

## The Bards of Wales<sup>1</sup>



Can you find Hungary in your atlas? The picture shows the capital city of Hungary. It is called Bud-a-pest. Every country has its favourite poets. One of Hungary 's favourite poets is János Arany, (1817-1882). János Arany wrote a poem that every child in Hungary has to learn by heart. They learn it because János Arany wrote it to make Hungarian people feel brave. He wrote it at a time when Hungary was ruled by another country, Austria. The Hungarians wanted to be free from Austria. They tried to fight against the Austrians but the Austrians won.

János Arany wrote the poem to tell how much Hungarians love their country. He wrote it to tell how they longed to be free from the Austrian rulers. The funny thing about the poem is that it is not about Hungary. János Arany wrote about Wales in his poem instead! Why did he do that? Here is the story:

When he was young, János Arany had a hard life. When he was 14 he had to start work to look after his old parents. He had learned to read Hungarian and Latin when he was very little. He loved the Hungarian language. He loved Hungarian stories and old songs.

The Austrian Emperor was going to visit Hungary. “Get some Hungarian poets to write some special poems for my visit,” he ordered.

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<sup>1</sup> Image of Montgomery castle: By Derek Harper, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13836728>

János Arany was one of the poets who was asked to write a poem. He did not want to write a grand poem all about the Austrian Emperor. He did not like the Austrian Emperor. He thought he would write a different poem instead. He did not write about Hungary. Instead he found an old story. It was just right for what he wanted. It was an old story from Wales. János Arany made the story into a poem.



The old story was about the English King Edward I who fought the Welsh and won. The story said that Edward I ordered a feast to be held at Montgomery castle in Wales in 1277. He ordered the poets of Wales to come and sing his praises. They came, and one by one they sang to him. They sang of the evils of his rule and how

the Welsh hated him! This made the king very angry. As each one sang, the cruel king ordered them to be put to death. In the end he killed 500 poets that day. Can you see why János Arany chose this story?

János Arany's poem is called “A Walesi Bárdok” – “The Bards of Wales”. A Bard is a poet. Today the Hungarians rule their own country. You can see their parliament building on the first page of this lesson. But no one in Hungary wants to forget the time when Hungary was not free. That is why the children all learn “The Bards of Wales”.

If you ever visit Montgomery<sup>2</sup> go and see the castle. It is a ruin now. Do not forget to go and see the little memorial to János Arany. In this picture you can see the town hall. The memorial is nearby.



<sup>2</sup> Image of Montgomery Town Hall: By Derek Harper, CC BY-SA 2.0, By Stephen Elwyn RODDICK, CC BY-SA 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9209912>