THE BOOK OF HERGEST.

This very valuable MS., in which so much of the ancient litera­ture of Wales has been preserved, is now the property of Jesus College, Oxford, and is well known from the Mabinogion published by Lady Charlotte Guest having been taken from it

This MS. was given to Jesus College in 1701 by Thomas Wilkins of Llanblethian, to whom it had been left by Dr. John Davies. Dr. John Davies obtained it in Glamorgan in 1634 from Louis Manscl of Margarn, and it appears then to have belonged to the Margani family. The MS., however, takes its name from Ilergest Court, a seat of the Vaughans, near Knighton, Radnor, and was probably compiled for them. A complete table of its contents will be found in the Camhro-Briton, vol. ii. p. 75.

It is a thick folio MS. consisting of 360 leaves of vellum, and has been written at different times, extending from the early part of the fourteenth to the middle of the fifteenth century.

It is written in double columns, and apparently in three different handwritings.

“ It is worthy of notice that Gwenddydd in this dia­logue addresses Myrddin by the appellation of Llallogan, twin- brother. . . Now this will explain a passage in the Life of St. Kentigern, in which it is said that there was at the court of JRyddtrch Had a certain idiot, named Laloicen, who uttered pre­dictions :—“ In curia ejus quidam homo fatuus vacabulo Laloicen f and in the Scotochronicofi it is stated that this Laloicen was Myrddin Wyllt. By connecting these several particulars, we find an air of truth cast over the history of this bard, as regards the principal incidents of his life, and there can be no reason to doubt that some of the poetry attributed to him was actually his composition/'—Rev. T. Price, Literary Remains, i. 143

THE BOOK OF TALIESSLN.

The MS. called the Book of Taliesein is a small quarto MS. written on vellum, in one hand throughout, of the early part of the four­teenth century, and has always been in the Hengwrt collection. It consists now of thirty-eight leaves of vellum, and at the bottom of one of the pages is the name of Kobert Vychan or Vaughan, which eh owe that it was one of the MSS. collected by him. The outer pago both at the beginning and at the end is wanting, and the MS. now begins in the middle of the poem known by the name of “ Prif gyfarch Taliesein,” and ends in the middle of a poem called “ Darogan Katwaladyr.”

One of the poems in this book mentions the Books of Beda, and another the line of Anaraut, who died in a.d. 913, so that these poems cannot have been brought together into one collection till the tenth century. On the other hand, none of the poems attri­buted to Jonas Athraw, and none of those which refer to Henri, are to be found in it

BLACK BOOK OF CAERMARTHEN.

“ Prior to the year 1148,” says Tanner, “ a priory was founded at Caennarthen for six black canons. It was dedicated to St John the Evangelist, and received a charter from King Henry the Second, who granted “ Deo et ecclesi® Sancti Joh. Evangelistic de Kayr- merdyn et canonicis ibidem Deo servientibus veteram Civitatem de Kayrmerdyn.” It was granted, 4th July, 33d Henry VIII., to Richard Andrews and Nicholas Temple. Upon the dissolution of the religious houses in the reign of King Henry VIIL, Sir John Price, a native of Breconsliire, was among others appointed a com­missioner for their suppression, and exercised this duty mainly in the county of Brecon, when he received grants of many of tho religious houses. In the course of the performance of this duty, he received from the Treasurer of the Church of St. David’s a MS. which had belonged to the Priory of Caermarthen, and was known which had belonged to the Priory of Caermarthen, and was known by tho name of tho *Black Book of Caermarthen.* In hie *llietorice Britannicce Defensio*, he quotes the concluding veree of the first poem in the MS.

The essentials of this tale were not products of Geoffrey's imagination, but had rather been lifted bodily from the Historia Brittonum with contractions and expansions here and there, including the addition of the Prophetiae Merlinus. There are however two major changes that give the story an entirely new direction. Firstly, in the Historia Brittonum the fatherless youth is named as Ambrosius, not Myrddin/Merlin. Secondly, in the Historia Brittonum the youth is found in Glywysing, not at Carmarthen in Dyfed. Thus it seems clear that the Merlin of Geoffrey's Historia Regum Britanniae was a result of Geoffrey identifying theHistoria Brittonum'sAmbrosius with Myrddin in his earliest form as the prophetic eponymous founder-figure of Carmarthen.

Geoffrey's interest in Merlin appears to have continued after the completion of his Historia and in his Latin poem ofc. 1150, Vita Merlini, he presents a portrait of Merlin totally at variance with that in the Historia. The Merlin of this poem is clearly the same person as the Myrddin of the Welsh poems: both are Wild Men of the woods who have lost their reason in battle and subsequently live in the forest of Calidon or Celyddon; both converse with the famed poet and reputed vaticinator Taliesin; both are associated with animal companions and apple-trees; and the characters that figure in the Welsh poems (Gwenddolau, Rhydderch and Gwenddydd) are clearly present in the Vita Merlini. There are, naturally, many points of divergence, but the general relationship is clear. The key question is what does this mean? How did this come about? Jarman holds that, when writing his Historia c. 1138 Geoffrey was only slightly acquainted with the Myrddin legends and this acquaintance merely amounted to knowledge of the belief at Carmarthen in an eponymous prophetic founder-figure named Myrddin/Merddin. However, at some time subsequent to the publication of the Historia he encountered pre-existing legends of Myrddin the prophetic Wild Man and thus set about composing a new 'life' of Merlin, which showed indebtedness to both the Welsh poems and the Lailoken tales. On the other hand, Padel has recently suggested that the reverse is true – rather than believing that the Vita Merliniwas influenced by the Welsh poems in which Myrddin appears as a Wild Man, he suggests that the Vitawas in fact the first text to conflate the Dyfed prophetic Myrddin with tales of a northern Wild Man that originally belonged to Lailoken. As such the Welsh poems which name Myrddin as this figure would, in his opinion, date from after the Vita Merliniand be derivative of it.

Whatever the case may be, the fact that Geoffrey produced two very different portraits of Merlin seems not to have unduly worried this most inventive of medieval British authors. Geoffrey solved the problem to his satisfaction by presenting Merlin's career as lasting from Vortigern's reign to the late-sixth century, though it has to be said that this solution appears to have strained even medieval credulity (see Giraldus Cambrensis, for example).  The view thus developed after Geoffrey that there had been two Merlins, the first that of theHistoria and the second that of the Welsh poems and the Vita Merlini, named respectively Merlinus Ambrosius (Myrddin Emrys) and Merlinus Silvester  (Merlinus Celidonus, Myrddin Wyllt).