

Commanding Youth

The poem now called *Peiryan Vaban* (Commanding Youth) occurs in a single early-fifteenth-century manuscript between versions of "The Little Pig Stanzas" and "The Separation-Song of Myrddin." The poem itself is difficult to date, and it is somewhat of an anomaly in the Myrddin corpus. In general, it is even more of a moral or gnostic poem than the other Myrddin poems are, though there is a prophetic element in it as well. The poem contains references to Myrddin, Gwenddydd, Gwenddolau, Rhydderch, and even Gwasawg. It adds little to our knowledge of that legend, but it does seem to portray Myrddin as more of a warrior than elsewhere. Also reflected in this poem are traditions about Aeddán ap Gafran, or Aedán mac Gabráin, the sixth-century ruler of the Irish kingdom of Dalriada in western Scotland. Aedán led an army against Æthelfrith, the Anglo-Saxon king of Bernicia, and was routed in the Battle of Degsastan in 603. There must have been strong connections between Aedán and the British, for among other things he named one of his sons Arthur, when that British hero's fame was still fresh.

Commanding Youth

Commanding youth, cease your complaining.
May God protect you from the Irish heathens,
and on the way to Irish Hill [=Galloway?], the Devil's Encounter;
and the Franks and the Irish will scarcely part.
Aeddan will come from crossing the broad sea, 5
and a host from the Isle of Man will rise up with him,
and the islands on the way to Irish Hill.
The Devil's Encounter, as swift as a spear.

Commanding youth, cease your groaning. 10
Aeddan will come from crossing the broad sea,
and there will be neither youth nor tumult nor thunder.
Many a sally, many a warrior, many an owner of arms are Aeddan's,
many a long-headed spear, many a long spear-shaft,
seizing land. May Gafran prosper.
Many a breastplate, many a helm on head, cattle as to his intent, 15
many a red sword, many a surly lad, a fortress of bloody conflict,
many a lively steed, many a light, broad, shining shield.
And he says to Gwenddydd, when the light of day comes, there
shall be prophecy.
And he says to Gwasawg he does not respect . . . nor sanctuary
nor church.

Commanding youth, cease your weeping. 20
From troubled air it is usual to hear rain.
Aeddan will come with a host across the region.
And Gwenddydd knows not what his hands will do,
brothers in battle like the ardent ones,
because they will not suffer oppression, neither here nor there. 25
Except one who had been left in his affliction,
alas, a rarity[?] is wisdom from him.
Myrddin son of Morfryn was a white hawk
when the fierce battle would be fought,
when there would be joyous death, when there would be a
broken shoulder, 30
when there would be heart's blood before he would be put to flight.
Because of the memory of Gwenddolau and his companions[?],
woe to me for my death—how slowly it comes.

Commanding youth, take your counsel. 35
It is usual for generous fortunate ones to deserve more.
From the encounter of Rhydderch the Generous, the indispensable one,
and if not a fortunate one, there will be no deliverance.
And I have prophesied between deep water and shallow,

since early his violence, lying at their anchor [?].
 There was a time once when I sat in a court;
 my covering was red and purple.
 And today neither my cheek nor my body is fair;
 for a comely maiden [it is] easy to spare me.
 I call upon Christ; my cry will be heard.
 May the gates of heaven be open for me.

Commanding youth, dry[?] your tears.
 Weeping is not pleasant; it is not best.
 Myrddin will come, great the intent,
 because of the death of my brothers and Gwenddolau,
 Llewelyn, Gwgon, best of the generous ones;
 Einion, Rhiwallon, lord of all battles.
 From the encounter of Rhydderch and renowned Aeddan
 so clearly it is heard from the north to the south.
 And he says to Gwenddydd, when it is daylight,
 the woods will be filled with men and arms.

Commanding youth, seek your sleep.
 Usual are pleasurable songs to supplicate for sleep.
 Usual will be generous ones to suppliants; usual is it for lovers to
 love one another.
 Usual is innate hatred between a man and one of equal strength,
 but not usual is it for one of the same origin to be without affection.
 Usual is it for an angry knight to be prince of a host,
 and ravens on bodies, and a spear black.
 Not usually does the wicked respect either cheek or eye
 or brain-pan, though he be attacked.
 After a long rest and resurrection from the grave,
 let him who may be in the end with Jesus. Amen.
 —[Myr]ddin sang it.