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## BARDIC CONGRESS OF WALES

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### ANTEDATES CHRISTIAN ERA

The First Eisteddfod Was Held Centuries Before the Christian Era, and Its Exercises Similar to Those of Today.

J. Humphreys Parry, the editor of "The Transactions of the Cymrodorion, or Metropolitan Cambrian Institution," a learned antiquarian and elegant writer, a native of North Wales, at the beginning of the present century, who had a university training, and gained the admiration of his fellow-countrymen by the publication of the Cambro-Briton, a most valuable miscellany, in which is contained a mass of information respecting the history of Wales, writes of the Gorsedd institution in the following manner:—"The Gorsedd, or Congress of Bards," he says, "owed its birth to the Bardic or Druidical Institution. It was at first established for the promotion of objects connected with the moral and political welfare of the community, as well as for the minor or subordinate purposes of cultivating the arts of music and poetry. The most ancient notices of it now extant occur in the Triads, of the social state, which are ascribed to Dyfwal Mowmud, who lived three or four centuries before the Christian era. In these ancient records, the Gorsedd y Heirdd, or congress of bards, is numbered among the national privileged meetings of the Cymry." It was held at stated times, in some central or exposed part of the country, or according to the bardic maxim, "in the face of the sun, and in the eye of light." Such was the primitive character of the ancient convention; but how long it was retained there are no means of ascertaining with any degree of precision. The long internecine wars consequent on the successive invasions of the Romans and Saxons, as well as the introduction of Christianity, by destroying the political and religious associations of the Druids, must have deprived the institution of its primitive importance, and from this period there is no doubt it gradually departed more and more from its genuine character.

The Gorsedd in its earliest stage, we have thus seen, was of a very different nature from what it has since become. In its next gradation it appears to have been devoted to the more particular encouragement of the musical and poetical talents of the country, as well as to the preservation of the ancient ordinances and traditions of the bards. The earliest congresses of this character of which we have many memorials are two which took place in the sixth and seventh centuries, under the patronage of Maelgwyn Gwynedd and Cadwalladr, last kings of the Britons, at which several poets and minstrels attended. From this period we have no further memorials of these national festivals until we arrive at the time of Bledydd ab Cynfyn and Gruffydd ab Cynan, when the original designation of the Gorsedd seems to have been first exchanged for that now in use, of eisteddfod or session. At the eisteddfod-holden during the reign of Gruffydd ab Cynan, in particular, many alterations or amendments were made in the Bardic laws, and the national music and poetry were subjected to a variety of important regulations, which have been in operation more or less ever since.

In the early part of the twelfth century Owain ab Bledydd ab Cynfyn followed the example of his father in the encouragement he gave to these national conventions and he was succeeded by Rhys ab Gruffydd, generally

called Lord Rhys in South Wales, during the latter part of the same era. From the period now mentioned for nearly three centuries we have no particular records of the eisteddfod. But the conquest of Wales by Edward I. in the thirteenth century, and the sanguinary events preceding and attending that epoch are sufficient to account for the temporary suspension of the practice. The ascendancy which the bards had acquired over their countrymen could not fall, besides, in rendering them objects of jealousy to so politic and ambitious a monarch as Edward. He accordingly deprived them of the public privileges they had enjoyed before and it was only after a long interval that they recovered any semblance of their ancient rites. The first instance of the revival of the national usage under consideration, after the conquest of Wales, of which any memorial has reached us occur about the year 1450, when Gruffydd ap Nicholas, a distinguished patron of the bards, obtained the sanction of Edward IV. for holding an eisteddfod at Carmarthen, which has been called by way of eminence, the great eisteddfod of Carmarthen. To this succeeded another one in the reign of Henry VII., convoked also under royal patronage, but of which no particular details are now extant. The next in order appears to have been an eisteddfod that took place at Caerwys, in Flintshire, in the year 1523, under the immediate auspices of Richard ab Iovell ab Ievan Yychan, Sir William Cruttydd and Sir Robert Salisbury, and at which Tudor Aled and many other distinguished poets were present. After this another was convened at the same place, on the 26th May, 1567, by virtue of a command granted by Queen Elizabeth to several gentlemen of North Wales and the Marches, most of whom attended on the occasion.

Other congresses also assembled during the same century in South Wales under the patronage of Sir Richard Herbert, and under the auspices of Sir Richard Bassett, in 1611, under the auspices of Sir Richard Bassett. This appears to have terminated the second stage of the bardic congress, or session, in which for more than six centuries, even according to our imperfect records, it had continued the means of rescuing from oblivion the ancient ordinances and traditions of the bards. Since the period alluded to it has been regarded more as a festival for the encouragement of the national music, poetry, and general talents, and under the auspices of Sir Richard Bassett until the year 1819, when the first meeting of the Cambrian society in Dyfed was held, the only efforts to revive the ancient custom of the Druidical institution, was of a higher nature than at present. It had for its various objects, in its primitive character, the reformation of manners and customs, the support of ancient privileges, commemoration of remarkable occurrences, the maintenance of public tranquility, and, finally, the general promotion of science, morality and religion. It was accordingly in the distant ages to which this observation has reference, connected in an integral manner with the public welfare of the country. It was the great political en-

gine by which the general prosperity of the state, as well as the integrity of its several social relations, was upheld and secured, for it must not be forgotten that in older times the bards were the public conservators of the laws, the literature, and the religion of the country; they were its legislators, its philosophers, and its priests.

Alderman Thomas Rees is opposed to robes for alderman, and he is surprised that such a "great girlish" proposition should be made in this the latter end of an enlightened century. When it was suggested to Alderman Rees that at one time he had worn the mayoral robes with much pride, the worthy city father said he had done so only after a lot of pressure and much against his indignation.

The bishop's residence at Llandaff was, it appears, built for Rear Admiral Mathew during his absence. It is a large three-story building. The old veteran, when he came to see it, is said to have given vent to his feelings after this fashion: "What a three-decker! I have spent too many years of my life to end them in this! and he didn't."

The only Welshman who ever tried to speak Welsh as "she is written" was Caledfryn. But Caledfryn was no ordinary man. He used to boast that he wrote his "Rothsay Castle" with the same pen and was willing to exchange all his poetical works for one line of Anne Griffith's hymns.

Professor D. M. Lewis, of Aberystwith, holds heterodox views on dialectic Welsh, is the opinion of Welsh purists. The professor maintains that spoken Welsh may be better Welsh than of literature, notwithstanding its being impregnated with English words. His superior merits consist in its being more racy and idiomatic.

The bishop, the dean and the archdeacon of Cardiff have long passed the allotted span of life—three score years and ten—and they are almost infans compared with Canon Hawkins, who has passed his ninety-sixth year.

Early in the century Swansea had quite a reputation as a health resort, but a notice appears in one of the magazines for the period that the high price of the lodging-house keepers effectually frightened customers away.

One of the Welsh coal owners died a short time ago at Cheltenham in the person of Mr. Shepherd, who was for many years cashier at Cyfarthfa. In connection with Mr. David Evans, of Trexton Bank, Merthyr, and others, he sank a pit at Cymaman, but after a time sold out to Powell Duffryn. During the term of Shepherd and Evans there was a run of good times, but the colliers were a prosperous one until taken in hand by Powell Duffryn, who made it one of the best in the district. The first time a very car of coal that came up meant a guinea for the company.

It has been announced from a Swansea pulpit that "the Galatians and the Welsh are of the same family, and are allied in all characteristics; in other words, this is simply flaunting the red flag before the eyes of Morien."

There is an ingenious man walking the streets of Cardiff. He never gets up till noon if he can help it, and it used to break him up to find out at night that he was a great deal behind. So he now, he argues, contrives to keep square by having his breakfast and dinner together on the same plate, as follows: namely, Eggs and bacon on the left half of the plate, and beefsteak and vegetable crowding the other half. Moreover, with the left hand he drinks a cup of tea, and with the right a glass of beer. So far, the authorities have taken no action, the man being a musician.

An English traveler gives his traveling experience in Wales in the following way:—"When touring in Wales one summer, not long ago, I stayed awhile at a little inn in an outlying part of the principality. The church was old and interesting, and I went to inspect it. Finding the door open, I entered, and learnt from the broken English of an old woman churchkeeper that a wedding party from the neighboring village was soon expected. Wishing to see a Welsh country wedding, I remained for the service. All seemed to go well until the clergyman asked for the ring, and then it was found that the bridegroom had made no provision whatever; indeed, it was evident that he had never thought of it. The clergyman showed no surprise at what appeared to me to be an extraordinary omission, but sent the old woman for the church-door key, and the bridegroom placed the ring which secured

for the key-handle over the finger of the bride, and so she was wed. My curiosity was aroused in regard to what I had seen, and I soon ascertained that wedding-rings were quite exceptional among the poorer people in that neighborhood. One ring—a silver one—had done duty in a large number of instances, and when this ring could not be obtained from its fortunate possessor the ring of the church-door key was the makeshift, as in the marriage I had witnessed."

Major Wyndham-Quinn, one of the members of parliament for Glamorgan-shire, received an official communication recently from Windsor Castle in answer to the representations which he has been making for the Rhonda Glee singers to sing before the queen. He was informed that, owing to the death of Prince Henry of Battenburg, her majesty has decided not to have any entertainments or concerts at the castle for the next ten months, and that under the circumstances the queen will be unable to hear the choir at present. He has, however, high authority for stating that, after this period of mourning has elapsed, it is more than probable that an invitation will be extended to her choir to appear before her majesty. Their reputation has already penetrated court circles, and a desire has been expressed in more than one influential quarter that her majesty should hear the members sing. Major Quinn, who is very enthusiastic on the subject, is very sanguine that the wishes of Rhonda people will be gratified in this matter.

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