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GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH  
THE HISTORY OF THE  
KINGS OF BRITAIN

TRANSLATED  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION  
BY LEWIS THORPE



PENGUIN BOOKS

1966

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THE PENGUIN CLASSICS

FOUNDER EDITOR (1944-64) E. V. RIEU

Editor: Betty Radice

A tentative outline of the life of GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH can be made from evidence in his text and from various other sources. He calls himself *Galfridus Monemutensis*, which suggests he was born and brought up in Monmouthshire, most likely not far from Caerleon-on-Usk, which he often mentions and which is only some twenty miles from Monmouth. From 1129 to 1151 he seems to have lived in Oxford and was probably a canon of the secular college of St George's. During this time he wrote his *History of the Kings of Britain*, the 'Prophecies of Merlin', originally conceived as a separate volume, and the *Life of Merlin*. In 1151 Geoffrey became Bishop Elect of St Asaph, North Wales. He was ordained priest at Westminster in February 1152 and consecrated a week later at Lambeth by Archbishop Theobald. According to the Welsh chronicles he died in 1155.

LEWIS THORPE, Ph.D., D. de l'U., LL.D., was Professor of French at the University of Nottingham from 1958. He joined the staff of that University in 1946 after distinguished war service. He was International President of the Arthurian Society, and a member of the Calvin Publications Committee of the World Alliance of Reformed and Protestant Churches. His books include *La France Guerrière* (1945), *Le roman de Laurin, fils de Marques le Sénéchal* (1950), *Le roman de Laurin, text of MS. B.N. f. fr. 22548* (1960), *Guido Farina, painter of Verona, 1896-1957* (1967) with Barbara Reynolds, *Einhard the Frank: The Life of Charlemagne* (1970), *Le roman de Silence, by Heldris de Cornuälle* (1972), and *The Bayeux Tapestry and the Norman Invasion* (1973). He also translated *Two Lives of Charlemagne*, *Gregory of Tours: The History of the Franks* and *Gerald of Wales: The Journey Through Wales and The Description of Wales* (to be published in 1978) for the Penguin Classics. Lewis Thorpe was a member of the M.C.C. He died in 1977.

Part One

BRUTUS OCCUPIES THE ISLAND  
OF ALBION

BRITAIN, the best of islands,<sup>1</sup> is situated in the Western Ocean, (1.2) between France and Ireland. It stretches for eight hundred miles in length and for two hundred in breadth. It provides in unfailing plenty everything that is suited to the use of human beings. It abounds in every kind of mineral. It has broad fields and hillsides which are suitable for the most intensive farming and in which, because of the richness of the soil, all kinds of crops are grown in their seasons. It also has open woodlands which are filled with every kind of game. Through its forest glades stretch pasture-lands which provide the various feeding-stuffs needed by cattle, and there too grow flowers of every hue which offer their honey to the fitting bees. At the foot of its windswept mountains it has meadows green with grass, beauty-spots where clear springs flow into shining streams which ripple gently and murmur an assurance of deep sleep to those lying on their banks.

What is more, it is watered by lakes and rivers full of fish, and at its southern end by a narrow strait across which men sail to France. There are three noble rivers, the Thames, the Severn and the Humber, and these it stretches out as though they were three arms.

1. This description of Britain is similar in many ways to the opening chapter of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. It can be traced further back still, to §§ 7-9 of the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius, written towards the end of the eighth century, where the thirty-three cities of the Britons are listed. As early as the sixth century something very similar to it appears in the *De excidio Britanniae* of Gildas, who, in his §3, writes of 'the mouths of two noble rivers, the Thames and the Severn, as it were two arms, by which foreign luxuries were of old imported', of 'eight-and-twenty cities' and of 'transparent rivers, flowing in gentle murmurs, and offering a pledge of sweet slumber to those who recline upon their banks'. (Translation by J. A. Giles, 1841, as in all the notes which follow on Gildas and Nennius.)

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Into them goods from across the ocean are carried, merchandise coming from all countries by this same sea-traffic.

In earlier times Britain was graced by twenty-eight cities. Some of these, in the depopulated areas, are now mouldering away, with their walls broken. Others remain whole and have in them the shrines of saints, with towers built up to a noble height, where whole companies of men and women offer praise to God according to the Christian tradition.

Lastly, Britain is inhabited by five races of people, the Norman-French, the Britons, the Saxons, the Picts and the Scots. Of these the Britons once occupied the land from sea to sea, before the others came. Then the vengeance of God overtook them because of their arrogance and they submitted to the Picts and the Saxons. It now remains for me to tell how they came and from where, and this will be made clear in what follows.

(4.3) After the Trojan war, Aeneas fled from the ruined city with his son Ascanius and came by boat to Italy. He was honourably received there by King Latinus, but Turnus, King of the Rutuli, became jealous of him and attacked him. In the battle between them Aeneas was victorious. Turnus was killed and Aeneas seized both the kingdom of Italy and the person of Lavinia, who was the daughter of Latinus.

When Aeneas' last day came, Ascanius was elected King. He founded the town of Alba on the bank of the Tiber and became the father of a son called Silvius. This Silvius was involved in a secret love-affair with a certain niece of Lavinia's; he married her and made her pregnant. When this came to the knowledge of his father Ascanius, the latter ordered his soothsayers to discover the sex of the child which the girl had conceived. As soon as they had made sure of the truth of the matter, the soothsayers said that she would give birth to a boy, who would cause the death of both his father and his mother; and that after he had wandered in exile through many lands this boy would eventually rise to the highest honour.

The soothsayers were not wrong in their forecast.<sup>1</sup> When the day came for her to have her child, the mother bore a son and died in childbirth. The boy was handed over to the midwife and was given the name Brutus. At last, when fifteen years had passed, the young man killed his father by an unlucky shot with an arrow, when they were out hunting together. Their beaters drove some stags into their path and Brutus, who was under the impression that he was aiming his weapon at these stags, hit his own father below the breast. As the result of this death Brutus was expelled from Italy by his relations, who were angry with him for having committed such a crime. He went in exile to certain parts of Greece; and there he discovered the descendants of Helenus, Priam's son, who were held captive in the power of Pandrasus, King of the Greeks. After the fall of Troy, Pyrrhus, the son of Achilles, had dragged this man Helenus off with him in chains, and a number of other Trojans, too. He had ordered them to be kept in slavery, so that he might take vengeance on them for the death of his father.

When Brutus realized that these people were of the same race as his ancestors, he stayed some time with them. However, he soon gained such fame for his military skill and prowess that he was esteemed by the kings and princes more than any young man in the country. Among the wise he was himself wise, and among the valiant he too was valiant. All the gold and silver and the equipment which he acquired he handed over to his soldiers. In this way his fame spread among all peoples. The Trojans began to flock to him and to beg him to become their leader, so that they might be

1. In essence the story of Brutus is taken from §10 of the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius, where the birth of the hero is described; and §15, which gives the journey westwards. Cp., for example, the sentences: 'Thus reduced, he wandered forty-two years in Africa, and arrived, with his family, at the altars of the Philistines, by the Lake of Osiers. Then passing between Rusicada and the hilly country of Syria, they travelled by the River Malva through Mauretania as far as the Pillars of Hercules...' (Nennius, §15), with the similar passage on p. 66.

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freed from their subjection to the Greeks. They said that this could easily be done, for they had now increased in number in the country to such an extent that there were reckoned to be seven thousand of them, not counting the women and children.

What is more, there was a certain nobly-born youth in Greece called Assaracus who favoured their faction. He was the son of a Trojan mother, and he had the greatest faith in them, thinking that with their help he could resist the persecution of the Greeks. His own brother was harassing Assaracus, on account of three castles which his dying father had given him, and was trying to take these away from him by alleging that he was the son of a concubine. This brother was Greek on both his father's and his mother's side, and he had persuaded the King and the other Greeks to support his case. When Brutus saw how many men he now had, and realized that the castles of Assaracus were there for him to take, he agreed without misgiving to the request of the Trojans.

(14) Once Brutus had been promoted to the position of leader, he called the Trojans together from all sides and fortified the castles of Assaracus. Assaracus himself occupied the open woodlands and the hills with the entire force of men and women who supported him and Brutus. Then Brutus sent to the King a letter which read as follows:

'Brutus, the leader of those who survived the fall of Troy, sends his greeting to King Pandrasus. The people sprung from the illustrious line of Dardanus have withdrawn to the hidden depths of the forests, for they have found it intolerable that they should be treated in your kingdom otherwise than as the purity of their noble blood demands. They have preferred to keep themselves alive on flesh and herbs, as though they were wild beasts, and have their liberty, rather than remain under the yoke of your slavery, even if pampered there by every kind of wealth. If, in the pride of your power, this offends you, then you should not count it against them. Rather you should pardon them, for it is the natural aim of everyone in captivity to strive to return to his former dignity. Be

moved to pity for them, and deign to bestow upon them their lost liberty. Give them permission to inhabit the forest-glades which they have occupied in their attempt to escape from slavery. If you cannot grant this, then let them, with your approval, go off to join the peoples of other lands.'

When the content of this letter was explained to him, Pandrasus (15) was greatly surprised that people whom he had held in slavery should be so bold that they could send such messages to him. He summoned a council of his leaders and decided to collect an army and to pursue the Trojans. While he was searching the waste lands in the neighbourhood of the castle of Sparatinum where he thought they were, Brutus made a sally with three thousand men and suddenly attacked when Pandrasus was least expecting anything of the sort. Having heard of the coming of Pandrasus, Brutus had entered this castle the night before, so that he might make a surprise attack on the Greeks, as they passed by unarmed and marching in broken order. The Trojans charged them and attacked them fiercely, aiming at killing as many as they could. In their utter stupefaction the Greeks fled in all directions. With the King at their head they rushed to cross the River Akalon which flowed near by. As they forded the river they were in grave danger from the whirling current of its water. Brutus attacked them as they fled, and by his assault he slaughtered some of them in the river and others on the bank. This double death which he was inflicting gave him immense pleasure as he rushed to and fro in the battle.

Antigonus, the brother of Pandrasus, was greatly distressed when he observed what was happening. He marshalled his scattered forces into formation. Then he turned and charged swiftly at the raging Trojans. He preferred to meet death while fighting rather than turn in cowardly flight and be drowned in the muddy whirlpools of the river. He moved forward in close formation and exhorted his men to resist bravely and to hurl back with all their might the weapons which were causing such slaughter among them.

This availed him little or nothing. The Trojans were fully equipped; their enemies were virtually unarmed. Because of this the Trojans pressed on all the more boldly and the slaughter which they inflicted was very heavy. They continued to attack in this way until almost all the Greeks were killed and they had captured Antigonus and his comrade Anacletus.

(1.6) Once Brutus had made sure of victory, he garrisoned the fortress with six hundred soldiers and then set off for the hidden recesses of the forest-groves where the Trojan people were waiting for his help. Pandrasus, on the other hand, was upset by his own flight and by the fact that his brother was captured, and spent that night in rallying his scattered forces. When the next day dawned, he set off with his re-formed army to besiege the castle, for he imagined that Brutus had himself occupied it, taking with him Antigonus and the other captives whom he had seized. As soon as he reached the walls, Pandrasus reconnoitred the site of the castle, divided his army into troops and stationed them at various places round the perimeter. Some he ordered to prevent those inside from coming out, some that they should cut off the water-courses which ran from the rivers, and others that with a great number of battering-rams and other machines of war they should shatter the fabric of the walls. They followed his instructions with good results and strove with great zeal and in every way they could imagine to harass the besieged unmercifully. When night fell they chose their bravest men to guard the camp and their tents from any stealthy attack by the enemy, while the others who were worn out by toil enjoyed peaceful sleep.

(1.7) Those who were besieged stood on the top of the walls and strove with might and main to repel the assault-machines of the enemy with devices of their own. They struggled as one man to defend themselves by hurling down missiles and brimstone torches; and when the enemy constructed a *testudo* and dug underneath their walls, they used Greek fire and a deluge of boiling water to force them to retreat. In the end, suffering as they were from lack

of food and from their day-long effort, they sent a messenger to Brutus to beg him to hasten to their assistance. They were afraid that they would become so weak that they would be compelled to abandon the fortress.

Brutus wanted very much to bring help, but he was himself greatly preoccupied by the fact that he did not have enough soldiers to permit him to join battle in the field. He relied instead upon a cunning plan, thinking that he would approach the enemy's camp in the night and that once he had tricked their guards he would slaughter them as they slept. However, this could not be achieved without the assent and the assistance of one of the Greeks. Brutus therefore summoned Anacletus, the comrade of Antigonus, drew his sword out of its scabbard and said to him: 'My fine young friend, unless you agree faithfully to what I propose and carry out what I order you to do, this is the end of your life and of that of Antigonus too. This coming night I intend to attack the Greeks' camp and to slaughter them when they least expect it. I am afraid that their sentinels may discover my intention and so hinder my plan. In so far as it is necessary for me to attack their sentinels first, I want them to be deceived by your behaviour so that I can come within striking-distance of the others in safety. You must carry out this cunning plan for me. Go to the besiegers in the second hour of the night and allay their suspicion by lying to them. Say that you have freed Antigonus from where I held him prisoner, taken him to a valley in the woods and hidden him there among the bushes. Pretend that he is unable to go any farther because of the chains with which he is shackled. Then lead them to the edge of the glade, as if they are going to free him. I shall be there with a band of armed men, ready to kill them.'

Anacletus was terrified by the sight of the sword, which threatened (1.8) him with death all the time that Brutus was speaking. He swore that he would carry out this order, if only he himself and Antigonus too were allowed to live. The bargain was struck between them, and at the second hour of the night, which had already nearly come,

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he started on his way towards the siege as he had been ordered. When he finally came near to the camp, the sentinels, who were keeping a watchful eye on all the obscurer spots in the neighbourhood, gathered around him on all sides. They asked him what he had come for and if he was there to betray the army. He pretended to be overjoyed at seeing them and answered them in this way: 'I am not here to betray my own people. I have escaped from the Trojans' prison. I beg you to come with me to your own Antigonus, whom I have rescued from the fetters of Brutus. He is hampered by the weight of his chains and I have told him to stay hidden in the bushes a short distance back on the edge of the forest, until I could find some of you whom I could bring back to free him.' They were not sure whether he was telling the truth or not, but one of their number appeared who recognized Anacletus, greeted him and told his companions who he was. They hesitated no longer, but called the others who were some way off to come quickly. They followed Anacletus to the wood where, according to what he had said, Antigonus lay hidden. As they made their way through the bushes Brutus attacked them with his armed bands. He charged at them and, terrified as they were, he was able to inflict frightful slaughter upon them.

Then he set out for the siege. He divided his comrades into three companies and ordered each band to go to a different part of the camp, discreetly and without making a sound. Once they were in position they were not to kill anyone until he himself had seized the King's tent with his own troop. He would then blow his horn as a signal to them.

[1.9] When Brutus had told the Trojans what they were to do, they quietly and without more ado entered the camp; they occupied the various parts as he had ordered and awaited the promised signal. As soon as he stood in front of the tent of Pandrasus, which he was burning to enter more than all the others, Brutus gave his men the signal without waiting any longer. The moment they heard it they quickly drew their swords, went into the sleeping-quarters of

the unconscious enemy and with deadly effect dealt blow after blow. In this way the Trojans moved forward through the camp, showing pity to none.

The Greeks woke up at the groans of the dying, and when they set eye on those who were about to butcher them they were stupefied, like sheep suddenly attacked by wolves. They saw no way of protecting themselves, for they had no time either to pick up their weapons or to take flight. Themselves unarmed, the Greeks ran to and fro between the armed men wherever their panic led them; but all the time they were being cut to pieces by the Trojans who were attacking them. Anyone who got away half-alive was dashed against the rocks and the tree-trunks as he rushed along in his desire for escape, and so gave up his soul together with his blood. Anyone who, protected only by his shield or by some other covering, rushed headlong through the pitch-dark night in fear of death and came upon these same rocks, fell there, and as he fell his arms or legs were shattered. He who avoided both of these disasters was drowned in the rivers which flowed near by, for he did not know where to flee. Hardly anyone escaped unhurt and without suffering some mishap. What is more, as soon as they heard of the arrival of their comrades-in-arms, the Trojans inside the fortress hurried out and doubled the slaughter which was being inflicted.

When Brutus had seized Pandrasus' tent, as we have said already, [1.10] he was careful to tie the King up and keep him safe, for he knew that he would get what he wanted more easily by keeping Pandrasus alive than by killing him. On the other hand, those who had come with Brutus went on with the slaughter. In the part of the camp which had been allocated to each of them they succeeded in killing everyone they found. It was in this way that they passed the night, and the light of dawn revealed just how many of the people there they had destroyed. As a result Brutus was beside himself with joy. When all the enemy had been slaughtered, he allowed his own men to deal as they wished with the spoils of those they had destroyed.



He himself entered the fortress, taking the King with him, and waited while the royal treasure was being distributed. When everything had been shared out, he placed a new garrison in the fortress and ordered the dead to be buried. He then reassembled his troops and returned jubilant with victory to the depths of the forest.

Their success filled his men's hearts with immense joy. Their illustrious leader called his elders together and asked them what ought to be demanded of Pandrasus. Now that the King was in their power, he would agree without reservation to any demand they might make, provided always that he were permitted to go free. They immediately began asking for all sorts of different things. Some begged Brutus to demand a part of Pandrasus' kingdom, so that they could settle there; others, on the contrary, asked for permission to emigrate and for whatever would be useful to them on their journey. When they had gone on vacillating for a long time, one of their number called Membritius stood up, called for silence and spoke as follows, while the others listened: 'Why do you hesitate about the measures which, in my opinion, ought to be adopted for your future welfare? If you want a lasting peace for yourselves and for your heirs, one thing alone must be asked for: permission to depart. If you grant Pandrasus his life on condition that he allows you to occupy a part of Greece and remain there among the descendants of Danaus, you will never enjoy lasting peace as long as the brothers, sons and grandsons of those on whom you have inflicted decisive defeat remain intermingled with you or as your neighbours. They will always remember the slaughter of their relatives and they will hate you for ever. They will take offence at the merest trifles and they will do all in their power to take vengeance. Since you command the smaller force, you will not have the strength to be able to resist the attacks of the local inhabitants. If any dispute should arise between you and them, their number will increase daily while your own will get smaller. My advice, therefore, is that you should ask Pandrasus for the hand of his eldest daughter, whom they call Ignoge, as a com-

fort to your leader. With her you should ask for gold and silver, ships and grain, and everything else that you will need for your journey. If we can arrange all this, we should obtain the King's permission and then sail away to other lands.'

When Membritius had finished his speech, which was longer (11) than what I have recorded, the entire assembly agreed with him. They decreed that Pandrasus should be brought into their midst and that, unless he agreed to what they demanded, he should be condemned to a most cruel death. He was led in straight away and was placed on a seat higher than the others.

When he had been told what tortures would be inflicted on him if he did not do the things that were demanded, he made the following reply: 'Since the gods are hostile to me and have delivered me and my brother Anacletus into your hands, I must obey your command; for, if you meet with a refusal, we shall both lose our lives, which you have the power to give to us or to take away as you choose. I consider that there is nothing better or more enjoyable than life itself. It is not therefore to be wondered at if I am willing to purchase life with my material possessions. I obey your orders, although against my will.

'I take some comfort in the knowledge that I am about to give my daughter to a young man of such great prowess. The nobility which flourishes in him, and his fame, which is well-known to us, show him to be of the true race of Priam and Anchises. Who other but he could have freed from their chains the exiles of Troy, when they were enslaved by so many mighty princes? Who other but he could have led them in their resistance to the King of the Greeks; or have challenged in battle such a vast concourse of warriors with so few men, and led their King in chains in the very first engagement? Since so noble a young man has been able to resist me so courageously, I give him my daughter Ignoge. I also give him gold and silver, ships and corn, and whatsoever you will consider necessary for his journey.'

'If you change your present plan and prefer to stay with the

Greeks, then I grant you a third of my kingdom for you to live in. If not, then I will carry out my promises effectively; and in order that you may feel the more assured, I will remain a hostage in your hands until I have done so.'

As soon as this agreement was made, messengers were sent to all the shores of Greece to collect ships. When these were brought together, to the number of three hundred and twenty-four, they were handed over and loaded with every kind of grain. The daughter of Pandrasus was married to Brutus; and, according to what his rank demanded, each man was presented with gold and silver. Once all these things had been done, the King was set free from prison. The Trojans sailed away from his dominion with a following wind. Ignoge stood on the high poop and from time to time fell fainting in the arms of Brutus. She wept and sobbed at being forced to leave her relations and her homeland; and as long as the shore lay there before her eyes, she would not turn her gaze away from it. Brutus soothed and caressed her, putting his arms round her and kissing her gently. He did not cease his efforts until, worn out with crying, she fell asleep.

Meanwhile the Trojans sailed on for two days and one night, with a favourable wind blowing. Then they touched land at a certain island called Leogetia, which had remained uninhabited since it was laid waste by a piratical attack in ancient times. Brutus landed three hundred armed men on the island to see if anything at all lived there. They found no one, but they killed all sorts of wild animals which they had discovered between the forest pastures and the woodlands.

They came to a deserted city and there they found a temple of Diana. In the city there was a statue of the goddess which gave answers if by chance it was questioned by anyone. In the end they returned to their ships, loaded with the game which they had discovered, and described the city and the lie of the land to their comrades. They suggested to their leader that he should go to the temple and that, when he had offered sacrifices, he should inquire

of the deity of the place what land she would grant them as a safe and permanent dwelling-place. By the common consent of all, Brutus took with him the Augur Gero and twelve of the older men and set out for the temple, carrying everything necessary for a sacrifice. When they reached the place, they wrapped fillets round their brows and, according to the age-old rite, they set up three sacrificial hearths to the three gods: to Jupiter, that is, to Mercury and to Diana. To each in turn they poured a libation. Brutus stood before the altar of the goddess, holding in his right hand a vessel full of sacrificial wine mixed with the blood of a white hind, and with his face upturned towards the statue of the godhead he broke the silence with these words: 'O powerful goddess, terror of the forest glades, yet hope of the wild woodlands, you who have the power to go in orbit through the airy heavens and the halls of hell, pronounce a judgement which concerns the earth. Tell me which lands you wish us to inhabit. Tell me of a safe dwelling-place where I am to worship you down the ages, and where, to the chanting of maidens, I shall dedicate temples to you.' This he said nine times; four times he proceeded round the altar, pouring the wine which he held upon the sacrificial hearth; then he lay down upon the skin of a hind which he had stretched before the altar. Having sought for slumber, he at length fell asleep. It was then about the third hour of the night, when mortal beings succumb to the sweetest rest. It seemed to him that the goddess stood before him and spoke these words to him: 'Brutus, beyond the setting of the sun, past the realms of Gaul, there lies an island in the sea, once occupied by giants. Now it is empty and ready for your folk. Down the years this will prove an abode suited to you and to your people; and for your descendants it will be a second Troy. A race of kings will be born there from your stock and the round circle of the whole earth will be subject to them.'

When he awoke from this vision, the leader remained in doubt as to whether it had been a dream which he had experienced or whether the living goddess really had prophesied the land to which

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he should travel. In the end he called his comrades together and told them in full detail what had happened to him in his sleep. They were delighted and advised him to turn back to the ships and to travel westwards under full sail in search of what the goddess had promised them, while the wind still blew fair. Without wasting time they turned back to their friends and put to sea.

After ploughing through the waves in a crossing which lasted thirty days, they arrived in Africa, still not knowing in which direction they should steer their ships. Then they came to the Altars of the Philistines and to the Salt-pan Lake, and from there they sailed on between Russicada and the mountains of Zarec. In this spot they suffered great danger from an attack by pirates, but they beat it off and became the richer by booty and plunder.

(1.12) After this they passed the River Malve and landed in Mauretania. There they were harassed by lack of food and drink; they therefore disembarked from their ships, split up into groups and ravaged the country from end to end. Once they had re-victualled they sailed for the Pillars of Hercules, and there those deep-sea monsters called the Sirens made their appearance and nearly sank their ships as they moved forward. They escaped, however, and came upon four generations born to exiles from Troy, generations which had accompanied Antenor in his flight. Their leader was called Corineus, a sober-minded man, wise in counsel, yet of great courage and audacity. If he were to come up against a giant he would overthrow him as easily as if he were fighting against a mere boy. As soon as they had realized that his stock was of such high antiquity, they took him into alliance with them straight away, together with the people over whom he ruled. Later Cornwall was called after the name of this leader. In every battle he was of more help to Brutus than anyone else.

Next they came to Aquitaine, where they entered the estuary of the Loire and cast anchor. They remained there for seven days and explored the lie of the land. At that time Goffar the Pict ruled in Aquitaine and was King of that country. When he learned that

a foreign people with a huge fleet had landed within the confines of his kingdom, he sent messengers to them to ask whether they brought peace or war. While the messengers were still on their way to the fleet, they met Corineus, who had just landed with two hundred men to hunt for game under the woodland trees. The messengers immediately accosted him and asked by whose permission he had entered the King's forest to kill his animals, seeing that it had been decreed from ancient time that no one should hunt there without that ruler's order. Corineus answered them that permission was completely unnecessary. Then one of their number called Himbert rushed forward, drew his bow and aimed an arrow at him. Corineus dodged the arrow, charged at Himbert and broke his head in pieces with the bow which he was carrying. Thereupon the others fled, escaping with some difficulty from the hands of Corineus, and reported the death of their comrade to Goffar.

The leader of the Poitevins, who was saddened by the news, collected a huge army together, so that he could take vengeance on them for the death of his messenger. When Brutus heard of Goffar's coming, he put his ships in a state of defence, ordering all the women and children to remain on board and then set out himself to meet the enemy with his entire force of vigorous young men.

The battle began and the fighting was fierce on both sides. When they had spent a great part of the day in slaughtering each other, Corineus felt ashamed that the Aquitanians should be so steadfast in their resistance and that the Trojans should not be able to press on to victory. He took fresh heart, called his own men over to the right of the battle, arranged them in fighting formation and charged headlong at the enemy. With his troops in close order he broke through their ranks in front and went on killing the enemy until he had worked right through their force and compelled them all to flee. He lost his sword, but by good luck he had a battle-axe: and anything he struck with this he cut in two from top to bottom. Brutus was greatly impressed by his boldness

and courage. So were his comrades, and so indeed were the enemy. Corineus brandished his battle-axe among the retreating battalions and added not a little to their terror by shouting: 'Where are you making for, you cowards? Where are you running to, you slackers? Turn back! Turn back, I say, and do battle with Corineus! Shame on you! You are so many thousands and yet you run away from me who am one! Take at least this comfort in your flight: that it is I, Corineus, who am after you - I who often drive in confusion before me the giants of Etruria, thrusting them down to hell three or four at a time.'

(1.13) At these words of his one of the Poitevin leaders called Suhard did turn back and charged at him with three hundred fighting-men. Corineus received on his outstretched shield the blow which Suhard dealt him. Then he remembered the battle-axe which he was holding. He swung it up in the air, struck Suhard on the crest of his helmet and at the spot where he made contact split him in two halves from top to bottom. Then he rushed at the others, twirling his battle-axe, and went on causing the same destruction. Up and down he ran, avoiding none of the blows which were dealt him and never pausing in his destruction of the enemy. From one he severed an arm and a hand, from another he carved the very shoulders from his body. At a single blow he struck off one man's head, while from another he cut away the legs. He was the one whom they all attacked, and he in his turn took them all on. Brutus was filled with emotion when he saw this, and he hurried forward with one of his companies to bring assistance to Corineus. A great bellow of shouting arose between the two peoples, many blows were struck and terrible slaughter was inflicted on each side.

This could not go on much longer. The Trojans were victorious: they drove King Goffar and his Poitevins backward in flight. Goffar managed to get away: he fled to the other regions of Gaul to seek help from his kinsmen and friends. At that time there were in Gaul twelve kings of equal rank, under whose dominion the

whole country was ruled. They received Goffar sympathetically and promised with one accord that they would drive this foreign people out of the lands of Aquitaine.

Brutus was overjoyed at this victory. He enriched his comrades (1.14) with the spoils of those whom they had killed, marshalled them once more into companies and then marched through the country in this order, for it was his intention to sack it completely and to load his ships with all its goods. He therefore burned the cities far and wide, heaping up fire upon fire. He carried away the goods which he had looted in these cities and he even ravaged the open fields. He wrought pitiable slaughter on both townfolk and peasantry, for his plan was to exterminate this unhappy race down to the last man. However, when Brutus had inflicted this devastation on almost all the regions of Aquitaine, he came to the place which is now called Tours, the city which, as Homer testifies, he himself afterwards founded. When he was examining places suitable for a refuge, it was here that he measured out a camp into which he might retreat if need should arise. He was driven to this by the fear caused by the arrival of Goffar, who had marched to this same neighbourhood with the kings and princes of Gaul and a huge force of armed men, so that he might do battle with Brutus. When his own camp was completely finished, Brutus waited there two days for Goffar, relying on his own prudence and the courage of the young men whom he had under command.

When Goffar learned of the presence of the Trojans in this (1.15) neighbourhood, he advanced by forced marches through the day and the night until he came close enough to see the camp of Brutus. He gazed at it grimly, and then with a sardonic smile burst forth with these words: 'How sad my destiny is! These ignoble exiles have pitched their camp in my kingdom. Arm yourselves, men! Arm yourselves, and charge through their serried ranks! In a short time we shall seize hold of these weaklings as if they were sheep and carry them captive through our kingdom.' All the men whom he had brought with him immediately armed themselves and marched,

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drawn up as they were in twelve columns, towards the enemy. The reaction of Brutus to this was far from that of a weakling. He placed his companies in position, and prudently instructed his troops as to what they were to do, how they should advance and how hold their ground. The result was that when they joined battle the Trojans at first had the upper hand and inflicted fearful slaughter on the enemy. Some two thousand of the Gauls fell dead, and in their terror the remainder were on the point of running away; but victory has the habit of appearing on the side where the number of men is the greater. Thus, although they had been driven back at first, the Gauls later on re-formed and attacked the Trojans on all sides, for they were three times as numerous as the others. The Gauls caused great slaughter among the Trojans and forced them to withdraw into their camp. When this victory was won, the Gauls besieged the Trojans in their camp, firm in the conviction that they themselves would never withdraw until the enemy whom they had surrounded had either offered their necks to be encircled with chains or had been cruelly tortured to death after suffering for a long time from hunger.

Meanwhile, on the next evening, Corineus had a conference with Brutus, saying that he wanted to make his way out that same night along certain little-known trackways and conceal himself until daybreak in a neighbouring wood. Brutus should leave the camp at first light and, while he was engaging the enemy, Corineus should attack from the rear and, by charging at them, bring about the overthrow of the Gauls.

This plan of Corineus' was approved by Brutus. Corineus emerged with all caution, as he had proposed, accompanied by three thousand men, and made his way into the depths of the woods. When the next day dawned, Brutus arranged his troops in battalions, opened up the gates of the camp and marched forth to battle. The Gauls immediately attacked him. They drew up their own line of battle and fought with Brutus hand to hand. Each side inflicted wounds on the other, and in both of the two armies many

thousands of men immediately fell dead, for no one spared his opponent. A certain Trojan called Turnus, who was a nephew of Brutus, was there, and, apart from Corineus, no one was stronger or bolder than he. He slew six hundred men himself with his own sword, but he was killed before his time by the Gauls, who made a sudden attack on him. The city of Tours, which we have already mentioned, took its name from Turnus, for he was buried there.' While the troops on either side were fighting bitterly, Corineus unexpectedly attacked the enemy from the rear, coming at full speed. Thereupon the other Trojans pressed on with all the more courage and renewed the attack from the front in their effort to complete the slaughter. The Gauls were terrified as much as anything by the din raised by Corineus as he charged them from their rear, for they thought that more men had come than were really there. They left the field at full speed and the Trojans pursued them with their blows. In their pursuit the Trojans continued to slaughter the Gauls, and they did not abandon the bloodshed until they had gained victory.

Although this signal triumph brought him great joy, Brutus was nevertheless filled with anxiety, for the number of his men became smaller every day, while that of the Gauls was constantly increasing. Brutus was in doubt as to whether he could oppose the Gauls any longer; and he finally chose to return to his ships in the full glory of his victory while the greater part of his comrades were still safe, and then to seek out the island which divine prophecy had promised would be his. Nothing else was done. With the approval of his men Brutus returned to his fleet. He loaded his ships with all the riches which he had acquired and then went on board. So, with the winds behind him, he sought the promised island, and came ashore at Totnes.

1. The germ of this idea comes from Nennius, *Historia Brittonum*, §10, where we read of Brutus that 'he was exiled on account of the death of Turnus, slain by Encas. He then went among the Gauls, and built a city of the Turones, called Turnis'.

[1.16] At this time the island of Britain was called Albion. It was uninhabited except for a few giants. It was, however, most attractive, because of the delightful situation of its various regions, its forests and the great number of its rivers, which teemed with fish; and it filled Brutus and his comrades with a great desire to live there. When they had explored the different districts, they drove the giants whom they had discovered into the caves in the mountains. With the approval of their leader they divided the land among themselves. They began to cultivate the fields and to build houses, so that in a short time you would have thought that the land had always been inhabited.

Brutus then called the island Britain from his own name, and his companions he called Britons. His intention was that his memory should be perpetuated by the derivation of the name. A little later the language of the people, which had up to then been known as Trojan or Crooked Greek, was called British, for the same reason.

Corineus, however, following in this the example of his leader, called the region of the kingdom which had fallen to his share Cornwall, after the manner of his own name, and the people who lived there he called Cornishmen. Although he might have chosen his own estates before all the others who had come there, he preferred the region which is now called Cornwall, either for its being the *cornu* or horn of Britain, or through a corruption of his own name.

Corineus experienced great pleasure from wrestling with the giants, of whom there were far more there than in any of the districts which had been distributed among his comrades. Among the others there was a particularly repulsive one, called Gogmagog, who was twelve feet tall. He was so strong that, once he had given it a shake, he could tear up an oak-tree as though it were a hazel wand. Once, when Brutus was celebrating a day dedicated to the gods in the port where he had landed, this creature, along with twenty other giants, attacked him and killed a great number of the Britons. However, the Britons finally gathered together from

round and about and overcame except Gogmagog. Brutus ordered alive, for he wanted to see a war and Corineus, who enjoyed they against such monsters. Corineus himself up, threw off his armour wrestling-match. The contest between the giant, each of them caught t arms round him, and the air vibrated. Gogmagog gripped Corineus with his ribs, two on the right side and summoned all his strength, for happened. He heaved Gogmagogning as fast as he could under the nearby coast. He clambered up to himself free and hurled this deadly on his shoulders, far out into the reef of rocks, where he was dashed and stained the waters with his blood. The fact that the giant was hurled down Leap to this day.

Once he had divided up his kingdom a capital. In pursuit of this plan, he searched for a suitable spot. He came walked up and down its banks a purpose. There then he built his c

1. Totnes, on the River Dart, once a fortified castle since the Conquest, was alienated and saw much trade with Brittany during the Middle Ages. It can still be used by vessels of up to 200 tons. Later on in the *Historia*, Vespasianus and Otherpendragon all came marauding Saxons. Totnes is, of course, Corineus had a long way to run with known this; but his distances are so oft-

Part Five

THE PROPHECIES OF MERLIN

(vii.1) I HAD not yet reached this point in my story when Merlin began to be talked about very much, and from all sorts of places people of my own generation kept urging me to publish his Prophecies. Outstanding among these people was Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, a man of the greatest religion and wisdom. No one else among the clergy or the people was waited upon by so many noblemen as he was, for his never-failing piety and his open-handed generosity attracted them to his service.

As I was particularly keen to please him, I translated the Prophecies and sent them to him with a letter which ran as follows:

(vii.2) 'Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, my admiration for your noble behaviour leaves me no other choice but to translate the "Prophecies of Merlin" from the British tongue into Latin, before I have finished the history which I had already begun of the deeds of the kings of the Britons. My intention had been to complete that other work first, and only then to have devoted myself to this present one. With the two tasks to preoccupy me I was afraid that my ability might well prove inadequate for both of them. However, I was assured in advance of the kind indulgence which the sympathetic understanding of your own subtle wit would afford me. I therefore pressed my rustic reed-pipe to my lips and, modulating on it in all humility, I translated into Latin this work written in a language which is unknown to you. All the same, I am greatly surprised that you should have deigned to commit the task to so poor a pen as mine, when your all-powerful wand could command the service of so many men more learned and more splendid than I - men who would soothe the ears of your own wise self with the delight of their sublimer song. Leaving on one side all the wise men

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of this entire island of Britain, I feel no shame at all in maintaining that it is you and you alone who should, in preference to all the others, declaim it with bold accompaniment, if only the highest honour had not called you away to other preoccupations. However, since it has pleased you that Geoffrey of Monmouth should sound his own pipe in this piece of soothsaying, please do not hesitate to show favour to his music-makings. If he produces any sound which is wrong or unpleasant, force him back into correct harmony with your own Muses' baton.'

While Vortigern, King of the Britons, was still sitting on the (vii.3) bank of the pool which had been drained of its water, there emerged two Dragons, one white, one red. As soon as they were near enough to each other, they fought bitterly, breathing out fire as they panted. The White Dragon began to have the upper hand and to force the Red One back to the edge of the pool. The Red Dragon bewailed the fact that it was being driven out and then turned upon the White One and forced it backwards in its turn. As they struggled on in this way, the King ordered Ambrosius Merlin to explain just what this battle of the Dragons meant. Merlin immediately burst into tears. He went into a prophetic trance and then spoke as follows:

'Alas for the Red Dragon, for its end is near. Its cavernous dens shall be occupied by the White Dragon, which stands for the Saxons whom you have invited over. The Red Dragon represents the people of Britain, who will be overrun by the White One: for Britain's mountains and valleys shall be levelled, and the streams in its valleys shall run with blood.

'The cult of religion shall be destroyed completely and the ruin of the churches shall be clear for all to see.

'The race that is oppressed shall prevail in the end, for it will resist the savagery of the invaders.

'The Boar of Cornwall shall bring relief from these invaders, for it will trample their necks beneath its feet.

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'The Islands of the Ocean shall be given into the power of the Boar and it shall lord it over the forests of Gaul.

'The House of Romulus shall dread the Boar's savagery and the end of the Boar will be shrouded in mystery.

'The Boar shall be extolled in the mouths of its peoples, and its deeds will be as meat and drink to those who tell tales.

'Six of the Boar's descendants shall hold the sceptre after it, and next after them will rise up the German Worm. The Sea-wolf shall exalt this Worm and the forests of Africa shall be committed to its care.

'Religion shall be destroyed a second time and the sees of the primates will be moved to other places. London's high dignity shall adorn Durobernia: and the seventh pastor of York will be visited in the realm of Armorica. Menevia shall be dressed in the pall of the City of the Legions, and a preacher from Ireland shall be struck dumb by a child still growing in the womb.

'A shower of blood shall fall and a dire famine shall afflict mankind.

'The Red One will grieve for what has happened, but after an immense effort it will regain its strength.

'Calamity will next pursue the White One and the buildings in its little garden will be torn down.

'Seven who hold the sceptre shall perish, one of them being canonized.

'The bellies of mothers shall be cut open and babies will be born prematurely. Men will suffer most grievously, in order that those born in the country may regain power.

'He who will achieve these things shall appear as the Man of Bronze and for long years he shall guard the gates of London upon a brazen horse.

'Then the Red Dragon will revert to its true habits and struggle to tear itself to pieces.

'Next will come the revenge of the Thunderer and every one of the farmer's fields will be a disappointment to him.

'Death will lay hands on the people and destroy all the nations. Those who are left alive will abandon their native soil and will sow their seeds in other men's fields.

'A king who is blessed will fit out a navy and will be reckoned the twelfth in the court among the saints.

'The realm shall be deserted in the most pitiful way and the harvest threshing-floors shall be overgrown once more by forests rich in fruit.

'Once again the White Dragon shall rise up and will invite over a daughter of Germany. Our little gardens will be stocked again with foreign seed and the Red Dragon will pine away at the far end of the pool.

'After that the German Worm shall be crowned and the Prince of Brass will be buried. A limit was set for him, beyond which he was powerless to pass. For a hundred and fifty years he shall remain in anguish and subjection, and then for three hundred more he shall sit enthroned. The North Wind will rise against him, snatching away the flowers which the West Wind has caused to bloom. There will be gilding in the temples, but the sword's cutting edge will not cease its work.

'The German Dragon will find it hard to escape to its cavernous lairs, for vengeance for its treason will overtake it. In the end it will become strong again just for a short time, but the decimation of Normandy will be a sorry blow.

'There shall come a people dressed in wood and in iron corselets who will take vengeance on it for its wickedness. This people shall give their dwellings back to the earlier inhabitants, and the destruction of foreigners will be clear for all to see.

'The seed of the White Dragon shall be rooted up from our little gardens and what is then left of its progeny shall be decimated. They shall bear the yoke of perpetual slavery and they will wound their own Mother with their spades and plough-shares.

'Two more Dragons shall follow, one of which will be killed





by the sting of envy, but the second will return under the cover of authority.

'The Lion of Justice shall come next, and at its roar the towers of Gaul shall shake and the island Dragons tremble. In the days of this Lion gold shall be squeezed from the lily-flower and the nettle, and silver shall flow from the hoofs of lowing cattle.

'Those who have had their hair waved shall dress in woollen stuffs of many colours, and the outer garment shall be a fair index of the thoughts within.

'The feet of those that bark shall be cut off.

'Wild animals shall enjoy peace, but mankind will bewail the way in which it is being punished.

'The balance of trade shall be torn in half; and the half that is left shall be rounded off.

'Kites will lose their ravenous hunger and the teeth of wolves will be blunted.

'The Lion's cubs shall be transformed into salt-water fishes and the Eagle of Mount Aravia shall nest upon its summit.

'Venedotia shall be red with the blood of mothers and the house of Corineus will slaughter six brothers.

'The island will lie sodden with the tears of the night-time, and everyone will be encouraged to try to do everything. Those who are born later shall strive to fly over even the most lofty things, but the favour given to newcomers will be loftier even than that.

'Picty will frown upon the man who has inherited goods from the impious: that is, until he takes his style of dress from his own father. Girded around with a wild boar's teeth, he shall climb over the mountain summits and higher than the shadow of the Helmeted Man.

'Albany will be angry: calling her near neighbours to her, she shall give herself up entirely to bloodshed. Between her jaws there will be found a bit which was forged in the Bay of Armorica. The Eagle of the Broken Covenant shall paint it with gold and will rejoice in her third nesting.

'The cubs shall roar as they keep watch; they will forsake the forest groves and come hunting inside the walls of cities. They will cause great slaughter among any who oppose them, and the tongues of bulls shall they slice off. They shall load with chains the necks of the roaring ones and live again the days of their forefathers.

'Thereafter, from the first to the fourth, from the fourth to the third, from the third to the second shall the thumb be rolled in oil.

'The sixth shall throw down the walls of Ireland and transmute its forests into a level plain. This sixth shall unite the different parts into one whole, and he shall be crowned with the head of a lion. His beginning will yield to his own unstable disposition, but his end shall soar up towards those on high. He shall restore the dwellings of the saints throughout the lands, and settle the pastors in places which besit them. Two towns shall he cover with funeral palls and to virgins he will present virgin gifts. By doing this he will earn the favour of the Thunderer and he will be placed among the blessed. From him there will emerge a She-lynx, and this will nose its way into all things and strive for the downfall of its own race. Because of the She-lynx Normandy will lose both its isles and be deprived of its former dignity.

'Then the island's inhabitants shall return to it, for a great dissension will arise among the foreigners.

'A hoary old man upon a snow-white horse shall divert the River Petiron and above the stream he will measure out a mill with his white rod.

'Cadwallader shall summon Conanus and shall make an alliance with Albany. Then the foreigners shall be slaughtered and the rivers will run with blood.

'The mountains of Armorica shall erupt and Armorica itself shall be crowned with Brutus' diadem. Kambria shall be filled with joy and the Cornish oaks shall flourish. The island shall be called by the name of Brutus and the title given to it by the foreigners shall be done away with.

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Part Seven

ARTHUR OF BRITAIN

(ix.) AFTER the death of Utherpendragon, the leaders of the Britons assembled from their various provinces in the town of Silchester and there suggested to Dubricius, the Archbishop of the City of the Legions, that as their King he should crown Arthur, the son of Uther. Necessity urged them on, for as soon as the Saxons heard of the death of King Uther, they invited their own countrymen over from Germany, appointed Colgrin as their leader and began to do their utmost to exterminate the Britons. They had already over-run all that section of the island which stretches from the River Humber to the sea named Caitness.

Dubricius lamented the sad state of his country. He called the other bishops to him and bestowed the crown of the kingdom upon Arthur. Arthur was a young man only fifteen years old; but he was of outstanding courage and generosity, and his inborn goodness gave him such grace that he was loved by almost all the people. Once he had been invested with the royal insignia, he observed the normal custom of giving gifts freely to everyone. Such a great crowd of soldiers flocked to him that he came to an end of what he had to distribute. However, the man to whom open-handedness and bravery both come naturally may indeed find himself momentarily in need, but poverty will never harass him for long. In Arthur courage was closely linked with generosity, and he made up his mind to harry the Saxons, so that with their wealth he might reward the retainers who served his own household. The justness of his cause encouraged him, for he had a claim by rightful inheritance to the kingship of the whole island. He therefore called together all the young men whom I have just mentioned and marched on York.

As soon as this was announced to Colgrin, he assembled the

Saxons, Scots and Picts, and came to meet Arthur with a vast multitude. Once contact was made between the two armies, beside the River Douglas, both sides stood in grave danger for their lives. Arthur, however, was victorious. Colgrin fled, and Arthur pursued him; then Colgrin entered York and Arthur besieged him there.

As soon as Baldulf, the brother of Colgrin, heard of the latter's flight, he came to the siege with six thousand troops, in the hope of freeing the beleaguered man. At the time when his brother had gone into battle, Baldulf himself had been on the sea-coast, where he was awaiting the arrival of Duke Cheldric, who was on his way from Germany to bring them support. When he was some ten miles distant from the city of York, Baldulf decided to take the advantage of a night march, so that he could launch an unexpected attack. Arthur heard of this and ordered Cadur, Duke of Cornwall, to march to meet Baldulf that same night, with six hundred cavalry and three thousand foot. Cadur surrounded the road along which the enemy was marching and attacked the Saxons unexpectedly, so that they were cut to pieces and killed, and those who remained alive were forced to flee. As a result Baldulf became extremely worried at the fact that he could not bring help to his brother. He debated with himself how he could manage to talk with Colgrin; for he was convinced that by consulting together it would be possible for them to hit upon a safe solution - that is, if only he could make his way into his brother's presence.

Once Baldulf had come to the conclusion that no other means of access was open to him, he cut short his hair and his beard and dressed himself up as a minstrel with a harp. He strode up and down in the camp, pretending to be a harpist by playing melodies on his instrument. No one suspected him and he moved nearer and nearer to the city walls, keeping up the same pretence all the time. In the end he was observed by the besieged, dragged up over the top of the walls on ropes and taken to his brother. When Colgrin set

eyes on Baldulf he had the solace of embracing him and kissing him to his heart's desire, as though Baldulf had been restored to him from the dead. Finally, when, after exhaustive discussions, they had abandoned all hope of ever escaping, messengers returned from Germany to say that they had brought with them to Albany six hundred ships which were commanded by Cheldric and loaded with brave soldiery. When Arthur's advisers learned this, they dissuaded him from continuing the siege any longer, for if so large an enemy force were to come upon them they would all be committed to a most dangerous engagement.

(ix.2) Arthur accepted the advice of his retainers and withdrew into the town of London. There he convened the bishops and the clergy of the entire realm and asked their suggestion as to what it would be best and safest for him to do, in the face of this invasion by the pagans. Eventually a common policy was agreed on and messengers were dispatched to King Hoel in Brittany to explain to him the disaster which had befallen Great Britain. This Hoel was the son of Arthur's sister; and his father was Budicius, the King of the Armorican Britons.<sup>1</sup> As a result, as soon as he heard of the terrifying way in which his uncle was being treated, Hoel ordered his fleet to be made ready. Fifteen thousand armed warriors were assembled and at the next fair wind Hoel landed at Southampton. Arthur received him with all the honour due to him, and each man embraced the other repeatedly.

(ix.3) They let a few days pass and then they marched to the town of Kaerluideoit, which was besieged by the pagans about whom I have already told you. This town is situated upon a hill between two rivers, in the province of Lindsey; it is also called by another

1. Arthur's sister Anna is first mentioned on p. 208. On p. 209 she is married to Loth of Lodonesia. She later had two sons, Gawain and Mordred, who were thus Arthur's nephews. There is some confusion here. For 'Arthur's sister' we must read 'the sister of Aurelius Ambrosius', making Hoel I Arthur's first cousin. Cp. Madeleine Blaess, 'Arthur's sisters', in *Bulletin Bibliographique de la Société Internationale Arthurienne*, Vol. VII (1956), pp. 69-77.

name, Lincoln. As soon as they had arrived there with their entire force, keen as they were to fight with the Saxons, they inflicted unheard-of slaughter upon them; for on one day six thousand of the Saxons were killed, some being drowned in the rivers and the others being hit by weapons. As a result, the remainder were demoralized. The Saxons abandoned the siege and took to flight.

Arthur pursued the Saxons relentlessly until they reached Caledon Wood. There they re-formed after their flight and made an effort to resist Arthur. The Saxons joined battle once more and killed a number of the Britons, for the former defended themselves manfully. They used the shelter of the trees to protect themselves from the Britons' weapons. As soon as Arthur saw this, he ordered the trees round that part of the wood to be cut down and their trunks to be placed in a circle, so that every way out was barred to the enemy. Arthur's plan was to hem them in and then besiege them, so that in the end they should die of hunger. When this had been done, he ordered his squadrons to surround the wood and there he remained for three days. The Saxons had nothing at all to eat. To prevent themselves dying of sheer hunger, they asked permission to come out, on the understanding that, if they left behind all their gold and silver, they might be permitted to return to Germany with nothing but their boats. What is more, they promised that they would send Arthur tribute from Germany and that hostages should be handed over. Arthur took counsel and then agreed to their petition. He retained all their treasure, and took hostages to ensure that the tribute should be paid. All that he conceded to the Saxons was permission to leave.

As the Saxons sailed away across the sea on their way home, they repented of the bargain which they had made. They reversed their sails, turned back to Britain and landed on the coast near Totnes. They took possession of the land, and depopulated the countryside as far as the Severn Sea, killing off a great number of the peasantry. Then they proceeded by a forced march to the neighbourhood of Bath and besieged the town. When this was announced to King

Arthur, he was greatly astonished at their extraordinary duplicity. He ordered summary justice to be inflicted upon their hostages, who were all hanged without more ado. He put off the foray with which he had begun to harass the Scots and the Picts, and he hastened to break up the siege. Arthur was labouring under very considerable difficulties, for he had left behind in the city of Alclud his cousin Hoel,<sup>1</sup> who was seriously ill. He finally reached the county of Somerset and approached the siege. 'Although the Saxons, whose very name is an insult to heaven and detested by all men, have not kept faith with me,' he said, 'I myself will keep faith with my God. This very day I will do my utmost to take vengeance on them for the blood of my fellow-countrymen. Arm yourselves, men, and attack these traitors with all your strength! With Christ's help we shall conquer them, without any possible doubt!'

(ix.4) As Arthur said this, the saintly Dubricius, Archbishop of the City of the Legions, climbed to the top of a hill and cried out in a loud voice: 'You who have been marked with the cross of the Christian faith, be mindful of the loyalty you owe to your fatherland and to your fellow-countrymen! If they are slaughtered as a result of this treacherous behaviour by the pagans, they will be an everlasting reproach to you, unless in the meanwhile you do your utmost to defend them! Fight for your fatherland, and if you are killed suffer death willingly for your country's sake. That in itself is victory and a cleansing of the soul. Whoever suffers death for the sake of his brothers offers himself as a living sacrifice to God and follows with firm footsteps behind Christ Himself, who did not disdain to lay down His life for His brothers. It follows that if any one of you shall suffer death in this war, that death shall be to him as a penance and an absolution for all his sins, given always that he goes to meet it unflinchingly.'

Without a moment's delay each man present, inspired by the benediction given by this holy man, rushed off to put on his armour

1. Geoffrey sometimes calls Hoel I Arthur's 'nephew' when he means 'cousin'. Cp. p. 214, n.1.

and to obey Dubricius' orders. Arthur himself put on a leather jerkin worthy of so great a king. On his head he placed a golden helmet, with a crest carved in the shape of a dragon; and across his shoulders a circular shield called Pridwen, on which there was painted a likeness of the Blessed Mary, Mother of God, which forced him to be thinking perpetually of her. He girded on his peerless sword, called Caliburn, which was forged in the Isle of Avalon. A spear called Ron graced his right hand: long, broad in the blade and thirsty for slaughter. Arthur drew up his men in companies and then bravely attacked the Saxons, who as usual were arrayed in wedges. All that day they resisted the Britons bravely, although the latter launched attack upon attack. Finally, towards sunset, the Saxons occupied a neighbouring hill, on which they proposed to camp. Relying on their vast numbers, they considered that the hill in itself offered sufficient protection. However, when the next day dawned, Arthur climbed to the top of the peak with his army, losing many of his men on the way. Naturally enough, the Saxons, rushing down from their high position, could inflict wounds more easily, for the impetus of their descent gave them more speed than the others, who were toiling up. For all that, the Britons reached the summit by a superlative effort and immediately engaged the enemy in hand-to-hand conflict. The Saxons stood shoulder to shoulder and strove their utmost to resist.

When the greater part of the day had passed in this way, Arthur went berserk, for he realized that things were still going well for the enemy and that victory for his own side was not yet in sight. He drew his sword Caliburn, called upon the name of the Blessed Virgin, and rushed forward at full speed into the thickest ranks of the enemy. Every man whom he struck, calling upon God as he did so, he killed at a single blow. He did not slacken his onslaught until he had dispatched four hundred and seventy men with his sword Caliburn. When the Britons saw this, they poured after him in close formation, dealing death on every side. In this battle fell Colgrin, with his brother Baldulf and many thousands of others

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with them. Cheldric, on the contrary, when he saw the danger threatening his men, immediately turned away in flight with what troops were left to him.

(ix.5) As soon as King Arthur had gained the upper hand, he ordered Cadur, the Duke of Cornwall, to pursue the Saxons, while he himself hurried off in the direction of Albany. It had reached his ears that the Scots and the Picts had besieged his nephew Hoel in the town of Alclud, where, as I have explained already, Arthur had left him because of his poor health. Arthur therefore hastened to his nephew's assistance, for he was afraid that Hoel might be captured by the barbarians.

Meanwhile the Duke of Cornwall, accompanied by ten thousand men, instead of pursuing the fleeing Saxons, rushed off to their boats, with the intention of preventing them from going on board. Once he had seized their boats, he manned them with the best of his own soldiers and gave those men orders that they were to prevent the pagans from going aboard, if these last came running to the boats. Then he hurried off to pursue the enemy and to cut them to pieces without pity once he had found them: this in obedience to Arthur's command.

The Saxons, who only a short time before used to attack like lightning in the most ferocious way imaginable, now ran away with fear in their hearts. Some of them fled to secret hiding-places in the woods, others sought the mountains, and caves in the hills, in an attempt to add some little breathing-space to their lives. In the end they discovered safety nowhere; and so they came to the Isle of Thanet, with their line of battle cut to pieces. The Duke of Cornwall pursued them thither and renewed the slaughter. Cadur drew back in the end, but only after he had killed Cheldric, taken hostages, and forced what remained of the Saxons to surrender.

(ix.6) Once peace was restored in this way, Cadur set out for Alclud. Arthur had already freed the town from the harassing attentions of the barbarians. He now led his army to Moray, where the Scots and the Picts were under siege. They had fought three times against

the King and his nephew, suffering then seeking refuge in this particular Loch Lomond, they took possession hoping to find a safe refuge on islands and as sixty streams to feed flows down to the sea. On these crags, which between them supported eagles' nests. The eagles used to follow any prodigious event which was this by a shrill-pitched scream which was to the islands, then, that they fled, hoping to be protected they gained little help from it. Arthur's boats and sailed round the rivers. fifteen days he reduced them to such died in their thousands.

While Arthur was killing off the Gilnaurians, the King of Ireland, a horde of pagans, in an effort to bring sieged. Arthur raised the siege and brought against the Irish. He cut them to them to return home. Once he had at liberty once more to wipe out the them with unparalleled severity, sp hands. As a result all the bishops of the clergy under their command, their relics of their saints and the treasure to beg pardon of the King for the relief they came into the King's presence besought him to have mercy on the inflicted sufficient suffering on them was no need for him to wipe out to survived so far. He should allow them 1. The text says 'forty', but this is clear

vengeance on the Britons for the slaughter inflicted by their noble King. The fight continued with as much violence on both sides as if the gods only just at that moment come to blows with one another. On our side Arthur dealt blow after blow at his enemies (as I have told you already), shouting to the Britons to press on with the slaughter. On their side Lucius Hiberius urged his men on, repeatedly leading them on himself in daring counter-attacks. He fought on with his sword and, going the round of his troops in each sector and killing every enemy who came his way, either with his lance or his sword. The most fearful slaughter was done on both sides. At times the Britons would have the upper hand, then the Romans would gain it.

In the end of the battle continued between them, Mordred, the Earl of Gloucester, moved up at the double with his division, which, as I have told you, had been posted higher up in the hills. He attacked the enemy from the rear, when they were expecting nothing of the kind. His assault broke through their lines. As he moved forward he scattered them with tremendous slaughter. Many thousands of the Romans were killed. In the end, Lucius himself, their general, was brought to bay in the midst of his troops. He fell dead, pierced through by an unknown hand. The Britons followed up their advantage and finally won the day, but only after a supreme effort.

[x.12] The Romans were scattered. In their terror some fled to out-of-the-way spots and forest groves, others made their way to cities and towns, and all of them sought refuge in the places which seemed safest to them. The Britons pursued them as fast as they could go, putting them to death miserably, taking them prisoner and plundering them: this the more easily as most of them voluntarily held out their hands to be bound, like so many women, in the hope of prolonging their lives a little. All this was ordained by divine providence. Just as in times gone by the ancestors of the Romans had harassed the forefathers of the Britons with their unjust oppressions, so now did the Britons make every effort to pro-

tect their own freedom, which the Romans were trying to take away from them, by refusing the tribute which was wrongly demanded of them.

As soon as victory was assured, Arthur ordered the bodies of his leaders to be separated from the carcasses of the enemy. Once they were gathered together, he had these bodies prepared for burial with royal pomp and then they were carried to the abbeys of their own native districts and interred there with great honour. Bedevere the Cup-bearer was borne, with loud lamentations, by the Neustrians to Bayeux, his own city, which his grandfather Bedevere I had founded. There he was laid to rest with all honour, beside a wall in a certain cemetery in the southern quarter of the city. Kay, who was mortally wounded, was carried away to Chinon, the town which he himself had built. Not long afterwards he died from his wound. As was fitting for a Duke of the Angevins, he was buried in a certain wood belonging to a convent of hermits not far from that town. Holdin, the Duke of the Ruteni, was carried to Flanders and laid to rest in his own city of Thérouanne. At Arthur's command, the rest of the leaders and princes were borne to abbeys in the vicinity. He took pity on his enemies and told the local inhabitants to bury them. He ordered the body of Lucius to be carried to the Senate, with a message that no other tribute could be expected from Britain.

Arthur spent the following winter in this same locality and found time to subdue the cities of the Allobroges. When summer came, he made ready to set out for Rome, and was already beginning to make his way through the mountains when the news was brought to him that his nephew Mordred, in whose care he had left Britain, had placed the crown upon his own head. What is more, this treacherous tyrant was living adulterously and out of wedlock with Queen Guinevere, who had broken the vows of her earlier marriage.

About this particular matter, most noble Duke, Geoffrey of Monmouth prefers to say nothing. He will, however, in his own

poor style and without wasting words, describe the battle which our most famous King fought against his nephew, once he had returned to Britain after his victory; for that he found in the British treatise already referred to. He heard it, too, from Walter of Oxford, a man most learned in all branches of history.

As soon as the bad news of this flagrant crime had reached his ears, Arthur immediately cancelled the attack which he had planned to make on Leo, the Emperor of the Romans. He sent Hoel, the leader of the Bretons, with an army of Gauls, to restore peace in those parts; and then without more ado he himself set off for Britain, accompanied only by the island kings and their troops. That most infamous traitor Mordred, about whom I have told you, had sent Chelric, the leader of the Saxons, to Germany, to conscript as many troops as possible there, and to return as quickly as he could with those whom he was to persuade to join him. Mordred had made an agreement with Chelric that he would give him that part of the island which stretched from the River Humber to Scotland and all that Hengist and Horsa had held in Kent in Vortigern's day. In obedience to Mordred's command, Chelric landed with eight hundred ships filled with armed pagans. A treaty was agreed to and Chelric pledged his obedience to the traitor Mordred as if to the King. Mordred had brought the Scots, Picts and Irish into his alliance, with anyone else whom he knew to be filled with hatred for his uncle. In all, the insurgents were about eighty thousand in number, some of them pagans and some Christians.

Surrounded by this enormous army, in which he placed his hope, Mordred marched to meet Arthur as soon as the latter landed at Richborough. In the battle which ensued Mordred inflicted great slaughter on those who were trying to land. Auguselus, the King of Albany, and Gawain, the King's nephew, died that day, together with many others too numerous to describe. Ywain, the son of Auguselus' brother Urian, succeeded him in the kingship; and in the wars which followed he became famous because of the many brave deeds which he accomplished. In the end, but only with

enormous difficulty, Arthur's men occupied the sea-shore. They drove Mordred and his army before them in flight and inflicted great slaughter on them in their turn. Profiting from their long experience in warfare, they drew up their troops most skilfully. They mixed their infantry with the cavalry and fought in such a way that when the line of foot-soldiers moved up to the attack, or was merely holding its position, the horse charged at an angle and did all that they could to break through the enemy lines and to force them to run away.

However, the Perjurer re-formed his army and so marched into Winchester on the following night. When this was announced to Queen Guinevere, she gave way to despair. She fled from York to the City of the Legions and there, in the church of Julius the Martyr, she took her vows among the nuns, promising to lead a chaste life.

Now that he had lost so many hundreds of his fellow-soldiers, <sup>(xli.)</sup> Arthur was more angry than ever. He buried his dead and then marched on the third day to the city of Winchester and laid siege to his nephew who had taken refuge there. Mordred showed no sign of abandoning his plans. He gave his adherents every encouragement he could think of, and then marched out with his troops and drew them up ready for a pitched battle with his uncle. The fight began and immense slaughter was done on both sides. The losses were greater in Mordred's army and they forced him to fly once more in shame from the battle-field. He made no arrangements whatsoever for the burial of his dead, but fled as fast as ship could carry him, and made his way towards Cornwall.

Arthur was filled with great mental anguish by the fact that Mordred had escaped him so often. Without losing a moment, he followed him to that same locality, reaching the River Camblam,<sup>1</sup>

1. On 4 August 1960 I visited Camelford and walked along the River Camel as far as Slaughter Bridge. According to local legend the battle between Arthur and Mordred took place in the near-by water-meadow. On the bank of the Camel, where the stream had cut for itself a steep bluff overhung with hazel bushes, in a spot most difficult of access, I found an ancient

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always that they made up their minds to attack boldly and to fight like men.

While the two commanders were encouraging their men in this way in both the armies, the lines of battle suddenly met, combat was joined, and they all strove with might and main to deal each other as many blows as possible. It is heartrending to describe what slaughter was inflicted on both sides, how the dying groaned, and how great was the fury of those attacking. Everywhere men were receiving wounds themselves or inflicting them, dying or dealing out death. In the end, when they had passed much of the day in this way, Arthur, with a single division in which he had posted six thousand, six hundred and sixty-six men, charged at the squadron where he knew Mordred was. They hacked a way through with their swords and Arthur continued to advance, inflicting terrible slaughter as he went. It was at this point that the accursed traitor was killed and many thousands of his men with him.

However, the others did not take to flight simply because Mordred was dead. They massed together from all over the battlefield and did their utmost to stand their ground with all the courage at their command. The battle which was now joined between them was fiercer than ever, for almost all the leaders on both sides were present and rushed into the fight at the head of their troops. On Mordred's side there fell Chelric, Elaf, Egbrict and Bruning, all of them Saxons; the Irishmen Gillapatric, Gillasel and Gillarvus; and the Scots and Picts, with nearly everyone in command of them. On Arthur's side there died Odbrict, King of Norway; Aschil, King of Denmark; Cador Limenich; and Cassivelaunus, with many thousands of the King's troops, some of them Britons, others from the various peoples he had brought with him. Arthur himself, our renowned King, was mortally wounded and was carried off to the Isle of Avalon, so that his wounds might be attended to. He handed the crown of Britain over to his cousin Constantine, the son of Cador Duke of Cornwall: this in the year 542 after our Lord's Incarnation.

Saxons + Q Celts  
VS  
P Celts + Scandinavians

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