

**MADOC: AN ESSAY ON THE  
DISCOVERY OF AMERICA BY  
MADOC AP OWEN GWYNEDD IN  
THE TWELFTH CENTURY. [1893]**

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Madoc: An Essay on the Discovery of America by Madoc Ap Owen Gwynedd in the Twelfth Century. [1893] by Thomas Stephens & Llywarch Reynolds

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**THOMAS STEPHENS & LLYWARCH REYNOLDS**

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M A D O C

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TWELFTH CENTURY

BY

THOMAS STEPHENS

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE.

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THE QUESTION discussed in the following pages has persistently engaged the attention of the Welsh people from time to time during the last three hundred years, and it might well be supposed that the last word had long since been spoken upon this subject. But that this is not so, and that the topic is possessed of a perennial charm for the Cymric race, is shown by the continually recurring discussions thereof, in the native press and elsewhere, even in our own day; and the alleged discovery of America by Prince Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd in the twelfth century is still, by a certain class of minds, accepted as an article of faith, and its truth as implicitly believed as when first enunciated by Humphrey Llwyd in the sixteenth century. The fourth centenary celebrations in the past year in honour of Columbus, and the forthcoming Eisteddfod to be held at Chicago in the present summer, have combined to revive the interest felt in the Madoc story, which has induced the representatives of the late Mr. Thomas Stephens to yield to the oft-repeated solicitations of many of his fellow-countrymen, and to give the following work to the world.

This essay was written for competition at the celebrated Llangollen Eisteddfod, held on September 21, 1858, and three

following days. The subject for competition was announced in these terms: 'For the best essay upon the discovery of America in the twelfth century by Prince Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd, prize 20*l.* and a silver star'; and the following well-known Welsh *literati* were appointed to adjudicate upon this contest: the Rev. Thomas James ('Llallawg') and 'Myvyr Morganwg,' both since deceased; and the veteran Welsh lexicographer, the Rev. D. Silvan Evans, B.D., who still happily survives to serve the cause of Welsh literature.

Six essays were sent in for competition, five of which took the affirmative view, and assumed the truth of the Welsh tradition. Of these the only one which need be mentioned here was that bearing the *nom-de-guerre* of 'Wild Man of the Woods.' In the remaining essay, under the assumed name of 'Gwrnerth Ergydlym,' the writer, Mr. Thomas Stephens, the lamented author of 'The Literature of the Kymry,' after presenting an almost exhaustive summary of the literature of the subject, and marshalling all the evidence usually cited for and against the Cambrian story, subjected them to a rigid criticism, and finally adopted the negative view, and declared himself a disbeliever in the tale

'How Madoc from the shores of Britain spread  
The adventurous sail.'

That essay is now for the first time submitted to the public in the following pages.

The action of the Eisteddfod committee in reference to this competition created great commotion at the time, and roused the indignation of all fair-minded Welshmen; and it may not, therefore, be considered out of place to give a short summary of the facts, taken from the journals of that day, and



from authentic documents still extant ; and to stigmatise as it deserves conduct calculated to tarnish the fair fame of our national institution, the Eisteddfod, and rivalling in turpitude the disgraceful treatment accorded to ' Dewi Wyn o Eifion ' and his ' Awdl Elusengarwch ' in a previous generation.

Having become aware of the existence of the negative essay, the committee decided that the essay in question, being an essay not on the discovery but on the *non-discovery* of America by Madoc, was not upon the given subject, and must therefore be excluded from the competition. This unwarrantable interference with, and usurpation of the functions of, the judges was warmly resented by those gentlemen ; and ' Llallawg ' promptly resigned his office and declined to adjudicate. Mr. Silvan Evans forwarded to the secretaries, the day before the Eisteddfod, his award, which was in the following terms :

*To the Secretaries of the Llangollen Eisteddfod.*

GENTLEMEN,—I have read the essays on ' the Discovery of America by Madoc ab Owain Gwynedd in the twelfth century ' with as much care and attention as the circumstances would permit ; and the impression which the perusal of them has left on my mind is—that the existence of the so-called Welsh Indians has not yet been fully established—that Madoc's alleged discovery of the American continent rests upon bare conjecture, and that it is still an open question whether he ever left his native shores. If these essays may be considered as exhausting the subject to which they refer, I can draw no other inference from their contents than that these points cannot, with our present stock of knowledge, be proved to the satisfaction of any unbiassed mind. All the competitors, with one exception, adopt the affirmative side of the question, and defend it with greater or less ability ; but ' Gwrnerth Ergydlym, ' by far the ablest writer, takes the opposite side. He

examines the subject fully and candidly, and displays throughout a deep acquaintance with it, and no small amount of critical sagacity ; and I cannot but regret that the promoters of the Eisteddfod should have deemed it their duty to exclude his masterly essay from competition simply because the author arrives at a different conclusion from that of the others.

As all the essays which assume the truth of Madoc's discovery, whether we take them singly or collectively, appear to me to fall far short of establishing the points which their respective writers have undertaken to prove, and as no other view of the subject is to be entertained, I hope I may be excused from pronouncing any opinion as to the comparative merits of these productions.

I remain, Gentlemen,  
Your faithful servant,  
(Signed) D. SILVAN EVANS.

Llangian, Pwllheli :  
Sept. 20, 1858.

This communication was carefully suppressed, and no mention was made of it at the Eisteddfod. The Rev. Mr. Silvan Evans was, in consequence of severe domestic affliction, unable to be present at the Eisteddfod ; and the other adjudicator, ' Myvyr Morganwg,' who was present, and who had written an adjudication, was not called upon to read it. When this part of the programme was reached, the Rev. R. W. Morgan, one of the conductors of the Eisteddfod, instead of stating the facts as they were, announced that ' of the essays sent in, one was not on the subject ; and of the others the judges could not decide which was the best ; consequently, there would be no award.' The following account of the scene which ensued is reproduced from a contemporary newspaper report of the proceedings :

Mr. T. Stephens then stepped on the platform and claimed permission to say a few words in reference to the announcement made by Mr. Morgan ; but the chairman and 'Carn Ingli' begged he would refrain from doing so, and Mr. Morgan ordered the band to play up in order to drown the voice of the speaker ; but the audience claimed a hearing for him, urged by Mr. Francis of Manchester, who said it would be a burning shame to refuse a hearing to a man of Mr. Stephens's literary reputation. The chairman yielded, and Mr. Stephens then came forward. He had risen, he said, to protest against the terms of Mr. Morgan's announcement. He had said that one essay was not on the subject. This was not correct. The essay was strictly to the point, and he would not hesitate to announce that the essay pointed at was that of 'Gwrnerth Ergydlym,' of which he was the author. The real objection was that the conclusion arrived at was at variance with the preconceptions of the committee ; and if they had manfully announced the fact, he would have made no remonstrance ; but they had now thrown dust in the eyes of the assembly, and committed an unfairness to him (hear, hear) . . . He had, of course, seen that the committee held the affirmative view ; but he had before denied, and continued to deny, that an Eisteddfod was to be an arena for special pleading, but rather for the promulgation of the truth ; and he protested that no committee had any right to look upon their prizes as fees for the advocacy of one-sided views of disputed questions (hear, hear). The Madoc business had been under discussion for fifty years ; and it was therefore not to be wondered at if the competitors took different sides. For his own part he treated it as an open question ; and as the committee gave great prominence to the motto '*Y gwir yn erbyn y byd*,' he was led to conclude that there was to be full liberty of discussion, and that their object was to arrive at the truth (hear, hear). In that spirit he had written. . . . He said he was supported in his views by several of the ablest historical critics in Wales ; by the late Mr. Humffreys Parry, the Rev. Thomas Price ('Carnhuanawc'), and the Rev. Walter Davies ('Gwallter Mechain'). His ambition, he said, was to be the inter-