very fragmentary and requires a good deal of supplementing. This can only be done by careful study of the manuscripts and by a knowledge far greater than I can pretend to possess of mediaeval Welsh history and of mediaeval Welsh. If, however, I have not proved my case I have kept to the promise I made at the beginning of this paper, not to intrude upon current questions or present politics, and to abstain from repeating a twice-told tale.