

Sir Gawain's Coat of Arms

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## MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

### HUNUIL-UNWINE-UNWEN.

See *M. L. R.* XIV, p. 1.

Perhaps one of the deeds by which Unwine-Unwen won his fame was a single combat with Attila. A far-off echo of this may be contained in the following passage from the Romance of Waldef, in *T. C. D. MS. E. 5. 20* (Cat. No. 632 and 1704), of the fifteenth century, printed by Mr J. G. Smyly in No. XLI of *Hermathena*, p. 242: 'Eo tempore [i.e. after Arthur] surrexit in Northfolchia quidam rex dictus Attalus; in Suthfolchia vero surrexit rex Vnwyn vocatus, rex Thetfordiae, qui pugnavit cum Attala certamine singulari. Sed hii quidem concordēs effecti sunt, nemine mediante.'

The connection of Unwine with Attila might have partly arisen from Jordanes, *Getica*, xiv (ed. Holder, p. 18): 'Ostrogotha autem genuit Hunuin [Mommsen, *Hunuil*], Hunuin item genuit Athal...'

CYRIL BRETT.

CARDIFF.

### SIR GAWAIN'S COAT OF ARMS.

In the Romance of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, ll. 619-20 the blazoning of Sir Gawayne's shield is given as follows: on a field gules, in one half of the shield a golden pentangle; in the other half the Virgin Mary, the 'hende heven quene.' The author continues, ll. 648-50... 'the knight had in comely fashion in the larger half of his shield her image depicted, so that when he looked on it his courage failed never.'

It has been shown by Miss Weston that the 'Beheading Game' in *G. G. K.* ll. 279-456 and ll. 2239-2368, has been borrowed from the *Fled Bricrend* (pub. Irish Text Soc., ed. Henderson, 1899), where

Conchubar MacNessa = King Arthur.  
Cuchullain = Gawayne.

The *Fled Bricrend* (Bricriu's Feast) is an account of the strife caused by Bricriu of the Poison Tongue between the three heroes of Ulster at the court of Conchubar. Bricriu eggs them on to quarrelling about precedence and the judgment of a giant is sought to decide which of them is the best champion. The giant offers to each of them in turn his axe, and they each cut off the giant's head in turn but Cuchullain alone of the three goes to find this shape-shifting giant and to offer his own head for the return blow. The giant threatens Cuchullain with the axe but does not cut off his head and when Cuchullain has stood the test without shrinking, the giant pronounces him the champion. The date of the *Fled Bricrend* is fixed by M. Lot at 'not earlier than 875 A.D.'

A while ago I came across corroborative evidence of the link between the court of Conchubar and the Gawayne Romance. It relates to the passage paraphrased above and has not been previously noticed. O'Kearney (art. 'Folk Lore,' *Trans. Kilkenny Arch. Soc.* vol. II, 1852, pp. 32 ff.) quotes a gloss to support his thesis about the identity of the Celtic sea-god Lir or Cuilleán. This Latin gloss by the scribe of the MS. of the Irish story *An Tochtair Gaedhal* (inedited) says that Manannan MacLir = Gullinus (Cuilleán) = Neptune = Poseidon; and that the goddess of the sea was Tiobhal (who is the same as the Irish goddess Aoibheal). Cuilleán was the 'ceard' or smith who gave his name to Cuchullain, i.e. 'hound of Cuilleán.' The gloss tells us that Tiobhal met Conchubar when the latter went at the command of an oracle to the Isle of Man in order that Cuilleán might bestow druidical charms on his shield and weapons. Cuilleán depicted the image of Tiobhal on Conchubar's shield 'and it had many and invincible charms according to the old Irish writers.'

This Latin gloss or the old Irish writers referred to by the glossarist are quite evidently the source of the three lines in the Romance of *G. G. K.* The Latin is given below.

'Gullinus quidem Poseidon fuit, nam "lir" Ibernicum aut Phoenicum nomen Neptuni, et idem quod mare; ideo Gullinus fuit alterum nomen pro Lir, deo maris, ut Tiobal maris dea fuit. Nam illa Conchubaro MacNessa, postea regi Ultoniae, apparuit sub specie mulieris pulcherrimae, cum in Manniam jussu oraculi cui nomen "Cloch-oir"—i.e. saxum solis—quod isto tempore celeberrimum fuit his partibus, adebat ad Gullinum uti daret "buadha" druidica clypeo et armis eius. Gullinus imaginem "Tiobal" in clypeum finxit, et "buadha" multa invincibiliaque habebat, secundum aucthores veteres Ibernicos.'

One may add that Conchubar was successful with the shield, and conquered Ulster. In return for his success and the potent aid of the druidical charms, he invited Cuilleán (Gullinus) to settle in the Cuailgne district on the shores of Carlingford Lough. Setanta Beg (Cuchullain) appeared later at the court near there and gained his name Cuchullain.

In the early Middle Ages it was common to substitute Christian images for pagan ones in the old stories. Sir John Rhys has pointed out notable examples; so that this latest-noticed example conforms to the type of 'euhemerized' incidents.

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'AN IRONICALL LETTER.'

The following letter, which does not appear to have been printed before, occurs in a commonplace-book (now in the Bodleian) kept by Stephen Powle, Clerk to the Crown at the end of Elizabeth's reign. It was written before the capture of Antwerp by Parma in August 1585, and probably belongs to the early part of that year. The letter affords ample material for the most ardent of commentators. Whimsical and ironical in spirit, its many allusions might well have puzzled a contemporary, not in Roberts's immediate circle of acquaintance.

Jack Roberts, the writer of the letter, was probably the gentleman-adventurer who sailed with Raleigh and Whetstone in Sir Humphrey Gilbert's ill-fated expedition of 1579: if so, Churchyard described him appropriately as 'A speciall sparke with present witte'. Sir Roger Williams, to whom the letter was addressed, was a well-known figure in the army of Elizabeth. A Welshman, blunt in his speech and choleric, but of exceptional bravery, the hero of many a brilliant 'service' in France and the Low Countries, he has been called the Fluellen of his day. Leicester wrote of him in 1586 as 'worth his weight in gold', but regretted his habit of walking on the parapet of the trench, in full view of the enemy, 'with a great plume of feathers in his gyll morion'. Old Morgan may have been the captain under whom Williams fought in the Low Countries in 1572, and whom one writer described as a gallant gentleman but 'unfurnished of language', and Charles Herbert may very well be the fiery person of that name whom the Privy Council

<sup>1</sup> *Sir Humfrey Gylberte* (Prince Society, 1903), pp. 252 and 254. T. Churchyard, *A Discourse of The Queenes Maiesties entertainment in Suffolk and Norfolk* (1578), sig. H, verso.

<sup>2</sup> *Leicester Correspondence* (Camden Society), p. 407.

<sup>3</sup> Article in *D.N.B.* by R. Dunlop on 'Sir Thomas Morgan.'