

The Golden Harp

MORGAN is one of the oldest names in Cymric land. It means one who lives near the sea.

Every day, for centuries past, tens of thousands of Welsh folks have looked out on the great blue plain of salt water.

It is just as true, also, that there are all sorts of Morgans. One of these named Taffy, was like nearly all Welshmen, in that he was very fond of singing.

The trouble in his case, however, was that no one but himself loved to hear his voice, which was very disagreeable. Yet of the sounds which he himself made with voice or instrument, he was an intense admirer. Nobody could persuade him that his music was poor and his voice rough. He always refused to improve.

Now in Wales, the bard, or poet, who makes up his poetry or song as he goes along, is a very important person, and it is not well to offend one of these gentlemen. In French, they call such a person by a very long name—the improvisator.

These poets have sharp tongues and often say hard things about people whom they do not like. If they used whetstones, or stropped their tongues on leather, as men do their razors, to give them a keener edge, their words could not cut more terribly.

Now, on one occasion, Morgan had offended one of these bards. It was while the poetic gentleman was passing by Taffy's house. He heard the jolly fellow inside singing, first at the top and then at the bottom of the scale. He would drop his voice down on the low notes and then again rise to the highest until it ended in a screech.

Someone on the street asked the poet how he liked the music which he had heard inside.

"Music?" replied the bard with a sneer. "Is that what Morgan is trying? Why! I thought it was first the lowing of an aged cow, and then the yelping of a blind dog, unable to find its way. Do you call that music?"

The truth was that when the soloist had so filled himself with strong ale that his brain was fuddled, then it was hard to tell just what kind of a noise he was making. It took a wise man to discover the tune, if there was any.

One evening, when Morgan thought his singing unusually fine, and felt sorry that no one heard him, he heard a knock.

Instead of going to the door to inquire, or welcome the visitor, he yelled out "Come in!"

"The door opened and there stood three tired looking strangers. They appeared to be travelers. One of them said: "Kind sir, we are weary and worn, and would be glad of a morsel of bread. If you can give us a little food, we shall not trouble you further."

"Is that all?" said Morgan. "See there the loaf and the cheese, with a knife beside them. Take what you want, and fill your bags. No man shall ever say that Taffy Morgan denied anyone food, when he had any himself."

Whereupon the three travelers sat down and began to eat.

Meanwhile, without being invited to do so, their host began to sing for them. Now the three travelers were fairies in disguise. They were journeying over the country, from cottage to cottage, visiting the people. They came to reward all who gave them a welcome and were kind to them, but to vex and play tricks upon those who were



THE MORE MORGAN
PLAYED, - THE MADDER,
THE DANCE ~ ~ ~



stingy, bad tempered, or of sour disposition. Turning to Taffy before taking leave, one of them said:

"You have been good to us and we are grateful. Now what can we do for you? We have power to grant anything you may desire. Please tell us what you would like most."

At this, Taffy looked hard in the faces of the three strangers, to see if one of them was the bard who had likened his voice in its ups and downs to a cow and a blind dog. Not seeing any familiar face, he plucked up his courage, and said:

"If you are not making fun of me, I'll take from you a harp. And, if I can have my wish in full, I want one that will play only lively tunes. No sad music for me!"

Here Morgan stopped. Again he searched their faces, to see if they were laughing at him and then proceeded.

"And something else, if I can have it; but it's really the same thing I am asking for."

"Speak on, we are ready to do what you wish," answered the leader.

"I want a harp, which, no matter how badly I may play, will sound out sweet and jolly music."

"Say no more," said the leader, who waved his hand. There was a flood of light, and, to Morgan's amazement, there stood on the floor a golden harp.

But where were the three travelers? They had disappeared in a flash.

Hardly able to believe his own eyes, it now dawned upon him that his visitors were fairies.

He sat down, back of the harp, and made ready to sweep the strings. He hardly knew whether or not he touched the instrument, but there rolled out volumes of lively music, as if the harp itself were mad. The tune was wild and such as would set the feet of young folks a going, even in church.

As Taffy's fingers seemed every moment to become more skillful, the livelier the music increased, until the very dishes rattled on the cupboard, as if they wanted to join in. Even the chair looked as if about to dance.

Just then, Morgan's wife and some neighbors entered the house. Immediately, the whole party, one and all, began dancing in the jolliest way. For hours, they kept up the mad whirl. Yet all the while, Taffy seemed happier and the women the merrier.

No telegraph ever carried the news faster, all over the region, that Morgan had a wonderful harp.

All the grass in front of the house, was soon worn away by the crowds, that came to hear and dance. As soon as Taffy touched the harp strings, the feet of everyone, young and old, began shuffling, nor could anyone stop, so long as Morgan played. Even very old, lame and one-legged people joined in. Several old women, whom nobody had ever prevailed upon to get out of their chairs, were cured of their rheumatism. Such unusual exercise was severe for them, but it seemed to be healthful.

A shrewd monk, the business manager of the monastery near by, wanted to buy Morgan's house, set up a sanatorium and advertise it as a holyplace. He hoped thus to draw pilgrims to it and get for it a great reputation as a healing place for the lame and the halt, the palsied and the rheumatic. Thus the monastery would be enriched and all the monks get fat.

But Taffy was a happy-go-lucky fellow, who cared little about would not sell; for, with his harp, he enjoyed both fun and fame.

One day, in the crowd that stood around his door waiting to begin to hop and whirl, Morgan espied the bard who had compared his voice to a cow and a cur. The bard had come to see whether the stories about the harp were true or not.

He found to his own discomfort what was the fact and the reality, which were not very convenient for him. As soon as the harp music began, his feet began to go up, and his legs to kick and whirl. The more Morgan played, the madder the dance and the wilder the antics of the crowd, and in these the bard had to join, for he could not help himself. Soon they all began to spin round and round on the flagstones fronting the door, as if crazy. They broke the paling of the garden fence. They came into the house and knocked over the chairs and sofa, even when they cracked their shins against the wood. They bumped their heads against the walls and ceiling, and some even scrambled over the roof and down again. The bard could no more stop his weary legs than could the other lunatics.

To Morgan his revenge was so sweet, that he kept on until the bard's legs snapped, and he fell down on top of people that had tumbled from sheer weariness, because no more strength was left in them.

Meanwhile, Morgan laughed until his jaws were tired and his stomach muscles ached.

But no sooner did he take his fingers off the strings, to rest them, than he opened his eyes in wonder; for in a flash the harp had disappeared.

He had made a bad use of the fairies' gift, and they were displeased. So both the monk and Morgan felt sorry.

Yet the grass grew again when the quondam harper and singer ceased desolating the air with his quavers. The air seemed sweeter to breathe, because of the silence.

However, the fairies kept on doing good to the people of good will, and to-day some of the sweetest singers in Wales come from the poorest homes.