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978-1-108-04846-0 - A Collection of the Chronicles and Ancient Histories of Great Britain, Now Called England:

Volume 1: From Albina to A.D. 688

Jehan De Wavrin Edited and Translated by William Hardy

Excerpt

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A COLLECTION
OF THE
CHRONICLES AND ANCIENT HISTORIES OF GREAT
BRITAIN, NOW CALLED ENGLAND,
BY JOHN DE WAVRIN.

HERE FOLLOWS THE GENERAL PROLOGUE OF THE
AUTHOR OF THIS PRESENT WORK OF THE COLLECTION
OF THE CHRONICLES AND ANCIENT HISTORIES OF
GREAT BRITAIN, NOW CALLED ENGLAND.

It is well known that in all schools authors are daily read who have written in verse the lives and deeds of the Trojans, Greeks, Romans, Africans, and other nations, whereby they are and for ever will be remembered ; so likewise in France and the neighbouring regions there have been, and still are, kings and princes of great renown and prowess whose lives and deeds are worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance :

High and mighty my greatly honoured and dread Lord Monseigneur Waleran, lord of Wavrin, Lillers, Malannoy, and Saint Venant, forasmuch as after your late return from Constantinople (whither you had been commissioned and sent as captain general of several gallies and armed vessels furnished with numerous

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men at-arms and archers by the appointment of the most high, excellent, and powerful prince Philip, duke of Burgundy and of Limburg, Count of Flanders, Artois, and Burgundy, &c. into the seas of the Levant and of Greece to oppose and resist the enterprises of the Turkish infidels), you were pleased often to converse with me concerning many beautiful and ancient histories; among which you spoke of that noble and ancient kingdom of Great Britain, formerly called the island of Albion, and at present England, where there have been very high, excellent, and powerful kings and princes by whom that noble kingdom has been energetically governed even to this day, and which has also been always well furnished with noble knights who have in their day undertaken and accomplished many lofty enterprises through their great prowess; concerning which, as you conversed with me, you could not enough marvel how that no clerks of that kingdom had come forward to write the lives and deeds of these kings and princes, except only in some little books concerning each king apart: I then, having the advantage of your noble desire, and being assured of your good aid and counsel, which has been serviceable to me in this matter, have ventured to undertake this trouble and labour of collecting, adjusting, and bringing together in four volumes of books, to the best of my knowledge and skill, all the lofty deeds of those kings, of their prowess and of their lives, and how by their noble chivalry during the time of each, the said kingdom was governed.

Wherefore, my greatly honoured master, I John de Wavrin, knight, lord of Forestel, illegitimate son of your grandfather, Monseigneur Robert de Wavrin,

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PROLOGUE.

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formerly knight and lord of the lands and seigneuries of Wavrin, Lillers, and Malannoy, who died in the battle of Azincourt (where on that day I was); feeling within me that old age is approaching, and that I can no longer follow the profession of arms, nor prosecute long voyages as I did aforetime with you and in the company of many other princes and knights, from whom through the good pleasure of our Lord God I have parted without blame or reproach, and also in order to avoid idleness, the mother of all vices, determined about the year 1455 to undertake this work, and to bring it down to the coronation of King Henry the Fifth.

And now, my much honoured and dread lord, I humbly beg of you and of all those who shall read or hear read this collection of the chronicles and histories of the realm of England, that if there be found therein any superfluity or redundancy of language, or if by using too little care I have not been sufficiently explicit, it will please you to help my ignorance, and have regard to the intention of the history rather than to the order and fashion of this work; and also in case, my much honoured master, you find therein anything that can tend to magnify and recommend your noble self, it may please you to let it stand, as tending to the praise of our Lord Jesus Christ; and to kindly remember your very humble servant.

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CHAPTER I.

HERE BEGINS THE FIRST VOLUME OF THE ANCIENT CHRONICLES OF ENGLAND, WHICH CONTAINS SIX SEPARATE BOOKS, OF WHICH THE FIRST BEGINS WITH LADY ALBINE; AND THIS PRESENT VOLUME CONTINUES DOWN TO THE VALIANT KING EDWARD OF WINDSOR, WITH WHICH KING THE SECOND VOLUME COMMENCES, AS YOU SHALL HEAR AND SEE IN FOLLOWING OUT THIS MATTER.

And first there follows a little prologue to give a clearer understanding of the following work.

Now in order to open this entertaining subject, and place it effectively, be it known that the first book, which contains five chapters, is as a preamble and prologue for the understanding of the whole of this present work, that is to say, of the four volumes of the Chronicles of England, which was formerly called Lower Hibernia, and afterwards, in consequence of divers wars and conquests bore several other names, that is to say, Albion,¹ after Lady Albine and her sisters, the daughters of King Diodicias, of whom mention is made in this first book, because they first dwelt there, as you shall hear. And this name of Albion lasted till the time of a prince called Brutus. whc conquered it from the giants who were descended

¹ Compare the statement at pp. 23 and 29.

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from: the said Albine and her sisters, and who called it Britain the Great beyond Sea, to distinguish it from Basse Bretagne. And afterwards a great Saxon prince called Englist made alliance with Vortigern, earl of Winchester, who caused Constans the son of Constantine to perish by treachery that he might be king and succeed to the kingdom, and espoused the sister¹ of the said Englist, who assisted him against his enemies with 11,000 men. And for this cause King Vortigern gave him the territory of Kent and the lordship of the whole country, of which he made himself king, and named his said kingdom England after his own name; which name, that is to say, England, continues to this day as is evident.

CHAPTER II.

Here follows a suitable preamble by way of introduction.²

IN ancient times, when the valiant Hercules and Theseus reigned in Greece, and when Jahir (the third after Joshua) was judge of the people of Israel, there reigned in Syria a very powerful king named Diodicias, who held under his sovereignty the greater part of Persia, Media, and Mesopotomia; and there was in his day no king in the east by whom he was not feared and dreaded beyond all other; for by his great power and his personal valour he had conquered and subjugated many kingdoms and countries, so that even in Higher and Lower Armenia his commands

¹ So in the MS., but according to the narrative it should be *daughter*.

² The original word seems to have been *theume*, though one transcriber has made it *thermie*, and

another *chaune*. "*Introduction*" is scarcely a legitimate translation, though the only term that appears suitable to express the character of the preamble.

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were obeyed. Now it came to pass that one day as he was in his city of Antioch, he was strongly urged and entreated by his barons to marry, in order that he might have an heir who after his decease might maintain his kingdoms and lordships. To this request preferred to him by his barons King Diodicias readily inclined, inasmuch as the request was reasonable. Now Diodicias had an uncle called Albana, King of Cyrenia, who had a daughter then reckoned the handsomest, wisest, most modest and most courteous in the whole world, of whom, if I wished to treat of her beauty and all her virtues I should write at too great length. King Diodicias, knowing this damsel to be so handsome and well brought up, desired to have her rather than any other, notwithstanding she was his cousin-german, the daughter of his uncle. He sent ambassadors to King Albana, who so managed with the king, that with his full consent they brought his daughter in great state to their master King Diodicias, who greatly rejoiced thereat. So he received them very honourably, and espoused the damsel according to the pagan law: and by this noble lady he had fourteen very handsome daughters, of whom the eldest was named Albine. This Diodicias took afterwards, in addition to this wife, three others, of whom the first was called Manatrie, the second Meralis, and the third Canapile. By these three wives he had nineteen daughters and three sons. And all these four queens he kept in four great cities, and went to see them when it seemed good to him; but the best beloved of the king was the daughter of Albana King of Cyrenia.

It happened one day that King Diodicias, being in his city of Tarsus, with this queen his first wife, took it into his head to send for and assemble there all his daughters, and caused letters to be written and orders, by which he commanded all the kings, princes,

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FIRST VOLUME: BOOK I.

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and admirals under his authority to come to him, for that in the said city of Tarsus he would celebrate a feast to his gods. The letters being sent to all parts and received by the princes, they, not daring to make any excuse, came into the city of Tarsus on the day appointed by King Diodicias. And there came likewise his three other wives and with them all their daughters, who were received by the king and queen with great joy and gladness: and thus there were at this festival the four queens and their thirty-three daughters, all of whom were of marriageable age. There need be no long account given of their beauty, except concerning Albine the eldest; for history relates that there could not in her day be found her equal for stature or strength, nor for beauty, save only that she had a very malicious look. As to fine features and limbs, however, no one living could surpass her beauty, wherefor she was sought after by many princes and kings. All these damsels who were sisters, formed acquaintance with each other, stimulated thereto by sincere affection, and all drew towards Albine as the eldest, who knew well how to entertain them courteously. All these damsels were wise, courteous, and well behaved according to outward appearance, so that joy and gladness was multiplied to King Diodicias their father in great abundance; wherefore he planned it in his mind to marry them, seeing that they were of a proper age, and considering that in this company there were high born princes more than had been seen for a long time before. During this festival, which was magnificently arranged and conducted, King Diodicias managed matters so well that he married all his daughters to kings and princes of great excellence who had come to it, and who deemed themselves very fortunate to be brought by this means into such close relationship with King Diodicias as to have his daughters for wives, for

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which good fortune they thanked the gods most devoutly. The nuptials being completed, the feast began in the palace and throughout the city, and it was so great and plentiful that the like had not been seen for a long time.

This king Diodicias perceiving that the divine providence of the gods had thus provided for him and accepted his prayers, offered them sacrifices, humbly thanking them that thus in the midst of his days they had exalted him above all the kings of the earth; and especially to the goddess of Fortune, the object of his particular adoration, who had befriended him so much that he had lived to see all his daughters so nobly allied. Scorning all ingratitude, he humbly thanked the gods as we have said according to the ability they had given. This festival being ended, and the solemnity finished, all the princes and the sons-in-law of King Diodicias who had married his daughters took leave of him and of the four queens their mothers, who evinced much grief at the departure of their daughters. The princes brought each his wife into his own country where they were received, each in her own right, as queens and mistresses of all the countries in which they were located, and there they remained awhile with their husbands.

Now it came to pass one day that the Lady Albine felt sad and discontented, thinking that she was so far from the court of the king her father, where she had been accustomed daily to see such large establishments, and to hold such elegant festivals, with such profusion of wealth, and so many noble princes visiting every day; and that now, according to her view, she was reduced from the high condition of her birth and meanly married. So she worked herself into marvellous wrath, disdainning her husband in such fashion that in nothing would she obey him or perform his commands. Moreover, to carry her

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FIRST VOLUME : BOOK I.

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wickedness further, she sent letters by secret messengers to all her sisters, in which letters she directed them how to behave towards their husbands. When they had seen the letters and considered, they readily yielded to perform the command of their elder sister and to behave in the way she had directed them. Lady Albine, especially, would spend everything for her own whims, and according to her own will would beguile her labours and mode of life by various malicious and cruel pranks. And her sisters likewise, at her instigation, transgressing all bounds of reason, behaved so ill in the indulgence of pride, haughtiness, and sudden passion towards their husbands, that it was marvellous to behold; and the reason they did so was that their husbands were not of such high rank as they were. The princes and kings, husbands of the aforesaid ladies, greatly troubled by the conduct of their wives towards them, often coaxed them by gifts and promises, and affectionately advised them in goodwill and friendship that they should amend of their pride and folly; but it was of no use; for more and more they would fulfil their damnable and outrageous desires in every way in their power to the hurt and damage of their lords. Wherefore the thirty-three princes, the husbands of these ladies, beat them severely, believing that by such manifest correction they ought to be reformed and amended. But such were their habits that neither for kind exhortations nor for severities would they alter their manners in anything, but persisted more and more in transgressing the commands of their aforesaid husbands. Seeing this, the king who had married Albine wrote and secretly informed King Diodicias, his father-in-law, of the conduct of his wife towards him; and all his brothers-in-law adopted a similar course. When King Diodicias heard the complaints that his sons-in-law made against their wives, his visage waxed fierce and

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became scarlet with wrath against his daughters. So he thought within himself by what means he could correct them privately, consistently with his own dignity, and lead them to virtuous habits produced by good works. After many thoughts and imaginings within himself, Diodicias determined to command the husbands of his daughters that they should come to him and bring their wives with them on a certain day specified in the letters; and he thought that he would reclaim them from this error if he could do it in any good way. Then came the day appointed by King Diodicias when the husbands of his daughters were to come to him with their wives, for which cause he had gone into the city of Tyre to be nearer to them, to which place all the princes came and brought their wives as it had been commanded them by King Diodicias their father-in-law, who without showing any sign of anger or displeasure, received them all cheerfully and with great honour.

When all the princes and the ladies were arrived, and the appointed day came round, a great and notable feast began, which lasted three days, and on the fourth day King Diodicias ordered all his daughters to repair to his chamber, where he was waiting for them all alone. When they were come, he reasoned with them, reproving them for their follies, and scolding them severely after this manner: "Seeing
" the noble lineage from which you have proceeded
" both by father and mother, and which ought to
" result and display itself in you pre-eminently; and
" since nobility is virtue, with which is or ought to
" be connected humility, courtesy, gentleness, and
" true-heartedness, I marvel much that you come to
" be thus polluted with pride, cruelty, quarrelsomeness,
" and presumption against your husbands. And
" although by the malignant influence of the planets
" of your nativity, descending to these lower regions,