

THE FOUR BRANCHES OF THE MABINOGL.

Chapter IV. **Their structure.**

(Continued.)

In their present arrangement and with their present divisions the 'Four Branches of the Mabinogi' form a unified whole, worked together with considerable skill by a writer to whom the materials seem to have been thoroughly familiar from frequent narration. This writer seems to have been well acquainted with some of the leading local legends especially of Gwynedd, Dyfed and Gwent on the one hand, and, on the other, with stories and triads of the isle of Britain. Of the stories in question of the 'Ynys Prydain' type we have specimens in 'Lludd a Llevelys' and 'Breuddwyd Macsen Wledig'. In the 'Four Branches' we find that the first and the fourth branches consist very largely of local legends, while the second and the third contain, in the stories of the Llyr-cycle, a narrative which has many affinities with stories of the 'Lludd a Llevelys' and 'Macsen Wledig' types. The story of the Llyr-family here given, contains indeed some local allusions to certain parts of Wales, but, as it is a story concerning the family of a 'brenhin coronawc ar yr ynys honn', its scene ranges over the whole of 'Ynys y Kedyrn' and implies relations of the isle of Britain with Ireland and France. Similarly, the geographical area implied in the narrative is much wider, in the case of such stories as 'Macsen Wledig' and 'Lludd a Llevelys', than in the case of more narrowly local legends such as those of Pryderi and Gwydion. It is clear, too, that the mind

of the writer of the 'Four Branches' in their present form is dominated by ideas derived from the Feudal system of the Anglo-Norman period and the personages who play prominent parts in these stories come to be grouped in relation to one another accordingly. Thus, while Bendigeitvrn fab Llyr is a 'brenhin coronawc', Pwyll, Pryderi, Teyrnnon and Math ab Mathonwy are, in the final form of the narrative, only 'arglwyddi'; who may on occasion have to do homage (hebrŏng gŏrogaeth) to the ruling king. The legends concerning the 'arglwyddi' in question have a more purely local colouring than those concerning the royal families of Llyr and Caswallawn fab Beli. For some reason or other the Mabinogi refers to no lord of any portion of Powys, and thus we have in it no Powys legends of the Dyfed or the Gwynedd type. This may possibly have been accidental, for the Mabinogi in its final form does not ignore the existence of Powys, There appears to be a similar accidental absence of any reference to Rhiannon in the Book of Taliessin, for it is difficult to believe that poets so familiar with the Pwyll, Manawyddan, Pryderi, Gwydion and other legends should not have known the name which seems to have been familiar enough at any rate in the expression 'Adar Rhiannon'. Powys was not entirely ignored by the composer of the Mabinogi in its final form, as testified by the expressions 'Kymŏt ym Powys a elwir Mochnant' and 'minheu a baraf . . . dygyuori Gwyned a Phowys a Deheubarth y geissaŏ y uorŏyn'. In like manner, too, it would be rash to infer that the omission of the Taliessin legends from the Mabinogi implies ignorance of them on the part of their final composer, for Taliessin is mentioned as one of the seven men who carried the head of Bendigeitvrn to London. Nevertheless the fact remains that the districts whose local legends seem to have been most clearly incorporated in these stories are Dyfed, Gwent and Gwynedd, and these clusters of legends, that were closely connected in the mind of their narrator with certain definite localities, may, for the purpose of this article, be called respectively legends of the Rhiannon and the Don-cycles. It should be noted that some of these localities are definitely named while others such as 'Llyn y Morwynion' near Festiniog (alluded to in the Mabinogi of Math ab Mathonwy) are tacitly implied.

In order to bring out as clearly as possible the contrast between the Rhiannon-cycle, the Don-cycle and the Llyr-cycle

in the Mabinogi a general analysis is here given of these respective legendary cycles into their probable component legends with special reference to their topographical allusions.

1. The Rhiannon-cycle.

The Rhiannon-cycle as contained in the 'Four Branches' may be broadly analysed into the following component parts.

a) The story of the meeting and marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon (related in Pwyll, Pendefig Dyfed) and the subsequent vengeance of Gwawl fab Clut, on whose behalf Llwyt fab Kil coet lays Dyfed under a spell (Yr hud ar Ddyfed). This latter story, the sequel to that of the marriage of Pwyll and Rhiannon is given in the third branch of the Mabinogi, Manawyddan fab Llyr.

b) The story of the birth, loss, discovery and restoration of Pryderi, together with an account of Rhiannon's punishment for her supposed murder of her own child.

c) The story of the fosterage of Pryderi by Pendaran Dyfed. In the Mabinogi there is but a brief and passing allusion to this story.

d) The story of the marriage of Pryderi to Kicua. Here again the Mabinogi affords but a fugitive suggestion of the local affinities of this story.

e) The story of the second marriage of Rhiannon to Manawyddan fab Llyr.

f) The story of Pryderi's death (given in Math ab Mathonwy). To this story the account given in 'Pwyll Pendefig Dyfed' of the growth of friendly relations between Pwyll and Arawn may be considered as forming a prelude. To these stories of the Rhiannon-cycle may be added the passing allusion to the birds of Rhiannon, mentioned in Branwen ferch Llyr.

On taking these stories and carefully scrutinising them, the following appear to be their main topographical affinities. The narrative (a) is mainly associated with Arberth and the surrounding district. Arberth is doubtless the modern Narberth in Pembrokeshire; Arberth being the form of the name still in use among the Welsh-speaking inhabitants of the district. Then again, the story of Llwyt fab Kil coet, represented in the story of Manawyddan as a bishop, was no doubt associated in the

narrator's mind with the place now known in English as Ludchurch, but in Welsh as 'Eglwys Lwyd', not far from Narberth. Not far distant, too, is the stream called the 'Cilgoed'. These facts must be taken into account in any identification of Llwyt fab Kil Coet (in Manawyddan fab Llyr) or Llwyteu fab Kelcoet (in Kilhwch and Olwen) with the Liath mac Celtchair of Irish legend. Furthermore, in the reference to the story called 'Mabinogi Mynweir a Mynord' there is not improbably an allusion to Minwear near Narberth. It will be noted that Rhiannon herself is not represented as a native of Dyfed, for it is said of Pwyll and Rhiannon after their marriage at the court of Eueyd Hen — 'wynt a gerdassant trannoeth part a dyuet' (Oxford Mab. p. 17). Whether in the account of Heveyd there is any implied reference to Maesyfed = Maes Hyveyd, it is impossible to say, for the story affords no clue.

In b) we have, in the story of Pryderi's birth and Rhiannon's punishment, a reference to Presseleu in Dyfed, (possibly, as Professor Rhys has suggested, some spot near the Precelly range of mountains), where the nobles of Dyfed desire Pwyll to divorce Rhiannon for want of issue, and to Arberth, where Pryderi is born. In the account of Pryderi's restoration the narrator refers to the district of Gwent-is-coed, between Newport and Chepstow in Monmouthshire. Teyrnnon Twrf Vliant was doubtless connected in his mind with Nant Teyrnnon, now known as Llantarnam, in this district. Why Pryderi should be associated in the Mabinogi with this locality it is difficult to say. Possibly legends were current in Gwent which treated Rhiannon (Rigantona) as the female partner of Teyrnnon (Tiger-nonos). The identification of Pryderi with G6ri (or G6are, see Kilhwch and Olwen) Wallt Euryn may have been an after-thought. Apart from any question of local allusion, it should be noted that the story of the loss of Pryderi is closely associated in the narrator's mind with the derivation of the name from pryder, *anxiety*.

In c) we have but a meagre reference to a personage about whom legends may have been very plentiful at one time in Dyfed. The story of the fosterage of Pryderi by Pendaran Dyfed was probably much more important than we should imagine it to be from the Mabinogi; for example, the Triad referring to 'Tri Gwrdd feichiad Ynys Prydain' speaks of

Pryderi as the swineherd of his foster-father Pendaran Dyfed in Glyn Cwch (= Cuch) in Emlyn. To this story the Mabinogi does not even allude.

In d) the relation of Kicua, the wife of Pryderi, to *Gloy6* Wallt Lydan, her grandfather, according to the Mabinogi of Pwyll, suggests that into the original legend *Gloy6* the eponymous founder of *Caer Loyw* (Gloucester) entered. The story of Pryderi's connection with *Gloyw* may possibly be a fragment of the *Gwent* cluster of legends concerning *Gwri Wallt Eurnyn*, afterwards identified with Pryderi. Owing to the meagreness of the narrative one can only conjecture this connexion, but it is noteworthy that *Caerloyw* did not lie outside the purview of Welsh local legend, as we see from the story of *Kilhwch and Olwen*.

In e), the story of the second marriage of Rhiannon with *Manawyddan*, there seem to be no special local allusions which might help to suggest its origin. In *Branwen ferch Llŷr*, the three birds of Rhiannon are connected with *Hardlech*, but whether the local legends of that place spoke of Rhiannon as the wife of *Manawyddan* son of *Llŷr*, it is impossible to say. The story of Rhiannon's second marriage is not unlike an attempt to reconcile two divergent accounts of her wedded life (Vid. Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, Vol. II, p. 16. 17), but it may after all be a mere invention of the narrator in order to give sequence to the narrative.

The story f) is the connecting link between the legends of the Rhiannon-cycle and those of the Don-cycle, so far as the Four Branches are concerned, though, from the fact that the birds of Rhiannon were associated with *Hardlech* and the grave of Pryderi was shewn at *Maentwrog*, we may well suppose that there were current other Rhiannon legends, which formed similar links. This narrative, as given in the Mabinogi, is rich in local allusions. Several of these allusions are to place-names containing the word 'moch', and some of them are not introduced in a very relevant or natural manner. The prelude in Pwyll, to which reference has already been made, mentions *Arberth*, *Pen llwyn Diarwya* and *Glyn Cuch*. *Pen llwyn Diarwya* has not yet been identified with certainty, but it may possibly be another name for *Pen llwyn gaer*, which lies a little to the east of *Llanboidy*, a place through which Pwyll might naturally pass on his way from *Arberth* to *Glyn Cuch*. In the portion of this

story given in 'Math ab Mathonwy', reference is made to a court belonging to Pryderi at 'Rudlan Teiui', a place corresponding, according to the Ordnance Survey Map, to Highmead near Llanybyther, Cardiganshire, the house of the present Lord Lieutenant of the country. Rhuddlan Teifi was known by that name in contrast to Rhuddlan Tegeingl, the better known Rhuddlan on the river Clwyd. In the narrative of Gwydion's flight with the swine into Gwynedd, the local allusions appear to be the following. 'Mochnant yg g6arthaf keredigyawn' is probably one of the two streams known as Nant y Moch to the West of Plinlimon. 'Elenit' is the range of mountains between Cardiganshire and Radnorshire, to which Giraldus Cambrensis makes several references in his Itinerary. Mochtre, between Keri and Arwystli is the place now called Moughtre, a little to the east of Llandinam, Montgomeryshire. Mochnant in Powys is familiar in the name Llanrhaiadr-yn-Mochnant. Mochtre in Rhos now forms with Pabo the station called 'Mochdre and Pabo' on the Chester and Holyhead Railway. Creuwyrion ('y dref uchaf yn Arllechwedd') is the place now generally known as Cororion in the name 'Llyn Cororion', not far from the Bethesda Slate Quarry district. Caer Dathyl, also known as Caer Dathal (as in Cynddelw Brydydd Mawr), has not yet been identified with certainty. It is clear from the Mabinogi that it was located in Arvon. Pennard and Coet Alun are the modern Penardd and Coed Helen (a mistake for Coed Alun) respectively. Nant call should be Nant coll and Dol penn maen is still familiar in the name Garn Dolbenmaen, not far from Portmadoc. Y Traeth Mawr is still the name of one of the two beaches from which Penrhyndeudraeth derives its name, and y Felenrhyd is still the name of a farm near Maentwrog, the beautiful valley on the river Cynwal, in the Mabinogi mis-called 'y maen tyuya6c'.

2. The Don-cycle.

The stories of the Don-cycle seem to have been chiefly, if not entirely, connected, in the mind of the narrator of the Mabinogi, with the districts of Arvon (possibly also Arllechwedd) and Dunoding, containing Eifionydd and Arduwy. The following is a broad classification of these narratives.

a) The story of Giluaethwy's love for Goewin and the subsequent vengeance of Math ab Mathonwy.

b) The story of Gwydion's introduction of swine into Gwynedd, already given under the Rhiannon-cycle.

c) The story of the birth of Dylan eil ton.

d) The story of the birth of Llew Llaw Gyffes and Lleu son of Aranrot.

e) The story of Gwydion's success in obtaining for Lleu a name, arms and a wife. The legend describing the formation of Blodeuwedd, Llew's wife, out of flowers appears to have been an account of one out of many successes in sorcery attributed to Math ab Mathonwy and his magic wand called in the Book of Taliessin 'Hutlath Vathonwy'. Portions of the story, too, are pieces of old folk-lore explaining the peculiar appearance and habits of the owl.

f) The story of the infidelity of Lleu's wife with Gronw Peifr, lord of Penllyn, and the treacherous death of Lleu with his subsequent vengeance upon Gronw.

Taking these stories in order, we find that in a) the places to which reference is made are Caer Dathyl, the centre of Math's administration, and Dol pebin, the home of Goewin, now known in the district as Dol bebi. It may be noted that there is a place of the same name (similarly pronounced) in Arduwyl, not far from Harlech, but no connexion between the two places has been hitherto traced. This narrative is interesting as containing an old *englyn* of the *triban* type referring to 'bleidwn', 'hydwn' and 'hychtwn'. In the Mabinogi in its present form this story is closely connected with the story of Pryderi's death. This may not have been originally the case, but it was probably closely connected with the narrative of the birth of Dylan eil ton.

Of b) enough has been already discussed under the Rhiannon-cycle. It is probably one out of many stories at one time current to explain the introduction of swine into Gwynedd.

In c) the story of the birth of Dylan eil ton, we have only a fragment of a large mass of legend. In the narrator's mind, the story of Dylan was doubtless closely connected with the grave of Dylan, which was, according to 'Englynion y Beddau', in Llanbeuno, in Clynnog, and also with the headland called Maen Dylan which juts out into the sea close by.

In d) we have the first of a group of stories connected

with Lleu, not improbably, as Professor Rhys has pointed out in his 'Celtic Heathendom', the same as the Irish Lug and the Gaulish Lugus of Lugudunum. In connection with this story the original narrator had in mind certain spots in Arvon into which the name of Lleu entered, viz. Dinlle = Din Lleu and Nantlle = Nant Lleu. Gwydion is similarly thought of in connection with the place still known as Bryn-y-gwydion in Arvon. In this district, too, the graves of Gwydion and Lleu were shewn. The exact spot meant by *Caer Aranrot* is uncertain, and the same uncertainty exists in the case of *Cefn Cllutno*, but Bryn Aryen (also called in 'Englynion of Beddau' Bryn Aren) may possibly be the present Bryn Eura, now a farm near Clynog. For the loss of 'n' one may compare the local pronunciation *Dol bebi* for *Dol bebin*. The story here given, it should be noted, implies a reference to a triad which names Gwydion as one of 'Tri Eurgydd Ynys Prydain'.

In f), the story of the infidelity of Lleu's wife, the scene changes to the districts of *Trawsfynydd* and *Festiniog*. The references are to *Mur y castell* near *Trawsfynydd*, probably the present 'Tomen y Mur'; to *Bryn Cyfergyr* near *Festiniog*, now known as *Bryn Cyfergyd* and explained locally as *Bryn Cyfer Ergyd*; and to *Llech Gronw*, a large pierced stone once visible near the river *Cynwal*, less accurately called in the present version of the 'Four Branches', *Cynuael*. One of the most important spots, however, which the narrator had in view while writing is not expressly mentioned, viz. *Llyn y Morwynion* near *Blaenau Festiniog*. This story like that of the vengeance of *Math* upon *Gwydion* and *Giluaethwy* is of interest as containing specimens of old 'tribanau', the spelling of which shews that they were written originally in an orthography similar to that of the *Venedotian Code* of the Welsh Laws.

3. The Llyr-cycle.

The stories of the *Rhiannon-cycle* and the *Don-cycle* refer, in the *Four Branches* in their present form, to the families of 'arglwyddi' and to certain places within their supposed domains. The *Llyr* story, on the other hand, is given as an account of the members of the family of a 'brenhin coronawc' and naturally the scope of its topography is much wider. The stories of the

Llyr-cycle, as they are given in the Mabinogi, may be broadly classified as follows:

a) The story of 'Y Trydyd Anfat Palfawt' beginning with an account of the marriage of Branwen and describing her ill-treatment in Ireland. Branwen is here called 'tryded prif riein yn yr ynys honn'.

b) The story of 'Yspadawt Bran' when he went over to Ireland to avenge the insult to his sister.

c) The story of 'Yspadawt Urdawl Benn', containing an account of the adventures of the men who bore the head of Bendigeitfran to London. Here again the narrative is connected with triads: 'a h6nn6 uu y trydyd mat cud pan cudywyt, a'r trydyd anuat datcud pan datcudywyt; kany doey ormes byth dr6y vor yr ynys honn tra uei y penn yn y cud h6nn6'. In this narrative several stories have probably been fused together.

d) The story of the mischief-making Efnissyen, a kind of Welsh Bricriu, closely interwoven with the other stories of this branch of the Mabinogi.

e) The story of the conflict for the sovereignty of the isle of Britain between Caradawc fab Bran and Caswallawn fab Beli.

f) The story of the death of Branwen.

g) The story of the settlement of the five provinces of Ireland.

h) The story explaining the place-names having reference to 'Gwyddel' and 'Gwyddyl' in Anglesey and elsewhere.

i) The story of the term 'Trydydd Lleddf Unben' as applied to Manawyddan fab Llyr.

j) The story of the appellation 'y Trydydd Eurgrydd' as applied to Manawyddan fab Llyr.

k) The story of Manawyddan's relations with Pryderi and Rhiannon.

In a) the main story implies relations between the Isle of Britain as a whole with Ireland as a whole through their ruling families. It is significant, too, that the purely local allusions are to Aberffraw and Talebolion in Anglesey. At the time when this story was formed Aberffraw was doubtless at the height of its glory as the seat of the chief court of the Gwynedd princes. In the Mabinogi of Branwen there are references to two other places in Wales connected with the

government of the Llyr family, viz. Hardlech yn Ardudwy, where Bendigeitvrán is said to have had a 'llys', and Kaer Seint yn Aruon, where he held a 'dadleu'. For the term 'dadleu', one may compare 'a dadleu brenhined a oed arnað diwarnaut', said of Maxen Wledig. It is doubtful whether the introductory reference to Hardlech found a place in the original story of 'Palfawt Branwen'. The local allusions which connect Branwen closely with Anglesey seem to suggest forcibly that the story of her life was especially popular at the court of Aberffraw.

In b) we have a fragment of what was probably at one time a much longer story. Apart from the reference to Bendigeitvrán and his 'dadleu' at Caer Seint yn Arfon, a place which tends to figure very prominently in the 'Ynys Prydain' stories, there are no allusions to definite and clearly identifiable places. The rivers Lli, Archan and Llinon were probably mentioned in the older 'cyfarwydyt', but the narrator of the Mabinogi in its present form seems to have felt some difficulty in locating them. These stories which deal with adventures in Ireland are clearly of a different type from those in which the narrator has before his mind's eye certain definite Welsh localities. The form which the story of 'Yspadawt Bran' took probably varied a great deal with different narrators. For example, the reference in the Book of Taliessin, Poem XIV, seems to imply that the death of Mordwyt Tyllion played a very prominent part in the story, whereas in Branwen ferch Llyr the only reference to him is in the words 'Ac yna y dywaot mordôyd tyllion — Gwern gôngôch uioch uordwyt tyllion'.

In c), the story of Yspadawt Urdawl Benn we have also, not improbably, only fragments of a much longer and fuller narrative. The spots named as the halting-places of the bearers of Bendigeitvrán's head seem to suggest that, in its original form, the story was that of a voyage or Imram. For example, the bearers of the head stay at Hardlech and proceed thence to 'Gwalas ym Penuro', i. e. the island of Gresholm, off the coast of Pembrokeshire. The reference to the bride of Rhiannon at Harlech is interesting as apparently connecting the Rhiannon story with that place. It is noticeable that, according to Poem XIV of the Book of Taliessin, an 'yspydawt' was held at 'ebyr henvelen':

Keint yn yspya6t uch g6ira6t aflawen,
Keint rac meibon Llyr in ebyr henvelen.

The final resting-place of Bendigeitvran's head, according to this story, is 'y Gwynfryn yn Llundain'. London, it need scarcely be said, tends to figure very prominently in all the 'Ynys Prydain' stories.

In d) we have probably only a few out of many instances of the mischief wrought by Efnissyen. There appear to be no points of special topographical interest connected with him.

In e) the Mabinogi gives us but a short account of what must have been a much longer and fuller story, viz. the passing of the sovereignty of Britain from the hands of the family of Bran into the hands of the family of Beli. In the stories of Branwen, Lludd and Llevelys, and Maccsen Wledig, the island of Britain is represented as being, successively, in the hands of the families of Bran, Beli and Maccsen. It is interesting to note, too, that all these stories agree in giving prominence to Carnarvon and the neighbouring district, though the town itself is not expressly mentioned in Lludd a Llevelys. So far as the conflict of Caradawc and Caswallawn has reference to Wales, the narrator seems to be pre-occupied with the district of 'Seith Marchawc' in Edeyrnion, where there is still a place known as 'Bryn Saith Marchog' near Gwyddelwern. It would appear that legends about Bran were prevalent in the neighbouring districts. Near Llangollen there is a conspicuous ruin still known as Castell Dinas Bran, while a portion of the Llangollen district itself is called Dinbran. On the other side of Gwyddelwern, too, there is a lake near Nantglyn called Llymbran (i. e. Llyn Bran), from which a stream called the Brenig (apparently a diminutive of Bran) flows.

In f) we have a story connected with Glan Alaw and Aber Alaw in Talebolion in Anglesey, where a grave, said to be that of Branwen, was shewn.

In g) we have a story which has naturally no Welsh local allusions. The story classed as h) implies that it is the explanation of certain facts with regard to the population of Britain, in the words, 'pa del6, argl6yd, yd erbynneist ti 6ynt6y. Eu rannu ym pob lle yn y kyuoeth, ac y maent yn lluossa6c ac yn dyrchael ym pob lle, ac yn kadarnhau yn y uann y bont o wyr ac arueu goreu a welas neb'. It is not improbable that

the narrator had here in view the place-names which contain the word Gwyddel, and among them, doubtless, that of Gwyddelwern. For a list of these place-names and their distribution, see Basil Jones, *Vestiges of the Gael in Gwynedd*, pp. 35, 36, 37.

In the stories classed as i) and j) we have references to the triads of 'Trydydd lleddf unben' and 'Trydydd Eurgydd Ynys Prydain' respectively. Some of the local allusions in these stories are to well known places in England such as Oxford, Kent and Hereford.

To the story k) reference has already been made under the Rhiannon-cycle. In addition to the points to which reference has already been made, it may be noted that it is in the stories of the Llyr-cycle alone that we find references to Kymry, Lloegyr, and Ynys y Kedyrn, Iwerdon and Freinc. These indications are alone sufficient to shew that the Llyr-cycle belongs to a different type of narrative from that of the Rhiannon-cycle or the Don-cycle. In many respects it approximates closely to the 'Lludd a Llevelys' and the 'Macsén Wledig' stories.

Aberystwyth.

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