

GERALD OF WALES AND THE ANGEVIN KINGS

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On the 10th of November 1203, Silvester Giraldus Cambrensis¹ attended a meeting at Westminster Abbey in London at which Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury, announced the selection of Geoffrey de Henelawe as Bishop of the See of St David's. Although five years before, the canons of St David's had elected him their choice for Bishop, and although he had pushed his claim vigorously with two kings and a pope, Gerald of Wales accepted the decision quietly. He resigned his archdeaconry and retired from public life.² For decades, he had nursed the ambition to become Bishop of a St David's independent of Canterbury. This ambition had driven him and ultimately became an obsession. Now, his ambition crushed, Gerald looked for someone to blame. His gaze turned upon the Angevin kings. While once he had praised Henry II and his sons, now he used the full force of his invective against them and their memory.

Henry II had become King of England in 1154, the son of the Empress Matilda and the grandson of Henry I. Taking the throne in the wake of a ruinous civil war, Henry had used all of his energy and skill to undo the damage done during his predecessor Stephen's reign and rebuild the kingdom. Marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, the former Queen of France and heiress in her own right to the Duchy of Aquitaine, had added vast territories in Western and Southern France to his domain. Ruling for thirty-six years, Henry had done a great deal of good for the kingdom. He had reformed the system of law, restrained the power of the barons and gained control of not only of his own domains but also of much of Ireland. By the 1180s, men throughout Europe and the Levant regarded him as one of the most important and prestigious kings of the time. However, disputes with the church, and in particular his

long squabble with Thomas Becket, had sullied his reputation.³ Contemporary chroniclers, including Roger de Hoveden, Gervase of Canterbury, Walter Map and William of Newburgh, frequently felt ambivalent about Henry. Walter Map maintains that Henry "was distinguished by many good traits and blemished by some few faults."⁴ Similarly, Newburgh characterizes Henry as being "endowed with many virtues [...] and yet he was addicted to certain vices especially unbecoming in a Christian prince."⁵ These men similarly had their doubts about Henry's sons. Of Henry the Young King, they wrote little but most deplore the young man's rebellions against his father in 1173 and 1183.⁶ Richard, who succeeded his father in 1189 and John, who succeeded Richard in 1200, attracted similar doubts, albeit for different reasons. Yet, it was Gerald of Wales who showed the greatest variance over the course of his writings, from extravagant praise to utter loathing. Yet, he also differed from the other chroniclers. While others had criticized Henry most strongly during his lifetime, Gerald had been most solicitous. After his death, while Gerald's condemnation

³ For more information on the reigns of the Angevins see Robert Bartlett, *England Under the Norman and Angevin Kings, 1075-1225* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2000); Richard Mortimer, *Angevin England, 1154-1258* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994); C. Warren Hollister, Robert C. Stacey and Robin Chapman Stacey, *The Making of England to 1399*, 8th Ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001); W.L. Warren, *Henry II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); John Gillingham, *Richard I* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999) and W.L. Warren, *King John* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

⁴ Walter Map, *De Nugis Curialium* (Courtier's Trifles), edited and translated by M.R. James, revised by C.N.L. Brooke and R.A.B. Mynors, Oxford Medieval Texts, eds B.F. Harvey, D.E. Greenaway and M. Lapidge. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 485.

⁵ William of Newburgh, *The History*, translated by Joseph Stevenson (Lampeter: Llanerch 1996), 551.

⁶ Chroniclers referred to Henry II's eldest son as the Young King or Henry III after his father had him crowned king in 1170, presumably in an attempt to forestall any doubts over the succession. He should not be confused with John's son who took the throne as Henry III in 1216.

¹ Commonly known as Gerald of Wales or Gerald de Barri.

² Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *The Journey through Wales and the Description of Wales*, translated by Lewis Thorne (London: Penguin, 1978), Introduction, 22.

had increased, the opinions of many other chroniclers had softened. After Henry's death, Newburgh wrote that during the king's lifetime, men failed to notice Henry's good points, dwelling only upon his bad. Only afterwards did "the experience of present evils" make it clear to all that he was "an eminent and valuable prince."⁷

Gerald of Wales was born around 1146 in Southern Wales, the third son of an Anglo-Norman knight, William de Barri. De Barri was of the class known as the Marcher lords, veteran warriors who manned the borders of the English kingdom and often were at the forefront of territorial expansion. Although Gerald rejected the lure of knighthood for the Church, he retained an affinity for these men. His *Conquest of Ireland* is in many regards a paean to their efforts in Ireland. He often defended their rights, especially as he believed that the Angevins continually eroded them.⁸ Gerald's maternal grandmother was Nesta, daughter of the Welsh prince Rhys ap Tewdwr and one time lover of Henry I. Gerald was thus one quarter Welsh. However, despite attempts by Welsh historians Henry Owen and Thomas Jones to accentuate Gerald's Welshness, for much of his life Gerald was more disparaging about the Welsh than complimentary. In the *Description of Wales*, he characterizes them as greedy, incestuous, sinful and cowardly in battle.⁹ He never spoke Welsh and, while touring Wales in 1188, Gerald took an active part in subduing Welsh resistance to Anglo-Norman rule. Nevertheless, because of his Welsh and Marcher heritage, rivals often viewed Gerald with suspicion. The historian Robert Bartlett claims it was this suspicion that encouraged the Angevin kings and the English Archbishops of Canterbury to deny him preferment. Certainly, Gerald saw himself as an outsider, neither fully Norman nor fully Welsh, disliked by both sides.¹⁰

Perhaps because of, his complicated and troublesome heritage, Gerald was fiercely ambitious. During his youth, his uncle David was Bishop of St

David's and no doubt, this encouraged Gerald's ambitions. Eschewing knighthood for the church, he first studied in the great university school of Paris, and returned in 1174 to take up benefices in England and Wales. He soon became the Archdeacon of Brecon and from this base, he showed a "reforming zeal," persecuting lax and corrupt priests, stopping nepotism and attempting to improve the payment of tithes. In 1176, when his uncle died and the bishopric of St David's fell empty, he was the favorite of the four candidates the canons of St David's put forward to King Henry. Despite many people speaking in Gerald's favor, Henry chose instead the Anglo-Norman Peter de Leia.¹¹ Gerald attributes this decision to Henry's desire to avoid "promoting such a man, so honest and of such high a birth, to give new strength to the Welsh."¹² Other chroniclers, including de Hoveden and Newburgh, allow the selection of Peter de Leia to pass without comment or mention of Gerald.

Despite this disappointment, Gerald was only thirty years old. He must have believed that the fulfillment of his ambition was still possible. After a second period in Paris, he entered the service of Henry II in 1184 as court chaplain. He believed that his own learning and erudition would be of use to the "learned prince" and, by proving his scholarship and his loyalty, he could persuade Henry to show him the favor he had denied in 1176.¹³ He began writing seriously in the mid 1180s with the *Topography of Ireland* and produced books on a regular basis for the rest of his life, as well as revising existing works.

In his *The Topography of Ireland*, Gerald of Wales writes an astonishing panegyric to Henry II and to his sons.¹⁴ Gerald examines the character of Henry II, dwelling upon his strengths and dismissing his weaknesses. If we are to take the piece as sincere as

¹¹ Gerald, *Wales*, Introduction 13–15.

¹² Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *I, Giraldus: The Autobiography of Giraldus Cambrensis*, translated by H.E. Butler, edited and revised by Anne Rutherford (Cambridge: Rhwymbooks 2002), 22

¹³ Bartlett, *Gerald*, 59.

¹⁴ Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *The Topography of Ireland*, translated by Thomas Forester, revised and edited by Thomas Wright, Medieval Latin Series (Cambridge, Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2001), chapters 47–50.

⁷ Newburgh, 553

⁸ Robert Bartlett, *Gerald of Wales, 1146–1223* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982) 20.

⁹ Gerald, *Wales, Description of Wales* Book II, 255–267.

¹⁰ Bartlett, *Gerald*, 15–17.

written, it paints a surprising portrait of the king as a new “Alexander of the West.” Yet, in both the companion piece to this work, *The Conquest of Ireland* and also in his *The Journey through Wales*, Gerald is far harsher about his king. This changing attitude reached its apotheosis in Gerald’s *De Instructione Principis* (On the Instruction of a Prince), a searing polemic against Henry. We must consider why and for what reason Gerald wrote these works, what he might have been attempting to accomplish and the reasons for this important shift.

Gerald wrote *The Topography* around 1186 while he was in the employ of Henry II, accompanying the young Prince John into Ireland as chaplain and advisor. The clerk was thus beholden to the king as his lord and most important patron. After the events of 1176, he knew that, despite the Church’s protestations to the contrary, the king had the last word on the appointment of bishops and abbots. At that point in his career, he would not be foolish enough to anger the person with such control of his destiny. Certainly, he would know of the quick temper of the Angevins, including Henry. Peter of Blois, a contemporary of Gerald’s at Henry’s court wrote, “[Henry’s] eyes [...] in anger and disorder of heart [...] shine like fire and flash in fury” and that “once [Henry] has hated, with difficulty he receives into the grace of his familiarity.”¹⁵ Gerald himself recounted stories of the people who, having annoyed Henry, ended up in chains.¹⁶ Amid his homily to Henry and his sons, he even admits that the king could have him banished should he wish, betraying perhaps some of his concerns while writing.¹⁷

While Gerald published the first version of *The Conquest* in 1187 within a few years of *The Topography*, he revised it after Henry’s death, during the first years of King John’s reign. Similarly, while the first version of *The Journey through Wales* appeared around 1189, Gerald

revised it in 1197 and 1214.¹⁸ In both, it is a far more bitter Gerald writing. By 1187, as Henry’s power waned in the last years of his reign amid the rebellions of his sons, and the Bishop of St David’s remained in good health, Gerald must have realized that all of his flattery and loyalty to the King would not win him his dearest hope. In 1203, after years chasing the bishopric of Saint David’s, pleading with kings and popes, he had finally despaired of his deepest hope.¹⁹ He would never be bishop of St David’s. He no longer served the king. There was little reason for him to hold back his opinions and the revised texts reflect this.

Yet, Gerald’s desire for the bishopric alone may not be enough to explain the change in tone in these texts. In *The Topography*, Gerald explains that he is writing not just for the king, but also for posterity. This shows a great confidence in the longevity of this text and the extent to which it would be available to future generations. Like the classical authors and the Church fathers whom he regularly quotes, Gerald wrote his works to last the test of time. Naturally, his position at the heart of the king’s court had been crucial to this ambition. As a clerk to the king, and present at many of the important events of the period, Gerald had a rare opportunity to observe and to record the workings of the royal family. With an eye to his own place in literature, presumably he would not want to squander that by angering the king in his earlier work.

This ambition might also explain the excesses of *The Topography*. Gerald aimed to inspire “the minds of many in future times [...] to increased vigor by the examples of valorous action [...] rousing a laudable spirit of emulation.”²⁰ A balanced account would not fulfill this purpose. Would a mortal and fallible man inspire future generations? Clearly, Gerald thought not. He thus seems to describe the king not as he was but as he should be. He pictures an idealized king, shorn of his faults, better able to encourage future virtue. The Henry whom Gerald portrays in *The Topography* is a great king, a conqueror of petty kings, a man of learning and compassion, loyal to the God

¹⁵ Peter of Blois, “Letter 66, to Walter, Archbishop of Palermo, 1177”, translated by Scott McLetchie, reproduced in Paul Halsall, ed. *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*. Fordham University. February 2001. <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>>

¹⁶ Giraldus Cambrensis (Gerald of Wales), *The Conquest of Ireland*, translated by Thomas Forester, revised and edited by Thomas Wright, Medieval Latin Series. Cambridge (Ontario: In Parentheses Publications, 2001), 35.

¹⁷ Gerald, *Topography*, 90.

¹⁸ Gerald, *Wales*, 41.

¹⁹ Gerald, *Wales*, Introduction, 22

²⁰ Gerald, *Topography*, Second Preface, 6.

who had granted him the kingship. In praising Henry, Gerald implicitly suggests how a true and virtuous king should be. Perhaps Gerald also hoped to inspire improvement in the king himself. Instead of using a hectoring or disapproving tone, Gerald rather plays upon the king's vanity and his learning to show Henry the ideal he could become.

While writing or revising his later works, however, Gerald knows that his reputation will not come from being a great bishop of a free St David's. If future generations are to know of Gerald, it will only be through his writings. In addition, by the time he revised *The Conquest* and *The Journey through Wales*, Gerald had abandoned the court. He had seen all that he needed to see in order to analyze and comment upon Henry and his sons. He already had all the material he needed to portray their faults to future readers and so did not need to worry about losing this position.

Appearing to reject the trappings of power that would have come with the bishopric of Saint David's he professes himself content to achieve immortality through his words. He writes, "Wealth and violence seem to sustain us in this life, but after death they avail us nothing; on the contrary, the pursuit of letters brings us little except dislike as long as we live, but once we are dead our fame is immortal."²¹ It seems though that he protests too much for a man so determined in his ambition that he had made an arduous journey to Rome and, during the trip home, spent time imprisoned for his troubles. Perhaps he is trying to persuade himself as much as anyone that his life has not been a failure.

This new realization of that his words alone will define him for future generations seems to have inspired a shift in emphasis in Gerald's books. He acknowledges that he "was wont to allege in excuse the wickedness of the age."²² Now, he emphasizes that the truth, however difficult, is more important than pure praise. He is clearly attempting to provide a more a more balanced view of Henry and his sons than his earlier work. Poor behavior

and the "wantonness" of King Henry and his family may now serve to illuminate not the ideal but the obverse. They become a cautionary tale for future generations, as Gerald views them through his "bright mirror."²³ If he hoped to influence King John, it was not through the subtlety he used upon Henry, but he was more direct, detailing John's shortcomings and instructing him on his duties. Gerald is no longer writing for his contemporaries and potential patrons. Instead, he is writing for himself and for his future reputation. This important change leads to noticeable differences between the texts.

The path to publication of *The Instruction* reflects Gerald's continuing concerns. In 1190, when Gerald wrote much of *The Instruction*, King Henry and two of his sons were already dead. The eldest surviving son, Richard, had ordered Gerald to abandon his pledge to go on Crusade and sent him home to England.²⁴ The Bishop of St David's remained in ruddy good health. At this undoubtedly low point in his life, Gerald composed a work of such savagery that it stands alone among his own work and that of the other chroniclers. In it, he attacks Henry for the king's weakness, his impiety, his marriage to Eleanor and even the lineage that once he had praised. Finally, he vents his wrath, long suppressed, against the man who first denied him St David's in 1176. However, *The Instruction* includes not only condemnation of Henry, but also attacks his sons. Concerned about the effect that these opinions might have upon King Richard and later upon John, Gerald suppressed the full circulation of *The Instruction* until after John's death in 1216.²⁵

The Instruction is not a chronicle in the usual sense. It has none of the carefully recorded facts of a scholar such as Roger de Hoveden. It has none of the attempts at balance of Gerald's earlier works. It is rather a political polemic, written to sully the reputation of a man whom Gerald had come to loathe. All of the rumors that Gerald had omitted before, he included; all of the possible charges against Henry, he made. He seems to be writing for

²¹ Gerald, *Wales*, 65.

²² Gerald, *Conquest*, Second Preface, 3

²³ *Ibid*, Second Preface, 5

²⁴ Gerald, *Wales*, Introduction, 16.

²⁵ Bartlett, *Gerald*, 64

himself as much as he is writing for others, but certainly, future readers must have been in his mind. They must come to understand the venality of King Henry. Gerald may even have regretted his earlier praise in *The Topography* and wished to redress the balance.

One of the most important themes in all of Gerald's works concerning Henry and his sons is the relationship between the king and the Divine. To Gerald, it is clearly important that Henry is a rightly anointed king. This sets him apart from the "petty kings" of Ireland who lacked the holy sacraments upon their ascension and who, therefore, did not have the support of the Divine.²⁶ Without such aid, these kings could only fail against Henry. The relationship between God and a king is analogous to that between a lord and vassal. The Lord conferred Henry with "a grace that has no parallel upon earth." In turn, Henry was to act as his agent upon earth, working to "enlarge the fold of Christ."²⁷ This seems a peculiar role for Gerald to assign to Henry, who had a turbulent relationship with the Church. Not only did Henry indulge in the long-drawn out dispute with Becket but also he frequently refused to fill vacant abbacies and bishoprics so that the income due to the Church would instead go to the Crown treasuries.²⁸ More than anything, it would appear that here, Gerald is reminding Henry from whence came his position and his gifts. As "divine favor attended [the King]" surely too it could be retracted should Henry stray once more.²⁹

With the hindsight and freedom afforded to him when revising *The Conquest* and *The Journey through Wales*, Gerald's analysis of Henry's piety is clearer. While Henry played the role of Christian Prince, his Christianity was always more practical than devoted. While in Ireland, Gerald admits that Henry showed willing and worked hard to bring the Irish church into line with the English church and the papacy. Henry called the Synod of Cashel in 1172 that reformed the Irish church along such lines.³⁰ Yet, was this because of a deep piety or for practical reasons? An

Irish church that obeyed the King would be a useful tool to Henry. In addition, it would improve the King's standing with the Pope, which given that Henry was embroiled in the aftermath of the murder of Beckett at the time, was no small benefit.

Certainly, it would seem that Gerald did not believe in Henry's entire sincerity. Gerald reserves the most extreme of his criticisms in *The Conquest* for Henry's attitude to the Church. He describes the King as venturing on "many detestable usurpations in things belonging to God," and although Henry had been sanctified as a king, "he either dissembled or forgot the sacramental unction" and frequently missed mass. When he did attend, he talked through the ceremony.³¹ Finally, Henry not only refused to go to the aid of the Holy Land himself but he refused his sons permission to go.³² In Gerald's eyes, this final act of defiance of the needs of God sealed Henry's fate. How could Henry be any better than the petty kings Gerald had compared him to in *The Topography*? Henry could no longer depend on the support of the Divine.

Gerald reports the Patriarch of Jerusalem making the prophecy to Henry, "Henceforth, your glory will be turned to sorrow, and your honor to reproach, to the end of your days." The year was 1185, and Gerald notes with some ill-disguised satisfaction, that Henry was never to have peace again until he died. Listing the disasters that befell Henry, Gerald makes it clear that he agrees with the Patriarch that this was a direct result of Henry's impiety, quoting Gregory that "those whom the Lord hath long spared for their conversion, if they be not converted, he condemneth more grievously."³³ To further reinforce his point, Gerald includes a similar story in the 1214 revision of *The Journey through Wales*. Leaving Mass, Henry refuses to listen to a holy man who demands of the king that he forbid all trade and work on a Sunday so that men might devote themselves to spirituality. The man responds "If you fail to do as I say [...] and if you do not amend your ways, before this year is out you will hear such news

²⁶ Gerald, *Topography*, chapter 45.

²⁷ *Ibid*, chapter 48

²⁸ Gerald, *Conquest*, 46 and *Wales*, 203, a charge repeated in Newburgh, 551.

²⁹ Gerald, *Topography*, 88.

³⁰ Gerald, *Conquest*, 36

³¹ *Ibid*, 46

³² *Ibid*, 69.

³³ *Ibid*, 69–70

of what you hold dear in all the world, and you will be so troubled by it, that it will stay with you until the end of your life. According to Gerald, this occurred in 1173, the year of the first of the rebellions against Henry by his sons. Gerald is clearly associating the two events.³⁴ He also seems to be implying a level of hypocrisy in Henry's actions. Despite going to Mass and the religious man approaching him outside a Church, Henry does not really listen to men of the church. He pays mere lip service to religion.

Gerald returns to his theme of Divine favor and retribution in Henry's life in *The Instruction*, where it forms the heart of his argument in the second and third books. Henry achieved what he did through Divine grace and not through his own innate abilities. From the time of his birth, Gerald asserts, Henry "seemed to have obtained divine favor in almost everything [...] more by grace than as a reward for his merits." He came to the English throne and the Duchy of Normandy because of good fortune and it was God who helped him to achieve the throne. Similarly, it was "with God's good grace" that Henry kept peace and won victories.³⁵ Not only is Gerald here underplaying the ability of Henry to achieve success on his own, but he is also accentuating the role of the Divine in Henry's early life.

Despite all warnings, Henry remained of "obstinate mind and hard heart" towards God and paid the penalty.³⁶ Gerald can no longer warn Henry, for by the time of writing, Henry had already gone to meet his maker, but he can attempt to influence those that follow him. Remember the example of poor, wicked Henry, he implies. A king should never forget his obligation to God, whose power made him king, or risk the worst consequences.

Why, however, was the turning point in God's relationship with Henry not the Becket affair? Surely, the death of Becket had been the nadir of Henry's relations with the church? Yet, Henry's fortunes remained strong

long after 1170. Even the rebellion of his sons in 1173, while distressing for the King, counted as little more than a distraction. It was only in 1185 that Gerald portrays God as finally punishing Henry. Perhaps Gerald, like his contemporary William of Newburgh, believed that God had given Henry time after the murder of Becket to sufficiently show sincere penitence. Writing at the time of Henry's death, Newburgh notes that only when it was clear that Henry "had not yet sufficiently repented the severity and unfortunate obstinacy which he had shown towards the venerable archbishop Thomas" did God turn to divine punishment.³⁷

Another important theme in Gerald's works is the image of king as warrior knight. In *The Topography*, Gerald describes Henry in a role of king as conqueror.³⁸ It is certainly true that since Henry's conquest of Ireland, he ruled a vast swathe of Western Europe, but Gerald's association of the king with the Macedonian conqueror would seem rather disingenuous. Henry had acquired much of his lands by his birth as Count of Anjou or by his marriage to Eleanor.³⁹ Even though Henry had to fight Stephen to the rights to England, he did so as the grandson of an English king. Only the invasion and conquest of Ireland truly extended his hereditary bounds by war. Yet, the image of the "great and glorious" king sweeping aside his enemies seems important to Gerald. When he describes the "terror of [Henry's] incomparable valor," he is placing the knightly virtue of *animī* – spirit, pride and courage – at the heart of the King's character.⁴⁰

Gerald continues to acknowledge Henry's valor in *The Conquest* although in rather less effusive terms. Henry is no longer an Alexander during the invasion of Ireland, but merely "valiant."⁴¹ Yet, it is merely a matter of degree. A king must be strong, able not only to win wars abroad but more importantly to keep his realm in peace against internal and external threats. Internal threats must not have

³⁴ Gerald, *Wales*, 124–5

³⁵ Gerald, *De Instructione Principis* (Concerning the Instruction of a Prince), reproduced in *English Historical Documents, volume 2*, ed. David C. Douglas (London: Methuen, 1979), 409–10.

³⁶ Gerald, *Conquest* 41 and *Wales*, 125

³⁷ Newburgh, 552.

³⁸ Gerald, *Topography* 47, 86

³⁹ Eleanor, as Duchess of Aquitaine and Countess of Poitou brought lordship of great territories of Southern and Western France into the marriage.

⁴⁰ *Ibid* 48, 87

⁴¹ Gerald, *Conquest*, 34.

been far from Gerald's thoughts. Not only had Henry rescued England from the disastrous turbulence of Stephen's reign but he countered the rebellions of his own sons. In both cases, Henry's strength enabled the kingdom to recover. A weak or timorous king in these situations would have been a catastrophe.

In *The Journey through Wales*, however, Gerald is increasingly critical of Henry's attempts at territorial expansion. He names Henry as the "real instigator" for the Abergavenny Massacre in 1175, a "bloodthirsty outrage" in which Henry's vassals, William de Braose and Ranulf Poer, Sheriff of Herefordshire, murdered a number of Welshman.⁴² Henry is no longer a great conqueror, but rather a cruel and often incompetent commander. Despite attempting to subdue Wales three times, Gerald notes with some pleasure that the king, showing "youthful ardor and rash enthusiasm" failed each time. He attributes this failure to Henry's choice of advisors noting, "[Henry] placed no confidence in the local leaders, who were experienced and familiar with the conditions, preferring to take advice from men who lived far away from the Marches and knew nothing of the habits and customs of the inhabitants."⁴³ Gerald came from a Marcher family and was proud of their achievements.⁴⁴ He must have resented Henry ignoring them, especially on the matter of Wales. However, was Gerald speaking merely of the invasions or including another message to his readers? Henry had ignored the Welsh during his military adventures, just as he had ignored Gerald the Welshman in the matter of religion in Wales.

In *The Instruction*, Gerald at least acknowledges Henry's military success, noting that he "brought strong peace [...] to his hereditary dominions."⁴⁵ Henry also expanded his realm to include some counties of France that had belonged to the Duchy of Normandy but lost during the tumult that had preceded his reign.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the tone is significantly different from *The Topography*. In *The*

Instruction, Gerald does not himself admire the King's valor. The only reference to Henry's glory is indirect, reporting the attitude towards Henry of foreign princes. They might approve of the English king, Gerald seems to be saying, but they do not truly know Henry. Gerald portrays Henry without Divine Grace as a hesitant and incompetent commander, drawing attention to the disaster of Le Mans in 1189. Henry "as usual evaded military combat as long as he could" with his son Richard and the French king, and retreated to within the city walls. There, he ordered a suburb of the city to be set ablaze to prevent the besiegers from using it, but the fire spread throughout the city and forced Henry to flee.⁴⁷

Gerald approves even less the other aspects of 12th century chivalry. He mentions Henry hawking in Wales before embarking to Ireland in neutral terms, but in surrounding text suggests that the delay did little to help the cause of peace in Ireland.⁴⁸ He is similarly circumspect when describing the King's court in Ireland with the "sumptuousness of his entertainments and the splendor of his household."⁴⁹ His true feelings seem to appear later in *The Conquest*, when he describes King Henry as "immoderately fond of the chase" and depicts him careering around the countryside, his hapless courtiers in tow.⁵⁰ The clerk in Gerald clearly despaired of this obsession of the king's. However, both Peter of Blois and Walter Map put a different emphasis upon Henry's apparently boundless energy for the hunt. While Gerald sees only a waste of Henry's time and a distraction from sober study, Peter sees it more as an extension of Henry's general vitality and his willingness to "take on troubled and enormous labors."⁵¹ Walter Map, on the other hand, merely ascribes it to "[Henry's] fear of growing too fat."⁵²

Valor at arms alone was not enough for a virtuous king. Many of the earlier kings, of whom Gerald would probably have been aware, were brave but brutal, excelling at war but failing at peace. Such kings were unsuited to the

⁴² Gerald, *Wales*, 109

⁴³ *Ibid*, 196.

⁴⁴ For details of Gerald's families exploits in Ireland see *The Conquest*

⁴⁵ Gerald, *Instruction (EHD)*, 410.

⁴⁶ These counties included Auvergne, Berri and Gisors.

⁴⁷ Gerald, *Instruction (Documents)* 412.

⁴⁸ Gerald, *Conquest*, 34.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 36

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 45

⁵¹ Peter of Blois, "Letter 66," para 4.

⁵² Map, 477.

changing nature of 12th century England. In *The Topography*, Gerald thus emphasizes the clemency and learnedness of King Henry, extolling these virtues as necessary in the character of the king. Gerald imagines Henry inspired to such mercy by the classical authors Caesar and Seneca. Henry was a “learned prince [...] a brilliant gem among the princes of the world.”⁵³ Even in *The Conquest*, Gerald refers to Henry as a “learned Prince” and extols his “great eloquence.”⁵⁴ This is high praise indeed from a scholar. Yet, in the preface to *The Journey through Wales*, written in 1214 when it was clear that all his praise of Henry and Richard had come to naught, Gerald revised this assessment. He wrote, “I completely wasted my time when I wrote *The Topography of Ireland* for Henry II, King of the English and the companion volume, my Vaticinal History [*The Conquest of Ireland*], for Richard of Poitou, his son and successor in vice [...]. Both of these princes had little or no interest in literature, and both were much preoccupied with other matters.”⁵⁵ It is hard to determine which of Gerald’s wildly varied interpretations is closest to the truth, given Gerald’s great change in circumstance and outlook. Certainly, other observers of Henry had noted the king’s studiousness. Peter of Blois, himself a considerable scholar, notes that Henry often read alone, was “more literate by far” than the king of Sicily and that in his court, “every day is school.”⁵⁶ The truth probably lies somewhere in between, shrouded at turns by Gerald’s ambition and then his resentment.

Gerald makes Henry’s compassion and affability clear in both *The Topography* and *The Conquest* but, if anything, emphasizes these aspects of his character in *The Conquest*. He describes the King as having a “liberality and courtesy which was natural to him” when dealing with others and praises his temperance, affability and flexibility as well as his reluctance to turn to war except as a last resort.⁵⁷ Perhaps this is because by the time he revised this work, Gerald had lived through the reign of King Richard

who was notably more harsh and inflexible than was his father. With this in mind, maybe Henry’s peaceable and generous nature had become that much more appealing.

Yet, it is possible to detect a note of caution, even of rebuke, in Gerald’s words, even in *The Topography* and certainly in *The Conquest*. Not only had “premature success” cut short the king’s education but also the Henry showed “prodigal liberality” to “foreigners and strangers.”⁵⁸ Gerald notes that the latter seemed indiscriminating and, while this might bring the king great personal satisfaction and glory, it also inconvenienced those around him. He persists in this veiled censure, noting, “Who was evermore favorable to foreigners? Who more burthensome to his own people?”⁵⁹ This criticism continues in the second work, claiming that Henry “[bewailed] the dead more than he cared for the living.” He repeats also that Henry was “hard towards his own household but liberal to strangers.”⁶⁰ Gerald is praising the King for his compassion yet saying that there should be a limit, that one can be too solicitous. Compassion is a righteous virtue in a king, but one that a good king should focus not only upon his enemies but also upon his friends, not only upon foreigners but also upon the people of the kingdom. A king no longer has a duty merely to himself or even to his men and his court but also to his people and his nation. He must expand his view from the narrow bounds that once governed kingship. Probably, again, Gerald is thinking of the king’s poor attitude towards the Marcher lords and of his own situation. Had the king been more solicitous to his household as he was to strangers, surely he would have rewarded the loyal Gerald with the bishopric he so desired.

There is one final shift in interpretation between *The Topography* and *The Instruction* that deserves mention. In *The Topography*, Gerald makes a great deal of the inevitability of success for Henry’s sons, for they come from “illustrious stock,” their virtues inherited from a great king, “root into the branches.”⁶¹ Yet, his attitude changes

⁵³ Gerald, *Topography*, 87

⁵⁴ Gerald, *Conquest*, 45

⁵⁵ Gerald, *Wales*, Preface, 67–68

⁵⁶ Peter of Blois, “Letter 66”, para 4

⁵⁷ Gerald, *Conquest*. 12, 45

⁵⁸ Gerald, *Topography*, 87

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 90

⁶⁰ Gerald, *Conquest* 45

⁶¹ Gerald, *Topography*, 90.

dramatically in *The Instruction*. Here, Gerald not only condemns Henry but his entire line as defective, born out of sin and ungodliness. To back up this point, he uses gossip and rumors as truth.

Gerald begins by attacking William Duke of Aquitaine, father to Queen Eleanor. William, he asserts, stole a married woman to be his wife. Eleanor was thus the child of “an open and detestable act of adultery”, doomed by God to fruitlessness.⁶² It was through her own actions, however, that Eleanor exacerbated the situation. Citing only “sufficient notoriety,” Gerald strongly suggests that Eleanor committed adultery during the Second Crusade.⁶³ He then bluntly asserts that, “Geoffrey, earl of Anjou [...] had carnally known queen Eleanor” and that Henry soon followed his father into Eleanor’s bed. By committing adultery with the wife of his liege lord and luring her to divorce Louis, Henry not only broke the laws and doctrine of the church, but also ignored the rules of vassalage and loyalty binding together feudal society.⁶⁴

Of course, Gerald asserts, Henry’s actions were hardly unexpected, for his own line was as bad as was Eleanor’s, if not worse. Gerald recounts the story of a countess of Anjou, of “an unknown nation,” who had always avoided taking communion. When forced, she “flew out through a lofty window of the church,” taking two of her children with her, but leaving two behind. It was the latter, clearly children of a Demoness, from whom the counts of Anjou descended.⁶⁵ Gerald accuses Henry’s own mother, the Empress Matilda, of having married Geoffrey of Anjou while her first husband was still alive, making her a bigamist. His father, Geoffrey of Anjou, Gerald claims, “was mad with rage against holy Gerald, bishop of Seez, and emasculated him and laid his bloody

⁶² Gerald of Wales, *De Instrukione Principis* (Concerning the Instruction of a Prince), reproduced in Paul Halsall, ed. *The Internet Medieval Sourcebook*, Fordham University, February 2001 <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/sbook.html>> chapter 27, para 1.

⁶³ Gerald here alludes to rumors that Eleanor had an affair with her uncle, the Count of Toulouse, while accompanying her husband Louis to Palestine.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* 27, para 3. This was while Eleanor was still married to Geoffrey’s liege lord, Louis of France.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, para 6. The legend of Melusine was common during the 12th century.

hands on the Lord’s anointed.”⁶⁶ The sins of the son thus find parallel in those of the father.

Gerald was not alone in making these assertions, although he was certainly most blunt in his phrasing and the most expansive. Walter Map repeats the claim that “Eleanor, queen of the French, cast her unchaste eyes and married [Henry] though she was secretly reputed to have shared the couch [...] with [Henry’s] father Geoffrey” and characterized Henry’s mother the Empress Matilda as “most evil” yet his own assessment of Henry is broadly positive and frequently effusive.⁶⁷ Others disagreed with Gerald’s claims. William of Malmesbury, while critical of Empress Matilda’s husband Henry, is neutral about Matilda herself. He also notes that Emperor Henry died in 1125, three years before Matilda married Geoffrey.⁶⁸

These claims are extremely inflammatory and raise two questions. Firstly, why did divine favor fall upon the man who came from such an ignoble line? This appears to directly contradict Gerald’s own assertions that much of Henry’s success came from God, a theme that appeared prominently in *The Instruction* as well as other works. Gerald does not fully address this inconsistency. Perhaps he believed that, at least in part, the sacred sacrament that accompanied Henry’s coronation had washed away some of the sin that had accrued to the young king, and only Henry’s continuing impiety had condemned him. Certainly, as previously discussed, Gerald had a high opinion of this sacrament. It may also be a reflection of Gerald’s belief in the great patience of a God who was unwilling to condemn a son for the sins of the father.

The second question that arises concerns the implications of Gerald’s assertions for the sons of Henry. If both Eleanor and Henry came from lines tainted by sin, then their sons must be doubly condemned. How, Gerald asks, “From such a union could a fortunate race be born?”⁶⁹ If Gerald did not need to worry about insulting King Henry, two of his sons were still alive when he wrote

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 27, para 5

⁶⁷ Walter Map, 475, 479.

⁶⁸ William of Malmesbury, *A History of Kings of England and of his own Time*, translated by John Sharp, edited and revised by Joseph Stevenson (Lampeter: Llanerch 1996), 382.

⁶⁹ Gerald, *Instruction* (IMS), chapter 27, para 1

The Instruction. Why was he not concerned about arousing the wrath of Richard or John? Certainly, as a member of John's entourage he would have known of the fierce temper that the youngest son of Henry had inherited from his father. The Chronicler Richard of Devizes describes John in a rage "so altered in his whole body that a man would hardly have known him. Rancor made deep furrows in his forehead, his flaming eyes glistened, paleness discolored the rosy complexion of his face."⁷⁰ Part of the answer appears within *The Instruction* itself. Gerald asserts that Richard himself would tell the story of his diabolic ancestor to justify his actions against his father. Gerald claims Richard would affirm, "He knew that they all had come of the devil, and to the devil they would go."⁷¹ Gerald must have felt confident that Richard would hardly object to his repeating an anecdote that the king himself used. Nevertheless, Gerald still sought royal favor in 1190. He could not risk the ire of Richard, John or even Eleanor, who had recently returned to public life. Although Gerald wrote the *Instruction* in 1190, he did not publish it in its entirety until after John's death. As the new King Henry III was still a child and Gerald had long despaired of any preferment by the Angevins, he was finally safe to publish.

The same reluctance to anger King Henry that colored his portrait of the King himself may have influenced Gerald's assessment of Henry the Young King in *The Topography*. The scholar W. Warren describes the younger Henry as "shallow, vain, careless, empty-headed, incompetent, improvident and irresponsible."⁷² Yet, little of that appraisal appears in Gerald's earlier work. Perhaps again, Gerald is loath to insult the son of his patron, especially the son most loved by his father. Prince Henry had suffered an ignominious death while in rebellion against his father in 1183, four years before Gerald wrote *The Topography*. Yet, despite this uprising, King Henry

had grieved deeply at his son's death. Roger de Hoveden describes how upon hearing of his son's death, Henry "bursting into tears, [...] threw himself upon the ground, and greatly bewailed his son." He further notes that although "All are overjoyed, all rejoice, the father alone bewails his son."⁷³ Newburgh also notes the king's grief at his son's death, although admits that it was tempered by "the consideration that he was quit of an enemy."⁷⁴ Gerald may have been loath to risk the ire of a father by speaking ill of the dead. Yet, even in *The Conquest*, when Gerald's bitterness towards King Henry began to become apparent, he does not mirror this with a similar denunciation of the son.

It could simply be that Gerald liked the Young King despite himself. Certainly Prince Henry was the most universally beloved of his family during his lifetime.⁷⁵ Gerald notes that, "In peace, and in private life, [Prince Henry] was courteous, affable, gentle and amiable, kindly indulgent to those by whom he chances to be injured, and far more disposed to forgive, than to punish the offenders." These are similar to the qualities Gerald attributes to Henry and as in his assessment of the father; he also has reservations about the son. This is most clear when Gerald compares the two elder sons, Princes Henry and Richard. Just as the father had been rather indiscriminate with his goodwill, so too was young Henry. "The vile and undeserving found their refuge in [Henry]" and he "bestowed his favors on foreigners." This formed a stark contrast to Richard who punished the same people Henry befriended and was most generous to his own people.⁷⁶ Once more, Gerald is reinforcing the responsibility of a king to think not merely of his own interests but also of the interests of his people and his nation.

Gerald's estimation of Prince Henry's martial prowess also deserves mention. He equates the young king to "Hector, son of Priam" and describes him as

⁷⁰ Richard of Devizes, *Cronicon Richardi Divisensis de Tempore Regis Richardi Primi* (The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First), edited by John T. Appleby. Medieval Texts, eds V.H. Galbraith, Sir Roger Mynors and C.N.L. Brooke (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1963), 25.

⁷¹ Gerald, *Instruction* 27, para 7

⁷² Warren, *Henry II*, 580.

⁷³ Roger de Hoveden, *The Annals of Roger de Hoveden: Comprising the history of England and of other countries of Europe from A.D. 732 to A.D. 1201*, translated by Henry T. Riley (Lampeter: Llanerch 1994), Volume 2.1, 27.

⁷⁴ Newburgh, 522.

⁷⁵ Warren, *Henry II*, 580.

⁷⁶ Gerald, *Topography* 88–90

“impetuous, bold” and valorous.⁷⁷ However, he admits that Prince Henry was more “bent on martial sports” than upon real war.⁷⁸ Yet, despite his clear disapproval of the recreational aspects of chivalry when talking about King Henry, there is little note of condemnation of the son. This contrasts strongly with the opinions of other chroniclers regarding Prince Henry’s behavior. Roger of Wendover decries how Prince Henry, “laying aside his royal dignity, and assuming the character of a knight [...] devoted himself to equestrian exercises.”⁷⁹ Ralph de Diceto and others similarly criticize the young man’s obsession with tourneys and his lavish expenditures.⁸⁰ This disparity might be due to Gerald’s reluctance in his early work to rebuke either too strongly. Perhaps, however, he views the interest in hunting and tourneys as inappropriate in a king but more acceptable in the young prince. A king has other responsibilities to concern him. A prince has only a responsibility to learn the duties of a king, duties that include the ability to go to war.

Of course, however much Gerald wished to avoid castigating Prince Henry too harshly, he could not ignore the central fact of the young man’s life. Prince Henry had twice rebelled against his father. Despite acknowledging the terrible nature of this betrayal, Gerald almost seems an apologist for Prince Henry in *The Topography*. Henry was too perfect, Gerald argues, and so “envious nature, loth that so many good qualities should be united in one person without alloy, added one most signal blemish; making him only notorious for his ingratitude.” Gerald also seems to suggest that enemies of his father, using “evil counsels,” used Prince Henry’s good characteristics, especially his amiability, his desire to please others and his yearning for an opportunity to demonstrate his valor, against his best interests.⁸¹ It was not entirely Henry’s fault; Gerald seems

to be saying. This is a quite remarkable assessment from Gerald, especially when considered in the context that Prince Henry was dead at the time of writing and King Henry was still alive. If Gerald wanted to criticize Prince Henry without angering his father, surely this was the place. Yet, his criticism is half-hearted at best.

In the *Conquest*, Gerald continues in the same vein, never fully condemning the son for his rebellions. Although he refers to Prince Henry’s rebellions as “wickedness,” he continues to justify the Young King’s actions.⁸² He reinforces his assessment that others had stoked the fires of Prince Henry’s ambition, blaming both King Louis of France and the Prince Henry’s younger brother Geoffrey, Earl of Brittany. The latter, Gerald describes as being the “mainspring of the wicked enterprise.”⁸³ Gerald clearly disliked Geoffrey. As well as being ungrateful, the younger son was a smooth talker, with “powers of language to throw two kingdoms into confusion.” Geoffrey even seems to assume a darker aspect, “for with wonderful industry, he assumes all shapes, and dissembles all his designs.” Naturally, he could influence the amiable Prince Henry.⁸⁴ De Hoveden seems to agree with Gerald in his assessment of Geoffrey’s culpability in the young king’s rebellion, describing Geoffrey as “that son of perdition” and “son of iniquity” determined to push his brother to war with his father. Nevertheless, unlike Gerald, de Hoveden does not excuse the young king his treachery and blames Prince Henry’s death upon divine retribution for his wicked betrayal of his father.⁸⁵ Similarly, Newburgh firmly blames Prince Henry. While acknowledging Geoffrey’s part in the second rebellion, he asserts that the two rebellions had blemished the young king with an “indelible stain,” and that his miserable death was God avenging his “faithless acts.”⁸⁶

Yet, Gerald finds still another person to blame for Prince Henry’s rebellions. Gerald blames his father, King Henry. King Henry might have been a good father when

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 88.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 90

⁷⁹ Roger of Wendover, *Flowers of History*, translated by J.A. Giles, (Lampeter: Llanerch 1993), II.1 43

⁸⁰ Radulfi de Diceto Decani Lundoniensis (Ralph de Diceto), *Opera Historica (The Historical Works of Master Ralph de Diceto Dean of London)*, edited by William Stubbs (London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1876), I 428; Similar sentiments appear in de Hoveden and the *Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal*

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 88.

⁸² Gerald, *Conquest*, 43.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 66

⁸⁴ Gerald, *Topography*, 90–91 and *Conquest*, 66.

⁸⁵ De Hoveden, II.1 23–27

⁸⁶ Newburgh, 521–2.

his sons were still children but Gerald accuses Henry of looking upon them with an “evil eye” as they grew to adulthood. Henry no longer treated them neither as his sons, nor as his successors and constantly held them back.⁸⁷ If Prince Henry’s actions were wicked and ungrateful, Gerald seems to be arguing that they were not without cause.

This all suggests that Gerald, at the time of writing, avoided censuring Prince Henry not because of his fear of the father, but for another reason. It could be that of the family, Prince Henry alone had never truly ruled. He had never had the opportunity to show what sort of king he could really be. Moreover, and crucially, Prince Henry had never been in a position to help Gerald, and thus never in a position to disappoint Gerald’s ambitions. If Gerald’s bitter critique of King Henry stemmed in great part from Gerald’s own simmering disappointment at the King denying St David’s to Gerald, with the younger Henry there was no such impetus.

It is also possible that Gerald, while decrying the young prince’s vices, could see a greater purpose to Prince Henry’s behavior. In *The Conquest* and *The Journey through Wales*, Gerald judged the rebellions of King Henry’s sons to be punishment from God for the king’s impiety. He did not say as much in *The Topography*, presumably for fear of angering his patron, but if he had already conceived this notion then perhaps he saw Prince Henry as an instrument of God. The younger Henry had to be the way he was to act as the agent of his father’s punishment. Gerald himself found it particularly fitting that “as [Henry] had been a disobedient son to his spiritual father, his sons in the flesh should be disobedient to him.”⁸⁸ Of course, given Gerald’s dislike of King Henry by the end of Henry’s life, he could merely have taken delight in seeing Henry’s discomfort at his son’s rebellions. How could he decry too harshly the source of such pleasure, especially when the young prince had died a wretched death for his troubles?

⁸⁷ Gerald, *Conquest*, 46

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 40

Gerald’s opinion of Richard follows a similar track as his opinion of King Henry. At first, Gerald is broadly positive of the young Count of Poitou, but as time passes his critiques become increasingly harsh, his praise more tempered by resentment. Once again, the earlier praise in the *Topography* may have been due to Gerald’s apparent reluctance to anger King Henry or his son, but after his death and Richard’s reign, Gerald had a freer rein and a clearer view of his own place in posterity.

There are only hints of later criticism in the *Topography*. Gerald wrote his longest description of Richard in this work and for the most part, it is positive. Like his father and his brothers, Richard is a great warrior, “another Caesar” capable of “[reducing] to obedience a country hitherto ungovernable.”⁸⁹ A king must be valorous in arms and capable of keeping order within his realms, and certainly, the young Richard seemed to fulfill this requirement admirably. Gerald describes Richard as having not only “brilliant courage” but also the gravity and resoluteness his elder brother lacked. While Prince Henry had tended towards clemency and showing favor to the undeserving, his brother was quite the opposite. Richard was a punisher of the wicked, a “hammer to crush them.” Richard showed no favoritism to strangers, unlike his father, but “upon his own people.”⁹⁰ Perhaps Richard would finally reward loyal Gerald when he became king?

Nevertheless, Gerald inserts a note of warning even into the *Topography*. Richard, so “fierce in his encounters of arms [...] was only happy when he marked his steps with blood.” Gerald notes that this led to criticism of Richard’s over-zealousness and while he decries the naysayers as being without cause, he does not seem entirely convinced. That he repeats their charges against Richard, that Richard used “furious vigor” against his enemies and was too cruel and harsh, suggests that the clerk himself disapproved somewhat of the young man’s excesses. Was Richard too keen upon war, he seems to

⁸⁹ Gerald is referring here not to England but to Aquitaine, of which Richard assumed control during his father’s reign. Queen Eleanor had brought Aquitaine into the kingdom upon her marriage to Henry and it was apt that her favorite son should rule it in her place.

⁹⁰ Gerald, *Topography*, 89–90.

ask. A king needs to know the arts of war, naturally, but he has to be more than that. Kingship is not merely about scaling cliffs and besieging impregnable towers. It is about moderation, about firmness tempered with clemency, severity with liberality. When Gerald describes Richard's administration in Aquitaine as achieving this "golden mean" did he really believe this to be the case, or was he attempting to impress upon the young prince the necessity for restraint? Just as he seems to be pressing King Henry to improvement in the *Topography*, he seems to be trying the same on the son.⁹¹ He has not yet despaired of the attempt. Perhaps in addition, Gerald is again idealizing the Angevins as a means of instruction.

In the Second Preface to the first edition of the *Conquest of Ireland*, dedicated to Richard, Gerald seems to confirm his intentions. By 1188, Richard was clearly in the ascendant and it must have appeared to be only a matter of time before he became king. While Gerald used the main body of the *Conquest* to begin his more severe criticism of Henry, this Preface still flatters Richard and his father. Praising Richard and promising to "write hereafter a history of your noble achievements, which, great in the first beginnings, have already shed the brightest luster on your riper years" Gerald seems to be staking his claim as a most loyal subject, suitable not only to continue to attend court but also to achieve greater honors.⁹² Gerald would need the future patronage not of the waning King Henry but of his son to continue to gather material worthy of posterity but also to achieve his lifelong desire.

Gerald was to be bitterly disappointed. When the see of St David's once more fell vacant in 1198, the canons of St David's elected Gerald as their choice for bishop. They sent letters to Hubert Walter, Archbishop of Canterbury to confirm their choice but Walter refused, claiming that King Richard would not approve a Welshman for the position. After a flurry of letters between Gerald, Hubert Walter, Richard, the Justicar Geoffrey FitzPeter and the canons of St David's, Richard finally ordered the St David's canons to travel to him in

France so that he could make a final decision. Before they could reach him, however, Richard died. Already however, Gerald had realized that Richard's decision would not be in his favor. Gerald wrote, "The king was always quick to do whatever pleased him, and above all quick to promote unworthy persons. If he had not soon died overseas, great tribulation indeed would have fallen upon [St David's]."⁹³ This is a dramatic shift from the Gerald's assessment of Richard in the *Topography* and is clearly inspired by Gerald's own shift in fortunes.

Although Gerald revised the *Conquest* in King John's reign after this disappointment, he nevertheless finds something to admire in Richard. Gerald barely mentions him in the main text as it mostly covers events during Richard's childhood but when he does appear in the text, Gerald clearly approve of one thing. After his father refused to go on Crusade in 1185, Richard took up the Cross "with earnest devotion."⁹⁴ It is interesting that Gerald does not question Richard's sincerity, which seems rather surprising considering Richard's penchant for war and violence. It could be that he is saving his most severe vitriol for another work, but more probably, it is that Gerald himself took the cross inspired by Richard and to question the motives of the Count would have put a pall on his own actions. Unlike other churchmen, such as Abbot Samson of Bury St Edmonds, he does not appear to have allowed the romanticism of the Crusades to seduce him nor does he show any reluctance to criticize the Crusaders *per se*.⁹⁵ Gerald does just that in the next chapter, lamenting their delays, extravagances and their extortion of money from the people. To his mind, the Crusaders should have set out promptly with less money but more virtue, with a "pure conscience."⁹⁶ Given that Gerald revised the

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 89.

⁹² Gerald, *Conquest*, Second Preface, 4

⁹³ Gerald, *I Giralduus*, 88.

⁹⁴ Gerald, *Conquest*, 70. To "take the Cross" refers to the oath to go on Crusade and involved the use of the cross symbol on Crusaders' clothing to denote their special status.

⁹⁵ See Jocelin of Brakelond, *The Chronicle of Jocelin of Brakelond Monk of St. Edmundsbury: A Picture of Monastic and Social Life on the XIIth Century*, translated and edited by L.C. Jane, introduction by Abbot Gasquet (London: Chatto and Windus, 1907), 22, for an account of Samson's reaction to Richard's capture on Crusade.

⁹⁶ Gerald, *Conquest*, 71.

Conquest after Richard's adventures in the Holy Land and his plundering of the wealth of England to pay for it, this earlier concern must have gained a new resonance in hindsight.

When Gerald first wrote in the *Topography* about Prince John, the youngest son of Henry was still only in his teens. Of all the sons of Henry, Gerald probably knew John best, having accompanied him on his trip to Ireland. While there, the young Prince had even offered Gerald two bishoprics and when Gerald turned him down offered to merge the two into one large diocese for the Welshman. Gerald continued to refuse the honor.⁹⁷ Yet, it was during John's reign in 1203 that Gerald finally despaired of obtaining the only bishopric he truly desired. Given the reaction to this disappointment upon Gerald's attitude to both Henry and Richard, it would be reasonable to expect a similar level of resentment towards John. This would be especially likely considering the negative reaction to John on the part of many of Gerald's contemporaries. Yet, Gerald never really vents his feelings in the same manner he does against the earlier Angevin Kings in any of his historical works.

In the *Topography*, Gerald probably restrains himself in part for the same reasons that he did not criticize too harshly either King Henry or his other sons. Gerald was aware that, after the death of Prince Henry, Prince John was the elder king's favorite son and he must have feared angering the king. He probably did not fear angering John directly, for at the time, it was unlikely that John would achieve the throne or be in a position to help Gerald more than he had already done. In addition, if Gerald's intent was to draw a portrait of an idealized king for posterity, he must too similarly idealize the king's sons to fully achieve the desired effect.

Of course, John was far from ideal and no amount of good will on Gerald's part could make him so. Gerald admits that John was "prone to vice [...] lending himself to the seductions of his time of life." Like his eldest brother, John was over-keen upon the pleasures of life, upon the "evil courses" of chivalry rather than the sober necessities

of knighthood and he showed undue levity in his temperament. Yet, even as he lists the young man's faults, Gerald excuses them all. These mistakes were not some fundamental failing of his character, Gerald argues, but a consequence only of John's age. It was "no disgrace to have enjoyed the pleasures of youth" as long as John changed as he matured. Gerald was confident John would, assigning him as the subject of a prophecy by Merlin that said, "His beginning shall be abandoned to loose living, but his end shall waft him to heaven."⁹⁸

The consequences of John's immaturity come into sharper focus in the *Conquest* as John begins to administer Ireland. According to Gerald, once in Ireland, John surrounded himself with other callow young men who despised the Irish and had little interest in governance. These men, "who liked their gowns better than their armor," brought further instability to an already volatile region by pillaging Irish villages, humiliating Irish lords and resisting any advice by some seasoned soldiers. The Irish, sensing the weakness of the Prince, immediately began to resist and John could do little to stop the collapse without the resources or the experience of an older man. Only when his father intervened did the situation improve. Yet, while Gerald clearly has nothing but loathing for John's effete and evil followers, once more, he falls short of condemning John directly. John, still of "tender years," had been surrounded by "evil counsels." Ireland had been given to a "boy-king" and it was this act that was at fault. Of course, Henry had given Ireland to John to rule and thus Gerald seems to impute, it is Henry's fault that it went wrong.⁹⁹

Nevertheless, the situation in Ireland still concerned Gerald by the time he revised the *Conquest* in 1214 and he offers extensive counsel to John on the subject. When he charges John to, "not undervalue then [...] what cost your father and yourself so much toil," he clearly believes that the King is remiss in this regard.¹⁰⁰ Yet, at the same time, he flatters John. Gerald as much as any man knew that

⁹⁷ Gerald, *Wales*, Introduction, 15.

⁹⁸ Gerald, *Topography*, 91

⁹⁹ Gerald, *Conquest*, 78–80

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, Preface to Revised Edition 5

John's expedition to Ireland in 1186 had been an unmitigated disaster and yet he gives John some credit for its subjugation to England. What were Gerald's intentions? He no longer had anything personally to gain. The answer may lie in his next exhortations. Gerald, as already discussed, was a member of the Marcher families whose knights had initially conquered Ireland in advance of Henry's invasion. Each of the Angevins had marginalized these knights in favor of newcomers. Gerald's own comments within the body of the *Conquest* upon John's expedition already make it unmistakable how much he despises these newcomers. Now, he pushes the case for the Marcher lords further. Even if he does nothing else with Ireland, Gerald argues, John should, "protect and reinstate in their rights those veteran warriors who have served your father and yourself with such devoted fidelity, by whose enterprise that land was first taken possession of, and by whose valor it is still retained." These men are the key to success in Ireland, not the "new-comers, reaping the fruits of other men's labors, and advanced more by their good luck than by their valor."¹⁰¹

This is not the first time that Gerald identified with the Marcher lords. As already discussed, he included similar rebukes to Henry in the *Journey through Wales*. His disapproval of the Angevin tendency to favor strangers and foreigners hints at a sympathy with the cause of these barons. Yet, this is the most direct and insistent plea he makes on their behalf. With his career nearing its end and his ambitions already crushed, Gerald uses the opportunity to berate John for the situation in Ireland and that of the Marchers. He is still careful, naturally, of directly insulting John, as the king could still make his life difficult were he to take offense, but he is less wary than he had been before. Perhaps, with his own career stalled, he hopes for some degree of redemption through his kin. As his loyalty went unrewarded, so too did their own. His own case is hopeless, but their own might not be. If he can persuade John to rehabilitate the Marchers and take them once again into the heart of the Angevin administration, perhaps the

King will not pass over a future Marcher son looking for preferment in the church.

One of the charges their enemies most often leveled against the Marcher lords was that they sought to usurp the rights of the king in Ireland and Wales. Gerald, however, claims that this is not the case, but rather that it is the newcomers who "their folly risen to such a pitch of arrogance and presumption, that they even aspire to usurp in their own persons all the rights of dominion belong to the princes of [Ireland]."¹⁰² John would be foolish and negligent to continue to support these men. The wording of Gerald is interesting here. He phrases his words in the future tense, warning the King against contemplating trusting these men, but it is clear from his words elsewhere that he believes that the newcomers already have a firm hold upon John and upon Ireland. Was this a tactic to forestall a king's anger? The subtext is evidently that Gerald believes John to be guilty of "not only great negligence, but of idle folly." The King has already been "wrapping snakes in the folds of [his] robe, or nourishing fire in [his] bosom which was ready to burst into flame."¹⁰³ John has already been playing with fire and risks disaster should he not review his patronage of these men. Of course, Gerald may have already been aware of the rumblings of discontent in England that were to erupt into the revolt in 1215 that resulted in the Magna Carta.¹⁰⁴

Gerald is concerned with not only the secular rule of Ireland but also the state of the church there. Despite King Henry's assurances to Pope Adrian that he would "raise up the church of God in that country" the reality was far different. Gerald claims that "the poor clergy [...] are raised to beggary" and that "the cathedral churches [...] now echo with the lamentations for the loss of their possessions [to the newcomers]." While he blames this on Henry, implying he had "lying lips," the solution can only be in John's hands to "redress these evils." Not only is it John's duty to God, but also his duty to his father. Here, he returns to the theme of divine justice running through his

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 5

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 5

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 5

¹⁰⁴ For more information, see W.L. Warren, *King John*.

works. It is dangerous to fail to fulfill one's vows to God and this peril extends not only to King Henry's immortal soul but also to his son and successor. Should John ignore these vows then he too will suffer the "anger of the righteous blood" that his father endured.¹⁰⁵ Gerald does seem to believe that John has the chance of redemption that his father squandered. Only in *the Instruction* does Gerald fully criticize John, amid the more general and bitter condemnation of his entire family.

In the period during which Gerald of Wales wrote his major works, the ambitious cleric underwent a great change of fortune. In 1186, he was chaplain to the court of King Henry and still harbored great expectations of future elevation. In the *Topography*, written in this period, he extols the virtue of his patron and his family, focusing only upon their strengths and excusing or ignoring their weaknesses. Through his words, he hoped to impress Henry with his loyalty and his intellect as well as to write a work that would last through history and provide an exemplar to future kings. He wrote his subsequent books, including the *Conquest of Ireland* and the *Journey through Wales* during Henry's reign but revised them much later.

Similarly, he wrote his *On the Instruction of a Prince* in the early years of Richard's rule but only released it much later. In these later works, especially the *Instruction*, we see not the glorious monarch of the panegyric in the *Topography*, but an impious, incompetent, immoderate taskmaster, descended from a cursed line and succeeded by wicked sons. This drastic change must be the result of Gerald's own change in fortunes. In the intervening years, all his flattery and loyalty had culminated not in his bishopric, but in the miserable day in 1203 when he had lost it all. While neither Henry nor his sons had been directly responsible for this denial of his ambition, neither had they supported him against his chief rival, Archbishop Walter. They, therefore, bore the brunt of Gerald's resentment. Finding no other way to express his rage, he used words, confident that they would echo down through history and cast a light upon the iniquities of his age.

¹⁰⁵ Gerald, *Conquest*, Preface to the Revision, 6

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