



IOLO,
the "Welsh Shakespeare"

by

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EDWARD WILLIAMS, born 1745, Welsh poet of the Eighteenth Century, who became known as the "Welsh Shakespeare" in the Nineteenth, carried a wallet filled with rare manuscripts relating to ethnology of the Kymry and secret writing of the Bards. His horse was his companion, on long journeys carrying the wallet, he walking. It is recorded that he only once rode, the occasion being news of his father's dangerous illness.

He was a keen pedestrian when searching old bookstalls. For example, he walked 94 miles to Bristol, and back home next day to Cowbridge, Glam., with his wallet on his well-fed horse, he taking only tea and bread and butter. When he lived in London as stone-mason and carver for about thirty years, he associated with the *literati* of the day, and his revolutionary ideas were known as well as his wallet.

One day, returning home when the air was full of the French Revolution, he discovered his wallet had been seized by the Government, and he received a hint that the Prime Minister wanted to see him. At the interview that ensued, he found the wallet thoroughly ransacked, and Mr. Pitt, after congratulating him that nothing incriminating had been found, wished him goodbye. Iolo then indignantly replied: "Your men deprived me of my heavy wallet and I should be glad if they would return it"; and this was done. He returned in 1797 to his native county and opened a bookseller's shop, for which he was qualified, judging by Southey's panegyric:

"Iolo, Old Iolo, he who knows
The virtues of all herbs of mount or vale,
Whatever lore of science, or of song,
Sages and Bards of old have handed down."

At Cowbridge he had this piquant notice in his shop window: "East India Sweets, uncontaminated by human gore." The reason for this display was that he had refused the fortune left

him by his brothers, as it was made out of sugar in the West Indies. His fervent soul in the cause of emancipating slaves and love for old books left him a poor man, and he died at the age of 81, in 1826, and was buried at Flemingstone Churchyard.

Dr. Burgess, Lord Bishop of St. David's took a warm interest in Welsh Literature, and entertained Iolo when over 70 at Abergwili Palace. The Bishop's kindness and interest so touched the old Bard that at his departure he lent his Lordship several cherished manuscripts. These were submitted by the Bishop to two literary friends, who both died without returning the treasures, and to Iolo's consternation he heard they had been sold, and instanter he decided to trace them. After long searchings in the three counties, Carmarthen, Pembroke, and Cardigan, he secured them all except one.

The manuscripts formed the basis of a thesis which won a prize at a National Eisteddfod, and was published later as the book "Barddas" (the Bardo-Druidic System of the Isle of Britain, 2 vols.). These contained the symbols of the lost Bardic Alphabet and were accepted as genuine until 1926, when they were adjudged a forgery without protest by the Welsh Bards—who gather annually in robes designed by Hubert Herkomer. However, in 1931 and New Year's morn, 1932, three superhuman agencies—a cloudburst, blizzard, and landslide—led to discoveries of Oriental origins, among which was the geometric Bardic Alphabet of Egyptian and Assyro-Babylonian origins.

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