

Pastor and People.

GOLDEN GRAIN BIBLE READING.

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"DOUBTLESS."

- (I.) The "DOUBTLESS" of Divine assurance, in which God speaks.
Numbers 14. 30.—A brazen bar in the way.
2 Sam. 5. 19.—A strong encouragement.
Psalm 126. 6.—A gracious assurance.
- (II.) The "DOUBTLESS" of human confidence, in which man speaks.
Isai. 63. 16.—As to Divine relationship.
1 Cor. 9. 2.—As to Divine ambassadorship.
2 Cor. 12. 1.—As to gracious humility.
Phil. 3. 8.—As to self-denial.

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THE CHILDREN'S PULPIT.

EDITED BY M. H. C.

It was a babe, but not an infant, that Elfin placed before him on his horse, as he rode to the castle. "What have you there?" asked King Gwyddno. "It is a wonderful child," answered the prince. "Whether of mortal birth or no, I know not, but he is my Taliesin." Then the child began to sing, and, in his song, told that he was the son of King Tegid and Queen Ceridwen. Many more songs he knew, about the sea and the land, about the heaven, and the Great God over all, till wonder fell over all the people of the castle. Of King Tegid and Queen Ceridwen they knew nothing, and, herefore, thought they must have been rulers over some far-away land, where people spoke the Welsh tongue, perhaps over Brittany in Gaul. Men said to Prince Elfin, "You are poor; why do you burden yourself with the care of the child? He is born a bard, and will never be able to serve you as a warrior or even as a fisherman. His coracle has brought ill luck to the fishing wear." But the prince did not heed them. He kept the wonderful child, and took him with himself, whenever he went abroad on horse or foot. The fishing came speedily back again, even better than before, and Taliesin sang of the life of man that comes out of the water. When the boy was well grown, Elfin sent him to Cadog's college in Glamorganshire, far in the south, in the kingdom of Urien. There he gained great skill in playing the Welsh harp, and composed battle hymns that he sang before the king in person. In all the college there was no student whose touch was so fine, whose voice was so sweet and clear, whose compositions were so rhythmical, none who surpassed in manly beauty the bard of the radiant forehead.

While Taliesin was at Cadog's college, Prince Elfin came to Glamorgan to marry the Princess Angharad, the beautiful daughter of King Urien. The young bard was present at the marriage festivities, and composed a poem for the occasion which he sang and accompanied with his harp. Not long afterwards, old King Gwyddno died, and Elfin took his father's place. At once his mother's brother, Maelgwn, King of North Wales, summoned his nephew to surrender his kingdom and be his vassal. Elfin refused, so the men of Caernarvon and the rest of the north country marched down, a great army, upon Cardigan. The young king assembled his hardy fishermen, who fought bravely, but all in vain, against the fearful odds. Many were killed, many taken prisoners, and the rest found safety in flight, some even out upon the sea. Among the wounded prisoners was King Elfin, whose bride was left, with a few female attendants, and some old men past fighting age, in the castle. Maelgwn took all the property his people could carry away, and retired to his own kingdom. He made slaves of his prisoners, all except Elfin, whom he shut up in a dark dungeon in the tower of Deganwy. None but the cruel monarch and his chief officers knew where the young captive king of Cardigan was confined. Some of the slaves escaped and found their way back to Queen Angharad at the castle, but they could not tell her where her husband was, whether alive or dead. She sent a message to her father, King Urien, in the south, telling him all that had happened, and asking for help. Urien was grieved, but could do nothing. He was an old man, and had already been driven out of his first kingdom in Cumberland. Should he make any attempt to fight Maelgwn, that tyrant would call in the aid of his old enemies against him and his feeble people. So he begged to be allowed to end his days in peace.

Taliesin heard what had happened, and at once left Cadog's college. He put on all his finest attire, the dress, the cloak, the jeweled ornaments, he had received as prizes or as gifts from King Urien and his own royal master. He took his harp, and travelled away into the north. Princes and chiefs gladly received him, and rewarded him for his songs. Many gold chains were round his neck when he arrived in Cardigan, and found Queen Angharad mourning for her late consort. Taliesin, now a young man not far from twenty, knelt at his queen's feet, and, taking off his heavy chains of gold, laid them before her, as the first tribute of his gratitude. Then he promised the beautiful lady to search the world over, until he found him who had saved the child of the

coracle. The queen was not a little comforted, and bade God bless him for coming to her help in the time of her great distress. But she made him promise to let her know when he found out where her husband was, so that she also might take part in his deliverance. Taliesin journeyed on, accompanied by a young fisherman whom he could trust. As he went still northward, he visited every house of high degree, seeking for information, singing his poems, and receiving more chains and rich gifts, which he sent by his faithful attendant down to the queen. At last he arrived in the paternal domain of King Maelgwn, and was more diligent than ever in his enquiries and observations. Nobody had seen King Elfin since he had been brought a prisoner to Caernarvon, and many thought he had been put to death by Maelgwn and buried in some obscure spot. Taliesin met bards like himself, but poor bards, who had never been in Cadog's college, singing their doggerel verses in town and country. These he eagerly questioned, without avail. But, one afternoon, at a fair, he heard a harp twanging, and, going to the place where a half fool was singing to a group of rustics, he found that the man was telling the story of his own travels in company with a brother minstrel. In a Welsh triplet, he sang:

"At the hour of the sunset our journey began we,
Five leagues through the rain and the darkness then, ran we
To flee from the chain rattling ghost of Deganwy."

When the piece was over, Taliesin rewarded the fool with some links of gold broken from a heavy chain, and learned from him of the ghost who rattled his chains and cried aloud, "Hear me, ye wayfarers; I am King Elfin."

The young bard enquired his way to the place, and, after two days' walking, arrived at the solitary tower, round and built of rough masonry, near which stood two or three huts of wattles and mud, where the keeper and his friends probably lived. About as high as a man of ordinary size could reach there was a very narrow opening in the wall, large enough to allow a loaf of bread and a pitcher of water to enter, but that was all. There was no door or window in the tower, and no other visible opening. The prisoner must have been taken to the top by a ladder, that had then been carried far away, and been let down into the dungeon from the roof. It would take many men to carry a ladder long enough to reach the roof, and the tower was in a plain, where nothing appeared for miles round that could be used for such a purpose. Looking in a hollow of the ground, the bard saw the keeper leave one of the huts, with a loaf of coarse bread in one hand and a pitcher in the other. He stood on tiptoe, though a tall man, and put the two things in, shoving the bread through, so that it dropped upon the floor of the cell, and leaving the jug on the ledge. Then, without answering by a single word the voice of the prisoner, he hasted back to his hovel. Taliesin waited till it was dark and till everybody would be asleep. Then he approached the tower, and sat down under the mere slit in the wall. He touched his harp to arouse the attention of the prisoner, and when he heard a chain clank, began to sing:

"Elfin that gave me ale and mead,
With gold, and dress, and princely steed,
I'm with thee in thine hour of need."

A voice that he recognized, though hoarse and feeble, so replied:

"O Taliesin, more than son,
Of all my friends the only one
To seek a life that is undone."

How fares it with my queen and land?
How Urien dares to raise his hand,
The despot's power to withstand?"

Taliesin answered

"The queen fares well, the land is free,
King Urien dares not strike for thee.
Trust thou thy queen, and trust thou me."

Then he reached up and thrust in two chains of gold through the aperture, something to bribe the gaoler with; and, before his hand was withdrawn, the hand of King Elfin touched it. Taliesin put his lips to the place his master's hand had touched, and journeyed away into the darkness.

After two days he fell in with his fisher friend at their appointed place of meeting, but would not entrust him, faithful as he was, with the great secret. He made rapidly for Cardigan, having bought a horse so as to make better progress. Queen Angharad was ready to swoon with joy when she heard the news, and was eager to journey to Maelgwn's court, and beg for her husband's liberty. Taliesin, not knowing Maelgwn's nature very well, was full of hope, for the queen was very beautiful, and he could not think that anyone with the spirit of a man and a warrior could refuse the pleadings of her gentle voice and lovely tearful eyes. She dressed in her best and rode her palfrey, while the young bard followed on his beast, the fisherman astride another, carrying some articles for the queen's use, and Taliesin's harp as well. They stopped by the tower of Deganwy, the bard watching against interruption while the divided wife and husband conversed, and joined hands at the narrow opening. Then they pushed on for the court in the palace castle by the lake of Ceirionydd. It was well on in the afternoon when they arrived there, and found a great banquet in progress. The queen announced herself to the warder at the gate as the Princess Angharad, daughter of King Urien, and represented Taliesin as her bard. So Taliesin took the harp from the fisherman, and followed his royal mistress into the banqueting hall. King Maelgwn was in the best of spirits. He had been successful in war and in the chase, and he had drunk wine till his heart was merry. He received the Princess Angharad graciously, not knowing or not remembering that she was the wife of his nephew Elfin. When she removed

her veil, all at the tables were dazzled with her beauty. After some very indifferent harpers had played, she asked the king to do her the pleasure of hearing her bard, and forthwith Taliesin was commanded to do his best.

Soon as the fingers of the bard of the radiant forehead touched the strings, there was deep silence, and the other bards knew that a master had come among them. Then he began to sing of King Maelgwn and his noble line, of his kingdom and his wealth, of his prowess in the chase and his valour on the field of battle. When he ceased, the king was intoxicated with the sweet incense of the poet's praise. Like Herod of old, he bade the performer ask for any royal mansion in the land, short of the one in which they were seated, and it should be his, with all its contents, its furnishing and its servants. Then Taliesin touched his harp, and sang his request:

"King Maelgwn's heart great as his power
Filled mine to overflow, the hour
He gave to me Deganwy's tower."

King Maelgwn started and frowned severely, but he could not withdraw his promise before the royal lady whom he called Princess Angharad. He told the bard to sing now in praise of fair women, and this Taliesin did with such grace and delicacy in one so young as to call forth the admiration of all the company. The king asked the princess what her petition was, and she answered that it was the same as her bard's, the liberty of the captive monarch in the tower of Deganwy. "What is Elfin, son of Gwyddno, to you?" asked the king, and she answered that he was her husband. Maelgwn was much displeased. 'It was bad enough to lose his captive, but to lose this lovely queen at the same time, annoyed him greatly, and took away all the pleasure of the banquet. A thought occurred to him, however, a thought which made him smile. Then he said, "I have received two petitions for the same thing. To whom shall I grant this petition, to the queen or to the bard?" Taliesin at once answered, "To Queen Angharad." "Let it be so," replied the king, and he gave orders to some of his officers to have his promise carried into effect.

The queen withdrew to the women's apartments, and Taliesin rested with the bards. Next morning early they departed with a company that carried a long rope ladder coiled up, between two horses. In course of time they came to Deganwy. Then, approaching the round tower, an archer took an arrow to which a long cord was attached, and, fitting to his bowstring, sent it, over the roof, down to the ground on the other side. By this cord a rope was drawn over, and by the rope the ladder was hauled up, until its iron hooks grappled the top of the wall at a point in the masonry fitted to receive them. Taliesin wished to mount the ladder with the officers, and was allowed to do so, but not alone: Queen Angharad was told that she must mount of necessity. Arrived at the top of the tower, an iron covering was removed, disclosing not one cell but two, like semi-circular wells of great depth, one lightened by the narrow slit, the other in perfect darkness. At the top of the well-like cell in which King Elfin languished, a seat, hollowed out of heavy wooden plank, dangled by four chains, fixed to a stout rope, which passed down to the bottom of the farther cell, where lay a seat, the companion of that which dangled up above. "There is only one way to bring Elfin up," said the chief officer, "and that is by a heavier weight on the opposite seat. As you, Lady Angharad choose to release him, you must descend with a heavier weight of chains upon you." Taliesin pleaded that he might go instead of the queen, but his pleadings were of no avail. He implored, he told the officer to remember the promise of King Maelgwn, but the officer said he knew his master's will, and was performing it to the letter. When the queen at last prevailed upon him to let her save her husband even at the expense of her own life, he consented, though with agony, only whispering what the officers thought was a final leave-taking. His whisper was:

"Leave not the seat: twine round its chains thy chains.
Let no rude shock unset thee. Bear the pain
Till morn, when king and queen shall meet again."

So they clad the delicate woman with chains and riveted them on. Then, letting down the nearer seat until it came to the king, they called down to him to be seated in it.

King Elfin hardly knew what to do, what this action meant: he feared more treachery. Taliesin sang:

"Fear not, O Elfin, when they bid thee rise.
Freedom has come to greet the good and wise,
True freedom gained by worthiest sacrifice."

The queen took her place, soon as her husband had gathered up his chains and set himself on the board. A heavy stone was put in beside her to increase the weight on her side, and at once began on one side the ascent to life and liberty, on the other, the descent to captivity and death. Pale and emaciated Elfin rose from his seat, and his chains were removed, while the bard watched the progress of the smith who did the work. The officers commanded that the other seat should be twitched free of its burden and hauled up, but the men could not make any impression upon it. "She has swooned," said the chief officer; "perhaps is dead of fright already. Leave her alone." So the dreadful well was left, the bard being compelled to descend the ladder after his benefactor, at the point of the sword. "I leave you now, Sir Bard, in possession of your tower," said the commander, as he and his party rode away. The fisherman remained mounted and holding the two horses. Taliesin took the palfrey, and tethered it. Then he helped to place the dazed king upon his own horse, and bade the honest fisherman conduct him safely home. Mounting the palfrey himself, he followed the retreating officers of King Maelgwn. When he came up with the last of them, he found that they were the smith and a man in charge of the rope ladder carried between two horses. They travelled slowly, and showed no disposition to keep up with the rest of the party. Finally, they stopped at a country hostelry, and left their horses and tools without, while they went in to drink.

(To be continued.)