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# Meddygon Myddfai: A Preliminary Survey of Some Medieval Medical Writing in Welsh

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THE family of the late Professor Thomas Jones came from Carmarthenshire. Perhaps the major contribution which Professor Jones made to Welsh scholarship was his work in unravelling some of the problems of the Latin-derived Welsh literature of the Middle Ages. One aspect of that literature which has hitherto received little attention is a small corpus of medical writings traditionally associated with a Carmarthenshire family.

In 1861 the Welsh MSS. Society, under the editorship of a somewhat erratic and eccentric Welsh scholar called John Williams, commonly known as ab Ithel, published a volume called *The Physicians of Myddvai*.<sup>1</sup> The introductory section to the book gives the historical facts concerning a family of hereditary physicians at Myddfai in Carmarthenshire together with a fairy-tale which claims them to be the descendants of a union between a lake fairy and a mortal. The second part of the book contains two medical works purporting to represent the books of the physicians. The first of these texts is a copy of a genuine medieval text, the second appears to be a fabrication of Iolo Morganwg.<sup>2</sup> The book is a good example of how folk-tale, tradition, and historical fact can become fused together. For since its publication, the name of the physicians of Myddfai has been so inextricably linked with the tale of the *Lady of Llyn y Fan Fach* in modern folklore that all the facts regarding the traditional and historical significance of the contents of the volume have been forgotten. In this essay I should like to discuss the history and possible origins of the Myddfai physicians, their significance in the history of Welsh Society which can be paralleled by traditions from other Celtic lands, and also to say something of the nature of their writings.

## THE LEGEND<sup>3</sup>

The story of Llyn y Fan Fach in the Carmarthenshire Beacons tells how a widow's son of Blaen Sawdde near Llanddeusant used to graze his mother's cattle near Llyn y Fan Fach. While there one day he saw a maiden more beautiful than any he had seen before, sitting on the surface of the

<sup>1</sup> Ab Ithel, *The Physicians of Myddvai* (Llandovery, 1861).

<sup>2</sup> G. J. Williams, 'Meddygon Myddfai', *Llên Cymru*, i, 169-74. Like most of Iolo Morganwg's fabrications, the text is in fact a mixture of medieval fragments and Iolo's additions.

<sup>3</sup> Ab Ithel, op. cit. xxi-xxviii; *Y Cymmrodor*, iv, 1881, 155 ff.

water. He reached out for her offering her some of his bread but she slipped from his grasp saying:

'Cras dy fara, fyth nim dala.'

'Your bread is too hard baked,  
it will never catch me.'

The lad returned the next day with some underbaked dough, which she again refused saying:

'Llaith dy fara, ti ni fynna.'

'Your bread is wet, I don't want you.'

He returned the third day when she reappeared, accepted his bread, and consented to become his bride on condition that he did not strike her three times without cause. 'Tri ergyd diachos.' If this happened, she would leave him for ever. Thereupon she disappeared into the lake. A little later an old man appeared accompanied by two identical maidens. This man, the maidens' father, greeted the boy and said he would give his consent to the match provided the youth could identify his love. As the young man looked on in his dilemma, one of the maidens put forward her foot and the lad straightway recognized her. The old man confirmed his choice, consented to the match, and promised the couple as many sheep, goats, and cattle as the maiden could count in one breath. She immediately began to count in fives. The couple married and went to live happily and prosperously in a farm called Esgair Llaethdy and had three sons. Years passed and eventually one causeless blow was struck and then another and finally a third, and the wife, true to her warning returned to the lake calling her cattle together with the words:

Mu wlfrech, Moelfrech  
Mu olfrech, Gwynfrech  
Pedair cae tonn-frech  
Yr hen wynebwen  
A'r las Geigen,  
Gyda'r Tarw Gwyn  
O lys y Brenin  
A'r llo du bach  
Sydd ar y bach,  
Dere dithau, yn iach adre!  
Pedwar eidon glas  
Sydd ar y maes,  
Deuwch chwithau  
Yn iach adre!

Brindled cow, white speckled  
Spotted cow, bold freckled  
The four field sward mottled  
The old white-faced  
And the grey Geigen  
With the white bull  
From the Court of the King  
And the little black calf  
Tho' suspended on the hook  
Come thou also, quite well home!  
The four grey oxen  
That are on the field,  
Come you also  
Quite well home!

The husband was broken-hearted. Her sons wandered long searching for her and on one of their searches she appeared to them at a place called Dôl Hywel and told her eldest son Rhiwallon that he was to benefit mankind by his medicine. She then furnished him with a bag of medical

prescriptions and promised that he and his descendants would be for many generations the most skilful physicians in the country. On another occasion she accompanied her sons to a place called *Pant y Meddygon* where she pointed out to them various plants and herbs which grew in abundance in that place. The knowledge she imparted to them together with their unrivalled skill caused them to be more famous than any before them, and in order that their learning should not be lost they committed it to writing for the benefit of mankind throughout the ages.

The folk-tale is an interesting one. Ab Ithel claimed to have been given it by Mr. William Rees of Ton,<sup>1</sup> near Llandovery, who had in turn written it down from the oral recitation of three speakers. The tale was later published by Wirt Sikes in a collection called *British Goblins*,<sup>2</sup> together with a variant version from the same region which omits all mention of the physicians. Ab Ithel's own version was used almost verbatim by Sir John Rhys in *Y Cymmrodor*,<sup>3</sup> and in *Celtic Folklore*<sup>4</sup> he gives it together with other Lake Fairy stories in a chapter called *Undine's Celtic Sisters*. It has been included in almost every collection of folk-tales made in Wales during the last century and a half. The story was analysed by W. J. Gruffydd in *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion*<sup>5</sup> (when he offered an ethnic explanation of the fairy visitor), and partly analysed by Professor Jackson in *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition*,<sup>6</sup> and referred to by Alwyn and Brinley Rees in *Celtic Heritage*.<sup>7</sup>

The story contains a number of well-attested international folk-tale motifs—the chief one being that of the 'Fairy Waterbride',<sup>8</sup> an extremely popular theme in Wales which occurs in folk-tales connected with different lakes in the Principality. Subsidiary motifs like the recognition motif, the breaking of taboo, and the gifted descendants of fairy-mortal marriages are combined with it.<sup>9</sup> The tale also contains a 'run', namely the cattle call with its list of cow's names. This type of 'run'<sup>10</sup> is the only one which occurs with any regularity in Welsh folk-tales. Mr. Ffransis Payne<sup>11</sup> has suggested that the names of cattle listed in this particular 'run' are to be identified with the names of certain primitive breeds of cattle.

The tale seems to divide into two sections. The first section deals with the fairy-mistress union, the second with the visitation of the fairy to her children and the imparting of knowledge and skills. The second section is

<sup>1</sup> Ab Ithel, op. cit. xxi.

<sup>2</sup> Wirt Sikes, *British Goblins* (London, 1880), 38 ff.

<sup>3</sup> John Rhys, 'Welsh Fairy Tales', *Y Cymmrodor*, iv, 1881, 163 ff.

<sup>4</sup> John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol. i. Welsh and Manx (Oxford, 1901), 1 ff.

<sup>5</sup> W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff, 1950), 10 ff.

<sup>6</sup> K. H. Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff, 1961), 48–9.

<sup>7</sup> Alwyn Rees and Brinley Rees, *Celtic Heritage* (Cardiff, 1961), 266, 344.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, op. cit. 49.

<sup>9</sup> Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* (Helsinki, 1932–6), nos. F302, F241.2.3, F302.6, F384.3.

<sup>10</sup> John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, 10, 26, 145, et passim.

<sup>11</sup> Ffransis Payne, *Yr Aradr Gymreig* (Cardiff, 1950), 162 ff.

heavily loaded with onomastic references. The existence of a variant version of the tale as recorded by Wirt Sikes, without this second section, possibly suggests that the second half of the tale is an accretion to the original nucleus.<sup>1</sup> Ab Ithel's version could be a combination of two local tales, the fairy union motif of Llyn y Fan Fach and an onomastic tale centred around 'medical' place-names, the motif of the gifted descendants forming a link between them. A conflation of the two stories might have happened at the time, if not under the authorship of ab Ithel himself. I offer this suggestion tentatively with the reservation that there are other tales in Wales containing a combination of the fairy mistress with the gifted descendants' motifs. Nevertheless, although there are plenty of references to the physicians of Myddfai in Welsh literature<sup>2</sup> before the time of ab Ithel, some of them in the work of antiquarians like Edward Lhuyd,<sup>3</sup> Theophilus Evans,<sup>4</sup> and Lewis Morris,<sup>5</sup> men who were themselves interested in folklore and marvels, I have failed to find a single reference to the physicians' connection with the lake story, which has so obscured the other parts of the tradition during the last hundred years.

#### THE PHYSICIANS

From the fourteenth century onwards the fame of Meddygon Myddfai is attested in Welsh literary tradition. Families possessing certain medical skills are associated with farms in the Carmarthenshire parish of Myddfai, farms and holdings like Esgair Llaethdy, Tŷ Newydd, Llwyn Ifan Feddyg, and Llwyn Meredudd Feddyg.<sup>6</sup> A certain south-facing slope on Mynydd Myddfai, rich in ferns, bog plants, and lichens is called Pant y Meddygon and here traditionally the doctors collected the plants and herbs for their remedies. The last of the line of hereditary physicians who practised at Myddfai were two eighteenth-century men, father and son, whose grave-stone is at the church and whose deaths are recorded in the parish register. David Jones, Chirurgor, died in 1719<sup>7</sup> and John Jones, his son, died in 1739. Although Lewis Morris, the eighteenth-century antiquary, is said to have met the son of the latter who had abandoned the calling either

<sup>1</sup> Wirt Sikes, op. cit. 40 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The earliest is the reference in a cywydd of the fourteenth century

Meddyg ni wnai modd y gwnaeth/Myddfai o chai dyn meddfaeth,

attributed to Iorwerth ab y Cyriog in *Iolo Goch ac Eraill*, ed. H. Lewis, T. Roberts, I. Williams (Cardiff, 1937). This cywydd is attributed to Dafydd ap Gwilym in some manuscripts and it was as the work of this poet that it was quoted by John Davies, *Dictionarium Duplex* (1632), vide Myddfai.

<sup>3</sup> The medical MSS. Peniarth 119 and Peniarth 120E were copied by or for Edward Lhuyd and he owned Bodleian Rawlinson B 467, a composite MS. in five hands.

<sup>4</sup> Theophilus Evans, *Drych y Prif Oesoedd*, ed. S. J. Evans (Bangor, 1902), 158.

<sup>5</sup> J. H. Davies, *The Letters of Lewis, Richard, William, and John Morris*, ii (London, 1909), 284.

<sup>6</sup> P. Diverres, *Le Plus Ancien Texte des Meddygon Myddveu* (Paris, 1913), xxviii; *Y Cymmrodor*, iv, 174 ff.; Gruffydd Evans, 'The Story of the Ancient Churches of Llandovery', T.H.S.C., 1911–13, 44–5, n. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Ab Ithel, op. cit.; Diverres, op. cit.; also transcripts of Myddfai parish records in NLW and gravestone in the church at Myddfai.

'because he considered it beneath him or because he was brought up to other things',<sup>1</sup> distant descendants of the family, nevertheless, continued to practice medicine up until this century. The *Welsh Medical Gazette* in 1971 published photographs of two recent upholders of the tradition.<sup>2</sup>



FIG. 1. Farm names and medical place names in the Myddfai district.

Associated with these physicians are certain medical writings preserved in medieval and later manuscripts, the earliest of which belongs to the fourteenth century. These medical collections contain certain introductory passages or colophons which editors of the texts accept as referring to the origins of medical knowledge at Myddfai.

<sup>1</sup> H. Davies, *Welsh Botany* (London, 1813), vii.

<sup>2</sup> *Welsh Medical Gazette* (Cardiff, 1972).

There are two chief versions of the colophons:

### Colophon I<sup>1</sup>

Yma gan borth Duw goruchel bendeuic, y dangossir y medegynyaetheu arbennickaf a phennaf wrth gorff dyn. A sef y neb a beris eu hyscriuennu yn y mod hwnn: Riwallawn uedic ae ueibon, nyt amgen: Kadwgawn a Gruffud ac Einawn; kanyys wynt a oedynt oreu a phenna(f) or meddygon yn eu hamser hwy ac yn amser Rys Gryc eu harglwyd ac arglwyd Dinefwr, y gwr a gedwis eu breint ac eu dlyet yn gwbyl wrthunt yn enrydedus mal y dilynt. Ac ysef achaws y parassant hwy yscriuennu eu kywreinrwyd yn y mod hwnn: rac na bei a wypei gystal ac a wydynt hwy gwedy wy.

Here with the help of God, the almighty Lord, are shown the most important and essential remedies for man's body. And those who caused them to be written down in this manner were Rhiwallon, the doctor, and his sons, Cadwgan, Gruffudd, and Einion; for they were the best and leading doctors of their time and of the time of Rhys Gryg, their lord and Lord of Dinefwr, the man who safeguarded their status and privilege completely and honourably as was their due. And the reason they caused the rules of their art to be written down in this way was lest there be no one who knew them as well as they did after their days.

### Colophon II<sup>2</sup>

Y llyfyr hwnn a gynullwyd o amryvaelon lyfreu meddygon a fussygwyr yrei assyd brofiadwy eu bot yn wir nyt amgen Riwallon veddyc ae veibon sef ynt yr rei hynny Kadwgan ap Gruffut ac Einon.

This book was put together from the various books of the physicians and mediciners, such books as have been proved to be correct, namely the books of Rhiwallon, the doctor, and his sons, namely Cadwgan, Gruffudd, and Einion.

The first colophon suggests that Rhiwallon and his sons came into prominence under the patronage of Rhys Gryg, Lord of Dinefwr, and that they possessed certain basic medical skills and knowledge which they committed to writing in the vernacular. The last sentence of this colophon regarding preservation for posterity echoes Galenic sentiment.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This is the reading of the R.B.H. text as published by Diverres (op. cit.), 6. It differs but very slightly from the version found in B.M. MS. 14912.

<sup>2</sup> This reading is from B.M. 14912. The wording of Jesus XXII is somewhat different. The Jesus XXII text is difficult to read. The text was copied for Edward Lhuyd into MS. Peniarth 120E but it is difficult to see how he achieved all his readings. Here is my transcript of Jesus XXII:

Llyma rolyn y vengineth . . . edyic meddygon  
myvei a . . . rofadwy eu bod yn wyr ni  
amgen no rywallon vedic ay veibyon . . .  
sef . . . hynny kadu . . . ic einon  
hyn o lyvyr a dyl pop medyc yn redyn  
ay gadw ganthav yn da rac ovyn pallu o gelydyd  
megys dallav . . . klaf oe wall an . . . dywed dervyn.

In both MSS. it seems originally to have been connected with the text 'Deudec arwyd yssyd . . .'

<sup>3</sup> O. Temkin, *Galenism* (Ithaca and London, 1973), 49; C. G. Kühn (ed.), *Claudii Galeni Opera Omnia* (Leipzig, 1821-33), viii, 773, 2-6; 2.282.13-283.6.

The second colophon suggests either that manuscripts were written when the writings of Rhiwallon had gained a reputation and were used as source books by other compilers; or conversely, in the manner of the Middle Ages, the fame of the family was such that it added authority to the value of any fresh medical text to attribute it to their authorship. Both colophons suggest that there is a strong tradition connecting the family with a body of medical writings in the vernacular.

I should like first of all to examine the background to the historical references in the first colophon. Rhys Gryg or Rhys Fychan<sup>1</sup> (Rhys the Stammerer or Rhys the Younger), who died in 1233 was one of the eight sons of Rhys ap Gruffudd ap Rhys or the Lord Rhys who died in 1197, one of the most important of the last native Welsh princes. The family of the Lord Rhys is known not only for its considerable political achievements, but also for its patronage of the church, the arts, and of learning, both native and Latin.

The Lord Rhys organized the first Eisteddfod at Cardigan. The family were generous patrons of the Abbeys of Whitland and Strata Florida, whose scriptoria were centres of native learning, while the Lord Rhys himself founded the Premonstratensian Abbey of Talylychau. During this period and in these centres, and it seems likely under the patronage of the Rhys family, the *Brut y Tywysogyon*,<sup>2</sup> the Latin *Chronica de Wallia*,<sup>3</sup> certain religious texts, and possibly the earliest surviving Welsh literary manuscript the *Black Book of Carmarthen*,<sup>4</sup> were compiled, and the earliest known recensions of the Welsh law books<sup>5</sup> were recorded. The family is known as one of the most important patrons of learning both Welsh and Latin of the whole medieval period in Wales. It would be quite in character therefore for one of its members to support a family of medical men, particularly at a time when medical studies were gaining prominence in Europe, as they were in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The Lord Rhys had amassed for himself a substantial lordship.<sup>6</sup> When he died, his eight sons<sup>7</sup> succeeded to portions of it. The core of the whole Deheubarth regime of the Lord Rhys was the two *cantrefi* of Cantref Mawr, straddling some of the best land in Carmarthenshire, and Cantref Bychan, consisting of hilly land.<sup>8</sup> The caput of the whole domain was Dinefwr, the old ecclesiastical capital was Llandeilo Fawr. After his father's death and family struggles these two central *cantrefi* eventually, in

<sup>1</sup> J. E. Lloyd, *History of Wales* (henceforth, HW), ii (London, 1939), 768. Lloyd, *History of Carmarthenshire* (henceforth, HC), i (Cardiff, 1935). J. Beverley Smith, 'The Chronica De Wallia and the Dynasty of Dinefwr', BBCS xx, 261-85.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jones, *Brut y Tywysogyon* (Caerdydd, 1953).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Jones, 'Chronica de Wallia' and Other Documents from Exeter Cathedral Library', BBCS xii, 27-44; Smith, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Geraint Gruffydd, 'Cyntefin Ceinaf Amser o Lyfr Du Caerfyrddin', *Ysgrifau Beirniadol*, iv (Dinbych, 1969), 15, 16.

<sup>5</sup> Hywel D. Emanuel, *The Latin Texts of the Welsh Laws* (Cardiff, 1967), Introduction, 11 ff.

<sup>6</sup> William Rees, *A Historical Atlas of Wales* (Cardiff, 1959).

<sup>7</sup> J. E. Lloyd, HW ii, 769.

<sup>8</sup> J. E. Lloyd, HC, op. cit.

1222, passed entirely into the hands of Rhys Gryg.<sup>1</sup> The *cantrefi* of medieval Wales were divided into administrative units or *cymydau* of which there were three in Cantref Bychan, Iscennen, Perfedd, and Hirfryn.<sup>2</sup> The *cymydau* were further divided into economic units or *maenorau* or manors, consisting of groups of bond or free *trefi*. In the low-lying country the

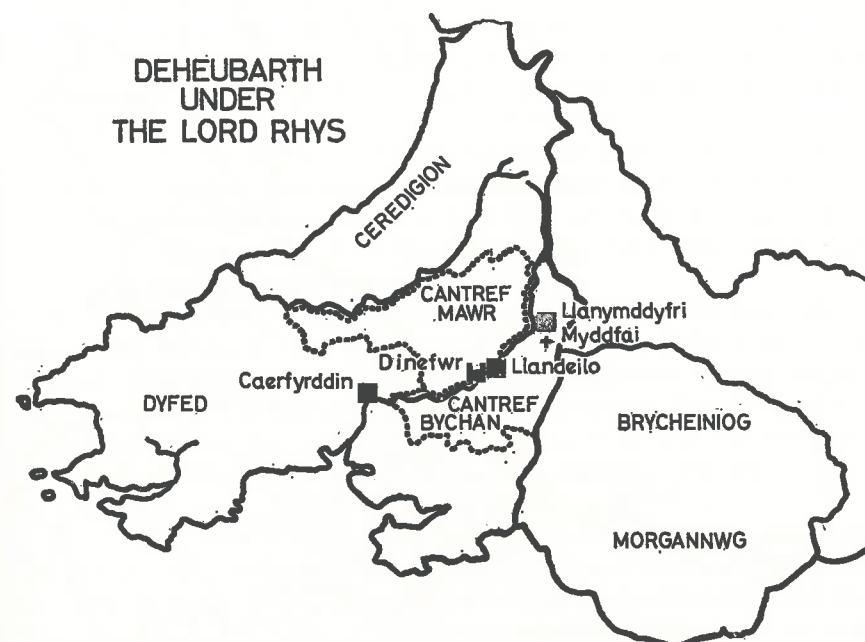


FIG. 2. Deheubarth under the Lord Rhys (after William Rees, *Historical Atlas of Wales* (Cardiff, 1959), plate 36).

*maenorau* tended to have a strong bond population, while in the hillier regions freemen were more evident. During the thirteenth century, Myddfai was a royal manor inhabited by freemen directly under the lordship of Dinefwr and for some of his rule under the lordship of Rhys Gryg who held Dinefwr from 1222 to 1233. He is referred to by the poets as 'llyw Dinefwr', 'taryan Ystrad Tywi'.<sup>3</sup> Myddfai was, therefore, a manor where Rhys Gryg might have settled some of his court officials.

Certain corroborative evidence for this theory can be found in other sources. The Welsh laws, whose earliest surviving recensions belong to this period, list the dues of the court physician in the section known as the Laws of the Court.<sup>4</sup> Most of the sections of the Welsh laws contain a nucleus of old material which corresponds with the Irish law texts. The tractate in the Laws of the Court dealing with the doctor includes references

<sup>1</sup> Smith, op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> Lloyd, HW i, 268.

<sup>3</sup> Smith, op. cit. 262 ff.

<sup>4</sup> John Cule, 'The Court Mediciner and Medicine in the Laws of Wales', *Journal for the History of Medicine* (1966), 21, 213-36.



FIG. 3. The medieval divisions of Cantref Bychan (after William Rees, *South Wales and the Marches in the 14th century* [Oxford, 1924]).

to a primitive system of sick-maintenance which has its parallel in the Irish institution of 'othrus'.<sup>1</sup> The account given shows him as a free layman, whose *galanas* (wergild) was equal to that of the poet, another professional man of learning. He held his land free and had the right to certain dues from the king and queen. He lodged with the chief of the warband (most suitable for someone whose duties must have been largely concerned with the healing of wounds). Herbs were especially cultivated for him. His professional opinion was called for in the assessment of certain payments of compensation. Passages in other parts of the law texts refer to medical

<sup>1</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', *Ériu*, xii, 1 ff.

matters. Significantly these passages describing wounds, injuries, and treatments correspond with some sections in the Myddfai doctors' books.<sup>1</sup> The law books also contain lists of the payments due to a doctor for attending to specific injuries: 24 pence for applying a surgical tent;<sup>2</sup> 8 pence for making up an ointment.<sup>3</sup> For each of the three mortal wounds, namely a blow on the head into the brain, a blow on the body into the bowels, and the breaking of the four limbs the doctor was to be given 9 score pence and his food or 12 score pence without it.<sup>4</sup> The evidence of the law books suggests that there was in Wales a class of practical doctors some of whom were sponsored by the Prince's Court, who were free landholders and responsible for treating, without payment, the injuries of fellow members of the Court but also responsible for treating other members of the community.<sup>5</sup> Their knowledge seems to have been similar to that found in the medical collections. The Rhiwallon whom Rhys Gryg patronized might well have been one of these doctors.

By the end of the thirteenth century the whole of Wales had fallen to the Anglo-Normans. The cymydau of Hirfryn and Perfedd in Cantref Bychan became part of the Lordship of Llanymddyfri.<sup>6</sup> Among the dues recorded for the Lordship of Llanymddyfri in the later Middle Ages is an unusual due of service, namely that the ten free tenants of the Maenor of Myddfai were obliged to supply the Lord of Llanymddyfri with a doctor to follow him in Wales at their own expense.<sup>7</sup>

Sir J. G. Edwards has shown how the great marcher lords of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries inherited a social structure and pattern of regalia from the native rulers who preceded them which they did their best to maintain, particularly when those regalia and the social structure were advantageous to them.<sup>8</sup> It seems possible in view of the colophon and the evidence of the dues of the Lordship of Llanymddyfri and from what is known from the law texts that lands in Myddfai could have been held by a family of lay physicians, originally mediciners of the Lords of Dinefwr, subsequently of the Anglo-Norman Lords of Llanymddyfri, and if the continuity of popular tradition be accepted, finally a family of country physicians famous for their remedies and their healings. At least one other family of hereditary physicians, the family of Bened Feddyg,<sup>9</sup> possessing medical writings, is known to have existed in Wales at the end of the Middle Ages. This was a family from Denbighshire, who possessed a medical manuscript now kept in the National Library of Wales (NLW

<sup>1</sup> Aled Rh. Wiliam, *Llyfr Iorwerth* (Cardiff, 1960), § 17, pp. 12-13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., § 147, 191.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Diverres, op. cit., pp. 6, 7, and Wiliam, op. cit., § 147, ll. 9-12.

<sup>4</sup> Lloyd, HC i, 208; Gruffydd Evans, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> A. J. Richard, 'Castles, Borough and Religious Houses', chapter 4 in Lloyd, HC i, 322.

<sup>6</sup> J. Goronwy Edwards, *The Normans and the Welsh March*, Raleigh Lecture in History 1956, P.B.A. xlii, 155-77.

<sup>7</sup> It is to be hoped that Mr. Gerallt Harries will soon publish his very fine paper on this family. Generally the records reveal doctors as men of some substance.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

MS. Sotheby 3) which records the names of five generations of the same family.<sup>1</sup>

This interpretation of the Myddfai traditions is corroborated by parallels in other Celtic countries. One of the features of early Celtic society in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales was the emergence in fairly early times of certain professional learned classes bound by a strong hereditary principle and having a well-defined status in the eyes of the law. The most publicized of these classes were, of course, the bards and lawyers. In Ireland there is evidence that doctors were classed among the professional men of learning from an early date.<sup>2</sup>

Two of the Old Irish Law tracts, *Bretha Crólige*<sup>3</sup> and *Bretha Déin Checht*,<sup>4</sup> deriving possibly from the seventh century, pay detailed attention to the payments and dues of doctors and the rules of sick-maintenance. In the later Middle Ages and up until modern times, families of doctors, like the Lees, Hickeys, Livingstones, O'Callinans, and Beaton are recorded as holding lands in different parts of Ireland and Scotland.<sup>5</sup> Eighteenth-century commentators on the Irish social scene relate that every noble household had a doctor attached to it for whom certain lands were reserved, who professed to a knowledge of Latin medical texts and possessed Gaelic manuscripts translated from Latin. Professor Derick Thomson<sup>6</sup> has discussed the history of the Scottish Gaelic family of Beaton, which is well attested. At the end of the thirteenth century, Angus Óg, Lord of the Isles, went to Ireland to seek a bride. He married one of the O'Cathain or Kane family. On his return from Ireland he brought with him in his train as physician a certain Mac Betha, anglicized Mac Beth and Beaton.

Descendants of Mac Betha under the name Beaton continued to hold lands and to practise medicine in territories held by the Lord of the Isles in Gaelic Scotland up until the seventeenth century. One of the chief claims of this Beaton family to distinction was the fact that its members possessed Gaelic manuscripts, containing Gaelic translations of classical medical texts, and their reputation as doctors was largely based on the esoteric knowledge they gained from these books (translations of works like the Canon of Avicenna and the aphorisms of Hippocrates) which they assiduously copied and preserved in the family library (60 cows was the recorded cost of copying one manuscript).<sup>7</sup> Edward Lhuyd saw some

<sup>1</sup> N.L.W. Schedule of Sotheby Collection 1931, i.

<sup>2</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'Bretha Déin Checht', *Ériu*, xx, 1-66. F. Shaw, 'Irish Medical Men and Philosophers', in *Seven Centuries of Irish Learning*, ed. Brian Ó Cuív (Dublin, 1961), 87-101.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Binchy, 'Bretha Crólige', op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Binchy, op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Shaw, op. cit. 92; also S. H. O'Grady, *Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, i (London, 1926), 175.

<sup>6</sup> Derick S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati', *Proceedings of the Third International Congress of Celtic Studies. Scottish Studies*, xii, ed. W. F. H. Nicolaisen (Edinburgh, 1968); D. Mackinnon, 'The Genealogy of the Macbeths or Beatons of Islay and Mull', *Caledonian Medical Journal*, v, 141-53.

<sup>7</sup> Mackinnon, op. cit.

of their manuscripts when he visited one John Beaton<sup>1</sup> in the late seventeenth century.

The Beaton story strongly resembles what is known of the physicians of Myddfai and spans much the same period and represents the same tenacity of custom which is characteristic of Celtic society. The Myddfai family claimed descent from Rhiwallon whose patron was Rhys Gryg, Lord of Dinefwr, the Beatons from Mac Betha whose patron was Angus Óg. Much store was set on the value of their books. Edward Lhuyd, just as he looked with interest at the manuscripts of John Beaton, was an assiduous copyist of Meddygon Myddfai texts.<sup>2</sup>

All the surviving Gaelic medical tracts are the products of the scholasticism of the later Middle Ages, written in straightforward prose and owing little to the native learned genres.<sup>3</sup> Traces of earlier Irish native medicine, as Dr. Binchy has shown, are found not in medical writings but in the law books and the saga literature. Dr. Binchy has suggested that the reason for this lack of evidence for an earlier period was that Irish medical learning was purely oral up until the thirteenth century. Standish Hayes O'Grady, cataloguing the Irish medical books of the later Middle Ages found in the British Museum collection, said pungently that the Irish hereditary physicians of the period were all staunch Arabians.<sup>4</sup>

#### THE MEDICAL COLLECTIONS

Although the contents of the Welsh books do not fall into the same category as the Irish books, they are certainly indebted to the general medical learning of medieval Europe, and any fairy involved in their transmission was surely the kind who might have been listed by Stith Thompson, as 'a fairy who speaks Latin'. For many of the contents of the books can be traced to direct Latin originals and two of the manuscripts which will be discussed contain fragments written in Latin.

The rest of the paper is concerned with three medieval manuscripts containing copies of one or both of the colophons quoted above associating the collections with Rhiwallon and his sons. The manuscripts consist of series of tractates dealing with different medical, philosopho-medical, and astrological topics. Brief tractates such as these are found in early medical collections all through Europe; one Italian authority has referred to them as 'trattatelli'. Early Welsh medical manuscripts other than the following are to be found, containing selections of the same material but without the specific reference to Rhys Gryg's physicians. For instance, the fifteenth-century manuscript Bodleian Rawlinson B 467 contains a form of the first colophon omitting the names of the physicians and a form of the second colophon with a reference to Myddfai but no named physicians.<sup>5</sup> The contents of this manuscript are in many ways similar to the Llyfr Coch

<sup>1</sup> J. L. Campbell and D. S. Thomson (eds.), *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands, 1699-1700* (Oxford, 1963), 9 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Above, p. 213, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Binchy, 'Bretha Déin Checht', 7-8.

<sup>4</sup> B.M. *Catalogue of Irish MSS.* i, 175.

<sup>5</sup> I hope to discuss this MS., its physical composition and contents, on another occasion.

text. The fourteenth-century manuscript Hafod 16 contains much similar material but in entirely different order.

In the lists that follow, I have made a tentative attempt to list the topics dealt with in the manuscripts indicating both the nature of the contents and the key passages common to more than one collection, which I have marked with an asterisk, although I have not noted all the correspondences to individual recipes.

## MS. I

The earliest surviving manuscript B.M. Add. MS. 14912 belongs to the second half of the fourteenth century. During the eighteenth century it was in the possession of the Welsh antiquary and man of learning, Lewis Morris.

The entry in the British Museum Catalogue reads as follows:

Meddygon Myddfai, or the practise of Physic of the Myddvai Doctors, a collection of Recipes for various diseases and injuries, prognostics, charms, virtues of herbs etc. in Welsh by the physicians of Myddvai co. Caermarthen;—Aristotles instructions to Alexander, on physiognomy etc. in Welsh:—Latin and Welsh vocabulary of herbs etc. A Welsh calendar is prefixed. On vellum, written in the XIV C.

The manuscript is annotated and indexed in the hand of Lewis Morris and has additional scientific material in a seventeenth-century hand. From Lewis Morris it passed into the Welsh School Collection and from there in 1843 into the British Museum.<sup>1</sup> It has never been published.

Here is a list of contents:

- |                  |                                                                   |                                                                          |
|------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I.               |                                                                   | Calendar                                                                 |
| 1.               | *Pedeir deirton yssyd . . .                                       | Fevers and their treatment                                               |
| 1.               | *Pedeir bolwyst yssyd . . .                                       | Abdominal disorders                                                      |
| 2.               | *Mis ionawr na lad waet . . .                                     | List of days for blood-letting and diet in the twelve months of the year |
| 3 <sup>v</sup> . | Rac mann kymer yr crinllys . . .                                  | Remedies                                                                 |
| 4 <sup>v</sup> . | Rac hwyd croth . . .                                              | Gynaecology, remedies                                                    |
| 4 <sup>v</sup> . | Rac brath abs . . .                                               | Remedies                                                                 |
| 5.               | *Seith gelyn llygat yssyd . . .                                   | Seven enemies of the eye                                                 |
|                  | *Tri ascwrn yssyd . . .                                           | Three bones which will never knit                                        |
| 5 <sup>v</sup> . | Pwy bynnac a vo hep allu kyscu .                                  | Remedies                                                                 |
| 6.               | *Gan borth duw goruchel ben-<br>defic . . .                       | COLOPHON I                                                               |
| 6.               | *Ac or peth pennaf y dychreu-<br>assant sef yw hynny or pen . . . | The first thing to be discussed is the head                              |
| 6.               | *Tri lle hagen y megyr clefyd-<br>au . . .                        | Parts of the head and mention of craniotomy                              |
| 6 <sup>v</sup> . | *Dyrnawt newyd neu vrath<br>newyd . . .                           | Diseases from head to lungs with remedies                                |
| 8 <sup>v</sup> . | *Tri ryw dosted yssyd . . .                                       | Dysuria; procedure for lithotomy                                         |

<sup>1</sup> *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 1844-45, 32. I hope to publish a transcript and a fuller discussion of this manuscript in a future number of *Studia Celtica*. The MS. has three sets of foliation. I have used the set which starts with the first page of the actual text.

- |                      |                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 9 <sup>v</sup> .     | Rac y clwyf digwyd . . .                                                          | Remedies                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 2. 10 <sup>v</sup> . | Pwy bynnac a vynno gwybod<br>dirgelwch a pherffeithrwydd<br>y gelfydyt honn . . . | Translation of 'De Corio Serpentis'<br>of Johannes Paulus by one Phylip                                                                                                                                           |
| 14 <sup>v</sup> .    | Y Dyd Kyntaf yn y oes . . .                                                       | Days of month; prognostications                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 17 <sup>v</sup> .    | *Y llyfyr hwnn a gynullwyd o<br>amryvaelon lyfreu meddygon . . .                  | COLOPHON II                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 18 <sup>v</sup> .    | Deudec arwydd yssyd a ddis-<br>gynnant pob blwyddyn . . .                         | Importance of knowledge of twelve<br>signs of the Zodiac                                                                                                                                                          |
| 21 <sup>v</sup> .    | Llyma eli mawrweirthiawc . . .                                                    | Remedies including Rhad Duw<br>(Gratia Dei), apothecary's mea-<br>sures, and prognostics                                                                                                                          |
| 33 <sup>v</sup> .    | *Diawt yw honn or kym i beri i<br>dyn kyscu . . .                                 | Soporific sponge                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 34 <sup>v</sup> .    | *Aristoteles y Alexander mawr o<br>adnabydded korf dyn . . .                      | Letter of Aristotle to Alexander the<br>Great on physiognomy                                                                                                                                                      |
| 38 <sup>v</sup> .    | Kanys or pedwar defnydd hynn<br>y gwnaethpwyd dyn . . .                           | The four elements and the four<br>humours                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 39 <sup>v</sup> .    | *Kanys drwy ansoddeu y trwnc                                                      | Uroscopy                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 44.                  | *Ef a ddylyir gollwng gwaet . . .                                                 | Brief instructions for blood-letting                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 44.                  | Y pwdyr saxifragia . . .                                                          | Remedies and recipes                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 50.                  | Wyth ran y ddyly bot ym pob<br>dyn . . .                                          | The eight parts of a man                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 50 <sup>v</sup> .    | *Llyma y tri thew annesgor . . .                                                  | The three thick indispensables                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                      | *Tri theneu anesgor ynt . . .                                                     | The three thin indispensables                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|                      | *Mae teir hir nych gweli . . .                                                    | The three lingering wounds                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|                      | Rac gwaew yn llygeit . . .                                                        | Remedies and recipes                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 51.                  | *Pa veddeginyaeth vwyaf pa un<br>leiaf . . .                                      | The greatest and smallest remedies                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                      | Rac y gwewyr . . .                                                                | Remedies and recipes                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| 59.                  | *Llyma gampeu y Kennin . . .                                                      | Virtues of the leek, mustard, pepper,<br>sea holly, purslane, parsley, hart's<br>tongue, cress, lettuce, mint, garlic,<br>and betony                                                                              |
|                      | *Mwstard yssyd da rac . . .                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                      | Pypyr ysydd wressoc a da . . .<br>(8 missing leaves)                              | Judicial astrology in Latin                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| 69.                  | Not ei dies boni sunt.                                                            | Remedies                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 69 <sup>v</sup> .    | Llyma veddeginyaeth ar ddiot . . .                                                | Virtues of the scabious, glossing<br>Latin verse (from Macer Floridus)                                                                                                                                            |
| 74.                  | Scabiosa y benlas yvet sudd . . .                                                 | Prognostications                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 75.                  | Llyma arwyddion duw Kalan<br>Ionawr . . .                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| 78.                  | Dy gyghor ath gyssul yw amovyn<br>a doeth . . .                                   | Precepts                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| 78.                  | Ad faciendum pilulo . . .                                                         | Latin instructions on preparing pills,<br>poultices and physic; Latin-Welsh<br>vocabulary of plant names as pub-<br>lished by Whitley Stokes, <i>Archiv<br/>für celtische Lexikographie</i> , i (1898),<br>37 ff. |

## MS. II

The second text, contained in Jesus MS. CXI, the Red Book of Hergest, was written about 1400.<sup>1</sup> This text has already been published twice; first by ab Ithel, and secondly in the admirable edition of Pol Diverres *Le Plus ancien texte des Meddygon Myddveu*. The inclusion of a medical text in this great literary compendium which was possibly written in south Wales for a local nobleman might be said to reflect a fashion of the late Middle Ages which considered a certain amount of medical knowledge to be the prerequisite of any well-educated nobleman. In Ireland, the Earl of Kildare in 1500 paid the equivalent of £1,000 for the manuscript of an Irish medical textbook.<sup>2</sup>

- |                                                               |                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. <sup>3</sup> *Yma gan borth Duw goruchel<br>bendeuic       | COLOPHON I                                                               |
| 2. *Ac or peth pennaf a chyntaf or a<br>ffurueidwys Duw . . . | The first thing to be discussed is the head                              |
| 3. *Tri lle yn y penn y megir cleuyd-<br>yeu . . .            | Parts of the head and mention of craniotomy                              |
| 7. *O dyrnawt newyd neu urath . . .                           | Diseases from head to lungs with remedies                                |
| 12. *Pedeir teirthon yssyd . . .                              | Fevers and their treatment                                               |
| 16. Deu ryw letywigwst yssyd . . .                            | Haemorrhoids, their ligation and remedy                                  |
| 17. *Pedeir bolwyst yssyd . . .                               | Abdominal disorders                                                      |
| 19. *Tri ryw dosted yssyd . . .                               | Dysuria; procedure for lithotomy                                         |
| 20. Gwreic y bo arnei rwystyr am gaff-<br>el beichogi—        | Gynaecology, remedies                                                    |
| 22. Gwreid y drycheigyauc . . .                               | Virtues of plants                                                        |
| 27. Or pan alho buch . . .                                    | Dietetics                                                                |
| 29. Rac derwhyden wlyb . . .                                  | Remedies                                                                 |
| 45. Tri chyualorn medic ynt—                                  | Three difficulties of a doctor                                           |
| 46. Rac Marchwreint—                                          | Remedy                                                                   |
| 47. *Seith gelyn llygat yssyd—                                | Seven enemies of the eye                                                 |
| 48. *Tri ascwrn yssyd . . .                                   | Three bones which will never knit                                        |
| 49. Briwaw grawn y pabi . . .                                 | Remedies                                                                 |
| 55. Rac pob teirton—                                          | Charm against fever and prognostic                                       |
| 56. Or mynny na bych uedw—                                    | Remedies or preventives                                                  |
| 75. *Mis Ionawr. —Na lad waet; . . .                          | List of days for blood-letting and diet in the twelve months of the year |
| 93. Athrawon da a gawssant . . .                              | Unfortunate (Egyptian) days                                              |
| 94. Rac chwyd y mywn croth . . .                              | Remedies                                                                 |
| 135. *Llyma gampeu y kennin . . .                             | Virtues of the leek                                                      |
| 136. Y rei ny allant kynnal na bwyt na<br>diawt . . .         | Remedies including some animal recipes                                   |
| 139. *Mwstart . . .                                           | Virtues of mustard                                                       |
| 140. *Kanystrwy ansodeu y trwnc . . .                         | Uroscopy                                                                 |

<sup>1</sup> R.W.M. ii, 1, 7.<sup>2</sup> Ab Ithel, op. cit.; Shaw, op. cit. 98.<sup>3</sup> Sections in Diverres, op. cit.

- |                                                                  |                                                                                                                               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 142. *Eff a dylyir gollwng gwaet . . .                           | Brief instructions for blood-letting                                                                                          |
| 143. Yth wneuthur byth yn iach . . .                             | Remedies                                                                                                                      |
| 152. *Llyma y tri thew anesgor . . .                             | The three thick indispensables                                                                                                |
| 153. *Tri theneu anescor . . .                                   | The three thin indispensables                                                                                                 |
| 154. *Mae teir hirnych gweli . . .                               | The three lingering wounds                                                                                                    |
| 155. Rac heint y marchogyon.—                                    | Remedies                                                                                                                      |
| 158. *Pa uedeginyaeth uwyhaf?                                    | The greatest remedies                                                                                                         |
| 159. *Pa uedeginyaeth leihaf?                                    | The smallest remedies                                                                                                         |
| Absinthium calidum et siccum . . .                               | Materia medica describing plants in Latin, attributed to Constantine                                                          |
| 160. Rac gwewyr.—                                                | Remedies                                                                                                                      |
| 171. Gwybydet pawp na ellir keissaw<br>dim onyt drwy nerth . . . | Mention of medical sources and the four elements, followed by principles of hygiene similar to the <i>Regimen Sanitatis</i> . |

## MS. III

The third manuscript belonging to a date later in the fifteenth century is a small medical manuscript Jesus MS. XXII.<sup>1</sup>

- |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. *Llyma rolyn yvengineth . . . edyic<br>medygon myvei . . .                        | COLOPHON II                                                                                                           |
| 3. Klan Ionawr dyd . . .                                                             | Calendar, including days for blood-letting and 'Egyptian' days                                                        |
| 18. Llythyr Aristotules yw hwn y<br>Alexander vawr, o gadwadigaeth<br>korf dyn . . . | Letter of Aristotle to Alexander on hygiene De Sanitatis tuenda                                                       |
| 48. *Aristoteles y Alexander mawr o<br>dirgeledigaeth korf dyn . . .                 | Letter of Aristotle to Alexander on physiognomy                                                                       |
| 66. Y pioni gwressoc, a sych yw . . .                                                | Virtues of plants and various meats and drinks                                                                        |
| 98. *Y gylvydyt hon a gynnullwyt o<br>dysc mydygon . . .                             | Soporific sponge                                                                                                      |
| 99. Y lad y prvyet aner yn gylla dyn . . .                                           | Recipes and remedies                                                                                                  |
| 103. Korff dyn a gyvansodir o bedwar<br>gwlybyr hyn . . .                            | The four humours, etc.                                                                                                |
| 113. Gwenith y sudd ardymerussach<br>un yl, (?) . . .                                | Virtues of wheat, barley, etc.                                                                                        |
| 120. Rac pyssychu kymer dwst man or<br>amhiben . . .                                 | Remedies                                                                                                              |
| 157. *Llyma gampeu y kennin . . .                                                    | Virtues of the leek, remedies                                                                                         |
| 160. Perchill oerach yw, a gwlypach eu<br>natur . . .                                | Virtues of meats, part of which corresponds to <i>supra</i> 66 ff. and is a section of Aristotle's letter on hygiene. |

All three medieval manuscripts derive from a period some century and a half after the time of Rhys Gryg. The first and earliest, B.M. 14912 already contains the two colophons: the second manuscript Jesus CXI contains the first colophon only: the third manuscript Jesus XXII, the second colophon

<sup>1</sup> R.W.M. ii, 38.

only. An analysis of the British Museum manuscript side by side with the other two manuscripts throws some light on the way these collections were compiled. The contents of B.M. 14912 could derive from two immediate sources.

(1) A source which contained the material listed as 1, and (2) a source containing the rest of the text, 2. This interpretation is suggested by the fact that slightly different orthography is used in the two sections. In the first part  $d = \delta$ ;  $ll = ll$  fairly regularly; in the second part  $dd = \delta$ ;  $ff = ll$ , and also by the fact that the second part of the text is found independently of the first in a later manuscript, Peniarth 119. We know that Peniarth 119 was copied from a medieval source because the scribe says that his prototype was a vellum manuscript and gives an example of the script used in that prototype. The script seems to be in a good fifteenth-century hand.<sup>1</sup>

The second part of the contents of B.M. 14912 contains a copy of the second colophon quoted. A copy of the same colophon is to be found at the beginning of Jesus XXII. Despite the common colophon there is only one major item which is common to both collections, namely, the *Letter of Aristotle to Alexander on Physiognomy*.

The contents of the first half of B.M. 14912, which contains a copy of the first colophon, may be compared with the contents of Jesus CXI, Llyfr Coch Hergest. The correspondence between the two manuscripts is here more striking, suggesting that the contents might derive from some common source. The order of the tractate is, nevertheless, somewhat different in the two manuscripts. The Jesus CXI order possibly preserves a more correct original arrangement. One of the fundamental schemes of describing disease and remedy inherited from classical times was one which began from the top of the head and worked downwards. Colophon I in both B.M. 14912 and Jesus CXI is followed by a sentence which refers to the head as the first part of the body to be discussed.<sup>2</sup>

The first five items in the Jesus CXI list, with the exception of the haemorrhoid tract, follow a head-downwards order. The first colophon quoted suggested that Rhiwallon and his sons had committed to writing some basic medical knowledge. The nucleus of Rhiwallon's compilation might have been a series of tractates describing illness and remedy in a head-downwards order.

It is difficult to find an exact context for the Welsh collections. When compared with the Middle-English recipe books<sup>3</sup> of the fourteenth century

<sup>1</sup> R.W.M. i, 726 footnote.

<sup>2</sup> The Llyfr Coch Hergest sentence reads, 'Ac or peth pennaf a chyntaf or a ffurueidwys Duw o gorff dyn: y pen yw hwnnw, kanyys yndaw y mae y pump synnwyr corff.' B.M. 14912 reads, 'Ac or peth pennaf y dychreuassant sef yw hynny or pen kanyys yndaw ymae pump synwyr corff' (6').

<sup>3</sup> Ed. M. S. Ogden, *Liber de Diversis Medicinis*, Early English Text Society, no. 207, 1938; ed. Fritz Heinrich, *Ein mittelenglisches Medizinbuch* (Halle, 1896); ed. Gottfried Müller, *Aus mittelenglischen Medizin-Texten; Die Prosarezepte des Stockholmer Miszellenkodex*, x, 90, although many of the individual recipes correspond.

it is clear that they contain short passages of theory and references to surgery which do not strictly belong to the context of popular recipe literature. On the other hand, if they are compared with scholastic works such as those of John of Gaddesden,<sup>1</sup> Lanfranch,<sup>2</sup> and Guy de Chauliac,<sup>3</sup> the theory, philosophy, and surgery found in them appears extremely simple. They are perhaps best considered in the first instance within the context of a tradition of medical writing in Wales; then each item should be considered against the more general background of European medical literature.

The varied nature of the contents of all three collections suggests a fluid and continuous tradition of medical writing in medieval Wales. The fluidity of this tradition may be compared with the fluidity seen in the manuscript tradition of the writings of another professional class, namely the books of the Welsh lawyers which contain collections of tractates dealing with legal topics. Law books constitute one of the most abundant classes of manuscripts preserved from the Middle Welsh period. There are about forty of these manuscripts written in Latin and in Welsh. Not one of these medieval Welsh law manuscripts is a direct and exact transcript of another, although it is possible to discern among the manuscripts families of texts whose contents are related. The reason for this lack of uniformity is that the manuscripts were probably lawyers' handbooks composed for the use of individuals from a variety of written and oral materials. Many of the law manuscripts are in the form of small neat books which could easily have been carried about, as opposed to being library volumes. B.M. 14912, Jesus XXII, Hafod 16, and Rawlinson B 467 are small neat books of the same size and style as the law manuscripts. They might well have been the handbooks of practising doctors—Sotheby 3, *Llyfr Bened Feddyg*<sup>4</sup> certainly was—whose contents were culled from a number of sources. In order to appreciate the nature of their contents it is necessary to look at the history of medical literature in medieval Europe generally.

Medieval European medical learning and literature flowed in two streams, both deriving ultimately from classical sources. The one stream consisted of the literature which had filtered through in western Europe from classical times. Sigerist described this literature as 'short treatises compiled for practical purposes in Greek in the fourth Century mostly translated into Latin in the sixth Century . . . In the West these short treatises dealing with urine, pulse, fever, diets, prognostic, blood-letting and pharmacology constituted the bulk of ancient literature that was still alive in Carolingian days.'<sup>5</sup> The topics listed by Sigerist are very evident

<sup>1</sup> John of Gaddesden, *Rosa Anglica*, Pavia: Birreta, 1492.

<sup>2</sup> Ed. Robert Fleischaker, *Lanfrank's Science of Girurgie*, Early English Text Society, Original Series no. 102 (London, 1894).

<sup>3</sup> Ed. Edouard Niçaise, *Le Grande chirurgie de Guy de Chauliac*, Balthère, Paris, 1890.

<sup>4</sup> See above, p. 219, n. 9 and p. 220, n. 1.

<sup>5</sup> H. E. Sigerist, 'Materia Medica in the Middle Ages', *Bulletin of History of Medicine*, vii, 417-23. Many of these treatises were based on the work of Galen.

among the Meddygon Myddfai tractates. The second stream of literature was that which developed after the recovery of Greek texts from Arabic sources in the eleventh century, due to the work of Constantine the African and the growth of important centres like Salerno. The scholasticism which developed subsequent to this movement and the Aristotelian revival of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries led to the production of a body of complicated pharmacology, and to the popularity of philosophical texts as represented by the writings of the so-called pseudo-Aristotle. The Gaelic texts which were owned by the Beaton families and similar families all derive from this second type of writing. The Welsh collections contain examples of both classes of literature.

Those of the Welsh tractates which can be traced to direct Latin originals derive from works belonging to different periods in the Middle Ages, and which are both pre-Constantine and post-Constantine. The *Letters of Aristotle to Alexander on Physiognomy and Hygiene*,<sup>1</sup> parts of the *Secretum Secretorum*, belong to the great corpus of pseudo-Aristotelian literature which became popular in the twelfth and thirteenth century. The *Secretum Secretorum* was translated in the twelfth century into Latin from Arabic texts which belonged to a much earlier period. *The Twelve Virtues of Snakeskin*<sup>2</sup> is the translation of a magico-alchemical text of the thirteenth century *De Corio Serpentis*. This tractate is the only one in the collections prefaced by a note attributing translation to a named individual, significantly not Rhiwallon or his sons.

Myvi Phylip, kyn bwyf lleiaff y wybod o ieithoed a droes hynn o ladin yn gymraec. A chyn no mineu y gwr y bo trugaroc Duw wrth y eneit a hwnnw a oed berffeith ym pob kelydyd ae troes o roec yn lladin mal y dywespywt rac llaw.

I Phylip, though I be the least in my knowledge of languages have turned this from Latin into Welsh. And before me that man—may God be merciful to his soul,—that man who was perfect in every art turned it from Greek into Latin as has been said beforehand.

The recipe for *Gracia Dei* or *Donum Dei* as it is sometimes known seems to belong to the later Middle Ages. M. S. Ogden<sup>3</sup> suggested that the earliest recorded example of a recipe for this all-purpose salve is to be found in the work of Jean Pitard which belongs to the early fourteenth century. It is in fact to be found a century earlier in the *Compendium Medicinae* of Gilbertus Anglicus. See below, p. 231, n. 1.

<sup>1</sup> Lynn P. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, ii (New York, 1923), 246 ff.; ed. Robert Steele, *Ludgate and Burghs, Secrets of Old Philosophers* (London, 1894), vii–xi; Steinschneider, 'Secreta Secretorum', *Jahrbuch für romanischen und englischen Literaturen*, xii; M. Gastner, 'The Hebrew Version of the Secretum Secretorum', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1907), 879–913; (1908), 111–62, 1065 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Ifor Williams, 'Rhinweddau Croen Neidr', *BBCS* iv, 33–6. J. W. S. Johnsson, 'De Corio Serpentis', *Bulletin de la Société Française d'Histoire de Médecine*, xii, 257–67.

<sup>3</sup> Ogden, op. cit. 113, n. 68/1–12. Mrs. Natalie Fryde has called my attention to *Gracia Dei* among the list of drugs taken by Edward II on his Scottish expedition in 1323, *E101/179/3*.

*The list of days for blood-letting and diet in the twelve months of the year*, on the other hand, corresponds to a Latin list in a ninth-century Chartres MS.<sup>1</sup> This tractate is found in the first section of B.M. 14912 and also in Jesus CXI. Although the original of this tractate can be traced to an early source, there is nothing in the language of the Welsh text to prove that it was translated into Welsh at an early date or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, to prove that it was written down in Welsh at an early date. Other tractates in the Welsh collection, while they resemble materials found in Latin, cannot be traced direct to Latin originals. This material is perhaps more interesting from the point of view of the history of Welsh medicine and culture. It consists of collections of remedies or recipes which take two forms. The one consists of lists of recipes following the pattern of early herbals, as in Diverres, S. 135.

Da yw y kennin a gwin rac dolor o arenneu  
Da yw y kennin y gyuanu asgwrn, ac y aedvedu cornwyteu  
O dodir y kennin a halen wrth weli ef ae kae yn ehegyr  
Or bwyteir y kenin yn amrwt; wynt a barant uedwi

Leeks and wine are good for pain in the kidneys  
Leeks are good to make a bone knit and to bring abscesses to a head  
If leeks and salt be applied to a wound, it will mend straight away  
If leeks be eaten raw they will cause drunkenness.

The other consists of lists of remedies for specific diseases and resembles recipes found in various antidotaria and recipe books throughout the medieval period. For instance, some of the Welsh recipes have their counterparts in the ninth-century Latin Hunterian<sup>2</sup> Antidotarium as well as in the fifteenth-century Thornton MS.<sup>3</sup> A recipe for a sleeping potion used during surgery and found in B.M. 14912, 33<sup>v</sup> and in Jesus XXII, 98 belongs to a long tradition of recipes for soporifics and soporific sponges. Sigerist has shown that the earliest example of this recipe is to be found in the *Bamberger Antidotarium*<sup>4</sup> written in the ninth–tenth centuries but variant versions of it occur throughout the Middle Ages as, for instance, in the works of Hugh de Lucca and of Gilbertus Anglicus. The wordings and content of the recipe vary a great deal. In the Welsh manuscripts the B.M. 14912 and Jesus XXII versions are slightly different. V. Nutton discussing different versions of the *Prognostica Galieni*<sup>5</sup> noted how different wordings are used in different copies of that text and makes the point that the textual transmission of ancient medical writings is more fluid than that of literary texts, as the meaning of the text is more important than

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Wickersheimer, 'Textes Médicaux Chartrains des ix<sup>e</sup>, x<sup>e</sup> et xi<sup>e</sup> siècles', ed. E. A. Underwood, *Science, Medicine and History*, i (London, 1953), 171.

<sup>2</sup> MS. Hunter 96 (T4. 13) described by E. Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiqui* (Oxford, 1935), ii, 12, 25, fols. 25–48. On the Galenic theory of treatment by contraries from which they basically derive, see Temkin, op. cit. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Ogden, op. cit.  
<sup>4</sup> H. E. Sigerist, *Studien und Texte zur frühmittelalterlichen Rezeptliteratur* (Leipzig, 1923), 37–8.

<sup>5</sup> V. Nutton, 'Prognostica Galieni', *Medical History*, xvi, 90–100.

elegance of style, or the needs of metre. A comparison of the Welsh versions with the text of the Bamberger antidotarium and that of Gilbertus Anglicus amply verifies this point. The Welsh versions are closer to that of Gilbertus Anglicus than to the earlier source.

B.M. 14912

Diawt yw honn or . . . . . i beri . . . . . i dyn kysku tra agorer ar vab pa le bynnac y bo y glwyf i leihau y dolor. Kymer sugun opu tebagia, y morgelyn, y papaver, sef yw hwnnw y bwlwc frenglic, mandragore, eiddyw y koet, y mwyr, y kegid, y lettus, Kymeint o bop un ac oe gilydd. Kymysker y mywn llester pridd glan a chatwer yndaw a gwnele y ddiawt honn y dyddyeu y kwn a phan ddarparer agori ar y klaf parer iddaw wylat yn hwyaf ac y galler ac wedy hynny bwryer beth yn y ffroeneu ac ef a gwsc heb y dolor. Pan vynyh y dyfroi mortera yspwng y mywn vinegyr a bwrw yn y ffroeneu.

This is a potion which, when taken, causes man to sleep when he be opened up; wherever the wound may be the potion eases the pain. Take the juice of opuntebagia, the sea holly, the papaver, namely the poppy, mandrake, rood ivy, blackberries, hemlock, lettuce, each one in equal amount. Let them be mixed in a clean earthenware dish and left in it, and let this potion be made during the dog-days, and when preparation is being made to open the patient, cause him to watch as long as possible and after that, let some of the mixture be put in his nostrils and he shall sleep without pain. When you wish to awake him, press a sponge in vinegar and push it into his nostrils.

Jesus XXII

Kymer sugyn opii tebasci, a llysieu y perviged, a sugyn bulwg ffrengic, a sugyn y mandrgon a sugyn yr eiddew, a sugyn y mwyr, a sugyn y kegid, a sugyn y letus. Kymin o bop un ai gilydd, pwys yr wyth ugein, a chymysc mewn llestyr pridd, ac yn y dyddieu y kwn y dylr y wneuthur, a phan vynyh egori ar y klaf par idd gwylio hwy a gallo a gwedy hynny gossot y ddiot yn y ddwy ffroen, ac yn y lle ef a gowgws. Yw ddeffroi bwrw spwng mewn gwynygyr ai ellwng yn y ffroen.

Take the juice of opium tebasum, plants of . . . , the juice of the poppy, the juice of the mandrake, the juice of the ivy, the juice of blackberries, the juice of hemlock and the juice of the lettuce. Take equal portions of each to the weight of eight score and mix them together in an earthenware vessel, and that should be done in the dog-days. When you wish to open up the patient cause him to watch as long as possible and after that place the potion in his nostrils and straightway he will take on the appearance of sleep. To wake him, plunge a sponge into vinegar and release it in his nostrils.

Bamberger Antidotarium

Ypnoticum adiutorium

id est somnificum conueniens his qui chirurgiam operantur aut sectiones ut dolore non sentiant soporati.

Recipit: opio teuaicu Z, mandragoris sucus ex foliis uncie octo, cicute his uiridis sucus, iusquiami sucu uncie tres in unum cum aqua sufficienti, ut sucum faciat et ipsum sucum in spungie rude sicca redigis et diligenter

siccabis. Et dum uti uolueris ipsa spongia ad hora indundis in calida et naris adponis et facit, ut ad se ipsum rapiat spiritum, donec dormiet et dum expergisci(t) uolueris alia spungia in aceto calefacto infusa ad nares ponit.

Gilbertus Anglicus: Compendium Medicinæ

Confectio soporifera ad incidendum: Recipe opii succi iusquiami, succi papaveris nigri vel eius seminis, succi mandragorae vel eius corticis, vel pomorum ipsius si succo carueris, foliorum hederæ arboreæ eius succi mororum rubi maturorum seminis lactucae, succi cuscute aa unciam in unam. Conmische in vase eneo cum succis et ponatur ad solem in canicularibus diebus et imponatur spongia ut totum conbibat et immoretur in sole donec humiditas a sole in spongia consumatur.

Cum autem opus fuerit incisione spongiam patiens super os et nares teneat donec somnum capiat et tunc incidere poteris. Cum autem excitare volueris aliam spongiam in aceto ponas et cum ea dentes frica et nares et acetum in naribus pone. Potio autem potest fieri ad idem. Recipe seminis papaveris albi et nigri et seminis lactucae aa in opii miscionis i vel ii pro ut tibi videbitur . . . et excitetur ut prius.<sup>1</sup>

The recipes in the collections are based chiefly on plants but there is a series of animal recipes.

Llyma y petheu yssyd da rac y kic drwc . . . . .

Kymer llyfant du ny allo namyn cropyan, a maed a gwialen yny littyo ac yny chwydo yny uo marw, a chymer ef a dot y mywn pridell a chae y bridell amdanaw hyt na chaffo y mwc vynet allan, nar gwynt y mywn, ae losgi yn y bridell yny uo yn lludw, a bwrw y lludw hwnnw arnaw. —Arall yw kymer gic uran yn yr un ryw losgyat, a bwrw y lludw arnaw. —

Here are the things which are good in case of gangrene.

Take a black toad which is only able to crawl, and beat it with a stick until it becomes furious and so that it swells until it dies, and take it and put it into an earthenware cooking pot and close the lid on it so that the smoke may not escape nor the air get into it, and burn it in the pot until it is ashes, and cast these ashes on it—Another is take a raven by the same process and throw the ashes on it.<sup>2</sup>

Both plant and animal recipes are directed at the cure of specific symptoms and diseases, and are classified according to the site or nature of the disease.

Rac chwyd neu dolor yg gwarreu—Mortera wreid y celidonia a llysseu y wennawl, ar ffenigyl, a phenneu garlec, a gw(i)n egyr neu win, ac emenyn a rwym yg kylch dy vynywyl, a hynny a ostwng y dolor ar chwyd.

—Rac gwaetlin o ffroeneu. —Berwi garlec drwy lastwr llefrith, ae yuet, prouedic yw.

<sup>1</sup> Gilbertus Anglicus, *Compendium Medicinæ*; *Gilberti anglici tam morborum universalium quam particularium nondum medicis sed 7 cyrurgicis utilissimum*. Lugduni (1510). Liber Quintus. fol. ccxxxiv; Henry E. Henderson, M.D., *Gilbertus Anglicus; Medicine of the Thirteenth Century* (Cleveland, Ohio, 1918), 65.

<sup>2</sup> Diverres, op. cit. 98, 100, S. 138.

For swelling or pain in the dorsal spine. Grind the root of the celandine, the plant of the celandine and the fennel, and garlic herbs and vinegar or wine, and butter and poultice it around your neck and that will reduce the pain and the swelling.

For nose bleed: boil garlic in watered milk and drink it; that is proven.<sup>1</sup>

Interspersed with the recipes are certain basic facts related to simple anatomy.

Tri thew annesgor: auu ac aren a chalonn a llyma yr achaws y gelwir velly, dilis yw, y lle y kyhyrddo klwyf ac un o'r tri na ellir gwaret udun namyn marw yn ehegyr.

The three thick indispensables: liver and kidney and heart and this is the reason they are so called, it is indisputable, that wherever a hurt touches one of them it cannot be got rid of but death will come at once.

Tri theneu anesgor ynt: pilyonnen yr emennydd a glas golud a chwyssygen achaws or un achaws y maent anesgor ar lleill.

The three thin indispensables: the membrane of the brain and the small intestine and the bladder, and it is for the same reason that they are as indispensable as the others.<sup>2</sup>

Other facts relate to the classification of disease, like the four kinds of summer fever. There are references to simple surgical procedures like lithotomy, ligation for haemorrhoids, and craniotomy.

Tri lle hagen y megyr clefydau, un yw ton eil yw y greuan. Trydyd yw y gryadur. O waet a llosceu y gwaredir y ton. O agori hyt y gryuan y gwaredir y greuan o agori ar ben hyd gryadur y gwaredir y gryadur.

There are three places where diseases develop, one is the scalp, the second is the cranium, the third is the dura mater. The scalp is saved by cautery and bleeding. The cranium is saved by opening the head as far as the cranium, the dura mater is saved by opening the head as far as the dura mater.<sup>3</sup>

There are significantly few charms.

Many of the recipes are relatively simple. This simplicity suggests an ultimate origin anterior to the scholastic complications of the later Middle Ages. The material in the first part of Jesus CXI and B.M. 14912 is of this type.

These sections are full of the patterns of expression that are found in the technical prose of a more native kind and connected with the activities of the other professional learned classes of medieval Wales, namely the prose of the bards and lawyers. Native Welsh technical prose, like that of the law texts and the bardic grammars, is distinguished by the frequent use of stylistic devices, such as numerical groupings, pairs of antithetical statements, alliteration, and rhymes.<sup>4</sup> It has been supposed that this style owes

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. 76, S. 98.

<sup>2</sup> B.M. 14912, 50<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 6<sup>r</sup>, 6<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> M. E. Owen, 'Y Cyfreithiau. Ansawdd y Rhyddiaith', gol. Geraint Bowen, *Y Traddodiad Rhyddiaith* (Llandybie, 1974). For the law books see M. E. Owen, 'Y Llyfrau Cyfraith' in the same volume.

its origin to the oral nature of the Welsh learned tradition and had a mnemonic function. All these stylistic devices are to be found in the medical collections, as can be seen in the examples quoted above. The use of these devices suggests that medical material had become completely absorbed into the Welsh learned tradition. It might have become absorbed in the first place as an oral learning. The art of medicine in every society and every age has always been and still is one that has been largely transmitted 'by word of mouth and practical instruction, from father to son and from master to pupil'. As an oral learning it would have had a dynamic tradition and been added to through the centuries. The eleventh and twelfth centuries saw a renewed interest in medical knowledge throughout Europe which stimulated the production of more written literature. The colophons of the Meddygon Myddfai texts suggest that one of the chief reasons for the Myddfai physicians' fame was that they committed medical knowledge to writing. It may be that their work, stimulated by contemporary movements, marked a change from an oral to a written tradition in medicine in Welsh and it is this achievement which constitutes the primary basis of their fame. If this is the case, it could be added in postscript that it indicates another interesting divergence between Ireland and Wales in the development of a similar tradition. In Ireland, early medicine seems to have been entirely abandoned and replaced by scholasticism in the writings of the late Middle Ages. In Wales, many early texts possibly continued to be used and were added to as part of a continuous tradition.

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