# CHAPTER VII

## TRIUMPHS OF THE WATER-WORLD

Une des légendes les plus répandues en Bretagne est celle d'une prétendue ville d'Is, qui, à une époque inconnue, aurait été engloutie par la mer. On montre, à divers endroits de la côte, l'emplacement de cette cité fabuleuse, et les pêcheurs vous en font d'étranges récits. Les jours de tempête, assurent-ils, on voit, dans les creux des vagues, le sommet des flèches de ses églises; les jours de calme, on entend monter de l'abîme le son de ses cloches, modulant l'hymne du jour.—RENAN.

MORE than once in the last chapter was the subject of submersions and cataclysms brought before the reader, and it may be convenient to enumerate here the most remarkable cases, and to add one or two to their number, as well as to dwell at somewhat greater length on some instances which may be said to have found their way into Welsh literature. He has already been told of the outburst of the Glasfryn Lake (p. 367) and Ffynnon Gywer (p. 376), of Llyn Llech Owen (p. 379) and the Crymlyn (p. 191), also of the drowning of Cantre'r Gwaelod (p. 383); not to mention that one of my informants had something to say (p. 219) of the submergence of Caer Arianrhod, a rock now visible only at low water between Celynnog Fawr and Dinas Dinlle, on the coast of Arfon. But, to put it briefly, it is an ancient belief in the Principality that its lakes generally have swallowed up habitations of men, as in the case of Llyn Syfaddon (p. 73) and the Pool of Corwrion (p. 57). To these I now proceed to add other instances, to wit those of Bala Lake, Kenfig Pool,

Llynclys, and Helig ab Glannog's territory including Traeth Lafan.

Perhaps it is best to begin with historical events, namely those implied in the encroachment of the sea and the sand on the coast of Glamorganshire, from the Mumbles, in Gower, to the mouth of the Ogmore, below Bridgend. It is believed that formerly the shores of Swansea Bay were from three to five miles further out than the present strand, and the oyster dredgers point to that part of the bay which they call the Green Grounds, while trawlers, hovering over these sunken meadows of the Grove Island, declare that they can sometimes see the foundations of the ancient homesteads overwhelmed by a terrific storm which raged some three centuries ago. The old people sometimes talk of an extensive forest called *Coed Arian*, 'Silver Wood,' stretching from the foreshore of the Mumbles to Kenfig Burrows, and there is a tradition of a long-lost bridle path used by many generations of Mansels, Mowbrays, and Talbots, from Penrice Castle to Margam Abbey. All this is said to be corroborated by the fishing up every now and then in Swansea Bay of stags' antlers, elks' horns, those of the wild ox, and wild boars' tusks, together with the remains of other ancient tenants of the submerged forest. Various references in the registers of Swansea and Aberavon mark successive stages in the advance of the desolation from the latter part of the fifteenth century down. Among others a great sandstorm is mentioned, which overwhelmed the borough of Cynffig or Kenfig, and encroached on the coast generally: the series of catastrophes seems to have culminated in an inundation caused by a terrible tidal wave in the early part of the year 1607[1].

[1] For most of my information on this subject I have to thank Mr. David Davies, editor of the *South Wales Daily Post*, published at Swansea.

To return to Kenfig, what remains of that old town is near the sea, and it is on all sides surrounded by hillocks of finely powdered sand and flanked by ridges of the same fringing the coast. The ruins of several old buildings half buried in the sand peep out of the ground, and in the immediate neighbourhood is Kenfig Pool, which is said to have a circumference of nearly two miles. When the pool formed itself I have not been able to discover: from such accounts as have come in my way I should gather that it is older than the growing spread of the sand, but the island now to be seen in it is artificial and of modern make[1]. The story relating to the lake is given as follows in the volume of the *Iolo Manuscripts*, p. 194, and the original, from which I translate, is crisp, compressed, and, as I fancy, in Iolo's own words:—

'A plebeian was in love with Earl Clare's daughter: she would not have him as he was not wealthy. He took to the highway, and watched the agent of the lord of the dominion coming towards the castle from collecting his lord's money. He killed him, took the money, and produced the coin, and the lady married him. A splendid banquet was held: the best men of the country were invited, and they made as merry as possible. On the second night the marriage was consummated, and when happiest one heard a voice: all ear one listened and caught the words, "Vengeance comes, vengeance comes, vengeance comes," three times. One asked, "When?" "In the ninth generation (*âch*)," said the voice. "No reason for us to fear," said the married pair; "we shall be under the mould long before." They lived on, however, and a *goresgynnyd*,

[1] I am indebted for this information to Mr. J. Herbert James of Vaynor, who visited Kenfig lately and has called my attention to an article headed 'The Borough of Kenfig,' in the *Archæologia Cambrensis* for 1898: see more especially the maps at pp. 138–42.

that is to say, a descendant of the sixth direct generation, was born to them, also to the murdered man a *goresgynnyd*, who, seeing that the time fixed was come, visited Kenfig. This was a discreet youth of gentle manners, and he looked at the city and its splendour, and noted that nobody owned a furrow or a chamber there except the offspring of the murderer: he and his wife were still living. At cockcrow he heard a cry, "Vengeance is come, is come, is come." It is asked, "On whom?" and answered, "On him who murdered my father of the ninth *âch*." He rises in terror: he goes towards the city; but there is nothing to see save a large lake with three chimney tops above the surface emitting smoke that formed a stinking . . .[1] On the face of the waters the gloves of the murdered man float to the young man's feet: he picks them up, and sees on them the murdered man's name and arms; and he hears at dawn of day the sound of praise to God rendered by myriads joining in heavenly music. And so the story ends.'

On this coast is another piece of water in point, namely Crymlyn, or 'Crumlin Pool,' now locally called the Bog. It appears also to have been sometimes called Pwll Cynan, after the name of a son of Rhys ab Tewdwr, who, in his flight after his father's defeat on Hirwaen Wrgan, was drowned in its waters[2]. It lies

[1] Here the Welsh has a word *edafwr*, the exact meaning of which escapes me, and I gather from the remarks of local etymologers that no such word is now in use in Glamorgan.

[2] See the *Book of Aberpergwm*, printed as *Brut y Tywysogion*, in the *Myvyrian Archaiology*, ii. 524; also Morgan's *Antiquarian Survey of East Gower*, p. 66, where the incident is given from '*Brut y Tywysogion*, A. D. 1088.' It is, however, not in what usually passes by the name of *Brut y Tywysogion*, but comes, as the author kindly informs me, from a volume entitled '*Brut y Tywysogion*, the Gwentian Chronicle of Caradoc of Llancarvan, with a translation by the late Aneurin Owen, and printed for the Cambrian Archæological Association, 1863': see pp. 70–1.

on Lord Jersey's estate, at a distance of about one mile east of the mouth of the Tawe, and about a quarter of a mile from high-water mark, from which it is separated by a strip of ground known in the neighbourhood as Crymlyn Burrows. The name Crymlyn means Crooked Lake, which, I am told, describes the shape of this piece of water. When the bog becomes a pool it encloses an island consisting of a little rocky hillock showing no trace of piles, or walling, or any other handiwork of man[1]. The story about this pool also is that it covers a town buried beneath its waters. Mr. Wirt Sikes' reference to it has already been mentioned, and I have it on the evidence of a native of the immediate neighbourhood, that he has often heard his father and grandfather talk about the submerged town. Add to this that Cadrawd, to whom I have had already (pp. 23, 376) to acknowledge my indebtedness, speaks in the columns of the *South Wales Daily News* for February 15, 1899, of Crymlyn as follows :—

'It was said by the old people that on the site of this bog once stood the old town of Swansea, and that in clear and calm weather the chimneys and even the church steeple could be seen at the bottom of the lake, and in the loneliness of the night the bells were often heard ringing in the lake. It was also said that should any person happen to stand with his face towards the lake when the wind is blowing across the lake, and if any of the spray of that water should touch his clothes, it would be only with the greatest difficulty he could save himself from being attracted or sucked into the water. The lake was at one time much larger than at present. The efforts made to drain it have drawn a good deal of the water from it, but only to convert it

[1] For this also I have to thank Mr. Herbert James, who recently inspected the spot with Mr. Glascodine of Swansea.

into a bog, which no one can venture to cross except in exceptionally dry seasons or hard frost.'

On this I wish to remark in passing, that, while common sense would lead one to suppose that the wind blowing across the water would help the man facing it to get away whenever he chose, the reasoning here is of another order, one characteristic in fact of the ways and means of sympathetic magic. For specimens in point the reader may be conveniently referred to page 360, where he may compare the words quoted from Mr. Hartland, especially as to the use there mentioned of stones or pellets thrown from one's hands. In the case of Crymlyn, the wind blowing off the face of the water into the onlooker's face and carrying with it some of the water in the form of spray which wets his clothes, howsoever little, was evidently regarded as establishing a link of connexion between him and the body of the water—or shall I say rather, between him and the divinity of the water?—and that this link was believed to be so strong that it required the man's utmost effort to break it and escape being drawn in and drowned like Cynan. The statement, supremely silly as it reads, is no modern invention; for one finds that Nennius—or somebody else—reasoned in precisely the same way, except that for a single onlooker he substitutes a whole army of men and horses, and that he points the antithesis by distinctly stating, that if they kept their backs turned to the fascinating flood they would be out of danger. The conditions which he had in view were, doubtless, that the men should face the water and have their clothing more or less wetted by the spray from it. The passage (§ 69) to which I refer is in the *Mirabilia*, and Geoffrey of Monmouth is found to repeat it in a somewhat better style of Latin (ix. 7): the following is the Nennian version:—

*Aliud miraculum est, id est Oper Linn Liguan. Ostium fluminis illius fluit in Sabrina et quando Sabrina inundatur ad sissam, et mare inundatur similiter in ostio supra dicti fluminis et in stagno ostii recipitur in modum voraginis et mare non vadit sursum et est litus juxta flumen et quamdiu Sabrina inundatur ad sissam, istud litus non tegitur et quando recedit mare et Sabrina, tunc Stagnum Liuan eructat omne quod devoravit de mari et litus istud tegitur et instar montis in una unda eructat et rumpit. Et si fuerit exercitus totius regionis, in qua est, et direxerit faciem contra undam, et exercitum trahit unda per vim humore repletis vestibus et equi similiter trahuntur. Si autem exercitus terga versus fuerit contra eam, non nocet ei unda.*

'There is another wonder, to wit Aber Llyn Lliwan. The water from the mouth of that river flows into the Severn, and when the Severn is in flood up to its banks, and when the sea is also in flood at the mouth of the above-named river and is sucked in like a whirlpool into the pool of the Aber, the sea does not go on rising: it leaves a margin of beach by the side of the river, and all the time the Severn is in flood up to its bank, that beach is not covered. And when the sea and the Severn ebb, then Llyn Lliwan brings up all it had swallowed from the sea, and that beach is covered while Llyn Lliwan discharges its contents in one mountain-like wave and vomits forth. Now if the army of the whole district in which this wonder is, were to be present with the men facing the wave, the force of it would, once their clothes are drenched by the spray, draw them in, and their horses would likewise be drawn. But if the men should have their backs turned towards the water, the wave would not harm them [1].'

[1] I do not know whether anybody has identified the spot which the writer had in view, or whether the coast of the Severn still offers any feature which corresponds in any way to the description.

One story about the formation of Bala Lake, or Llyn Tegid[1] as it is called in Welsh, has been given at p. 376: here is another which I translate from a version in Hugh Humphreys' *Llyfr Gwybodaeth Gyffredinol* (Carnarvon), second series, vol. i, no. 2, p. 1. I may premise that the contributor, whose name is not given, betrays a sort of literary ambition which has led him to relate the story in a confused fashion; and among other things he uses the word *edifeirwch*, 'repentance,' throughout, instead of *dial*, 'vengeance.' With that correction it runs somewhat as follows:—Tradition relates that Bala Lake is but the watery tomb of the palaces of iniquity; and that some old boatmen can on quiet moonlight nights in harvest see towers in ruins at the bottom of its waters, and also hear at times a feeble voice saying, *Dial a ddaw, dial a ddaw*, 'Vengeance will come'; and another voice inquiring, *Pa bryd y daw*, 'When will it come?' Then the first voice answers, *Yn y drydedd genhedlaeth*, 'In the third generation.' Those voices were but a recollection over oblivion, for in one of those palaces lived in days of yore an oppressive and cruel prince, corresponding to the well-known description of one of whom it is said, 'Whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive.' The oppression and cruelty practised by him on the poor farmers were notorious far and near. This prince, while enjoying the morning breezes of summer in his garden, used frequently to hear a voice saying, 'Vengeance will come.' But he always laughed the threat away with reckless contempt. One night a poor harper

[1] Supposed to be so called after a certain *Tegid Foel*, or 'Tegid the Bald,' of Penllyn: the name *Tegid* is the phonetic spelling of what might be expected in writing as *Tegyd*—it is the Latin *Tacitus* borrowed, and comes with other Latin names in Pedigree I. of the Cunedda dynasty; see the *Cymmrodor*, xi. 170. In point of spelling one may compare *Idris* for what might be expected written *Idrys*, of the same pronunciation, for an earlier *Iuddrys* or *Iuddris*.

from the neighbouring hills was ordered to come to the prince's palace. On his way the harper was told that there was great rejoicing at the palace at the birth of the first child of the prince's son. When he had reached the palace the harper was astonished at the number of the guests, including among them noble lords, princes, and princesses: never before had he seen such splendour at any feast. When he had begun playing the gentlemen and ladies dancing presented a superb appearance. So the mirth and wine abounded, nor did he love playing for them any more than they loved dancing to the music of his harp. But about midnight, when there was an interval in the dancing, and the old harper had been left alone in a corner, he suddenly heard a voice singing in a sort of a whisper in his ear, 'Vengeance, vengeance!' He turned at once, and saw a little bird hovering above him and beckoning him, as it were, to follow him. He followed the bird as fast as he could, but after getting outside the palace he began to hesitate. But the bird continued to invite him on, and to sing in a plaintive and mournful voice the word 'Vengeance, vengeance!' The old harper was afraid of refusing to follow, and so they went on over bogs and through thickets, whilst the bird was all the time hovering in front of him and leading him along the easiest and safest paths. But if he stopped for a moment the same mournful note of 'Vengeance, vengeance!' would be sung to him in a more and more plaintive and heartbreaking fashion. They had by this time reached the top of the hill, a considerable distance from the palace. As the old harper felt rather fatigued and weary, he ventured once more to stop and rest, but he heard the bird's warning voice no more. He listened, but he heard nothing save the murmuring of the little burn hard by. He now began to think how foolish he

had been to allow himself to be led away from the feast at the palace: he turned back in order to be there in time for the next dance. As he wandered on the hill he lost his way, and found himself forced to await the break of day. In the morning, as he turned his eyes in the direction of the palace, he could see no trace of it: the whole tract below was one calm, large lake, with his harp floating on the face of the waters.

Next comes the story of Llynclys Pool in the neighbourhood of Oswestry. That piece of water is said to be of extraordinary depth, and its name means the 'swallowed court.' The village of Llynclys is called after it, and the legend concerning the pool is preserved in verses printed among the compositions of the local poet, John F. M. Dovaston, who published his works in 1825. The first stanza runs thus:—

> Clerk Willin he sat at king Alaric's board,
> And a cunning clerk was he;
> For he'd lived in the land of Oxenford
> With the sons of Grammarie.

How much exactly of the poem comes from Dovaston's own muse, and how much comes from the legend, I cannot tell. Take for instance the king's name, this I should say is not derived from the story; but as to the name of the clerk, that possibly is, for the poet bases it on Croes-Willin, the Welsh form of which has been given me as Croes-Wylan, that is Wylan's Cross, the name of the base of what is supposed to have been an old cross, a little way out of Oswestry on the north side; and I have been told that there is a farm in the same neighbourhood called Tre' Wylan, 'Wylan's Stead.' To return to the legend, Alaric's queen was endowed with youth and beauty, but the king was not happy; and when he had lived with her nine years he told Clerk Willin how he first met her when he was