

THE TALE OF TALIESIN

In times past there lived in Penllyn a man of gentle lineage, named Tegid Foel, and his dwelling was in the midst of the Lake Tegid, and his wife was called Caridwen. And there was born to him of his wife a son named Morfran ab Tegid, and also a daughter named Creirwy, the fairest maiden in the world was she; and they had a brother the most ill-favoured man in the world, Afagddu. Now Caridwen his mother thought that he was not likely to be admitted among men of noble birth, by reason of his ugliness, unless he had some exalted merits or knowledge. For it was in the beginning of Arthur's time and of the Round Table.

So she resolved, according to the arts of the books of the Fferyllt, to boil a cauldron of inspiration and science for her son, that his reception might be honourable because of his knowledge of the mysteries of the future state of the world.

Then she began to boil the cauldron, which from the beginning of its boiling might not cease to boil for a year and a day, until three blessed drops were obtained of the grace of inspiration.

And she put Gwion Bach the son of Gwreang of Llanfair in Caereinion, in Powys, to stir the cauldron, and a blind man named Morda to kindle the fire beneath it, and she charged them that they should not suffer it to cease boiling for the space of a year and a day. And she herself, according to the books of the astronomers, and in planetary hours, gathered every day of all charm bearing herbs. And one day, towards the end of the year, as Caridwen was culling plants and making incantations, it chanced that three drops of the charmed liquor flew out of the cauldron and fell upon the finger of Gwion Bach. And by reason of their great heat he put his finger to his mouth, and the instant he put those marvel-working drops into his mouth, he foresaw everything that was to come, and perceived that his chief care must be to guard against the wiles of Caridwen, for vast was her skill. And in very great fear he fled towards his own land. And the cauldron burst in two, because all the liquor within it except the three charm-bearing drops was poisonous, so that the horses of Gwyddno Garanhir were poisoned by the water of the stream into which the liquor of the cauldron ran, and the confluence of that stream was called the Poison of the Horses of Gwyddno from that time forth.

Thereupon came in Caridwen and saw all the toil of the whole year lost. And she seized a billet of wood and struck the blind Morda on the head until one of his eyes fell out upon his cheek. And he said "Wrongfully hast thou disfigured me, for I am innocent. Thy loss was not because of me."

"Thou speakest truth" said Caridwen "it was Gwion Bach who robbed me."

And she went forth after him, running. And he saw her, and changed himself into a hare and fled. But she changed herself into a greyhound and turned him. And he ran towards a river, and became a fish. And she in the form of an otter bitch chased him under the water, until he was fain to turn himself into a bird

of the air. Then she, as a hawk, followed him and gave him no rest in the sky. And just as she was about to stoop upon him, and he was in fear of death, he espied a heap of winnowed wheat on the floor of a barn, and he dropped amongst the wheat, and turned himself into one of the grains. Then she transformed herself into a high-crested black hen, and went to the wheat and scratched it with her feet, and found him out and swallowed him. And, as the story says, she bore him nine months, and when she was delivered of him, she could not find it in her heart to kill him, by reason of his beauty. So she wrapped him in a leathern bag, and cast him into the sea to the mercy of God, on the twenty-ninth day of April.

And at that time the weir of Gwyddno was on the strand between the River Dyfi and Aberystwyth, near to his own castle, and the value of a hundred pounds was taken in that weir every May eve. And in those days Gwyddno had an only son named Elffin, the most hapless of youths, and the most needy. And it grieved his father sore, for he thought that he was born in an evil hour. And by the advice of his council, his father had granted him the drawing of the weir that year, to see if good luck would ever befall him, and to give him something wherewith to begin the world.

And the next day, when Elffin went to look, there was nothing in the weir. But as he turned back he perceived the leathern bag upon a pole of the weir. Then said one of the weir wards unto Elffin "Thou wast never unlucky until tonight, and now thou hast destroyed the virtues of the weir, which always yielded the value of a hundred pounds every May Eve, and tonight there is nothing but this leathern skin within it."

"How now" said Elffin "there may be therein the value of an hundred pounds."

Well! They took up the leathern bag, and he who opened it saw the forehead of the boy, and said to Elffin "Behold a radiant brow!"

"Taliesin be he called" said Elffin. And he lifted the boy in his arms, and lamenting his mischance, he placed him sorrowfully behind him. And he made his horse amble gently, that before had been trotting, and he carried him as softly as if he had been sitting in the easiest chair in the world. And presently the boy made a Consolation and praise to Elffin, and foretold honour to Elffin; and the Consolation was as you may see:

"Fair Elffin cease to lament!
Let no one be dissatisfied with his own,
To despair will bring no advantage.
No man sees what supports him;
The prayer of Cynllo will not be in vain;
God will not violate his promise.
Never in Gwyddno's weir
Was there such good luck as this night.
Fair Elffin, dry thy cheeks!
Being too sad will not avail,

Although thou thinkest thou hast no gain,
Too much grief will bring thee no good;
Nor doubt the miracles of the Almighty:
Although I am but little, I am highly gifted.
From seas, and from mountains,
And from the depths of rivers,
God brings wealth to the fortunate man.
Elffin of lively qualities,
Thy resolution is unmanly;
Thou must not be over sorrowful:
Better to trust in God than to forbode ill.
Weak and small as I am,
On the foaming beach of the ocean,
In the day of trouble, I shall be
Of more service to thee than 300 salmon.
Elffin of notable qualities,
Be not displeased at thy misfortune;
Although reclined thus weak in my bag,
There lies a virtue in my tongue.
While I continue thy protector
Thou hast not much to fear;
Remembering the names of the Trinity,
None shall be able to harm thee.”

And this was the first poem that Taliesin ever sang, being to console Elffin in his grief for that the produce of the weir was lost, and, what was worse, that all the world would consider that it was through his fault and ill-luck. And then Gwyddno Garanhir asked him what he was, whether man or spirit. Whereupon he sang this tale, and said:

“First, I have been formed a comely person,
In the court of Ceridwen I have done penance;
Though little I was seen, placidly received,
I was great on the floor of the place to where I was led;
I have been a prized defence, the sweet muse the cause,
And by law without speech I have been liberated
By a smiling black old hag, when irritated
Dreadful her claim when pursued:
I have fled with vigour, I have fled as a frog,
I have fled in the semblance of a crow, scarcely finding rest;
I have fled vehemently, I have fled as a chain,
I have fled as a roe into an entangled thicket;
I have fled as a wolf cub, I have fled as a wolf in a wilderness,
I have fled as a thrush of portending language;
I have fled as a fox, used to concurrent bounds of quirks;
I have fled as a martin, which did not avail:
I have fled as a squirrel, that vainly hides,
I have fled as a stag’s antler, of ruddy course,
I have fled as iron in a glowing fire,

I have fled as a spear-head, of woe to such as has a wish for it;
I have fled as a fierce bull bitterly fighting,
I have fled as a bristly boar seen in a ravine,
I have fled as a white grain of pure wheat,
On the skirt of a hempen sheet entangled,
That seemed of the size of a mare's foal,
That is filling like a ship on the waters;
Into a dark leathern bag I was thrown,
And on a boundless sea I was sent adrift;
Which was to me an omen of being tenderly nursed,
And the Lord God then set me at liberty."

Then came Elffin to the house or court of Gwyddno his father, and Taliesin with him. And Gwyddno asked him if he had had a good haul at the weir, and he told him that he had got that which was better than fish. "What was that?" said Gwyddno.

"A Bard" answered Elffin.

Then said Gwyddno "Alas, what will he profit thee?"

And Taliesin himself replied and said "He will profit him more than the weir ever profited thee."

Asked Gwyddno "Art thou able to speak, and thou so little?"

And Taliesin answered him "I am better able to speak than thou to question me." "Let me hear what thou canst say" quoth Gwyddno. Then Taliesin sang:

"In water there is a quality endowed with a blessing;
On God it is most just to meditate aright;
To God it is proper to supplicate with seriousness,
Since no obstacle can there be to obtain a reward from him.
Three times have I been born, I know by meditation;
It were miserable for a person not to come and obtain
All the sciences of the world, collected together in my breast,
For I know what has been, what in future will occur.
I will supplicate my Lord that I get refuge in him,
A regard I may obtain in his grace;
The Son of Mary is my trust, great in Him is my delight,
For in Him is the world continually upholden.
God has been to instruct me and to raise my expectation,
The true Creator of heaven, who affords me protection;
It is rightly intended that the saints should daily pray,
For God, the renovator, will bring them to him.

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And forthwith Elffin gave his haul to his wife, and she nursed him tenderly and lovingly. Thenceforward Elffin increased in riches more and more day after day, and in love and favour with the king, and there abode Taliesin until he was thirteen years old, when Elffin son of Gwyddno went by a Christmas invitation to his uncle, Maelgwn Gwynedd, who sometime after this held open court at Christmas-tide in the castle of Dyganwy, for all the number of his lords of both degrees, both spiritual and temporal, with a vast and thronged host of knights and squires. And amongst them there arose a discourse and discussion. And thus was it said.

“Is there in the whole world a king so great as Maelgwn, or one on whom Heaven has bestowed so many spiritual gifts as upon him? First, form, and beauty, and meekness, and strength, besides all the powers of the soul?” And together with these they said that Heaven had given one gift that exceeded all the others, which was the beauty, and comeliness, and grace, and wisdom, and modesty of his queen; whose virtues surpassed those of all the ladies and noble maidens throughout the whole kingdom. And with this they put questions one to another amongst themselves, Who had braver men? Who had fairer or swifter horses or greyhounds? Who had more skilful or wiser bards — than Maelgwn?

Now at that time the bards were in great favour with the exalted of the kingdom; and then none performed the office of those who are now called heralds, unless they were learned men, not only expert in the service of kings and princes, but studious and well versed in the lineage, and arms, and exploits of princes and kings, and in discussions concerning foreign kingdoms, and the ancient things of this kingdom, and chiefly in the annals of the first nobles; and also were prepared always with their answers in various languages, Latin, French, Welsh, and English. And together with this they were great chroniclers, and recorders, and skilful in framing verses, and ready in making englyns in every one of these languages. Now of these there were at that feast within the palace of Maelgwn as many as four and twenty, and chief of them all, was one named Heinen Fardd.

When they had all made an end of thus praising the king and his gifts, it befell that Elffin spoke on this wise. “Of a truth none but a king may vie with a king; but were he not a king, I would say that my wife was as virtuous as any lady in the kingdom, and also that I have a bard who is more skilful than all the king’s bards.” In a short space some of his fellows showed the king all the boastings of Elffin; and the king ordered him to be thrown into a strong prison, until he might know the truth as to the virtues of his wife, and the wisdom of his bard.

Now when Elffin had been put in a tower of the castle, with a thick chain about his feet, (it is said that it was a silver chain, because he was of royal blood;) the king, as the story relates, sent his son Rhun to enquire into the demeanour of Elffin’s wife. Now Rhun was the most graceless man in the world, and there was neither wife nor maiden with whom he had held converse, but was evil spoken of. While Rhun went in haste towards Elffin’s dwelling, being fully minded to bring disgrace upon his wife, Taliesin told his mistress how that

the king had placed his master in durance in prison, and how that Rhun was coming in haste to strive to bring disgrace upon her. Wherefore he caused his mistress to array one of the maids of her kitchen in her apparel; which the noble lady gladly did; and she loaded her hands with the best rings that she and her husband possessed.

In this guise Taliesin caused his mistress to put the maiden to sit at the board in her room at supper, and he made her to seem as her mistress, and the mistress to seem as the maid. And when they were in due time seated at their supper in the manner that has been said, Rhun suddenly arrived at Elffin's dwelling, and was received with joy, for all the servants knew him plainly; and they brought him in haste to the room of their mistress, in the semblance of whom the maid rose up from supper and welcomed him gladly. And afterwards she sat down to supper again the second time, and Rhun with her. Then Rhun began jesting with the maid who still kept the semblance of her mistress. And verily this story shows that the maiden became so intoxicated, that she fell asleep; and the story relates that it was a powder that Rhun put into the drink, that made her sleep so soundly that she never felt it when he cut from off her hand her little finger, whereon was the signet ring of Elffin, which he had sent to his wife as a token, a short time before. And Rhun returned to the king with the finger and the ring as a proof, to show that he had cut it from off her hand, without her awaking from her sleep of intemperance.

The king rejoiced greatly at these tidings, and he sent for his councillors, to whom he told the whole story from the beginning. And he caused Elffin to be brought out of his prison, and he chided him because of his boast. And he spake unto Elffin on this wise. "Elffin, be it known to thee beyond a doubt that it is but folly for a man to trust in the virtues of his wife further than he can see her; and that thou mayest be certain of thy wife's vileness, behold her finger, with thy signet ring upon it, which was cut from her hand last night, while she slept the sleep of intoxication."

Then thus spake Elffin. "With thy leave, mighty king, I cannot deny my ring, for it is known of many; but verily I assert strongly that the finger around which it is, was never attached to the hand of my wife, for in truth and certainty there are three notable things pertaining to it, none of which ever belonged to any of my wife's fingers. The first of the three is, that it is certain, by your grace's leave, that wheresoever my wife is at this present hour, whether sitting, or standing, or lying down, this ring would never remain upon her thumb, whereas you can plainly see that it was hard to draw it over the joint of the little finger of the hand whence this was cut; the second thing is, that my wife has never let pass one Saturday since I have known her without paring her nails before going to bed, and you can see fully that the nail of this little finger has not been pared for a month. The third is, truly, that the hand whence this finger came was kneading rye dough within three days before the finger was cut therefrom, and I can assure your goodness that my wife has never kneaded rye dough since my wife she has been."

Then the king was mightily wrath with Elffin for so stoutly withstanding him, respecting the goodness of his wife, wherefore he ordered him to his prison a second time, saying that he should not be loosed thence until he had proved the truth of his boast, as well concerning the wisdom of his bard as the virtues of his wife.

In the meantime his wife and Taliesin remained joyful at Elffin's dwelling. And Taliesin showed his mistress how that Elffin was in prison because of them, but he bade her be glad for that he would go to Maelgwn's court to free his master. Then she asked him in what manner he would set him free. And he answered her:

“A journey will I perform,
And to the gate I will come;
The hall I will enter,
And my song I will sing;
My speech I will pronounce
To silence royal bards.
In presence of their chief,
I will greet to deride,
Upon them I will break
And Elffin I will free.
Should contention arise,
In presence of the prince,
With summons to the bards
For the sweet flowing song,
And wizards' posing lore
And wisdom of Druids.
In the court of the sons of the distributor
Some are who did appear
Intent on wily schemes,
By craft and tricking means,
In pangs of affliction
To wrong the innocent,
Let the fools be silent,
As erst in Badon's fight, —
With Arthur of liberal ones
The head, with long red blades;
Through feats of testy men,
And a chief with his foes.
Woe be to them, the fools,
When revenge comes on them.
I Taliesin, chief of bards,
With a sapient druid's words,
Will set kind Elffin free
From haughty tyrant's bonds.
To their fell and chilling cry,
By the act of a surprising steed,
From the far distant North,

There soon shall be an end.
Let neither grace nor health
Be to Maelgwn Gwynedd,
For this force and this wrong;
And be extremes of ills
And an avenged end
To Rhun and all his race:
Short be his course of life,
Be all his lands laid waste;
And long exile be assigned
To Maelgwn Gwynedd!”

After this he took leave of his mistress, and came at last to the court of Maelgwn, who was going to sit in his hall and dine in his royal state, as it was the custom in those days for kings and princes to do at every chief feast. And as soon as Taliesin entered the hall, he placed himself in a quiet corner, near the place where the bards and the minstrels were wont to come to in doing their service and duty to the king, as is the custom at the high festivals when the bounty is proclaimed. And so, when the bards and the heralds came to cry largess and to proclaim the power of the king and his strength, at the moment that they passed by the corner wherein he was crouching, Taliesin pouted out his lips after them, and played “Blerwm, blerwm” with his finger upon his lips. Neither took they much notice of him as they went by, but proceeded forward till they came before the king, unto whom they made their obeisance with their bodies, as they were wont, without speaking a single word, but pouting out their lips, and making mouths at the king, playing “Blerwm, blerwm” upon their lips with their fingers, as they had seen the boy do elsewhere. This sight caused the king to wonder and to deem within himself that they were drunk with many liquors. Wherefore he commanded one of his lords, who served at the board, to go to them and desire them to collect their wits, and to consider where they stood, and what it was fitting for them to do. And this lord did so gladly. But they ceased not from their folly any more than before. Whereupon he sent to them a second time, and a third, desiring them to go forth from the hall. At the last the king ordered one of his squires to give a blow to the chief of them named Heinen Fardd; and the squire took a broom, and struck him on the head, so that he fell back in his seat. Then he arose and went on his knees, and besought leave of the king’s grace to show that this their fault was not through want of knowledge, neither through drunkenness, but by the influence of some spirit that was in the hall. And after this Heinen spoke on this wise. “Oh honourable king, be it known to your grace, that not from the strength of drink, or of too much liquor, are we dumb, without power of speech like drunken men, but through the influence of a spirit that sits in the corner yonder in the form of a child.”

Forthwith the king commanded the squire to fetch him; and he went to the nook where Taliesin sat, and brought him before the king, who asked him what he was, and whence he came. And he answered the king in verse:

“Primary chief bard am I to Elffin,

And my original country is the region of the summer stars;
Idno and Heinen called me Myrddin,
At length every king will call me Taliesin.

I was with my Lord in the highest sphere,
On the fall of Lucifer into the depth of hell:
I have borne a banner before Alexander;
I know the names of the stars from north to south;
I have been on the galaxy at the throne of the Distributor;
I was in Canaan when Absalom was slain;
I conveyed the divine Spirit to the level of the vale of Hebron;
I was in the court of Don before the birth of Gwydion.
I was instructor to Eli and Enoc;
I have been winged by the genius of the splendid crosier;
I have been loquacious prior to being gifted with speech;
I was at the place of the crucifixion of the merciful Son of God;
I have been three periods in the prison of Arianrod;
I have been the chief director of the work of the tower of Nimrod;
I am a wonder whose origin is not known.

I have been in Asia with Noah in the ark,
I have seen the destruction of Sodom and Gomorra;
I have been in India when Roma was built,
I am now come here to the remnant of Troia.

I have been with my Lord in the manger of the ass;
I strengthened Moses through the water of Jordan;
I have been in the firmament with Mary Magdalene;
I have obtained the muse from the cauldron of Ceridwen;
I have been bard of the harp to Lleon of Lochlin.
I have been on the White Hill, in the court of Cynfelyn,
For a day and a year in stocks and fetters,
I have suffered hunger for the Son of the Virgin.
I have been fostered in the land of the Deity,
I have been teacher to all intelligences,
I am able to instruct the whole universe.
I shall be until the day of doom on the face of the earth;
And it is not known whether my body is flesh or fish.

Then I was for nine months
In the womb of the hag Ceridwen;
I was originally little Gwion,
And at length I am Taliesin.”

And when the king and his nobles had heard the song, they wondered much, for they had never heard the like from a boy so young as he. And when the king knew that he was the bard of Elffin, he bade Heinen, his first and wisest bard, to answer Taliesin and to strive with him. But when he came, he could do no other, but play “blerwm” on his lips; and when he sent for the others of the four

and twenty bards, they all did likewise, and could do no other. And Maelgwn asked the boy Taliesin what was his errand, and he answered him in song:

“Puny bards, I am trying
To secure the prize, if I can;
By a gentle prophetic strain
I am endeavouring to retrieve
The loss I may have suffered;
Complete the attempt, I hope,
Since Elffin endures trouble
In the fortress of Teganwy,
On him may there not be laid
Too many chains and fetters;
The Chair of the fortress of Teganwy
Will I again seek;
Strengthened by my muse I am powerful;
Mighty on my part is what I seek,
For three hundred songs and more
Are combined in the spell I sing.
There ought not to stand where I am
Neither stone, neither ring;
And there ought not to be about me
Any bard who may not know
That Elffin the son of Gwyddno
Is in the land of Artro,
Secured by thirteen locks,
For praising his instructor;
And then I Taliesin,
Chief of the bards of the west,
Shall loosen Elffin
Out of a golden fetter.”

* * * * *

“If you be primary bards
To the master of sciences,
Declare ye mysteries
That relate to the inhabitants of the world;
There is a noxious creature,
From the rampart of Satanias,
Which has overcome all
Between the deep and the shallow;
Equally wide are his jaws
As the mountains of the Alps;
Him death will not subdue,
Nor hand or blades;
There is the load of nine hundred waggons
In the hair of his two paws;
There is in his head an eye

Green as the limpid sheet of icicle;
Three springs arise
In the nape of his neck;
Sea-roughs thereon
Swim through it;
There was the dissolution of the oxen
Of Deifrdonwy the water-gifted.
The names of the three springs
From the midst of the ocean;
One generated brine
Which is from the Corina,
To replenish the flood
Over seas disappearing;
The second, without injury
It will fall on us,
When there is rain abroad.
Through the whelming sky;
The third will appear
Through the mountain veins,
Like a flinty banquet.
The work of the King of kings.
You are blundering bards,
In too much solicitude;
You cannot celebrate
The kingdom of the Britons;
And I am Taliesin,
Chief of the bards of the west,
Who will loosen Elffin
Out of the golden fetter.”

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“Be silent, then, ye unlucky rhyming bards,
For you cannot judge between truth and falsehood.
If you be primary bards formed by Heaven,
Tell your king what his fate will be.
It is I who am a diviner and a leading bard,
And know every passage in the country of your king;
I shall liberate Elffin from the belly of the stony tower;
And will tell your king what will befall him.
A most strange creature will come from the sea marsh of Rhianedd
As a punishment of iniquity on Maelgwn Gwynedd;
His hair, his teeth, and his eyes being as gold,
And this will bring destruction upon Maelgwn Gwynedd.”

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“Discover thou what is
The strong creature from before the flood,

Without flesh, without bone,
Without vein, without blood,
Without head, without feet;
It will neither be older nor younger
Than at the beginning;
For fear of a denial,
There are no rude wants
With creatures.
Great God! how the sea whitens
When first it come!
Great are its gusts
When it comes from the south;
Great are its evaporations
When it strikes on coasts.
It is in the field, it is in the wood,
Without hand and without foot,
Without signs of old age,
Though it be co-eval
With the five ages or periods;
And older still,
Though they be numberless years.
It is also so wide
As the surface of the earth;
And it was not born,
Nor was it seen.
It will cause consternation
Wherever God willeth.
On sea, and on land,
It neither sees, nor is seen.
Its course is devious,
And will not come when desired.
On land and on sea,
It is indispensable.
It is without an equal,
It is four-sided;
It is not confined,
It is incomparable;
It comes from four quarters
It will not be advised,
It will not be without advice.
It commences its journey
Above the marble rock.
It is sonorous, it is dumb,
It is mild,
It is strong, it is bold,
When it glances over the land.
It is silent, it is vocal,
It is clamorous,
It is the most noisy

On the face of the earth.
It is good, it is bad,
It is extremely injurious.
It is concealed,
Because sight cannot perceive it.
It is noxious, it is beneficial;
It is yonder, it is here;
It will discompose,
But will not repair the injury;
It will not suffer for its doings,
Seeing it is blameless.
It is wet, it is dry,
It frequently comes,
Proceeding from the heat of the sun,
And the coldness of the moon.
The moon is less beneficial,
Inasmuch as her heat is less.
One Being has prepared it,
Out of all creatures,
By a tremendous blast,
To wreak vengeance
On Maelgwn Gwynedd.”

And while he was thus singing his verse near the door there arose a mighty storm of wind, so that the king and all his nobles thought that the castle would fall upon their heads. And the king caused them to fetch Elffin in haste from his dungeon, and placed him before Taliesin. And it is said that immediately he sang a verse, so that the chains opened from about his feet.

“I adore the Supreme, Lord of all animation, —
Him that supports the heaven, Ruler of every extreme,
Him that made the water good for all,
Him who has bestowed each gift, and blesses it; —
May abundance of mead be given Maelgwn of Anglesey, who supplies us,
From his foaming mead horns, with the choicest pure liquor.
Since bees collect, and do not enjoy,
We have sparkling distilled mead, which is universally praised.
The multitude of creatures which the earth nourishes,
God made for man, with a view to enrich him; —
Some are violent, some are mute, he enjoys them,
Some are wild, some are tame; the Lord makes them; —
Part of their produce becomes clothing;
For food and beverage till doom will they continue.
I entreat the Supreme, Sovereign of the region of peace,
To liberate Elffin from banishment,
The man who gave me wine, and ale, and mead,
With large princely steeds, of beautiful appearance;
May he yet give me; and at the end,
May God of His good will grant me, in honour,

A succession of numberless ages, in the retreat of tranquillity. —
Elffin, knight of mead, late be thy dissolution!”

And afterwards he sang the ode which is called “The Excellence of the Bards.”

“What was the first man
Made by the God of heaven;
What the fairest flattering speech
That was prepared by Ieuav;
What meat, what drink,
What roof his shelter;
What the first impression
Of his primary thinking;
What became his clothing;
Who carried on a disguise,
Owing to the wiles of the country,
In the beginning?
Wherefore should a stone be hard;
Why should a thorn be sharp-pointed;
Who is hard like a flint;
Who is salt like brine;
Who sweet like honey;
Who rides on the gale;

Why ridged should be the nose;
Why should a wheel be round;
Why should the tongue be gifted with speech
Rather than another member?
If thy bards, Heinen, be competent,
Let them reply to me, Taliesin.”

And after that he sang the address which is called “The Reproof of the Bards.”

“If thou art a bard completely imbued
With genius not to be controlled,
Be thou not untractable
Within the court of thy king;
Until thy rigmarole shall be known,
Be thou silent Heinen
As to the name of thy verse,
And the name of thy vaunting;
And as to the name of thy grandsire
Prior to his being baptized.
And the name of the sphere,
And the name of the element,
And the name of thy language,
And the name of thy region.
Avaunt, ye bards above,
Avaunt, ye bards below!

My beloved is below,
In the fetter of Arianrod.
It is certain you know not
How to understand the song I utter,
Nor clearly how to discriminate
Between the truth and what is false;
Puny bards, crows of the district,
Why do you not take to flight?
A bard that will not silence me,
Silence may he not obtain,
Till he goes to be covered
Under gravel and pebbles;
Such as shall listen to me,
May God listen to him.”

Then sang he the piece called “The Spite of the Bards.”

“Minstrels persevere in their false custom,
Immoral ditties are their delight;
Vain and tasteless praise they recite;
Falsehood at all times do they utter;
The innocent persons they ridicule;
Married women they destroy,
Innocent virgins of Mary they corrupt;
As they pass their lives away in vanity;
Poor innocent persons they ridicule;
At night they get drunk, they sleep the day;
In idleness without work they feed themselves;
The Church they hate, and the tavern they frequent;
With thieves and perjured fellows they associate;
At courts they inquire after feasts;
Every senseless word they bring forward;
Every deadly sin they praise;
Every vile course of life they lead;
Through every village, town, and country they stroll;
Concerning the gripe of death they think not;
Neither lodging nor charity do they give;
Indulging in victuals to excess.
Psalms or prayers they do not use,
Tithes or offerings to God they do not pay,
On holidays or Sundays they do not worship;
Vigils or festivals they do not heed.
The birds do fly, the fish do swim,
The bees collect honey, worms do crawl,
Everything travails to obtain its food,
Except minstrels and lazy useless thieves.

I deride neither song nor minstrelsy,
For they are given by God to lighten thought;

But him who abuses them,
For blaspheming Jesus and his service.”

Taliesin having set his master free from prison, and having protected the innocence of his wife, and silenced the Bards so that not one of them dared to say a word, now brought Elffin’s wife before them, and showed that she had not one finger wanting. Right glad was Elffin, right glad was Taliesin.

Then he bade Elffin wager the king, that he had a horse both better and swifter than the king’s horses. And this Elffin did, and the day, and the time, and the place were fixed, and the place was that which at this day is called Morfa Rhiannedd; and thither the king went with all his people, and four and twenty of the swiftest horses he possessed. And after a long process the course was marked, and the horses were placed for running. Then came Taliesin with four and twenty twigs of holly, which he had burnt black, and he caused the youth who was to ride his master’s horse to place them in his belt, and he gave him orders to let all the king’s horses get before him, and as he should overtake one horse after the other, to take one of the twigs and strike the horse with it over the crupper, and then let that twig fall; and after that to take another twig, and do in like manner to every one of the horses, as he should overtake them, enjoining the horseman strictly to watch when his own horse should stumble, and to throw down his cap on the spot. All these things did the youth fulfil, giving a blow to every one of the king’s horses, and throwing down his cap on the spot where his horse stumbled. And to this spot Taliesin brought his master after his horse had won the race. And he caused Elffin to put workmen to dig a hole there; and when they had dug the ground deep enough, they found a large cauldron full of gold. And then said Taliesin “Elffin, behold a payment and reward unto thee, for having taken me out of the weir, and for having reared me from that time until now.” And on this spot stands a pool of water, which is to this time called Pwllbair.

After all this, the king caused Taliesin to be brought before him, and he asked him to recite concerning the creation of man from the beginning; and thereupon he made the poem which is now called “One of the Four Pillars of Song”.

“The Almighty made,
Down the Hebron vale,
With his plastic hands,
Adam’s fair form;

And five hundred years,
Void of any help,
There he remained and lay
Without a soul.

He again did form,
In calm paradise,
From a left-side rib,
Bliss-throbbing Eve.

The Mabinogion

Seven hours they were
The orchard keeping,
Till Satan brought strife,
With wiles from hell.

Thence were they driven,
Cold and shivering,
To gain their living,
Into this world.

To bring forth with pain
Their sons and daughters,
To have possession
Of Asia's land.

Twice five, ten and eight,
She was self-bearing,
The mixed burden
Of man-woman.

And once, not hidden,
She brought forth Abel,
And Cain the forlorn,
The homicide.

To him and his mate
Was given a spade,
To break up the soil,
Thus to get bread.

The wheat pure and white,
Summer tilth to sow,
Every man to feed,
Till great yule feast.

An angelic hand
From the high Father,
Brought seed for growing
That Eve might sow;

But she then did hide
Of the gift a tenth,
And all did not sow
Of what was dug.

Black rye then was found,
And not pure wheat grain,
To show the mischief

Thus of thieving.

For this thievish act,
It is requisite,
That all men should pay
Tithe unto God.

Of the ruddy wine,
Planted on sunny days,
And on new moon nights;
And the white wine.

The wheat rich in grain
And red flowing wine
Christ's pure body make,
Son of Alpha.

The wafer is flesh,
The wine is spilt blood,
The Trinity's words
Sanctify them.

The concealed books
From Emmanuel's hand
Were brought by Raphael
As Adam's gift.

When in his old age,
To his chin immersed
In Jordan's water,
Keeping a fast,

Moses did obtain,
In Jordan's water,
The aid of the three
Most special rods.

Solomon did obtain,
In Babel's tower,
All the sciences
In Asia land.

So did I obtain,
In my bardic books,
All the sciences
Of Europe and Africa.

Their course, their bearing
Their permitted way,

The Mabinogion

And their fate I know,
Unto the end.

Oh! what misery,
Through extreme of woe,
Prophecy will show
On Troia's race!

A coiling serpent,
Proud and merciless,
On her golden wings,
From Germany.

She will overrun
England and Scotland,
From Lychlyn sea-shore
To the Severn.

Then will the Brython
Be as prisoners,
By strangers swayed,
From Saxony.

Their Lord they will praise,
Their speech they will keep,
Their land they will lose,
Except wild Walia.

Till some change shall come,
After long penance,
When equally rife
The two crimes come.

Britons then shall have
Their land and their crown,
And the strangers swarm
Shall disappear.

All the angel's words,
As to peace and war,
Will be fulfilled
To Britain's race.

He further told the king various prophecies of things that should be in the world, in songs, as follows.

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