

John Bale

1495-1563

Most famous for his anti-Catholic plays and polemics, John Bale was a fervent Protestant convert, who having renounced his earlier Catholic vows as a priest, married, and engaged in active preaching among the Lollards in the 1530s. When the Protestant boy-king Edward VI appointed him bishop of Ossory (1551), Bale tried to bring the Reformation to Catholic Ireland. Imprisoned under the reign of the Catholic queen Mary I, Bale fled to the Continent where he remained until the accession of Elizabeth in 1558. Best known for his play *King John* (c. 1540), the earliest forerunner of the history plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, Bale was also an important historian of the reform movement, presenting Protestantism and the Reformation as part of a specifically heroic and evangelical historiography. His work on the manuscripts of fellow reformer and historian John Leland resulted in an index of more than 1,400 early English writers.

John Leland (c. 1503-52). Educated at St. Paul's and Cambridge, Leland became Henry VIII's chaplain and librarian. Having received a commission from Henry to catalogue the records of English monasteries and cathedrals, Leland left on a journey around England which lasted some eight years (1534-42). On its completion he began an ambitious history of the antiquities of England. Struck by mental illness in 1550, however, he was left incapable of finishing the project, and he died in April 1552. Bale's two letters, below, which preface the account of Leland's search for England's ancient historical documents and manuscripts constitute a tribute to Leland and a plea for the salvaging of England's fragile manuscript and print heritage.

EDITION: John Leland. *The laboryouse journey [and] serche of Johan Leylande, for Englandes antiquitees*. [London: Printed by S. Mierdman for John Bale, 1549]. STC 15445.



*The Laborious Journey and Search of John Leland, for England's Antiquities*¹

To the Most Virtuous, Mighty, and Excellent
Prince, Edward VI, by the Grace of God, King
of England, France, and Ireland, Defender of
the Faith, and in Earth under Christ, of the
Churches of the Said England and Ireland the
Supreme Head, Your Most Humble Subject John
Bale Wisheth All Honour, Health and Felicity.

¹ The title continues: "Given of Him as a New Year's Gift to King Henry VIII, in the 37 Year of His Reign, with Declarations Enlarged by John Bale." The title page also includes an epigram from 2 Maccabees 2:30-32: "He that beginneth to write a story, for the first, must with his understanding gather the matter together, set his words in order, and diligently seek out on every part."

The Epistle Dedicatory²

Among all the nations, in whom I have wandered,
for the knowledge of things (most benign Sover-
eign) I have found none so negligent and unto-
ward³ as I have found England in the due search
5 of their ancient histories, to the singular fame and
beauty thereof. This have I (as it were) with a woe-
fulness of heart since my tender youth bewailed,
and so much the more for that I have not, accord-
ing to the natural zeal which I bear to my country,
10 been able to redress it for ungentle poverty. A
much further plague hath fallen of late years (I
dolorously lament so great an oversight in the

² Written by John Bale (see headnote above).

³ *untoward* disinclined, indisposed.

most lawful overthrow of the sodomitrouse¹ (most worthy monuments of this realm so miserably perished in the spoil. Oh, that men of learning and of perfect love to their nation were not then appointed to the search of their libraries, for the conservation of those most noble antiquities! Covetousness was at that time so busy about private commodity² that public wealth³ in that most necessary and godly respect was not anywhere regarded. If your most noble father of excellent memory, King Henry VIII, had not of godly zeal, by special commission, directed Master John Leland to oversee a number of their said libraries, we had lost infinite treasure of knowledge by the spoil which anon⁴ after followed of their due suppression.

By that means we are yet in hope of somewhat to come forward to the inestimable glory of the land, namely his worthy works, *De Antiquitate Britannica*, and *De Illustribus Viris*,⁵ with his epigrams and epicedes,⁶ which a great number of godly men most fervently desireth. This treatise following, of his laborious progress,⁷ have I with all meekness dedicated to your magnificent Majesty, as a just possession to the right inheritor. For first was it given of the author to your most noble

father of famous memory instead⁸ of a lowly New Year's gift; now do I restore it to your worthy Highness, his natural son and only true successor in kingly dignity, as your own proper good, with all submission decent. I shall not now need to recite to your learned Majesty what profit ariseth by continual reading of books, specially of ancient histories after the necessary search of the Bible scriptures, for the treatise here following will plenteously declare it. They treat what is in each commonwealth to be followed, and what to be chiefly eschewed, what causeth a realm to flourish, and what doth diminish the estate thereof, with a thousand of like matters. They much deceive Christian princes that dissuade them from virtuous study of the sacred Scriptures and chronicles, as the virulent papists have done by all practices possible to make them the images of their beastly father of Rome⁹ (Apoc. 13).¹⁰

Most of all it becometh a king to know the laws of the Lord, for he here in earth by power representeth his eternal Majesty. "Be learned," sayeth David, "ye kings that judge the world; embrace good instructions, lest he in his anger do justly abhor you" (Psal. 2). "The honour of a king," sayeth Solomon, "standeth not in strength and riches, but in the search of wholesome doctrine, to divide the dross from the silver, and to follow God's holy commandments" (Prover. 25). A saying it was 1,130 years ago, such time as Paulus Orosius¹¹ was here a writer, that the doctrine of Christ was cause of the decay of the commonwealth of the Romans. Against them that so blasphemously babbled, the said Orosius wrote seven noble books as a confutation of the pernicious error; yet is that most unhappy and devilish opinion now raised up again from Hell, and

¹ *sodomitrouse* i.e., sodomitical; it was a commonplace of reformist polemic to accuse Roman Catholic monks, nuns, and friars of all manner of sexual sin, including heterosexual, homosexual, and autoerotic practices. Bale's writings are particularly emphatic about the sexual corruption of monasteries and convents.

² *commodity* advantage, benefit, profit.

³ *wealth* welfare.

⁴ *anon* at once, instantly.

⁵ *De Antiquitate ... Viris* Latin, "Of British Antiquities" and "Of Famous Men"; Leland's mental illness meant that none of these works were ever finished, although Leland's manuscripts were later used by other historians and antiquaries, such as Stow and Camden. His account of his journey in search of England's historical records and documents was edited and published in nine volumes (1710-12) by Thomas Hearne.

⁶ *epicedes* funeral odes. Leland published two Latin poems (one on the death of Henry Howard, earl of Surrey, and the other on the death of Sir Henry Dudley) which might be described as epicedes (funeral orations); the epigrams may refer to unpublished poems, including three books of epigrams which Leland says he wrote in his youth (J.P. Carley, "John Leland," *DNB online*).

⁷ *progress* journey.

⁸ *instead* in the place.

⁹ *beastly father of Rome* the Pope.

¹⁰ *Apoc. 13* Revelation 13.

¹¹ *Paulus Orosius* an early-fifth-century CE historian whose *Historia Adversus Paganos* (in seven books) attacked the pagan notion that the rise of Christianity and the Romans' subsequent neglect of the ancient gods were the cause of Rome's decay (*Dict. Christian Church*, p. 1012).

brought hither into England by a great number of
 obstinate papists and desperate libertines (it is to
 be feared) to the dreadful damnation of many. If
 any plague or punishment for sin do chance upon
 us by the rightful hand of God, then is the Gospel
 or message of salvation wrongfully accused and
 noised abroad to be the chief cause and stirrer up
 thereof, and not their own fornication and bribery
 with a thousand mischiefs more, which calleth to
 God for daily vengeance.

We had never good world (say they) since this
 new learning came in, neither are we like to have
 till it be clearly banished again. O voice more
 apparent to come from devils than from men
 christened! The son of the living God, Jesus
 Christ, showeth us the plain cause why these
 wicked persons so obstinately dwell in the hate of
 his heavenly word. "Everyone," sayeth he, "that
 worketh wickedness doth abhor that light,
 because they will not their mischiefs thereby to be
 known. For that light manifesteth to the world
 their foul, naughty doings and shameful oppres-
 sions to rebuke" (John 3). These seek but to reign
 here in a fleshly liberty over other men's wives
 and goods for the time of their cursed lives,
 which the Scriptures will not permit them. And
 therefore they fret at the very heart, and would
 have them banished the country, that they so
 might live here without check. These with such
 other most detestable abuses, whose due refor-
 mation chiefly belongeth to a king, may as in a
 clear mirror be seen in the said Scriptures and
 chronicles. It may also in them be perceived
 whereof they arise, and how they may well by
 good order be abolished. And therefore I reckon
 the continual search of them to a Christian gov-
 ernor most necessary.

We find [in] Exodus 1 that the mighty magis-
 trate under God, Moses, among his other most
 worthy acts, drove the devouring locusts, which
 had in Egypt destroyed all that was green upon the
 earth, into the Red Sea, and there drowned them,
 so that they were no more seen. The like wrought
 your Highness's most noble father of excellent
 memory, King Henry VIII, though it were in
 another kind, such time as he discharged this his

realm of Antichrist's noyful¹ cattle: monks,
 canons, friars, nuns, hermits, pardoners, and soul
 singers,² with other execrable sects of perdition.
 Nevertheless our Egyptians,³ both of the clergy
 and laity, have sought ever since, and yet seeketh
 to this day, to lead your Majesty's people in a pal-
 pable kind of darkness by their masses,⁴ and other
 sorcerous witchcrafts, as lately appeared in the last
 commotion of Cornwall and Devonshire,⁵ to
 reduce them again to the old obedience of the
 great pharaoh of Rome,⁶ in the stinking kingdom
 of idolatry. But your noble Council, to withstand
 this violence, hath hitherto most worthily
 wrought, in the mighty word of the Lord, and in
 the strong power of your regal rod, to drive this
 horrible plague of darkness from the face of this
 earth, and our good hope is that they will gra-
 ciously so still continue.

¹ *noyful* annoying, noxious.

² *canons* clergymen attached to a cathedral or collegiate church; *pardoners* persons licensed to sell papal pardons or indulgences; a figure who symbolized for reformers the corruption of the Catholic Church; *soul singers* priests who said masses, as well as monks, nuns, and friars who said prayers for the salvation of the souls of the dead; reformers saw these masses and prayers (for which the dead's friends and relatives paid fees) as another example of Catholic corruption.

³ *our Egyptians* implicitly comparing English Roman Catholic ecclesiastics to the Egyptians who held the people of Israel in bondage in Egypt. Reformists often employed the enslavement and God's subsequent freeing of the people of Israel from their Egyptian overlords to describe the divinely sanctioned nature of Protestant believers' liberation from the spiritual and political tyranny of the Catholic Church.

⁴ *masses* the Roman Catholic mass.

⁵ *and other sorcerous witchcrafts, as lately* [i.e., recently] *appeared in the last commotion of Cornwall and Devonshire* In 1549, the year this work was published, the Cornish or Western Rising took place, one of the most serious rebellions spurred by the mid-century's economic and agrarian crises and the attempts of Somerset to bring a halt to the wholesale enclosure of common land. Taking their cue from Somerset's position, large numbers of people in at least six English counties began tearing down these enclosures; while local nobility put down such revolts in most places, Cornwall's required a concerted effort on the part of the crown and its allies. According to Guy, "the 1549 revolts" were so serious as to be accurately described as "the closest thing Tudor England saw to a class war" (*Tudor England*, p. 208).

⁶ *pharaoh of Rome* i.e., the pope.

140 Solomon is commended of Jesus the son of
 Sirach (Eccles. 47¹) for that the Lord had him
 replenished with all wisdom, and for his sake had
 driven the enemies away far off, that he might build
 145 a house in his name, and prepare unto him a sanc-
 tuary forever, which all to this day we behold in
 your kingly person fulfilled, praying unto God that
 it may so still endure. As in your princely beginnings
 ye appear unto us as a very Josias² both in your
 tender youth and virtuous education, so our special
 150 hope is that in your daily proceedings ye will still
 persever the same. The likelihoods indeed are very
 apparent, God's name be praised for it. For by your
 gracious commandment hath been taken away the
 abominations of the ungodly, which is a plain token
 155 that ye have directed your noble heart to the living
 Lord, intending to set up his true worshippings
 again, that we, delivered (as Zacharias the married
 priest sayeth [Luke 1]) out of the cruel hands of our
 enemies, may serve him from henceforth without
 160 fear all the days of our life. These most godly prin-
 ciples refresheth your Christian subjects, and so
 greatly delighteth their obedient hearts that the only
 remembrance of your Majesty's name is to them
 now more pleasant, sweet, and delicious than is any
 165 other pleasure worldly, like as was the name of the
 first Josias to the people of that age (Eccles. 49).

The eternal living God prosper your Highness
 in all kinds of learning and virtue, and preserve
 you in long life upon earth, to the glory of his holy
 170 name and comfort of your loving subjects. Amen.

John Bale to the Reader

In what estimation antiquities have been had
 among men of grave wits and judgements, the his-
 tories which are, as testifieth Cicero, the mas-
 tresses³ of life and expositors of times have not

¹ *Eccles. 47* See Sirach 47:12-13 (also known as Ecclesiasticus).

² *Josias* See Sirach 49:1-3. The prophet proceeds to praise King Josiah for his success in converting his people back to God; he is contrasted with other kings of Judah who "gave their power to others, and their glory to a foreign nation" (5).

³ *Cicero* Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE), Roman orator, politician, and writer. In his treatise *On the Ideal Orator (De Oratore)*, Cicero

5 omitted to declare. The most ancient and autho-
 risable antiquities are those which Moses left to
 the Hebrews,⁴ and Berosus to the Caldeans⁵ as
 most precious treasure and lively memorials in
 writing, that both the Jews and the Gentiles and in
 10 them all the nations of the world might thereby
 know their original beginnings. What hath been
 done besides in the particular kingdoms abroad by
 their antique writers, it is known to them which
 have of long time been exercised in the reading of
 15 their most ancient chronicles. Though Gildas
 Badonicus⁶ do report on the side,⁷ in his first treatise
De Excidio Britanniae, that all the old monu-
 ments of the Britaines had perished afore his time,
 and were partly brent⁸ by the enemies, and partly
 20 conveyed into other lands by them that fled from
 hence. And although that Bedas Gerwinus⁹ also
 on the other side, in setting forth the history of
 the English Saxons, doth omit the antiquities of
 the said Britaines their predecessors, partly of
 25 hate, as it is supposed, and partly for want of their
 old writings; yet remained there of late years in
 certain libraries of this realm (I have seen part of

declares that history is "the witness of the ages, the illuminator of reality, the life force of memory, the teacher of our lives, and the messenger of times gone by" (trans. J.M. May and J. Wisse [Oxford, 2001], 2.36); *mastresses* masters.

⁴ Moses was thought at the time the sole author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament.

⁵ *Berosus to the Caldeans* Beros(s)us was a Babylonian scholar, astrol- ogist and the author of a Babylonian history in three books, presented to Antiochus I (c. 324-261 BCE); of this work only fragments remain, but it dealt with human history beginning before the great Flood and continuing down to the reign of Alexander the Great. Babylon was the capital of Chaldae (Oxford Classical Dict., pp. 239-40; Classical Dict., p. 116).

⁶ *Gildas Badonicus* (c. 500-c. 570), monk, saint, and earliest British historian; author of *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae ac flebili Castigatione in Reges, Principes, et Sacerdotes* (516-547?) the only history of the Celts, the native inhabitants of Britain, from approximately the first to sixth centuries CE (*Dict. Christian Church*).

⁷ *on the side* either, in a marginal note, or in a digression or paren- thetical comment.

⁸ *brent* burnt.

⁹ *Bedas Gerwinus* I.e., St Bede or the Venerable Bede (673/74-735 CE), monk, theologian, and historian, best-known for his *Historia Ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastic History of the English People)* [731 CE], although he wrote over thirty works in total, most of which are still extant, except for his translation of the gospel of St John.

them) the most worthy monuments, concerning antiquity, of Ninianus, Patricius, Ambrosius Merlinus, Gildas Albanus, Merlinus Sylvester, Thelesinus, Melkinus, Kentigernus, Nennius, Samuel,¹ and other like, of whom the more part wrote long afore them.

But this is highly to be lamented of all them that hath a natural love to their country, either yet to learned antiquity (which is a most singular beauty to the same), that in turning over of the superstitious monasteries so little respect was had

to their libraries for the safeguard of those noble and precious monuments. I do not deny it but the monks canons, and friars were wicked both ways, as the oiled bishops and priests for the more part are yet still: first, for so much as they were the professed soldiers of Antichrist, and next to that, for so much as they were most execrable livers. For these causes I must confess them most justly suppressed, yet this would I have wished (and I scarcely utter it without tears), that the profitable corn had not so unadvisedly and ungodly perished with the unprofitable chaff, nor the wholesome herbs with the unwholesome weeds: I mean the worthy works of men godly-minded and lively memorials of our nation with those lazy lubbers² and popish bellygods. But diverse were the workers of this desolation, like as the things dissipated were diverse. The verity and promise of our eternal God made an end of the Pope's disguised rabble, as it will do of his remnant, which are well known by their fruits. "All plants," sayeth Christ, "which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be plucked up by the roots, lest any longer the blind leaders should lead the blind multitude" (Math. 11).

Avarice was the other dispatcher which hath made an end both of our libraries and books without respect, like as of other most honest commodities, to no small decay of the commonwealth. Cyrus, the king of Persians (as testifieth Esdras), had a noble library in Babylon for the conservation both of the land's antiquities and also of the prince's acts, laws, and commandments, that (when necessity should require it) the certainty of things might there be sought and found out (1 Esdra 6). Nehemias the prophet made a library also, and gathered into it books from all countries, specially the books of the prophets and of David, the epistles and acts of the kings, with certain annotations and writings, Judas Machabeus adding diverse victories to the same (2 Macc 2). Thus are builders of libraries commended in the Scriptures; then must their destroyers have of the same their

¹ *Ninianus* St. Ninian (c. 360-c. 432 CE), bishop and Scottish missionary, whose church became a centre of learning and early missionary activity; *Patricius* St. Patrick, bishop and Irish missionary, traditionally represented as single-handedly responsible for the conversion of Ireland; the antiquities referred to may be his letters and spiritual autobiography, *Confessions* (written in Latin); *Ambrosius Merlinus* the fabled Merlin of the Arthurian legends; *Gildas Albanus* i.e., Gildas Albanicus, another early British historian (although modern writers believe that he has been confused with Gildas Badonicus (see p. 4, note 6); *Merlinus Sylvester* sometimes confused with Myrddin mab Morfryn, a sixth-century CE Welsh poet, Merlinus Sylvester (or "Celidonius") is mentioned in Giraldus Cambrensis as a contemporary of King Arthur ("Myrddin Wyllt, i.e., the Mad," *DNB*, p. 13); *Thelesinus* Taliesin (fl. 6th century CE), an early (and perhaps legendary) British bard, whose name is included in a list of famous poets appended to four of the manuscripts of Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* (*DNB*); *Melkinus* also known as Melchinus (perhaps Maelgwyn of Llandaff [c. 6th century CE]). Asser refers to him, along with Saint Gildas, Nennius, and Kentigern as having contributed to the "orders and institutions of [Oxford]" (*Life of King Alfred*, Part 2); *Kentigernus* St. Kentigern [also known as "Mungo"] (c. 550-612/14), bishop, ascetic, and founder of the see of Glasgow, missionary to the early Scots (*Biographical Dict. of Dark Age Britain*, ed. A. Williams, et. al., London, 1991, p. 158); *Nennius* (fl. c. 770-c. 810 CE) Welsh monk and historian, the *Historia Brittonum* (*History of the Britons*) is traditionally ascribed to him; it is a major if not entirely accurate source for British history from the fourth to seventh century (*Who's Who in Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R. Fletcher, London, 1989, p. 112); *Samuel* one of the manuscripts of Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* ends with a Latin inscription suggesting that an individual named "Samuel" was in some way involved in the preparation of this early history, perhaps as a scribe or editor. Bale may have seen this ms. and assumed that "Samuel" was an early historian, contemporary with Nennius (see Richard Vermaat's *Vortigern Studies* [<http://www.vortigernstudies.org.uk>]). Alcuin, abbot of Tours (b. c. 735) also gave the pseudonym "Samuel" to his kinsman Beornred, archbishop of Sens and abbot of Echternach (d. 797); if Beornred wrote any significant works, however, not even their titles now remain extant ("Beornred," *DNB*). Thanks to Richard Vermaat and Michael Treschow (UBC-O) for assistance with these notes.

² *lubber* big, stupid fellow; an idler; in early quotations, frequently applied to monks.

justly deserved infamies, namely when covetous-
ness is found the most busy doer, whose works are
always to be detested. Wherefore Solomon sayeth,
85 “A discreet and just ruler much profiteth a land,
where a covetous ravener destroyeth it again”
(Prov. 29). O most wicked avarice! St. Paul calleth
thee a worshipping of idols, which is a taking away
of all godly honour (Col 3).¹ He sayeth, “Thou art
90 such a temptation and snare of the Devil as
bringeth all to perdition.” Yea, he reporteth thee
to be the root of all mischief (1 Tim 6). “Nothing
upon earth,” sayeth Jesus Syrach, “is so evil as a
covetous man” (Eccles 10).

95 Never had we been offended for the loss of our
libraries—being so many in number, and in so
desolate places for the most part—if the chief
monuments and most notable works of our excel-
lent writers had been reserved. If there had been
100 in every shire of England, but one solemn library,
to the preservation of those noble works and
preferment of good learnings in our posterity, it
had been yet somewhat. But to destroy all without
consideration is and will be unto England forever
105 a most horrible infamy among the grave seigniors²
of other nations. A great number of them which
purchased those superstitious mansions³ reserved
of those library books, some to serve their jakes,⁴
some to scour their candlesticks, and some to rub
110 their boots. Some they sold to the grocers and
soap sellers,⁵ and some they sent over sea to the
bookbinders,⁶ not in small number, but at times
whole ships full, to the wondering of the foreign
nations. Yea, the universities of this realm are not

¹ “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (3:5).

² *seigniors* lords, noblemen.

³ *superstitious mansions* I.e., Roman Catholic abbeys, monasteries, and convents.

⁴ *serve their jakes* I.e., serve as toilet-paper in their privies or out-houses.

⁵ *Some they sold to the grocers and soap sellers* The grocers and soap-sellers would use the pages of unsold books for wrapping paper.

⁶ *some they sent over sea to the bookbinders* On the dismembering and reuse of old books and manuscripts (not just for bookbinding but for other purposes), see *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. L. Hellinga and J.B. Trapp, 7 vols., Cambridge, 1999, vol. 3: 1400-1557, pp. 110-14, 234, 345.

115 all clear in this detestable fact.⁷ But cursed is that
belly which seeketh to be fed with such ungodly
gains, and so deeply shameth his natural country. I
know a merchant man, which shall at this time be
nameless, that bought the contents of two noble
120 libraries for 40 shillings price—a shame it is to be
spoken. This stuff hath he occupied in the stead
of gray paper⁸ by the space of more than these
ten years, and yet he hath store enough for as
many years to come. A prodigious example is this,
125 and to be abhorred of all men which love their
nation as they should do.

O cities of England, whose glory standeth
more in belly cheer than in the search of wisdom
godly! How cometh it that neither you nor yet
130 your idle massmongers⁹ have regarded this most
worthy commodity of your country? I mean the
conservation of your antiquities, and of the
worthy labours of your learned men. I think the
renown of such a notable act would have much
135 longer endured than of all your belly-banquets
and table-triumphs, either yet of your newly pur-
chased halls to keep St. George’s feast¹⁰ in. What
else made the ancient Greeks and Romans famous
to the world, but such virtuous and necessary pro-
visions in their commonwealths? What else hath
140 made the Jews now an obscure nation but the
decay of their kingdom and continual destructions
besides? Yea, what may bring our realm to more
shame and rebuke than to have it noised abroad
that we are despisers of learning? I judge this to be
145 true, and utter it with heaviness, that neither the
Britaines¹¹ under the Romans and Saxons, nor yet
the English people under the Danes and
Normans, had ever such damage of their learned
monuments as we have seen in our time. Our pos-

⁷ *clear* innocent; *fact* crime.

⁸ *gray paper* an unbleached paper used chiefly for wrapping.

⁹ *massmonger* contemptuous term for a Roman Catholic.

¹⁰ *St. George’s feast* held in honour of St. George, the patron saint of England, on his feast day: April 23rd.

¹¹ *Britaines* I.e., Britons, inhabitants of Britain. We have maintained Bale’s spelling, because the word around this time seems to have largely denoted the ancient Britons. See *OED*, Britain, n¹ and Britain, n².

terity may well curse this wicked fact of our age,
 this unreasonable spoil of England's most noble
 antiquities, unless they be stayed in time, and by
 the art of printing be brought into a number of
 155 copies. The monks kept them under dust, and
 idle-headed priests regarded them not; their later
 owners have most shamefully abused them, and
 the courteous merchants have sold them away into
 foreign nations for money.

160 Step you forth now, last of all, ye noble men
 and women (as there are in these days a great
 number of you most nobly learned, praise be God
 for it), and show your natural, noble hearts to your
 nation. Tread under your feet the unworthy exam-
 165 ples of these Herostrates¹ or abominable destroy-
 ers, and bring you into the light that² they kept
 long in the darkness, or else in these days seeketh
 utterly to destroy. As ye find a notable antiquity—
 such as are the histories of Gildas and Nennius³
 170 among the Britaines, Stephanides and Asserius³
 among the English Saxons—let them anon be
 imprinted, and so bring them into a number of
 copies, both to their and your own perpetual fame;
 for a more notable point of nobility can ye not
 175 show than in such sort to beautify your country,
 and so to restore us to such a truth in histories as
 we have long wanted.⁴ We have the fable of Dio-
 cletian and his thirty-three daughters, and how this

¹ *Herostrates* plural of the proper name Herostratus (sometimes “Eratrostratus”), an inhabitant of Ephesus who, out of desperation to be immortalized and remembered by posterity, burnt down the famous Temple of Diana/Artemis. The Ephesians unwittingly contributed to the spread of his fame when they passed a law forbidding anyone to speak his name (*Classical Dict.*, p. 255).

² *that* i.e., that which.

³ *Gildas and Nennius* See p. 4, note 6 and p. 5, note 1; *Stephanides* probably Stephen of Whitby (d. ?1112), abbot of Whitby and of St Mary's (York), who wrote one (or perhaps two works): *De fundatione Abbatiae Sanctae Mariae Virginis Eboraci ... 1088* (which includes an account of Stephen's life) and *De Reparato Monachatu* (which Bale records as having seen in Westminster), an account of the problems in implementing monastic reform [DNB]; *Asserius* Asser (d. 909), Welsh priest and historian, later bishop of Sherborne and author of the biography of King Alfred [*Life of Alfred*], written while its subject was still alive (completed 893) [*Who's Who in Roman Britain and Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 136].

⁴ *wanted* lacked.

180 realm was called *Albion ab albis rupibus*,⁵ with lie
 and all, but the verity as yet we have not, how this
 land was first inhabited. If we find them mixed
 with superstitions, we shall measure them by the
 Scriptures, and somewhat bear with the corrup-
 tion of their times. Unknown is it not unto you
 185 but that the most noble conquerors of the world
 have evermore had in much price the antiquities of
 stories,⁶ and have learned of them the thing which
 hath most increased their worthy fame.

Now come we to the author of this present
 190 treatise, which plenteously hath declared the abun-
 dance of a noble heart to his country. This was
 John Leland, an excellent orator and poet, more-
 over a man learned in many sundry languages, as
 Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, British,
 195 Saxonish, Welsh, English, and Scottish. A most
 fervent favourer was this man and a most diligent
 searcher of the antiquities of this our English or
 British nation, as will appear not only by this treatise
 following, but also by many other notable
 200 works which he hath learnedly compiled. Because
 I will not stand alone in the praise of him and his
 worthy acts, I will now bring forth another
 witness, a man learned and loving his country also,
 which wrote unto me three years ago, dolorously
 205 lamenting his sudden fall:

“Master Leland,” sayeth he, “whose printed
 works I have sent you, is in such a frenzy⁷ at this
 present that little hope I have of his recover,

⁵ *Diocletian and his thirty-three daughters* An early Anglo-Norman poem (written sometime in the 13th century) recounts the tale of the Roman emperor Diocletian and his thirty-three wicked daughters. Having been married to husbands of their father's choice, husbands who were supposed to curb their vice, the daughters, under the influence of eldest (named Alba), murdered them. As a punishment the daughters were set adrift in a boat which finally landed on the coast of England. Cohabiting with the demons who dwelt there, the daughters gave birth to a race of giants, and the land was named Albion (an ancient name of Britain) after the eldest daughter. See R. Barber, ed. *Myths and Legends of the British Isles* (London, 1999), pp. 3-8; *Albion ab albis rupibus* Latin, “Albion from the white rocks” (a reference to the distinctive White Cliffs of Dover).

⁶ *conquerors ... stories* Bale may be thinking specifically here of Alexander the Great who venerated the works of Homer and carried them with him on all his military conquests.

⁷ *frenzy* mental derangement, delirium, or temporary insanity.

whereby he might finish such things as he began,
 210 and would have ended, if life, health, and right
 reason had served him thereunto. There be divers¹
 which (by report of his enemies, as Polydore
 Vergil² and others) say that he would never have
 215 set forth such things as he promised, affirming
 him to be a vainglorious person, which would
 promise more than ever he was able or intended to
 perform.

“I much do fear it that he was vainglorious, and
 that he had a poetical wit, which I lament, for I
 220 judge it one of the chiefest things that caused him
 to fall besides his right discernings.³ But this dare
 I be bold to say, as one that knoweth it (for I saw
 and read of them in his study diverse and many
 225 times) that he never promised to set forth so many
 works as he had digested in an order,⁴ and had in
 a forward readiness to have set forth. And surely
 in such a sort he handled the matters by him
 treated of, that (by my simple judgement) if he
 230 had so finished them and set them forth according
 as he then intended and would have done, truly I
 suppose no less, but it would have been a wonder
 (yea, a miracle to the world) to have read them;
 and that all other authors, which have written of
 235 us and of ours in times past, concerning things
 memorable to be chronicled, either yet put in

¹ *divers* several; many.

² *Polydore Vergil* (c. 1470-1555), historian, Italian scholar, and papal official in England. He achieved preferment in England, becoming archdeacon of Wells, and remained in the country for almost fifty years. Commissioned by Henry VII to write a history of England, he produced *Anglica Historia* (1534; 3rd expanded edition, 1555), which has gained him the status of the first “modern” historian, for his attention to evidence, the working of random chance, and the construction of historical narrative. He treated the legendary origins of the English people with scepticism. See D.R. Woolf, “Historical Thought,” *Hist. Dict. Tudor England*, pp. 240-44. Leland responded to Polydore Vergil’s sceptical treatment of the early chronicler, Geoffrey of Monmouth, particularly in Vergil’s dismissal of Monmouth’s claims about the historical nature of King Arthur, in his *Codrus sive laus et defensio Gallofridi Arturii contra Polydorum Vergilium* (written c. 1536) and *Assertio Inchyttissimi Arturii* (1544). See D. Hay, *Polydore Vergil: Renaissance Historian and Man of Letters* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 158-59.

³ *discernings* discernments, intellectual perceptions; ability to discern, discriminate.

⁴ *digested in an order* arranged methodically or systematically; classified.

writing, should have been counted but as shadows,
 or of small estimation in respect of him. So
 learnedly, lively, evidently, and groundedly, and
 with such authorities (yea, and as it were with a
 240 certain majesty) would he have fully and wholly
 painted, described, or set forth this our realm and
 all things therein, with all the dominions thereof,
 and with all such things as have from time to time
 been done in them.

“I was as familiarly acquainted with him as with
 whom I am best acquainted, and do know certainly
 that he from his youth was so earnestly studious
 and desirous of our antiquities that always
 his whole studies were directed to that end. And
 245 for the true and full attaining thereunto, he not
 only applied himself to the knowledge of the
 Greek and Latin tongues, wherein he was (I might
 say) excellently learned, but also to the study of
 the British, Saxonish and Welsh tongues, and so
 250 much profited therein that he most perfectly
 understood them. And yet not herewithal content,
 he did fully and wholly both labour and travail in
 his own person through this our realm and certain
 of the dominions thereof, because he would have
 255 the perfect and full knowledge of all things that
 might be gathered or learned, both for things
 memorable, and for the situation of the same.
 And as for all authors of Greek, Latin, French,
 Italian, Spanish, British, Saxonish, Welsh, English
 260 or Scottish, touching in any wise the understand-
 ing of our antiquities, he had so fully read and
 applied them, that they were in a manner grafted
 in him as of nature. So that he might well call
 himself *Antiquarius*.

“Surely, my friend, I cannot therefore but
 lament this his estate, boldly affirming that
 England never saw (nor as I believe, shall see,
 except God say ‘Amen’ thereto) a man to him
 herein in all things to be compared. For
 270 undoubted he was in these matters wonderful and
 peerless, so that as concerning them, England had
 yet never a greater loss. But what shall we say? It
 hath pleased God that he should thus be deprived
 of his wits, that Lord knoweth best what he hath
 275 to do, his name be forever more blessed. But this
 shall be my prayer still, that if the Lord will not

285 give him his right understanding again, that it may
yet please his goodness to put in the minds of
some that best may to do it that not only such
things as Master Leland intended to have set forth
of his own, but also such old authors as he hath
gathered together into his libraries (and as yet not
printed), may (and that with speed) be set forth in
print, for the necessary knowledge of all men
touching antiquities. But after such rate and sort as
Master Leland himself (if his right reason had
served him) would have set them forth, for that do
I never look. But hereof once to make an end as
Terence¹ feately sayeth, *ut quimus, quando ut volumus*
295 *non licet*: “We must do as we may, when we cannot
do as we would.” All these are the testimonies of
my friend.

Thus am I not alone in opinion concerning
John Leland and such other for antiquities’ sake,
but have so many more with their good wills to
assist me as naturally favoureth England. “By this
worthy property,” sayeth Cassiodorus,² “is a noble
citizen known.” He seeketh the commodity, praise
and advancement of his country. Sweet is the
remembrance of a man’s natural land to him that
is absent. The birds that fly abroad do love their
own nests. The beasts that run astray seeketh their

accustomed couches. And the fishes within the
water resorteth to their hollow dens. Right notably
was it alleged of Plato³ that we are not born only
to our own commodities, but we ought to have
respect both to our country and kindred. Of our
natural country we have our parents, our food, our
nourishment, friendship, friends, acquaintance,
house, wife, children, with such like. The fathers in
the old law⁴ had such an inward love to their
native soil that they would nowhere else be buried.
Though Christ our most loving master said it—
that “a prophet is not without honour but in his
own country and kindred” (Matt 13)—yet beauti-
fied it he above all nations, both with his doctrine
and miracles, alleging many of their noble antiqui-
ties in Noe,⁵ Lot, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David,
Solomon, Elias, Eliseus,⁶ and other to confirm
them in the true faith. He that naturally loveth his
land obeyeth therewith the commandments of
God concerning the love of his neighbour, and
the faithful obedience of kings. Which I instantly
desire all godly subjects to follow, to the praise of
him which gave those necessary commandments.
So be it.

—1549

¹ *Terence* in the ancient Latin dramatist’s play *Andria*, 1.805.

² *Cassiodorus* (c. 490-c. 583 CE), Roman statesman, monk and writer; he wrote at least two panegyrics (which survive in fragments), a prose chronicle (*History of the Goths*) of which only a later abridgement survives, a treatise on the nature and origin of the soul (*De Anima*), a commentary on the Psalms, the *Historia Tripartita* (a compendium of passages taken from other early historians and philosophers), and the influential exegetical handbook, *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* (*Catholic Encycl.*).

³ *Plato* This sentiment is most often quoted from Cicero: “We are not born for ourselves alone, but our country” (*De Officiis* [*On Duties*], 1.7.22).

⁴ *the old law* a reference to the conventional division of the Bible into the “old law” (the Old Testament) and the “new law” (the New Testament).

⁵ *Noe* Noah.

⁶ *Elias* Elijah; *Eliseus* Elisha (both prophets in the Old Testament).