KING ARTHUR.

Many theories have been set forth as to the identity and parentage of King Arthur, and I hope I may be forgiven for propounding yet another. In dealing with him we are at once confronted with this difficulty; Arthur, like many another Celtic hero, had a mythical as well as a real existence, and the mythical Arthur, in the minds of some, has destroyed or swamped the real historic man, so that many are prepared to assert he never existed. This is not to be wondered at when one reads the Arthurian literature. Poets, romancers and writers of both early and late times have so mixed up the mythical and realistic with regard to him that the skein seems to be beyond the powers of human patience to unravel; nevertheless, let me lay before you my attempt for what it is worth.

The simple ungarnished story of Arthur's birth, as set forth in Welsh tradition, is as follows:—Uter Pendragon, son of Cystennyn Vendigaid or "Constantine the Blessed," King of Britain, falls in love with Eigyr, wife of Gorlais, Duke of Cornwall, and by a subtlety gains access to her and upon her begets Arthur.

Besides Uter Pendragon, Constantine had two older sons. The eldest Constans, a Monk, was of weak intellect, but nevertheless upon his father's death succeeded to the British throne, and was shortly afterwards murdered at the instigation of Vortigern, who thereupon became King of Britain. The second son was one Emrys Wledig, or Ambrosius Aurelianus, who revenged his brother's death by overthrowing Vortigern, and was elected King of Britain in his stead. Upon the death of Ambrosius Aurelianus, Uter Pendragon, the third son, succeeded to the British throne. So much for the Welsh tradition.

The first historian of any repute to mention Arthur is Nennius, who wrote his British History *circa* 796.[1] He calls him "*Artur Mab Uter*,"[2] which means "Arthur, son of Uther," and he states that as "*Dux bellorum cum regibus Britonum*," he led the British forces victoriously twelve times against the Saxons. The twelfth and last battle of this series was Badon Mount.

Professor Zimmer has something to say about this office of *Dux Bellorum*, and also about Uther Pendragon; he writes:—[3]

"It is possible that this '*Dux bellorum Arthur*' occupied a position under the British Kings analogous to that of '*Dux Brittaniarum*' under the Roman sway, or it may even have been evolved from the latter during the changed conditions of the fifth century. The name of Arthur's legendary father 'Uther Pendragon' may also be cited. This is nothing more than '*Uther* [Latin, victor!] *dux bellorum*' . . . It is not without significance that to Arthur, who according to the oldest source is not a '*Rex Britonum*,' but

[1] *Nennius Vindicatus*, Zimmer.
[2] *Nennius*, cap. lxiii.
[3] *Nennius Vindicatus*, Zimmer.

a '*Dux bellorum cum regibus Britonum*,' has been assigned by tradition a '*Victor princeps Draconum*' [Uther Pendragon], as a father."

To go one step further, this would mean that Arthur was the son of the "victorious leader of battles" or "the victorious commander-in-chief" of the day—or to put it otherwise, the term "Uther Pendragon," may after all be nothing more than a *nom de guerre;* this is further borne out by the fact that nowhere else in British or Welsh genealogies does one find "Uter" used as a proper name.

Let us now see what Gildas has to say upon this matter, for although he does not mention King Arthur by name, the internal evidence in his statement is very suggestive. The date assigned to Gildas' work *De Excidio*, which I am about to quote, is *circa* 537.[1] In paragraph 25 he writes somewhat as follows:—

"xxv. . . . that they [*i.e.* the Britons] might not be brought to utter destruction, took arms under the conduct of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who of all the Roman nation was then alone in the confusion of this troubled period by chance left alive. His parents, who for their merit were adorned with the purple, had been slain in these same broils, *and now his progeny in these our days, although shamefully degenerated from the worthiness of their ancestors,* provoke to battle their cruel conquerors, and by the goodness of our Lord obtained the victory. xxvi. After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy won the field to the end that our Lord might in this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Bath hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes, which was [as I am sure] forty-four years and one month after the landing of the Saxons, and also the time of my own nativity."

The foregoing translation of Gildas' somewhat corrupt Latin is that given in the *Bohn* edition, the italics are mine, and the words used by Gildas in that passage are:—"*cujus nunc temporibus nostris soboles magnopere avita bonitate degeneravit.*" The words used for "Bath Hill" are "*Badonici montis*," which identifies the battle with "Badon Mount."

Bede, who wrote his Ecclesiastical History *circa* 731, evidently copies paragraph 26 from Gildas, as he begins with the same words, "*ex eo tempore*," like Gildas he does not mention Arthur, but dates the battle of "Badon Mount" as taking place forty-four years after the landing of the Saxons.[2]

The Anglo Saxon Chronicle gives the date of the landing of the Saxons as *circa* 449, so the battle of Baden Mount would take place *circa* 493.

As before stated, Nennius names the general who led the British forces at this battle as "*Arthur Mab Uter*." Taking the two statements of Gildas and Nennius it seems to me that we are

[1] *Bede Opera Historica*, Plummer, Tom. ii, 31.
[2] *Bede*, Lib. 1, cap. xvi.

justified in saying that Arthur was a descendant of Ambrosius Aurelianus. The statement in Gildas that Ambrosius was the last of his race left alive [in his own generation, must be understood, as he left "*soboles*" or "issue"], altogether upsets the Welsh tradition that his younger brother Uther Pendragon succeeded him upon the throne. To no one at this period could such a title as "victorious commander-in-chief" be more aptly applied than to Ambrosius Aurelianus. He came as a God-send to the Britons at a most critical moment, when through the misrule of Vortigern not only had the country been over-run by swarms of Saxons, but they were constantly being harassed by inroads from the Picts and Scots, or as Nennius puts it, "Vortigern then reigned in Britain. In his time the natives had cause of dread, not only from the inroads of the Scots and Picts, but also from the Romans, and their apprehension of Ambrosius."[1] There can be little doubt but that Geoffrey of Monmouth, king of imaginative historians, is responsible for this splitting up of one man into two, and this is somewhat indicated by the complete failure of his imagination to deal with them; he states that both Ambrosius and Uther were poisoned, and buries them both at Stonehenge, which is a very tame effort on his part. So I would suggest that King Arthur was the son of the "victorious commander-in-chief," in British, "Uther Pendragon," whose name, Latinized, was, "Ambrosius Aurelianus," or, in British, "Emrys Wledig."

Let us now turn our attention to Ambrosius. Nennius, writing about two provinces over which Pascent, a son of Vortigern, reigned, says, "These were given to him by Ambrosius, who was '*rex in omnes regiones Brittaniæ.*'"[2] It is therefore clear that upon Vortigern's death, Ambrosius, from being "Pen Dragon," was elected supreme King of Britain. The long fabulous story related by Nennius in cap. xl to cap. xlvi, in which Ambrosius poses as a boy and the dragons, red and white, fight, etc., appears to me to be a mythical relation of how Vortigern, driven into a corner, handed over to Ambrosius the position of Pendragon.

Welsh tradition says Ambrosius was second son of "Constantine the Blessed" or "Cystennyn Vendigaid," his elder brother being one Constans, a monk, who, as before stated, was killed at the instigation of Vortigern. Gildas says that Ambrosius was a Roman, and that his parents had been *elevated to the purple* for their services, but had been murdered in these same broils. These statements tally to a startling extent with the history of Constantine the Usurper, who was elected by the army Emperor of the West. His brief career I give below, as gleaned from the later Greek and Latin writers.[3]

In 407 the army in Britain revolted and elected one Marcus as Emperor of the West, but shortly afterwards killed him and put in his place one Gratian, a Briton. His reign lasted but four months; he was murdered and one Constantine usurped the position

[1] *Nennius*, cap. xxxi.
[2] *Ibid.*, cap. liii.
[3] See *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, Petrie and Sharp.

of Emperor of the West, having been elected thereto by the the army. He crossed into Gaul with a large force, landing at Bonovia; there, having collected further allies, together with a fleet, he attacked simultaneously Gaul and Spain, which at that time were overrun by the Vandals. In 408 securing a great victory, Honorius, Emperor of Rome, much against his will, sent an imperial robe to Constantine, acknowledging him thereby as Emperor of the West. Thereupon Constantine made his son Constans, *who was a monk*, Cæsar, and sent him to command his troops in Spain. In 409 Constans leaves Spain to consult with his father, appointing one Gerontius (?Geraint) a Briton, his general. Later on in the year he returns to Spain, taking with him one Justus, as his general; this gives offence to Gerontius, who commences to sow seeds of dissension among the troops. The outcome of it all was that in the year 411 the army rose in revolt against Constantine, who together with his son Julian they murdered at Arles, and Constans, the Cæsar, formerly the Monk, was murdered by Gerontius at Vienne.

Surely Constantine, Emperor of the West, with his son Constans, a Monk, is one and the same man with Cystennyn Vendigaid or Constantine the Blessed, with his son Constans, a Monk!

Let us now treat of "Constantine the Blessed." Welsh genealogists make him second son of Tydwall, King of Brittany or Armorica, and give his descent thus:—Constantine, ap Tydwall, ap Morfawr, ap Cadvan, ap Conan, ap Caradoc, ap Llewelyn, which Llewelyn was father of Maxen Wledig "or Maximus, the Emperor," and younger brother of Coel Godebog, or Coelhen.

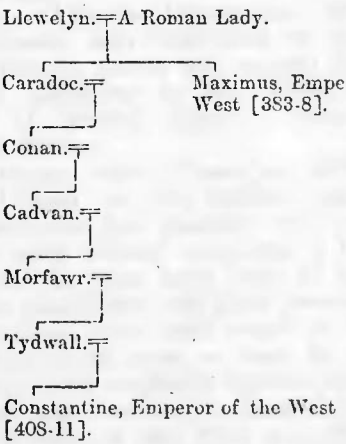
John Rowse in *The Warwick Roll*, thus writes of him, "Constantine broder to ye kinge of litill britayn by election was made kinge of this lande, he was gronfader to king Arthur yt myghtie warreor on of ye ix worthys,"[1] etc.

The Hendre Book thus quaintly alludes to him, "Constantine the second son of Tudwall, after he had slaine Gratian was ye flirst crowned Kinge in Brytt: He was trayterously murdered by a Picte after he had reign: 10 yeares. He marr: a Romane ladie & by her had issue. He was for vertuous government called by the Britt: Kustennyn fedigaid."[2]

It is quite evident that neither of these writers knew anything that was going on beyond the cliffs of Dover—this island was their world. They were clearly quite ignorant of the fact that when Constantine in 407 took his army to Gaul and obtained a great victory he was acknowledged by Honorius as Emperor of the West. They have, together with all the Welsh genealogists, displayed equal ignorance as to the parentage of Constantine in making him second son of Tydwall, King of Brittany. The pedigree is chronologically impossible, to prove which I must now give an epitome of the history of Maxen Wledig or Maximus from the later Latin and Greek writers.[3]

[1] *Rowse Roll*, College of Arms.
[2] *Hendre Book*, Protheroe MSS., College of Arms.
[3] *Monumenta Historica Britannica*, Petrie and Sharp

382 A.D. Maximus, who some say was a Spaniard, others a Briton, was in command of the Roman army of occupation in this island, and repelled the incursions of the Picts and Scots. 383. Having sown sedition in the army against the Roman power, he brought about a revolt against Gratian who, with his brother Valentinian, were Emperors of the West. At this time Gratian was harassed by a war with the Alemanni, so Maximus crossing with an army into Gaul, gave Gratian battle, putting him to flight at Paris, finally killed him at Lyons, and thereupon was himself elected by the army Emperor of the West. 384. Maximus made his son Victor (? Uter) partner in the empire, and fixed his seat of government at Treves. 387. Having collected a large army in Britain and Gaul he marches upon Italy, expelling therefrom the Emperor Valentinian II, who was brother to Gratian. Valentinian flies for safety to the Emperor Theodosius at Rome. The following year, 388, Theodosius and Valentinian joining forces, defeat Maximus, and having taken him prisoner, behead him at the third mile stone from the city of Aquileia. His son Victor was killed the same year by Arbogastus at Vienne in Gaul.



A glance at this pedigree, with the dates added to Maximus and Constantine, shows the futility of it. In twenty-three years six generations are killed off, so I think we are justified in saying that Constantine Vendigaid, King of Britain, Emperor of the West, and father of Ambrosius Aurelianus, was not Constantine, son of Tydwall, King of Armorica. Who was he?

In the manuscript before quoted, *The Henâre Book*, is the following statement under the heading Maxen Wledig, ". . . About this time Maxen died at Rome wᵗʰ Gratian understandinge he took upon him the government of Brytt: who immediately was slayne by Kustennyn or Constantine the son of Maxen."

Concerning Constantine, son of Maximus, the same work makes this statement, "Constantine made noe clayme to the crowne, but contented himself wᵗʰ the Earldom of Ewies Urchingfield."

It then proceeds to give a descent, which is chronologically impossible, from the said Constantine to Vortigern, covering seven generations!

It will be noticed that the same work, *The Hendre Book*, asserts that Gratian was slain by Constantine, son of Tydwali.

The only fact gained from these mis-statements is that Gratian was slain by one Constantine, who thereupon usurped the empire.

In the *Iolo MSS.*,[1] Maxen Wledig is given four sons, viz., Owain Vinddu, *i.e.*, Owain with the dark face, Ednyved, Peblig and Custennyn, to whom we can add a fifth in Victor (?Uter), who shared his father's empire and also his fate.

To take an absolutely common sense view of the case, surely in Constantine, son of Maximus, we have the man who slew the usurper Gratian, and was thereupon elected, like his father before him, Emperor of the West.

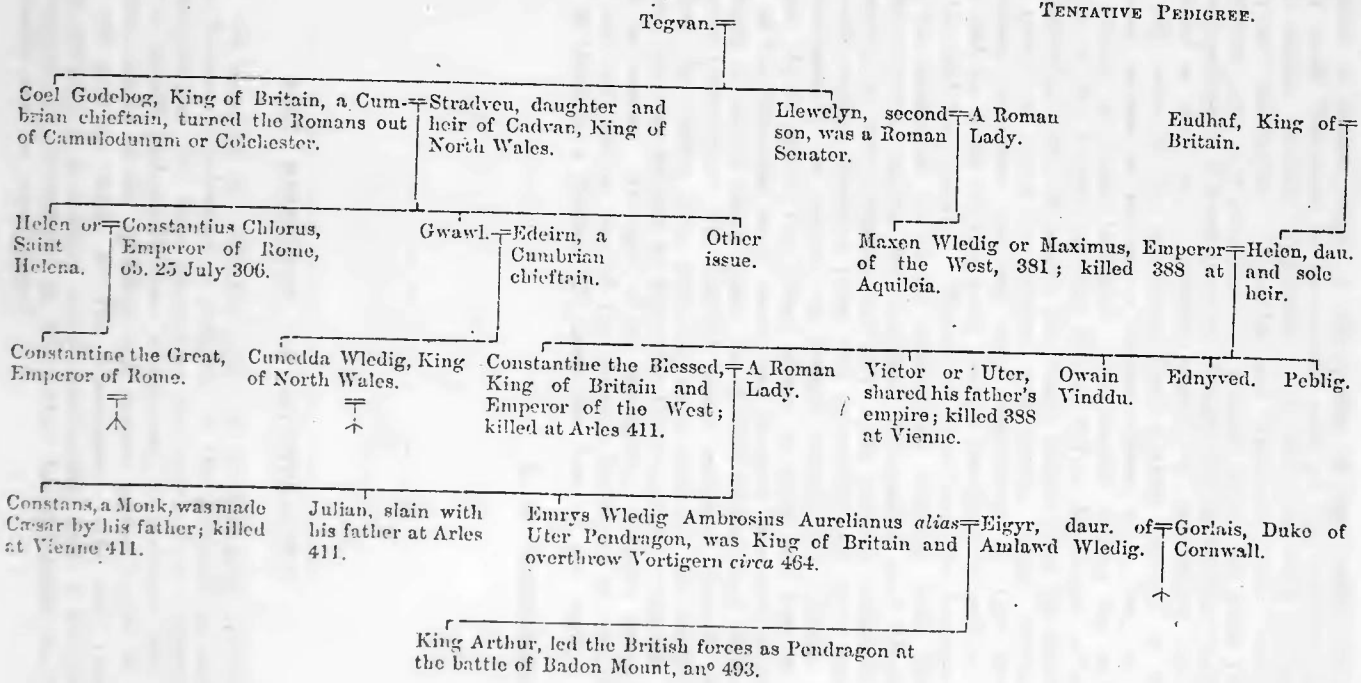
I may add that having worked out this theory of Arthur's ancestry from the evidences above quoted, I thought I might as well see if that imaginative creature Geoffrey of Monmouth had anything bearing upon the case, and I must confess I was somewhat startled to find these words put into Arthur's mouth when addressing his followers before starting on his expedition to Rome, "Likewise Constantine, the son of Helena, and Maximian [Maximus] who were both my kinsmen, and both wore the crown of Britain, gained the imperial throne of Rome."[2]

Maximus married, according to the Welsh tradition, Helen, daughter and heir of Eudhaf, King of Britain, and so was *jure uxoris* King of Britain.

If this tentative theory which I have set forth, and have also given in tabulated form on the opposite page, be correct, it is not hard to understand the glamour with which Arthur has been surrounded by early writers. Although a Briton by descent, with such progenitors, he must have been in cultivation and at heart a Roman. His grandfather and great grandfather Constantine the Blessed and Maximus, held their courts in Gaul. His father Ambrosius Aurelianus would have no time for courtly functions, as he must have been fully employed fighting against the enemies of his country; not only had he to keep in check the Saxon invasion and the inroads of the Picts and Scots, but also to fight against and overthrow the debased British rule under Vortigern. To Arthur alone of this line of Romano-British warriors and kings did the opportunity arise of holding court in Britain. After the battle of Badon Mount A.D. 493, comparative peace reigned in the island for a considerable period. Then it would be that Arthur settled down to social life, and we may be sure that, with his Roman education and tastes, his court must have been a surprise indeed to the rough untutored British kings and chieftains, his immediate followers. We get a glimpse of the civilization of this period in the ruins, now being excavated, of the Romano-British city of Silchester. Arthur, no doubt, had accumulated great wealth in the only way in which wealth could be

[1] *Iolo MSS.*, p. 512.

[2] *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, Book ix, cap. xvi.


Tegvan.
Coel Godebog, King of Britain, a Cumbrian chieftain, turned the Romans out of Camulodunum or Colchester.
Stradveu, daughter and heir of Cadvan, King of North Wales.
Llewelyn, second son, was a Roman Senator.
A Roman Lady.
Eudhaf, King of Britain.
Helen or Saint Helena.
Constantius Chlorus, Emperor of Rome, ob. 25 July 306.
Gwawl.
Edeirn, a Cumbrian chieftain.
Other issue.
Maxen Wledig or Maximus, Emperor of the West, 381; killed 388 at Aquileia.
Helen, dau. and sole heir.
Constantine the Great, Emperor of Rome.
Cunedda Wledig, King of North Wales.
Constantine the Blessed, King of Britain and Emperor of the West; killed at Arles 411.
A Roman Lady.
Victor or Uter, shared his father's empire; killed 388 at Vienne.
Owain Vinddu.
Ednyved.
Peblig.
Constans, a Monk, was made Cæsar by his father; killed at Vienne 411.
Julian, slain with his father at Arles 411.
Emrys Wledig Ambrosius Aurelianus *alias* Uter Pendragon, was King of Britain and overthrew Vortigern *circa* 464.
Eigyr, daur. of Amlawd Wledig.
Gorlais, Duke of Cornwall.
King Arthur, led the British forces as Pendragon at the battle of Badon Mount, anº 493.

amassed in those days, by the power of the sword, and his court would therefore be surrounded with all the luxuries of the then modern Roman civilization. In such old-world stories as "Trystan and Isolda," "Lancelot and Guinevere," etc., there are indications that this luxurious life brought about its usual result, moral decadence. We can trace all through the Arthurian romances, beautiful as they are, a distinct current of immorality, and we can only come to the conclusion that Arthur was not as great a social success as he was a warrior—brave as a lion, he was yet wanting in moral backbone. No wonder Gildas, the ascetic, alludes to him without naming him as "The degenerate offspring of Ambrosius," and denounces the whole British race for spending this period of peace in idleness and riotous living, instead of rebuilding the cities that had been overthrown by the Saxons. It is sad to think of this great warrior revelling in such a life, but the end was coming. Roused at last from his lethargy by what he considered to be an impertinent message from Rome, he determines to emulate his ancestors Constantine and Maximus by leading an army against that city. He therefore appoints his supposed nephew Mordred [who was in reality his own son by his half-sister!] his deputy in Britain during his absence, and departs. It is stated that when about to cross the Alps at the head of his victorious army, news was brought him that Mordred had risen in revolt, seized upon the British throne, and abducted his wife Guinevere. He hurried home, revenged himself upon Mordred by killing him with his own hand at the battle of Camlan, but was himself at the same time mortally wounded. So ended his career. In spite of all his faults, Arthur's name has lived and will live as one of the greatest heroes of the world so long as there is a Briton left upon the face of the earth.

A. S. Scott-Gatty.