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The Journey Through Wales And The Description Of Wales (Classics)



PENGUIN CLASSICS

GERALD OF WALES

*The Journey Through Wales
The Description of Wales*



Synopsis

Scholar, churchman, diplomat and theologian, Gerald of Wales was one of the most fascinating figures of the Middle Ages and *The Journey Through Wales* describes his eventful tour of the country as a missionary in 1188. In a style reminiscent of a diary, Gerald records the day-to-day events of the mission, alongside lively accounts of local miracles, folklore and religious relics such as Saint Patrick's Horn, and eloquent descriptions of natural scenery that includes the rugged promontory of St David's and the vast snow-covered panoramas of Snowdonia. The landscape is evoked in further detail in *The Description*, which chronicles the everyday lives of the Welsh people with skill and affection. Witty and gently humorous throughout, these works provide a unique view into the medieval world.

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Customer Reviews

If I was writing a book set in Medieval Wales, I would not be without this book. Descriptions of the country and its people are given, as are extensive biographies of many of the famous rulers and clergymen of the day. On the other hand, it isn't the easiest reading. The material is easy to comprehend, but at times the text itself is dry.

Giraldus Cambrensis was a curmudgeon with a vivid imagination. He has an eye for detail and an ear for a good story. As such, his works combine many different elements -- travelogue, miracle tales, slander, complaints, and puffed-up pride. I love him for all this; Gerald is a very real person, warts and all. This book serves as a great introduction to medieval writing in many ways. First of all, it is relatively short and is full chapters. Each one could be read in connection with the others or solo. One chapter might be about the lay of the land. The next might have to do with a miraculous lake of birds. The next might include scurulous reports about cannibalism. This book, then, is not a history book, not a religious book, not a travelogue, but instead the notes and jottings of a mind interested in many topics. While a lot of the writing speaks of God, Christ and miracles, not all of it does -- this will help give a general reader a broader understanding of the medieval world-view. Give him a try. You might find the Middle Ages a truly engaging time, a time when people, then as now, were people.

First, I want to say thank you, wherever he is today, to Mr. Jones, himself a Welsh patriot, for recommending this book to me nine years ago. What these two books (collected in one volume) are is an invaluable resource that takes a reader on a village-by-village, region-by-region tour of 12th century Wales. Gerald, a Benedictine monk in royal service, had a scholarly eye and a novelist's touch in describing what he encountered on his trips thru the westernmost nation on the island of Britain. Gerald tells of a Wales still independent from England, still Celtic and very much a fiercely independent state in its own right. He describes the hair styles, clothing, dining preferences, architecture, religious and historical sites (including a legend of the burial place of one King Arthur) and does it in a way that never loses the spark of immediacy, even for those of us centuries in Gerald's future. This book reads a lot like a piece from National Geographic, only it's nine-hundred years old! Without Gerald, we never would get to meet so many interesting human beings who once lived out lives in a time and place far removed from where we dwell today. This descriptive memoir is an improbable survivor, and a treasure in the collective library of the human race.

This is a fascinating little book which the translator has done an excellent job of putting in general context with other works, not only in the introduction and appendices but also in the extensive footnotes tracing quotations. Gerald was quite clearly a fan of Roman literature (Virgil, Lucan, Horace, etc) and he clearly saw the Welsh, as did Geoffrey of Monmouth, as a part of some ancient Trojan extension of culture. This book contains two of Gerald's writings. The first is The Journey

Through Wales, which I found very easy to read, and which basically recounts a trip around Wales preaching and performing Mass. Each area is described in substantial detail and often historical episodes or accounts of relics of saints are interspersed in the text. Some of these accounts have clear pagan origins meaning that students of Celtic prehistory as well as of the Middle Ages may find much material in here to ponder. Of course separating Catholic from Pagan elements is not very easy, but I have no doubt it could be done. At any rate that synthesis is what made Medieval Wales into what it was. The second part is The Description of Wales, which describes the geography and people of that country. The first part of that book describes all that is noble. The second part describes all that is not. It ends with a prediction of how the English will probably eventually conquer Wales, and what can be done to keep up a resistance. I found this book to be quite a bit drier than The Journey Through Wales, but it could be of interest to many people nonetheless. Despite the dry portions of the second work, I decided to give this work 5 stars because the first work brings Wales to life so vividly and provides so much material for consideration that this book really should be on the top of the reading list for anyone interested in Wales and/or the middle ages. Highly recommended.

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