



The Four Ancient Books of Wales Volume 2 of 3

William Forbes Skene

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This looks at ancient Welsh history and legends. From the intro: "libraries, led to many Welsh MSS., which had been preserved in them, passing into the hands of private individuals; and collections of Welsh MSS. soon began to be formed by persons who took an interest in the history and literature of their country. The principal collectors in North Wales were Mr. Jones of Gelly Lyvdy, whose collection was formed between the years 1590 and 1630, and Mr. Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt, author of a work termed *British Antiquities Revived*, published in 1662, who died at Hengwrt four years after, in 1666 ; and in South Wales, William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, who formed a collection at Raglan Castle in 1590 ; and Sir Edward Mansel, whose father had received a gift of the priory of Margam in Glamorgan, in 1591. The collections of Mr. Jones and Mr. Vaughan became united at Hengwrt, an arrangement having been made between them that the MSS. collected by each should become the property of the survivor. Mr. Jones having predeceased Mr. Vaughan, the united collection, consisting of upwards of 400 MSS., remained at Hengwrt till within the last few years, when it was bequeathed by Sir Robert Vaughan of Hengwrt to W. W. E. Wynne, Esq. of Peniarth, in whose possession it now is. In the following century various collections were made, and among others some valuable MSS. became the property of Jesus College, Oxford. The collection of the Earl of Pembroke at Raglan Castle was destroyed by fire in the time of Oliver Cromwell; and a similar fate overtook two of these later collections, which had become the property of Sir Watkin Williams Wynne, and were preserved at Wynnstay, but which were likewise destroyed by fire. Other collections passed into the British Museum, and the principal collections of Welsh MSS. are now the Hengwrt collection at Peniarth, those in the British Museum, the MSS. at Jesus College, and those belonging to Lord Mostyn, Mr. Panton of Plas Gwyn, and others. In the Hengwrt collection were preserved three ancient MSS., termed the Black Book of Caermarthen, the Book of Aneurin, and the Book of Taliessin, containing a considerable collection of Welsh poetry bearing marks of antiquity; and in the library of Jesus College is a MS. which contains similar poems, termed the Red Book of Hergest. These poems are some of a historic character, and others not so, and are attributed, either by their rubric, by the title of the MS., or by tradition, to four bards termed Myrddin, Aneurin, Taliessin, and Llywarch Hen, who are supposed to have lived in the sixth century."

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