

Some Insular Sources of the “*Excidium Britanniae*”.

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By the *Excidium Britanniae* I mean chs. 2-26 only of the work commonly so called. The remaining chapters, that is, ch. 1 and chs. 27-110, originally formed another and a much earlier work, namely, the *Epistola Gildae*, the Epistle of Gildas. In my new series of articles on this question, beginning with that entitled “The *Romani* in the *Excidium Britanniae*” in the *Celtic Review* (Edinburgh) for August 1913, I find that the *Excidium Britanniae* was written in A.D. 708 which is about two centuries later than the *Epistola Gildae*. The succeeding articles, which are still in progress, appear in the *Celtic Review* for April 1914, November 1915, and June 1916. In adopting the view that the *Epistola Gildae* and the *Excidium Britanniae* are distinct productions, I am at variance with all the scholars, students, and inquirers of the present day who are known to me, with the exception of Mr. Alfred Anscombe. In 1911, Prof. J. E. Lloyd in his *History of Wales*, 161, could say “The authenticity of the *De Excidio* as a real production of the early sixth century is no longer seriously questioned”. And again, “The efforts of Thomas Wright (*Biographia Britannica*, i, 115-35) and A. Anscombe (*Academy*, 1895) to find a place for it, either as a whole or in part, in the seventh century have been quite unsuccess-

ful". And still more recently we have been assured by so distinguished a scholar as Dr. F. Haverfield that he sees "no reason to put either Gildas or any part of the *Epistola* later than about 540" (Haverfield's *Romanization of Roman Britain*, 3rd ed., 1915, p. 84, n. 1).

In 1894, Mommsen edited this supposed work of Gildas, now divided into 110 chapters, under a lengthy title beginning *Gildae Sapientis de excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, Gildas the Wise on the Ruin and Conquest of Britain (M. G. H. *Chronica Minora*, iii, 1-85). In 1899, Mommsen's Latin text was edited with translation and notes by Professor Hugh Williams of Bala as No. 3 of the Cymmrodorion Record Series. The work has long been popularly known from the handy little volume entitled *Six Old English Chronicles* in Bohn's Antiquarian Library where it is translated into English under the heading *The Works of Gildas*. Students should be warned against using this translation or even that of Prof. Hugh Williams without reference to the original. No mediæval Latin work known to me needs such careful handling as chs. 2 to 26 of this collection, which, as I have said, constitute no part of the *Epistola Gildae*, but form a much later work wrongly incorporated with the *Epistola Gildae* and alone meriting the title *Excidium Britanniae*, the Loss of Britain. It actually possesses a Table of Contents proper to itself, now ingeniously interwoven with the prefatory remarks of the *Epistola Gildae*, and is also furnished with a typically formal ending, now blunted and blurred to make the close of the one book read smoothly into the succeeding portion of the other.

The *Excidium Britanniae* must have been completed before A.D. 725 because by that year it had come into the hands of the great English scholar and historian, Bede. The consequences were fateful, for Bede used it again in

his *Historia Ecclesiastica* as his foremost authority for insular events in the fifth and sixth centuries, quoting or paraphrasing the greater portion of it. The first and immediate result was that the *Excidium Britanniae* was lost, so to speak, in the more brilliant narrative of Bede. Henceforward men read the *Excidium Britanniae* only through Bede's eyes. The *Excidium Britanniae* was supplanted by Bede's borrowings therefrom, the latter being universally accepted whilst scant attention was paid to the former.

More than a century ago Peter Roberts in his *Chronicle of the Kings of Britain* (London, 1811) complains of Leland, Lhuyd, Ussher, and Stillingfleet, that while they were always ready to attend to the references made by Bede and his chronicling disciples to the writings ascribed to Gildas, yet, says he, these scholars “do not appear to have given that attention to the writings themselves, which was extremely necessary”. And so to-day one has cause to complain and protest that writers of distinction issue works from the press, dealing with fifth and sixth century Britain, of whom it may equally truly be said (for a close scrutiny of their books and articles proves it), that they “do not appear to have given that attention, which was extremely necessary” to the *Excidium Britanniae*, notwithstanding their assurance that its author was the chief, if not the only, contemporary voice speaking to us out of those two dark British centuries. They attend to the *Chronicles* which follow Bede, and they attend to Bede who follows the *Excidium Britanniae*, but they curiously stop short at giving that close and serious attention, which is extremely necessary, to the *Excidium Britanniae* itself. Seventy years after Peter Roberts sent out his disregarded protest, it was possible for John Richard Green, the author of *A Short History of the English People*,

to write in all seriousness and sobriety that "Gildas had seen the English invasion"; and yet the man, whom Green took to be Gildas, tells us plainly that from the very year in which he was born there had been peace between the English and the Welsh!

Bede's use of the *Excidium Britanniae* was followed by a far greater calamity than the one I have mentioned because of the manner in which he misunderstood it. Indeed almost all the prevailing misconceptions as to the work in question are traceable to him. It is Bede who, missing the purport of the *Excidium Britanniae* that the Britons lost the whole island of Britain except certain corners in the west, north Scotland first, and south Scotland with the English lowlands from the Firth of Forth to the English Channel next, limits the loss to the latter alone. It is Bede, who, mistaking the chronological sequence of the narrative before him, makes the English to have landed shortly after A.D. 446, and interprets the forty-fourth year from the Battle of the Badonic Hill as about forty-four years from the English arrival, with the fatal result that he throws back the victory and the writing of the book by a hundred and fifty to two hundred years. And finally it is Bede who virtually ascribes the authorship of the *Excidium Britanniae* to Gildas who died in the sixth century, and so starts the notion that Gildas was *par excellence* the historian of the Britons.

That Bede should have set the seal of his immense authority on such lamentable misconceptions of the *Excidium Britanniae* has so weighed with subsequent writers, both mediæval and modern, Welsh writers no less than English, that one can hardly get a hearing for any other view. Peter Roberts at the commencement of the nineteenth century, Thomas Wright in the middle, and Alfred Anscombe at the end, have been so many voices

crying in the wilderness. For over a thousand years the knowledge of our national origins, both English and Welsh, has been poisoned at the springs. On the strength of a slight sermonical sketch of a supposed national decline, written in A.D. 708 and erroneously conceived to have been by a prominent and learned Welsh ecclesiastic about A.D. 540, there is taught as sober history throughout the schools of the world the fable of an English conquest of Britain commencing shortly after A.D. 446, and accompanied by a vast displacement of Welsh people from the eastern districts of southern Britain into the midlands and from the midlands into the western corners of Strathclyde, Wales, and the Devonian peninsula. The true story of fifth and sixth century Britain, whatever that may have been, is obscured almost to obliteration, the chronological sequence of events thrown out of gear, and the events themselves distorted in exposition to force them to fit into the scheme of a fictitious theory.

Of the history of Britain down to the memorable siege of the Badonic Hill there appears to have been no connected narrative known to the author of the *Excidium Britanniae*. He tells us in ch. 4 that he follows the account of the island as given by foreign historians, which says he, is far from clear owing to its scrappiness. Apparently there are no British historians to draw from, no British Paulus Orosius or Rufinus, but it should be noted that he does not altogether deny having made use of British documentary evidence. He will write, says he, *non tam ex scriptis patriae*, not so much from native records, which, if they ever existed, have been burnt or carried away, and so are not at hand. He will write not so much from native records *quam transmarina relatione*, as from foreign accounts. Decisive as this language may sound, it does not preclude British writings but even implies some use of such.

Indeed, if we consider his words closely, it is the paucity or lack of native records *in the times of the Roman emperors* that he is referring to. His words are as follows: "Only those evils which the island has both suffered and inflicted upon other and distant citizens *in the times of the Roman emperors* will I attempt to make public. I shall have done it, however, as well as I can, not so much from writings of the country or records of authors, which indeed, if they ever existed, have either been burnt by the enemies' fires or carried far away in the citizens' fleet of exile and so are not at hand, as from foreign accounts, which, broken by frequent gaps, are not very clear." Now a long time had elapsed since the days of the Roman emperors and the crackling of the enemies' fires and the over-sea migration of citizens. First, there had been forty-three years of peace between Britons and Saxons, that is, since the victory at the Badonic Hill. Secondly, there had been a period up to that victory of alternate successes and reverses going back to the days of Ambrosius Aurelianus, who, after the Britons had been bundled into the west, rallied them to their first victory over the Saxons. Thus at the date when our author was writing, there had been ample time and occasion for learned Britons to jot down memoranda of events in their history. Note well then that it is the affairs of the island *in Roman times* for which he lacks native records. If such ever existed, they were either burnt in that rapid fiery advance of the English from the eastern portion of the island to the Western Ocean, even from sea to sea, or they were carried away by those Britons who quitted Britain for foreign strands. Our author is not referring to what historical memoranda may have been written since those fires and flights. And it is one of my objects in this paper to shew that he must have had some such before him.

But first I will deal with the use which he made of archæological evidence, especially for that Roman period, for which he professes himself to be short of native written material. The foreign accounts of Roman Britain being scrappy, he is constrained to seek what the actual Roman remains in the island may have to tell him.

(a) ARCHÆOLOGICAL EVIDENCE.

(i) *Cities and Strongholds*.—In ch. 3 he says that the island of Britain is “beautified by twice ten and twice four *civitates*, cities, and some *castella*, strongholds, *molationes*, laborious buildings, built in an unexceptionable manner, of *muri*, walls, *turres serratae*, serrated towers, *portae*, gates, *domus*, houses, the tops of which, stretching aloft with threatening height, were firmly fixed”.¹ In ch. 24, where he describes the Saxon advance, he says, “For the fire of just vengeance blazed, because of former crimes, from sea to sea, heaped up by the eastern band of sacrilegists (*i.e.* the Saxons), and as it devastated all the nearest *civitates agrique*, cities and lands, did not cease after it had been kindled until it burnt up nearly the whole surface of the island and licked the Western Ocean with its red and savage tongue Thus were all the *coloniae*

¹ The chapter, in which the above passage occurs, is given a capitulum in ch. 2 entitled *De situ [Britanniae]*. This capitulum doubtless applies only to the opening of the chapter “on the geographical situation of Britain”, although the chapter itself includes also a short general description of the island, its dimensions, physical features, towns, forts, and a reference to its former history. If *situs* is meant to include all this, a still more extended use of the word may be exemplified in another document of Welsh importance, the *De situ Brecheniauc*, early thirteenth century, copied from a MS. at least as old as the eleventh century and printed in *F Cymrodor*, xix, 24-27. Nothing is said in this of the geographical situation of Brycheiniog, but there are indications that the document is incomplete.

brought low with the frequent shocks of battering rams, also all the *coloni* with the bishops of the church, with priests and people, whilst swords gleamed on every side and flames crackled. They were mown down together to the ground. And, sad sight! there were seen in the midst of *plateae*, streets, the bottom stones of *turres*, towers, with tall *cardo*, beam or door, cast down, and of *muri celsi*, high walls, sacred *altaria*, altars. . . . There was no sepulture of any kind save *domorum ruinae*, the ruins of houses", etc. In ch. 26 describing the state of Britain forty-three years after the Battle of the Badonic Hill, he says: "not even now are the *civitates*, cities, of the country inhabited as formerly; but deserted and dismantled they lie neglected until now".

The chapter, in which the first of the above passages occurs, includes much of what the author had doubtless seen with his own eyes, the sea promontories and curved bays, the plains, hills, mountains, the flora, wells, streams and lakes. His eyes are receptive to the physical objects about him, and when these chance to be the work of men's hands, he will try to make them tell their story. The number of cities in Britain may have been a commonplace, but his additional mention of strongholds, his account of such structures as works of great labour, his detailed notice of walls, towers, gates, and houses, strong in their foundations and therefore able to have borne lofty and threatening superstructures,—all this certainly suggests the description of an eye witness. The land is full of ruined cities and forts from Roman times, and our author has seen some of them and may see them again at any time.

It was a sad sight. He could still wander in the deserted streets and view those strong foundations whereon had once stood towers, high walls, and altars. Around

him were ruins of houses, and as he gazed he could recreate in his mind the lurid scenes of their destruction. All this would have occurred long before he was born. There had been peace in his time, ever since the year of the great victory at the Badonic Hill, which was the forty-fourth backwards from the time in which he was writing. And these *civitates* and *coloniae* had perished long even before that.

The *civitates* and *coloniae* to which he refers, are to be sought in Britain south of the Firths of Forth and Clyde. The *coloniae* properly so called were York, Lincoln, Colchester, and Gloucester. Their destruction was from that eastern portion of the island where the Saxons first landed no small interval after A.D. 446 to the Western Ocean, even from sea to sea.

(ii) *The Two Walls*.—In ch. 15 the Roman legion, which after the death of Maximus in 388, comes to the assistance of the Britons against the Picts and Scots, is made to bid the citizens “to build a *murus*, wall, across the island between two seas, so that when manned by a troop it might be a terror to repel the foe and a protection to the citizens; which being made not so much of *lapides*, stones, as of *cespites*, turf, proved of no benefit to the foolish and leaderless mob”. In ch. 18 the Romans, who came to assist the Britons for the second time against the Picts and Scots,—“because they were thinking that this would bring some advantage to the people whom they were leaving behind, build a *murus*, wall, not [like the other, at the public and at private expense, the wretched inhabitants being joined with them; [they build the wall] in their wonted manner of structure, across, in a straight line, from sea to sea”.

These two walls are those of Antonine and Hadrian (as we commonly call them) respectively, constructed not

as our author says after the death of Maximus in 388, but in 140 and 124 (or 211). Whether he had seen them himself does not appear, but he is certainly well informed as to their character. Of the first, which he says was made of turf rather than stone, modern archæologists declare that it is a wall of regularly laid sods resting on a stone pavement. As to the second he knows that it is built of stone, in the manner of the Romans, and that it runs directly from sea to sea.

(iii) *The Forts on Hadrian's Wall*.—In ch. 18 the Romans build the stone wall “between *urbes*, forts, which had perhaps been erected there through fear of enemies.”

By the *urbes* he doubtless means the larger forts, contiguous to the wall or generally so, some sixteen in number. He knows that they were older than what he deems the wall itself to be. But why they should have been erected there, he is at a loss to know. It must be remembered that he thought Britain to have been wholly British and to have been wholly unmolested by barbarians till after the revolt of Maximus (383-388), when Picts and Scots began coming for the first time. The wall was built to keep these back, but why the *urbes*, forts, between which the wall had been built, should have been erected there, he could not tell. He suggests that it was owing to some enemy.

(iv) *The Forts of the Saxon Shore*.—In ch. 18 he says that the Romans “on the shore of the ocean also *ad meridianam plagam*, towards the south, where their ships were wont to ride, erect *turres per intervalla*, towers at intervals, overlooking the sea, because from that quarter also wild barbarian hordes were being feared.”

The nine forts of the Saxon Shore extended from the Wash to the Solent. They were all erected before the death of Constantius Chlorus in A.D. 306, and not as our

author says after the death of Maximus in 388. There is no indication that he has seen them, but he is well informed of their situation. They overlook the sea, they are built at intervals, and they are towards the south of the island.

(v) *Sculptured Remains*.—In ch. 4: “nor do I enumerate those diabolical *portenta*, monstrosities, of the country, almost surpassing in number those of Egypt, of which we still see some, of ugly features, within or without deserted walls, stiff with stern looks as was the custom.”

Here we have confessedly the testimony of an eye witness, who speaks of what he himself has seen and of what may be seen by anyone in his time, of monuments of pagan gods, once honoured but now neglected and shunned like the walls about them. They are the remains of the old idolatry, of the old gods of pagan Rome affined or otherwise with barbarian deities, and of oriental cults such as of Mithras, Isis, and Serapis. Many of these still survive.

(vi) *Coins*.—In ch. 7: “whatever [Britain] might have of copper, silver, or gold, might be stamped with the image of Cæsar.”

Our observant author could not have been otherwise than familiar with Roman coins, which are still being discovered yearly in Britain. The complete subjugation of the island to Rome is evident to him from the universal image and superscription of Cæsars on the old coinage.

(vii) *Weapons*.—In ch. 18 the Romans before their final departure urge the Britons “to provide their hands with *peltae*, shields, *enses*, swords, and *hastae*, spears.” And the Romans leave behind *exemplaria instituendorum armorum*, patterns for the manufacture of weapons. In ch. 19 there is mention of the *uncinata tela*, the hooked weapons, of the Piets and Scots with which they drag the

citizens from the walls. In ch. 21 reference is made to *hostium tela*, missiles of enemies, and in ch. 22 to *mucro*, a sword. In ch. 24: "all the *coloniae* were brought down with the frequent shocks of *arietes*, battering rams," *i.e.*, by the Saxons, who are also provided with gleaming *mucrones*, swords.

The author is apparently distinguishing between the weapons of the Britons and those of their enemies. The weapons of the Britons are Roman weapons, copied from Roman patterns. He may have arrived at this conclusion or corroborated it to his own satisfaction by examination of such relics from Roman times.

(viii) *Ships*.—In ch. 3 *rates*, vessels, were wont to bear foreign luxuries along the Thames and the Severn. In ch. 4 there is reference to *civium exilii classis*, citizens' fleet of exile. In ch. 15 a Roman legion crosses the ocean to the country in *rates*, vessels. In ch. 16 the Picts and Scots "burst the boundaries, borne across by wings of oars, by arms of rowers, and by sails bulged with wind." In ch. 18 Roman *naves*, ships, were wont to ride near the coast towards the south. In ch. 19 "the Scots and Picts eagerly emerge from the *curuci*, coracles, in which they sailed across the sea." In ch. 23, "the Saxons came *tribus ut lingua eius exprimitur cyulis nostra longis navibus*, in three ships, *cyulae*, keels, as it is expressed in their language (English), *longae*, llongau, in ours (Welsh)." Another company of Saxons follows "borne in *rates*, vessels." In ch. 25 some of the Britons fled beyond the seas "singing beneath the swelling sails".

In comparing the above passages it will be seen that our author is clearly distinguishing between the vessels used by the different peoples connected with the British Isles. The coracle was doubtless a slight vessel, provided with sails as well as oars. The Saxon *keels* are equated

with the British *llongau*, the latter word being from the Latin *long(a navis)*, ship of war.

(ix) *Ancient Martyrs*.—In ch. 10, our author in referring to the Diocletian persecution (303-312) speaks of “holy martyrs, the graves of whose bodies and the sites of whose sufferings might now be inspiring the minds of beholders with no small glow of divine love if they were not, *quam plurima*, very many of them, taken away from the citizens on account of our crimes owing to *lugubre divortium barbarorum*, the disastrous partition caused by the barbarians. I speak of saint Alban of Verulam, Aaron and Julius, citizens of Caerlleon, and the rest of either sex in diverse places who in Christ’s battle stood firm with lofty nobleness of mind.” In ch. 10: “Thus when ten years of the violence referred to had scarcely passed they repair the churches ruined to the ground, they found, construct, and complete *basilicæ* of holy martyrs, and set them forth in many places as emblems of victory”.

Here again the author doubtless has his eye on actual sites, where he supposes martyrs to have perished in the Diocletian persecution, or where he supposes the bodies of martyrs to lie. There can be but little doubt that he is referring to the *merthyr* place-names of ‘Britannia’, which were formerly far more common than they are now and which are still sufficiently numerous, and, in the one instance of Merthyr Tydvil, sufficiently important to make the term familiar to all. They are generally associated with personal names, not only of men like Cynog but also of women like Tydvil, so that when our author speaks of martyrs of both sexes in diverse places, he is doubtless thinking of our *merthyr* place-names, which carry with them the names of both males and females. In *Y Cymrodor*, xxiv, 46-7, I have collected instances of these *merthyr*

place-names, and it is to be observed that they are only found in those parts of Wales where Irish influences are known to have prevailed. [I shall not be far wrong when I say that they are found in "the regions producing inscribed stones with rude Latin capitals" of which Prof. J. E. Lloyd speaks in his *History of Wales*, 115.] The personal names are those of "saints" who flourished, not indeed in the time of the Emperor Diocletian or any other persecuting Emperor, but in the fifth and sixth centuries, many of them being members of the very Irish family of Brychan. In fact they were, many of them, contemporaries and perhaps acquaintances of St. Gildas, who therefore (densely ignorant though Prof. Lloyd thinks him to have been, *ibid.*, 98) could hardly have supposed that they were victims of Christian persecution two centuries previously.

Merthyr in Welsh place-names does not stand for *martyrium* in the catholic sense, that is, a church raised in memory of a martyr on the site of his martyrdom or over his remains. According to Sir Edward Anwyl it simply meant a saint. "Am ystyr y gair Merthir (says he) mewn enwau lleoedd yng Nghymru, credwn nad oes ynddo unrhyw gyfeiriad at 'ferthyrdod' o gwbl, ond ei fod fel y gair Gwyddelig *martir* yn gyfystyr a 'sant'" (*Y Beirniad*, ii, 135). Hitherto from some words of Zimmer I have understood that Welsh *merthyr* is from the Latin *martyr*-ium bearing an Irish meaning 'the burial place of a saint'; that Merthyr Dingad, for instance, in Monmouthshire, has an exact English equation in *Dingatstow*, *i.e.*, the holy place of saint Dingad. However this may be, one thing is certain that our *merthyr* place-names do not in any way involve reminiscences of Diocletian martyrs.

The author of the *Excidium Britanniae*, therefore, in

considering the many *merthyr* place-names of ‘Britannia’, would have made two mistakes about them, first, in supposing that they were *martyria* in the catholic sense familiar to readers of such fathers as St. Jerome; and secondly, in supposing that they derived their origin from the Diocletian persecution. It would have been impossible for a sixth century Welsh ecclesiastic to have committed such a blunder, which ranks with the author’s statement about the Walls of Hadrian and Antonine and the Forts of the Saxon Shore that they were built after A.D. 388, and with those other equally stupid statements relative to the Picts and Scots that they never entered Britain till the departure of Maximus exposed the island to their forays, and relative to the Saxons that they landed in Britain for the first time some considerable interval after A.D. 446! Much less could that ecclesiastic have been St. Gildas who was familiar with Irish Christianity, and who must at least have met people who knew some of the ‘martyrs’ after whom the *merthyr* place-names are called. It is obvious that the man who wrote the *Excidium Britanniae* was writing at a much later period, when Irish influences in Wales had decayed, and did not even suspect that the *merthyr* place-names could stand for anything other than *martyres* or *martyria* in the catholic sense.

In this connection it is instructive to realize that the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* seemed to be unaware of any permanent Irish settlements in southern Britain. The Picts and Scots had seized Scotland, north of the wall of Hadrian, before A.D. 446, and had ravaged southern Britain. But when, sometime after A.D. 446, the Britons inflicted upon them a very decisive defeat, the Scots went back to Ireland, whilst the Picts retired beyond the Wall of Antonine to settle there for the first

time! No small interval after A.D. 446, which interval was a period of unpredecated prosperity, the English landed in Britain for the first time and drove the Britons in one amazing, irresistible sweep out of the eastern division of southern Britain into the mountains, forests, and sea-islands of the west. The English had come at the invitation of the Britons because the Picts and Scots had recommenced worrying them. No particulars are given of this fourth invasion of Picts and Scots, but as it is made to occur no small interval after A.D. 446, it may point to the advent of the Dalriad Scots in Cantire under Fergus mac Ere. At any rate, the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* nowhere gives any indication that he knew of Irish settlements in Wales. No wonder, then, that he blundered in his interpretation of *martyr* with its specifically Irish meaning.

Our author states that very many of the graves of his supposed Diocletian martyrs and of the sites of their sufferings had fallen into the hands of the barbarians, which he might very reasonably have calculated must have been so, seeing that according to him the whole island of Britain from Totnes to Caithness was occupied by the Britons under Roman rule until after the revolt of Maximus in A.D. 383-8. If there were numerous martyr sites still left in Wales, how many more must there not have been in the rest of Britain whence the Britons had been driven out! Our author, then, might simply have concluded from the *merthyr* place-names of Wales (as of Julius and Aaron at Caerlleon) that there must have been similar martyr sites in England (as perhaps at that time of Alban at Verulam) and in Scotland as well, which had been captured by the barbarians. This may have been all that he meant. But he here uses a very peculiar phrase. He speaks of graves having been taken away owing to a

lugubre divortium, a disastrous partition, a 'divorce', a cutting-asunder, caused by the barbarians. The word *divortium*, 'divorce', seems too specific to mean the general destruction of the island. May it not refer to some specially disastrous cutting-asunder of Britons, such as we have all hitherto fancied ensued on the Battle of Dyrham in A.D. 577 when the West-Saxons successfully penetrated the tripolitan area of Gloucester, Cirencester, and Bath, and 'divorced' the Britons of Wales from those of the Devonian peninsula? If Britons or Irish really did occupy this tripolitan area, we might here find room for lost *merthyr* place-names, an extension eastwards of the *merthyr* place-names of Monmouthshire.

(x) *Retreats of persecuted Christians*.—In ch. 11, our author says that those who survived the Diocletian persecution "hid themselves in *silvae*, woods, and in *deserta*, deserts, and in secret *spelunca*, caves".

Ever since the Christian religion triumphed in 'Britannia' there have existed place-names of woods, deserts, and caves, associated with 'saints'. The Latin *desertum* has become the Welsh place-name *dyserth*, meaning a wild desolate spot adopted for religious retirement by some Christian hermit. We have to-day such places as *ogof Edi*, St. Edi's cave, and *Gelli Cawrdaf*, St. Cawrdaf's wood. In such place-names our author might very possibly have seen evidences of Christian persecution in Britain as he doubtless did in the *merthyr* place-names. I cannot refrain in this connection from quoting some words of that excellent Welsh clergyman, Carnhuanawc, writing between 1836 and 1842. He says, "Pe buasai hanes y wlad hon yn amser Diocletianus ar glawr mewn cyflwr o gyflawnder, diameu y gwelsem amryw enghreifftiau o ferthyrdod a dioddefaint. Ac am fod yr ychydig hysbysiad a roddir gan awdur yr *Excidium Britanniae* yn

mynegi i'r Cristionogion orfod ffoi i'r coedydd a'r llefydd anial a'r ogfeydd celedig, y mae'n ddilys y buasai gennym yr awrhon goffadwriaeth am ddefnyddiad amryw leoedd adnabyddys yn ein plith i'r cyfryw ddiogeliad. Ac y mae ynof duedd cryf i feddwl fod rhai ogfeydd yng Nghymru eto yn dwyn arnodiaid o'r cyfryw wasanaeth neu o ryw un cyffelyb". There is no foundation, however, for this belief. As in the case of the merthurs, the saintly names associated with wood and rock retreats are those of fifth and sixth century ecclesiastics.

(b) INDICATIONS OF NATIVE RECORDS AND TRADITIONS.

(i) Among these we must class the *Epistolae ad Agitium*, the Letter to Agitius. Agitius is Aëtius (wrongly spelt in transcription), chief minister of the Western Empire under Placidia and Valentinian. He was four times consul, to wit, in 432, 437, 446, and 454. In 455 he was assassinated by Valentinian himself. The author of the *Excidium Britanniae* must have had access to a copy of the letter sent by the Britons to this Aëtius, and as Aëtius is described in it as *ter consul*, consul for the third time, we are fortunately furnished with an important date which helps us to determine the chronological framework of the narrative of the *Excidium Britanniae*. Only a portion of the letter is given, which is made to represent the misery of Britain owing to the ravages of Picts and Scots. It begins as follows: *Agitio ter consuli gemitus Britannorum*, to Agitius in his third consulship, the Groans of the Britons. That the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* was actually quoting from a copy of the very letter, is proved by the fact that he tells us he is skipping a passage before going on with his quotation. Then: "the barbarians drive us to the sea, the sea drives us to the barbarians; between these two sorts of deaths we either have our throats cut or are drowned". And

again the author instead of quoting gives the sense, to the effect that the Britons assert they have no aid. Now as Aëtius was consul for the third time in A.D. 446 this letter must have been written any time from that year to the year when he became consul for the fourth time, *i.e.*, A.D. 454. In other words, the letter was written and sent not earlier than A.D. 446 and not later than A.D. 453. And as it was in this interval (*circa* 447) that St. Germanus of Auxerre came to Britain for the second time, who, we know, did go afterwards to Ravenna to intercede with Aëtius for the peace of Armorica (*Vita s. Germani*, II, i, 62), we may not unreasonably believe that he at the same time carried with him “the Groans of the Britons”. The author of the *Excidium Britanniae* is making too great a demand on our credulity when he would have us believe that the barbarians mentioned in the letter were only the Picts and Scots. We know from other and better sources that the Saxons too were busy in Britain at this time. But our author would make no small interval intervene between the despatch of the Letter to Aëtius and the first landing of the Saxons. He tells us that after the Letter to Aëtius in 446 the Britons won their first victory over the Picts and Scots. The Scots retired to Ireland, whilst the Picts withdrew to north Scotland to settle there for the first time! Then followed a period of unprecedented prosperity, and the narrative demands that it should be no small period. Only at its termination did the Saxons come. Whatever may be thought of this, one thing is certain that the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* was quite clear in his own mind, although he may not have managed to make it so clear to us, as to the year when he conceived the English to have landed for the first time in the island. It was no small interval after A.D. 446.

(ii) It is evident that in his account of St. Alban our author is quoting from some *Passio Albani*. It is the only part of his narrative where the miraculous element is introduced, and at this point he seems to imply the presence of a Roman army in the island which he certainly does not do elsewhere except in his account of Maximus, where also he appears to be following some written account. Whether the *Passio* was of British or continental origin is not so certain. St. Alban was certainly known in Gaul in the sixth century as evidenced by the poem of Fortunatus (Bede's *H.E.*, i, 7), and also in the fifth century, for Constantius makes St. Germanus visit St. Alban's tomb in his *Vita S. Germani*. Possibly, therefore, the *Passio* was compiled in Gaul. This may account for the mention of the Thames as the river which the saint crossed. It is significant that Bede, who fixes the site of the martyrdom at Verulamium, does not name the river. The *Excidium Britanniae* names the river, which, as I have said, is the Thames, but does not fix the site. Alban is only said to have been of Verulamium. There is evidence that the site was really Mount St. Albans, nearly two miles N.E. of Caerlleon in Monmouthshire, and that the river was the Usk. The two other martyrs mentioned, Aaron and Julius, both of Caerlleon, may have figured with Alban in one and the same incident. However this may be, the *Passio Albani*, from which our author is drawing, does not strike one as being particularly British.¹

¹ In my notes on St. Alban's near Caerlleon (*Arch. Camb.*, 1905, pp. 256-9; *I Cymmrodor*, xxii, 75, n. 6) I overlooked the additional evidence of Giraldus Cambrensis, who passed through Caerlleon in A.D. 1188. He tells us (*Itinerarium Cambriae*, i, 5): "Here lie two noble persons, the leading proto-martyrs of Great Britain after Alban and Amphibalus, adorned in this place with the martyr's crown, to wit, Julius and Aaron, each of whom had a fine church in the city,

(iii) Maximus proceeds to the Gauls with *magna satel-
litum caterva*, a great crowd of followers. Our author is
using expressions here which go contrary to the trend of
what he has hitherto said. Maximus is started on his rebel-
lious career by *tumultuans miles*, a turbulent soldiery. He
takes away with him *omnis armatus miles*, all the armed
soldiery, *militares copiae*, the military supplies, the *rectores*,
rulers (or as he called them before *praepositi*, overseers),
cruel though they had been, and the able-bodied youth.
In the words *tumultuans miles*, *armatus miles*, *militares
copiae*, and *rectores*, history seems to be peeping through the
narrative as though the author were for a moment quitting

distinguished by his own name. *For in ancient times there were three
excellent churches in this city*, one of the martyr Julius graced with a
choir of virgins dedicated to God; another raised to the name of
his blessed companion Aaron and enriched by a renowned order of
canons; and the third distinguished as the metropolitan see of all
Wales". This, of course, is clearly reminiscent of Geoffrey's *H.R.B.*,
ix, 12, as quoted and translated by me in *Y Cymmrodor*, xxii, 57.
But there is a striking difference. Geoffrey says there were two
churches and a school of astronomical philosophers. Giraldus says
there were three churches, the third distinguished as the metropolitan
see of all Wales. The three sites referred to are without doubt the
three chapels mentioned by Coxe in his *Historical Tour through
Monmouthshire*, 1801, reprinted 1904, p. 103, namely, 'one near the
present site of St. Julian's'; 'the other at Penros, in the vicinity of
the town'; 'a third chapel, dedicated to St. Alban, another martyr,
which was constructed on an eminence to the east of Caerleon, over-
looking the Usk'. The legend of St. Alban demands the proximity of
a large river near the site of the martyr's death. Bede, who fixes
the site at Verulam, carefully omits the name of the river. The
Excidium Britanniae, which omits the name of the site, mentions a
large river—the Thames. It is clear that before the appearance of
either Bede's Book or the *Excidium Britanniae*, St. Alban had some-
how been associated with Verulam, the modern St. Alban's in Hert-
fordshire, for in both works that place is mentioned, and according
to Bede a church had already been erected there to his memory
where miracles frequently occurred (*H. E.*, i, 7). But that site won't
fit. According to the legend as quoted by Bede, the martyr was

his own fancies and quoting some reliable document. Whether such a document was British or continental is uncertain. He adds that Maximus' host never returned. Much has been made of this. It has proved the tiny seed of legend and pseudo-history galore even to the present day. Before relying on it, this important point should be borne in mind that it is our author's explanation of the wonderful ruin and loss of Britain. For many years the island became the sport and prey of Picts and Scots attacking from over the sea. Appeals had to be made to Rome. The north was completely lost. The south was ravaged from end to end. Finally the English had to be

brought to a river, but would not have been able to arrive that evening at the place of execution had not the river miraculously divided. The spot was outside the city (for the judge was left behind in it) and on the opposite side of the river. It is called at first the *harena ubi feriendus erat*, the arena where he was to be executed. Then, when he had crossed the river, he ascends the hill of his martyrdom, which is about half-a-mile from the *arena*! This confusion is due to corruption in the text, the idea of which seems to be that the martyr was led some distance out of the city, the other side of the river, and up a hill situated about half-a-mile from the river. These conditions are met by Mount St. Alban's near Caerleon.

The importance of the question as to the site of St. Alban's martyrdom is very great, because it determines one of the localities which St. Germanus of Auxerre visited in 429, and helps to elucidate the point as to what that Britannia was which needed purging of Pelagianism in that year. Messrs. Baring Gould and Fisher in their *Lives of the British Saints*, i, 142, say, that the account of Germanus' visit to Alban's tomb does not appear in the original Life of Germanus by Constantius. "It is (they say) an interpolation of the first half of the ninth century; it is not found in any of the copies of the unadulterated Life by Constantius." And again, *ibid.*, iii, 53, they say that "the seeking for, finding and translation of the relics of S. Alban" is not to be found in the earlier life, "and is, in fact, an early ninth century amplification". However this may be, Bede certainly refers to it in his *H. E.*, i, 18, which he wrote about A.D. 730.

called in. If an incredulous reader asks why did not Britain defend itself, the answer is here pat. It was because Maximus drained the island of all its armed soldiery, all its military supplies, all its overseers or rulers, all its able-bodied youth. Not a fighting man was left or even a weapon to fight with. *And they never returned ! !*

Judging from the *Excidium Britanniae* what good Latinists the Britons were able to produce, it is incredible that no historical memoranda of any kind were written throughout the forty-three years of peace since the Badonic Hill, and still backwards through the period of occasional victories to the time of Ambrosius Aurelianus. There may indeed have been no connected narrative of British history, for the scholarship of the time was concentrated on purely religious matters, but it is impossible to believe that there was a total lack of any description of historical memoranda. How else could our author have quoted from the *Epistolae ad Agitium*, which hailed even from the times of the emperors? How else could he have learnt the precise interval between the despatch of that letter and the year when the Saxons were invited to help the Britons? I take it, therefore, that he did have some good written sources with reliable chronological data, whence he sketched the history of the island from the Roman period to that in which he himself lived.

(iv) For instance, it seems evident that he had before him a statement to the effect that Britannia was invaded from over the sea by two nations who came in coracles, the Scots *a circione*, from the north-west, and the Picts *ab aquilone*, from the north. Their cruel ravages extended over many years. They differed partly in their customs, but in appearance they were the same, wearing beards and apparently kilts. All this occurred in and about the fifth cen-

ture. Now we know that the only part of Roman Britain which could be attacked from the N.W. and the N. by nations coming over the water, is Wales. The record, which the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* presumably had before him, was a perfectly sane one. It referred to the well-known invasions of Britannia, that is, Wales, in the fifth century by Scots and Picts. In the *Vita s. Carantoci*, ch. 2, we read that about A.D. 432 the Scots overcame Britannia, the names of the leaders being Briscus, Thuibaius, Machleius, and Anpacus. The Picts are well known to us by the name *gwyr y gogledd*, men of the north, including the bands which came with Cunedda. One of the Pictish leaders was Caw, the father of St. Gildas, who came from Arglud, a district on the river Clyde, to Twrcelyn in Anglesey. The record, I say, was a perfectly plain and sensible one. What does the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* do with it? He converts 'Britannia' into *the island of Britain*, and makes the Picts a people living outside the island and attacking it from some northern habitat beyond the Pentland Firth! Not until after the Revolt of Maximus (383-388) did Picts or Scots ever set foot in Britain! Not till after A.D. 446 did the Picts begin to settle for the first time in the north of Scotland!

(v) After the despatch of the Letter to Aëtius in A.D. 446, the Britons win their first decisive victory over the Picts and Scots with the result that the latter returned to Ireland whilst the Picts for the first time begin to settle *in extrema parte insulae*, in the extreme part of the island. As the narrative stands, this means that the Picts now for the first time settled down beyond the Firths of Forth and Clyde! The brief before our author, however, may have stated that the Picts now after a lengthy period of conquest settled down *in sinistrali parte*

Britanniae, in the northern part of Britannia, that is to say, in the left part of Wales as distinct from the *dexter-
alis pars*, y deheubarth, the south, the reference being to the settlements of the sons of Cunedda from the river Dee to the river Teifi. The decisive victory may be Cadwallon's defeat of the Scots at Cerryg y Gwyddyl in Anglesey, for our author, who knew of no Scots or Picts in southern Britain, would not realize that Cadwallon and his son Maelgwn were 'Picts'. Or it may be one of the Arthurian victories, for as is proved by the precious fragment already referred to, viz., the *Vita s. Carantoci prima*, Arthur flourished in the second half of the fifth century.¹

(vi) Following the expulsion of the Scots to Ireland there was a considerable period of prosperity. No age previously remembered the possession of such affluence. Kings were now annointed, some of whom were quickly cut down and succeeded by others. Our author says there was no room for kings of milder disposition. If such a king attained power, he was soon withstood as

¹ For the historic Arthur see sections 4 and 5 of the first *Vita s. Carantoci* printed with translation and notes in the Rev. J. T. Evans's *Church Plate of Cardiganshire* (Stow-on-the-Wold, 1914), 133-142. [The two *Vitae s. Carantoci* are printed as one *Vita* and with many errors in Rees' *Cambro-British Saints*, 97-101.] Here it will be seen that the locale of Arthur is our modern Somerset and Dorset. He rules in conjunction with Cadwy ab Geraint at *Dindraithor*, which may be either Cadbury on the R. Camel (a tributary of the Yeo or Ivel) in Somerset, or Dundry, near Bristol, in the same county. He moves about the district from the mouth of the R. Willett which flows into the Bristol Channel near Watchet, to Charmouth in Dorset on the coast of the English Channel. But we need not suppose that Arthur was confined to the places mentioned in the *Vita*, only that he was certainly connected with them. As Mr. Egerton Phillimore says, all the various hill-forts in the Devonian peninsula called Cadbury, are probably so named after the above Cadwy ab Geraint, which means that this king ruled from the Dartmoor-Exmoor line across Devon as far east, say, as the Bristol and Wiltshire Avons. As Arthur was ruling in conjunction with

though he were *Britanniae subversor*, a subvertor of Britain, which phrase is reminiscent of well-known Welsh ones, Pabo Post Prydain, Pabo the Pillar of Britain, and especially, now that we are in the Arthurian age, Iddawc Cordd Prydain, Iddawc the Churning Staff of Britain.

(vii) This age of unprecedented prosperity is suddenly brought to an end by a fourth invasion of Picts and Scots. As we are now no small interval of time later than A.D. 446, we have probably to do here with the coming of the Dalriad Scots under Fergus mac Ere circa A.D. 500. Then comes the famous pestilence, which in a short time brings down such a number that the living are unable to bury the dead. Again, as we are no small interval after A.D. 446, and we know that the Yellow Plague which raged in Britain carried off Maelgwn Gwynedd, who was *fifth* ancestor to Cadwallon (killed at Rowley Water in A.D. 634), we can have no doubt that it is this Yellow Plague which is referred to here and that we are now in the very early sixth century.

him, these must be his approximate boundaries also. The *Vita s. Carantoci prima* also fixes the chronology of Arthur, for being a contemporary of St. Carantocus, who went to Ireland the same time as Bishop Patrick, that is, A.D. 432, Arthur must have flourished in the fifth century. It may also be said that St. Carantocus was uncle to St. David, who was born in A.D. 462.

Arthur is described by Geoffrey of Monmouth as a contemporary of the Emperor Leo (457-474) and of Pope Simplicius (468-483), both of whom he is made to survive, but not later than 492. And this evidence is all the more convincing, inasmuch as the chronology implied is unknown to Geoffrey, who unwittingly contradicts it. But it still remains to be seen how far this chronology is based on the Bedan misinterpretation of the *Excidium Britanniae* that Badon was fought the forty-fourth year from the Saxon Advent. In my *Chronology of Arthur* the argument is vitiated by the view which I took from Mr. Anscombe and which I have since discarded, that the passage in the *Excidium Britanniae* about the forty-fourth year is an interpolation (*Y Cymmrodor*, xxii, 137-8). The evidence in the above *Vita*, however, as to Arthur's period is independent of Geoffrey.

(viii) So the time is drawing near when the iniquities of Britain should be complete. A council assembles to determine as to ways and means to withstand the Picts and Scots. The council with the proud tyrant is blinded, and the Saxons are invited to assist the Britons. They come in three ships. Here our author shows some familiarity with English traditions. First they called their ships *keels*; secondly, there was a prophecy current amongst them that they should occupy Britain for 300 years. For half this time they should be fighting the Britons, that is, for 150 years. After that (so it is implied) there would be peace. Now as peace began with the Battle of the Badonic Hill which had already lasted over 43 years, it follows that the *Excidium Britanniae* was written 193 years after that particular year in which the Britons asked the Saxons to help them.

(ix) Our author of course knew that particular year, though all he conveys is that it was no small interval after A.D. 446. There can be no manner of doubt that he is referring to a real event, which it was hardly likely for him to have known without some documentary evidence. I say it was a real event, although of course he distorts it into the first landing of the English in Britain! Just as no Picts ever settled permanently in north Scotland until after A.D. 446, so not till some considerable interval after this same year did ever English set foot in Britain! The English landed somewhere “in the eastern part of the island,” and soon drove the Britons pell-mell into the hilly country of the west, Strathelyde, Wales, and the Devonian peninsula. The truth now peeps out in one of his phrases. He says that after the Britons had been cooped up in the mountains, forests, and sea-islands of the west, the Saxons “returned home”. And *cum recessissent domum crudelissimi praedones*, when the most

cruel robbers had returned home, the Britons rallied under Ambrosius Aurelianus and won their first victory. The phrase indicates a good written source from which our author is drawing. The incident, which he regards as the first advent of the Saxons in Britain no small interval after A.D. 446, was doubtless an invitation sent by some British *tyrannus* in 'Britannia' to *Saxones* in Britain. The *Saxones* came and afterwards rebelled and ravaged the British lands. When the *Saxones* had returned home, that is, to their own lands in Britain, Ambrosius Aurelianus, a 'Roman', rallied the Britons and won a victory.

(x) In ch. 7: the Romans place *praepositi*, overseers or taskmasters, over the Britons to make *nomen Romanae servitutis*, the name of Roman slavery, to cling to the soil, and to vex the crafty race "so that it might no longer be regarded as Britannia, but as Romania". In ch. 13: the island retaining *nomen Romanum*, the Roman name, but not [Roman] law and custom", sends Maximus to the Gauls. In ch. 17: again messengers are sent to ask help of the Romans "lest the wretched country be completely destroyed and *nomen Romanorum*, the name of Romans, should grow vile", etc. In ch. 20: the miserable survivors send a letter to Agitius, *Gemitus Britannorum*, the Groans of the Britons. In ch. 25: "to Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who alone of the Roman race chanced to survive in the shock of such a storm, his parents being killed in it, who doubtless were people clad in the purple".

Although the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* is careful to distinguish between Britons and Romans throughout the whole of his narrative, yet in some of the passages here quoted there are distinct reminiscences of a very thorough Romanization of Britain. He suggests that the

name of Roman supplanted that of Briton, especially where he says that the *gens*, race, "might no longer be regarded as Britannia but Romania". In the word Romania, he seems to me to be translating from the Welsh *Rumein*. *Rumein* from *Romani*, Romans, like *Ffrainc* from *Franci*, Franks, meant people at first, and then country. To-day *Rhufain* and *Ffrainc* mean Rome and France: new nouns, *Rhufeiniaid* and *Ffrancod*, have been invented for Romans and French. If we suppose our author had some note before him which stated that the Britons were *Rumein* rather than *Bridein* (or whatever the form may have been) meaning *Romani* rather than *Britanni*, he might very well have translated these two words into Romania and Britannia respectively, treating them as places rather than peoples. Still it is evident that he had no idea that Britain was Romanized to the extent that we are taught by Dr. Haverfield. With him Britons and Romans are always two distinct and hostile racial elements. The Britons are the native population, conquered and enslaved by Rome; the Romans (of whom Ambrosius Aurelianus was the last) are the official alien class, placed in power by the imperial government. In A.D. 446, when the Britons appeal to Aetius, they do not say 'the groans of the Romans in Britain', but 'the groans of the Britons'. Dr. Haverfield tells us that "the old idea that Britons and Romans remained two distinct and hostile elements, has, of course, been long abandoned by all competent inquirers". Doubtless this is so, but Dr. Haverfield will have to face the difficulty that the *Excidium Britanniae*, written according to him by Gildas "about 540", differentiates carefully between them.

(xi) A study of ch. 2, which formed originally a 'Table of Contents' to the *Excidium Britanniae*, reveals a well

arranged order of incidents in chronological sequence. Beginning with the Letter to Aëtius we have: *de epistolis ad Agitium*, of the Letter to Agitius, *de victoria*, of a Victory, *de sceleribus*, of crimes, *de nuntiatis subito hostibus*, of enemies suddenly announced, *de famosa peste*, of the famous Plague, *de consilio*, of counsel, *de saeviore multo primis hoste*, of an enemy far more savage than the first, *de urbium subversione*, of the ruin of cities, *de reliquis*, of the survivors, *de postrema patriae victoria*, of the last victory of the country, which has been granted in our times by the will of God. The first of these items provides us with a definite date beyond which it could not have occurred, viz., A.D. 446, so that all the other items mentioned here must have occurred later than A.D. 446. Our author certainly was familiar with the chronology of these events, which he could hardly have been unless he had written material to go upon. The crucial date is that of the Battle of the Badonic Hill, which he helps us to determine, first, by making the Saxon Advent to have occurred no small interval after A.D. 446, and, secondly, by mentioning the prophecy of the 300 years during which the Saxons were to occupy Britain and for the first 150 of which they were to continue their aggressions on the Britons. Now as these aggressions ceased with the Badonic Hill, this battle must have been fought no small interval after A.D. 446 *plus* 150 years. And as the *Excidium Britanniae* was in Bede's hand when he was writing his *De temporum ratione* in 725, the Badonic Hill must have been won at least 43 years before that year, that is, by A.D. 682. We must therefore look for the victory about the middle of the seventh century. Fortunately the date is preserved for us in the tenth century Latin Welsh Chronicle, the so-called *Annales Cambriae*, which has opposite Annus ccxxi the words *Bellum Badonis*

secundo, the Battle of Badon for the second time. Striking out *secundo* as due to Bede's misinterpretation of the *Excidium Britanniae* who fixes the Badonic Hill about 44 years after the Saxon Advent, we have no other alternative than to accept Annus ccxxi as the year of the Victory, which in the era of that document is 665. The Chronological scheme of the *Excidium Britanniae*, therefore, is as follows, and it cannot but have been drawn by the author from good written sources.

A.D. 446.—The Letter to Aëtius.

446-514.—The first victory over Picts and Scots.

The period of unprecedented prosperity.

The sudden arrival of Picts and Scots for the fourth time. The famous Pestilence.

The assembly of Britons invites the Saxons to their assistance.

514.—The arrival of the Saxons.

514-665.—The Britons expelled into the western corners of Britain. The victory of Ambrosius Aurelianus. 150 years of warfare between Britons and Saxons.

665.—The Battle of the Badonic Hill. Birth of the author of the *Excidium Britanniae*.

708.—The forty-fourth year of peace. The *Excidium Britanniae* is being written.

(c) CONCLUSION.

The *Excidium Britanniae* is a first class authority, only if we realize the true date of its composition. Regarded as a Gildasian work written “about A.D. 540”, it is absolutely irreconcilable with all we know from other sources. The many attempts, for instance, to square its supposed evidence with the story of the invasion of Wessex, have completely broken down. That the leading

Welsh ecclesiastic of the sixth century, St. Gildas, writing "about A.D. 540", should have made the English land in Britain for the first time no small interval after A.D. 446, and even the Picts to settle in Scotland for the first time after that same date, he himself being a Pict born near the R. Clyde, is so incredible and nonsensical that only a long series of writers from Bede downwards, desperately ignorant of Welsh affairs, could by the massive weight of their names have imposed a conception so baseless and perverse even on Welsh scholars. The author of the *Excidium Britanniae* was very short of native records for the Roman period, but for the succeeding age his narrative shews that he had some valuable memoranda to go upon. Some of these he grossly misunderstood, especially in the matter of the meaning of 'Britannia', the first settlements of the Picts, and the invitation for assistance which brought *Saxones* on the scene in A.D. 514. But his general conception of the relations between Britons and Saxons from the time when he supposed the former to have been driven into the west to A.D. 665 is sane and historical. From that year there was, as he tells us, comparative peace. The old Roman cities were abandoned and in ruins. Social order among the Britons was steady and hopeful. It is true he mentions civil wars, but these were normal throughout Europe at that time, being the then equivalent of our modern party strifes. As a zealous religionist he was naturally dissatisfied with what was to him the prevailing religious apathy. He was not, however, like the men of St. Gildas' day, above writing history or above quoting Vergil.¹ The general impression left on the mind

¹ The only secular writers, with whom Mommsen can trace some familiarity in the 110 chapters which he supposes to have been all written by Gildas, are Vergil (chs. 6, 17, 25), Juvenal (*epimonia*, 23), Persius or Martial or both (*catasta*, 23, 109), and Claudian (*Tithica vallis*, 19). Of these, *catasta* must be ruled out as it frequently

by his treatise is that in A.D. 708 the Britons of Strathclyde, Wales, and the Devonian peninsula were well organized, well able to hold their own, faithful children of the Christian Church, fond of learning, and producers of no mean Latinists.

occurs in early Christian literature (Williams' *Gildas*, 55, note). Thus the only traces of familiarity with secular authors which Mommsen can find in the 110 chapters, are confined to those chapters (2 to 26) which in my opinion are not by Gildas at all, but constitute the distinct work to which alone the title *Excidium Britanniae* applies.

The attitude of the genuine Gildas to secular writings is made plain to us by himself in ch. 66, where in his censure of the clergy of Britannia he says of them that they are “listless and dull *ad praecepta sanctorum*, towards the precepts of the saints, if at any time they should only have heard what ought to be heard by them very often; and ready and attentive *ad ludicra*, to public games, *et ineptas saecularium hominum fabulas*, and improper stories of men of the world, as though what opened the way of death were the way of life”. By *praecepta sanctorum* is meant religious literature, and by *ineptae saecularium hominum fabulae* is meant secular literature. As is well known, in the time of Gildas (*i.e.*, from the close of the fifth to about the middle of the sixth centuries) the Church authorities frowned on all studies of *codices seculares*, secular books. Men like Jerome and Augustine had felt uneasy with respect to the reading of heathen writings, and before long Homer, Vergil, and Cicero were abandoned. By the time, however, that the author of the *Excidium Britanniae* and Bede were flourishing this hostility to secular learning had largely passed away. Hence we are not surprised that Vergil is quoted in the *Excidium Britanniae*, though we would have been had Gildas quoted him.
