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The Vita Merlini by Geoffrey of Monmouth.

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## The Vita Merlini (The Life Of Merlin)

I am preparing to sing the madness of the prophetic bard, and a humorous poem on Merlin; pray correct the song, Robert <sup>1</sup>, glory of bishops, by restraining my pen. For we know that Philosophy has poured over you its divine nectar, and has made you famous in all things, that you might serve as an example, a leader and a teacher in the world. Therefore may you favour my attempt, and see fit to look upon the poet with better auspices than you did that other whom you have just succeeded, promoted to an honour that you deserve. For indeed your habits, and your approved life, and your birth, and your usefulness to the position, and the clergy and the people all were seeking it for you, and from this circumstance happy Lincoln is just now exalted to the stars. On this account I might wish you to be embraced in a fitting song, but I am not equal to the task, even though Orpheus, and Camerinus <sup>2</sup>, and Macer, and Marius, and mighty-voiced Rabirius were all to sing with my mouth and all the Muses were to accompany me. But now, Sisters, accustomed to sing with me, let us sing the work proposed, and strike the cithara.

Well then, after many years had passed under many kings, Merlin the Briton was held famous in the world. He was a king and prophet; to the proud people of the South Welsh he gave laws, and to the chieftains he prophesied the future. Meanwhile it happened that a strife arose <sup>3</sup> between several of the chiefs of the kingdom, and throughout the cities they wasted the innocent people with fierce war.<sup>4</sup> Peredur, king of the North Welsh, made war on Gwenddoleu, who ruled the realm of Scotland; and already the day fixed for the battle was at hand, and the leaders were ready in the field, and the troops were fighting, falling on both sides in a miserable slaughter. Merlin had come to the war with Peredur and so had Rhydderch, king of the Cumbrians, <sup>5</sup> both savage men. They slew the opposing enemy with their hateful swords, and three brothers of the prince <sup>6</sup> who had followed him through his wars, always fighting, cut down and broke the battle lines. Thence they rushed fiercely through the crowded ranks with such an attack that they soon fell killed. At this sight, Merlin, you grieved and poured out sad complaints throughout the army, and cried out in these words, “Could injurious fate be so harmful as to take from me so many and such great companions, whom recently so many kings and so many remote kingdoms feared? O dubious lot of mankind! O death ever near, which has them always in its power, and strikes its hidden goad and drives out the wretched life from the body! O glorious youths, who now will stand by my side in arms, and with me will repel the chieftains coming to harm me, and the hosts rushing in upon me? Bold young men your audacity has taken from you your

<sup>1</sup> Robert de Chesney, fourth Bishop of Lincoln, was chosen toward the end of the year 1148 after the death of Bishop Alexander, to whom Geoffrey had dedicated his version of the prophecies of Merlin.

<sup>2</sup> Camerinus, Macer, Marius, and Rabirius are all referred to within a few lines of one of Ovid’s *Epistles from Pontus* (IV, xvi).

<sup>3</sup> For this battle and the persons concerned in it see the Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> This seems like a reference to the pillaging expedition, which, according to the *Triads*, was made by Aeddan shortly before the battle of Arderydd.

<sup>5</sup> The name Cambri (Cymry), now applied to the Welsh, was formerly used of the Britons of Strathclyde and Cumberland - “Y Gogledd”. The kingdom of Rhydderch was in this region. Jocelyn of Furness in his *The Life of St Kentigern* (Chap xxxi) speaks of going “de Wallia ad Cambrian”. See also *Y Cymmrodor*, XI, 98.

<sup>6</sup> The Welsh dialogue between Myrddin and Taliesin speaks of the death in the battle of, “Three men of note whose esteem was great with Elgan.” It speaks also of the prodigies of valour performed by the seven sons of Eliffer, of whom Peredur we know was one, and it may be three of these who are referred to. See the Miscellany.

pleasant years and pleasant youth! You who so recently were rushing in arms through the troops, cutting down on every side those who resisted you, now are beating the ground and are red with red blood!” So among the hosts he lamented with flowing tears, and mourned for the men, and the savage battle was unceasing. The lines rushed together, enemies were slain by enemies, blood flowed everywhere, and people died on both sides. But at length the Britons assembled their troops from all quarters and all together rushing in arms they fell upon the Scots and wounded them and cut them down, nor did they rest until the hostile battalions turned their backs and fled through unfrequented ways.

Merlin called his companions out from the battle and bade them bury the brothers in a richly coloured chapel; and he bewailed the men and did not cease to pour out laments, and he strewed dust on his hair and rent his garments, and prostrate on the ground rolled now hither and now thither. Peredur strove to console him and so did the nobles and princes, but he would not be comforted nor put up with their beseeching words. He had now lamented for three whole days and had refused food, so great was the grief that consumed him. Then when he had filled the air with so many and so great complaints, new fury seized him <sup>7</sup> and he departed secretly, and fled to the woods not wishing to be seen as he fled. He entered the wood and rejoiced to lie hidden under the ash trees; he marvelled at the wild beasts feeding on the grass of the glades; now he chased after them and again he flew past them; he lived on the roots of grasses and on the grass, on the fruit of the trees and on the mulberries of the thicket. He became a silvan man just as though devoted to the woods. For a whole summer after this, hidden like a wild animal, he remained buried in the woods, found by no one and forgetful of himself and of his kindred. But when the winter came and took away all the grass and the fruit of the trees and he had nothing to live on, he poured out the following lament in a wretched voice.

“Christ, God of heaven, <sup>8</sup> what shall I do? In what part of the world can I stay, since I see nothing here I can live on, neither grass on the ground nor acorns on the trees? Here once there stood nineteen apple trees <sup>9</sup> bearing apples every year; now they are not standing. Who has taken them away from me? Whither have they gone all of a sudden? Now I see them - now I do not! Thus the fates fight against me and for me, since they both permit and forbid me to see. Now I lack the apples and everything else. The trees stand without leaves, without fruit; I am afflicted by both circumstances since I cannot cover myself with the leaves or eat the fruit. Winter and the south wind with its falling rain have taken them all away. If by chance I find some navews [turnips] deep in the ground the hungry swine and the voracious boars rush up and snatch them away from me as I dig them up from the turf. You, O wolf, dear companion, accustomed to roam with me through the secluded paths of the woods and meadows, now can scarcely get across fields; hard hunger has weakened both you and me. You lived in these woods before I did and age has whitened your hairs first. You have nothing to put into your mouth and do not know how to get anything, at which I marvel, since the wood abounds in so many goats and other wild beasts that you might catch. Perhaps that detestable old age of yours has taken away your strength and prevented your following the chase. Now, as the only thing left to you, you fill the air with howlings, and stretched out on the ground you extend your wasted limbs.”

<sup>7</sup> The madness of Merlin, hardly intelligible here, is clear enough in the other versions where it comes as a punishment for his own misdeeds. For parallels to this story see the Irish *Frenzy of Suibhne* and the other texts referred to in the Introduction.

<sup>8</sup> “Celi Duw” came to be a very common title of the Deity in Welsh, the “coeli” losing completely its original meaning and being considered quite equivalent to “God.”

<sup>9</sup> For references in Welsh literature to Merlin’s apple trees see the *Afallennau* and the *Oianau*.



These words he was uttering among the shrubs and dense hazel thickets when the sound reached a certain passer-by who turned his steps to the place whence the sounds were rising in the air, and found the place and found the speaker. As soon as Merlin saw him he departed, and the traveller followed him, but was unable to overtake the man as he fled. Thereupon he resumed his journey and went about his business, moved by the lot of the fugitive. Now this traveller was met by a man from the court of Rhydderch, king of the Cumbrians, who was married to Ganieda and happy in his beautiful wife. She was sister to Merlin and, grieving over the fate of her brother, she had sent her retainers to the woods and the distant fields to bring him back. One of these retainers came toward the traveller and the latter at once went up to him and they fell into conversation; the one who had been sent to find Merlin asked if the other had seen him in the woods or the glades. The latter admitted that he had seen such a man among the bushy glades of the Calidonian forest,<sup>10</sup> but, when he wished to speak to him and sit down with him, the other had fled away swiftly among the oaks. These things he told, and the messenger departed and entered the forest; he searched the deepest valleys and passed over the high mountains; he sought everywhere for his man, going through the obscure places.

On the very summit of a certain mountain there was a fountain, surrounded on every side by hazel bushes and thick with shrubs. There Merlin had seated himself, and thence through all the woods he watched the wild animals running and playing. Thither the messenger climbed, and with silent step went on up the heights seeking the man. At last he saw the fountain and Merlin sitting on the grass behind it, and making his plaint in this manner.

“O Thou who rulest all things, how does it happen that the seasons are not all the same, distinguished only by their four numbers? Now spring, according to its laws, provides flowers and leaves; summer gives crops, autumn ripe apples; icy winter follows and devours and wastes all the others, bringing rain and snow, and keeps them all away and harms with its tempests. And it does not permit the ground to produce variegated [various?] flowers, or the oak trees acorns, or the apple trees dark red apples. O that there were no winter or white frost! That it were spring or summer, and that the cuckoo would come back singing, and the nightingale who softens sad hearts with her devoted song, and the turtle dove keeping her chaste vows, and that in new foliage other birds should sing in harmonious measures, delighting me with their music, while a new earth should breathe forth odours from new flowers under the green grass; that the fountains would also flow on every side with their gentle murmurs, and near by, under the leaves, the dove would pour forth her soothing laments and incite to slumber.”

The messenger heard the prophet and broke off his lament with cadences on the cither he had brought with him that with it he might attract and soften the madman.<sup>11</sup> Therefore making plaintive sounds with his fingers and striking the strings in order, he lay hidden behind him and sang in a low voice, “O the dire groanings of mournful Guendoloena! O the wretched tears of weeping Guendoloena! I grieve for wretched dying Guendoloena! There was not among the Welsh a woman more beautiful than she. She surpassed in fairness the goddesses, and the petals of the privet, and the blooming roses and the fragrant lilies of the fields. The glory of spring shone in her alone, and she had the splendour of the stars in her two eyes, and splendid hair shining with the gleam of gold. All this has perished; all beauty has departed from her, both colour and figure and also the glory of her snowy flesh. Now, worn with

<sup>10</sup> Coed Celyddon or the Forest of Calidon originally stretched over the greater part of what is now southern Scotland.

<sup>11</sup> In the Irish story of Suibhne his madness is softened in a very similar way by Loingreachan who played upon the harp and sang to him of his family, and finally persuaded him to return home.

much weeping, she is not what she was, for she does not know where the prince has gone, or whether he is alive or dead; therefore the wretched woman languishes and is totally wasted away through her long grief. With similar laments Ganieda weeps with her, and without consolation grieves for her lost brother. One weeps for her brother and the other for her husband, and both devote themselves to weeping and spend their time in sadness. No food nourishes them, nor does any sleep refresh them wandering at night through the brushwood, so great is the grief that consumes them both. Not otherwise did Sidonian Dido grieve when the ships had weighed anchor and Aeneas was in haste to depart; so most wretched Phyllis groaned and wept when Demophoon did not come back at the appointed time; thus Briseis wept for the absent Achilles.<sup>12</sup> Thus the sister and the wife grieve together, and burn continually and completely with inward agonies.”

The messenger sang thus to his plaintive lyre, and with his music soothed the ears of the prophet that he might become more gentle and rejoice with the singer. Quickly the prophet arose and addressed the young man with pleasant words, and begged him to touch once more the strings with his fingers and to sing again his former song. The latter therefore set his fingers to the lyre and played over again the song that was asked for, and by his playing compelled the man, little by little, to put aside his madness, captivated by the sweetness of the lute. So Merlin became mindful of himself, and he recalled what he used to be, and he wondered at his madness and he hated it. His former mind returned and his sense came back to him, and, moved by affection, he groaned at the names of his sister and of his wife, since his mind was now restored to him, and he asked to be led to the court of King Rhydderch. The other obeyed him, and straightway they left the woods and came, rejoicing together, to the city of the king. So the queen was delighted by regaining her brother and the wife became glad over the return of her husband. They vied with each other in kissing him and they twined their arms about his neck, so great was the affection that moved them. The king also received him with such honour as was fitting, and the chieftains who thronged the palace rejoiced in the city.

But when Merlin saw such great crowds of men present he was not able to endure them; he went mad again, and, filled anew with fury, he wanted to go to the woods, and he tried to get away by stealth. Then Rhydderch ordered him to be restrained and a guard posted over him, and his madness to be softened with the cithar; and he stood about him grieving, and with imploring words begged the man to be sensible and to stay with him, and not to long for the grove or to live like a wild beast, or to want to abide under the trees when he might hold a royal sceptre and rule over a warlike people. After that he promised that he would give him many gifts, and he ordered people to bring him clothing and birds, dogs and swift horses, gold and shining gems, and cups that Wayland had engraved in the city of Segontium.<sup>13</sup> Every one of these things Rhydderch offered to the prophet and urged him to stay with him and leave the woods.

The prophet rejected these gifts, saying, “Let the dukes who are troubled by their own poverty have these, they who are not satisfied with a moderate amount but desire a great deal. To these gifts I prefer the groves and broad oaks of Calidon, and the lofty mountains with green pastures at their feet. Those are the things that please me, not these of yours - take these away with you, King Rhydderch. My Calidonian forest rich in nuts, the forest that I prefer to everything else, shall have me.”

<sup>12</sup> These lines show that Geoffrey was familiar with the *Heroides* of Ovid.

<sup>13</sup> Guilandus is probably, as San Marte suggests, Wayland Smith. Urbs Sigenus is the old Welsh Kaer Sigont (now Caer Seiont), a name perhaps transferred to Carnarvon from the ruins of the Roman station of Segontium on the hill a short distance above the present city.

Finally since the king could not retain the sad man by any gifts, he ordered him to be bound with a strong chain lest, if free, he might seek the deserted groves. The prophet, when he felt the chains around him and he could not go as a free man to the Calidonian forests, straightway fell to grieving and remained sad and silent, and took all joy from his face so that he did not utter a word or smile.

Meanwhile the queen was going through the hall looking for the king, and he, as was proper, greeted her as she came and took her by the hand and bade her sit down, and, embracing her, pressed her lips in a kiss. In so doing he turned his face toward her and saw a leaf hanging in her hair;<sup>14</sup> he reached out his fingers, took it and threw it on the ground, and jested joyfully with the woman he loved. The prophet turned his eyes in that direction and smiled, and made the the men standing about look at him in wonder since he was not in the habit of smiling. The king too wondered and urged the madman to tell the cause of his sudden laugh, and he added to his words many gifts. The other was silent and put off explaining his laugh. But more and more Rhydderch continued to urge him with riches and with entreaties until at length the prophet, vexed at him, said in return for his gift, “A miser loves a gift and a greedy man labours to get one; these are easily corrupted by gifts and bend their minds in any direction they are bidden to. What they have is not enough for them, but for me the acorns of pleasant Calidon and the shining fountains flowing through fragrant meadows are sufficient. I am not attracted by gifts; let the miser take his, and unless liberty is given me and I go back to the green woodland valleys I shall refuse to explain my laughter.”

Therefore when Rhydderch found that he could not influence the prophet by any gift, and he could not find out the reason for the laughter, straightway he ordered the chains to be loosed and gave him permission to seek the deserted groves, that he might be willing to give the desired explanation. Then Merlin, rejoicing that he could go, said, “This is the reason I laughed, Rhydderch. You were by a single act both praiseworthy and blameworthy. When just now you removed the leaf that the queen had in her hair without knowing it, you acted more faithfully toward her than she did toward you when she went under the bush where her lover met her and lay with her; and while she was lying there supine with her hair spread out, by chance there caught in it the leaf that you, not knowing all this, removed.”

Rhydderch suddenly became sad at this accusation and turned his face from her and cursed the day he had married her. But she, not at all moved, hid her shame behind a smiling face and said to her husband, “Why are you sad, my love? Why do you become so angry over this thing and blame me unjustly, and believe a madman who, lacking sound sense, mixes lies with the truth? The man who believes him becomes many times more a fool than he is. Now then, watch, and if I am not mistaken I will show you that he is crazy and has not spoken the truth.”

There was in the hall a certain boy, one of many, and the ingenious woman catching sight of him straightway thought of a novel trick by which she might convict her brother of falsehood.<sup>15</sup> So she ordered the boy to come in and asked her brother to predict by what

<sup>14</sup> This incident is contained in an expanded form in a fragment believed to be from a lost life of Kentigern, printed by Ward in *Romania*, xxii; there however the story is of Lailoken and the wife of Meldred, king of Dunmeller. It bears some resemblance to the story told in Jocelyn's *The Life of St Kentigern* of the adultery of Languoreth, wife of Rhydderch.

<sup>15</sup> This resembles closely another fragment printed by Ward in which Lailoken prophesies a similar threefold death, in this case, however, for himself. Much the same incident has been preserved in by Welsh oral tradition in Glamorgan in connection with Twm Ieuan ap Rhys (born in 1474), commonly called Twm Gelwydd Teg or Tom of the Fine Lies. According to the story printed in the *Iolo Manuscripts*, (Second edition, p 202, translation p 616)



death the lad should die. He answered, "Dearest sister, he shall die, when a man, by falling from a high rock." Smiling at these words, she ordered the boy to go away and take off the clothes he was wearing and put on others and to cut off his long hair; she bade him come back to them thus that he might seem to them a different person. The boy obeyed her, for he came back to them with his clothes changed as he had been ordered to do. Soon the queen asked her brother again, "Tell your dear sister what the death of this boy will be like." Merlin answered, "This boy when he grows up shall, while out of his mind, meet with a violent death in a tree." When he had finished she said to her husband, "Could this false prophet lead you so far astray as to make you believe that I had committed so great a crime? And if you will notice with how much sense he has spoken this about the boy, you will believe that the things he said about me were made up so that he might get away to the woods. Far be it from me to do such a thing! I shall keep my bed chaste, and chaste shall I always be while the breath of life is in me. I convicted him of falsehood when I asked him about the death of the boy. Now I shall do it again; pay attention and judge."

When she had said this she told the boy in an aside to go out and put on woman's clothing, and to come back thus. Soon the boy left and did as he was bid, for he came back in woman's clothes just as though he were a woman, and stood in front of Merlin to whom the queen said banteringly, "Say brother, tell me about the death of this girl." "Girl or not she shall die in the river," said her brother to her, which made King Rhydderch laugh at his reasoning; since when asked about the death of a single boy Merlin had predicted three different kinds. Therefore Rhydderch thought he had spoken falsely about the queen, and did not believe him, but grieved, and hated the fact that he had trusted him and had condemned his beloved. The queen, seeing this, forgave him and kissed and caressed him and made him joyful.

Meanwhile Merlin planned to go to the woods, and he left his dwelling and ordered the gates to be opened; but his sister stood in his way and with rising tears begged him to remain with her for a while and to put aside his madness. The hard-hearted man would not desist from his project but kept trying to open the doors, and he strove to leave and raged and fought and by his clamour forced the servants to open. At length, since no one could hold him back when he wanted to go, the queen quickly ordered Guendoloena, who was absent, to come to make him desist. She came and on her knees begged him to remain; but he spurned her prayers and would not stay, nor would he, as he was accustomed to do, look upon her with a joyful face. She grieved and dissolved in tears and tore her hair, and scratched her cheeks with her nails and rolled on the ground as though dying. The queen seeing this said to him, "This Guendoloena who is dying thus for you, what shall she do? Shall she marry again or do you bid her remain a widow, or go with you wherever you are going? For she will go, and with you she will joyfully inhabit the groves and the green woodland meadows provided she has your love." To this the prophet answered, "Sister I do not want a cow that pours out water in a broad fountain like the urn of the Virgin in summer-time, nor shall I change my care as

Twm was one day threshing in a barn, and a young lad went by and addressed him as follows: "Well, Twm Gelwydd Teg, what news have you today?" "There is news for thee," said he; "thou shalt die three deaths before this night." "Ha! Ha!" said the youth, "nobody can die more than one death," and he went off laughing. In the course of the day, the lad went to the top of a great tree on the brink of a river, to take a kite's nest, and in thrusting his hand into the nest, he was wounded by an adder, brought by the kite to her young ones, as she was accustomed to do. This causing him to lose his hold, he fell down on a great branch and broke his neck, and from there he fell into the river, and thus he met with three deaths, to be wounded by an adder, to break his neck, and to drown.

The relation of such stories as these to similar incidents found earlier in the romances is a puzzling one, but probably relate to much earlier tales.

Orpheus once did when Eurydice gave her baskets to the boys to hold before she swam back across the Stygian sands. Freed from both of you I shall remain without the taint of love. Let her therefore be given a proper opportunity to marry and let him whom she shall choose have her. But let the man who marries her be careful that he never gets in my way or comes near me; let him keep away for fear lest if I happen to meet him he may feel my flashing sword. But when the day of the solemn [formal] wedding comes and the different viands are distributed to the guests, I shall be present in person, furnished with seemly gifts, and I shall profusely endow Guendoloena when she is given away.” When he had finished he said farewell to each of them and went away, and with no one to hinder him he went back to the woods he longed for.

Guendoloena remained sadly in the door watching him and so did the queen, both moved by what had happened to their friend, and they marvelled that a madman should be so familiar with secret things and should have known of the love affair of his sister. Nevertheless they thought that he lied about the death of the boy since he told of three different deaths when he should have told of one. Therefore his speech seemed for long years to be an empty one until the time when the boy grew to manhood; then it was made apparent to all and convincing to many. For while he was hunting with his dogs he caught sight of a stag hiding in a grove of trees; he loosed the dogs who, as soon as they saw the stag, climbed through unfrequented ways and filled the air with their baying. He urged on his horse with his spurs and followed after, and urged on the huntsmen, directing them, now with his horn and now with his voice, and he bade them go more quickly. There was a high mountain surrounded on all sides by rocks with a stream flowing through the plain at its foot; thither the animal fled until he came to the river, seeking a hiding place after the usual manner of its kind. The young man pressed on and passed straight over the mountain, hunting for the stag among the rocks lying about. Meanwhile it happened, while his impetuosity was leading him on, that his horse slipped from a high rock and the man fell over a precipice into the river, but so that one of his feet caught in a tree, and the rest of his body was submerged in the stream. Thus he fell, and was drowned, and hung from a tree, and by his threefold death made the prophet a true one.

The latter meanwhile had gone to the woods and was living like a wild beast, subsisting on frozen moss, in the snow, in the rain, in the cruel blasts of the wind. And this pleased him more than administering laws throughout his cities and ruling over fierce people. Meanwhile Guendoloena, since her husband was leading a life like this with his woodland flock through the passing years, was married in accordance with her husband’s permission.

It was night and the horns of the bright moon were shining, and all the lights of the vault of heaven were gleaming; the air was clearer than usual, for cruel, frigid, Boreas had driven away the clouds and had made the sky serene again and had dried up the mists with his arid breath. From the top of a lofty mountain the prophet was regarding the courses of the stars, speaking to himself out in the open air. “What does this ray of Mars mean? Does its fresh redness mean that one king is dead and that there shall be another? So I see it, for Constantine has died and his nephew Conan, through an evil fate and the murder of his uncle, has taken the crown and is king.<sup>16</sup> And you, highest Venus, who slipping along within your ordered limits beneath the zodiac are accompanying the sun in his course, what about this double ray of yours that is cleaving the air? Does not its division indicate a severing of my love? Such a ray indeed shows that loves are divided. Perhaps Guendoloena has left me in

<sup>16</sup> These lines, backed up by lines 1133-1135, place the action of the poem in the reign of Aurelius Conan, which according to the *Historia* began about two years after the translation of Arthur and lasted for about two years. As Geoffrey places the translation of Arthur in 542, he has made a mistake in dating, since the Battle of Arderydd was fought about 577.

my absence and now clings to another man and rejoices in his embraces. So I lose; so another enjoys her. So my rights are taken away from me while I dally. So it is surely, for a slothful lover is beaten by one who is not slothful or absent but is right on hand. But I am not jealous; let her marry now under favourable auspices and let her enjoy her new husband with my permission. And when tomorrow's sun shall shine I will go and take with me the gift I promised her when I left." So he spoke and went about all the woods and groves and collected a herd of stags in a single line, and the deer and she-goats likewise, and he himself mounted a stag.<sup>17</sup> And when day dawned he came quickly, driving the line before him to the place where Guendoloena was to be married. When he arrived he forced the stags to stand patiently outside the gates while he cried aloud, "Guendoloena! Guendoloena! Come! Your presents are looking for you!" Guendoloena therefore came quickly, smiling and marvelling that the man was riding on the stag and that it obeyed him, and that he could get together so large a number of animals and drive them before him just as a shepherd does the sheep that he is in the habit of driving to the pastures.

The bridegroom stood watching from a lofty window and marvelling at the rider on his seat, and he laughed. But when the prophet saw him and understood who he was, at once he wrenched the horns from the stag he was riding and shook them and threw them at the man and completely smashed his head in, and killed him and drove out his life into the air. With a quick blow of his heels he set the stag flying and was on his way back to the woods. At these happenings the servants rushed out from all sides and quickly followed the prophet through the fields. But he ran ahead so fast that he would have reached the woods untouched if a river had not been in his way; while his beast was hurriedly leaping over the torrent Merlin slipped from his back and fell into the rapid waves. The servants lined the shore and captured him as he swam, and bound him and took him home and gave him to his sister.

The prophet, captured in this way, became sad and wanted to go back to the woods, and he fought to break his bonds and refused to smile or to take food or drink, and by his sadness he made his sister sad. Rhydderch, therefore, seeing him drive all joy from him and refuse to taste of the banquets that had been prepared for him, took pity on him and ordered him to be led out into the city, through the market place among the people, in the hope that he might be cheered up by going and seeing the novelties that were being sold there.

After he had been taken out and was going away from the palace he saw before a door a servant of a poor appearance, the doorkeeper, asking with trembling lips of all the passers-by some money with which to get his clothes mended.<sup>18</sup> The prophet thereupon stood still and laughed, wondering at the poor man. When he had gone on from here he saw a young man holding some new shoes and buying some pieces of leather to patch them with. Then he laughed again and refused to go further through the market place to be stared at by the people he was watching. But he yearned for the woods, toward which he frequently looked back, and to which, although forbidden, he tried to direct his steps.

<sup>17</sup> In the Irish version of the story Eorann, wife of Suibhne, takes a new mate in much the same fashion as Guendoloena does here. In the same story we find Suibhne speaking of his herd of stags, to one of which he says,

"Thou stag that comest lowing  
to me across the glen,  
pleasant is the place for seats  
on the top of they antler-points."

<sup>18</sup> These two incidents are apparently of Oriental origin and quite possibly came to Geoffrey through some collection of exempla. In the *Babylonian Talmud* there is a similar tale in which a daemon laughs at a man buying shoes and at a fortune-teller prophesying wealth for others.

The servants returned home and told that he had laughed twice and also that he had tried to get away to the woods. Rhydderch, who wished to know what he had meant by his laughter, quickly gave orders for his bonds to be loosed and gave him permission to go back to his accustomed woods if only he would explain why he laughed. The prophet, now quite joyful, answered, "The doorkeeper was sitting outside the doors in well worn clothing and kept asking those who went by to give him something to buy clothes with, just as though he had been a pauper, and all the time he was secretly a rich man and had under him hidden piles of coins. That is what I laughed at; turn up the ground under him and you will find coins preserved there for a long time. From there they led me further toward the market place and I saw a man buying some shoes and also some patches so that after the shoes were worn out and had holes in them from use he might mend them and make them fit for service again. This too I laughed at since the poor man will not be able to use the shoes nor," he added, "the patches, since he is already drowned in the waves and is floating toward the shore; go and you will see." Rhydderch, wishing to test the man's sayings, ordered his servants to go quickly along the bank of the river, so that if they should chance to find such a man drowned by the shore they might at once bring him word. They obeyed the king's orders, for going along the the river they found a drowned man in a waste patch of sand, and returned home and reported the fact to him. But the king meanwhile, after sending away the doorkeeper, had dug and turned up the ground and found a treasure placed under it, and laughingly he worshipped the prophet.

After these things had happened the prophet was making haste to go to the woods he was accustomed to, hating the people in the city. The queen advised him to stay with her and to put off his desired trip to the woods until the cold of white winter, which was then at hand, should be over, and summer should return again with its tender fruits on which he could live while the weather grew warm from the sun. He refused, and desirous of departing and scorning the winter he said to her, "O dear sister, why do you labour to hold me back? Winter with his tempests cannot frighten me, nor icy Boreas when he rages with his cruel blasts and suddenly injures the flocks of sheep with hail; neither does Auster disturb me when its rain clouds shed their waters. Why should I not seek the deserted groves and the green woodlands? Content with a little I can endure the frost. There under the leaves of the trees among the odorous blossoms I shall take pleasure in lying through the summer; but lest I lack food in winter you might build me a house in the woods and have servants in it to wait on me and prepare me food when the ground refuses to produce grain or the trees fruit. Before the other buildings build me a remote one with seventy doors and as many windows through which I may watch fire-breathing Phoebus and Venus and the stars gliding from the heavens by night, all of whom shall show me what is going to happen to the people of the kingdom. And let the same number of scribes be at hand, trained to take my dictation, and let them be attentive to record my prophecy on their tablets.<sup>19</sup> You too are to come often, dear sister, and then you can relieve my hunger with food and drink." After he had finished speaking he departed hastily for the woods.

His sister obeyed him and built the place he had asked for, and the other houses and whatever else he had bid her. But he, while the apples remained and Phoebus was ascending higher through the stars, rejoiced to remain beneath the leaves and to wander through the groves with their soothing breezes. Then winter came, harsh with icy winds, and despoiled the ground and the trees of all their fruit, and Merlin lacked food because the rains were at hand, and he came, sad and hungry, to the aforesaid place. Thither the queen often came and

<sup>19</sup> In the Irish version the prophecies are taken down by St Molig; in the Scottish version by St Kentigern; in the Welsh poems Myrddin makes them to his sister.

rejoiced to bring her brother both food and drink. He, after he had refreshed himself with various kinds of edibles, would arise and express his approval of his sister. Then wandering about the house he would look at the stars while he prophesied things like these which he knew were going to come to pass.

“O madness of the Britons whom a plenitude, always excessive, of riches exalts more than is seemly.<sup>20</sup> They do not wish to enjoy peace but are stirred up by the Fury’s goad. They engage in civil wars and battles between relatives, and permit the church of the Lord to fall into ruin; the holy bishops they drive into remote lands. The nephews of the Boar of Cornwall<sup>21</sup> cast everything into confusion, and setting snares for each other engage in a mutual slaughter with their wicked swords. They do not wish to wait to get possession of the kingdom lawfully, but seize the crown. The fourth<sup>22</sup> from them shall be more cruel and more harsh still; him shall a wolf from the sea conquer in fight and shall drive defeated beyond the Severn through the kingdoms of the barbarians. This latter shall besiege Cirencester with a blockade and with sparrows, and shall overthrow its walls to their very bases. He shall seek the Gauls in his ship, but shall die beneath the weapon of a king. Rhydderch shall die,<sup>23</sup> after whom long discord shall hold the Scots and the Cumbrians for a long time until Cumbria shall be granted to his growing tusk. The Welsh shall attack the men of Gwent,<sup>24</sup> and afterwards those of Cornwall and no law shall restrain them. Wales shall rejoice in the shedding of blood; O people always hateful to God, why do you rejoice in bloodshed? Wales shall compel brothers to fight and to condemn their own relatives to a wicked death. The troops of the Scots shall often cross the Humber and, putting aside all sentiment, shall kill those who oppose them. Not with impunity, however, for the leader shall be killed; he shall have the name of a horse<sup>25</sup> and because of that fact shall be fierce. His heir shall be expelled and shall depart from our territories. Scots, sheathe your swords which you bare too readily; your strength shall be unequal to that of our fierce people. The city of Dumbarton<sup>26</sup> shall be destroyed and no king shall repair it for an age until the Scot shall be subdued in war. Carlisle, spoiled of its shepherd, shall lie vacant until the sceptre of the Lion shall restore its pastoral staff.<sup>27</sup> Segontium and its towers and mighty palaces shall lament in ruins until the Welsh return to their former domains.<sup>28</sup> Porchester shall see its broken walls in its harbour until a rich man with the tooth of a wolf shall restore it. The city of Richborough<sup>29</sup> shall lie spread out on the shore of its harbour and a man from Flanders<sup>30</sup> shall re-establish it with his crested ship. The fifth from him shall rebuild the walls of St David’s and shall bring back to her the pall lost for

<sup>20</sup> The following passage is a working over of the *Historia*, XI, vii-x. The “Wolf of the Sea” refers to Gormund.

<sup>21</sup> The “Boar of Cornwall” is Geoffrey’s name for Arthur in the *Prophecies*; the “nephews” are apparently his grand-nephews, the sons of Modred. (*Historia*, XI, iii).

<sup>22</sup> This evidently refers to Careticus of the *Historia*, the fourth after Arthur’s successor Constantine.

<sup>23</sup> For the greater part of this there are no specific explanations. In Jocelyn’s *Kentigern* we find Lailoken predicting the death of Rhydderch, and in the Welsh poem of the *Cyfoesi* we find Myrddin doing the same.

<sup>24</sup> On the *Gewissi*, who are probably intended here, see note 54 below.

<sup>25</sup> Men whose names are derived from horses, that one naturally thinks of, are Hengist, Horsus, and March, but none of these seems to fit here.

<sup>26</sup> Kaer Alclwyd, the modern Dumbarton, was destroyed by the Picts in 736, and by the Northmen in 870.

<sup>27</sup> Carlisle was destroyed by the Northmen and restored by William Rufus. In 1133 Henry I (the “Lion of Justice” of the *Prophecies*) re-established its bishopric.

<sup>28</sup> Lot believes that this passage was inspired by the sight of the ruins of the old Roman station of Segontium on the hill above the modern city of Carnarvon.

<sup>29</sup> The old Roman port, now Richborough on the Kent coast between Ramsgate and Deal.

<sup>30</sup> The Rutheni were, according to Alanus, the people of Flanders.

many years.<sup>31</sup> The City of the Legions<sup>32</sup> shall fall into thy bosom, O Severn, and shall lose her citizens for a long time, and these the Bear in the Lamb<sup>33</sup> shall restore to her when he shall come.

Saxon kings shall expel the citizens and shall hold cities, country, and houses for a long time. From among them thrice three dragons shall wear the crown. Two hundred monks shall perish in Leicester<sup>34</sup> and the Saxon shall drive out her ruler and leave vacant her walls. He who first among the Angles shall wear the diadem of Brutus<sup>35</sup> shall repair the city laid waste by slaughter. A fierce people shall forbid the sacrament of confirmation throughout the country, and in the house of God shall place images of the gods. Afterward Rome shall bring God back through the medium of a monk and a holy priest shall sprinkle the buildings with water and shall restore them again and shall place shepherds in them. Thereafter many of them shall obey the commands of the divine law and shall enjoy heaven by right. An impious people full of poison shall violate that settlement and shall violently mix together right and wrong. They shall sell their sons and their kinsmen into the furthest countries beyond the sea and shall incur the wrath of the Thunderer. O wretched crime! that man whom the founder of the world created with liberty, deeming him worthy of heaven, should be sold like an ox and be dragged away with a rope. You miserable man who turned traitor to your master when first you came to the throne, you shall yield to God. The Danes<sup>36</sup> shall come upon [you] with their fleet and after subduing the people shall reign for a short time and shall then be defeated and retire. Two shall rule over them<sup>37</sup> whom the serpent forgetful of his treaty shall strike with the sting in his tail instead of with the garland of his sceptre.

Then the Normans,<sup>38</sup> sailing over the water in their wooden ships, bearing their faces in front and in back, shall fiercely attack the Angles with their iron tunics and their fierce

<sup>31</sup> This may refer to the passage in the *Historia* (VII, iii), "Menevia shall be robed in the pall of the City of the Legions," but I think more probably it expresses the hope that a king should soon come who would re-establish (or establish) an archbishop at St David's, a hope that must have been cherished by the Welsh even before the time of Giraldus Cambrensis. According to Welsh belief this city had been the seat of an archbishop until the time of Samson, twenty fifth from Dewi or David, who fled to Dol in Brittany taking the pall with him. (Giraldus Cambrensis, *De Menevensi Ecclesia Dialogus*).

<sup>32</sup> This is the city on the Usk and not Chester, also called the City of the Legions, as the reference to the Severn shows.

<sup>33</sup> San Marte believes from what follows that this refers to the coming of Augustine.

<sup>34</sup> Clearly the defeat of Brocmail and the slaughter of the monks at Leicester referred to in the *Historia* (XI, xiii), although the number does not agree with the printed texts; it does agree with the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

<sup>35</sup> Athelstan, according to *Historia*, XII, xix.

<sup>36</sup> Daci was commonly used for the Danes at this period, as Neustrenses was for the Normans.

<sup>37</sup> Possibly Canute and his son Harold. San Marte evidently translates this passage differently, since his not explains that the "Lex Marsia" was used south of the Thames and the Danish laws north of it.

<sup>38</sup> This refers to the *Historia*, VII, iii, but its meaning remains unclear. The "three" are the two Williams and Henry I, and the "fourth" Stephen. San Marte takes the "four" to be William Rufus, Henry I, Stephen, and Henry II, and the "two" to be Richard and John, the latter of whom he believes to be the "sixth", even if line 680 does not fit him. However, the same thing occurs in the *Historia*, and although it is not safe to say that a certain passage is not an interpolation, this passage was probably written forty years or so before King John was born. It is possible that Geoffrey was basing this passage on an old Welsh poem which Skene believes to have been written before 655.

Five chiefs there will be to me  
Of the Gwyddyl Ffichti  
Of a sinner's disposition  
Of a race of the knife;  
Five others will there be to me  
Of the Norddmyn place;  
The sixth a wonderful king,



swords, and shall destroy them and possess the field. They shall subjugate many realms to themselves and shall rule foreign peoples for a time until the Fury, flying all about, shall scatter her poison over them. Then peace and faith and all virtue shall depart, and on all sides throughout the country the citizens shall engage in battles. Man shall betray man and no one shall be found a friend. The husband, despising his wife, shall draw near to harlots, and the wife, despising her husband, shall marry whom she desires. There shall be no honour kept for the church and the order shall perish. Then shall bishops bear arms, and armed camps shall be built. Men shall build towers and walls in holy ground, and they shall give to the soldiers what should belong to the needy. Carried away by riches they shall run along on the path of worldly things and shall take from God what the holy bishop shall forbid. Three shall wear the diadem<sup>39</sup> after whom shall be the favour of the newcomers. A fourth shall be in authority whom awkward piety shall injure until he shall be clothed in his father, so that girded with boar's teeth he shall cross the shadow of the helmeted man.<sup>40</sup> Four shall be anointed, seeking in turn the highest things, and two shall succeed who shall so wear the diadem that they shall induce the Gauls to make war on them. The sixth shall overthrow the Irish and their walls, and pious and prudent shall renew the people and the cities. All these things I formerly predicted more at length to Vortigern in explaining to him the mystic war of the two dragons when we sat on the banks of the drained pool. 40 But you, dear sister, go home to see the king dying and bid Taliesin come, as I wish to talk over many things with him; for he has recently come from the land of Brittany where he learned sweet philosophy of Gildas the Wise."<sup>41</sup>

Ganieda returned home and found that Taliesin had returned and the prince was dead and the servants were sad. She fell down lamenting among her friends and tore her hair and cried, "Women, lament with me the death of Rhydderch and weep for a man such as our earth has not produced hitherto in our age so far as we know. He was a lover of peace, for he so ruled a fierce people that no violence was done to any one by any one else. He treated the holy priest with just moderation<sup>42</sup> and permitted the highest and the lowest to be governed by law. He was generous, for he gave away much and kept scarcely anything. He was all things to all men, doing whatever was seemly; flower of knights, glory of kings, pillar of the kingdom. Woe is me! for what you were - now so unexpectedly you have become food for worms, and your body moulders in the urn. Is this the bed prepared for you after fine silks? Is it true that your white flesh and royal limbs will be covered by a cold stone, that you will be nothing but dust and bones? So it is, for the miserable lot of mankind goes on throughout the years so that they cannot be brought back to their former estate. Therefore

From the sowing to the reaping;  
The seventh proceeded  
To the land over the flood  
The eighth, of the line of Dyfi,  
Shall not be freed from prosperity.

Skene explains the five kings of the Northumbrians as Ida, Ella, Ethelric, Ethelfred, and Edwin. The sixth was Osric who reigned only a few months, and the seventh was Eanfrid, who crossed the Firth of Forth and was slain by Cadwallawn of the line of Dyfi. Even if Geoffrey understood the references in the poem, which he probably did not, it must have seemed to him good material to work over and put in the mouth of Merlin. This would lead to the confusion about the later kings of Norman line as they do not quite follow the same pattern.

<sup>39</sup> Alanus explains that the "Helmeted Man" was the name given to one of the mountains of Scotland because of its shape.

<sup>40</sup> From the *Historia*, VII, iii.

<sup>41</sup> The *Life of Gildas* by the Monk of Rhuys tells that after Gildas settled in Brittany people began to flock to him to entrust their sons for their instruction to his superintendence and teaching.

<sup>42</sup> Apparently a reference to the fact told in the Scottish version but not mentioned by Geoffrey except here, that Rhydderch took St Kentigern under his protection after he had been driven out of his home in the north.

there is no profit in the bravery of the transient world that flees and returns, deceives and injures the mighty. The bee anoints with its honey what it afterwards stings. So also those whom the glory of the world caresses as it departs it deceives and smites with its disagreeable sting. That which excels is of brief duration, what it has does not endure; like running water everything that is of service passes away. What is a rose if it blushes, a snowy lily if it blooms, a man or a horse or anything else if it is fair! These things should be referred to the Creator, not to the world. Happy therefore are those who remain firm in a pious heart and serve God and renounce the world. To them Christ who reigns without end, the Creator of all things, shall grant to enjoy perpetual honour. Therefore I leave you, ye nobles, ye lofty walls, household gods, sweet sons, and all the things of the world. In company with my brother I shall dwell in the woods and shall worship God with a joyful heart, clothed in a black mantle.” So she spoke, giving her husband his due, and she inscribed on his tomb this verse, “Rhydderch the Generous, than whom there was no one more generous in the world, a great man rests in this small urn.”<sup>43</sup>

Meanwhile Taliesin had come to see Merlin the prophet who had sent for him to find out what wind or rain storm was coming up, for both together were drawing near and the clouds were thickening. He drew the following illustrations under the guidance of Minerva his associate.

“Out of nothing the Creator of the world produced four [elements] that they might be the prior cause as well as the material for creating all things when they were joined together in harmony:<sup>44</sup> the heaven which He adorned with stars and which stands on high and embraces everything like the shell surrounding a nut; then He made the air, fir for forming sounds, through the medium of which day and night present the stars; the sea which girds the land in four circles, and with its mighty refluent so strikes the air as to generate the winds which are said to be four in number; as a foundation He placed the earth, standing by its own strength and not lightly moved, which is divided into five parts, whereof the middle one is not habitable because of the heat and the two furthest are shunned because of their cold. To the last two He gave moderate temperature and these are inhabited by men and birds and herds of wild beasts. He added clouds to the sky so that they might furnish sudden showers to make the fruits of the trees and of the ground grow with their gentle sprinkling. With the help of the sun these are filled like water skins from the rivers by a hidden law, and then, rising through the upper air, they pour out the water they have taken up, driven by the force of the winds. From them come rain storms, snow, and round hail when the cold damp wind breathes out its blasts which, penetrating the clouds, drive out the streams just as they make them. Each of the winds takes to itself a nature of its own from its proximity to the zone where it is born. Beyond the firmament in which He fixed the shining stars He placed the ethereal heaven and gave it as a habitation to troops of angels whom the worthy contemplation and marvellous sweetness of God refresh throughout the ages. This also He adorned with stars and the shining sun, laying down the law by which the star should run within fixed limits through the part of heaven entrusted to it. He afterwards placed beneath this the airy heavens, shining with the lunar body, which throughout their high places abound

<sup>43</sup> Such Latin epitaphs on early British tombs are by no means rare. The grave of Rhydderch Hael has not been found, but at Warrior’s Rest, near Yarrow, in Selkirkshire, is an inscription to the sons of his cousin Nudd Hael. HIC MEMORIAE ET [BE]LLO INSIGNISIMI PRINCIPES. NVDI DVMNOGENI. HIC IACENT IN TYMVLO. DVO FILII LIBERALIS

According to Sir John Rhys the probable date of the stone is the latter part of the sixth century.

<sup>44</sup> Much of the material in this passage must have been taught in every school in Geoffrey’s time so that it is perhaps useless to expect to find an exact source for it. Bede’s *De Natura Rerum* furnishes a fairly close parallel for much of it and must have been known to Geoffrey since it seems to have been taught in the Welsh Schools.

in troops of spirits who sympathize or rejoice with us as things go well or ill. They are accustomed to carry the prayers of men through the air and to beseech God to have mercy on them, and to bring back intimations of God's will, either in dreams or by voice or by other signs, through doing which they become wise. The space beyond the moon abounds in evil demons, who are skilled to cheat and deceive and tempt us; often they assume a body made of air and appear to us and many things often follow. They even hold intercourse with women and make them pregnant, generating in an unholy manner.<sup>45</sup> So therefore He made the heavens to be inhabited by three orders of spirits that each one might look out for something and renew the world from the renewed seed of things.

The sea too He distinguished by various forms that from itself it might produce the forms of things, generating throughout the ages. Indeed, part of it burns and part freezes and the third part, getting a moderate temperature from the other two, ministers to our needs. That part which burns surrounds a gulf and fierce people, and its divers streams, flowing back, separate this from the orb of the earth, increasing fire from fire. Thither descend those who transgress the laws and reject God; whither their perverse will leads them they go, eager to destroy what is forbidden to them. There stands the stern eyed judge holding his equal balance and giving to each one his merits and his deserts. The second part, which freezes, rolls about the foreshore sands which it is the first to generate from the near-by vapour when it is mingled with the ray of Venus' star. This star, the Arabs say, makes shining gems when it passes through Pisces [the fishes] while its waters look back at the flames. These gems by their virtues benefit the people who wear them, and make many well and keep them so. These too the Maker distinguished by their kinds (as He did all things), that we might discern from their forms and from their colours of what kinds they are and of what manifest virtues. The third form of the sea which circles our orb furnishes us many good things owing to its proximity. For it nourishes fishes and produces salt in abundance, and bears back and forth ships carrying our commerce, by the profits of which the poor man becomes suddenly rich. It makes fertile the neighbouring soil and feeds the birds who, they say, are generated from it along with the fishes and, although unlike, are moved by the laws of nature. The sea is dominated by them more than by the fishes, and they fly lightly up from it through space and seek the lofty regions. But its moisture drives the fishes beneath the waves and keeps them there, and does not permit them to live when they get out into the dry light. These too the Maker distinguished according to their species and to the different ones gave each his nature, whence through the ages they were to become admirable and healthful to the sick.

For men say that the barbel restrains the heat of passion but makes blind those who eat it often.<sup>46</sup> The thymallus, which has its name from the flower thyme, smells so that it betrays the fish that often eats of it until all the fishes in the river smell like itself. They say the muraenas, contrary to all laws, are all of the feminine sex, yet they copulate and reproduce and multiply their offspring from a different kind of seed. For often snakes come together along the shore where they are, and they make the sound of pleasing hissing and, calling out the muraenas, join with them according to custom. It is also remarkable that the remora, half a foot long, holds fast the ship to which it adheres at sea just as though it were fast aground, and does not permit the vessel to move until it lets go; because of this power it is to be feared. And that which they call the swordfish because it does injury with its sharp beak, people often fear to approach with a ship when it is swimming, for if it is captured it at once makes a hole in the vessel, cuts it in pieces, and sinks it suddenly in a whirlpool. The serra

<sup>45</sup> For this same material in the *Historia* Geoffrey refers us to the work of Apuleius on *The God of Socrates* but a number of other parallels exist.

<sup>46</sup> The whole passage on fish follows closely Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae sive Origines*, XII, vi.

makes itself feared by ships because of its crest; it fixes to them as it swims underneath, cuts them to pieces and throws the pieces into the waves, wherefore its crest is to be feared like a sword. And the water dragon, which men say has poison under its wings, is to be feared by those who capture it; whenever it strikes it does harm by pouring out its poison. The torpedo is said to have another kind of destruction, for if any one touches it when it is alive, straightway his arms and his feet grow torpid and so do his other members and they lose their functions just as though they were dead, so harmful is the emanation of its body.

To those and other fishes God gave the sea, and He added to it many realms among the waves, which men inhabit and which are renowned because of the fertility which the earth produces there from its fruitful soil. Of these Britain is said to be the foremost and best, producing in its fruitfulness every single thing. For it bears crops which throughout the year give the noble gifts of fragrance for the use of man, and it has woods and glades with honey dripping in them, and lofty mountains and broad green fields, fountains and rivers, fishes and cattle and wild beasts, fruit trees, gems, precious metals, and whatever creative nature is in the habit of furnishing. Besides all these it has fountains healthful because of their hot waters which nourish the sick and provide pleasing baths, which quickly send people away cured with their sickness driven out. So Bladud established them when he held the sceptre of the kingdom,<sup>47</sup> and he gave them the name of his consort Alaron. These are of value to many sick because of the healing of their water, but most of all to women, as often the water has demonstrated. Near to this island lies Thanet which abounds in many things but lacks the death-dealing serpent, and if any of its earth is drunk mixed with wine it takes away poison.<sup>48</sup> Our ocean also divides the Orkneys from us. These are divided into thirty three islands by the sundering flood; twenty lack cultivation and the others are cultivated. Thule receives its name “furthest” from the sun, because of the solstice which the summer sun makes there, turning its rays and shining no further, and taking away the day, so that always throughout the long night the air is full of shadows, and making a bridge congealed by the benumbing cold, which prevents the passage of ships.

The most outstanding island after our own is said to be Ireland with its happy fertility. It is larger and produces no bees, and no birds except rarely, and it does not permit snakes to breed in it. Whence it happens that if earth or a stone is carried away from there and added to any other place it drives away snakes and bees. The island of Gades lies next to Herculean Gades, and there grows there a tree from whose bark a gum drips out of which gems are made, breaking all laws. The Hesperides are said to contain a watchful dragon who, men say, guards the golden apples under the leaves. The Gorgades are inhabited by women with goats’ bodies who are said to surpass hares in the swiftness of their running. Argyre and Chryse bear, it is said, gold and silver just as Corinth does common stones. Sri Lanka blooms pleasantly because of its fruitful soil, for it produces two crops in a single year; twice it is summer, twice spring, twice men gather grapes and other fruits, and it is also most pleasing because of its shining gems. Tiresias produces flowers and fruits in an eternal spring, green throughout the seasons.

The island of apples which men call “The Fortunate Isle” gets its name from the fact that it produces all things of itself; the fields there have no need of the ploughs of the farmers and all cultivation is lacking except what nature provides. Of its own accord it produces grain and grapes, and apple trees grow in its woods from the close-clipped grass. The ground of its

<sup>47</sup> The account of Bladud is to be found in the *Historia*, II, x. The name of Alaron is not recorded in Wales, but “Alarun” is recorded as a woman’s name in Brittany in 1152, which supports the reading of the manuscript in this passage.

<sup>48</sup> The account of the islands is from Isidore, XIV, vi.

own accord produces everything instead of merely grass, and people live there a hundred years or more. There nine sisters rule by a pleasing set of laws those who come to them from our country.<sup>49</sup> She who is first of them is more skilled in the healing art, and excels her sisters in the beauty of her person. Morgen is her name, and she has learned what useful properties all the herbs contain, so that she can cure sick bodies. She also knows an art by which to change her shape, and to cleave the air on new wings like Daedalus; when she wishes she is at Brest, Chartres, or Pavia,<sup>50</sup> and when she will she slips down from the air onto your shores. And men say that she has taught mathematics to her sisters, Moronoe, Mazoe, Gliten, Glitonea, Gliton, Tyronoe, Thitis; Thitis best known for her cither. Thither after the battle of Camlan we took the wounded Arthur, guided by Barinthus<sup>51</sup> to whom the waters and the stars of heaven were well known. With him steering the ship we arrived there with the prince, and Morgen received is with fitting honour, and in her chamber she placed the king on a golden bed and with her own hand she uncovered his honourable wound and gazed at it for a long time. At length she said that health could be restored to him if he stayed with her for a long time and made use of her healing art. Rejoicing, therefore, we entrusted the king to her and returning spread our sails to the favouring winds.”

Merlin said in answer, “Dear friend, since that time how much the kingdom has endured from the violated oath, so that what it once was it no longer is! For by an evil fate the nobles are roused up and turned against each other’s vitals, and they upset everything so that the abundance of riches has fled from the country and all goodness has departed, and the desolated citizens leave their walls empty. Upon them shall come the Saxon people, fierce in war, who shall again cruelly overthrow us and our cities, and shall violate God’s law and his temples. For He shall certainly permit this destruction to come upon us because of our crimes that He may correct the foolish.” Merlin had scarcely finished when Taliesin exclaimed, “Then the people should send some one to tell the chief to come back in a swift ship if he has recovered his strength, that he may drive off the enemy with his accustomed vigour and re-establish the citizens in their former peace.”

“No,” said Merlin, “not thus shall this people depart when once they have fixed their claws on our shores. For at first they shall enslave our kingdom and our people and our cities, and shall dominate them with their forces for many years. Nevertheless three<sup>52</sup> from among our people shall resist with much courage and shall kill many, and in the end shall overcome them. But they shall not continue thus, for it is the will of the highest Judge that the Britons shall through weakness lose their noble kingdom for a long time, until Conan<sup>53</sup> shall come in his chariot from Brittany, and Cadwalader the venerated leader of the Welsh, who shall

<sup>49</sup> The description of the Fortunate Isles comes largely from classical tradition (much of it is to be found in Isidore), but it seems also to be influenced by Celtic legends of the happy otherworld. There is a significant passage in Pomponius Mela, *De Situ Orbis*, III, 6, which reflects ancient Celtic tradition. “Sena in Britannico mari, Osismicis adversa litoribus, Gallici numinis oraculo insignis est; cuius antistes, perpetua virginitate sanctae, numero novem esse traduntur; Gallicenas vocant, putantque ingeniis singularibus praeditas, maria ac ventos concitare carminibus, seque in quae velint animalia vertere, sanare, quae apud alios insanabilia sunt, scire ventura et praedicare, sed non nisi deditas navigantibus, et in id tantum, ut se consulerent profectis.” The *Gesta Regum Britanniae* (IX, 4213-4234) which, although slightly later in date than this poem may represent independent tradition, gives a somewhat similar account. So too, a later Welsh version, which shows French influence but may also contain native elements, says that Uther caused Dioneta, daughter of Gwrleis and Eigyr to be sent to the Isle of Avallach, and of all in her age she was the most skilled in the seven arts.

<sup>50</sup> Although these three places are usually rendered Brest, Chartres, and Pavia, the last is sometimes translated as Paris. R.S.Loomis has suggested that Bristi may be the locative of the Latin name for Bristol.

<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey may have got his Barinthus from an early tradition in which he was god of the sea and the otherworld rather than from the *Navigatio Brendani* as is sometimes suggested.

<sup>52</sup> On the basis of Book XII of the *Historia*, the three are probably Cadvan, Cadwallo, and Cadwallader.

<sup>53</sup> For this prophecy among the Welsh before Geoffrey, see Introduction.

join together Scots and Cumbrians, Cornishmen and men of Brittany in a firm league, and shall return to their people their lost crown, expelling the enemy and renewing the times of Brutus, and shall deal with the cities in accordance with their consecrated laws. And the kings shall begin again to conquer remote peoples and to subjugate their own realms to themselves in mighty conflict.” “No one shall then be alive of those who are now living,” said Taliesin, “nor do I think that any one has seen so many savage battles between fellow citizens as you have.” “That is so,” said Merlin, “for I have lived a long time, seeing many of them, both of our own people among themselves and of the barbarians who disturb everything.

“And I remember the crime when Constans was betrayed and the small brothers Uther and Ambrosius fled across the water.<sup>54</sup> At once wars began in the kingdom which now lacked a leader, for Vortigern of Gwent,<sup>55</sup> the consul, was leading his troops against all the nations so that he might have the leadership of them, and was inflicting a wretched death upon the harmless peasants. At length with sudden violence he seized the crown after putting to death many of the nobles and he subdued the whole kingdom to himself. But those who were allied to the brothers by blood relationship, offended at this, began to set fire to all the cities of the ill-fated prince and to perturb his kingdom with savage soldiery, and they would not permit him to possess it in peace. Disquieted therefore since he could not withstand the rebellious people, he prepared to invite to the war men from far away with whose aid he might be able to meet his enemies. Soon there came from divers parts of the world warlike bands whom he received with honour. The Saxon people, in fact, arriving in their curved keels had come to serve him with their helmeted soldiery. They were led by two courageous brothers, Horsus and Hengist, who afterwards with wicked treachery harmed the people and the cities. For after this, by serving the king with industry, they won him over to themselves and seeing the people moved by a quarrel that touched them closely they were able to subjugate the king; then turning their ferocious arms upon the people they broke faith and killed the princes by a premeditated fraud while they were sitting with them after calling them together to make peace and a treaty with them, and the prince they drove over the top of the snowy mountain. These are the things I had begun to prophesy to him would happen to the kingdom. Next roaming abroad they set fire to the houses of the nation, and strove to make everything subject to themselves. But when Vortimer saw how great was the peril of his country, and saw his father expelled from the hall of Brutus, he took the crown, with the assent of the people, and attacked the savage tribes that were crushing them, and by many battles forced these to return to Thanet where the fleet was that had brought them. But in their flight fell the warrior Horsus and many others, slain by our men. The king followed them and, taking his stand before Thanet besieged it by land and sea, but without success, for the enemy suddenly got possession of their fleet and with violence broke out and, led over the sea, they regained their own country in haste. Therefore, since he had conquered the enemy in victorious war, Vortimer became a ruler to be respected in the world, and he treated his

<sup>54</sup> More or less a summary of the *Historia*, VI, v-xix; VIII, i - XI, v.

<sup>55</sup> In spite of the testimony of Bede that the Gewissi were a people of the West Saxons, J.J.Parry believes that Geoffrey was referring to a British people, and that his contemporaries would have understood this to be so. Alanus, who was almost a contemporary, explains that the Gewissi were “a people of the Britons”, and the early Welsh translation in the *Red Book* says that Vortigern was “earl of Gwent and Ergig and Euas” (that is, Ercing and Ewias, the districts on the two sides of the Wye); for the “Gewissi” of *Historia*, XII, xiv, this same text has “euas and Ergig,” while “Octavius, Duke of the Wissei” of V, viii becomes “Eudaf, Earl of Ergig and Euas.” Even the Latin text makes Vortigern take refuge “in natione hergign super fluvium Guaie.” The Welsh name for the people of Gwent was “Gwennwys” or “Gwenhwyson”, and there is a dialect of Welsh in that district known as “Gwenhwyseg.” From some form of this word came the name “Gewissi”.



kingdom with just restraint. But Hengist's sister, Rowena,<sup>56</sup> seeing with indignation these successes, and protected by deceit, mixed poison, becoming on her brother's account a malignant step-mother, and she gave it to Vortimer to drink, and killed him by the draught. At once she sent across the water to her brother to tell him to come back with so many and such great multitudes that he would be able to conquer the warlike natives. This therefore he did, for he came with such force against our army that he took booty from everybody until he was loaded with it, and he thoroughly destroyed by fire the houses throughout the country.

“While these things were happening Uther and Ambrosius were in Breton territory with King Biducus and they had already girded on their swords and were proved fit for war, and had associated with themselves troops from all directions so that they might seek their native land and put to flight the people who were busy wasting their patrimony. So they gave their boats to the wind and the sea, and landed for the protection of their subjects; they drove Vortigern through the regions of Wales and shut him up in his tower and burned both him and it. Then they turned their swords upon the Angles and many times when they met them they defeated them, and on the other hand they were often defeated by them. At length in a hand to hand conflict our men with great effort attacked the enemy and defeated them decisively, and killed Hengist, and by the will of Christ triumphed.

“After these things had been done, the kingdom and its crown were with the approval of clergy and laity given to Ambrosius, and he ruled justly in all things, but after the space of four [sixteen] years had elapsed he was betrayed by his doctor, and died from drinking poison. His younger brother Uther succeeded him, and at first was unable to maintain his kingdom in peace, for the perfidious people, accustomed by now to return, came and laid waste everything with their usual phalanx. Uther fought them in savage battles and drove them conquered across the water with returning oars. Soon he put aside strife and re-established peace and begat a son who afterwards was so eminent that he was second to none in uprightness. Arthur was his name and he held the kingdom for many years after the death of his father Uther, and this he did with great grief and labour, and with the slaughter of many men in many wars. For while the aforesaid chief lay ill, from Anglia came a faithless people who with sword subdued all the country and the regions across the Humber. Arthur was a boy and on account of his youth he was not able to defeat such a force. Therefore after seeking the advice of clergy and laity he sent to Hoel, king of Brittany, and asked him to come to his aid with a swift fleet, for they were united by ties of blood and friendship, so that each was bound to relieve the distresses of the other. Hoel therefore quickly collected for the war fierce men from every side and came to us with many thousands, and joining with Arthur he attacked the enemy often, and drove them back and made terrible slaughter. With his help Arthur was secure and strong among all the troops when he attacked the enemy whom at length he conquered and forced to return to their own country, and he quieted his own kingdom by the moderation of his laws.

“Soon after this struggle he changed the scene of the war, and subdued the Scots and Irish and all these warlike countries by means of the forces he had brought. He also subjugated the Norwegians far away across the broad seas, and the Danes whom he had visited with his hated fleet. He conquered the people of the Gauls after killing Frolo to whom the Roman power had given the care of that country; the Romans, too, who were seeking to make war on his country, he fought against and conquered, and killed the Procurator Hiberius

<sup>56</sup> The Welsh form of this name is Ronwen (*Red Book* passim).

Lucius<sup>57</sup> who was then a colleague of Legnis the general, and who by the command of the Senate had come to bring the territories of the Gauls under their power. Meanwhile the faithless and foolish custodian Modred had commenced to subdue our kingdom to himself, and was making unlawful love to the king's wife. For the king, desiring, as men say, to go across the water to attack the enemy, had entrusted the queen and the kingdom to him. But when the report of such a great evil came to his ears, he put aside his interest in the wars and, returning home, landed with many thousand men and fought with his nephew and drove him flying across the water. There the traitor, after collecting Saxons from all sides, began to battle with his lord, but he fell, betrayed by the unholy people confiding in whom he had undertaken such big things. How great was the slaughter of men and the grief of women whose sons fell in that battle! After it the king, mortally wounded, left his kingdom and, sailing across the water with you as you have related, came to the court of the maidens. Each of the two sons of Modred, desiring to conquer the kingdom for himself, began to wage war and each in turn slew those who were near of kin to him. Then Duke Constantine, nephew of the king, rose up fiercely against them and ravaged the people and the cities, and after having killed both of them by a cruel death ruled over the people and assumed the crown. But he did not continue in peace since Conan his relative waged dire war on him and ravaged everything and killed the king and seized for himself those lands which he now governs weakly and without a plan.”

While he was speaking thus the servants hurried in and announced to him that a new fountain had broken out at the foot of the mountains and was pouring out pure waters which were running through all the hollow valley and swirling through the fields as they slipped along. Both therefore quickly rose to see the new fountain, and having seen it Merlin sat down again on the grass and praised the spot and the flowing waters, and marvelled that they had come out of the ground in such a fashion. Soon afterward, becoming thirsty, he leaned down to the stream and drank freely and bathed his temples in its waves, so that the water passed through the passages of bowels and stomach, settling the vapours within him, and at once he regained his reason and knew himself, and all his madness departed and the sense which had long remained torpid in him revived, and he remained what he had once been - sane and intact with his reason restored.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, praising God, he turned his face toward the stars and uttered devout words of praise. “O King, through whom the machine of the starry heavens exists, through whom the sea and the land with its pleasing grass give forth and nourish their offspring and with their profuse fertility give frequent aid to mankind, through whom sense has returned and the error of my mind has vanished! I was carried away from myself and like a spirit I knew the acts of past peoples and predicted the future. Then since I knew the secrets of things and the flight of birds and the wandering motions of the stars and the gliding of the fishes, all this vexed me and denied a natural rest to my human mind by a severe law. Now I have come to myself and I seem to be moved with a vigour such as was wont to animate my limbs. Therefore, highest Father, ought I to be obedient to Thee, that I may show forth Thy most worthy praise from a worthy heart, always joyfully making joyful offerings. For twice Thy generous hand has benefited me alone, in giving me the gift of this new fountain out of the green grass. For now I have the water which hitherto I lacked, and by drinking of it my brains have been made whole. But whence comes this virtue, O dear companion, that this new fountain breaks out thus, and makes me myself again who up to now was as though insane and beside myself?”

<sup>57</sup> In the *Historia* this is “Lucio Tiberio”, although some of the manuscripts also read “Lucio Hybero”. The weight of evidence is in favour of “Hybero”.

<sup>58</sup> Such healing fountains springing up suddenly are quite common in Celtic tales.

Taliesin answered, “The opulent Regulator of things divided the rivers according to their kinds, and added moreover to each a power of its own, that they might often prove of benefit to the sick.<sup>59</sup> For there are fountains and rivers and lakes throughout the world which by their power cure many, and often do so. At Rome, for instance, flows swift Albula, with its health-giving stream which men say cures wounds with its sure healing. There is another fountain, called Cicero’s, which flows in Italy, which cures the eyes of all injuries. The Ethiopians also are said to have a pool which makes a face on which it is poured shine just as though from oil. Africa has a fountain, commonly called Zama, a drink from it produces melodious voices by its sudden power. Lake Clitorius in Italy gives a distaste for wine; those who drink from the fountain of Chios are said to become dull. The land of Boeotia is said to have two fountains; the one makes the drinker forgetful, the other makes them remember. The same country contains a lake so harmful with its dire plague that it generates madness and the heat of too much passion. The fountain of Cyzicus drives away lust and the love of Venus. In the region of Campania there flow, it is said, rivers which when drunk of make the barren fruitful, and the same ones are said to take away madness from men. The land of the Ethiopians contains a fountain with a red stream; whoever drinks of this will come back demented. The fountain of Leinus never permits miscarriages. There are two fountains in Sicily, one of which makes girls sterile and the other makes them fruitful by its kindly law. There are two rivers in Thessaly of the greatest power; a sheep drinking of one turns black and is made white by the other, and any one drinking of both spends its life with a variegated fleece. There is a lake called Clitumnus in the Umbrian land which is said at times to produce large oxen, and in the Reatine Swamp the hooves of horses become hard as soon as they cross its sands. In the Asphalt Lake of Judaea bodies can never sink while life animates them, but on the other hand the land of India has a pool called Sida in which nothing floats but sinks at once to the bottom. And there is a Lake Aloe in which nothing sinks but all things float even if they are pieces of lead. The fountain of Marsida also compels stones to float. The River Styx flows from a rock and kills those who drink of it; the land of Arcadia bears testimony to this form of destruction. The fountain of Idumea, changing four times throughout the days, is said to vary its colour by a strange rule; for it becomes muddy, then green, then the order changes and it turns red and then becomes clear with a beautiful stream. It is said to retain each of these colours for three months as the years roll around. There is also a Lake Trogdytus whose waves flow out, three times in the day bitter, and three times sweet with a pleasant taste. From a fountain of Epirus torches are said to be lighted, and if extinguished to resume their light again. The fountain of the Garamantes is said to be so cold in the day time, and on the other hand so hot all night, that it forbids approach on account of its cold or its heat. There are also hot waters that threaten many because of the heat which they get when they flow through alum or sulphur which have a fiery power, pleasant for healing. God endowed the rivers with these powers and others so that they might be the means of quick healing for the sick, and so that they might make manifest with what power the Creator stands eminent among things while He works thus in them. I think that these waters are healthful in the highest degree and I think that they could afford a quick cure through the water that has thus broken out. They have up to now been flowing about through the dark hollows under the earth like many others that are said to trickle underground. Perhaps their breaking out is due to an obstacle getting in their way, or to the slipping of a stone or a mass of earth. I think that, in making their way back again, they have gradually penetrated the ground and have given us this fountain. You see many such flow along and return again underground and regain their caverns.”

<sup>59</sup> These lines on fountains follow closely after Isidore of Seville, XIII, xiii.

While they were doing these things a rumour ran all about that a new fountain had broken out in the woods of Calidon, and that drinking from it had cured a man who had for a long time been suffering from madness and had lived in these same woods after the manner of the wild beasts. Soon therefore the princes and the chieftains came to see it and to rejoice with the prophet who had been cured by the water. After they had informed him in detail of the status of his country and had asked him to resume his sceptre, and to deal with his people with his accustomed moderation, he said, “Young men, my time of life, drawing on toward old age, and so possessing my limbs that with my weakened vigour I can scarce pass through the fields, does not ask this of me. I have already lived long enough, rejoicing in happy days while an abundance of great riches smiled profusely upon me. In that wood there stands an oak in its hoary strength which old age, that consumes everything, has so wasted away that it lacks sap and is decaying inwardly.<sup>60</sup> I saw this when it first began to grow and I even saw the fall of the acorn from which it came, and a woodpecker standing over it and watching the branch. Here I have seen it grow of its won accord, watching it all, and, fearing for it in these fields, I marked the spot with my retentive mind. So you see I have lived a long time and now the weight of age holds me back and I refuse to reign again. When I remain under the green leaves the riches of Calidon delight me more than the gems that India produces, or the gold that Tagus is aid to have on its shore, more than the crops of Sicily or the grapes of pleasant Methis, more than lofty turrets or cities girded with high walls or robes fragrant with Tyrian perfumes. Nothing pleases me enough to tear me away from my Calidon which in my opinion is always pleasant. Here shall I remain while I live, content with apples and grasses, and I shall purify my body with pious fastings that I may be worthy to partake of the life everlasting.”

While he was speaking thus, the chiefs caught sight of long lines of cranes in the air, circling through space in a curved line in the shape of certain letters; they could be seen in marshalled squadron in the limpid air. Marvelling at these they asked Merlin to tell why it was that they were flying in such manner. Merlin presently said to them, “The Creator of the world gave to the birds as to many other things their proper nature, as I have learned by living in the woods for many days.

“It is therefore the nature of the cranes,<sup>61</sup> as they go through the air, if many are present, that we often see them in their flight form a figure in one way or another. One, by calling, warns them to keep the formation as they fly, lest it break up and depart from the usual figure; when he becomes hoarse another takes his place. They post sentries at night and the watchman holds a pebble in his claws when he wishes to drive away sleep, and when they see any one they start up with a sudden clamour. The feathers of all of them grow black as they grow older. But the eagles, who get their name from the sharpness of their sight, are said to be of such keen vision, beyond all others, that they are able to gaze at the sun without flinching. They hang up their young in its rays wishing to know by his avoidance of them whether their exists among them one of inferior breeding. They remain on their wings over waters as high as the top of a mountain and they spy their prey in the lowest depths;

<sup>60</sup> The closest Welsh parallel to this is to be found in the *Iolo Manuscripts* (Second edition, pp 189 and 601) “The Stag answered him thus: ‘Thou seest, my friend and companion, this oak by which I lie, it is at present no more than an old withered stump, without leaves or branches, but I remember seeing it an acorn in the top of the chief tree of this forest, and it grew into an oak, and an oak is three hundred years in growing, and after that three hundred years in its strength and prime, and after that three hundred years decaying before death, and after death three hundred years returning into earth, and upwards of sixty years of the last hundred of this oak are past, and the Owl has been old since I first remember her.”

The *Iolo Manuscript* is late, but early forms of this tale are known, see especially *Culhwch and Olwen*.

<sup>61</sup> The description of the birds is from Isidore, XII, vii.

straightway they descend rapidly through the void and seize the fish swimming as their inheritance demands. The vulture, thinking little of the commerce of the sexes, often conceives and bears (strange to say) without any seed of her spouse. Flying about on high in the manner of the eagle she scents with distended nostrils a dead body far across the water. This she has no horror of approaching in her flight, although she is slow, so that she may satiate herself with the prey she wishes for. This same bird also lives vigorous for a hundred years. The stork with its croaking voice is a messenger of spring; it is said to nourish its young so carefully that it takes out its own feathers and denudes its own breast. When winter comes men say it avoids the storms and approaches the shores of Asia, led by a crow. Its young feed it as it grows old because it fed them when it owed them this care. The swan, a bird most pleasing to sailors, excels all others in the sweetness of its music when it dies. Men say that in the country of the Hyperboreans it comes up close by being attracted by the sound of a zither played loudly along the shore. The ostrich deserts her eggs which she places under the dust that they may be taken care of there when she herself neglects them. Thence the birds come into the world hatched by the sun instead of their mother. The heron, when it fears the rain and the tempests, flies to the clouds to avoid such a peril; hence sailors say that it portends sudden rainstorms when they see it high up in the air. The phoenix by divine dispensation always lives as an unique bird, and in the land of the Arabs rises with a renewed body. When it grows old it goes to a place very warm from the heat of the sun and gets together a great heap of spices and builds itself a pyre, which it lights with rapid movements of its wings, and it settles down upon this and is completely consumed. The ashes of its body produce a bird, and in this way the phoenix is again renewed throughout the ages. The cinnamolgus when it wishes to build a nest brings cinnamon, and builds of that because of its undoubted strength. From this men are in the habit of driving it away with arrows, after which they remove the heap and sell it. The halcyon is a bird that frequents sea pools and builds its nest in time of winter; when it broods the seas are calm for seven days and the winds cease and the tempests, relaxed, hold off, furnishing placid quiet for the bird. The parrot is thought to utter human speech as its own call when no one is looking directly at it, and it mixes “ave” and “chaire” with jocose words. The pelican is a bird accustomed to kill its young and to lament for three days confused with grief. Then it tears its own body with its beak and, cutting the veins, lets out streams of blood with which it sprinkles the birds and brings them back to life. The Diomedae when they resound with tearful noise and make lament are said to portend the sudden death of kings or a great peril to the realm. And when they see anyone they know at once what he is, whether barbarian or Greek; for they approach a Greek with beatings of the wings and with caresses and they make a joyful noise but they fly about the others on hostile wings and approach them with a horrible sound as though they were enemies. The Memnonides are said to go on a long flight every fifth year to the tomb of Memnon, and to lament the prince killed in the Trojan war. The shining Hercynia has a marvellous feather which gleams on a dark night like a lighted lamp, and shows the way if it is carried in front of a traveller. When the woodpecker makes a nest he pulls out of the tree nails and wedges that no one else can get out and the whole neighbourhood resounds with his blows.”

After he had finished speaking a certain madman came to them, either by accident or led there by fate;<sup>62</sup> he filled the grove and the air with a terrific clamour and like a wild boar he foamed at the mouth and threatened to attack them. They quickly captured him and made him sit down by them that his remarks might move them to laughter and jokes. When the prophet looked at him more attentively he recollected who he was and groaned from the

<sup>62</sup> This incident may be based on one in the Irish *Voyage of Maelduin*.

bottom of his heart, saying, “This is not the way he used to look when we were in the bloom of our youth, for at that time he was a fair, strong knight and one distinguished by his nobility and his royal race. Him and many others I had with me in the days of my wealth, and I was thought fortunate in having so many good companions, and I was. It happened one time while we were hunting in the lofty mountains of Arwystli <sup>63</sup> that we came to an oak which rose in the air with its broad branches. A fountain flowed there, surrounded on all sides by green grass, whose waters were suitable for human consumption; we were all thirsty and we sat down by it and drank greedily of its pure waters. Then we saw some fragrant apples lying on the tender grass of the familiar bank of the fountain. The man who saw them first quickly gathered them up and gave them to me, laughing at the unexpected gift. I distributed to my companions the apples he had given to me, and I went without any because the pile was not big enough. The others to whom the apples had been given laughed and called me generous, and eagerly attacked and devoured them and complained because there were so few of them. Without any delay a miserable sadness seized this man and all the others; they quickly lost their reason and like dogs bit and tore each other, and foamed at the mouth and rolled on the ground in a demented state. Finally, they went away like wolves filling the vacant air with howlings. These apples I thought were intended for me and not for them, and later I found out that they were. At that time there was in that district a woman who had formerly been infatuated with me, and had satisfied her love for me during many years. After I had spurned her and had refused to cohabit with her she was suddenly seized with an evil desire to do me harm, and when with all her plotting she could not find any means of approach, she placed the gifts smeared with poison by the fountain to which I was going to return, planning by this device to injure me if I should chance to find the apples on the grass and eat them. But my good fortune kept me from them, as I have just said. I pray you, make this man drink of the healthful waters of this new fountain so that, if by chance he get back his health, he may know himself and may, while his life lasts, labour with me in these glades in service to God.” This, therefore, the leaders did, and the man who had come there raging drank the water, recovered, and, cured at once recognized his friends.

Then Merlin said, “You must now go on in the service of God who restored you as you now see yourself, you who for so many years lived in the desert like a wild beast, going about without a sense of shame. Now that you have recovered your reason, do not shun the bushes or the green glades which you inhabited while you were mad, but stay with me that you may strive to make up in service to God for the days that the force of madness took from you. From now on all things shall be in common between you and me in this service so long as either lives.” At this Maeldinus (for that was the man’s name) said, “Reverend father, I do not refuse to do this, for I shall joyfully stay in the woods with you, and shall worship God with my whole mind, while that spirit, for which I shall render thanks to your ministry, governs my trembling limbs.” “And I shall make a third with you, and shall despise the things of the world,” said Taliesin. “I have spent enough time living in vain, and now is the time to restore me to myself under your leadership. But you, lords, go away and defend your cities; it is not fitting that you should disturb beyond measure our quiet with your talk. You have applauded my friend enough.”

The chiefs went away, and the three remained, with Ganieda, the prophet’s sister, making a fourth, she who at length had assumed and was leading a seemly life after the death of the king who so recently had ruled so many people by the laws he administered. Now with her brother there was nothing more pleasant to her than the woods. She too was at times elevated by the spirit so that she often prophesied to her friends concerning the future of the

<sup>63</sup> Argustli is the modern Arwystli, a district in the central part of Wales.



kingdom. Thus on a certain day when she stood in her brother's hall and saw the windows of the house shining with the sun she uttered these doubtful words from her doubtful breast.

“I see the city of Oxford filled with helmed men,<sup>64</sup> and the holy men and the holy bishops bound in fetters by the advice of the Council, and men shall admire the shepherd's tower reared on high, and he shall be forced to open it to no purpose and to his own injury. I see Lincoln<sup>65</sup> walled in by savage soldiery and two men shut up in it, one of whom escapes to return with a savage tribe and their chief to the walls to conquer the cruel soldiers after capturing their leader. O what a shame it is that the stars should capture the sun, under whom they sink down, compelled neither by force nor by war! I see two moons in the air near Winchester<sup>66</sup> and two lions acting with too great ferocity, and one man looking at two and another at the same number, and preparing for battle and standing opposed. The others rise up and attack the fourth fiercely and savagely but not one of them prevails, for he stands firm and moves his shield and fights back with his weapons and as victor straightway defeats his triple enemy. Two of them he drives across the frozen regions of the north while he gives to the third the mercy that he asks, so that the stars flee through all portions of the fields. The Boar of Brittany, protected by an aged oak, takes away the moon, brandishing swords behind her back. I see two stars engaging in combat with wild beasts beneath the hill of Urien where the people of Gwent and those of Deira met in the reign of the great Coel.<sup>67</sup> O with what sweat the men drip and with what blood the ground while wounds are being given to the foreigners! One star collides with the other and falls into the shadow, hiding its light from the renewed light. Alas what dire famine shall come, so that the north shall inflame her vitals and empty them of the strength of her people. It begins with the Welsh and goes through the chief parts of the kingdom, and forces the wretched people to cross the water. The calves accustomed to live on the milk of the Scottish cows that are dying from the pestilence shall flee. Normans depart and cease to bear weapons through our native realm with your cruel soldiery. There is nothing left with which to feed your greed for you have consumed everything that creative nature has produced in her happy fertility. Christ, aid thy people! restrain the lions and give to the country quiet peace and the cessation of wars.” She did not stop with this and her companions wondered at her, and her brother, who soon came to her, spoke approvingly with friendly words in this manner, “Sister, does the spirit wish you to

<sup>64</sup> The Welsh still use the name Rhydychen or Oxen's Ford for the city of Oxford. This incident may relate either to the events of 24 June 1139, or to those of Easter Week, 1215. In 1139, the Bishops Roger of Salisbury and Alexander of Lincoln were seized by Stephen at the instigation of the Court, whilst Bishop Nigel of Ely fled to Roger's castle at Devizes. Thereafter Roger was dragged to Devizes and forced to open and surrender the castle. In 1215, King John went to Oxford to confer with his rebellious barons, at which time Oxford must have been filled to bursting with helms and tiaras. The line “Pastor ... reserare sui cogetur fictile dampni,” may well refer to the signing of the Magna Carta later in the year.

<sup>65</sup> Again the possibility of two events being referred to is apparent. The name Kaerlwoitcoit refers regularly to Lichfield, and an error of Geoffrey in the *Historia* has caused it to be attached to Lincoln. It is undoubtedly the “caerlwytcoet” or “city of the gray wood” of the *Red Book* translation, which there seems to be used for Lincoln. It could, therefore, have been the Battle of Lincoln of 2 February 1141 in which Stephen blockaded William de Roumare and Randolph of Chester in Lincoln castle, Chester managing to escape and return with the Welsh under Robert of Gloucester and capture Stephen - the ‘sidera’ capturing the ‘sun’. Alternatively it could refer to the capture of Lincoln in April of 1217.

<sup>66</sup> Caerwent is the regular Welsh name for the City of Winchester. Yet again there are two possible events referred to here. On 14 September 1141, Queen Matilda and Empress Matilda (the two moons?) brought their rival forces to Winchester. Winchester also hosted the events of 20 July 1213 when King John and Stephen Langton met.

<sup>67</sup> The reference here is probably to the battle of Coleshill in Flint fought in 1150, in which Madoc ab Maredudd and Randolph, Earl of Chester, were defeated with great slaughter by Owen Gwynedd, and were driven back out of Wales. The “great Coel” is Coel Godebrog.

foretell future things, since he has closed up my mouth and my book? Therefore this task is given to you; rejoice in it, and under my favour devoted to him speak everything.”

I have brought this song to an end. Therefore, ye Britons, give a wreath to Geoffrey of Monmouth. He is indeed yours for once he sang of your battles and those of your chiefs, and he wrote a book called “The Deeds of the Britons” which are celebrated throughout the world.

THE END

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