*L. Observations on the Welsh Castles : By the Honourable
Daines Barrington, A. S. S. In a Letter to the late
Lord Bishop of Carlisle.*

Read at the SOCIETY of ANTIQUARIES, January 14, 1768.

MY LORD,

Dec. 29, 1767.

HA V I N G had some conversation with your Lordship last summer with regard to Caerphylly (or Sengenneth Castle), and having afterwards travelled very much, at my leisure, round the sea coast of Wales, I take the liberty of troubling your Lordship with such observations as have occurred to me with relation to these venerable ruins, of which there is such a profusion in the principality.

As these ancient fortresses so particularly claim the attention of the antiquary, it seems rather extraordinary, that we have no better account of the time in which they were first built.

GYRALDUS Cambrensis is well known to have made a progress with Archbishop Baldwine through North and South Wales, in the reign of Henry the second; but he takes no further notice of the castles, than by giving to some of the places through which he passed the title of Castrum; the reason for which seems to arise from their having been very insignificant at that time, as I shall endeavour to prove hereafter.

LELAND, indeed, travelled through the principality much later, and had an opportunity of seeing some of these castles more complete than they appear at present; he barely, however, gives us a catalogue of some of them in the different counties; and they seem to have neither struck him as an antiquary, nor as picturesque and venerable objects.

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AFTER this, we have no writers to consult, except Humphrey Llwyd and Camden. As for the former of these, he is known to have been the translator of Caradoc of Lancarvan, which was certainly his authority for what little he hath said with regard to the Welsh castles; and as the translation, with Dr. Powel's notes, was published before the Britannia, Camden may be supposed to have had recourse to this as his chief source.

THIS will bring me hereafter to consider how much Caradoc's account of fortresses which existed soon after the Conquest is to be applied to the remains of those we see at present.

HAVING thus mentioned the only authorities from which any light may be expected upon this subject, I shall now throw together what hath occurred to me, both with regard to the antiquity of the Welsh castles, and the uses for which they were intended.

IN the first place, it seems to be very clear, that none of these fortresses were built by the princes of Wales, as no considerable remains are to be found near any of those places where they are known to have fixed their residence, which they must have consequently endeavoured to have made particularly strong and secure.

THE palace of the Prince of North Wales was at Aberfraw; those of the Princes of Powisland, first at Pengwern, and afterwards at Mathraval.

THAT of the Princes of South Wales was first at Carmarthen, and afterwards at Dinevawr.

Now there are no remains either at Aberfraw, Pengwern, or Mathraval; and as for Carmarthen, Caradoc of Lancarvan informs us, that the Castle was twice destroyed, viz. in 1196, and 1216; Dinevawr castle was also rased in the year 1194. See Powel's History of Wales, page 244, 247, and 273.

IF it was not for this express mention of Dinevawr's being destroyed, I should be inclined to think, that its present remains might owe their
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origin to a Prince of S. Wales, as the castle is very small and inconsiderable; and if any vestiges continue of a fortress built by the Welsh themselves, I should imagine it to be those of Carndochen and Teberry, both in Merionethshire. The first of these is situated five miles S. W. of Bala on a high hill, and out of all track or road, so that it is scarcely known in that neighbourhood.

THE latter lies in a line from Dolgelly to Towen, upon a small eminence which rises in the middle of a valley. I conjecture these to have been built by the Welsh, not only because they are of a very inconsiderable size, but because this county was scarcely ever invaded by the English. They are, therefore, the only castles in it, except Harlech, which from its magnificence is clearly a work of later times.

I SHOULD add to these Castel Dinas-Bran in Denbighshire, was it not so near to the English frontier.

WHOEVER hath seen any of the more considerable castles in Wales, and hath at all reflected upon the state of the principality during the time it was governed by its own Princes, will immediately perceive other most cogent arguments, why the fortresses which remain at this day could scarcely have been built by the Welsh themselves.

CASTLES of any magnitude require money to pay the labourers; skill in masonry at least, if not in architecture; and lastly, a number of hands to complete such a work, none of which requisites were to be found in the principality during that period.

I HAVE never yet heard of a coin in any collection which had the head of a Welsh Prince, or could be considered in any respect as coming from his mint; they, therefore, wanted the very sinews of building.

As for skill in masonry, it is much doubted, whether the most expert of them at present can lay the courses of stones so regularly, or hew them so well, as those in many of the ancient castles.

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THIS, however, may be most confidently asserted, that the masons, during the reigns of the Lewellins and Rees's, were as incapable of executing stone work in so masterly a manner, as they would be at present of carving an elegant Corinthian capital. They will be found also to have been still more deficient in regard to the last most material requisite, of a proper number of workmen.

So thinly was the principality inhabited before the time of Edward the first, that the Welsh histories are totally silent with regard to any town in the most populous parts, or even near the residence of their Princes.

THE country was, therefore, not better peopled during this period, than the desarts and wildernesses of America.

To this it may be added, that they could not be assisted in such works by the English or Irish, as they had no trade or intercourse with either of these neighbouring nations. It may be doubted also, whether they had any agriculture.

THE want of inhabitants may be further proved by comparison with the number of people at present in the Welsh counties, which are as much improved in cultivation, as any other parts of the island; at least, I can see no difference, except in the management of their quickset fences, which are not equal to those in most parts of England.

It is unnecessary to say, therefore, that a country which is so much improved in its agriculture, which hath now considerable towns, and also some mines, must at the same time be better peopled; whilst they enjoy likewise in common with England the blessings of the most mild and perfect of governments.

I HAVE taken some pains to ascertain the present number of inhabitants in Anglesey, Carnarvonshire, and Merionethshire: though I cannot pretend to any precision or accuracy in this point, I am persuaded, that the souls (as the writers upon political arithmetic express themselves) of all ages, and both sexes, do not exceed 50,000. The labouring men, consequently, are not above 10,000.

I WILL mention the means which I have used to procure this information, as I know part of what I must state will give infinite satisfaction to your Lordship.

BESIDES inquiries from intelligent persons in different parts of the counties, I have applied to some of the clergy with regard to the number of communicants at the more solemn festivals, the people of the principality punctually attending these, as, indeed, they do every other religious duty.

As the women must be included in this method of numeration, and the age of communicants may in general be supposed the same with that of men capable of bearing arms, viz. from 20 to 60, I should conjecture, that the communicants may amount to two fifths of the number of souls, as the proportion of men between these ages is commonly calculated to be one fifth.

I TAKE the liberty likewise of here mentioning to your Lordship (though it hath no relation to the subject of this letter) that I have been informed there is not a single papist in these three counties, notwithstanding the present alarm with regard to the increase of popery.

HAVING thus endeavoured to shew the probability that the Welsh castles were not built by the princes of that country; I shall hazard a conjecture, that all the more considerable ones were the works of Edward the first; I shall at the same time allow, that perhaps some of the less important ones were fortresses of the Lords Marchers, or grantees of the crown.

WE know with certainty that those of Conway, Beaumaris, and Carnarvon, owe their origin to this king; and, if I am right in what I have supposed, many others are equally to be ascribed to him.

BEFORE his time, the state of both civil and military architecture was at a very low ebb; but it should seem that Edward the first had brought with him from the Crusade plans of fortresses erected by
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the Christians in that part of Asia, which was then contested with the Mahometans.

DURING the seasons when it was improper to carry on the operations of a campaign, that most numerous army collected from all parts of Europe could have been in no way so well employed, as in raising strong fortifications to protect the Christian frontier [*a*].

I SUPPOSE that this king had seen such castles in Asia; for I cannot hear on inquiry, that any of the same kind are to be found in other parts of Europe; nor does Pouffin, or the other great painters of landscape, make use of them, though so very picturesque objects.

EDWARD was three years on this Crusade, at a proper age to make remarks of this sort; and no other King of Europe was ever on the same expedition, who had either taste to carry what he had seen into execution, or ever had occasion, or the means, to erect such expensive and magnificent fortresses.

As for Richard the first, his long captivity in his return from the Holy Land prevented his undertaking any works of this kind; besides this, he had not conquered such a country as Wales, which might require fortifications of any consequence.

As for Saint Lewis, though he made a Crusade, yet he seems to have thought of little more than counting his beads, or perhaps seeing the holy sepulchre, in common with the other pilgrims of that time: he died also on the expedition.

[*a*] Fuller, in his account of the holy wars, expressly mentions the building of many fortifications in Asia by the Christians: “And now the Christians began every where to build (sc. anno 1192); the Templars fortified Gaza; King Richard repaired and walled Ptolemais, Porphyra, Joppa, and Ascalon.” B. iii. c. 2. See also B. iv. c. 8. where elegance in Richard’s buildings in Palestine is also mentioned. Fuller’s authority for this seems to be a Willielmus Tyrensis, who was Treasurer to a subsequent Crusade, and Archbishop of Tyre.

EDWARD the first, however, meant not only to conquer in the cause of Christianity, but to make use of the military knowledge he had acquired during the Crusade, in acquisitions to the crown of England.

As the annexing Wales to the English dominions was deservedly his first and most favourite object, he was determined not only to acquire the principality by his armies led by himself in person, but to secure it by a strong chain of forts.

For this purpose he continued a whole year in North Wales (as Prynne [b] hath irrefragably proved); during which time he must have employed his large army, and numerous garrisons, in carrying on these fortifications, as the principality in its then state of population could not have furnished labourers.

He must likewise have had able engineers with him to execute such plans, as also some master masons from England.

WHEN he had built these magnificent structures, he could not but wish, like most improvers of more modern times, that they should be admired by others: it was for this reason, I am persuaded, he sent for his Queen; I have also little doubt, but that every good English courtier visited the principality, and properly commended the royal architecture.

HAVING thus attempted to shew, that most of the considerable castles of Wales owe their origin to Edward the first; however ignorant I may be of what relates to military operations, I shall, nevertheless, take the liberty of a common traveller, who hath seen almost every one of those fortresses, to make such observations as have occurred to me with regard to the use of them, as also what seems to have fixed most of their situations.

[b] See his Animadversions on Sir Edward Coke's IVth Inst. pag. 57.

THE castles upon the more extensive plans are almost universally either upon the sea coast, or not far from the mouths of great rivers, or arms of the sea.

SUCH expensive fortifications secured the landing of English troops, which could not be marched through the inland parts, both from frequent attacks in the passes of the mountains, as also from want of provisions.

THE Kings of England, therefore, when they passed through, or invaded either North or South Wales, always kept near to the sea coast, except in the unfortunate expedition of Henry the second, who attempted to march his army over the Berwin mountains, which was consequently defeated, and nearly destroyed by cold and famine.

WE found, in the late war, the great difficulty and expence of marching four or five thousand men to Lake Champlain or Oswego; and Wales was, perhaps, a still less practicable country, in the 12th or 13th centuries.

THE reason of these castles being sometimes built at small distances seems to be owing to a want of reciprocal assistance in case of an attack by the Welsh, who, having no fleet, could not interrupt the communication by sea.

THUS, for example, the garrisons of Carnarvon, Beaumaris, and Conway, could at any time send supplies of provisions or men by the Menay, to the fortrefs which apprehended an attack.

THE less important castles are to be found generally on the marches which divided England from Wales; and it was not necessary for the English to build them upon so extensive a scale, as assistance was so near at hand in case of an attack. The Welsh likewise were not provided with any military engines, or means of forming a regular siege: it is to the use of formidable battering trains of artillery, that we owe the expensive plans of a Cohorn or a Vauban. The castles of Edward the first were rather
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calculated for parade and ornament, than for a necessary security against the enterprizes of such an enemy as the Welsh.

BESIDES these fortresses on the frontier, there are a good number of castles both in Glamorganshire and Pembrokehire, which are neither on the sea coast, nor on the confines of England.

THE first of these were probably built by the descendants of the twelve knights adventurers, who conquered that county under Fitzhammon, in the time of William Rufus.

THOSE in Pembrokehire by the descendants of the Flemings, who were sent there in the reign of Henry the first; I say, by the descendants, because on their first settling there they could not have had a sufficient number of hands to carry on such works. Whatever they might have been when first completed, we find mention in Caradoc's history of most of the castles in both these counties being destroyed.

IT should follow from what I have been thus endeavouring to prove, that the central parts of Wales, being the counties inhabited by the Welsh themselves after the English conquests, should have scarcely any castles at all; if any one, therefore, will draw a line from Cowbridge in Glamorganshire, to Denbigh, he will find this to be the case. I have fixed upon these two towns, as being each of them about ten miles from the sea coast, and lying nearly North and South.

I THINK I could account for almost every castle in each county, upon these principles; but this would lead me to a very tedious enumeration, and I fear that I am already scarcely intelligible without the assistance of a map of the principality.

BUT it may be said, that these conjectures are contrary to the Welsh histories, which mention castles, that were the works of the Welsh and English, before the reign of Edward the first.

THAT such might have been built, there can be no dispute; but if by the Welsh, I am confident, they could have been little more than

than a fortification of fods ; or if by the English, previous to that time, they must still have been very inconsiderable. If this kind of military architecture had been brought to any degree of perfection in the reign of Henry the second, would not that king have secured his conquest of Ireland by such fortresses ?

I SHALL not here repeat what I have already urged on these two heads ; but with regard to the supposition of large castles being built by the English Lord Marchers or adventurers, I must observe, that it was a fundamental rule of policy in the crown of England, not to permit its powerful vassals to erect fortifications of a considerable strength. They were not wanted against the Welsh, and, therefore, could be only used against the crown : I may add also to this, that a Lord Marcher was not equal to the expence.

I MUST likewise observe, that it by no means follows, because Caradoc of Lancarvan mentions a castle having been built before the time of Edward the first, remains of which, bearing the same name, continue at this day, that these are the ruins of that identical one which he gives an account of.

THE fortress may have been so much repaired as to become a new one, or it may have been entirely rebuilt at a small distance. The castles of Flint and Rhydland were thus refortified and augmented by Edward the first.

I PRETEND to no greater knowledge in the Welsh language than having picked up the names of the principal objects that have occurred on the road ; I can, however, from the etymology of a word, shew a probable conjecture, that a castle may have changed its situation, though not its name.

It seems to be generally agreed, that Pengwern, where the Princes of Powisland are said to have had a palace, is the same with Shrewsbury.

Now Pengwern signifies high land, or a promontory which projects into a morass ; and this is by no means applicable to the situation of Shrewsbury at present.

BUT there is no occasion to decline the authority of the great Welsh historian ; if he raises a castle in one page, he often destroys it in the next ; in short, in the early times, they were easily built and easily thrown down. Every page almost of Caradoc's history furnishes proofs of this.

I SHALL, however particularize the instance of Caerphyli castle, as I had the honour of a conversation with your Lordship on this head, which hath, indeed, been the occasion of my troubling you with these observations.

THIS is, perhaps, the most considerable fortress in the principality ; and therefore should be, according to what I have already presumed to conjecture,

“ ——— Regis opus,”

and of no other king than the conqueror of Wales.

CARADOC informs us, that Rees Prees raised the castle of Sengenneth in the year 1221 ; he likewise mentions, that it was re-fortified two years afterwards by John le Bruse [c]. Now I will refer it to any one who hath ever seen these magnificent ruins, whether a Prince of S. Wales could take such a fortress as the remains shew it to have been. I am persuaded he would not have pulled it down even in the compass of two years, as he had neither gunpowder nor battering rams to use against it, which Sir Christopher Wren was obliged to employ in demolishing the old cathedral of Saint Paul's.

MUCH less could a Lord Marcher re-fortify it in that time.

As it is, therefore, clear from Caradoc's authority, that this castle was raised and re-fortified within the compass of two years, during the reign of Henry the third, I conclude that it was a very common and insignificant fortress.

WHEN then could this vast structure be built, but in the reign of Henry's successor ? who meant to give South Wales a specimen

[c] See Powel's History of Wales, p. 278 and 271.

of his magnificent architecture, as he had already done in North Wales, by building the castles of Carnarvon, Beaumaris, and Conway [*d*].

IF it be said, that it cannot be supposed the Welsh history would be silent on this head, my answer is, that Caradoc only mentions this king's having built the castle of Beaumaris, without taking notice of either Carnarvon or Conway, which we know with the greatest certainty to have been works of Edward the first.

I MAY add to this, by way of strengthening the conjecture, that this king once returned from North Wales by the sea coast through South Wales, and proceeded thence to Bristol, though I cannot immediately recollect the authority which I can refer to for this.

IT is, therefore, highly probable, that in this progress he might pass the Taf at a ford near Caerphily (as I conclude there was then no bridge or ferry at Cardyf), and might at the same time have fixed the situation of that castle, the ruins of which are still so magnificent and stupendous.

BUT it may possibly be urged, that some of these considerable fortresses were built by the successors of Edward the first; to which I answer, that the Kings of England seem to have paid very little attention of any kind to the principality after its conquest, till the reign of Henry the eighth: Dr. Powel's continuation of its history till that period does not fill above twenty pages.

[*d*] “ So well founded is the conjecture, that Edward the first built what now
“ remains of the present castle of Caerphily, that Mr. Miller of Warwickshire,
“ one of the best architects and antiquaries now living, pronounced it the work of
“ that Prince several years ago, before it was known that Caerphily and Sengen-
“ neth were the same, and when this vast structure was generally esteemed a Roman
“ work.”

The late Bishop of Carlisle was so obliging as to add this confirmation of my conjectures since the letter had the honour of being communicated to the Society of Antiquaries.

SOME antiquaries have likewise attributed many of these structures to the Romans.

WITH regard to this supposition, it may be said, that such castles might chiefly have been expected near Chester and Caerleon, as those were the most fixed and eminent stations for the Roman legions.

Now I cannot observe, that any of the fortresses, near either of these places, differ materially in their architecture from those which are known to be the works of much later times. If any considerable castles likewise in Great Britain had been the works of the Romans, we must undoubtedly have found some remains of them at proper intervals near Severus's wall; but I never happened to hear of such.

BESIDES this, it must be considered, that the Roman garrisons both in Germany and Gaul were precisely in the same situation that they were in England, being equally surrounded by the natives, who occasionally rose against them.

Now I have often inquired from travellers, whether they had ever seen in France or Germany castles like those in Wales, and have always been answered in the negative.

It is undoubtedly true, however, that the Romans raised *oppida* (generally translated Castles) in almost every part of their empire, against the incursions of the barbarians.

PROCOPIUS hath a particular treatise "*De Aedificiis Justiniani*," and enumerates upwards of 500.

As there are no remains of these fortresses, it should seem, that when the Romans built a temple or amphitheatre, they not only considered magnificence but duration; any hasty fortification was, however, deemed sufficient against barbarians, and therefore we have no traces of them at present.

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It is high time, however, that I should release your Lordship from this tedious length of letter, and subscribe myself

Your Lordship's

Most faithful humble servant,

DAINES BARRINGTON.

P. S. It may, perhaps, surprize your Lordship, who are so conversant in every thing which relates to British antiquities, that I have not taken any notice of the remains of that magnificent castle called Braich y Dhinias, said to be on the top of Penmanmawr.

As this is mentioned in the additions to Bishop Gibson's translation of the Britannia, I have frequently made inquiries concerning it; and have always been answered, that there are no traces of any such structure.

I REMEMBER particularly to have desired my brother Dr. Barrington, and Mr. Holland of Conway, who went to the top of this mountain some years ago in search of plants, to observe whether there were any such remains. They could find, however, neither castle nor plant; nor any thing the least remarkable, except a common *carnedd* or heap of stones.

ANOTHER supposed wonder of this mountain I must beg leave to contradict on my own knowledge. It is universally believed in that neighbourhood, that wild lemons grow near the summit of Penmanmawr. I once happened to procure a branch of this extraordinary shrub, and it turned out to be the "*Sorbus Sylvestris*," or quick beam tree of Gerard, which is not very uncommon in mountainous countries; the fruit, indeed, somewhat resembles a young and unripe lemon.