

**Y GODODIN: A POEM ON THE BATTLE OF
CATTRAETH, BY ANEURIN, A WELSH
BARD OF THE SIXTH CENTURY, WITH AN
ENGLISH TRANSLATION, AND
NUMEROUS HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL
ANNOTATIONS**

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JOHN WILLIAMS AB ITHEL

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PREFACE.

ANURIN, the author of this poem, was the son of Caw, lord of Cwm Cawlwyd, or Cowllwg, a region in the North, which, as we learn from a Life of Gildas in the monastery of Fleury published by Johannes a Bosco, comprehended Arecluta or Strath Clyde.* Several of his brothers seem to have emigrated from Prydyn in company with their father before the battle of Catteraeth, and, under the royal protection of Maolwyn Gwynedd, to have settled in Wales, where they professed religious lives, and became founders of churches. He himself, however, remained behind, and having been initiated into the mysteries of Bardism, formed an intimate acquaintance with Owen, Cian, Llywarch Hen, and Taliesin, all likewise disciples of the Awen. By the rules of

* Perhaps Cawlwyd is a compound of Caw Clywd, that is, the Clyde of Caw.

his order a Bard was not permitted ordinarily to bear arms,*and though the exceptional case, in which he might act differently, may be said to have arisen from "the lawlessness and depredation†" of the Saxons, Anourin does not appear to have been present at Cattraeth in any other capacity than that of a herald Bard. Besides the absence of any intimation to the contrary, we think the passages where he compares Owen to himself, and where he makes proposals at the conference, and above all where he attributes his safety to his "gwonwawl," conclusive on the subject. His heraldic character would be recognised by all nations, according to the universal law of warfare, whereas it is very improbable that any poetic effusion which he might have delivered, could have influence upon a people whose language differed so materially from his own.

The Gododin was evidently composed when the various occurrences that it records were as yet fresh in the author's mind and recollection. It is divided into stanzas, which, though they now amount to only ninety-seven, are supposed to have originally corresponded in point of number with the chieftains that went to Cattraeth. This is

* Institutional Triads.

† Ibid.

strongly intimated in the declaration subjoined to Gorchan Cynvelyn, and cited in the notes at page 86, and thence would we infer that the Gorchanau themselves are portions of the Gododin, having for their object the commemoration of the persons whose names they bear. Of course all of them, with the exception of the short one of Adebón, contain passages that have been transposed from other stanzas, which may account for their disproportionate lengths. This is especially the case with Gorchan Maelderw, the latter, and by far the greater portion whereof, is in the Carnhuanawc MS. detached from the former, and separately entitled "Fragments of the Gododin and other pieces of the sixth century." That they were "incantations," cannot be admitted; and if the word "gorchan," or "gwarchan" mean here anything except simply "a canon, or fundamental part of song," we should be inclined to consider it as synonymous with "gwarthan," and to suppose that the poems in question referred to the camps of Adebón, Maelderw, and Cynvelyn:—

"Gwarchan Cynvelyn ar Ododin."

According to the tenor of the Cynvelyn statement, every stanza would bring before us a fresh hero. This principle we have not overlooked in the disci-

mination and arrangements of proper names, though owing to evident omissions and interpolations, an irregularity in this respect occasionally and of necessity occurs.

Anourin, like a true poet of nature, abstains from all artful introduction or invocation, and launches at once into his subject. His eye follows the gorgeously and distinctively armed chiefs, as they move at the head of their respective companies, and perform deeds of valour on the bloody field. He delights to enhance by contrast their domestic and warlike habits, and frequently recurs to the pang of sorrow, which the absence of the warriors must have caused to their friends and relatives at home, and reflects with much genuine feeling upon the disastrous consequences, that the loss of the battle would entail upon these and their dear native land. And though he sets forth his subject in the ornamental language of poetry, yet he is careful not to transgress the bounds of truth. This is strikingly instanced in the manner in which he names no less than four witnesses as vouchers for the correctness of his description of Caradawg. Herein he produces one of the "three agreements that ought to be in a song," viz. an agreement "between truth and the marvellous."*

* Bardic Triads.