1. County and Shire. The name *Merionethshire*. Its Origin and Meaning.

The division of Wales into shires first took place in the reign of Edward the First. Before the conquest of Wales by that monarch there was no division of the Principality into shire ground as understood in English annals. The *Shire* (i.e. the part *shorn* off, or cut off, from the Anglo-Saxon word *scir*) was a Saxon institution brought into use at an early period, as early as the seventh century. In the code of laws of Ina of Wessex, we find portions of the country under his rule divided into *scir* ground, and each division was placed under an officer who was styled a *scir-gerefa*, i.e. a shire-reeve or sheriff. He was the natural leader of the shire in war and peace. His duties were to look after the king's rights, dues and fines, and he acted as the sovereign's representative as regards finance and the execution of justice.

County is a word of Norman origin (*comté*) which came into use in our country after the Conquest, when the administration of each shire was entrusted to a great earl or baron, who was often a count (*comte*), i.e. a companion of the king.

The shiring of Wales was the direct outcome of the extension of English influence into our land. It took place upon two separate occasions, the first as stated above, and the second in the reign of Henry the Eighth. Consequently the shires of Wales do not stand in the same relation to the early history of the particular districts of which they are a share, as the real shires of England proper stand to old English history. They are really administrative districts formed for convenience, rather than organic divisions of land and people like Sussex and Kent, which correspond to original tribal kingdoms. Of the Welsh counties Anglesey's insular position gave it a unity and compactness of its own, but as regards the others, Cardiganshire alone in extent of territory and distinctive characteristics is in an analogous position to that of Sussex and Kent among English counties. It probably corresponded with the ancient principality of Ceredigion, and to this, perhaps, the strong local feeling and distinctive type of character still associated with that county are due. The other counties have, however, been built up of the immemorial territorial divisions (hundreds and commotes) of the Cymry.

The county of Merioneth is one of the eight counties which came into existence by the Statute of Rhuddlan in 1284. The name, however, is of much earlier date as the name of a cantrev. In its Welsh form of Meirionydd we are taken back to a period some eight centuries earlier.

The tradition is that about 420 A.D. Cunedda, a powerful British chief who held his court at Carlisle, was

invited by his kindred, the Brythons, to come and assist them, as they were sore pressed by the Gwyddyl or Goidels from across the Irish Sea. In right of his mother, as we are told in the Welsh pedigrees, Cunedda was able to claim large tracts of territory in Wales. He therefore most readily responded to the appeal, and by the aid of his numerous sons succeeded in expelling the Goidels from the greater part of the territory. Cunedda's men, it is recorded, settled permanently in the land, and so did his sons, except the eldest, named Tybiawn, who had died some time before in Manaw Gododin, as the territory of the north was called.

The names of the sons have survived in the territories which they wrested from the Gwyddyl. Ceredig occupied Ceredigion (Cardiganshire); Arwystl seized upon Arwystli, a part of Montgomeryshire; Edeyrn made his abode in Edeyrnion in our present county; Einion possessed himself of Caereinion in Montgomeryshire. The sons of Tybiawn were likewise granted their shares, in right of the eldest son. Maelor obtained Dyffryn Maelor, and Meirion possessed the territory called Cantrev Meirion, "the Hundred of Meirion," which in its turn gave its name to Meirionydd, and the county of Merioneth.

By the Statute of Rhuddlan there were added to the cantrev of Meirionydd the commotes of Penllyn, Edeyrnion, and Ardudwy, and these together constituted the shire of Merioneth until the time of Henry VIII. When the Principality became ripe for its union with England in the time of the Welsh sovereigns, the Tudors, an "Act of Union" was passed, by which five new shires

were created from the Marcher lordships. This Act added to the county of Merioneth the lawless lordship of Mawddwy.

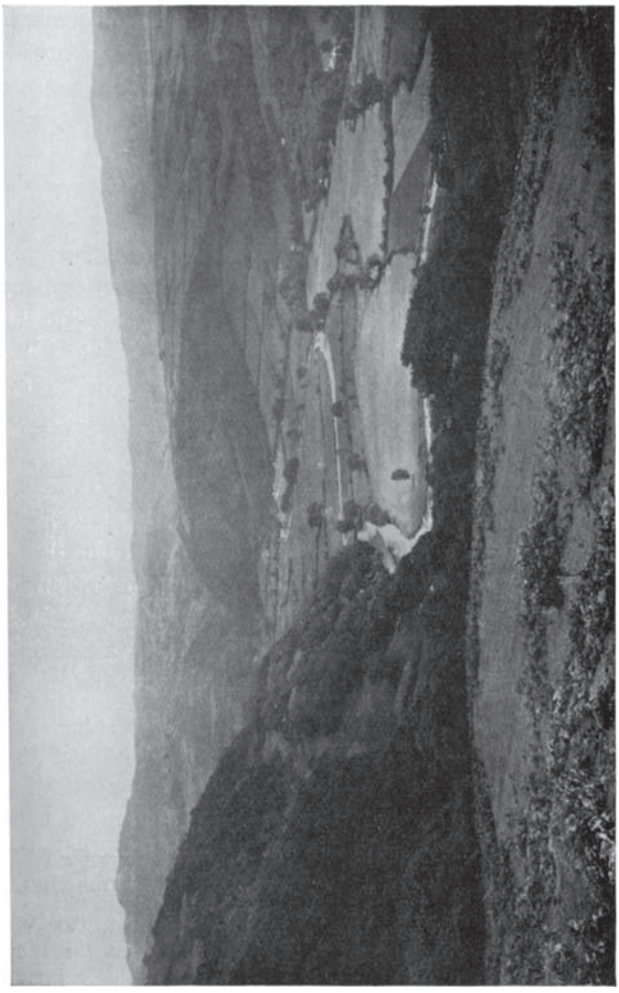
2. General Characteristics.

Merionethshire is a maritime county of North Wales, washed on its western side by Cardigan Bay, and bordered on the north, east, and south by the counties of Carnarvon, Denbigh, Montgomery, and Cardigan respectively.

It is more mountainous than any of the North Wales counties with the exception perhaps of Carnarvonshire. Its deep and secluded valleys, with the ruggedness and variety of its elevated districts, give it a particular charm and interest. The varied panoramic views from its heights surpass anything to be seen in Wales.

Portions of the county, by the nature of its rocks, are devoted to the industry of slate-quarrying. The best slate in the world for roofing purposes is worked in various parts of the county, but mainly in the north. Ours, too, is the only county in Wales in which gold has been found in quantities sufficient to pay for working; but, in the main, Merionethshire is an agricultural and pastoral county, the great proportion of the people being devoted to husbandry.

Merionethshire is one of the most Welsh in customs and habits of all the counties of Wales. Its people have not been influenced to the same extent as other Welsh



The Vale of Festiniog

counties by the influx of the English wave. In the most numerous instances business and trade dealings are carried on in the vernacular, and the native inhabitants treasure their ancient language as the worthiest of their inheritances.

The county has figured largely in the history of the Principality from the earliest times. Its remains of the prehistoric past form an interesting chapter in the story of our land. The Brythonic wave of our Celtic forebears pushed itself from the plains of England into Wales by way of large tracts in this county, and terminated like the point of a broad wedge at the mouth of the Dovey. From this fact has arisen the name of the Brythonic tribe in the second wave of Celtic migration, *Yr Ardyfiaid*, or as it was known to the Romans, the *Ordovices*. The Goidels and the Brythons have left traces of their occupation in the vast number of tumuli, menhirs, stone circles, and cromlechs now seen in elevated situations in various parts of the county.

The remains of Roman times are also very interesting. These comprise military roads, camps, and stations in all parts of the county. Other remains, such as coins, inscribed stones, and Samian ware prove that Roman civilisation held sway in secluded corners of this county as well as in the more accessible parts of England and the borders, while the ruins of castles and ecclesiastical buildings show it to have been a not unimportant territory in medieval times.

Its rivers are famous all the world over for their incomparable scenery. The Dee, with its great inland

sheet of water snugly sheltered by the Arenigs and the Berwyns, has been more sung about and visited than most of the rivers of Cambria. The Mawddach with its broad tidal estuary and its numerous rushing contributory streams has noble scenery to show, and the district through which it flows is sometimes called the British Tyrol. Its lakes and waterfalls are equal in beauty to those in any part of

The Mawddach, from Panorama Walk

the kingdom, and are an unceasing source of attraction to hosts of sight-seers at all seasons of the year. The woody character of its valleys and uplands make it a delightful land. No part of its surface can be said to be tame or monotonous. From every standpoint our county of Merioneth is one of the most charming and interesting of all the Welsh counties.

3. Size. Shape. Boundaries.

Merionethshire is one of the largest counties of North Wales, comprising an area of 602 square miles with a superficial surface in the administrative county of 418,475 acres excluding water. Its water area totals 3897 acres. It occupies nearly one-twelfth of the whole area of Wales, and ranks as seventh in point of size of the twelve Welsh counties. In the geographical or ancient county area it would take rank as sixth in Wales.

Its extreme length, from north-east to south-west, measured in a straight line drawn along the southern contour of the county from Berwyn on the Dee to Aberdovey on the Dovey estuary, is 46 miles. Its greatest breadth, measured from Llyn-y-Ddinas in the north, near the village of Beddgelert, to near Mallwyd on the borders of Montgomeryshire, is 29 miles.

In shape, speaking generally, the county has the appearance of a scalene triangle, having its shorter side on the west where it faces Cardigan Bay. The base, its longest side, lies contiguous to Montgomeryshire for a length of 37 miles, with the remaining nine miles touching Denbighshire. The apex of this triangle is at the west corner of Llyn-y-Ddinas, whilst the angles of the base are respectively at the village of Berwyn on the Dee and at Aberdovey.

In a perambulation of the limits of the county it will be well to make our start at the apex of this irregular triangle. We shall be compelled to observe that, with the

exception of the west side, our county is so circumscribed by high mountains that there are only a very few artificial boundaries necessary. Nature has fulfilled her part in an admirable manner; she has supplied the county with natural boundaries in her high mountains, rivers, and sea.

Leaving Llyn-y-Ddinas the boundary line takes us first to the top of the Glyders, high mountains forming

Aberdovey

an offshoot of the Snowdon group. Hence we proceed by an arc of a circle to the north of the steep and rugged Cynicht, until it encloses the slate district of Festiniog within its bounds. The circumference of this arc of a circle descends by Llyn-y-Dywarchen, a charming sheet of water, and leaves the limits of Carnarvonshire to enter those of Denbighshire.

We now follow it a little to the north of the mountain called Arenig Fach, from which it proceeds in a north-easterly direction across the elevated expanse of the Gylchedd, to ascend the ridge of Carnedd Filast and then drop into the valley of the upper course of the Alwen. It follows this little stream for about two miles until it approaches Cerrig-y-Drudion on the Denbighshire side of the boundary. The line of demarcation now takes a southerly course, and forms what may be called three-fourths of a circle to cross the Alwen again about two miles to the south of Bettws Gwerfil Goch. It assumes a northward direction a little to the west of this village, and reaches Llanfihangel Glyn Myfyr. Here it proceeds eastward for four miles, and then by an artificial limit makes for the valley of the Clwyd, which it crosses at the village of Derwen. A mile beyond this north-eastern limit an artificial boundary again marks the line of demarcation on the eastern side until it arrives at the village of Berwyn on the Dee.

From Berwyn our direction is now south-west by a zigzag course until we reach the summit of Moel Ferna in the Berwyn group. Proceeding along the length of this chain of mountains for nearly ten miles we arrive at Cader Berwyn, and here we leave Denbighshire to beat the bounds of Montgomeryshire. The boundary line continues along the Berwyn chain as far as the pass of Bwlch-y-Groes. On our right is the valley of the Dee with Bala Lake in its course; and on our left, in closer proximity to the mountains, is Lake Vyrnwy, the great artificial reservoir of the city of Liverpool. These