from *The Welsh Fairy Book*
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- The Fairy Harp
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The Fairy Harp

A COMPANY of fairies who lived in the recesses of Cader Idris were in the habit of going about from cottage to cottage in that part of the country to test the dispositions of the cottagers. Those who gave the fairies an ungracious welcome were subject to bad luck during the rest of their lives; but those who were good to the little folk who visited them in disguise received substantial favours from them.

Old Morgan ap Rhys was sitting one night by himself in his own chimney corner, solacing his loneliness with his pipe and some Llangollen ale. The generous liquor made Morgan very light-hearted, and he began to sing—at least he was under the impression that he was singing. His voice, however, was anything but sweet, and a bard whom he had offended—it is a very dangerous thing to fall foul of the bards in Wales, because they often have such bitter tongues—had likened his singing to the lowing of an old cow or the yelping of a blind dog which has lost its way to the cowyard. His singing, however, gave Morgan himself much satisfaction, and this particular evening he was especially pleased with the harmony he was producing. The only thing which marred his sense of contentment was the absence of an audience. Just as he was coming to the climax of his song, he heard a knock at the door. Delighted with the thought that there was someone to listen to him, Morgan sang with all the fervour he was capable of, and his top note was, in his opinion, a thing of beauty and a joy for ever. When he had quite finished, he again heard a knock at the door, and shouted out, "What is

the door for but to come in by? Come in, whoever you are." Morgan's manners, you will see, were not very polished.

The door opened and in came three travellers, travel-stained and weary-looking. Now these were fairies from Cader Idris disguised in this manner to see how Morgan treated strangers, but he never suspected they were other than they appeared. "Good sir," said one of the travellers, "we are worn and tired, but all we seek is a bite of food to put in our wallets, and then we will go on our way."

"Brensiach," said Morgan, "is that all you want? Well, there, look you, is the loaf and the cheese, and the knife lies by them, and you cut what you like. Eat your heartiest and fill your wallets, for never shall it be said that Morgan ap Rhys denied bread and cheese to strangers that came into his house." The travellers proceeded to help themselves, and Morgan, determined not to fail in hospitality, sang to them while they ate, moistening his throat occasionally with Llangollen ale when it became dry.

The fairy travellers, after they had regaled themselves sufficiently, got up to go and said, "Good sir, we thank you for our entertainment. Since you have been so generous we will show that we are grateful. It is in our power to grant you any one wish you may have: tell us what that wish may be."

"Well, indeed," said Morgan, "the wish of my heart is to have a harp that will play under my fingers, no matter how ill I strike it: a harp that will play lively tunes, look you—no melancholy music for me. But surely it's making fun of me you are."

But that was not the case: he had hardly finished speaking when, to his astonishment, there on the hearth before him stood a splendid harp. He looked round and found his guests had vanished. "That's the most extraordinary thing I have ever seen in my life," said Morgan, "they must have been fairies," and he was so flabbergasted that he felt constrained to drink some more ale. This allayed to some extent his bewilderment, and he proceeded to try the instrument he had been so mysteriously presented with. As soon as his fingers touched the strings, the harp began to play a mad and capering tune. Just then there was a sound of footsteps, and in came his wife with some friends. No sooner did

they hear the strains of the harp than they began dancing, and as long as Morgan's fingers were on the strings, they kept footing it like mad creatures.

The news that Morgan had come into possession of a harp with some mysterious power spread like wildfire over the whole country, and many were the visitors who came to see him and it. Every time he played it everyone felt irresistibly impelled to dance, and could not leave off until Morgan stopped. Even lame people capered away, and a one-legged man who visited him danced as merrily as any biped.

One day, among the company who had come to see if the stories about the harp were true, was the bard who had made such unpleasant remarks about Morgan's singing. Morgan determined to pay him out, and instead of stopping as usual after the dance had been going on for a few minutes, he kept on playing. He played on and on until the dancers were exhausted and shouted to him to stop. But Morgan was finding the scene such too amusing to want to stop. He laughed until his sides ached and the tears rolled down his cheeks at the antics of his visitors, and especially at those of the bard. The longer he played the madder became the dance: the dancers spun round and round, wildly knocking over the furniture, and some of them bounded up against the roof of the cottage till their heads cracked again. Morgan did not stop until the bard had broken his legs and the rest had been jolted almost to pieces. By that time his revenge was satisfied, and his sides and jaws were so tired with laughing that he had to take his fingers away from the strings.

But this was the last time he was to have the chance of venting his spite on his enemies. By next morning the harp had disappeared, and was never seen again. The fairies, evidently displeased with the evil use to which their gift had been put, must have taken it away in the night. And this is a warning to all who abuse the gifts of the fairies.

A Fairy Dog

GOING home from Pentre Voelas Church, the good wife of Hafod y Gareg found a little dog in an exhausted state on the ground. She took it up tenderly and carried it home in her apron. This she did partly from natural kindliness of heart and partly from fear, because she remembered what had happened to her cousin of Bryn Heilyn. She had come across a strange little dog and treated it cruelly. The fairies had come to her as she was taking *glasdwr* (which is butter-milk diluted with water) to the hayfield. They seized her and enquired whether she would travel above wind, mid wind or below wind. She ought to have selected the middle course, which would have meant a pleasant voyage through the air at a moderate height, equally removed from the clouds and the earth. Above wind is a giddy and terrible passage through the thin ether between the worlds, and it was well that she did not choose it. But the course she made choice of, below wind, was almost as bad, because she was snatched through miry bog and swampy lea, through brambles and briars, until all her clothes were torn off her body, and she was brought back to her home scratched and bleeding all over.

The good wife of Hafod y Gareg had no desire for any such excursions, and she made a nice soft bed for the fairy dog in the pantry, and fed it well. The following day a company of fairies came to the farmhouse to make enquiries about it. She told them it was safe and sound, and that they were welcome to take it away. In gratitude for her kindness, they asked her which she would prefer, a clean or a dirty cowyard. Reflecting that you cannot have a clean cowyard unless your cows are very few in number, she gave the right answer, a dirty cowyard. She found two cows for every one she had possessed before, and their milk made the best butter in the whole neighbourhood.

The Lady of the Lake

HIGH up in a hollow of the Black Mountains of South Wales is a lonely sheet of water called Llyn y Fan Fach.

In a farm not far from this lake there lived in the olden time a widow, with an only son whose name was Gwyn. When this son grew up, he was often sent by his mother to look after the cattle grazing. The place where the sweetest food was to be found was near the lake, and it was thither that the mild-eyed beasts wandered whenever they had their will. One day when Gwyn was walking along the banks of the mere, watching the kine cropping the short grass, he was astonished to see a lady standing in the clear smooth water, some distance from the land.

She was the most beautiful creature that he had ever set eyes upon, and she was combing her long hair with a golden comb, the unruffled surface of the lake serving her as a mirror.

He stood on the brink, gazing fixedly at the maiden, and straightway knew that he loved her. As he gazed, he unconsciously held out to her the barley-bread and cheese which his mother had given him before he left home. The lady gradually glided towards him, but shook her head as he continued to hold out his hand, and saying:

Cras dy fara,	O thou of the crimped bread,
Nid hawdd fy nala,	It is not easy to catch me,

she dived under the water, and disappeared from his sight.

He went home, full of sorrow, and told his mother of the beautiful vision which he had seen. As they pondered over the

strange words used by the mysterious lady before she plunged out of sight, they came to the conclusion that there must have been some spell connected with the hard-baked bread, and the mother advised her son to take with him some "toes," or unbaked dough, when next he went to the lake.

Next morning, long before the sun appeared above the crest of the mountain, Gwyn was by the lake with the dough in his hand, anxiously waiting for the Lady of the Lake to appear above the surface. The sun rose, scattering with his powerful beams the mists which veiled the high ridges around, and mounted high in the heavens. Hour after hour the youth watched the waters, but hour after hour there was nothing to be seen except the ripples raised by the breeze and the sunbeams dancing upon them. By the late afternoon despair had crept over the watcher, and he was on the point of turning his footsteps homeward when to his intense delight the lady again appeared above the sunlit ripples. She seemed even more beautiful than before, and Gwyn, forgetting in admiration of her fairness all that he had carefully prepared to say, could only hold out his hand, offering to her the dough. She refused the gift with a shake of the head as before, adding the words:

Llaith dy fara,	O thou of the moist bread,
Ti ni fynna.	I will not have thee.

Then she vanished under the water, but before she sank out of sight, she smiled upon the youth so sweetly and so graciously that his heart became fuller than ever of love. As he walked home slowly and sadly, the remembrance of her smile consoled him and awakened the hope that when next she appeared she would not refuse his gift. He told his mother what had happened, and she advised him, inasmuch as the lady had refused both hard-baked and unbaked bread, to take with him next time bread that was half-baked.

That night he did not sleep a wink, and long before the first twilight he was walking the margin of the lake with half-baked bread in his hand, watching its smooth surface even more impatiently than the day before.

The sun rose and the rain came, but the youth heeded nothing as he eagerly strained his gaze over the water. Morning wore to afternoon, and afternoon to evening, but nothing met the eyes of the anxious watcher but the waves and the myriad dimples made in them by the rain. The shades of night began to fall, and Gwyn was about to depart in sore disappointment, when, casting a last farewell look over the lake, he beheld some cows walking on its surface. The sight of these beasts made him hope that they would be followed by the Lady of the Lake, and, sure enough, before long the maiden emerged from the water. She seemed lovelier than ever, and Gwyn was almost beside himself with joy at her appearance. His rapture increased when he saw that she was gradually approaching the land, and he rushed into the water to meet her, holding out the half-baked bread in his hand. She, smiling, took his gift, and allowed him to lead her to dry land. Her beauty dazzled him, and for some time he could do nothing but gaze upon her. And as he gazed upon her he saw that the sandal on her right foot was tied in a peculiar manner. She smiled so graciously upon him that he at last recovered his speech and said, "Lady, I love you more than all the world besides and want you to be my wife."

She would not consent at first. He pleaded, however, so earnestly that she at last promised to be his bride, but only on the following condition. "I will wed you," she said, "and I will live with you until I receive from you three blows without a cause—tri ergyd diachos. When you strike me the third causeless blow I will leave you for ever."

He was protesting that he would rather cut off his hand than employ it in such a way, when she suddenly darted from him and dived into the lake. His grief and disappointment was so sore that he determined to put an end to his life by casting himself headlong into the deepest water of the lake. He rushed to the top of a great rock overhanging the water, and was on the point of jumping in when he heard a loud voice saying, "Forbear, rash youth, and come hither."

He turned and beheld on the shore of the lake some distance from the rock a hoary-headed old man of majestic mien, accompanied by two maidens. He descended from the rock in fear

and trembling, and the old man addressed him in comforting accents.

"Mortal, thou wishest to wed one of these my daughters. I will consent to the union if thou wilt point out to me the one thou lovest."

Gwyn gazed upon the two maidens, but they were so exactly similar in stature, apparel and beauty that he could not see the slightest difference between them. They were such perfect counterparts of each other that it seemed quite impossible to say which of them had promised to be his bride, and the thought that if perchance he fixed upon the wrong one all would be for ever lost nearly drove him to distraction. He was almost giving up the task in despair when one of the two maidens very quietly thrust her foot slightly forward. The motion, simple as it was, did not escape the attention of the youth, and looking down he saw the peculiar shoe-tie which he had observed on the sandal of the maiden who had accepted his half-baked bread. He went forward and boldly took hold of her hand.

"Thou hast chosen rightly," said the old man, "be to her a kind and loving husband, and I will give her as a dowry as many sheep, cattle, goats, swine and horses as she can count of each without drawing in her breath. But remember, if thou strikest her three causeless blows, she shall return to me."

Gwyn was overjoyed, and again protested that he would rather lop off all his limbs than do such a thing. The old man smiled, and turning to his daughter desired her to count the number of sheep she wished to have. She began to count by fives—one, two, three, four, five—one, two, three, four, five—one, two, three, four, five—as many times as she could until her breath was exhausted. In an instant as many sheep as she had counted emerged from the water. Then the father asked her to count the cattle she desired. One, two, three, four, five—one, two, three, four, five—one, two, three, four, five—she went on counting until she had to draw in her breath again. Without delay, black cattle to the number she had been able to reach came lowing out of the mere. In the same way she counted the goats, swine and horses she wanted, and the full tale of each kind ranged themselves alongside the sheep and cattle. Then the old man and his other daughter vanished.

The Lady of the Lake and Gwyn were married amid great rejoicing, and took up their home at a farm named Esgair Llaethdy, where they lived for many years. They were as happy as happy can be, everything prospered with them, and three sons were born to them.

When the eldest boy was seven years old, there was a wedding some distance away, to which Nelferch—for that was the name the Lady of the Lake gave herself—and her husband were specially invited. When the day came, the two started and were walking through a field in which some of their horses were grazing, when Nelferch said that the distance was too great for her to walk and she would rather not go. "We must go," said her husband, "and if you do not like to walk, you can ride one of these horses. Do you catch one of them while I go back to the house for the saddle and bridle."

"I will," she said. "At the same time bring me my gloves. I have forgotten them—they are on the table."

He went back to the house, and when he returned with the saddle and bridle and gloves he found to his surprise that she had not stirred from the spot where he had left her. Pointing to the horses, he playfully flicked her with the gloves and said, "Go, go (dos, dos)."

"This is the first causeless blow," she said with a sigh, and reminded him of the condition upon which she had married him, a condition which he had almost forgotten.

Many years after, they were both at a christening. When all the guests were full of mirth and hilarity, Nelferch suddenly burst into tears and sobbed piteously. Gwyn tapped her on the shoulder and asked her why she wept. "I weep," she said, "because this poor innocent babe is so weak and frail that it will have no joy in this world. Pain and suffering will fill all the days of its brief stay on earth, and in the agony of torture will it depart this life. And, husband, thou hast struck me the second causeless blow."

After this, Gwyn was on his guard day and night not to do anything which could be regarded as a breach of their marriage covenant. He was so happy in the love of Nelferch and his children that he knew his heart would break if through some accident he gave the last and only blow which would take his

dear wife from him. Some time after, the babe whose christening they had attended, after a short life of pain and suffering, died in agony, as Nelferch had foretold. Gwyn and the Lady of the Lake went to the funeral, and in the midst of the mourning and grief, Nelferch laughed merrily, causing all to stare at her in astonishment. Her husband was so shocked at her high spirits on so sad an occasion, that he touched her, saying, "Hush, wife, why dost thou laugh?"

"I laugh," she replied, "because the poor babe is at last happy and free from pain and suffering." Then rising she said, "The last blow has been struck. Farewell."

She started off immediately towards Esgair Llaethdy, and when she arrived home, she called her cattle and other stock together, each by name. The cattle she called thus:

Mu wlfrech, moelfrech,	Brindled cow, bold freckled,
Mu olfrech, gwynfrech,	Spotted cow, white speckled,
Pedair cae tonn-frech,	Ye four field sward mottled.
Yr hen wynebwen,	The old white-faced,
A'r las Geigen,	And the grey Geigen
Gyda'r tarw gwyn	With the white bull
O lys y Brenin,	From the court of the King,
A'r llo du bach,	And thou little black calf,
Sydd ar y bach,	Suspended on the hook,
Dere dithe, yn iach adre!	Come thou also, whole again, home.

They all immediately obeyed the summons of their mistress. The little black calf, although it had been killed, came to life again, and descending from the hook, walked off with the rest of the cattle, sheep, goats, swine and horses at the command of the Lady of the Lake.

It was the spring of the year, and there were four oxen ploughing in one of the fields. To these she cried:

Y pedwar edion glas,	Ye four grey oxen,
Sydd ar y ma's,	That are on the field,
Deuwch chwithe	Come you also
Yn iach adre!	Whole and well home!

Away went the whole of the live stock with the Lady across the mountain to the lake from whence they had come, and disappeared beneath its waters. The only trace they left was the furrow made by the plough which the oxen drew after them into the lake; this remains to this day.

Gwyn's heart was broken. He followed his wife to the lake, crushed with woe, and put an end to his misery by plunging into the depths of the cold water. The three sons distracted with grief, almost followed their father's example, and spent most of their days wandering about the lake in the hope of seeing their lost mother once more. Their love was at last rewarded, for one day Nelferch appeared suddenly to them.

She told them that their mission on earth was to relieve the pain and misery of mankind. She took them to a place which is still called the Physician's Dingle (Pant y Meddygon), where she showed them the virtues of the plants and herbs which grew there, and taught them the art of healing.

Profiting by their mother's instruction, they became the most skilful physicians in the land. Rhys Grug, Lord of Llandovery and Dynevor Castles, gave them rank, lands and privileges at Myddfai for their maintenance in the practice of their art and for the healing and benefit of those who should seek their help. The fame of the Physicians of Myddfai was established over the whole of Wales, and continued for centuries among their descendants.

The Tale of Gwion Bach and The Tale of Taliesin

The two tales that follow require but a single head-note, for they are virtually one story. Strangely enough, many of the manuscripts that record the Taliesin material have only what is called here "The Tale of Gwion Bach," that is, the part of the story that tells how Gwion Bach came to acquire the magical drops of poetic inspiration, how he was pursued and swallowed by the witch Ceridwen, and reborn as Taliesin. The remainder of the story tells how Taliesin, as a young lad of thirteen, came to the court of Maelgwn, King of Gwynedd, confused the king's bards, and rescued his master Elphin, whose misfortunes are delightfully recounted in Thomas Love Peacock's novel, *The Misfortunes of Elphin*. It is easy to understand how these two sections of the saga of Taliesin drifted apart; the first section deals with a witch, a magical brew, shape-shifting, and is set in the days of the legendary king, Arthur. Its wonder and magic remind us of "Culhwch and Olwen." The second part, however, has few of those qualities. There is some magic there, to be sure, but the setting is historical, and a good deal of attention is paid to customs and manners of the court. It is peopled with bards and heralds, nobles and ladies, and is motivated by economic misfortune and the consequences of unbridled pride and boasting. While the two parts are chronologically consecutive, they are worlds apart in setting and, perhaps, in audience.

There can be little doubt that the tale of Taliesin is very old, and yet none of it turns up in any Welsh manuscript before the sixteenth century. The earliest recorded version appears to be that found in a manuscript written by Elis Gruffydd sometime in the middle of that century. Gruffydd was in fact compiling a "Chronicle of the World," but

at the same time he was preserving bits of lore from his own Welsh tradition, and inserting them into his chronicle in the appropriate places. The Taliesin tale is fit into the events of the sixth century, in the days of the legendary Arthur and the historical Maelgwn Gwynedd. Gruffydd implies that he knew the story from oral and written sources, but he is not content to simply copy out the story, or record a version he knew; he comments on his text frequently, sometimes referring in a self-conscious way to the story or "the opinion of the people," sometimes objecting to the impiety of the story or its irrationality, or doubting its veracity with such comments as, "if the story can be believed" and "indeed, in my opinion it is very difficult for anyone to believe that this tale is true." The total effect is very different from anything found in the other tales in this collection. In those, the scribe is simply recording aspects of a tradition that is an integral part of his own heritage. Gruffydd is at a distance from the tradition; as a man of letters and somewhat cosmopolitan figure who knew French and English, and perhaps Latin, as well as his native Welsh, and who had travelled extensively, his attitude is less parochial than that of the scribes of the fourteenth century who gave us faithful copies of the *mabinogi* and other tales. Gruffydd acts partly as judge and editor of his material.

And yet, it is a well-developed story that Gruffydd records, and the characters are full of life for the most part. Morfran is so ugly he is nicknamed Afagddu (alternatively Y Fagddu), after the pitch-black night, but like most sons and daughters, however cheated by nature, he has a loving mother. The story does not say she was "loving," but it does say that it saddened her to think that he would have trouble getting on in the world because of his ugliness. Fortunately for him, she was a witch, and after consulting her book on the Virgilian arts, she brews a brew from which three distilled drops will make him so full of knowledge and prohpecy that he shall never want for patronage and respect if not love and admiration. And though the story at this point is "illogical and contrary to faith and piety," Gruffydd gives us a fine picture of the gathering of herbs, and the occupations of her two assistants, Gwion Bach and his nameless and blind companion. Apparently exhausted from her year-long activities, Ceridwen is asleep at the crucial moment, and the three distilled drops impart their wisdom to Gwion Bach; Morfran, about whom we hear no more in this story, remains ignorant as well as ugly. (In "Culhwch and Olwen" we discover that he was at the battle of Camlan. He went unwounded there because of his ugliness; he had hair on him like a stag, and everyone thought he was an attendant demon; above, p. 127). The rest of this part of the story perhaps embarrassed Gruffydd too much to give all the details, for in almost every

other version of the story known to me, the transformations undergone by Ceridwen and Gwion as she pursued him are specified: he turns into a hare, she pursues in the shape of a greyhound; he escapes into the water in the shape of a fish, she continues the chase as an otter; he takes to the air as a bird, she flies after him as a hawk; at last, he descends into the barn where there is a stack of winnowed wheat and turns himself into one of the grains.

But when the story does not violate reason or faith, Gruffydd allows the tale to unfold unimpeded. It concentrates on the character of Elphin, the hopeless spendthrift who has ingratiated himself with the courtiers at Maelgwn's court by spreading his father's money around. Alas for poor Elphin, his father falls on hard times. With the help of his cronies, the son manages to get one last gift from Gwyddno, namely, the miraculous Hallowe'en catch of fish from Gwyddno's weir. Imagine Elphin's dismay when instead of finding the expected ten (a hundred in other versions) pounds worth of fish, he finds nothing but a hide-covered basket. His lamentations and dejection are so great that the baby Taliesin, who has arrived in this unlikely conveyance, offers a poetic consolation as they make their way back to Elphin's court (though "this is far from reason and sense").

The story changes course here, and we lose sight of Elphin's former companions. He has a wife now, and she is entrusted with the rearing of the child Taliesin. From this point on Elphin's fortunes increase; he becomes wealthier, though we are not told under what circumstances, and he finds greater "favor and acceptance with the king." But when he boasts in Maelgwn's court that his wife is more chaste than the king's wife, and his bard more skilful, Elphin is thrown into prison. The king calls on his son Rhun to test the chastity and continence of Elphin's wife, for the story has it that Rhun was the most successful seducer of his time. Taliesin knows of this plan by divination, and Rhun is tricked into believing he has come away with a sure trophy of the incontinence of Elphin's wife. Gruffydd seems to have enjoyed this part of the story, and it is very carefully developed. The ruse works well, and Maelgwn is in high spirts as he summons Elphin before him to taunt him with what he supposes is the finger of Elphin's wife with Elphin's own ring upon it. But calmly, and with a perceptivity that would win the approval of Sherlock Holmes, the prisoner demonstrates that the finger cannot have been cut from his wife's hand, her faithlessness has not been proved ,and Rhun has been duped. The king's pride is outraged by the event, and he consigns Elphin to prison once again.

Young Taliesin's success in the court of Maelgwn at the expense of the company of bards is equally entertaining. By sympathetic magic he

causes the dignified bards to stand before the king and make bumbling sounds more befitting babes and idiots. The king's response after several warnings is suited to the preposterous behavior of the bards, and poor Heinin Fardd, the chief poet, suffers the indignity of a blow to the head from a serving platter. None of this part of the tale has much to do with the mythological traditions of the archetypal poet, as does the first part, but it is a good satire against the pomposity and idolatry of official court poets.

The poems in the tale present a special problem. They were not considered an integral part of the tale, and many manuscripts omit them entirely. Elsewhere, we find the poems, but without the prose or separated from it. Even where the poems are integrated with the text, there is little agreement on their order from one manuscript to the next. The poems identify their speaker as personified wisdom and contain prophecies that are sometimes relevant to the tale. The tale, on the other hand, describes how wisdom was acquired by the archetypal poet and how he established his supremacy over all other poets.

The Tale of Gwion Bach

In the days when Arthur began to rule, there was a nobleman living in the land now called Penllyn. His name was Tegid Foel, and his patrimony—according to the story—was the body of water that is known today as Llyn Tegid.

And the story says that he had a wife, and that she was named Ceridwen. She was a magician, says the text, and learned in the three arts: magic, enchantment, and divination. The text also says that Tegid and Ceridwen had a son whose looks, shape and carriage were extraordinarily odious. They named him Morfran, "Great-crow," but in the end they called him Afagddu, "Utter darkness," on account of his gloomy appearance. Because of his wretched looks his mother grew very sad in her heart, for she saw clearly that there was neither manner nor means for her son to win acceptance amongst the nobility unless he possessed qualities different from his looks. And so to encompass this matter, she turned her thoughts to the contemplation of her arts to see how best she could make him full of the spirit of prophecy and a great prognosticator of the world to come.

After laboring long in her arts, she discovered that there was a way of achieving such knowledge by the special properties of the earth's herbs and by human effort and cunning. This was the method: choose and gather certain kinds of the earth's herbs on certain days and hours, put them all in a cauldron of water, and set the cauldron on the fire. It had to be kindled continually in order to boil the cauldron day and night for a year and a day. In that time, she would see ultimately that three drops containing all the virtues of the multitude of herbs would spring forth; on whatever man those three drops fell, she would see that he would be extraordinarily learned in various arts and full of the spirit of prophecy. Furthermore, she would see that all the juice of those herbs except the three aforementioned drops would be as powerful a poison as there could be in the world, and that it would shatter the cauldron and spill the poison across the land.

(Indeed, this tale is illogical and contrary to faith and piety; but as before:) the text of the story shows clearly that she collected great numbers of the earth's herbs, that she put them into a cauldron of water, and put it on the fire. The story says that she engaged an old blind man to stir the cauldron and tend it, but it says nothing of his name any more than it says who the author of this tale was. However, it does name the lad who was leading this man: Gwion Bach, whom Ceridwen set to stoke the fire under the cauldron. In this way, each kept to his own job, kindling the fire, tending the cauldron, and stirring it, with Ceridwen keeping it full of water and herbs till the end of a year and a day. At that time Ceridwen took hold of Morfran, her son, and stationed him close to the cauldron to receive the drops when their hour to spring forth from the pot arrived. Then Ceridwen set her haunches down to rest.

She was asleep at the moment the three marvellous drops sprung from the cauldron, and they fell upon Gwion Bach, who had shoved Morfran out of the way. Thereupon the cauldron uttered a cry and, from the strength of the poison, shattered. Then Ceridwen woke from her sleep, like one crazed, and saw Gwion. He was filled with wisdom, and could perceive that her mood was so poisonous that she would utterly destroy him as soon as she discovered how he had deprived her son of the marvellous drops. So he took to his heels and fled. But as soon as Ceridwen recovered from her madness, she examined her son, who told her the full

account of how Gwion drove him away from where she had stationed him.

She rushed out of the house in a frenzy in pursuit of Gwion Bach, and the story says that she saw him fleeing swiftly in the form of a hare. She turned herself into a black greyhound and pursued him from one place to another. Finally, after a long pursuit in various shapes, she pressed him so hard that he was forced to flee into a barn where there was a great pile of winnowed wheat. There he turned himself into one of the grains; what Ceridwen did then was to change herself into a tufted black hen, and the story says that in this form she swallowed Gwion into her belly.

She carried him there for nine months, at which time she got deliverance of him. But when she gazed upon him after he had come into the world, she could not in her heart do him any physical harm herself, nor could she bear to see anyone else do it. In the end she had the prince put into a coracle or hide-covered basket, which she had fitted snugly all around him; then she caused it to be cast into the lake—according to some books, but some say he was put into a river, others that she had him put into the sea—where he was found a long time afterwards, as the present work will show when the time comes.

[Here follows a religious poem (*Odl Ddwyfol*) attributed to Taliesin; 23 stanzas beginning '*Gwae . . .* ', followed by 5 beginning '*man . . .*' and a final stanza.]

The Tale of Taliesin

In the days when Maelgwn Gwynedd was holding court in Castell Deganwy, there was a holy man named Cybi living in Môn. Also in that time there lived a wealthy squire near Caer Deganwy, and the story says he was called Gwyddno Garanhir (he was a lord). The text says that he had a weir on the shore of the Conway adjacent to the sea, in which was caught as much as ten pounds worth of salmon every eve of All Hallows. The tale also

says that Gwyddno had a son called Elphin son of Gwyddno, who was in service in the court of King Maelgwn. The text says that he was a noble and generous man, much loved among his companions, but that he was an incorrigible spendthrift—as are the majority of courtiers. As long as Gwyddno's wealth lasted, Elphin did not lack for money to spend among his friends. But as Gwyddno's riches began to dwindle, he stopped lavishing money on his son. The latter regretfully informed his friends that he was no longer able to maintain a social life and keep company with them in the manner he had been accustomed to in the past, because his father had fallen on hard times. But as before, he asked some of the men of the court to request the fish from the weir as a gift to him on the next All Hallow's eve; they did that and Gwyddno granted their petition.

And so when the day and the time arrived, Elphin took some servants with him, and came to set up and watch the weir, which he tended from high tide until the ebb.

When Elphin and his people came within the arms of the weir, they saw there neither head nor tail of a single young salmon; its sides were usually full of such on that night. But the story says that on this occasion he saw nothing but some dark hulk within the enclosure. On account of that, he lowered his head and began to protest his ill-fortune, saying as he turned homeward that his misery and misfortune were greater than those of any man in the world. Then it occurred to him to turn around and see what the thing in the weir was. Immediately, he found a coracle or hide-covered basket, wrapped from above as well as from below. Without delay, he took his knife and cut a slit in the hide, revealing a human forehead.

As soon as Elphin saw the forehead, he said, "behold the radiant forehead (i.e., *tal iesin*)!" To those words the child replied from the coracle, "Tal-iesin he is!" People suppose that this was the spirit of Gwion Bach, who had been in the womb of Ceridwen; after she was delivered of him, she had cast him into fresh water or into the sea, as the present work shows above. He had been in the pouch, floating about in the sea, from the beginning of Arthur's time until about the beginning of Maelgwn's time—and that was approximately forty years.

Indeed, this is far from reason and sense. But as before, I will

keep to the story, which says that Elphin took the bundle and placed it in a basket upon one of the horses. Thereupon, Taliesin sang the stanzas known as *Dehuddiant Elphin,* or, "Elphin's Consolation," saying as follows:

Fair Elphin, cease your weeping!
Despair brings no profit.
No catch in Gwyddno's weir
Was ever as good as tonight's.
Let no one revile what is his.
Man sees not what nurtures him;
Gwyddno's prayers shall not be in vain.
God breaks not his promises.

Fair Elphin, dry your cheeks!
It does not become you to be sad.
Though you think you got no gain
Undue grief will bring you nothing—
Nor will doubting the miracles of the Lord.
Though I am small, I am gifted.
From the sea and the mountain, from rivers' depths
God sends bounty to the blessed.

Elphin of the cheerful disposition—
Meek is your mind—
You must not lament so heavily.
Better God than gloomy foreboding.
Though I am frail and little
And wet with the spume of Dylan's sea,
I shall earn in a day of contention
Riches better than three score for you.

Elphin of the remarkable qualities.
Grieve not for your catch.
Though I am frail here in my bunting,
There are wonders on my tongue.
You must not fear greatly
While I am watching over you.
By remembering the name of the Trinity
None can overcome you.

Together with various other stanzas which he sang to cheer Elphin along the path from there toward home, where Elphin turned over his catch to his wife. She raised him lovingly and dearly.

From that moment on, Elphin's wealth increased more and more each succeeding day, as well as his favor and acceptance with the king. Some while after this, at the feast of Christmas, the king was holding open court at Deganwy Castle, and all his lords—both spiritual and temporal—were there, with a multitude of knights and squires. Their conversation grew, as they queried one another, saying:

"Is there in the entire world a man as powerful as Maelgwn? Or one to whom the heavenly father has given as many spiritual gifts as God has given him: beauty, shape, nobility, and strength, besides all the powers of the soul?" And with these gifts, they proclaimed that the Father had given him an excellent gift, one that surpassed all of the others, namely, the beauty, appearance, demeanor, wisdom, and faithfulness of his queen. In these virtues, she excelled all the ladies and daughters of the nobility in the entire land. Beside that, they asked themselves: "whose men are more valiant? Whose horses and hounds are swifter and fairer? Whose bards more proficient and wiser than Maelgwn's?"

At that time poets were received with great esteem among the eminent ones of the realm. And in those days, none of whom we now call "heralds" were appointed to that office, unless they were learned men, and not only in the proper service of kings and princes, but steeped and skilled in pedigrees, arms, the deeds of kings and princes of foreign kingdoms as well as the ancestors of this kingdom, especially in the history of the chief nobility. Furthermore, each of these bards had to have their responses readily prepared in various languages, such as Latin, French, Welsh, and English, and in addition, be a great historian and good chronicler, be skilled in the composition of poetry and ready to compose metrical stanzas in each of these languages. On this feast, there was in the court of Maelgwn no less than twenty-four of these; chief among them was the one called Heinin Fardd the Poet.

And so after everyone had spoken in praise of the king and his blessings, Elphin happened to say this: "Indeed, no one can

compete with a king except another king; but, truly, were he not a king, I would surely say that I had a wife as chaste as any lady in the kingdom. Furthermore, I have a bard who is more proficient than all the king's bards."

Some time later, the king's companions told him the extent of Elphin's boast, and the king commanded that he be put into a secure prison until he could get confirmation of his wife's chastity and his poet's knowledge. And after putting Elphin in one of the castle towers with a heavy chain on his feet (some people say that it was a silver chain that was put upon him, because he was of the king's blood), the story says that the king sent his son Rhun to test the continence of Elphin's wife. It says that Rhun was one of the lustiest men in the world, and that neither woman nor maiden with whom he had spent a diverting moment came away with her reputation intact.

As Rhun was hastening toward Elphin's residence, fully intending to despoil Elphin's wife, Taliesin was explaining to her how the king had thrown his master into prison and how Rhun was hurrying there with the intention of corrupting her virtue. Because of that he had his mistress dress one of the scullery maids in her own garb. The lady did this cheerfully and unstintingly, adorning the maid's fingers with the finest rings that she and her husband possessed. In this guise, Taliesin had his mistress seat the girl in her own chamber to sup at her own table and in her own place; Taliesin had made the girl look like his mistress, his mistress like the girl.

As they sat most handsomely at their supper in the manner described above, Rhun appeared suddenly at the court of Elphin. He was received cheerfully, for all the servants knew him well. They escorted him without delay to their mistress's chamber. The girl disguised as the mistress rose from her supper and greeted him pleasantly, then sat back down to her meal, and Rhun with her. He began to beguile the girl with seductive talk, while she preserved the mien of her mistress.

The story says that the maiden got so inebriated that she fell asleep. It says that Rhun had put a powder in her drink that made her sleep so heavily—if the tale can be believed—that she didn't even feel him cutting off her little finger, around which was Elphin's signet ring that he had sent to his wife as a token a short

time before. In this way he did his will with the maiden, and afterwards, he took the finger—with the ring on it—to the king as proof. He told him that he had violated her chastity, explaining how he had cut off her finger as he left, without her awakening.

The king took great delight in this news, and, because of it, summoned his council, to whom he explained the whole affair from one end to the other. Then he had Elphin brought from the prison to taunt him for his boast, and said to him as follows:

"It should be clear to you, Elphin, and beyond doubt, that it is nothing but foolishness for any man in the world to trust his wife in the matter of chastity any farther than he can see her. And so that you may harbor no doubts that your wife broke her marriage vows last night, here is her finger as evidence for you, with your own signet ring on it; the one who lay with her cut it off her hand while she slept. So that there is no way that you can argue that she did not violate her fidelity."

To this Elphin replied, "with your permission, honorable king, indeed, there is no way I can deny my ring, for a number of people know it. But, indeed, I do deny vehemently that the finger encircled by my ring was ever on my wife's hand, for one sees there three peculiar things not one of which ever characterized a single finger of my wife's hands. The first of these is that—with your grace's permission—wherever my wife is at this moment, whether she is sitting, standing, or lying down, this ring will not even fit her thumb! And you can easily see that it was difficult to force the ring over the knuckle of the little finger of the hand from which it was cut. The second thing is that my wife has never gone a single Saturday since I have known her without paring her nails before going to bed. And you can see clearly that the nail of this finger has not been cut for a month. And the third thing, indeed, is that the hand from which this finger was cut kneaded rye dough within the past three days, and I assure you, your graciousness, that my wife has not kneaded rye dough since she became my wife."

The story says that the king became more outraged at Elphin for standing so firmly against him in the matter of his wife's fidelity. As a result, the king ordered him to be imprisoned again, saying that he would not gain release from there until he proved true his boast about the wisdom of his bard as well as about the fidelity of his wife.

Those two, meanwhile, were in Elphin's palace, taking their ease. Then Taliesin related to his mistress how Elphin was in prison on account of them. But he exhorted her to be of good cheer, explaining to her how he would go to the court of Maelgwn to free his master. She asked him how he could set his master free and he replied as follows:

I shall set out on foot,
Come to the gate,
And make for the hall.
I shall sing my song
And proclaim my verse,
And the lord's bards I shall inhibit:
Before the chief one
I shall make demands,
And I shall overcome them.

And when the contention comes
In the presence of the chieftains,
And a summons to the minstrels
For precise and harmonious songs
In the court of the scions of nobles
Companion to Gwion,
There are some who assumed the appearance
Of anguish and great pains.

They shall fall silent by rough words,
If it grows ever worse, like Arthur, Chief of givers,
With his blades long and red
From the blood of nobles;
The king's battle against his enemies,
Whose gentles' blood flows
From the battle of the woods in the distant North.

May there be neither blessing nor beauty
On Maelgwn Gwynedd,
But let the wrong be avenged–
And the violence and the arrogance–finally,
For the act of Rhun his offspring:
Let his lands be desolate,
Let his life be short,
Let the punishment last long
on Maelgwn Gwynedd.

And after that he took leave of his mistress, and came at last to the court of Maelgwn Gwynedd. The latter, in his royal dignity, was going to sit in his hall at supper, as kings and princes were accustomed to do on every high feast in those days.

And as soon as Taliesin came into the hall, he saw a place for himself to sit in an inconspicuous corner, beside the place where the poets and minstrels had to pass to pay their respects and duty to the king–as is still customary in proclaiming largess in the courts on high holidays, except that they are proclaimed now in French. And so the time came for the bards or the heralds to come and proclaim the *largesse*, power, and might of the king. They came past the spot where Taliesin sat hunched over in the corner, and as they went by, he puckered his lips and with his finger made a sound like *blerum blerum*. Those going past paid no attention to him, but continued on until they stood before the king. They performed their customary curtsy as they were obliged to do; not a single word came from their mouths, but they puckered up, made faces at the king, and made the *blerum blerum* sound on their lips with their fingers as they had seen the lad do it earlier. The sight astonished the king, and he wondered to himself whether they had had too much to drink. So he ordered one of the lords who was administering to his table to go to them and ask them to summon their wits and reflect upon where they were standing and what they were obliged to do. The lord complied.

But they did not stop their nonsense directly, so he sent to them again, and a third time, ordering them to leave the hall; finally, the king asked one of the squires to clout their chief, the one called Heinin Fardd. The squire seized a platter and struck him over the head with it until he fell back on his rump. From that spot, he rose up onto his knees whence he begged the king's mercy and leave to show him that it was neither of the two failings on them–neither lack of intelligence nor drunkenness–but due to some spirit that was inside the hall. And then Heinin said as follows: "O glorious king! Let it be known to your grace, that it is not from the pickling effect of a surfeit of spirits that we stand here dumb, unable to speak properly, like drunkards, but because of a spirit, who sits in the corner yonder, in the guise of a little man."

Whereupon, the king ordered a squire to fetch him. He went to the corner where Taliesin sat, and brought him thence before the king, who asked him what sort of thing he was and whence he

came. He answered the king in verse, and spoke as follows:

Official chief-poet
to Elphin am I,
And my native abode
is the land of the Cherubim.

Then the king asked him what he was called, and he answered him saying this:

Johannes the prophet
called me Merlin,
But now all kings
call me Taliesin.

Then the king asked him where he had been, and thereupon he recited his history to the king, as follows here in this work:

I was with my lord
in the heavens
When Lucifer fell
into the depths of hell;
I carried a banner
before Alexander;
I know the stars' names
from the North to the South
I was in the fort of Gwydion,
in the Tetragramaton;
I was in the canon
when Absalon was killed;
I brought seed down
to the vale of Hebron;
I was in the court of Dôn
before the birth of Gwydion;
I was patriarch
to Elijah and Enoch;
I was head keeper
on the work of Nimrod's tower;
I was atop the cross
of the merciful son of God;
I was three times
in the prison of Arianrhod;

I was in the ark
with Noah and Alpha;
I witnessed the destruction
of Sodom and Gomorrah;
I was in Africa
before the building of Rome;
I came here
to the survivors of Troy.

And I was with my lord
in the manger of oxen and asses;
I upheld Moses
through the water of Jordan;
I was in the sky
with Mary Magdalen;
I got poetic inspiration
from the cauldron of Ceridwen;
I was poet-harper
to Lleon Llychlyn;
I was in Gwynfryn
in the court of Cynfelyn;
In stock and fetters
a day and a year.

I was revealed
in the land of the Trinity;
And I was moved
through the entire universe;
And I shall remain till doomsday,
upon the face of the earth.
And no one knows what my flesh is—
whether meat or fish.

And I was nearly nine months
in the womb of the witch Ceridwen;
I was formerly Gwion Bach,
but now I am Taliesin.

And the story says that this song amazed the king and his court greatly. Then he sang a song to explain to the king and his people why he had come there and what he was attempting to do, as the following poem sets forth.

Provincial bards! I am contending!
To refrain I am unable.
I shall proclaim in prophetic song
To those that will listen.
And I seek that loss
That I suffer:
Elphin, from the punishment
Of Caer Deganwy.

And from him, my lord will pull
The binding chain.
The Chair of Caer Deganwy—
Mighty is my pride—
Three hundred songs and more
Are the songs I shall sing;
No bard that knows them not
Shall merit spear
Nor stone nor ring,
Nor remain about me.

Elphin son of Gwyddno
Suffers torment now,
'Neath thirteen locks
For praising his master-bard.

And I am Taliesin,
Chief-poet of the West,
And I shall release Elphin
From the gilded fetters.

After this, as the text shows, he sang a song of succour, and they say that instantly a tempestuous wind arose, until the king and his people felt that the castle would fall upon them. Because of that, the king had Elphin fetched from prison in a hurry, and brought to the side of Taliesin. He is said to have sung a song at that moment that resulted in the opening of the fetters from around his feet—indeed, in my opinion, it is very difficult for anyone to believe that this tale is true. But I will continue the story with as many of the poems by him as I have seen written down.

Following this, he sang the verses called "Interrogation of the Bards," which follows herewith.

What being first
Made Alpha?
What is the fairest refined language
Designed by the Lord?

What food? What drink?
Whose raiment prudent?
Who endured rejection
From a deceitful land?

Why is a stone hard?
Why is a thorn sharp?
Who is hard as a stone,
And as salty as salt?

Why is the nose like a ridge?
Why is the wheel round?
Why does the tongue articulate
More than any one organ?

Then he sang a series of verses called "The Rebuke of the Bards," and it begins like this:

If you are a fierce bard
Of spirited poetic-inspiration,
Be not testy
In your king's court,
Unless you know the name for *rimin,*
And the name for *ramin,*
And the name for *rimiad,*
And the name for *ramiad,*
And the name of your forefather
Before his baptism.

And the name of the firmament,
And the name of the element,
And the name of your language,
And the name of your district.

Company of poets above,
Company of poets below;
My darling is below

'Neath the fetters of Aranrhod.
You certainly do not know
The meaning of what my lips sing,
Nor the true distinction
Between the true and the false.
Bards of limited horizons,
Why do you not flee?
The bard who cannot shut me up
Shall have no quiet
Till he come to rest
Beneath a gravelly grave.
And those who listen to me,
Let God listen to them.

And after this follows the verses called "The Satire on the Bards."

Minstrels of malfeasance make
Impious lyrics; in their praise
They sing vain and evanescent song,
Ever exercising lies.
They mock guileless men
They corrupt married women,
They despoil Mary's chaste maidens.
Their lives and times they waste in vain,
They scorn the frail and the guileless,
They drink by night, sleep by day,
Idly, lazily, making their way.
They despise the Church
Lurch toward the taverns;
In harmony with thieves and lechers,
They seek out courts and feasts,
Extol every idiotic utterance,
Praise every deadly sin.
They lead every manner of base life,
Roam every village, town, and land.
The distresses of death concern them not,
Never do they give lodging or alms.
Excessive food they consume.
They rehearse neither the psalms nor prayer,
Pay neither tithes nor offerings to God,
Worship not on Holy Days nor the Lord's day,
Fast on neither Holy Days nor ember days.
Birds fly,

Fish swim,
Bees gather honey,
Vermin crawl;
Everything bustles
To earn its keep
Except minstrels and thieves, the lazy and worthless.

I do not revile your minstrelsy,
For God gave that to ward off evil blasphemy;
But he who practices it in perfidy
Reviles Jesus and his worship.

After Taliesin had freed his master from prison, verified the chastity of his mistress, and silenced the bards so that none of them dared say a single word, he asked Elphin to wager the king that he had a horse faster and swifter than all the king's horses. Elphin did that.

On the day, time, and place determined—the place known today as Morfa Rhianedd—the king arrived with his people and twenty-four of the swiftest horses he owned. Then, after a long while, the course was set, and a place for the horses to run. Taliesin came there with twenty-four sticks of holly, burnt black. He had the lad who was riding his master's horse put them under his belt, instructing him to let all the king's horses go ahead of him, and as he caught up with each of them in turn, to take one of the rods and whip the horse across his rump, and then throw it to the ground. Then take another rod and do in the same manner to each of the horses as he overtook them. And he instructed the rider to observe carefully the spot where his horse finished, and throw down his cap on that spot.

The lad accomplished all of this, both the whipping of each of the king's horses as well as throwing down his cap in the place where the horse finished. Taliesin brought his master there after his horse won the race, and he and Elphin set men to work to dig a hole. When they had dug the earth to a certain depth, they found a huge cauldron of gold, and therewith Taliesin said, "Elphin, here is payment and reward for you for having brought me from the weir and raising me from that day to this." In that very place there stands a pool of water, which from that day to this is called "Cauldon's Pool."

After that, the king had Taliesin brought before him, and asked for information concerning the origin of the human race. Forthwith, he sang the verses that follow here below, and that are known today as one of the four pillars of song. They begin as follows:

Here begin the prophecies of Taliesin.

The Lord made
In the midst of Glen Hebron
With his blessed hands,
I know, the shape of Adam.

He made the beautiful;
In the court of paradise,
From a rib, he put together
Fair woman.

Seven hours they
Tended the Orchard
Before Satan's strife,
Most insistent suitor.

Thence they were driven
Through cold and chill
To lead their lives
In this world.

To bear in affliction
Sons and daughters,
To get tribute
From the land of Asia.

One hundred and eight
Was she fertile,
Bearing a mixed brood,
Masculine and feminine.

And then, openly,
When she bore Abel
And Cain, unconcealable,
Most unredeemable.

To Adam and his mate
Was given a digging shovel
To break the earth
To gain bread.

And shining white wheat
To sow, the instrument
To feed all men
Until the great feast.

Angels sent
From God Almighty
Brought the seed of growth
To Eve.

She hid
A tenth of the gift
So that not all did
The whole garden enclose.

But black rye was had
In place of the fine wheat,
Showing the evil
For stealing.

Because of that treacherous turn,
It is necessary, says Sattwrn,
For each to give his tithe
To God first.

From crimson red wine
Planted on a sunny day,
And the moon's night prevails
Over white wine.

From wheat of true privilege,
From red wine generous and privileged.
Is made the finely molded body
Of Christ son of Alpha.

From the wafer is the flesh.
From the wine is the flow of blood.

And the words of the Trinity
Consecrated him.

Every sort of mystical book
Of Emmanuel's work
Rafael brought
To give to Adam.

When he was in ferment,
Above his two jaws
Within the Jordan river
Fasting.

Moses found,
To guard against great need,
The secret of the three
Most famous rods.

Samson got
Within the tower of Babylon
All the magical arts
Of Asia land.

I got, indeed,
In my bardic song,
All the magical arts
Of Europe and Africa.

And I know whence she emanates
And her home and her hospitality,
Her fate and her destiny
Till Doomsday.

Alas, God, how wretched,
Through excessive plaint,
Comes the prophecy
To the race of Troy.

A coiled serpent,
Proud and merciless,
With golden wings
Out of Germany.

It shall conquer
England and Scotland,
From the shore of the Scandinavian Sea
To the Severn.

Then shall the Britons be
Like prisoners,
With status of aliens,
To the Saxons.

Their lord they shall praise.
Their language preserve,
And their land they will lose—
Save wild Wales.

Until comes a certain period
After long servitude,
When shall be of equal duration
The two proud ones.

Then will the Britons gain
Their land and their crown,
And the foreigners
Will disappear.

And the words of the angels
On peace and war
Will be true
Concerning Britain.

And after this he proclaimed to the king various prophecies in verse, concerning the world that would come hereafter.