

**Nennius**



*History  
of the Britons*

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# **History of the Britons**



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# The Prologue

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Nennius, the lowly minister and servant of the servants of God, by the grace of God, disciple of St. Elbotus,<sup>[1]</sup> to all the followers of truth sendeth health.

Be it known to your charity, that being dull in intellect and rude of speech, I have presumed to deliver these things in the Latin tongue, not trusting to my own learning, which is little or none at all, but partly from traditions of our ancestors, partly from writings and monuments of the ancient inhabitants of Britain, partly from the annals of the Romans, and the chronicles of the sacred fathers, Isidore, Hieronymus, Prosper, Eusebius, and from the histories of the Scots and Saxons, although our enemies, not following my own inclinations, but, to the best of my ability, obeying the commands of my seniors; I have lispingly put together this history from various sources, and have endeavored, from shame, to deliver down to posterity the few remaining ears of corn about past transactions, that they might not be trodden under foot, seeing that an ample crop has been snatched away already by the hostile reapers of foreign nations. For many things have been in my way, and I, to this day, have hardly been able to understand, even superficially, as was necessary, the sayings of other men; much less was I able in my own strength, but like a barbarian, have I murdered and defiled the language of others. But I bore about with me an inward wound, and I was indignant, that the name of my own people, formerly famous and distinguished, should sink into oblivion, and

like smoke be dissipated. But since, however, I had rather myself be the historian of the Britons than nobody, although so many are to be found who might much more satisfactorily discharge the labour thus imposed on me; I humbly entreat my readers, whose ears I may offend by the inelegance of my words, that they will fulfil the wish of my seniors, and grant me the easy task of listening with candour to my history. For zealous efforts very often fail: but bold enthusiasm, were it in its power, would not suffer me to fail. May, therefore, candour be shown where the inelegance of my words is insufficient, and may the truth of this history, which my rustic tongue has ventured, as a kind of plough, to trace out in furrows, lose none of its influence from that cause, in the ears of my hearers. For it is better to drink a wholesome draught of truth from the humble vessel, than poison mixed with honey from a golden goblet.

And do not be loath, diligent reader, to winnow my chaff, and lay up the wheat in the storehouse of your memory: for truth regards not who is the speaker, nor in what manner it is spoken, but that the thing be true; and she does not despise the jewel which she has rescued from the mud, but she adds it to her former treasures.

For I yield to those who are greater and more eloquent than myself, who, kindled with generous ardour, have endeavoured by Roman eloquence to smooth the jarring elements of their tongue, if they have left unshaken any pillar of history which I wished to see remain. This history therefore has been compiled from a wish to benefit my inferiors, not from envy of those who are superior to me, in the 858th year of our Lord's incarnation, and in the 24th

year of Mervin, king of the Britons, and I hope that the prayers of my betters will be offered up for me in recompence of my labour. But this is sufficient by way of preface. I shall obediently accomplish the rest to the utmost of my power.

## **The Apology of Nennius**

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Here begins the apology of Nennius, the historiographer of the Britons, of the race of the Britons.

I, Nennius, disciple of St. Elbotus, have endeavoured to write some extracts which the dulness of the British nation had cast away, because teachers had no knowledge, nor gave any information in their books about this island of Britain. But I have got together all that I could find as well from the annals of the Romans as from the chronicles of the sacred fathers, Hieronymus, Eusebius, Isidorus, Prosper, and from the annals of the Scots and Saxons, and from our ancient traditions. Many teachers and scribes have attempted to write this, but somehow or other have abandoned it from its difficulty, either on account of frequent deaths, or the often recurring calamities of war. I pray that every reader who shall read this book, may pardon me, for having attempted, like a chattering jay, or like some weak witness, to write these things, after they had failed. I yield to him who knows more of these things than I do.

## **Six Ages of the World**

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