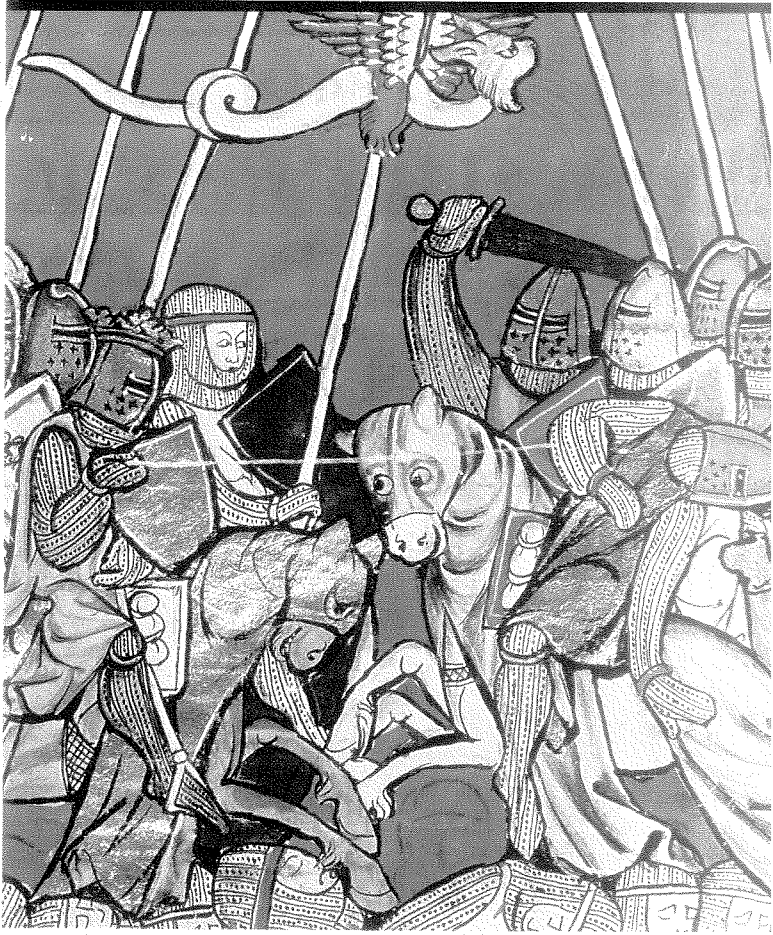
PENGUIN CLASSICS

# GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH

# THE HISTORY OF THE KINGS OF BRITAIN



# *Introduction*

## I. GEOFFREY'S PURPOSE

In some ways the *History of the Kings of Britain*, this strange, uneven and yet extraordinarily influential book written in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth and finished *c.* 1136,[1] may be said to bear the same relationship to the story of the early British inhabitants of our own island as do the seventeen historical books in the Old Testament, from Genesis to Esther, to the early history of the Israelites in Palestine.

As he explains to us in his preface, Geoffrey's purpose in writing the book was to trace the history of the Britons through a long sweep of nineteen hundred years, stretching from the mythical Brutus, great-grandson of the Trojan Aeneas, whom he supposed to have given his name to the island after he had landed there in the twelfth century before Christ, down to his last British King, Cadwallader, who, harassed by plague, famine, civil dissension and never-ending invasion from the continent, finally abandoned Britain to the Saxons in the seventh century of our era. Between these two extreme limits in time, he planned to relate for us the history of the British people, sometimes as a mere genealogy of royal primogeniture, sometimes in succinct chronicle form, more often as a dynastic sequence told with considerable detail, reign by reign, and occasionally even, when he considered this to be worthy of our close attention, by permitting an individual incident or anecdote to swell out of proportion and to become a narrative in its own right. For Geoffrey, his history was a pageant of striking personalities, moving forward to the greatest personality of them all, Arthur, son of Utherpendragon and Ygerna. With the passing of Arthur his interest gradually died away, and so indeed, does that of the modern reader.

Geoffrey's essential inspiration was a patriotic one. At the point where the story ends, that is, with the death of Cadwallader in

Rome, 'in the six hundred and eighty-ninth year after our Lord's Incarnation', Britain is still the best of all lands, providing in unfailing plenty everything that is suited to the use of human beings; but the British people, who once ruled the country from sea to sea, have now allowed themselves to be divided into two separate nations: those who crossed back over the Channel and settled in the Armorican peninsula and those who stayed on in the island. The vengeance of God and the domination of the Saxons have overtaken these last, who are now called the Welsh, and they live precariously and in greatly reduced numbers in the remote recesses of the western forests.[2] Let these Welshmen remember their glorious past, cries Geoffrey towards the end of his story, their descent from the Kings of Troy and the various moments in their history when they dominated Europe. Above all let them remember the prophecies of Merlin, made to King Vortigern and set out in full in this book, which tell of the triumphs of the British people yet to come, when the mountains of Armorica shall erupt, Kambria shall be filled again with joy and the Cornish oaks shall once more flourish.

As J. S. B. Tatlock pointed out, in Geoffrey's time 'the lack of accounts of British history was notorious' (*Tatlock*, p. 430). Geoffrey had several clear-cut political reasons for what he wrote, his desire to give 'a precedent for the dominions and ambitions of the Norman kings' (ibid., p. 426) and his wish to ingratiate himself with his various dedicatees. To some degree the book pretends to be an ecclesiastical history as well as a political one. Through it runs a deep-felt and often bitter desire to denigrate the Romans and to put the Britons in their place in the forefront of history.

## 2. WHO WAS GEOFFREY OF MONMOUTH?

Who then was this Geoffrey of Monmouth who wrote the *History of the Kings of Britain* more than eight hundred years ago? We can learn a number of things about him from a careful reading of his book. On three occasions he refers to himself by name, each time

adding the information that he has some connexion with Monmouth. In vii. 2 he calls himself *Gaufridus Monemutensis*, this being a repetition of the genitive form *Galfridi Monemutensis* given in i.1; and in xi.1 the name comes a third time and is spelt *Galfridus Monumotensis*.

In his later chapters Geoffrey occasionally mentions other monastic and ecclesiastical centres in Wales: Llandaff, ix.15, for example, Bangor Iscoed, xi.3, xi.12–13, and Llanbadarn xi.3. Much more striking than this, however, are the many references to Caerleon-on-Usk, thirteen in all,[3] working up to the long chapter ix.12, which describes in full detail a plenary court which Arthur held in that city after he had conquered the whole of Gaul, this with a wealth of topographical and architectural information.

Where Geoffrey found his material will be discussed later, but for the moment we can observe his clear-cut statement, made in i.1, that he was translating directly into Latin from 'a certain very ancient book written in the British language', that is, presumably, from early Welsh.[4] Three times he names an acquaintance of his, Walter, Archdeacon of Oxford, the man who, so he maintains, gave him the ancient book in Welsh.[5] The 'Prophecies of Merlin', printed on pp. 170–85, were originally conceived as a separate volume;[6] and they have a short preface of their own, in which Geoffrey praises Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, the churchman who had asked him to make this part of his translation and from whom he obviously expected some reward for his pains. Finally, there is in this text the double dedication of the work as a whole, which is here presented jointly to Robert, Earl of Gloucester, the natural son of Henry I, and to Waleran, Count of Mellent, son of Robert de Beaumont.[7]

Considerable external evidence can be added to these few facts culled from the text itself.

Geoffrey's signature appears in the list of witnesses appended to six different twelfth-century charters which have been dated between 1129 and 1151, all of them connected with religious

*Oxenefordiae*, using the same title as Geoffrey. The Oseney Chronicle says that the theologian Robert Pullen came over from Paris in 1133 to give a series of lectures, and many other contemporary scholars seem to have been connected with the place. Beaumont Palace was built just outside the North Gate by Henry I, who often visited it; and there Richard Cœur de Lion was born in 1157. Stephen held council in Oxford in 1136; and to that council came Robert, Earl of Gloucester, the eldest bastard of Henry I and step-brother to Matilda. In 1142 Matilda herself took refuge in Oxford Castle and was besieged there by Stephen, eventually making her celebrated escape across the ice and through the snow to Abingdon.[14]

These were eventful times in Oxford and one can imagine that Geoffrey must have met many distinguished visitors there and often been interrupted in his duties in St George's Chapel and in his literary pursuits.

## 3. GEOFFREY'S SOURCES

Where did Geoffrey of Monmouth find his material? This question is infinitely more important than any argument as to where he was buried, or whether or not one of the charters which he was supposed to have signed is a thirteenth-century forgery. There are two simple answers to the question, simple in the sense that they are naïve: these are that he took his material from a little book which a friend had given to him; and alternatively that he made his material up.

We have seen how, at the beginning of his *History*, Geoffrey stated categorically that Walter the Archdeacon presented him with 'a certain very ancient book written in the British language' and that he then proceeded to translate the book into plain, straightforward Latin. This source-book is mentioned again casually in xi.1; and then referred to a third time in the short epilogue which appears at the end of some versions of the *History*, with the variation that its antiquity is not stressed and we are given the new information that Walter had fetched it *ex Britannia*. The essential problem

of Walter's very ancient book is that we do not possess it. As Sir John Lloyd wrote, 'no Welsh composition exists which can be reasonably looked upon as the original, or even the groundwork, of the *History of the Kings of Britain*'.[15]

The first obvious comment is that the fact that we do not possess this book does not rule out its possible one-time existence. It would have been a manuscript, of course, and maybe a unique copy; and far more medieval manuscripts have been destroyed than have come down to us.

Acton Griscom, inspired to some extent by an address given by Sir Flinders Petrie[16] to the British Academy on 7 November 1917, had a second theory. This was that, while it is agreed that Geoffrey's 'very ancient book' no longer exists, we may have in our possession, without realizing it, evidence of the book's one-time existence.[17] In various collections in England and Wales there are to be found at least fifty-eight manuscripts and two fragments of manuscripts which contain early Welsh chronicles. All of them, admittedly, are later in date than the *History of the Kings of Britain*, but it does not follow that some of the material incorporated in them does not pre-date Geoffrey's work. It is now accepted that he had at his disposal something closely related to MS. Harl. 3859 in the British Museum, the contents of which are Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* with the *Cities and Marvels of Britain*, the *Annales Cambriae* and the medieval Welsh king-lists and genealogies. He also knew something of Taliesin's panegyrics to Urien Rheged; much of the material underlying *Culhwch and Olwen*; and the *Life of Saint David* and certain other hagiographical material.

There is a third possibility. Despite his categorical statement about the 'very ancient book', was Geoffrey perhaps thinking symbolically?[18] By this 'ancient book' did he really mean the knowledge of early British history which his friend Walter the Archdeacon had culled from a lifetime of talking to fellow enthusiasts and of extensive reading, he being so 'well-informed about the history of foreign countries', which knowledge he had shared with

Geoffrey during the long years of their acquaintanceship? Some support is given to this idea by the statement in xi.1, concerning the battle of Camlann, in which Arthur received his mortal wound, that Geoffrey '*heard it, too*, from Walter of Oxford, a man most learned in all branches of history'.

In the last few years, a fourth and most striking suggestion has been made about Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History*. In a book published in 1951, Jacob Hammer printed a variant version of the *Historia*, which differs in many ways from the standard or Vulgate text.[19] Hammer's suggestion was that this variant version was an adaptation of what Geoffrey himself had written, made by some other contemporary author. Concerning this variant version, Robert A. Caldwell has now put forward a startling theory. This is that the variant version possibly preceded the standard text. 'The former, therefore,' he writes, 'looks like an early draft put together from original sources, the latter like a deliberate revision.'[20] The variant version lacks the dedications, the acknowledgements to Walter the Archdeacon, and the references to the 'very ancient book'. The only mention which it contains of Geoffrey himself is at the end in a colophon, which may be false.[21] We come then to this point: if we are prepared to ignore the evidence of the colophon and the variant version's lack of antiquity, it is conceivable that someone else wrote the variant version and that Geoffrey merely adapted it; in short that Jacob Hammer's variant version, written admittedly in Latin and not in British, is itself Geoffrey's source, his 'certain very ancient book'. To push Professor Caldwell's argument to the extreme, the source of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia* may be a contemporary book by a person whom, for want of a better name, we can call the pseudo-Geoffrey. It would then remain for us to discover the sources used by the pseudo-Geoffrey.

We have, then, a choice of possibilities: that Geoffrey had a source-book and that this book has disappeared without leaving any other trace; that Geoffrey's source-book is lost indeed, but that we can trace his use of at least one written Old Welsh source in his

reproduction of the names preserved in the dynastic genealogies of MS. Harl. 3859 and in the Nennian list of the Cities of Britain; that Geoffrey's essential source was really oral tradition, personified, as it were, in his friend Walter the Archdeacon (himself, no doubt, a widely-read man); or that behind the Geoffrey of Monmouth of the Vulgate text of the *History* there lies a pseudo-Geoffrey who had earlier written the variant text, an arch-hoaxer, who not only left no clue whatsoever to his own personality but was happy to see his *History* fathered on to Geoffrey. We are free to accept any one of these theories, to attempt a combination of two or more of them, to try to discover some intermediary position between some pair of them, or, indeed, to reject them all.

What nobody who has examined the evidence carefully can ever dare to say is that Geoffrey of Monmouth, or the pseudo-Geoffrey, simply made up his material. It is true that William of Newburgh, writing about 1190, less than forty years after Geoffrey's death, condemned his fellow-chronicler out of hand. 'It is quite clear', maintained William, 'that everything this man wrote about Arthur and his successors, or indeed about his predecessors from Vortigern onwards, was made up, partly by himself and partly by others, either from an inordinate love of lying, or for the sake of pleasing the Britons.'[22] One is sometimes tempted to agree with William of Newburgh. After all, the *History of the Kings of Britain* rests primarily upon the life-history of three great men: Brutus, grandson of Aeneas; Belinus, who sacked Rome; and Arthur, King of Britain. This particular Brutus never existed; Rome was never sacked by a Briton called Belinus; and Geoffrey's Arthur is far nearer to the fictional hero of the later Arthurian romances, of whom he is the prime but not the 'onlie begetter', than to the historical Arthur of whom we learn a few scanty details in Nennius and elsewhere.[23] In short, most of the material in the *History* really is fictional and someone did invent it. What is more, Geoffrey is a great believer in circumstantial detail. In the description of the decisive battle between Arthur and Lucius Tiberius, for example, he gives us

precise information about the positioning of the divisions on each side, the number of men engaged and the names of the divisional commanders. Then come, in direct speech in the Vulgate version, Arthur's address to his troops and that of Lucius Tiberius to the Roman army. One is tempted to say that this is romanticized history with a vengeance, until one remembers that the battle never took place and that it is merely romantic fiction.

Fortunately there is ample evidence to sway us in the opposite direction. The list of proper names and place-names given at the back of this volume includes 871 head-words. A large proportion of these are the names of historical people and of places actually on the map. Much of this background material is twisted almost beyond recognition; but in earliest essence it has some element of truth. Geoffrey did not invent it, nor did the pseudo-Geoffrey: *ergo* one or other of them must have taken it from somewhere.[24] In addition to the debt which he acknowledged to Walter's 'very ancient book' and to the book of the 'Prophecies of Merlin' which he said he translated, also from British, to please Alexander, Bishop of Lincoln, Geoffrey made many cross-references in the Vulgate text to such writers as Cicero, Juvenal, Lucan, Apuleius, Bede, King Alfred, etc. He can also be shown to have drawn upon Livy, Orosius and Virgil. For the variant version Jacob Hammer has made a long list of such cross-references to the Old Testament and to the New, and then to twenty-eight separate Latin writers.[25] Finally, there is the archaeological evidence, the fact that strange light has been thrown upon certain of the alleged fancies of Geoffrey of Monmouth by subsequent archaeological discoveries. The connexion of Vortigern and his son Pacentius with Ireland (viii.14) is, for example, allegedly supported by the ogham stones with Vortigern's name on them which have been discovered at Ballybank and Knockaboy.[26] As fate caught up with him, Vortigern, in Geoffrey's account (viii.2), fled to the fortified camp of Genoreu, on the hill called Cloartius, in Erging, by the River Wye. Here 'Gonoreu' is Ganarew and 'Cloartius' a misspelling for the modern

Little Doward, with its hilltop camp, all of it very near to Monmouth.[27] There is the remarkable story of how Merlin brought Stonehenge piecemeal from Mount Killaraus in Ireland to Salisbury Plain (viii.10–14) and its resemblance to the parallel account of the carrying of the bluestones by sea and overland from the Prescelly mountains which is given by modern archaeologists.[28] In v.4 Geoffrey tells how the Venedoti decapitated a whole Roman legion in London and threw their heads into a stream called Nantgallum or, in the Saxon language, Galobroc. In the 1860s a large number of skulls, with practically no other bones to accompany them, were dug up in the bed of the Walbrook by General Pitt-Rivers and others.[29]

We are presented, then, with a well-nigh insoluble mystery. Whether the author of the *Historia Regum Britanniae* was Geoffrey of Monmouth himself or some curious pseudo-Geoffrey, it remains true that much, if not most, of his material is unacceptable as history; and yet history keeps peeping through the fiction. We can perhaps give Acton Griscom the last word here: 'How much allowance must be made for expansion and embellishment', he wrote, 'is admittedly hard to determine, because, first and foremost, Geoffrey was bent on turning chronicle history into literature.'[30] From the great number of borrowings which, as I point out in my notes, he makes from the *De excidio Britanniae* of Gildas and the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius, his debt to these two early chroniclers is certainly a considerable one. Some scholars have suggested that our search for sources might well begin and end there.

## 4. THE WORK ITSELF

In Geoffrey's long and eventful account of the history of the Britons there are, as we have seen, three personalities which dominate: Brutus himself, the imaginary founder of the nation, and the father-figure; Belinus, who, with his brother Brennius, is supposed to have captured and sacked Rome; and Arthur of Britain, with his beautiful

wife Guinevere, Mordred who betrayed him, and his four brave knights, Cador of Cornwall, Gawain son of Loth, Bedevere the Cup-bearer and the Seneschal Kay. Some 82 pages of the *History of the Kings of Britain*, in this translation of the Vulgate text, are devoted to these three, and Arthur himself fills more than a fifth of the book. In between the adventures of Brutus, Belinus, Arthur, and their supporting chieftains, come a host of lesser figures and a succession of curious episodes: some of them more than touched with reality, others purely fictional; some of them well-known Romans, others half-forgotten Britons, but many of them still familiar enough today to all who are interested in the literature and the early history of our island: the giant Gogmagog; Locrinus who married Gwendolen but loved the Saxon woman Estrildis; Hudibras; Bladud and the founding of Bath; King Lear and his three daughters; Gorboduc; the brothers Ferrex and Porrex; Lud who built London; Cassivelaunus; Julius Caesar; Cymbeline; Claudius; Vespasian; Constantine; King Cole; Vortigern; Hengist and Horsa; Octa; the prophecies of Merlin the magician; Utherpendragon; the moving of Stonehenge from Ireland to Salisbury Plain; the seduction of Ygerna of Tintagel; Loth; Lucius Tiberius; Gormont and Isembard; and, finally, the coming of Saint Augustine.

The first half of Geoffrey's book is a well-ordered chronicle of what might well appear to be remote but nevertheless historical events, were it not for their very strangeness, the imaginative treatment given to some of them, and their factual extravagance in certain fields of history where we are too well informed from other sources to allow ourselves to be misled.

It is not until vi.17 that we read of the discovery by Vortigern's messengers of the boy Merlin, the soothsayer son of an incubus and of a princess who had entered a nunnery, a discovery to be followed a little later by the long interpolation devoted to Merlin's prophecies. If we have been deceived before, and Merlin is the first really other-worldly element in the book, then we now at once realize how far away we are from anything which can ever approach real

history. As a direct result of the magic arts of Merlin, Arthur himself is born, and there follows the most striking part of Geoffrey's *History*: the long series of extraordinary episodes which form the life-history of the most outstanding of all British heroes, from his mysterious conception in the castle of Tintagel to his mortal wounding but not death at the battle of Camlann. After holding our attention for so long, Arthur then steps out of the story as mysteriously as he had entered it. At one moment we are told that 'Arthur continued to advance, inflicting terrible slaughter as he went.' A few lines later Geoffrey tells us laconically that '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' (xi.2). He is never mentioned again, apart from two trifling cross-references in xii.2 and xii.6, until, nearly at the end of the book, the Angelic Voice announces to Cadwallader that 'God did not wish the Britons to rule in Britain any more, until the moment came which Merlin had prophesied to Arthur' (xii.17).

Merlin the magician and Arthur the all-conquering British King: it was these two personages who were to give Geoffrey of Monmouth his place in the development of European literature. 'Here,' wrote Professor Lewis Jones, 'was just what a romantic age was thirsting for, and Arthur immediately became the central figure of the most popular and most splendid of the romantic cycles . . . a hero whose deeds challenged comparison with those of Alexander and Charlemagne.'[31] Geoffrey may be said to have created the figure of the prophet Merlin as he appears in later romance, even though, according to Celtic scholars, it can now be regarded as certain that he derived the outline of the Merlin story from anterior Welsh sources.[32] Behind Geoffrey's new literary Arthur, on the other hand, lies a long tradition of historical references, going back in ultimate essence to the ninth-century chronicler Nennius.[33]

If we leave Brutus on one side, it is an interesting exercise to set face to face Geoffrey's other two major heroes: Belinus, who sacked

Rome, and Arthur, who was forced to turn back when he had reached the passes over the Alps; and then to consider why the former has had no appeal for later writers, while the latter has enjoyed a European, and, indeed, a world, success which still continues unabated today. We must note, first of all, that, as a personality and as a character, Geoffrey's Arthur is nearer to Belinus than is the later and more literary Arthur of Chrétien de Troyes. What is there about Geoffrey's Arthur which was to make him a world figure? In Geoffrey's book, Arthur's story is coupled with that of Merlin; but so was Vortigern's. From his coronation at the age of fifteen Geoffrey's Arthur was all-conquering; but so was Belinus. Arthur fought with a giant on St Michael's Mount; but Corineus had been a famous baiter of giants in his day. Arthur's wife Guinevere was a very beautiful woman; but there are many other striking beauties in Geoffrey's book. The truth is that Geoffrey's Arthur differs from Belinus and the other characters in the *Historia* by the air of other-worldliness and mystery attached to his person from before his birth; by his identification with the new ideal of chivalry in Western Europe, e.g. at the plenary court which he held at Caerleon-on-Usk, and by the attractive, up-to-date nature of his four favourite knights, Cador, Gawain, Bedevere and Kay; by the fact that he did not die, but was carried away to the Isle of Avalon, there to await the moment when he would fulfil Merlin's prophecy by reappearing in history; and finally, most important and pervading all the rest, by the romantic way in which Geoffrey chose to describe his every action.[33]

To help us to accept some of his flights of fancy, Geoffrey has a number of favourite devices. From time to time, he provides cross-references to allegedly contemporary events in other parts of the world, and, in particular, allusions to Old Testament and Roman history. 'At that time,' he adds, when describing the reign of Cunedagius, 'Isaiah was making his prophecies; and on the eleventh day after the Kalends of May Rome was founded by the twin brothers Remus and Romulus' (ii.15). He shows us the extent of his read-

ing by an occasional modest remark about some other historian. 'However, since Gildas the historian has dealt with this quarrel at sufficient length,' he writes of the disagreement between Lud and Nennius, 'I prefer to omit it, for I do not wish to appear to be spoiling by my homelier style what so distinguished a writer has set out with so much eloquence' (i.17). Or again: 'Cadwallader, the son of Cadwallo, succeeded his father in the government of the realm. This was the youth whom Bede called Cliedvalla' (xii.14). Geoffrey's text is larded with toponymic conundrums, made the more exciting by the interlocking of Celtic and English roots. The capital of Britain, for example, according to Geoffrey, was first called 'Troia Nova'. This degenerated into 'Trinovantum', but Lud changed the name to 'Kaerlud' or 'Lud's City', from which last the word 'London' was formed (i.17). As a supreme touch, Geoffrey occasionally rejects some more than usually indigestible story, thus attempting to show his historical sense and to prove to us that there were bounds to his credulity. When discussing the building of the fortress of Paladur, now called Shaftesbury, by King Rud Hud Hudibras, son of Leil, he adds: 'There the Eagle spoke, while the wall was being built. If I believed its Sayings to be true, I would not hesitate to hand them down to history with my other material' (ii.9). This fine show of critical judgement is spoilt by the fact that, at the very end of the *History*, when the Angelic Voice has spoken and Alan of Brittany is called upon to make the fateful decision as to whether or not he should support the exiled Cadwallader in his attempt to recapture Britain, it is to the Auguries of the Eagle that he turns. 'Alan thereupon took a number of books, such as the one about the Auguries of the Eagle which had prophesied at Shaftesbury and those on the oracular Sayings of the Sybil and of Merlin' (xii.18). Once he had translated the Prophecies of Merlin, no doubt Geoffrey's judgement of what was credible or not became less severe.

## *Part Two*

# BEFORE THE ROMANS CAME

In the meantime Brutus had consummated his marriage with his [ii. wife Ignoge. By her he had three sons called Locrinus, Kamber and Albanactus, all of whom were to become famous. When their father finally died, in the twenty-third year after his landing, these three sons buried him inside the walls of the town which he had founded. They divided the kingdom of Britain between them in such a way that each succeeded to Brutus in one particular district. Locrinus, who was the first-born, inherited the part of the island which was afterwards called Loegria after him. Kamber received the region which is on the further bank of the River Severn, the part which is now known as Wales but which was for a long time after his death called Kambria from his name. As a result the people of that country still call themselves Kambri today in the Welsh tongue. Albanactus, the youngest, took the region which is nowadays called Scotland in our language. He called it Albany, after his own name.

Eventually, when these three had reigned in peace and harmony for a long time, Humber, the King of the Huns, landed in Albany. He met Albanactus in battle, killed him and forced the people of his country to flee to Locrinus.

As soon as Locrinus heard the news, he persuaded his brother [ii. Kamber to join him in an alliance. Locrinus called up all the young men of his own country and went out to meet the King of the Huns somewhere near the river which is now called the Humber. When the two forces made contact, Locrinus forced Humber to flee. Humber retreated as far as the river and was then drowned beneath its waters, giving his name to the stream. Once he had gained this victory, Locrinus distributed the spoils of the enemy among his allies, keeping back nothing for himself except the gold and silver

which he found on board their ships. He also reserved for himself three young women of striking beauty. The first of these girls was the daughter of the King of Germany. Humber had seized this girl along with the other two at a time when he was sacking her homeland. Her name was Estrildis and she was of such beauty that it would be difficult to find a young woman worthy to be compared with her. No precious ivory, no recently fallen snow, no lilies even could surpass the whiteness of her skin. Locrinus was overcome with passion for her. He was determined to make love with her, and he even went so far as to suggest that she might marry him.

When he discovered this, Corineus was greatly annoyed, for Locrinus had promised that he would marry Corineus' own daughter.

[*ii.3*] Corineus therefore went to the King and addressed him as follows, brandishing his battle-axe as he did so: 'These then, Locrinus, are the rewards you offer me in exchange for all the wounds which I have received through my allegiance to your father, at the time when he was waging war with unknown peoples? My daughter is to be passed over and you are to demean yourself to the point where you will be prepared to marry some barbarian woman or other! You will not do this unpunished – as long, that is, as strength is left to this right hand of mine which has torn the joy of living from many a giant up and down the Tyrrhenian shores!' He bellowed out these words again and again, brandishing his battle-axe as if he was going to strike Locrinus.

Then the friends of the two men came between them. These friends forced Locrinus to carry out what he had promised and Corineus was pacified.

[*ii.4*] Locrinus duly married Corineus' daughter, whose name was Gwendolen. For all that, he could not forget the love which he felt for Estrildis. He had a cave dug beneath the town of Trinovantum and there he shut Estrildis up, putting her in the care of his servants with orders that she should be treated with all honour, for despite everything that had happened he was determined to make love with

her in secret. Locrinus was so consumed with fear of Corineus that he did not dare to entertain Estrildis openly. Therefore he concealed her, as has been explained. He visited her for seven whole years, without anyone being the wiser, except those who were the deepest in his confidence. Whenever he went to Estrildis he gave it out that he intended to make some secret sacrifice to his gods; and he managed to persuade others to believe this, although it was not true. In the end Estrildis became pregnant and gave birth to an extraordinarily beautiful daughter whom she called Habren. Gwendolen was pregnant, too, and she bore a son who was given the name Maddan. This Maddan was handed over to his grandfather Corineus to be taught his early lessons.

Some time later, when Corineus was at long last dead, Locrinus [ii deserted Gwendolen and took Estrildis as his Queen. Gwendolen was most indignant at this. She went off to Cornwall and there she assembled all the young men of that region and began to harass Locrinus with border forays. At last, when both sides had gathered an army together, they joined battle near the River Stour.[1] There Locrinus was struck by an arrow and so departed from the joys of this life. With Locrinus out of the way, Gwendolen took over the government of the kingdom, behaving in the same extravagant fashion as her father had done. She ordered Estrildis and her daughter Habren to be thrown into the river which is now called the Severn; and she published an edict throughout the length and breadth of Britain that this river should be called after the girl's name. Gwendolen's intention was that this everlasting honour should be done to Habren because her own husband had been the girl's father. It thus comes about that right down to our own times this river is called Habren in the British language, although by a corruption of speech it is called Sabrina in the other tongue.

1. This is usually identified as the river which 'enters the Severn some ten miles above Worcester' (*Tatlock*, p. 29). In 'Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and the Stour', *Modern Language Notes*, LXIX (1954), pp. 237–9, Robert A. Caldwell follows Wace in suggesting the Dorsetshire Stour.

[ii.6] Gwendolen reigned for fifteen years after the death of Locrinus, who had himself reigned ten years. As soon as she realized that her son Maddan had grown to man's estate, she passed the sceptre of the realm to him, being content herself with the province of Cornwall for the remainder of her life.

At that time the prophet Samuel was reigning in Judea, Aeneas Silvius was still alive and Homer was considered to be a famous rhetorician and poet.

Maddan married and by his wife he became the father of two sons, Mempricius and Malin. He ruled his kingdom in peace and frugality for forty years. When he died, a quarrel over the kingship arose between the sons whom I have mentioned, for each of the two was eager to possess the whole island. Mempricius, who wanted very much to carry out his own plan, called a conference with Malin, giving the impression that he was about to come to some agreement with him. Mempricius was, however, eaten up with burning treachery and he killed his brother in the presence of the other delegates. He then took over the government of the whole island, exercising so great a tyranny over the people that he encompassed the death of almost all the more distinguished men. He hated all his own family; and, by main force or by treachery, he did away with anyone who he feared might succeed him in the kingship. What is more, he deserted his own wife, by whom he had become the father of a much-admired young man called Ebraucus, and he abandoned himself to the vice of sodomy, preferring unnatural lust to normal passion. At last, in the twentieth year of his reign, when he was out on a hunting expedition, he became separated from his companions in a certain valley. There he was surrounded by ravening wolves and eaten up in miserable circumstances.

At that time Saul was reigning in Judea and Eurysthenes in Sparta.

[ii.7] After the death of Mempricius, his son Ebraucus, who was very tall and a man of remarkable strength, took over the government of Britain and held it for thirty-nine years. He was the first after

Brutus to sail a fleet to the shores of Gaul. He made war upon the provinces of the Gauls, slaughtering their menfolk and sacking their cities. By the time he came back victorious he was enriched with a vast booty of gold and silver. At a later date he founded a city on the farther side of the Humber, which city he called Kaerebrauc after himself, that is to say the City of Ebraucus.

At that time King David was reigning in Judea and Silvius Latinus was King in Italy. In Israel, Gad, Nathan and Asaph were the prophets.

Ebraucus also founded the city of Alclud over in Albany; and the castle of Mount Agned, which is now called the Maidens' Castle and the Dolorous Mountain.

What is more, by the twenty wives which he had, he was the [ii.8
father of twenty sons and of thirty daughters. For forty years he ruled over the kingdom of Britain with great firmness. The names of his sons were as follows: Brutus Greenshield, Margodud, Sisillius, Regin, Morvid, Bladud, Lagon, Bodloan, Kincar, Spaden, Gaul, Dardan, Eldad, Ivor, Cangu, Hector, Kerin, Rud, Assaracus and Buel. The names of his daughters were: Gloigin, Ignogin, Oudas, Guenlian, Guardid, Angarad, Guenlodoe, Tangustel, Gorgon, Medlan, Methahel, Ourar, Mailure, Kambreda, Ragan, Gael, Ecub, Nest, Chein, Stadudud, Cladus, Ebrein, Blangan, Aballac, Angoes, Galaes (the most beautiful of the young women who lived at that time in Britain or in Gaul), Edra, Anor, Stadiald and Egron. The father sent all his daughters to Italy to Silvius Alba, who was king after Silvius Latinus. There they were married to the more noble of the Trojans whose offers of marriage were being refused by the Latin and Sabine women. With their brother Assaracus as leader the sons took a fleet to Germany. There, with the help of Silvius Alba, they subdued the people and seized the kingdom.

The Brutus who was surnamed Greenshield stayed behind, how- [ii.9
ever, with his father. It was he who took over the government of the kingdom after Ebraucus. He reigned for twelve years.

Leil, the son of Greenshield, a great lover of peace and justice,

succeeded him. Leil took advantage of the prosperity of his reign to build a town in the northern part of Britain which he called Kaerleil after himself.

This was the time when Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem and when the Queen of Sheba came to listen to his wisdom. About the same time Silvius Epitus succeeded his father Alba in the kingship of Rome.

Leil lived on for twenty-five years after mounting the throne, but towards the end he ruled the kingdom feebly. As a result of Leil's prolonged inactivity a civil war suddenly broke out in the realm. Leil's son Rud Hud Hudibras reigned for thirty-nine years after him. Once the civil war was over, Hudibras restored peace once more to the people. It was he who built Kaerreint: that is, Canterbury. He also founded Kaerguenit, or Winchester, and the fortress of Paladur, which is now called Shaftesbury. There the Eagle spoke, while the wall was being built. If I believed its Sayings to be true, I would not hesitate to hand them down to history with my other material.

At that time Capys, the son of Epitus, was reigning in Rome; and Haggai, Amos, Joel and Azariah were making their prophecies.

[*ii.10*] Hudibras' son Bladud finally succeeded him and ruled the kingdom for twenty years. It was he who built the town of Kaerbadum, which is now called Bath, and who constructed the hot baths there which are so suited to the needs of mortal men. He chose the goddess Minerva as the tutelary deity of the baths. In her temple he lit fires which never went out and which never fell away into ash, for the moment that they began to die down they were turned into balls of stone.[1]

At that time Elijah prayed that it should not rain upon the earth, so that for three years and six months no rain fell.

1. Geoffrey makes no mention of the legend that Bladud was a leper whose initial enthusiasm for Bath arose from the fact that the water and the impregnated mud there had cured him. Cp. R. A. L. Smith, *Bath*, 3rd ed., 1948, London, pp. 11–12.

Bladud was a most ingenious man who encouraged necromancy throughout the kingdom of Britain. He pressed on with his experiments and finally constructed a pair of wings for himself and tried to fly through the upper air. He came down on top of the Temple of Apollo in the town of Trinovantum and was dashed into countless fragments.

After Bladud had met his fate in this way, his son Leir was [iii.] raised to the kingship. Leir ruled the country for sixty years. It was he who built the city on the River Soar which is called Kaerleir after him in the British tongue, its Saxon name being Leicester. He had no male issue, but three daughters were born to him. Their names were Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Their father was very fond indeed of them and above all he loved Cordelia, his youngest daughter. When he felt himself becoming a really old man, he made up his mind to divide his kingdom between these three daughters of his and to marry them to husbands whom he considered to be suited to them and capable of ruling the kingdom along with them. In an attempt to discover which of the three was most worthy of inheriting the larger part of his realm, he went to them each in turn to ask which of them loved him most. When he questioned Goneril, she immediately called the gods of heaven to witness that he was dearer to her than the very soul which dwelt within her body. 'My dearest daughter,' answered Leir, 'since you have preferred me, even in my old age, to your own life, I will marry you to any young man you choose and I will give you a third part of the kingdom of Britain.' Regan, the second daughter, was determined to wheedle her own way into Leir's favour, just as her sister had done. It was her turn next to be questioned. She swore that her only possible answer could be that she loved Leir more than any other living person. Her credulous father thereupon decided to marry Regan with the same pomp that he had promised to his eldest child and to give her at the same time another third of his kingdom.

When she heard how Leir had been deceived by the blandishments of her two older sisters, Cordelia, the King's youngest

daughter, made up her mind to test him by giving quite a different answer. 'My father,' she said, 'can there really exist a daughter who maintains that the love she bears her own father is more than what is due to him as a father? I cannot believe that there can be a daughter who would dare to confess to such a thing, unless, indeed, she were trying to conceal the truth by joking about it. Assuredly, for my part, I have always loved you as my father, and at this moment I feel no lessening of my affection for you. If you are determined to wring more than this out of me, then I will tell you how much I love you and so put an end to your inquiry. You are worth just as much as you possess, and that is the measure of my own love for you.'

Cordelia's father, who was angry because she had spoken in this way and apparently really meant what she had said, immediately lost his temper with her. He wasted no time in showing what his reaction was going to be. 'Since you have so much scorn for me your old father that you refuse to love me as much as your sisters do, then I in my turn will scorn you. You shall never share my kingdom with your sisters. All the same, you are still my daughter. I do not say that I shall be unwilling to marry you off to some foreigner, if fate should offer you such a husband; but this I do make clear to you, that I shall never attempt to marry you with the same honour as your sisters. Until this moment I have loved you more than the others. Now, indeed, you say that you love me less than they do.'

With the advice of the nobles of his realm he proceeded there and then to give the older girls in marriage to two of his Dukes, Cornwall and Albany, and to share between them one half of the island for as long as he, Leir, should live. He agreed that after his own death they should inherit the entire kingdom of Britain.

Soon afterwards it happened that Aganippus, King of the Franks, heard Cordelia's beauty being greatly praised. He immediately sent messengers to Leir to ask if the King would let Cordelia go back with them so that he could marry her. Cordelia's father was still as angry as ever. He said that he would willingly give her to

Aganippus, but that there would be no land or dowry to go with her; for he had shared his kingdom, with all his gold and silver, between her two sisters Goneril and Regan. Aganippus' love for the girl was not damped when he received this answer. He sent a second time to King Leir to say that he had plenty of gold and silver himself, and other possessions, too, for he ruled over a third of Gaul. He wanted the girl for one reason only, so that he might have children by her. The bargain was struck. Cordelia was dispatched to Gaul and there she was married to Aganippus.

Some long time after, when King Leir began to grow weak with [ii. old age, the Dukes whom I have mentioned, with whom, as the husbands of his daughters, he had shared Britain, rebelled against him. They took the remainder of his kingdom from him and with it the royal power which up to then he had wielded manfully and in all glory. There was no direct break between them, however, for Maglaurus, Duke of Albany, one of Leir's sons-in-law, agreed to maintain him, together with one hundred and forty knights, so that he should not end his days alone and in obscurity.

By the time Leir had stayed two years with his son-in-law, his daughter Goneril made up her mind that he had too many attendants, especially as they kept wrangling with her own servants because they were not offered more plentiful rations each month. Goneril duly spoke to her husband about it. Then she ordered her father to content himself with the service of thirty soldiers and to dismiss the others whom he had with him. Leir was infuriated by this. He left Maglaurus and went off to Henwinus, the Duke of Cornwall, to whom he had married Regan, his second daughter. Leir was received honourably by the Duke, but a year had not passed before a quarrel arose between the two households. Regan was annoyed by this and she ordered her father to dismiss all his retainers except five who should remain to do him service. Thereupon Leir, who was greatly aggrieved by what had happened, went back again to his eldest daughter, thinking that she might take pity on him and let him stay with his full retinue. Goneril,

however, had never recovered from her first burst of indignation. She now swore by all the gods in heaven that Leir should not lodge with her at all unless he contented himself with a single soldier-attendant and dismissed all the others. She upbraided her father for wanting to go about with such a huge retinue now that he was an old man with no possessions at all. She refused steadfastly to give way to his wish. For his part he had to obey her, and so the other attendants were dismissed and he was left with a single soldier.

As he sat thinking about his former glories, Leir developed such a loathing for the misery to which he had been reduced that he began to wonder whether he would not be better off with his youngest daughter across the sea. He had an unpleasant feeling that she would not be willing to do anything at all for him, seeing that he had given her away so shamefully, as I have already told you. For all that, he could not bear his poverty-stricken existence any longer and he set off across the sea to the lands of Gaul.

As he made the crossing, he observed that he was held third in honour among the princes who were on the boat. He burst into tears and sobbed aloud. 'Oh, you Fates,' he cried, 'so constant in your own sequences, you who in some fixed course steadfastly follow your own preordained journey, why did you ever raise me up to happiness only to snatch it away from me again? It is even more miserable to sit thinking of some past success than to bear the burden of subsequent failure. Indeed, the memory of the time when, attended by so many hundred thousand fighting-men, I used to batter down the walls of cities and to lay waste the provinces of my enemies saddens me more than the calamity of my own present distress, although it has encouraged those who once grovelled beneath my feet to abandon me in my weakness. Oh, spiteful Fortune! Will the moment never come when I can take vengeance upon those who have deserted me in my final poverty? Oh, Cordelia, my daughter! How true were the words you spoke to me when I asked you how much you loved me! You said: "You are

worth as much as you possess, and that is the measure of my own love for you." As long, then, as I had something to give, so long did I seem worth while to the other two, for it was my gifts that they cared for, not me myself. At times they were affectionate towards me, it is true, but they loved my presents more. Now that the gifts have ceased, these two have disappeared as well. How shall I dare to ask favours of you, the dearest of my daughters – I who, in my anger at those very words of yours which I have just quoted, decided to marry you off less honourably than I did your sisters? Yet, after all the kindnesses which I have done them, they are content to see me as an outcast and a beggar.'

At last Leir landed. He kept muttering these things to himself and many others like them as he travelled to Karitia, where his daughter was. He waited outside the city and sent a messenger to Cordelia to tell her into what poverty he had fallen. It was simply because he had nothing to eat and nothing with which to clothe himself that he had come to seek her compassion. Cordelia was greatly moved by what she heard and she wept bitterly. She asked how many armed attendants Leir had with him. The messenger replied that he had no one, except a certain knight who was waiting with him outside the city. Cordelia then took as much gold and silver as was necessary and gave it to the messenger, telling him to accompany her father to some other city and to bathe him, dress him and nurse him there, giving it out that he was ill. Cordelia also commanded that Leir should take into his retinue forty properly-equipped and fully-armed knights and that only when this was done should he announce his arrival to King Aganippus and his own daughter. The messenger went back immediately. He led King Leir off to another city and hid him there while he was doing all the things which Cordelia had ordered.

As soon as Leir was dressed in royal robes, equipped with royal [ii.
insignia and accompanied by a household, he announced to Aganippus and his own daughter that he had been expelled from the realm of Britain by his own sons-in-law and that he had come

to them so that he might recover his kingdom. Accompanied by their counsellors and noblemen, Aganippus and Cordelia came out to meet him. They received him honourably and they granted him the rank which he held in his own country until such time as they should have restored him to his former dignity.

[ii.14] Meanwhile Aganippus sent messengers throughout the whole of Gaul to summon all the men there who could bear arms, so that with their help he might endeavour to restore the kingship of Britain to his father-in-law Leir. When this was done, Leir marched at the head of the assembled army, taking his daughter with him. He fought with his sons-in-law and beat them, thus bringing them all under his dominion again.

Three years later Leir died; and Aganippus, King of the Franks, died too. As a result Leir's daughter Cordelia inherited the government of the kingdom of Britain. She buried her father in a certain underground chamber which she had ordered to be dug beneath the River Soar, some way downstream from Leicester. This underground chamber was dedicated to the two-faced Janus: and when the feast-day of the god came round, all the craftsmen in the town used to perform there the first act of labour in whatever enterprise they were planning to undertake during the coming year.

[ii.15] When Cordelia had ruled the kingdom peacefully for a period of five years, Marganus and Cunedagius began to cause her trouble. These were the sons of her two sisters who had been married to the Dukes Maglaurus and Henwinus. They were both young men known for their remarkable courage. Maglaurus was the father of Marganus, the first of the two; and Henwinus was the father of the second, Cunedagius. When, after the death of their fathers, these two had succeeded them in their dukedoms, they became indignant at the fact that Britain was subjected to the rule of a woman. They therefore assembled their armies and rose in rebellion against the Queen. They refused to stop their outrages; and in the end they laid waste to a number of provinces and met the

Queen herself in a series of pitched battles. In the end she herself was captured and put in prison. There she grieved more and more over the loss of her kingdom and eventually she killed herself. As a result the two young men seized the island. That region which extends beyond the Humber in the direction of Caithness submitted to the rule of Marganus; the other part which stretches towards the setting sun south of the river was put under Cunedagius.

Two years later certain people who were tainted with subversive ideas came to Marganus. They started to encourage him to make trouble, telling him that it was a shame and a disgrace that he, who was the elder, should not rule over the whole island. Marganus was stirred up by this grievance and by others of a like nature. He led his army through the lands of Cunedagius and began to set light to one place after another. In this way a quarrel sprang up between the two; and Cunedagius marched out to meet Marganus with all his own army. When the two met in battle the slaughter which Cunedagius inflicted was considerable and he drove Marganus in flight before him. Cunedagius pursued Marganus as the latter fled from province to province; and in the end he caught up with his cousin in a remote district in Wales. There Marganus was killed and to this day the place is called Margon by the country folk from his name. Once he had won this victory, Cunedagius took over the kingship of the whole island and ruled it in great glory for thirty-three years.

At that time Isaiah was making his prophecies; and on the eleventh day after the Kalends of May Rome was founded by the twin brothers Remus and Romulus.[1]

After the death of Cunedagius, his son Rivallo succeeded him, a peaceful, prosperous young man who ruled the kingdom frugally. In his time it rained blood for three days and men died from the flies which swarmed. Rivallo's son Gurgustius succeeded him.

1. *Remus and Romulus.* The text has '*a geminis fratribus Remo et Remulo*'. Geoffrey has already twice mentioned Rome as being in existence, on p. 80.