

Arany János:

THE BARDS OF WALES

Edward the king, the English king,  
Bestrides his tawny steed,  
"For I will see if Wales," said he,  
"Accepts my rule indeed.

"Are stream and mountain fair to see?  
Are meadow grasses good?  
Do corn-lands bear a crop more rare  
Since wash'd with rebel's blood?

"And are the wretched people there,  
Whose insolence I broke  
As happy as the oxen are  
Beneath the driver's yoke?

"In truth this Wales, Sire, is a gem,  
The fairest in your crown:  
The stream and field rich harvest yield,  
And fair and dale and down.

"And all the wretched people there  
Are calm as man could crave;  
Their hovels stand throughout the land  
As silent as the grave."

Edward the king, the English King  
Bestrides his tawni steed;  
A silence deep his subjects keep  
And Wales is mute indeed.

The castle named Montgomery  
Ends that day's journeying;  
The castle's lord, Montgomery,  
Must entertain the king.

Then game and fish and ev'ry dish  
That lures the taste and sight  
A hundred hurrying servants bear  
To please the appetite.

With all of worth the isle brings forth  
In dainty drink and food,  
And all the wines of foreign vines  
Beyond the distant flood.

"You lords, you lords, will none consent  
His glass with mine to ring?  
What? Each one fails, you dogs of Wales,  
To toast the English king?

"Though game and fish and ev'ry dish  
That lures the taste and sight  
Your hand supplies, your mood defies

My person with a slight.

"You rascal lords, you dogs of Wales,  
Will none for Edward cheer?  
To serve my needs and chant my deeds  
Then let a bard appear!"

The nobles gaze in fierce amaze,  
Their cheeks grow deadly pale;  
Not fear but rage their looks engage,  
They blanch but do not quail.

All voices cease in soundless peace,  
All breathe in silent pain;  
Then at the door a harper hoar  
Comes in with grave disdain:

"Lo, here I stand, at your command,  
To chant your deeds, O king!"  
And weapons clash and hauberks crash  
Responsive to his string.

"Harsh weapons clash and hauberks crash,  
And sunset sees us bleed,  
The crow and wolf our dead engulf -  
This, Edward, is your deed!

"A thousand lie beneath the sky,  
They rot beneath the sun,  
And we who live shall not forgive  
This deed your hand hath done!"

"Now let him perish! I must have"  
(The monarch's voice is hard)  
"Your softest songs, and not your wrongs!"  
In steps a boyish bard:

"The breeze is soft at eve, that oft  
From Milford Havens moans;  
It whispers maidens' stifled cries,  
It breathes of widows' groans.

"You maidens, bear no captive babes!  
You mothers, rear them not!"  
The fierce king nods. The lad is seiz'd  
And hurried from the spot.

Unbidden then, among the men,  
There comes a dauntless third  
With speech of fire he tunes his lyre,  
And bitter is his word:

"Our bravest died to slake your pride -  
Proud Edward, hear my lays!  
No Welsh bards live who e'er will give  
Your name a song a praise.

"Our harps with dead men's memories weep.  
Welsh bards to you will sing  
One changeless verse - our blackest curse  
To blast your soul, O king!"

"No more! Enough!" - cries out the king.  
In rage his orders break:  
"Seek through these vales all bards of Wales  
And burn them at the stake!"

His men ride forth to south and north,  
They ride to west and east.  
Thus ends in grim Montgomery  
The celebrated feast.

Edward the king, the English king  
Spurs on his tawny steed;  
Across the skies red flames arise  
As if Wales burned indeed.

In martyrship, with song on lip,  
Five hundred Welsh bards died;  
Not one was mov'd to say he lov'd  
The tyrant in his pride.

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"'Ods blood! What songs this night resound  
Upon our London streets?  
The mayor shall feel my irate heel  
If aught that sound repeats!

Each voice is hush'd; through silent lanes  
To silent homes they creep.  
"Now dies the hound that makes a sound;  
The sick king cannot sleep."

"Ha! Bring me fife and drum and horn,  
And let the trumpet blare!  
In ceaseless hum their curses come -  
I see their dead eyes glare..."

But high above all drum and fife  
and trumpets' shrill debate,  
Five hundred martyr'd voices chant  
Their hymn of deathless hate.

(Transl. by Watson Kirkconnel)