

Giant

tales from Wales

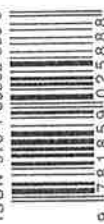
Did you know that Wales is a land of giants?

Well, you won't see one every day, but we have certainly had our fair share of giants over the years – some gruesome, some friendly. From these seven stories, you can decide on your favourite. Is it the Giant of Pumlumon, with his two heads? Or old Rhitta, the Giant of Snowdon, who leaps from mountain to mountain? Or perhaps you will feel safer with the gentle giant of the Preseli Hills, who doesn't even mind being woken from his sleep.

Happy reading, and look out for the other giants who live near you!



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GIANT TALES FROM WALES

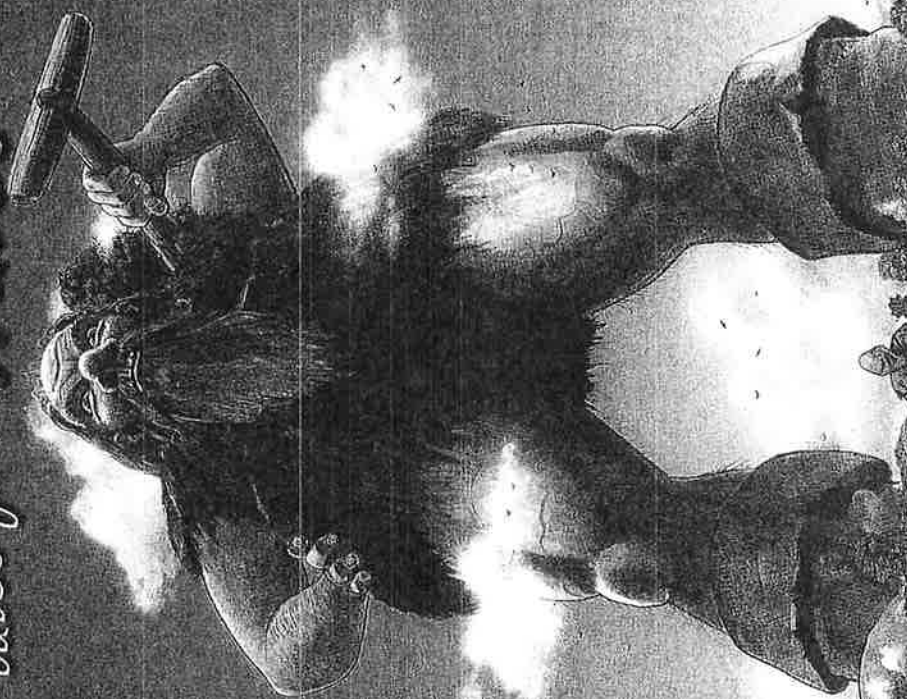
Brenda Wyn Jones

A translation by Ann Saer

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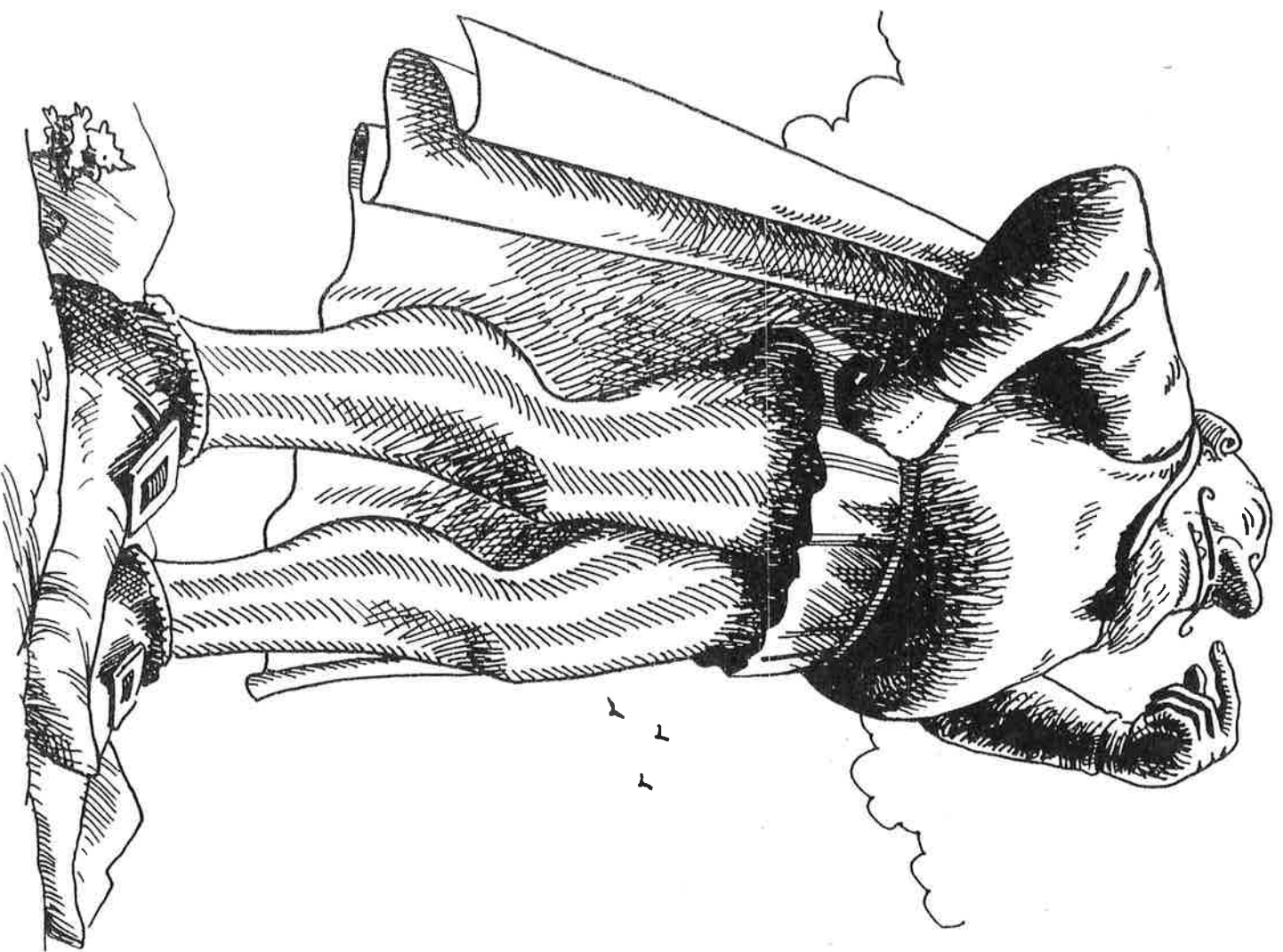
Giant

tales from Wales



Brenda Wyn Jones





2 The Giant of the Rhondda

'I am the biggest!

I am the best!

I am the greatest in the whole wide world!'

Brag, brag, brag. That was all Hywel ever did from morning till night, day in day out. He wasn't half as nasty as old Rhitta, but he used to get on everyone's nerves because he was forever challenging the other giants to a fight. Everyone who lived in the Rhondda valley had had more than enough of him. It was always the same boring old chant:

'I am the biggest!

I am the best!

I am the greatest in the whole wide world!'

Of course, everybody used to agree with him because not one of them wanted to give him an excuse to give them a good hiding. But though he looked so nasty and threatening, really and truly Hywel, like so many bullies, was just a great big baby. And in the end, he showed off a bit too much. This is what happened.

Hywel had heard that there was a great giant in Ireland who terrified all the people in the land. In fact, it was said that this Irish giant really was the biggest, the best and the greatest giant in the whole world.

Do you know what Hywel did? He challenged the Irish giant to come over to the Rhondda to fight him. Of course, he thought the giant wouldn't take any notice of the invitation. Well—that's certainly what he hoped.

'After all, Ireland's far enough away over the sea,' Hywel reassured himself. 'Though I do remember hearing my father say that the great giant Bendigeidfran once walked from Wales to Ireland. But so what? Whoever heard of a giant from Ireland coming over here to Wales? He'll never come, that's for sure.'

Months went by and Hywel's head had grown bigger than ever.

'I must be a super-giant,' he said to everyone. 'Why, even the great giant of Ireland is too scared to come over here to fight me.'

'I am the biggest!

I am the best!

I am the greatest in the whole wide world!

I am a SUPER-GIANT!

All the people of the Rhondda were really fed up with his boasting, but were too frightened to disagree.

Then, one morning, as Hywel was sitting outside the door of his cottage, waiting for his wife to bring him his breakfast, he saw a huge shape in the distance, moving slowly towards him. It grew bigger and bigger as it came closer. YES! It was the giant from Ireland. He was so enormous that he looked like a great mountain moving up the valley, and his eyes glittered like twin lakes in the morning sun. Hywel fled into the house in terror and squeezed himself under the table.

'What on earth's the matter with you?' asked his wife. 'It's the giant from Ireland!' cried Hywel. 'Here . . . now!' 'But I thought you said you were looking forward to meeting him?'

'Yes, yes, I know, but just go over to the window and look at the size of him. Oh, whatever shall I do?'

'I know,' said his wife, after thinking for a moment. 'I have an idea. Go upstairs and hide under the bed.'

'But he'll be bound to find me there!' Hywel protested.

'Do as I tell you,' said his wife, 'and perhaps I can save you. You really are a very silly giant, making all this trouble for yourself.'

'Yes, you're right, I know that now,' Hywel snivelled.

'But if you save me, I'll never, ever brag and show off again. That's a promise.'

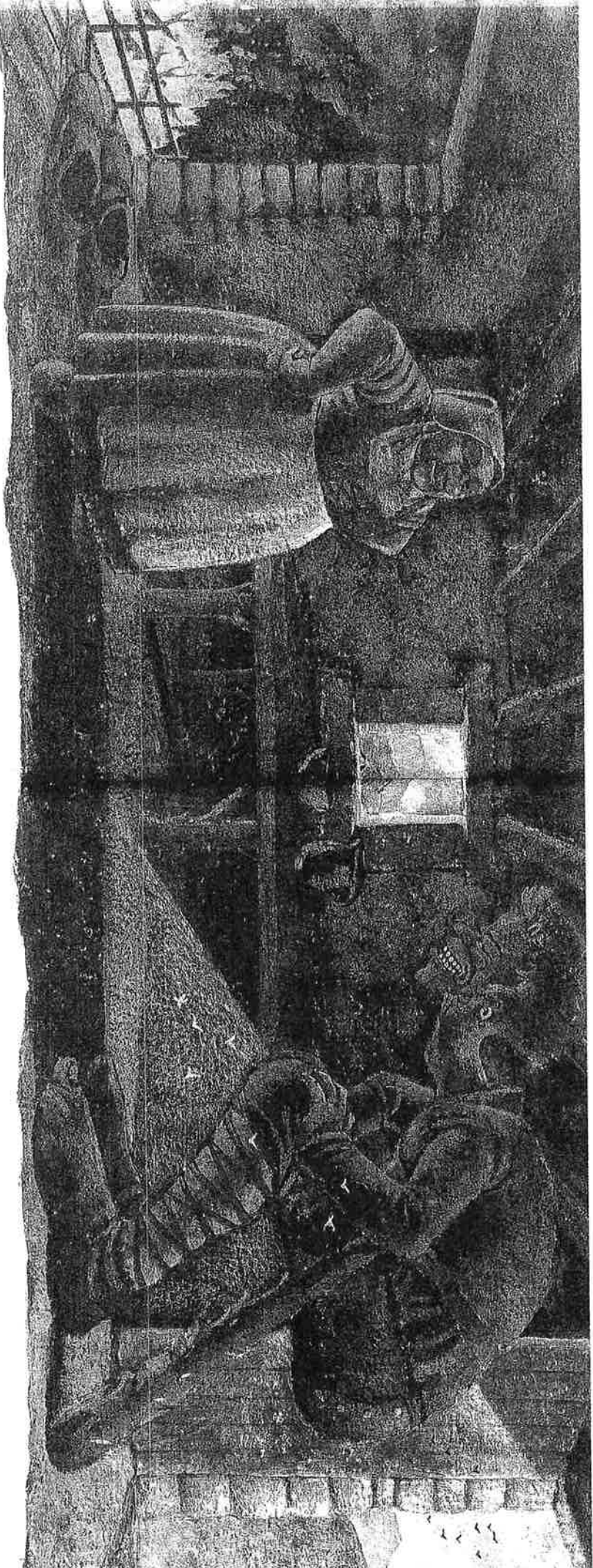
'Cross your heart? Honest to goodness?' asked his wife hopefully. She was tired of hearing how marvellous he was, and how lucky she was to have married him.

'Cross-my-heart-and-honest-to-goodness-and-really-and-truly-for-ever-Amen,' said Hywel.

'Right!' said his wife. 'Now move—fast. Give me your shoes and go upstairs to hide.'

Hywel crept upstairs and crawled under their enormous bed, his heart pounding like a grandfather clock and his legs quivering like jellies. Meanwhile, his wife had grabbed his shoes and set them carefully in front of the fire. Then she took her time over preparing breakfast.

'The top of the mornin' to you an' all! Is there a welcome here for Gwyddel, a giant from Ireland?' roared a lilting Irish voice at the door.



'Of course you are welcome here, Gwyddel. Come in,' said Hywel's wife, smiling at him nicely. 'You're just in time to join us for breakfast. We'll be more than happy to share it with you when Hywel comes home.'

'Aha,' said Gwyddel. 'He'll be the person I've come all this way to see. And where would he be then? In bed, perhaps?' And he glanced at the enormous pair of shoes warming in front of the fire.

'In bed? No indeed,' she retorted indignantly, staring at him straight in the eye. 'But he'll be delighted to see you. I know he's looking forward to meeting you.'

'Oh, is he? Well, we'll have to see about that. But what are these doing here?' asked Gwyddel, pointing to the shoes on the hearth. 'Does Hywel usually go

hunting in his bare feet? I can't believe that, somehow. But I'll tell you what I do believe—there's an old show-off hiding somewhere in this house because he's too much of a baby to face me.'

'No, you're quite wrong there,' insisted the good wife. 'Who do these shoes belong to, then?'

'Oh, they're the baby's shoes,' she replied. 'The *cariad bach* is asleep in his cot upstairs.'

Gwyddel the giant of Ireland stared at the shoes. He began to think hard. 'Connemara!' he said to himself. 'If the baby's as big as this, his dad must be . . . massive.'

'Er—Missus,' he said aloud, his voice trembling. 'I've just remembered . . . two important appointments I have to get back for. There's an important committee I have to

attend in Tipperary, and there's a gig in Galway. I don't know how they slipped my mind. I shall have to hurry back at once. Tell your husband how sorry I am to have missed him . . . nice meeting you . . .'

The giant of Ireland backed out of the door like a dog with its tail between its legs and stumbled headlong down the valley to Cardiff Bay. He was determined to get far away before Hywel arrived home.

'Hywel! You can come downstairs to have your breakfast now,' called his wife.

'Are you sure he's gone?' quavered Hywel from his cwtsh under the bed.

'Yes—and he'll never come back either,' she laughed.

'Thank goodness for that,' said Hywel happily and straightaway he began to chant:

'I am the biggest!

I am the best!

I am the great . . .'

'Stop that nonsense at once,' said his wife, sharp as a kitchen knife. 'Just you remember what you promised. If you ever brag like that again, I'll tell everybody what really happened when Gwyddel came by!'

'Oh, all right then,' Hywel agreed, hanging his head and sulking. He'd been looking forward to telling his own version of the story to the other giants.

From that day on, Hywel really did stop boasting. He was too afraid that his wife would tell the true story of how she had got rid of Gwyddel, the great giant of Ireland, all by herself.

