WELSH TRADITIONS IN LAYAMON'S "BRUT."

MOST careful students of the metrical chronicle written by the English priest Layamon, son of Leovenath, agree that it embodies here and there bits of Welsh tradition which its author, who dwelt near the border of Wales, either heard directly from his Welsh-speaking neighbors or got at second-hand from his English parishioners, among whom legends of Welsh origin were doubtless popular. Sir Frederic Madden, the learned editor of Layamon's *Brut*, says:[1] "That Layamon was indebted to Welsh traditions, not recorded in Geoffrey of Monmouth, or in Wace, is scarcely to be questioned." Ten Brink, in his History of English Literature,[2] remarks: "Some of Layamon's interpolations can have been derived from traditions clinging to places not far distant from the poet's home," and Wülker, in another History of English Literature, declares:[3] "[Layamon] wohnte dicht an der Grenze von Wales und scheint von dort manche Sage gehört zu haben, die er in seiner Dichtung verwertete."

Though professed students of Layamon have agreed that the additions he has made to his French original sometimes contain Welsh traditions, advocates of the theory that the legends of Arthur were developed in Brittany have neglected the English chronicle and have failed to observe its important bearing on the question in dispute. To call attention to the neglected importance of Layamon for the vexed question of the development of the Arthurian legend is the object of the following pages.

Layamon, writing about the year 1205, in the main translated the Norman-French chronicle of Wace, which was written in 1155,[4] but he expanded its 15,300 lines to 32,250. Part of this great expansion is due to Layamon's love for detailed description

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[1] *Layamon's Brut*, London, 1847, Vol. I, p. xvi. MADDEN's text is used throughout this article.

[2] KENNEDY's translation (1889), Vol. I, p. 190.

[3] *Gesch. der englischen Litt.*, Leipzig, 1896, p. 81.

[4] So MADDEN, *Brut*, Vol. I, pp. xix and xiii.

and comes from his own fancy. I quote, for example, Merlin's splendid prophecy of Arthur's greatness:[1]

So long as is eternity he shall never die; while the world standeth his glory shall last; all shall bow to him that dwell in Britain; of him shall gleemen sing; of his breast noble poets shall eat; of his blood shall warriors be drunk; from his eyes shall fly fiery embers; each finger of his hand shall be a sharp steel brand; stone walls shall before him tumble; barons give way and their standards fall;

the account of how the youthful Arthur received the news of his succession to the kingship:[2]

He sat very still; for a while he was wan and exceeding pale of hue; for a while he was red and was moved at heart;

the ghastly details of the slaughter made by Childric:[3]

All the good wives they sticked with knives; all the maidens they killed with murder; and all the learned men they laid on burning coals; all the domestics they killed with clubs. They felled the castles; the land they ravaged; the churches they burned down; grief was among the folk; the sucking infants they drowned in the water;

the fantastic description of Loch Lomond:[4]

Nikers dwell there; there is a play of elves in the hideous pool.

Especially noteworthy are Layamon's accounts of hunting and of the sea. His description of a fox hunt[5] is too long to quote, but observe three splendid lines about the voyage of Cadwalon:[6]

> Both were calm; the sea and the sun;
> The wind and the wide ocean; both together.
> The flood bare the ships; minstrels there sang.

All this is developed from the bald statement in Wace that Cadwalon put his ships to sea.

So clever is Layamon in transforming a brief hint, dropped by Wace, into a vivid picture, that a feeling might arise in one's mind that perhaps Layamon invented *all* his additions to Wace, the more important as well as the mere expansions of his original. To dispel this doubt, one has but to see how closely most of the noteworthy additions made by Layamon are connected with Wales and with Welsh tradition.

[1] Vss. 18848–69.   [3] Vss. 20961–74.   [5] Vss. 20840–70.
[2] Vss. 19887–91.   [4] Vss. 21746–8.   [6] Vss. 30610–15.

Layamon adds to Wace's account of Queen Judon the remark that she was put to death by drowning. Madden has pointed out that this is in agreement with Welsh tradition.[1] Welsh legend has it that Queen Judon was sewed up in a sack and drowned in the Thames. Layamon puts into the mouth of Merlin the explicit prophecy, "Arthur shall come again to the help of the Britons." This is not in Wace, but as Madden has again noted,[2] is in accord with Welsh tradition. The case is similar with Layamon's change of the name of Arthur's last battlefield from Camblan to Camelford.[3] Layamon's circumstantial account of the arms and dress of Irish warriors, Madden has shown,[4] agrees exactly with descriptions given by Giraldus Cambrensis and by Froissart. Evidently Layamon's statements regarding Celtic matters are not spun out of his own fancy.

In an article entitled, "The Round Table before Wace,"[5] I have called attention to the way in which Layamon sometimes changes Wace's proper names to make them accord with Welsh forms: *Genievre* becomes *Wenhauer* (Welsh *Gwenhwyfar*); *Hoel* becomes *Howel* (Welsh *Howel*); *Holdin* becomes *Howeldin*, as if Layamon were attempting a Welsh etymology for it; *Guenelande* in the "Round Table" passage[6] becomes *Winet-londe*, showing apparently that Layamon understood it as the name of *Gwynedd* or North Wales; *Hiresgas*, Layamon changes to the sufficiently Celtic looking *Riwaddlan*. Wace's *Cadval*, Layamon changes to *Cadwadlan*. To this list let me add two names, *Gille Callœt*, a Pict,[7] and *Gille Caor*, a king in Ireland,[8] which are new in Layamon. They mean respectively "prudent gillie" and "mighty gillie," and seem to have come straight out of Celtic folk-tales.[9]

Layamon always presents the Welsh in a favorable light. A good example occurs at the end of his history. Wace's statement that the Welsh are all changed and degenerated from the

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[1] Vs. 4033, and the note, Vol. III, p. 321.

[2] Vss. 28650, 28651, and the note, Vol. III, p. 412.

[3] Vol. III, p. 408.   [4] Vol. III, p. 366.

[5] *Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature*, Vol. VII (1900), p. 189.

[6] Vs. 22788.   [7] Vs. 13564.   [8] Vs. 10061.

[9] Cf. *Gilla Decair* (slothful gillie), O'GRADY, *Silva Gadelica*, Vol. I, pp. 257 ff.; *Gille Glas* (gray gillie), CAMPBELL, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, Vol. I, pp. 102 ff., etc.

nobility, the honor, and the manners of their ancestors, he alters
to: "The Britons moved to Welshland, and lived in their laws
and their popular manners, and yet they dwell there as they shall
do evermore."[1]

With a presumption of Welsh influence on Layamon estab-
lished by this mass of cumulative evidence I go on to several
new points which, if they can be maintained, make very definite
the connection between Layamon and Welsh tradition.

Layamon tells us that Carric, the last Welsh king to rule over
any considerable part of what is now England, was derisively
called by his Anglo-Saxon enemies *Kinric*. The passages in
question are as follows:

> Carric took this kingdom and with sorrow dwelt therein; a strong
> knight was Carric, but he was not prosperous because foreigners destroyed
> all his nation. This king was a noble British man; derision and con-
> tempt men threw on him; they renounced the name of Carric and called
> him Kinric, and yet in many books, men so write his name. People
> began to abase him, people hated him, and sang contemptuous songs of
> the odious king. Then began war over all this country; and Saxon men
> sailed to this land and took their station beyond the Humber and the
> king began to live in exile wide over this nation; hateful he was to all
> folk that looked on him.[2] . . . . The Saxon men sent messengers to
> Carric the king and said that they would make peace with him; they
> would prefer to obey Carric rather than another.[3] . . . . And Carric
> believed all their falsehood and granted them peace. Then was Carric
> betrayed by their craft. Carric has ever since been called Kinric. All
> with contemptuous words the king they derided. Carric believed the
> Saxon men's words.[4] . . . . The Saxon men assembled forces innumer-
> able in the land, and marched toward Carric the king of this kingdom;
> and ever they sang with contempt of Kinric the king. Carric gathered
> his Britons[5] . . . . [he was defeated]. . . . . As many of his wretched
> folk as could fled out of the country. Some went to Wales, some to
> Cornwall, some to Neustrie that now is called Normandy; some fled
> beyond sea to Brittany and dwelt afterwards in the land called Armorica.[6]

No one has hitherto commented on this incident, or attempted
to explain what derisive force there is in the name *Kinric*.
Carric, which in Welsh means a rock, is a sufficiently dignified
name. I venture to suppose that *Kinric* is an English tran-

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[1] Vss. 32226 ff.   [3] Vss. 28992–7.   [5] Vss. 29081–8.

[2] Vss. 28853–83.   [4] Vss. 29012–23.   [6] Vss. 29143–52.

scription[1] of *Cymraeg*, and is the name that the Anglo-Saxons
applied to Carric when they refused to have him any longer for
king over them. He is *Cymraeg*, they said, "a Welshman," and
they called him "Welsh" in derision.[2]

Layamon has added to Wace's mention of Arthur's coat-of-
mail the information that it was made "by an elvish smith who
was named *Wygar*, the witty wright."[3] Madden thought that
this name *Wygar* was a corrupted form for *Weland*, the well
known Germanic smith-god.[4] It is likely that *Weland* has in
this passage been substitued for *Gofan* (Irish *Gobban*),[5] the Celtic
smith-god who corresponds roughly to the classic *Vulcan* and the
Germanic *Weland*. In Irish and Welsh, wonderful arms are
regularly said to be the work of *Gobban*. He would therefore be
the natural artificer of Arthur's magic accoutrements. English

[1] *Cynric* was a royal name among the Anglo-Saxons at the time of Arthur. Cf. *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, years 495 ff. May not the transcription of the spoken word *Cymraeg* have got confused with this well-known name?

[2] Compare what happens in our schools. A German lad gets the nickname of "Dutch," or a Norwegian that of "Norsk." The opprobrious name, it will be noticed, is given in the form peculiar to the language of the person ridiculed (cf. *Cymraeg*), not in its English form.

[3] Vss. 21131-4. MADDEN's translation.

[4] Vol. III, p. 376. Madden's view has not hitherto been assailed (cf. BINZ, *Beitr.*, Vol. XX, p. 187). I am indebted to Professor F. G. Hubbard for calling my attention to the extreme difficulty of maintaining with Madden that *Wygar* is merely a corrupted form for *Weland*. Professor Hubbard, adopting Madden's translation, suggests as a more probable origin for the form the name of *Widia*, or *Wudga*, *Weland's* son (cf. GREIN-WÜLCKER, *Bib. der angelsäch. Poesie*, Vol. I, pp. 6, 12), probably confused with that of the father in popular story. Professor Kittredge, who has very kindly looked over the proof-sheets of these pages, suggests a translation of the passage entirely different from Madden's. Layamon says:

| Text A. "he wes ihatē Wygar | Text B. "he was i-hote Wigar |
| þe witeȝe wurhte." | þe wittye wrohte." |

Professor Kittredge proposes to translate: "It [the coat-of-mail or burny] was named *Wygar* which *Witeȝe* wrought." *Wygar* would then be the Anglo-Saxon *wigheard* (battle hard), an appropriate name for the burny. *Witeȝe* would stand for the Anglo-Saxon *Widia*, the name of *Weland's* son. *Wideȝe*, the regular Middle-English equivalent for *Widi(g)a*, may have passed into the form *Witeȝe* through popular etymology, or scribal error, influenced by the well known word *witeȝe* (prophet) which occurs repeatedly in Layamon. (The form *wittye* of text B is found elsewhere in that text, meaning "prophet;" one is not obliged, however, to explain text B in harmony with text A, for the scribe of B may have misunderstood A.) Professor Kittredge by this translation avoids several difficulties. *Witeȝe* is probably not "witty," for, as he observes, words of the kind do not in Layamon end in -eȝe, but in simple -i. "Smith" is, of course, not the most natural meaning of the word *wurhte*.

[5] Cf. GUEST's *Mabinogion*, ed. NUTT (London, 1902), pp. 122 and 67; WINDISCH, *Irische Texte*, Vol. I, p. 319; KEATING, *History of Ireland* (Irish Texts Society, Vol. IV), p. 219. With reference to the substitution of *Weland* for a Celtic smith Professor Kittredge compares the way in which Alfred translates "Ubi nunc fidelis ossa *Fabricii* manent" (BOETH. II, *metr.* 7), taking Fabricius as *faber:* "Hwær synt nū þæs foremæran and þæs wīsan gold-smiðes bān Wēlondes?" (ed. SEDGEFIELD, chap. xix, ll. 15, 16). Cf. also the *Vita Merlini* ascribed to Geoffrey: "pocula quae sculpsit Guielandus in urbe Sigeni" (vs. 235).

narrators may easily have substituted *Weland* or *Wudia* for the unfamiliar *Gofan* of Welsh legend.[1]

Indeed we find in Layamon what is perhaps distinct evidence that the arms of Arthur were at first said to be the work of *Gofan*. Some verses beyond the passage just quoted Layamon has another occasion to mention Arthur's spear and he declares that it "was made in Caermarthen by a smith called *Griffin*." It had once, he adds, belonged to King Uther.[2] All the belongings of Uther were in the beginning undoubtedly magical, like the Round Table which would seat sixteen hundred men and more, and yet Arthur could carry it with him wherever he rode,[3] or like the sword *Caliburn* (*Excalibur*).[4] This smith, added by Layamon to Wace's narrative, ought then to be possessed of magical powers. No one has hitherto explained his name. It is hard to imagine any reason for his being named after the fabulous griffin of classic antiquity. An extract recently published by Professor R. H. Fletcher, from the *Polistorie del Eglise de Christ de Caunterbyre*, an inedited chronicle extending to the year 1313, makes perfectly clear that the name of the Welsh smith *Gofan* or *Govan*, in slightly distorted form, passed into general Arthurian tradition. The *Polistorie* says that Gawain's sword bore an inscription declaring it to be the work of *Gaban*.[5] The passage is of great interest because it shows the survival of an hitherto unnoticed bit of Celtic folk-lore in a late Arthurian legend. It makes easy the supposition that *Gofan*, through some intermediate form like *Gaban*, got changed by an English writer to *Griffin*.[6]

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[1] It is important to note that the assumption of a reference in the passage from Layamon to the Germanic *Weland* is in no way essential to my proposed identification in the following paragraph of *Griffin* with *Gofan*. *Wygar* may be left unexplained without impairing conclusions about *Griffin*.

[2] Vss. 23781-6.   [3] Vss. 22911-22.   [4] "Made in Avalon with magic craft," vss. 21137-40.

[5] *Pub. of the Mod. Lang. Assoc. of America*, Vol. XVIII (1903), p. 90. The inscription is said to read:

> " Jeo su forte trenchaunte e dure.
> gaban me fist. per mult graunt cure.
> xiii. anns auoyt ihesu crist.
> kaunt ga*l*an (original reading *gaban*) metrempa e fist."

Professor Fletcher notes the similarity of the figure of Gaban to Layamon's *Wygar* and *Griffin*, but he has not perceived the identity of *Gaban* with the Welsh *Gofan*.

[6] Students of mediæval literature will see no difficulty in supposing that *Griffin*, a form that has meaning in old English, was derived by some Englishman from the to him incomprehensible *Gofan*. An adventitious *r* is particularly likely to creep in. I need only cite the

The distortion of *Cymraeg* to *Kinric* assumed above could have occurred only under the conditions of oral transmission. This agrees with historical requirements. The English warriors who applied the term *Cymraeg* to the Welsh king cannot be supposed to have read the word, but only to have heard it pronounced. On the other hand, the distortion of *Gofan* to *Griffin* could only occur in written transmission. Layamon evidently drew from English tales about Arthur, founded on earlier Welsh tradition and handed down, in part at least, in writing. This opinion has been already expressed by Ferdinand Lot in a review of my article referred to above. Lot's words,[1] "Comme il est totalement impossible que Layamon connût la phonétique du vieux-gallois, il faut qu'il ait puisé son récit à une source d'origine celtique et à une source écrite," accord exactly with the idea that Layamon's *Griffin*, the smith of Caermarthen in Wales, is a distorted survival of the Welsh *Gofan*.

Layamon gives to Arthur's helmet a particular name, "Goswhit."[2] Madden has conjectured that this is a traditional name, and must be explained as the translation of a Welsh epithet.[3] I believe that I have found curious evidence that such is really the case. In *Kulhwch* and *Olwen* of the Red Book of Hergest, a Welsh tale which is so archaic in character that it is admitted on all hands[4] to represent genuine Welsh tradition, we have the names of a number of Arthur's magic belongings. These names, it must be observed, almost invariably contain the meaning "white." *Pridwen*[5] (the name of Arthur's ship) means "white form." *Wynebgwrthucher* (Arthur's shield) means "night gain-

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well known variants: *Guingalet, Gringalet; Guingamore, Gringamore; Gifflet, Grifflet.* Cf. SCHOFIELD, *Pub. of Mod. Lang. Assoc.*, Vol. XV (1900), p. 143. It is fair to add that the well-known Welsh name *Griffith,* "ruddy," might give rise by corruption to the form *Griffin. Griffith,* however, seems not specially applicable to a smith.

[1] *Le Moyen Age,* Vol. VI (1892), pp. 115, 116. Cf. the opinion of GASTON PARIS, *Romania,* Vol. XXIX (1900), p. 634, though this review is not explicit on the question of *written* sources.

[2] Vs. 21147.

[3] Vol. III, p. 377. The text of Layamon indicates, I think, clearly enough that he understood "Goose-white" to be the translation of a Welsh epithet. In the next line, after the account of the helmet, he describes Arthur's shield, and adds: "Its name was in *British* called Pridwen," implying, of course, that the name of the helmet had not been given in *British* (Welsh), but in English.

[4] Cf. ZIMMER, *Gött. gel. Anz.* (1890), p. 524.

[5] GUEST's *Mabinogion,* ed. NUTT, p. 106 (for *Pridwen* cf. p. 142).

sayer." *Carnwenhau* (Arthur's dagger) means "white haft." *Ehangwen*[1] (Arthur's hall). means "broad white," and even *Gwenhwyfar* (Arthur's wife) means "white enchantress." Surely it is no mere coincidence that Layamon's name for Arthur's helmet is "Goose-white." Probably all the belongings of the Celtic Other World had whiteness or luminosity attributed to them.[2] The name *Goswhit* occurs nowhere else, but I do not see how one can doubt but that it goes back to Welsh tradition. The coincidences between Layamon and Welsh tradition form a mass of cumulative evidence, the combined weight of which is almost irresistible.

Students of Arthurian romance have hitherto neglected Layamon. It was perhaps natural that they should. Layamon wrote about 1205, probably fifty years after traditions about Arthur were widely popular in France. At first thought it seems impossible that his chronicle could throw light on the history of the early development of the Arthurian legend. His additions to Wace might come, apparently, from the French romances. This, however, is not the case. Layamon lived in the wild borderland between Wales and England. The situation was evidently too remote for him to be acquainted with the romances current at Paris and London. Names like *Goswhit* have not passed through any French intermediary. The Round Table incident, with its archaic features of a combat with knives at a royal feast, and of the brutal punishment of nose cutting, is not from any chivalric French source.[3] It betrays its origin by its connection with Gwynedd or North Wales[4] and with Cornwall, whence the workman who made the Round Table is said to have come.

Layamon's additions to Wace, especially the account of Arthur's

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[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

[2] In the *Revue Celtique*, Vol. XXII (1901), pp. 339 ff., I have shown that Manannán, the Celtic sea-god and lord of the Other World, was almost certainly known by the epithet *Barintus*, "white-haired" or "white-topped." It is important to add that Manannán has in Irish legend a marvelous steed, *Enbarr*, "foam of the water" (evidently a personification of the crest of a storm wave).—JOYCE, *Old Celtic Romances*, p. 38, from the Book of Lecan compiled about 1416; and a helmet *Cannbarr* that glittered with dazzling brightness, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

[3] Vss. 22737-974; cf. "The Round Table before Wace," referred to above.

[4] Professor Kittredge first pointed out to me the identity of Layamon's "Winet-lond" (vs. 22788) and Gwynedd.

departure to Argante the queen[1] (perhaps a corruption for Morgan, the fay), and the Round Table story, the longest and most splendid of all, prove that the Welsh had a romantic Arthur about whom tales and legends were clustered. These additions made by Layamon are fatal to any theory which assumes that the Arthur stories were developed exclusively in Brittany, and that the Welsh knew only a heroic, not a romantic, Arthur. It is with the hope of calling attention to the importance of Layamon that these pages have been written. Layamon's *Brut* shows that at least some Arthur stories were developed in Wales, and passed directly from Welsh into English.

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[1] Vss. 28610-51.