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SOUTHEY AND HEBER IN POWYSLAND.

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THE footsteps of "Men of Note" possess an attraction which does not attach to those of ordinary people, and we like to trace their movements, and to observe the impressions which our every-day world makes upon them. Hence the charm of a well-written biography. When, moreover, the biographer tells his own story, and we are brought face to face with the thoughts and expressions of the man himself, and that, too, in language of singular grace and power, the pleasure is vastly enhanced. And when it further happens that the scenes described, and the characters alluded to, are otherwise familiar to us, we have all the elements of an attractive subject, backed by the conditions of a highly instructive treatment. Such appears to me to be eminently the case with the subject I have chosen for this paper, the "Visit of Southey and Heber to Powysland"--a visit, in the case of Heber, not unconnected, it may be, with his nomination to the See of Calcutta; and in the case of Southey, a link in an intimate and life-long friendship. They were the fellow-guests of the Right Hon. C. W. Williams-Wynn, for so long a period the representative of this county in the House of Commons, and, at that time, a member of the Cabinet. This intimacy was begun, like so many of the truest and most enduring friendships, in their days of boyhood, when they were schoolfellows together at Westminster; was cemented by the strongest proofs of esteem and affection through many years of good and evil fortune;

and was only closed by death. Indeed, I believe I am not wrong in saying that it was owing to this friendship, and to the material help which Mr. Williams-Wynn extended for so many years to the poet in his early career, that we owe it that Southey was enabled to pursue that literary course, to which he was so devoted, and which has conferred so much pleasure and benefit upon us, his countrymen. And I know no greater encomium that has ever been passed upon that able statesman; certainly none that will excite so vivid a sense of his personal worth, as that in which Southey describes him as

> "My earliest friend, whom I
> Have ever, through all changes, found the same
> From boyhood to grey hairs,
> In goodness and in warmth of heart."

The interesting old hall at Llangedwyn, with its beautiful surroundings, in the valley of the Tanat, was Mr. Wynn's country residence; and here it was that Robert Southey and Reginald Heber, while they formed a mutual friendship, enjoyed his genial hospitality, and made their first acquaintance with Powys-land. And we can well imagine how these two high-souled and congenial spirits must have enjoyed the society, the intercourse, and the pleasant excursions in which they shared. In an "Ode on Bishop Heber's portrait", Southey thus alludes to the occasion:—

> "Ten years have held their course
> Since last I looked upon
> That living countenance,
> When on Llangedwyn's terraces we paced
> Together to and fro;
> Partaking there its hospitality,
> We with its honoured master spent
> Well pleased the social hours."

Here, before passing on to the descriptions which the poet gives of the scenes they visited together, it may not be amiss to put on record two little episodes, of a literary character, for which I am indebted to the "honoured master's" son, each of which has an interest

of its own. It was during this visit, that Heber, after hearing the old Welsh air of "Ar hyd y nos" played upon the harp, and while the tune was still ringing in his ears, composed to its music his well-known Evening Hymn.

"God, that madest earth and heaven,
Darkness and light;
Who the day for toil has given,
For rest the night,
May Thine angel guards defend us,
Slumber sweet Thy mercy send us,
Holy dreams and hopes attend us,
This livelong night.

"Guard us waking, guard us sleeping,
And when we die,
May we in Thy mighty keeping,
All peaceful lie;
When the last dread call shall wake us,
Do not Thou, our God, forsake us,
But to reign in glory take us
With Thee on high."

And it was when accompanying Mr. Wynn to Meifod, when the latter was about to purchase the Humphreys property in that parish, that Southey extended his expedition to the ruins of Mathraval, and there, after careful investigation into the stories and legends of the place, collected the materials for one of the chief scenes, if not for the whole scheme of his poem, entitled "Madoc in Wales":—

"He came
Where Warnway rolls its waters underneath
Ancient Mathraval's venerable walls,
Cyveilioc's princely and paternal seat."

Few are the vestiges that remain of this once famous palace of the Princes of Powys—nothing to betoken its royal splendour. The lofty mound, first raised to guard the river ford, and afterwards converted into a keep, when the castle was erected on its bank; the broken ground which shows roughly where the foundations of the buildings ran; an angle of the walling,

upon which it is probable that a wooden superstructure was raised, and the deep foss which enclosed the whole space: these are all that remain, perhaps all that ever survived the disastrous fire on the 2nd of August 1212, when King John set it ablaze, in order to check the victorious rising of Llewelyn ap Iorwerth, and the chieftains of Powys. Decay and silence have been its after portion, a strange contrast to that life and splendour of its earlier days, which the poet has re-awakened in those vivid lines,—

"From Cyveilioc's hall
The voice of harp and song commingled came,
It was that day the feast of victory there;
Around the Chieftain's board the warriors sate;
The sword and shield and helmet on the wall
And round the pillars were in peace hung up;
And as the flashes of the central fire
At fits arose, a dance of wavy light
Played o'er the reddening steel. The Chiefs who late
So well had wielded in the work of war
Those weapons, sate around the board to quaff
The beverage of the brave and hear their fame.—
Mathraval's Lord, the Poet and the Prince,
Cyveilioc stood before them—in his pride;
His hands were on the harp, his eyes were clos'd,
His head, as if in reverence to receive
The inspiration, bent; anon, he raised
His glowing countenance and brighter eye
And swept with passionate hand the ringing harp,
'Fill high the Hirlas Horn.'"

To return from this digression to the two friends, Southey and Heber. One of their excursions was to Sycharth, in the adjoining parish of Llansilin:—

"Together there we traced
The grass-grown site, where armed feet once trod
The threshold of Glendower's embattled hall."

Burnt down in revenge for that chieftain's rising in arms, there are no vestiges left of the ancient palace and its surrounding buildings. The site, however, is unmistakably marked out by the enclosing foss, and the outer ward, and the inner keep, on which once stood

the fair house of wood, "Ty pren glân, yn nhop bryn glas". Happily, too, we have a minute description of it, as it stood, from the pen of Iolo Goch, Glyndwr's domestic bard and Laureate. It is the more interesting as picturing a typical moated mansion of the end of the fourteenth century, with its picturesque outlines, and its domestic arrangements. The palace, he tells us, was surrounded by a well-filled moat, and was entered through a spacious gate, standing on a bridge. It had a tower of Irish type, that reminded him of the Cloisters at Westminster, with their vaults and arches, and gilded chancel. The basement (apparently of stone) comprised eighteen compartments, and above were four stories, raised on four firm and richly-carved pillars, each story being subdivided into eight sleeping chambers. The whole was covered with a shingle roof, and there were chimney stocks to carry off the smoke. In the rooms were wardrobes, stored with apparel, not unlike the shops in London. It had a church, too, quadrangular in form, with chapels richly glazed. Around the palace he enumerates an orchard and a vineyard, a park with deer, a rabbit warren, meadows, and cornfields, a mill, a pigeon-house, and a fish-pond, stocked with pike and gwyniaid; and here, in the poet's trysting place,

"Yn Sycharth, buarth y beirdd,"

was abundance of Shropshire ale and malt liquor.

There are so many local traits in this roughly rendered description, that we have less difficulty in accepting the account of those parts which have disappeared. The nearest house to it is still called *Parc Sycharth*, probably the old deer park,

"Gerllaw'r llys
Pawr ceirw mewn parc arall."

And not far off is Pentref y Cwn, which tells of the pack of staghounds. The present Pandy (fulling mill) was, in earlier times, a corn mill, the "Melin deg ar

ddifreg ddwr", and one[1] who has studied the question well has identified the site of the fishponds.

"Pysgodlyn—a fo raid i fwrw rhwydau."

Hither, too, some fifty years later, hied another genius, that gossipy, amusing and rather credulous traveller, George Borrow, who, if not a poet, had a good deal of the poetic spirit about him, as is testified by his translation of Iolo Goch's poem; a translation which he made, as he tells us, in the days of his boyhood, and which he chanted anew on the opposite hill, after visiting the scene described. It is so spirited, that it will not be amiss to reproduce it, as it may be more interesting to many of our readers than the original itself.

"Twice have I pledged my word to thee
To come thy noble face to see;
His promises let every man
Perform as far as e'er he can!
Full easy is the thing that's sweet,
And sweet this journey is and meet;
I've vow'd to Owain's Court to go,
And I'm resolv'd to keep my vow;
So thither straight I'll take my way
With blithsome heart, and there I'll stay,
Respect and honour, whilst I breathe,
To find his honor'd roof beneath.
My chief of long lined ancestry
Can harbour sons of poesy.
I've heard, for so the muse has told,
He's kind and gentle to the old;
Yes, to his castle I will hie;
There's none to match it 'neath the sky:
It is a baron's stately court,
Where bards for sumptuous fare resort;
There dwells the lord of Powis land,
Who granteth every just demand.
Its likeness now I'll limn you out:
'Tis water girdled wide about;
It shows a wide and stately door
Reached by a bridge the water o'er;

[1] Rev. Walter Davies, who wrote a History of Llansilin Parish in *Cambro-Briton*, 1820.—See *Gwaith Gwallter Mechain*, iii, 66.

'Tis formed of buildings coupled fair,
Coupled is every couple there;
Within a quadrant structure tall
Muster the merry pleasures all.
Conjointly are the angles bound—
No flaw in all the place is found.
Structures in contact meet the eye
Upon the hillock's top on high;
Into each other fastened they
The form of a hard knot display.
There dwells the chief we all extol
In timber house on lightsome knoll;
Upon four wooden columns proud
Mounteth his mansion to the cloud;
Each column's thick and firmly bas'd,
And upon each a loft is plac'd;
In these four lofts, which coupled stand,
Repose at night the minstrel band;
Four lofts they were in pristine state,
But now partitioned form they eight.
Piled is the roof, on each house-top
Rise smoke-ejecting chimneys up.
All of one form there are nine halls
Each with nine wardrobes in its walls
With linen white as well supplied
As fairest shops of fam'd Cheapside.
Behold the church with cross uprais'd
And with its windows neatly glazed;
All houses are in this comprest—
An orchard's near it of the best,
Also a park where void of fear
Feed antler'd herds of fallow deer.
A warren wide my chief can boast,
Of goodly steeds a countless host.
Meads where for hay the clover grows,
Corn-fields which hedges trim inclose,
A mill a rushing brook upon,
And pigeon tower fram'd of stone;
A fish-pond deep and dark to see
To cast nets in when need there be,
When never yet was known to lack
A plenteous store of perch and jack.
Of various plumage birds abound;
Herons and peacocks haunt around.
What luxury doth his hall adorn,
Showing of cost a sovereign scorn;

His ale from Shrewsbury town he brings;
His usquebaugh is drink for kings;
Bragget he keeps, bread white of look,
And, bless the mark! a bustling cook.
His mansion is the minstrels' home,
You'll find them there whene'er you come.
Of all her sex his wife's the best;
The household through her care is blest;
She's scion of a knightly tree,
She's dignified, she's kind and free.
His bairns approach me, pair by pair,
O what a nest of chieftains fair!
Here difficult it is to catch
A sight of either bolt or latch;
The porter's place here none to fill;
Here largess shall be lavish'd still,
And ne'er shall thirst or hunger rude
In Sycharth venture to intrude.
A noble leader Cambria's Knight,
To take possession, his by right,
And midst that azure water plac'd,
The castle, by each pleasure grac'd.

Another excursion, in which Southey and Heber joined, was to the secluded, but wildly beautiful valley of Pennant:—

"Melangel's lonely church—
Amid a grove of evergreens it stood,
A garden and a grove, where every grave
Was deck'd with flowers, or with unfading plants
O'ergrown, sad rue and funeral rosemary."

There they

"Saw the dark yews, majestic in decay
Which in their flourishing strength
Cyveilioc might have seen—
Letter by letter traced the lines
On Yorwerth's fabled tomb:
And curiously observe what vestiges
Mouldering and mutilate
Of Monacella's legend there are left."

From the epithet "fabled", we may gather that Southey was misled by the legendary tradition (as given in *Pennant's Tours*), that it was the tomb of

Iorwerth Drwyndwn, the eldest son of Owen Gwynedd, with whom he very effectively connects it in his *Madoc*.

> "His glancing eye fell on a monument
> Around whose base the rosemary droop'd down
> As yet not rooted well. Sculptured above
> A warrior lay; the shield was on his arm,
> Madoc approach'd and saw the blazonry ....
> A sudden chill ran through him—as he read—
> 'Here Yorworth lies' .. it was his brother's grave."

The legend on the effigy, "Hic jacet Edwart", and the tradition that the neighbouring *Bwlch Croes Yorwerth* took its name from a memorial cross, erected in the pass where Iorwerth Drwyndwn fell, harmonise well with the idea; but "the blazonry" of the shield claims it for another Iorwerth. The rampant "wolf" proclaims that it belonged to Edward ap Madoc ap Rhirid Flaidd, the potent Lord of Penllyn. And it is probable that the female effigy, which has so often done duty as "the rude image of St. Monacel, is that of Gladus, the daughter and heiress of Gwrdendu, Lord of Bryn, with whom Bryn and Pennant passed, as a marriage portion, to Rhirid Flaidd.

They marked well the legend carved by skilful hand upon the holy screen which

> "Told how here a poor and hunted hare
> Ran to the Virgin's feet and look'd to her
> For life."

But no notice is recorded of the giant Rib, "Asgwrn or Asen y Gawres", still preserved within the church, or of the small square room at its east end, called "Cell y Bedd", said to mark the burial place of the founder. Here I hold that the shrine stood which preserved her relics; and I would suggest that the early Roman capitals, built into the south wall of the church, were part of this shrine. The room itself may have supplied a lodging for those who sought "sanctuary" within these precincts. For, by the laws of Howell Dda, which treat of "Church Protection", it is enacted that "whoever shall take protection, is to

walk about within the churchyard and the burial-ground, without relics upon him". And "the measure of the burial-ground is a legal 'erw' in length, with its end toward the churchyard; and that circling the churchyard is to be its compass".[1]

The importance of this privilege, and the extent of the cultus, may be gathered from the fact, that at the period of the Reformation, the "oblaciones ad reliquias" amounted, in the money of those days, to the respectable sum of £2 16*s.* 8*d.* per annum.

With this use and purpose of Cell y Bedd, I would compare that of Eglwys Gwyddvarch, which once stood in the west end of Meifod churchyard. For to Meifod, I believe, and not to Chirk, *i.e.*, to Mechain, and not to Y Waun, we must assign the grant referred to in the *Worthenbury MSS.*, Hist. MS. Commission, quoted in the *Arch. Cambr.*, 1880, p. 150, "1467, April 4 or 14. Grant by several Cardinals, of remission of one hundred days, to those who should go to the chapel of St. Gwyddvarch, confessor and abbot, or to the cemetery at Chirk, of St. Tysilio, confessor, and hear mass of Richard ap J (ohn ap David), priest of the said diocese, or give to him support, or say *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* for the souls of his parents on certain days". There is, however, this difference between the two, that whereas "Cell y Bedd" still remains to the church, Eglwys Gwyddfarch has been alienated and secularised.

There is one legend mentioned by Southey, which I have met with no reference to elsewhere; although similar ones do occur in connexion with other places. The old house alluded to is evidently, from his account of it, "Llechweddgarth", an ancient mansion of the Thomas's, from whom it passed by marriage to the late Mr. Griffiths of Caer-Hun :—

> We "together visited the ancient house
> Which from the hill-top takes
> Its Cymric name euphonious: there to view,
> Though drawn by some rude limner inexpert,

[1] Quoted in "Pennant Melangell", *Mont. Coll.*, 1879, p. 76.

The faded portrait of that lady fair,
Beside whose corpse her husband watched,
And with perverted faith,
Preposterously placed,
Thought, obstinate in hopeless hope, to see
The beautiful dead, by miracle, revive."

The legend is not mentioned in Mr. Hancock's parochial account in the *Montgomeryshire Collections*, 1878-9; and though I have made inquiries, I can hear of no such tradition now surviving in the parish. It does not, indeed, follow that the lady was an actual resident here; and a similar story exists relating to a former lady at Newtown Hall. Perhaps the inquiry may lead to further information relative to the Pennant legend and clear up the mystery.
