

love knows neither limit nor measure. But that is fostered not by afflicting your flesh, but in holy desires and loving meditations and through the touchwood of sisterly love by which every one of you loves her neighbour as herself.

Brother Bernard, the Prior Provincial, greets you.

ST DAVID AND WALES

BY

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IN St David's Day Welshmen are apt to make speeches. For once in the year the virtue of speaking Welsh is generally conceded. One of the objections to giving much time to Welsh in the schools used to be its lack of 'commercial value': Welsh, it was argued reasonably enough, brought no dividends. John Capgrave, in his *Legenda Nova Historie Angliæ*, tells a story which suggests that Welsh may be very useful indeed:

'A certain Welshman coming from the diocese of Menevia was captured by the Saracens, and was put in chains together with a German. The Welshman cried aloud day and night in his own language to St David, "Dewi, wared!", which is to say, "David, come to my aid!" And, wonderful to relate, he suddenly found himself restored to his own country. Making this known to Gervase, at that time the bishop of those parts, he was taken into the dwelling of the latter on account of so notable a miracle. But his companion the German, considered to be privy to what had happened, was submitted to beatings and placed in even stricter custody. He remembered, therefore, how his companion frequently called out "Dewi, wared!", and although he did not understand the meaning of the words he decided to cry aloud in the same manner and began to exclaim, "Dewi wared!" Without delay he was suddenly caught up and brought to his own home, and he knowing nothing of how it came about. He tried everywhere to find out what the words might mean, but without success until he came to Paris where a certain Welshman made known to him the meaning of those words. He gave thanks to God, and in acknowledgment of so notable a benefit he decided to go as a pilgrim to St David's shrine at Menevia. Arrived there, he was seen by his companion, who greatly wondered and greeted him with tears of joy. And to him he told the whole account of what had happened'.

This story, which I have translated from the Appendix to the Bollandist life of St David,¹ is perhaps more edifying than accurate. The earliest life of St David, that by Rhygyfarch, was written at least five centuries after David's death and is concerned to forward the claims of Menevia against Canterbury, by extolling its first bishop rather than by providing a critical biography. It may well be that half-a-dozen other saints have as good a claim to be the patron saint of Wales. But David found a biographer, who, as he himself tells us, 'rashly applied the capacity of my intelligence to these things', and produced a convincing picture of one who, 'with the consent of all the bishops, kings, princes, nobles and all grades of the whole Britannic race, was made archbishop, and his monastery too is declared the metropolis of the whole country, so that whoever ruled it should be accounted archbishop'.²

Giraldus Cambrensis—and this year is the eighth centenary of his birth—devoted the best part of his life to pursuing the metropolitan claims of Menevia. He failed in his task, and indeed admits³ that he followed 'tradition and public opinion rather than the certain proof of history'. Thus it is that the name of David has become a war-cry, not to say a shibboleth, and it is impossible now to go behind the elaborate superstructure of legend and partisan argument to rediscover David himself. Each generation finds in him an acceptable model of the virtues thought to be notably Welsh. His title of *Dewi Ddyfrwr*, 'David the Waterman', recalling his austerity of life, has often enough inspired a total abstinence peroration; and his dying words, 'Brethren, keep the faith', have been quoted in support of faiths that would have greatly surprised the adversary of the Pelagians.

And yet the association of David with a language and a tradition which, however distorted, still remain in the land that was his own, is a reality. One remembers the prophecy of the old man of Pencader, with which Giraldus ends his *Description of Wales*:

'Nor do I think, that any other nation than this of Wales, or any other language, whatever may hereafter come to pass, shall, in the day of Judgment, answer for this corner of the earth'.

More than seven hundred years have passed since then, and despite all the probabilities of history, nearly a million people would still need no interpreter if, as a hoary Welsh story suggests, St Peter proves to be a monoglot Welshman.

It is easy to smile at the credulities of the past, but one can find in their artless joy in believing something we have lost. As Père

1 *Acta Sanctorum*, Vol. VII.

2 *Vita Sancti Davidis*, 53. (ed. Wade-Evans, *Y Cymmrodor*, 1913.)

3 *Retractationes* (*Works*, I, p. 426).

Delehaye pointed out, the 'legends' and 'inventions' of hagiography have a deep truth of their own. They may not suit the exacting demands of modern criticism, but they reflect a consciousness of the providential *unity* of human life. The stock miracles and the marvellous prophecies may have a precarious connection with the particular saint whose 'life' they adorn, but they are never idle inventions: however crudely, they proclaim a world where God's hand is seen at work in unlikely places. And a world where the language you speak may have its providential uses!

R E V I E W S

A NEW FIORETTI. Translated with introduction and notes by John R. H. Moorman, D.D. (S.P.C.K.; 3s. 6d.)

The exquisite series of tales whose English title is *The Little Flowers of St Francis* forms but a portion of a collection known to scholars as the *Actus Beati Francisci*, itself only one of half-a-dozen similar groups of stories of equal or greater historical respectability. It has been the happy idea of Dr Moorman to 'round off and complete our collection of all that is known of the life of the Poverello' in English with a new selection from this mass of writing, and he has headed each tale with a scholarly little note indicating its origin and drift. The collection is introduced by a prefatory essay that sums up the critical problem embedded in Franciscan origins with the competence we have come to expect from this erudite student of Franciscan history. Dr Moorman has already made all workers in Franciscan origins his debtors with a very significant study of the whole problem in his *Sources for the Life of St Francis*; the introductory essay here, though necessarily much briefer, yields nothing in ability to that fine work. It is a pleasure to be able to assure lovers of Franciscan literature that this little book will make a notable addition to their Seraphic collections.

The seventy-five tales that make up this book are done into an English that aims successfully at reproducing the directness, the sincerity, and at times even the bluntness of the originals. There is nothing here, we must warn the reader, of the archaic and almost Scriptural manner that makes much of the charm of Arnold's *Fioretti*. Moorman's idiom is strictly contemporary; but the modern reader will probably prefer his strength and compactness to the more leisurely loveliness of a bygone age.

It is a pity not to be able to stop here. But the reader who has no Latin or who cannot easily come by the originals must be warned of one or two slips that mar this fine translation. The first is so strange