

***ELLIS
WYNNE***



***THE VISIONS
OF THE SLEEPING
BARD***

Ellis Wynne

The Visions of the Sleeping Bard

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE

ELLIS WYNNE'S PEDIGREE.

THE RELATION BETWEEN ELLIS WYNNE & BISHOP HUMPHREYS.

INTRODUCTION.

I.—THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

II.—THE TEXT.

III.—A BRIEF SUMMARY.

TO THE READER.

I.—VISION OF THE WORLD.

II.—THE VISION OF DEATH IN HIS NETHERMOST COURT.

III.—THE VISION OF HELL.

WITH HEAVY HEART.

PREFACE

[Table of Contents](#)

AT the National Eisteddfod of 1893, a prize was offered by Mr. Lascelles Carr, of the *Western Mail*, for the best translation of Ellis Wynne's *Vision of Hell*. The Adjudicators (Dean Howell and the Rev. G. Hartwell Jones, M.A.), awarded the prize for the translation which is comprised in the present volume. The remaining Visions were subsequently rendered into English, and the complete work is now published in the hope that it may prove useful to those readers, who, being unacquainted with the Welsh language, yet desire to obtain some knowledge of its literature.

My best thanks are due to the Rev. J. W. Wynne Jones, M.A., Vicar of Carnarvon, for much help and valuable criticism; to the Rev. R Jones, MA., Rector of Llanfair-juxta-Harlech, through whose courtesy I am enabled to produce (from a photograph by Owen, Barmouth) a page of the register of that parish, containing entries in Ellis Wynne's handwriting; and to Mr. Isaac Foulkes, Liverpool, for the frontispiece, which appeared in his last edition of the *Bardd Cwsc*.

R. GWYNEDDON DAVIES.

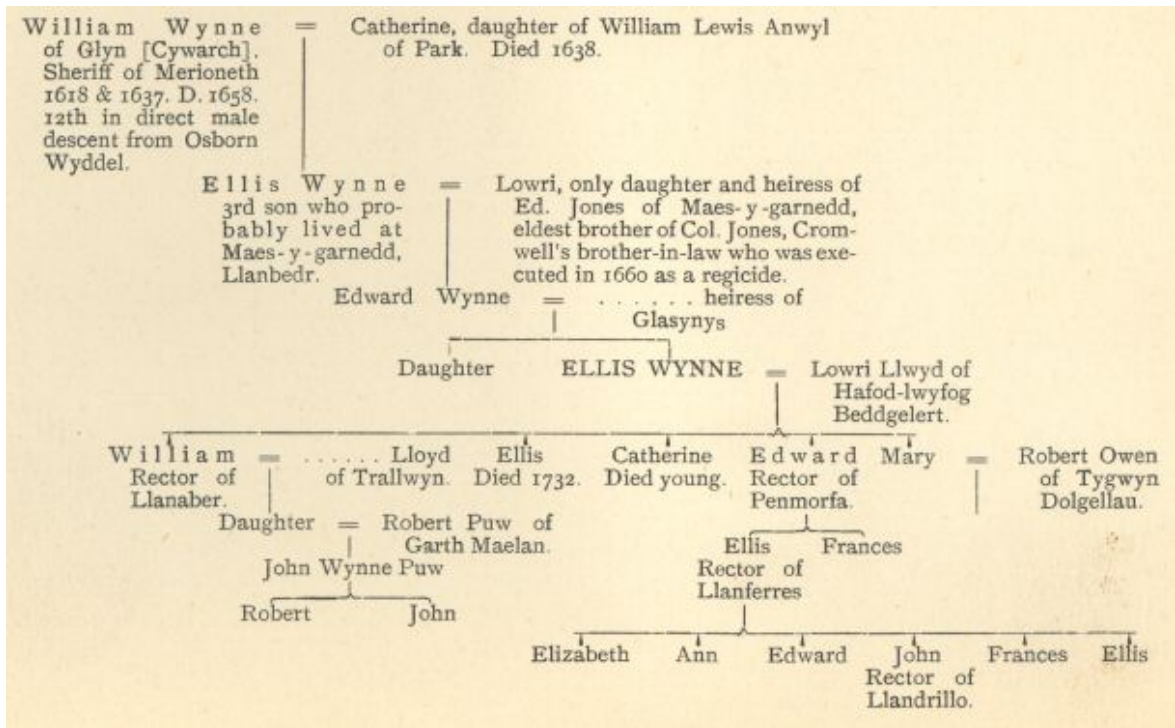
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1st July, 1897.

ELLIS WYNNE'S PEDIGREE.

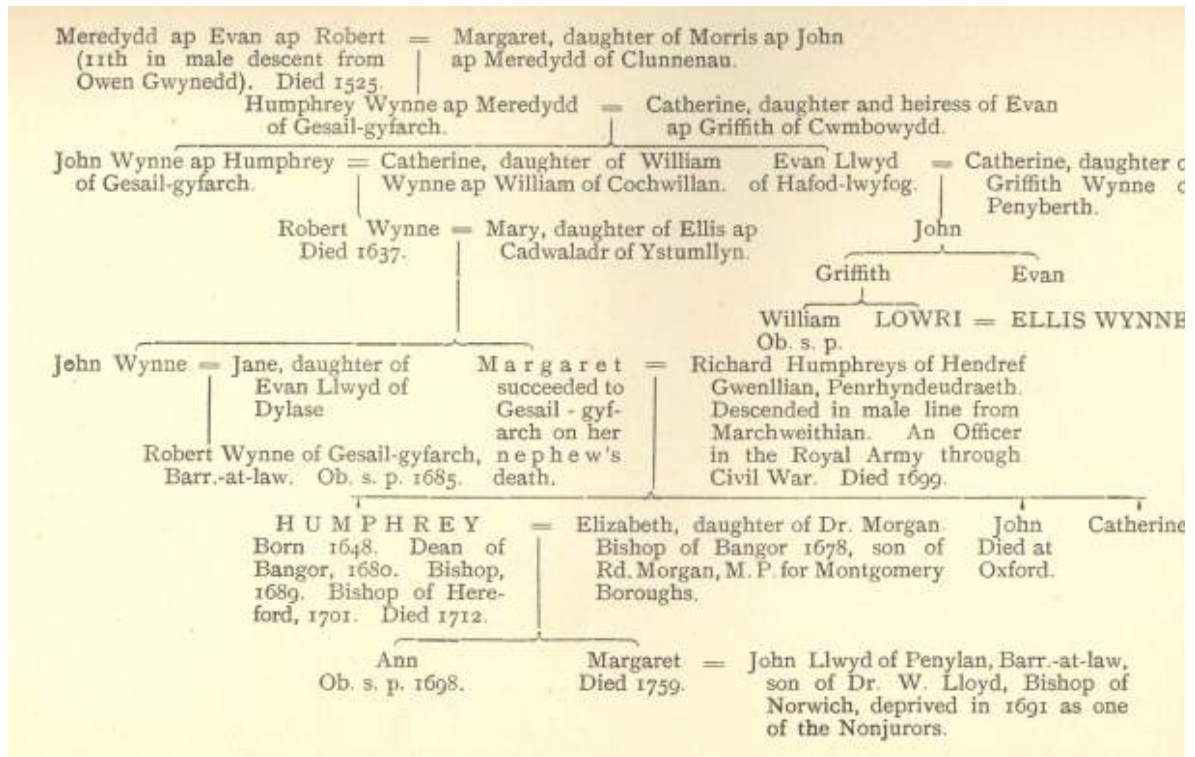
[Table of Contents](#)

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** (I am indebted to E. H. Owen, Esqr., F.S.A., Tychoch, Carnarvon, for most of the information compiled in the following tables.)



THE RELATION BETWEEN ELLIS WYNNE & BISHOP HUMPHREYS.

[Table of Contents](#)



INTRODUCTION.

[Table of Contents](#)

I.—THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.

[Table of Contents](#)

ELLIS WYNNE was born in 1671 at Glasynys, near Harlech; his father, Edward Wynne, came of the family of Glyn Cywarch (mentioned in the second Vision), his mother, whose name is not known, was heiress of Glasynys. It will be seen from the accompanying table that he was descended from some of the best families in his native county, and through *Osborn Wyddel*, from the Desmonds of Ireland. His birth-place, which still stands, and is shown in the frontispiece hereto, is situate about a mile and a half from the town of Harlech, in the beautiful Vale of Ardudwy. The natural scenery amidst which he was brought up, cannot have failed to leave a deep

impression upon his mind; and in the Visions we come across unmistakable descriptions of scenes and places around his home. Mountain and sea furnished him with many a graphic picture; the precipitous heights and dark ravines of Hell, its caverns and its cliffs, are all evidently drawn from nature. The neighbourhood is also rich in romantic lore and historic associations; Harlech Castle, some twenty-five years before his birth, had been the scene of many a fray between Roundheads and Cavaliers, and of the last stand made by the Welsh for King Charles. These events were fresh in the memory of his elders, whom he had, no doubt, often heard speaking of those stirring times; members of his own family had, perhaps, fought in the ranks of the rival parties; his father's grand-uncle, Col. John Jones, was one of those "who erstwhile drank of royal blood."

It is not known where he received his early education, and it has been generally stated by his biographers that he was not known to have entered either of the Universities; but, as the following notice proves, he at least matriculated at Oxford:

—

WYNNE, ELLIS, s. Edw. of Lasypeys, co. Merioneth, pleb. Jesus Coll. matric. 1st March 1691-2, aged 21; rector of Llandanwg, 1705, & of Llanfair-juxta-Harlech (both) co. Merioneth, 1711. (*Vide Foster's Index Eccles.*)

Probably his stay at the University was brief, and that he left without taking his degree, for I have been unable to find anything further recorded of his academic career. [0a] The Rev. Edmund Prys, Vicar of Clynnog-Fawr, in a prefatory *englyn* to Ellis Wynne's translation of the "*Holy Living*" says that "in order to enrich his own, he had ventured upon the study of

three other tongues.” This fact, together with much that appears in the *Visions*, justifies the conclusion that his scholarly attainments were of no mean order. But how and where he spent the first thirty years of his life, with the possible exception of a period at Oxford, is quite unknown, the most probable surmise being that they were spent in the enjoyment of a simple rural life, and in the pursuit of his studies, of whatever nature they may have been.

According to Rowlands’s *Cambrian Bibliography* his first venture into the fields of literature was a small volume entitled, *Help i ddarllen yr Yscreythur Gyssegr-Lân* (“Aids to reading Holy Writ”), being a translation of the *Whole Duty of Man* “by E. W., a clergyman of the Church of England,” published at Shrewsbury in 1700. But as Ellis Wynne was not ordained until 1704, this work must be ascribed to some other author who, both as to name and calling, answered to the description on the title-page quoted above. But in 1701 an accredited work of his appeared, namely, a translation into Welsh of Jeremy Taylor’s *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living*, a 12mo. volume published in London. It was dedicated to the Rev. Humphrey Humphreys, D.D., Bishop of Bangor, who was a native of the same district of Merionethshire as Ellis Wynne, and, as is shown in the genealogical table hereto, was connected by marriage with his family.

In 1702 [0b] he was married to Lowri Llwyd—*anglicè*, Laura Lloyd—of Hafod-lwyfog, Beddgelert, and had issue by her, two daughters and three sons; one of the daughters, Catherine, died young, and the second son, Ellis, predeceased his father by two years. [0c] His eldest son, Gwilym, became rector of Llanaber, near Barmouth, and inherited his ancestral home; his youngest son, Edward, also entered the Church and

became rector of Dolbenmaen and Penmorfa, Carnarvonshire. Edward Wynne's son was the rector of Llanferres, Denbighshire, and his son again was the Rev. John Wynne, of Llandrillo in Edeyrnion, who died only a few years ago.

The following year (1703), he published the present work—his *magnum opus*—which has secured him a place among the greatest names in Welsh Literature. It will be noticed that on the title-page to the first edition the words “*Y Rhann Gyntaf*” (“The First Part”) appear; the explanation given of this is that Ellis Wynne did actually write a second part, entitled, *The Vision of Heaven*, but that on hearing that he was charged with plagiarism in respect of his other Visions, he threw the manuscript into the fire, and so destroyed what, judging from the title, might have proved a greater success than the first part, as affording scope for lighter and more pleasing flights of the imagination.

It is said by his biographers that he was induced to abandon the pursuit of the law, to which he was educated, and to take holy orders, by Bishop Humphreys, who had recognised in his translation of the *Holy Living* marked ability and piety, and that he was ordained deacon and priest the same day by the Bishop, at Bangor, in 1701, and presented on the following day to the living of Llanfair-juxta-Harlech and subsequently to Llandanwg.

All these statements appear to be incorrect. To deal with them categorically: I find no record at the Diocesan Registry of his having been ordained at Bangor at all; the following entry in the parish register of Llanfair shows that he was not in holy orders in July, 1704: “*Gulielmus filius Elizaei Wynne generosi de Lâs ynys et uxoris suis baptizatus fuit quindecimo die Julii, 1704.—W. Wynne Rr., O. Edwards, Rector.*” His first living was

Llandanwg, and not Llanfair, to which he was collated on January 1st, 1705. Moreover, the above-named Owen Edwards was the rector of Llanfair until his death which took place in 1711. [Od] From that date on to 1734, the entries in the register at Llanfair church are all in Ellis Wynne's handwriting; these facts prove conclusively that it was in 1711 he became rector of the latter parish.

In 1710 he edited a new and revised edition of the Book of Common Prayer, at the request of his patron, the Bishop of Hereford (Dr. Humphreys) and the four Welsh bishops,—a clear proof of the confidence reposed in him by the dignitaries of his church as a man of learning and undoubted piety. He himself published nothing more, but *A Short Commentary on the Catechism* and a few hymns and carols were written by him and published posthumously by his son, Edward, being included in a volume of his own, entitled *Prif Addysc y Cristion*, issued in 1755.

The latter part of his life is as completely obscure as the earlier; he lapsed again into the silence from which he had only just emerged with such signal success, and confined his efforts as a Christian worker within the narrow limits of his own native parts, exercising, doubtlessly, an influence for good upon his immediate neighbourhood through force of character and noble personality, as upon his fellow-countrymen at large by means of his published works. His wife died in 1720, and his son, Ellis, in 1732; two years later he himself died and was buried under the communion table in Llanfair church, on the 17th day of July, 1734. [Oe] There is no marble or "perennial brass" to mark the last resting-place of the Bard, nor was there, until recent years, any memorial of him in either of his parish churches, when the late Rev. John Wynne set up a fine

stained-glass window at Llanfair church in memory of his illustrious ancestor.

Ellis Wynne appeared at a time when his country had sore need of him, when the appointed teachers of the nation were steeped in apathy and corruption, when ignorance and immorality overspread the land—the darkest hour before the dawn. He was one of the early precursors of the Methodist revival in Wales, a voice crying in the wilderness, calling upon his countrymen to repent. He neither feared nor favored any man or class, but delivered his message in unfaltering tone, and performed his allotted task honestly and faithfully. How deeply our country is indebted to him who did her such eminent service in the days of adversity and gloom will never be known. And now, in the time of prosperity, Wales still remembers her benefactor, and will always keep honored the name of Ellis Wynne, the SLEEPING BARD.

II.—THE TEXT.

[Table of Contents](#)

The *Bardd Cwsc* was first published in London in 1703, a small 24mo. volume of some 150 pages, with the following title-page

“GWELEDIGAETHEU Y BARDD CWSC. Y Rhann Gyntaf.
Argraphwyd yn Llundain gan E. Powell i’r Awdwr, 1703.”

[\[Of\]](#)

A second edition was not called for until about 1742, when it was issued at Shrewsbury; but in the thirty years following, as many as five editions were published, and in the present century, at least twelve editions (including two or three by the

Rev. Canon Silvan Evans) have appeared. The text followed in this volume is that of Mr. Isaac Foulkes' edition, but recourse has also been had to the original edition for the purpose of comparison. The only translation into English hitherto has been that of George Borrow, published in London in 1860, and written in that charming and racy style which characterises his other and better known works. He has, however, fallen into many errors, which were only natural, seeing that the Visions abound in colloquial words and phrases, and in idiomatic forms of expression which it would be most difficult for one foreign to our tongue to render correctly.

The author's name is not given in the original nor in any subsequent edition previous to the one published at Merthyr Tydfil in 1806, where the *Gweledigaethu* are said to be by "Ellis Wynne." But it was well known, even before his death, that he was the author; the fact being probably deduced from the similarity in style between the Visions and an acknowledged work, namely, his translation of the *Holy Living*. The most likely reason for his preferring anonymity is not far to seek; his scathing denunciation of the sins of certain classes and, possibly, even of certain individuals, would be almost sure to draw upon the author their most bitter attacks. Many of the characters he depicts would be identified, rightly or wrongly, with certain of his contemporaries, and many more, whom he never had in his mind at all, would imagine themselves the objects of his satire; he had nothing to gain by imperilling himself at the hands of such persons, or by coming into open conflict with them; he had his message to deliver to his fellow-countrymen, his Visions a purpose to fulfil, the successful issue of which could not but be frustrated by the introduction of personal hatred and ill-will. Ellis Wynne was

only too ready to forego the honor of being the acknowledged author of the Visions if thereby he could the better serve his country.

The *Bardd Cwsc* is not only the most popular of Welsh prose works, but it has also retained its place among the best of our classics. No better model exists of the pure idiomatic Welsh of the last century, before writers became influenced by English style and method. Vigorous, fluent, crisp, and clear, it shows how well our language is adapted to description and narration. It is written for the people, and in the picturesque and poetic strain which is always certain to fascinate the Celtic mind. The introduction to each Vision is evidently written with elaborate care, and exquisitely polished—“*ne quid possit per leve morari,*” and scene follows scene, painted in words which present them most vividly before one’s eyes, whilst the force and liveliness of his diction sustain unflinching interest throughout. The reader is carried onward as much by the rhythmic flow of language and the perfect balance of sentences, as by the vivacity of the narrative and by the reality with which Ellis Wynne invests his adventures and the characters he depicts. The terrible situations in which we find the Bard, as the drama unfolds, betoken not only a powerful imagination, but also an intensity of feeling which enabled him to realise the conceptions of such imagination. We follow the Bard and his heavenly guide through all their perils with breathless attention; the demons and the damned he so clothes with flesh and blood that our hatred or our sympathy is instantly stirred; his World is palpitating with life, his Hell, with its gloom and glare, is an awful, haunting dream. But besides being the possessor of a vivid imagination, Ellis Wynne was endowed with a capacity for transmitting his own experience

in a picturesque and life-like manner. The various descriptions of scenes, such as Shrewsbury fair, the parson's revelry and the deserted mansions; of natural scenery, as in the beginning of the first and last Visions; of personages, such as the portly alderman, and the young lord and his retinue, all are evidently drawn from the Author's own experience. He was also gifted with a lively sense of humor, which here and there relieves the pervading gloom so naturally associated with the subject of his Visions. The humorous and the severe, the grotesque and the sublime, the tender and the terrible, are alike portrayed by a master hand.

The leading feature of the Visions, namely the personal element which the Author infuses into the recital of his distant travels, brings the reader into a closer contact with the tale and gives continuity to the whole work, some parts of which would otherwise appear disconnected. This telling of the tale *in propria persona* with a guide of shadowy or celestial nature who points out what the Bard is to see, and explains to him the mystery of the things around him, is a method frequently adopted by poets of all times. Dante is the best known instance, perhaps; but we find the method employed in Welsh, as in "The Dream of Paul, the Apostle," where Paul is led by Michael to view the punishments of Hell (*vide* Iolo MSS.). Ellis Wynne was probably acquainted with Vergil and Dante, and adopted the idea of supernatural guidance from them; in fact, apart from this, we meet with several passages which are eminently reminiscent of both these great poets.

But now, casting aside mere speculation, we come face to face with the indisputable fact that Ellis Wynne is to a considerable degree indebted to the *Dreams* of Gomez de Quevedo y Villegas, a voluminous Spanish author who

flourished in the early part of the 17th century. In 1668, Sir Roger L'Estrange published his translation into English of the *Dreams*, which immediately became very popular. Quevedo has his Visions of the World, of Death and her (*sic*) Empire, and of Hell; the same characters are delineated in both, the same classes satirized, the same punishments meted out. We read in both works of the catchpoles and wranglers, the pompous knights and lying knaves—in fine, we cannot possibly come to any other conclusion than that Ellis Wynne has “read, marked and inwardly digested” L'Estrange's translation of Quevedo's *Dreams*. But admitting so much, the *Bardd Cwsc* still remains a purely Welsh classic; whatever in name and incident Ellis Wynne has borrowed from the Spaniard he has dressed up in Welsh home-spun, leaving little or nothing indicative of foreign influence. The sins he preached against, the sinners he condemned, were, he knew too well, indigenous to Welsh and Spanish soil. George Borrow sums up his comments upon the two authors in the following words: “Upon the whole, the Cymric work is superior to the Spanish; there is more unity of purpose in it, and it is far less encumbered with useless matter.”

The implication contained in the foregoing remarks of Borrow—that the *Bardd Cwsc* is encumbered to a certain degree with useless matter, is no doubt well founded. There is a tendency to dwell inordinately upon the horrible, more particularly in the Vision of Hell; a tiring sameness in the descriptive passages, an occasional lapse from the tragic to the ludicrous, and an intrusion of the common-place in the midst of a speech or a scene, marring the dignity of the one and the beauty of the other.