

The Poem-Book of the Gael

Translations from Irish Gaelic Poetry into English Prose and Verse,

ed. Eleanor Hull (Chatto & Windus 1913)

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Frontispiece

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[III.] Opening passage of the Saltair na Rann. Opening passage of the "Saltair na Rann." from the MS. in the Bodleian Library.

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[Title Page]

[vi]

A NEW IMPRESSION

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[vii]

CONTENTS

(Where not otherwise indicated, the translation or poetic setting is by the author.)

PAGE

Introduction xv

THE SALT AIR NA RANN, OR PSALTER OF THE VERSES

I.	The Creation of the Universe	3
II.	The Heavenly Kingdom	11
III.	The Forbidden Fruit	20
IV.	The Fall and Expulsion from Paradise	22
V.	The Penance of Adam and Eve	31
VI.	The Death of Adam	43

ANCIENT PAGAN POEMS

The Source of Poetic Inspiration (founded on translation by Whitley Stokes)	53
Amorgen's Song (founded on translation by John MacNeill)	57

[viii]

The Song of Childbirth	59
Greeting to the New-born Babe	61
What is Love?	62
Summons to Cuchulain	63
Laegh's Description of Fairy-land	65
The Lamentation of Fand when she is about to leave Cuchulain	69
Mider's Call to Fairy-land	71
The Song of the Fairies A. H. Leahy	73
The great Lamentation of Deirdre for the Sons of Usna	74

OSSIANIC POETRY

First Winter-Song	Alfred Percival Graves	81
Second Winter-Song		82
In Praise of May	T. W. Rolleston	83
The Isle of Arran		85
The Parting of Goll from his Wife		87
Youth and Age		91
Chill Winter		92
The Sleep-song of Grainne over Dermuid		94
The Slaying of Conbeg		97
The Fairies' Lullaby		98
Song of the Forest Trees	Standish Hayes O'Grady	99

[ix]

EARLY CHRISTIAN POEMS

St. Patrick's Breastplate	Kuno Meyer	105
Patrick's Blessing on Munster	Alfred Perceval Graves	107
Columcille's Farewell to Aran	Douglas Hyde	109
St. Columba in Iona	Eugene O'Curry	111
Hymn to the Dawn		113
The Song of Manchan the Hermit		117
A Prayer		119
The Loves of Liadan and Curithir		121
The Lay of Prince Marvan		125
The Song of Crede, daughter of Guare	Alfred Perceval Graves	130
The Student and his Cat	Robin Flower	132
The Song of the Seven Archangels	Ernest Rhys	134
The Féilire of Adamnan	P. J. McCall	136
The Feathered Hermit		138
An Aphorism		138
The Blackbird		139
Deus Meus	George Sigerson	140
The Soul's Desire		142
Tempest on the Sea	Robin Flower	144
The Old Woman of Beare		147
Gormliath's Lament for Nial Black-knee		151

[x]

The Mother's Lament at the Slaughter of the Innocents	Alfred Perceval Graves	153
Consecration		156
Teach me, O Trinity		157
The Shaving of Murdoch	Standish Hayes O'Grady	159
Eileen Aroon		161

POEMS OF THE DARK DAYS

The Downfall of the Gael	Sir Samuel Ferguson	165
Address to Brian O'Rourke "of the Bulwarks" to arouse him against the English		169
O'Hussey's Ode to the Maguire	James Clarence Mangan	172
A Lament for the Princes of Tyrone and Tyrconnell	James Clarence Mangan	176

The County of Mayo	George Fox	182
The Outlaw of Loch Lene	Jeremiah Joseph Callanan	184
The Flower of Nut-brown Maids		186
Roisín Dubh		188
My Dark Rosaleen	James Clarence Mangan	190
The Fair Hills of Eire	George Sigerson	194
Shule Aroon	(Traditional)	196
Love's Despair	George Sigerson	198
The Cruiskeen Lawn	George Sigerson	200
[xi]		

Eamonn an Chnuic, or "Ned of the Hill"	P. H. Pearse	202
O Druimin donn dilish		204
Do you Remember that Night?	Eugene O'Curry	206
The Exile's Song		208
The Fisherman's Keen	(Anonymous)	210
Boatman's Hymn	Sir Samuel Ferguson	213
Dirge on the Death of Art O'Leary		215
The Midnight Court	(Prologue)	224

RELIGIOUS POEMS OF THE PEOPLE

Hymn to the Virgin Mary		229
Christmas Hymn	Douglas Hyde	231
O Mary of Graces	Douglas Hyde	232
The Cattle-shed		233
Hail to Thee, O Mary		234
O Mary, O blessed Mother		235
I rest with Thee, O Jesus		236
Thanksgiving after Food		236
The Sacred Trinity		237
O King of the Wounds		237
Prayer before going to Sleep		238
I lie down with God		239
The White Paternoster		240
[xii]		

Another Version		241
A Night Prayer		243
Mary's Vision		243
The Safe-guarding of my Soul be Thine		244
Another Version		244
The Straying Sheep		246
Before Communion		246
May the sweet Name of Jesus		247
O Blessed Jesus		248
Another Version		248
Morning Wish		249
On Covering the Fire for the Night		249
The Man who Stands Stiff	Douglas Hyde	250
Charm against Enemies	Lady Wilde	252
Charm for a Pain in the Side	Lady Wilde	252
Charm against Sorrow	Lady Wilde	253
The Keening of Mary	P. H. Pearse	254

LOVE-SONGS AND POPULAR POETRY

Cushla ma Chree Edward Walsh	259
The Blackthorn	260
Pastheen Finn Sir Samuel Ferguson	263
She	265
Hopeless Love	266
The Girl I Love Jeremiah Joseph Callanan	267
[xiii]	

Would God I were Katharine Tynan-Hinkson	268
Branch of the Sweet and Early Rose William Drennan	269
Is truagh gan mise I Sasana Thomas MacDonagh	270
The Yellow Bittern Thomas MacDonagh	271
Have you been at Carrack? Edward Walsh	273
Cashel of Munster Sir Samuel Ferguson	275
The Snowy-breasted Pearl George Petrie	277
The Dark Maid of the Valley P. J. McCall	279
The Coolun Sir Samuel Ferguson	281
Ceann dubh dhileas Sir Samuel Ferguson	283
Ringleted Youth of my Love Douglas Hyde	284
I shall not Die for You Padraic Colum	286
Donall Oge	288
The Grief of a Girl's Heart	291
Death the Comrade	294
Muirneen of the Fair Hair Robin Flower	296
The Red Man's Wife Douglas Hyde	298
Another Version	299
My Grief on the Sea Douglas Hyde	302
Oró Mhór, a Mhóirín P. J. McCall	304
The little Yellow Road Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil	306
Reproach to the Pipe	308
Lament of Morian Shehone for Miss Mary Bourke (Anonymous)	311
[xiv]	

Modereen Rue Katherine Tynan-Hinkson	314
The Stars Stand Up	316
The Love-smart	318
Well for Thee	319
I am Raftery Douglas Hyde	320
Dust hath Closed Helen's Eye Lady Gregory	321
The Shining Posy	324
Love is a Mortal Disease	326
I am Watching my Young Calves Sucking	328
The Narrow Road	329
Forsaken	332
I Follow a Star Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil	334

LULLABIES AND WORKING SONGS

Nurse's Song (Traditional)	337
A Sleep Song P. H. Pearse	339
The Cradle of Gold Alfred Perceval Graves	340
Rural Song	341
Ploughing Song	342

[xv]

INTRODUCTION

“An air is more lasting than the voice of the birds,
A word is more lasting than the riches of the world.”

The truth of this Irish proverb strikes us forcibly as we glance through any such collection of Gaelic poetry as this, and consider how these lays, the dates of whose composition extend from the eighth to the present century, have been preserved to us.

On the border of some grave manuscript, such as a Latin copy of St. Paul's Epistles or a transcript of Priscian, a stray quatrain may be found jotted down by the tired scribe, recording in impromptu verse his delight at the note of a blackbird whose song has penetrated his cell, his amusement at the gambols of his cat watching a mouse, or his reflections on a piece of news brought to him by some wandering monk, about the terror of the viking raids, or a change of dynasty “at home in Ireland.”

Several of our Ossianic poems are taken from a manuscript of lays collected in 1626-27 in and about the Glens of Antrim, and sent out to while away the tedium of camp life to an Irish officer serving in the Low Countries, who wearied for the poems and stories of his youth. The religious hymns of Murdoch O'Daly (Muredach Albanach), called “the Scot” on account of his affection for his adopted country, though he was born in Connaught, [xvi] are preserved in a collection of poems gathered in the Western Highlands, many Irish poems, even from so great a distance as Munster, being found in it.

The *Saltair na Rann* or “Psalter of the Verses,” the most important religious poem of ancient Ireland, is preserved in one copy only. It seems as though a miracle had sometimes intervened to guard for later generations some single version of a valuable tract at home or abroad; but it is a miracle which we could have wished to have taken place more often, when we reflect upon the large number of manuscripts forever lost to us.

Many of the most beautiful of the ancient poems, as well as of the popular songs, are anonymous; they are frequently found mixed up with material of the most arid description, genealogies, annals, or miscellaneous matter. It is easier to guess from the tone of the poems under what mood of mind they were composed than to tell exactly who wrote them. Even when they come down to us adorned with the name of some well-known saint or poet, we have an uncertain feeling about the accuracy of the ascription, when we find a poem whose language cannot be earlier than the tenth or eleventh century confidently connected with a writer who lived two or three centuries earlier. In some cases, no doubt, the versions we possess, though modernised in language and rhythm, are in reality old; in others the ascription probably bears witness to the desire of the author or his public to win esteem for his work by adorning it with some famous name. Some of these poems, of which only one copy has come down to us, were, however, well known in an earlier day, and are quoted in old tracts on Irish metric as examples of the metres used in the bardic [xvii] schools. It is evident that though standards of taste may change, the recognition of what is really beautiful in poetry remains as a settled instinct in man's nature. Many of those poems which now appeal most strongly to ourselves took rank as verses of acknowledged merit nearer to the time of their composition. This we can deduce from their use as examples worthy of imitation in these mediæval Irish text-books, where the names of songs we still admire are quoted as specimens of good poetry.

It is remarkable that a very large proportion of fine poetry comes to us from the period of the Norse invasions, a time which we are accustomed to think of as one continuous series of wars, raids, and burnings; but which, if we may judge by what has come down to us of its verse, shows us that the Irish

gentleman of that day had ideas of refinement that raise him far above the mere fighting clansman; his critical view of literature was a severe one. The fine freedom shown in many of these poems is surprising, both as regards the sentiments and the metres. They possess a mastery of form that argues a high cultivation, not only of the special art of poetry, but of the whole intellectual faculties of the writers.

Some of these poems are strangely modern, even *fin de siècle* in their tone. The poem of the "Old Woman of Beare" has often been compared to Villon's "Regrets de la Belle Heaulmière ja parvenue à vieillesse," or to Béranger's "Grand'mère." But the Irish poem is far more artistically wrought than either of these comparatively modern poems. For in the ancient verses, the old woman is set, a lonely and forsaken figure, against the background of the ebbing tide, and the slow throbs of her heart, worn with age and sin, beat in unison with the [xviii]retreating motion of the wave. There is also a further significance in the poem which we must not miss. It is the earliest of the long series of allegorical songs in which Ireland is depicted under the form of a woman; though, unlike her successors of a later day, she is here represented, not as a fair maiden, a Grainne Mhaol, or Kathleen ni Houlahan, or Little Mary Cuillenan, but as an aged joyless hag, forlorn and censorious, bemoaning the loss of bygone pleasures, and the gravity of her nun's veil. The "Cailleach Bheara," the "Hag" or "Nun of Beare" is known in many place-names in Ireland. It is on Slieve na Callighe, or the "Hill of the Hag" or "Nun," in Co. Meath that the great cairns and tumuli of Lough Crew are found; it was evidently, like the neighbourhood of the Boyne, a place of pagan sanctity; and such names as Tober na Callighe Bheara, the "Well of the Hag of Beare," are found in different parts of the country. The "Hag of Beare" seems to be symbolic of pagan Ireland, regretting the stricter regime of Christianity, and the changes that time had brought about. The curious legend which prefaces the poem suggests the same idea. She is said to have seen seven periods of youth, and to have outlived tribes and races descended from her. For a hundred years of old age she wore the veil of a nun. "Thereupon old age and infirmity came upon her." We catch the same note of regret for the days of paganism through many legends and poems. It is mystical and veiled in such stories as that of "King Murtough and the Witch-woman"; it is fierce, but also often touched by the grotesque, in the innumerable colloquies between Patrick and Oisín (Ossian), the last of the ancient pagan heroes. But in all this there is a note of apology. It is not so outspoken in its revolt [xix]against the new system of life and thought as are the Norse chronicles and the Icelandic Sagas. After all, Christianity was an accomplished thing; quietly but persistently it took its place, sweeping into its fold chiefs and common folk alike. No resistance could stop this universal progress. And the literary man or the peasant, dwelling on his early legends, the outcome of a state of thought passed or passing away, dared only half-heartedly bemoan the former days, when wars and raids, the "Creach" and the "Táin" were the highest way of life for a brave man, and no Christian doctrine of forgiveness of enemies and charity to foes had come in to perplex his thoughts and confuse their issues. The Raid remained, it was an essential part of actual life; and burnings and wars went on as before, but they were no longer, theoretically, at least, matters to win praise and honour, they were condemned beforehand by the Christian ethic. A chief, to hold his own, must still throw open doors of hospitality to his tribe, must dispense largesse to all-comers, must gather about his board the neighbours and dependents in riotous assemblies and festivals. But all this the Christian monk and priest looked upon with suspicion; they bade him fill his thoughts with a future Kingdom, rather than with the earthly one to which he had been born, and to keep his soul in humble readiness by prayers and fastings, by seclusion and self-sacrifice. The great disjuncture is everywhere apparent; chiefs are seen flying from their plain duties to their clans in order to win a heavenly chieftom, not of this world; kings retire into hermitages, and whole villages take on the aspect and system of life of the monastery. To escape a network of religious service so closely spread throughout the country was [xx]impossible; all that the half-convinced could do was to relieve his soul in legend and song and jest. Hence the large amount of this literature of protest, coming to us curiously side by side with poems breathing the very spirit of religious devotion, the work of peaceful recluse or retired monk.

For the movement had its other aspect. If the warrior or chief resigned much in becoming a Christian monk, there is no doubt that he gained as well. Contemporaneous religious poetry in the Middle Ages is elsewhere overshadowed by the cast of theologic thought. The "world" from which the saint must flee is no mere symbol, denoting the perils of evil courses; it is the actual visible earth, its hills and trees and

flowers, and the beauty of its human inhabitants that are in themselves a danger and a snare. St. Bernard walking round the Lake of Geneva, unconscious of its presence and blind to its loveliness, is a fit symbol of the tendency of the religious mind in the Middle Ages. Sin and repentance, the fall and redemption, hell and heaven, occupied the religious man's every thought; beside such weighty themes the outward life became almost negligible. If he dared to turn his mind towards it at all, it was in order to extract from it some warning of peril, or some allegory of things divine. In essence, the "world" was nothing else than a peril to be renounced and if possible entirely abandoned.

But the Irish monk showed no such inclination, suffered no such terrors. His joy in nature grew with his loving association with her moods. He refused to mingle the idea of evil with what God had made so good. If he sought for symbols, he found only symbols of purity and holiness. The pool beside his hut, the rill that flowed across his green, became to his watchful eye the [xxi]manifestation of a divine spirit washing away sin; if the birds sang sweetly above his door, they were the choristers of God; if the wild beasts gathered to their nightly tryst, were they not the congregation of intelligent beings whom God Himself would most desire? The friendly badgers or foxes of the wood that came forth, undismayed by the white or brown-robed figure who seemed to have taken up his lasting abode amongst them, became to his mind fellow-monks, authorised members of his strange community. Amongst his feathered and furred associates, he read his Psalms and Hours in peace; sang his periodic hymn to St. Hilary or St. Brigit, and performed his innumerable genuflections and "cross-vigils." Here, from time to time, he poured forth in spontaneous song his joy in the life that he had elected as his own. When King Guaire of Connaught stands at the door of the hermitage in which his brother Marvan had taken refuge from the bustle of court life, and asks him why he had sacrificed so much, Marvan bursts forth into a poem in praise of his hermit life, and the King is fain to confess that the choice of the recluse was the wiser one; when St. Cellach of Killala is dragged into the forest by his comrades and threatened with death, not even the sight of the four murderers lying at his feet with swords ready drawn in their hands to slay him can prevent him from greeting the Dawn in a beautiful song.

The saint who, like St. Finan, lived shut up within his cell, in many cases lost his mental balance, and degenerated into a mere Fakir, winning heaven by the miseries of his self-imposed mortifications; but the monk who trusted himself to untrammelled intercourse with nature, preserved his underlying sanity. For whether or no the hundreds of daily genuflections were [xxii]performed, the patch of ground around the solitary's cell must be ploughed or sown or reaped; the apples must be gathered or the honeysuckles twined. The salmon or herring must be netted or angled for. Thus nature and its needs kept the hermit on the straight and simple paths of physical and mental healthfulness, however he might try to escape into a wilderness of his own imaginings.

The early poetry, we feel, is on the whole joyous; whether pagan or Christian in tone, it arises from a happy heart. The pagan is more robust, more vigorous; the Christian gentler and more reflective; but alike they are free from the mournful note of despair that throws a settled gloom over much of the later literature.

The Ossianic poems have quite a distinctive tone; in them we catch the abounding energy belonging to the days of the hunt of the wild native boar or stag, when all the country was one open hunting-ground, fit for men whose ideal was that of the sportsman and the warrior. Besides romantic tales, we have a whole body of poetry, loosely strung together under the covering name of Oisín, or Ossian, and usually ascribed to him or to Fionn mac Cumhall, his father and chief, dealing with the themes of war and of the chase. They are often in the nature of the protest of the fighting and hunting-man against the claims of religion. He is perpetually proclaiming that the sounds and sights of the forest and seashore are more dear to him than any others, and when he is called upon to give the first place to the duties of religion, placed before him, as it usually is, in its most enfeebling aspect, he raises the stout protest that the hunting-horn has greater attractions for him than the tinkling bell which calls to prayer.

[xxiii]

“I have heard music sweeter far
Than hymns and psalms of clerics are;
The blackbird’s pipe on Letterlea,
The Dord Finn’s wailing melody.
“The thrush’s song of Glenna-Scál,
The hound’s deep bay at twilight’s fall,
The barque’s sharp grating on the shore,
Than cleric’s chants delight me more.”

There is the ring of the obstinate pagan about such verses; and many poems are wholly occupied by an unholy wrangling between the representative of the old order, Oisín, and the representative of the new, St. Patrick. The poems themselves probably date from a far later period than either.

More healthy are the true hunting songs. Many of these are in praise of the Isle of Arran, in the Clyde, a favourite resort during the sporting-season both for the Scottish and Irish huntsman. In the poem we have called “The Isle of Arran,” from the “Colloquy of the Ancient Men,” the charm of the Isle is well described. We have in it the same pure joy in natural scenery that we find in the poems of the religious hermits, but the tone is manlier and more emphatic.

Occasionally a fiercer note creeps into the hunter’s mood. The chase of the boar and deer was not without its dangers. Winter, and the unfriendly clan hard by, or the lean prowling wolf at night, were real terrors to the small companies encamped on the open hill-side or in the forest. Though the warrior in peaceful times loved the chase of swine and stag, his hand had done and was always ready to do sterner work when opportunity offered. The poem “Chill Winter” has a note of almost [xxiv] savage exultation; the old fighter turns from his present perils and discomforts to remember the warrior onslaughts which had left the glen below him silent, and its once happy inhabitants cold in death; colder, as he gladly reflects, than even he himself feels on this chill winter’s night. It is the voice of the ancient warrior, who thought no shame of slaying, but thanked God when he had knocked down his fellow. Whether he, in his turn, were the undermost man, or whether he escaped, he cared not at all.

Two difficulties face the modern reader in coming for the first time upon genuine Irish literature, whether poetry or prose. The first is the curious feeling that we are hung between two worlds, the seen and the unseen; that we are not quite among actualities, or rather that we do not know where the actual begins or where it ends. Even in dealing with history we may find ourselves suddenly wafted away into some illusory spirit-world with which the historian seems to deal with the same sober exactness as in detailing any fact of ordinary life. The faculty of discerning between the actual and the imaginary is absent, as it is absent in imaginative children; often, indeed, the illusory quite overpowers the real, as it does in the life of the Irish peasant to-day.

There is, in most literatures, a meeting-place where the Mythological and the Historic stand in close conjunction, the one dying out as the other takes its place. Only in Ireland we never seem to reach this point; we can never anywhere say, “Here ends legend, here begins history.” In all Irish writing we find poetry and fact, dreams and realities, exact detail and wild imagination, linked closely hand in hand. This is the Gael as revealed in his literature. At first we are inclined to doubt the accuracy of [xxv] any part of the story; but, as we continue our examination, we are surprised at the substantial correctness of the ancient records, so far as we are able to test them, whether on the historical or on the social side. The poet is never wholly poet, he is also practical man; and the historian is never wholly chronicler and annalist, he is also at the back of his mind folklorist, lover of nature, dreamer. It is the puzzle and the charm of Ireland.

A good example of this is the very beautiful anonymous Irish poem, rich in poetic imagery, addressed to Ragnall or Reginald, son of Somerled, lord of the Isles from 1164-1204. This poem, written for an historical prince, begins with a description of the joys of the fairy palace, “Emain of the Apples,” whence this favoured prince is supposed by the poet to have issued forth:

“Many, in white grass-fresh Emain,
Of men on whom a noble eye gazes
(The rider of a bay steed impetuously)
Through a countenance of foxglove hue,
Shapely, branch-fresh.

“Many, in Emain of the pastures,
From which its noble feast has not parted,
Are the fields ploughed in autumn
For the pure corn of the Lord’s Body.”

The poet’s mind wanders from the ancient Emain, capital of Ulster, to the allegorical Emain, the dwelling of the gods or fairy-hosts, who were thought of as inhabiting the great tumuli on the Boyne; again, he transplants his fairy-land to the home of Ragnall, and seems to place it in Mull or the Isle of Man, which was indeed the especial abode of Manannan, the Ocean-god and Ruler of Fairy-land.

[xxvi]

“What God from Brugh of the Boyne,
Thou son of noble Sabia,
Thou beauteous apple-rod
Created thee with her in secret?

“O Man of the white steed,
O Man of the black swan,
Of the fierce band and the gentle sorrow,
Of the sharp blade and the lasting fame.

“Thy fair side thou hast bathed,
The grey branch of thy eyes like summer showers,
Over thy locks, O descendant of Fergus,
The wind of Paradise has breathed.” [1]

We recognise that this is fine poetry, but we feel also that it needs a specialised education thoroughly to understand it. The world from which it hails is not our world, and to comprehend it we must do more than translate, we must add notes and glossary at every line; but no poetry, especially poetry under the initial disadvantage of a translation, could retain its qualities under such treatment.

In all the ancient verse we meet with these obstacles. Even much of the most imaginative Ossianic poetry becomes too difficult from this point of view for the untrained reader.

Take the fine poem detailing the history of the Shield of Fionn. Poetic addresses to noted weapons are common enough, and are not confined to Irish literature; but the adventures of this shield pass beyond the ordinary uses of human battles, and enter the realm of mythology. The very name given to it, the “Dripping Ancient Hazel,” carries us into a world of poetic imagination.

[xxvii]

“Scarce is there on the firm earth, whether it be man or
woman, one that can tell why thy name abroad
is known as the Dripping Ancient Hazel.

“‘Twas Balor that besought Lugh before his beheading:
‘Set my head above thy own comely head and
earn my blessing.’

“That blessing Lugh Longarm did not earn; he set up
the head above a wave of the east in a fork of hazel
before him.

“A poisonous milk drips down out of that hardened tree; through the baneful drip, it was not slight, the tree split right in two.

“For full fifty years the hazel stood, but ever it was a cause of tears, the abode of vultures and ravens.

“Manannan of the round eye went into the wilderness of the Mount of White-Hazel; there he saw a shadeless tree among the trees that vied in beauty.

“Manannan sets workmen without delay to dig it out of the firm earth. Mighty was the deed!

“From the root of that tree arises a poisonous vapour; there were killed by it (perilous the consequence) nine of the working folk.

“Now I say to you, and let the prophecy be sought out: Around the mighty hazel without reproach was found the cause of many a woe.”

“It was from that shield that Eitheor of the smooth brown face was called ‘Son of Hazel,’—for this was the hazel that he worshipped.” [2]

[xxviii]

Or take again the strange mythological poem of the “Crane-bag,” made out of the skin of a wandering haunted crane, which had once been a woman; condemned for “two hundred white years” to dwell in “the house of Manannan,” i.e. in the wastes of the ocean, ever seeking and never finding land. When the wanderings came to an end, and the unhappy Crane-woman died, Manannan (the Ocean-god) made of her skin a bag into which he put “every precious thing he had; the shirt of Manannan and his knife, the girdle of Goibniu (the Vulcan of Irish legend); the king of Scotland’s shears, the king of Lochlann’s helmet, and the bones of the swine of Asal—these were the treasures that the Crane-bag held.... When the sea was full, its treasures were seen in its midst; when the fierce sea was on ebb, the Crane-bag was empty.” The story has the impress of great age, and manifold changes; it belongs to the period when the gods were not yet transformed into human beings, but were still primæval elemental powers, impersonations of fire and light and water, and the wisdom that is above mankind. But the link is lost, and the story remains a suggestion only, vague and indistinct. As an image of the hollow ocean, holding the treasures of the Sea-god, the idea is, however, full of force and beauty. [3]

The second difficulty, which is closely connected with the first, lies in the retention of the ancient and unfamiliar nomenclature; the old geographical and family names, which have dropped out of actual use, being everywhere found in the poetry.

Scotland is still Alba in Irish, as it was in the sixth century; Éire (gen. Éirinn) is the ordinary name for Ireland, not only in poetry, as is commonly supposed, but in the living language of the country. But it has besides an abundance of specially poetic names, such as Inisfail, “the island of Destiny,” Banba, Fodla, &c., connected with early legends, and these, if we are to understand the poetry, we must accustom ourselves to.

[xxix]

England is still to-day the land of the Saxons to the Gael, and its inhabitants are the “Sassenachs”; the Irishman persists in disregarding the coming of the Angles. We may talk of the extinction of the Gaelic tongue, but in his poetry, as in every place-name of stream or hill or townland all over the country, it is about us still. In the poetry we are back in Gaelic Ireland; the old tribal distinctions, the old clan names, meet us on every page. What does the modern man know of Leth Cuinn or Leth Mogha, the ancient

divisions of the North and South, or of the stories which gave them birth? What of Magh Breagh or Magh Murtheimne? What of Emain Macha and Kincora? Who, again, are the Clann Fiachrach or the Eoghanacht, or the Children of Ir or Eiber? Even before the much later titles of Thomond and Desmond, of Tyrconnell and Tyrowen he is somewhat at a loss.

But to the bard the past is always present, the ancient nomenclature is never extinct. The legend which caused the River Boyne to be called “The forearm of Nuada’s wife,” or the tumuli on its banks to be thought of as the “Elfmounds of the wife of Nechtan,” are familiar to him; and to enter into the spirit of the mythological poetry we must know something of Irish folklore and tradition. Many of these expressions have a high imaginative significance, as when the sea is called the “Plain of Ler” (the elder Irish Sea-god), or its waves are “the tresses of Manannan’s wife” or the “Steeds of Manannan.”

Of the large body of bardic poetry we have been unable to give an adequate representation, partly from considerations of space, but also because we are not yet, until a larger quantity of this poetry has been published, able to estimate its actual poetic value. Much fine poetry [xxx]by the historic bards undoubtedly exists, but we have as yet only a few published fragments to choose from. The first specimen we give, Teigue Dall O’Higgin’s appeal to O’Rourke of the Bulwarks (na murtha), must stand as an example of much similar poetry in and about his own day.

The call to union against England or against some local enemy sounds loud and constant in the bardic poems. There is much anti-English poetry; poetry which has for its object the endeavour to unite for a single purpose the chiefs who had split up the provinces into small divisions under separate leaders, each fighting for his own hand.

To stir up the lagging or too peaceful chief was one of the prime duties of the bard; to address to him congratulations on his accession, or to bewail him when he died, was his official function; and to judge by the quantity of paper covered with these laudatory effusions and elegies, he performed his task with punctilious care. It was likely that he would do so, for the fees for a poem that gave satisfaction were substantial. We miss the family bard in these days; there is no one at hand to praise indifferently all that we do.

The bardic poetry attracted the genius of Mangan, and his “Farewell to Patrick Sarsfield” and O’Hussey’s “Ode to the Maguire,” are not only fine poetry, but excellent representations of two of the finest of the bardic poems. Elsewhere in his poems, we have usually too much Mangan to feel that the tone of the original is faithfully conveyed. His soaring poem, “The Dark Rosaleen,” can hardly be said to represent the Irish “Roisín Dubh,” of which, for purposes of comparison, we give a literal rendering; beautiful as Mangan’s poem is, it has to our mind lost something of the exquisite grace of the original.

[xxxi]

It may be well to indicate here the relations between Mangan’s version and the original in the poem in which he keeps most strictly to the words of the bard. “O’Hussey’s Ode to the Maguire,” that fine address of the Northern bard, O’Hussey, to his young chief, whose warlike foray into Munster in the depth of winter filled his mind with anxiety and distress. A literal translation of the opening passage reads as follows:

“Too cold for Hugh I deem this night, the drops so
heavily downpouring are a cause for sadness;
biting is this night’s cold—woe is me that such is
our companion’s lot.

In the clouds’ bosoms the water-gates of heaven are
flung wide; small pools are turned by it to seas,
all its destructiveness hath the firmament spewed
out.

A pain to me that Hugh Maguire to-night lies in a
stranger's land, 'neath lurid glow of lightning-bolts
and angry armed clouds' clamour;

A woe to us that in the province of Clann Daire (Southwest
Munster) our well-beloved is couched, betwixt
a coarse cold-wet and grass-clad ditch and the
impetuous fury of the heavens." [4]

But it is not, after all, the verses of the bards, even of the best of them, that will survive. It is the tender religious songs, the passionate love-songs, the exquisite addresses to nature; those poems which touch in us the common ground of deep human feeling. Whether it came to us from the sixth century or from the sixteenth, the song of Crede for the dead man, whom she had grown to love only when he was dying, would equally move us; the passionate cry of Liadan after Curithir would wring our hearts whatever century produced it. The voice of love is alike in every age. It has no date.

[xxxii]

Having written so far, we begin to wonder whether it was wise or necessary to set so much prose between the reader and the poems which, as we hope, he wishes to read. In an ordinary anthology, the interruption of a long preface is a mistake and an intrusion, for, more than any other good art, good poetry must explain itself. The mood in which a poem touches us acutely may be recorded, but it cannot be reproduced in or for the reader. He must find his own moment. For the most part, these Irish poems need no introduction. We need no one to explain to us the beauty of the lines in the "Flower of Nut-brown Maids":

"I saw her coming towards me o'er the face of the mountain,
Like a star glimmering through the mist";

or to remind us of the depth of Cuchulain's sorrow when over the dead body of his son he called aloud:

"The end is come, indeed, for me;
I am a man without son, without wife;
I am the father who slew his own child;
I am a broken, rudderless bark
Tossed from wave to wave in the tempest wild;
An apple blown loose from the garden-wall,
I am over-ripe, and about to fall;"

or to tell us that the "Blackthorn," or "Donall Oge," or "Eileen Aroon," are exquisite in their pathos and tenderness. But there are, besides these enchanting things, which we are prepared to expect from Irish verse, also [xxxiii] things for which we are not prepared; unfamiliar themes, treated in a new manner; and to judge of these, some help from outside may be useful. The reader who does not know Ireland or know Gaelic, is ready to accept softness, the almost endless iteration of expressions conveying the sense of woman's beauty and of man's affection, in phrases that differ but little from each other; what he is not prepared for is the sudden break into matter-of-fact, the curt tone that cuts across much Irish poetry, revealing an unexpected side of life and character. Even the modern Irishman is tripped up by the swift intrusion of the grotesque; the cold, cynical note that exists side by side with the most fervent religious devotion, especially in the popular poetry, displeases him. He resents it, as he resents the tone of the "Playboy of the Western World"; yet it is the direct modern representative of the tone of mind that produced the Ossianic lays.

We find it in all the popular poetry; as an example take the argument of the old woman who warns a young man that if he persists in his evil ways, there will be no place in heaven for such as he. The youth replies:

"If no sinner ever goes to Paradise,
But only he who is blessed, there will be wide empty places in it.

If all who follow my way are condemned
Hell must have been full twenty years and a year ago,
And they could not take me in for want of space."

The same chill, almost harsh tone is heard in the colloquy between Ailill of Munster and the woman whom he has trusted on the night after his death, [5] or in the poem, "I shall not die for you" (p. 286), or in the verses on the fairy-hosts, published by Dr. Kuno Meyer, where, instead of praise of their ethereal loveliness, we are told:

[xxxiv]

"Good are they at man-slaying,
Melodious in the ale-house,
Masterly at making songs,
Skilled at playing chess." [6]

Could anything be more matter-of-fact than the clever chess-playing of the shee-folk and their pride in it?

A collection of translations must always have some sense of disproportion. It is natural that translators should, as a rule, have been attracted, not only to the poems that most readily give themselves to an English translation, but to those which are most easily accessible. The love-songs, such as those collected by Hardiman and Dr. Douglas Hyde, have been attempted with more or less success by many translators, while much good poetry, not so easily brought to hand, has been overlooked. Dr. Kuno Meyer's fine translations of a number of older pieces, which came out originally either in separate publications, [7] or in the transactions of the Arts Faculty of University College, Liverpool, have now been rendered more accessible in a separate collection; but the English ear is wedded to rhyme, and a prose translation, however careful and choice, often misses its mark with the general reader. Long ago, Miss Brooke (in her *Reliques of Irish Poetry*) and Furlong (in *Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy*) essayed the translation of a number of the longer "bardic remains"; and these earlier collectors and translators will ever retain the gratitude of their countrymen for rescuing and printing, at a time when little value was placed upon such things, these stores of Irish song.

[xxxv]

But the translations suited better the taste of their own day than of ours; we cannot read them now, nor do they in the slightest way represent the verse they are intended to reproduce. Naturally, too, it is easier to give the spirit and language of a serious poem than that of a humorous one in another tongue, so that the more playful verse has been neglected.

It may be thought that this book is overweighted by religious and love poems; but in a collection essentially lyrical, religion and love must ever be the two chief themes. In Ireland, the inner spirit of the national genius ever spoke, and still speaks, through them.

Among the people of the quiet places where few strangers come, and where night passes into day and day again to night with little change of thought or outward emotion, simple sorrows and simple pleasures have still time to ripen into poetry. The grief that came to-day will not pass away with a new grief to-morrow; it will impress its groove, straight and deep, upon the heart that feels it, lying there without hope of a summer growth to hide its furrow. The long monotonous days, the dark unbroken evenings are the nurseries of sorrow; the white open roads are the highways of hope or the paths for the wayfaring thoughts of despair. The stranger who came one day comes again no more, though we watch the long white track never so earnestly; the boy or girl who went that way to foreign lands has not thrown his or her shadow across the road again. Where the turf fire rises curling and blue into the air, where the young girl stands waiting by the winding "boreen," where the old woman croons over the hearth, there we [xxxvi] shall surely find, if we know how to draw it forth, that a well of poetry has been sunk, and that half-unconsciously the thought of the heart has expressed itself in simple verse, or in rhythmic prose almost more beautiful than verse. The minds that produced the touching melodies that wail and croon

and sing to us out of Ireland, have not the less expressed themselves in melodious poetry. Here, if anywhere, we may look to find a style unspoiled by imitation, and a sentiment moving because it is perfectly sincere. It is thus that such poems as “Donall Oge” or the “Roísín Dubh” or “My Grief on the Sea” come into existence.

Where the outward distractions of life are few, the grave monotony of sea and moor and bog-land, the swirl of cloud and mist, and the loneliness of waste places sink more deeply into the mind. The visible is less felt than the invisible, and life is surrounded by a network of fears and dreams to which the town-dweller is a stranger. To-day, in the Western Isles of Ireland and Scotland, the huntsman going out to hunt, the fisherman to fish or lay his nets, the agriculturist to sow or reap his harvest, and the weaver or spinner to wind his yarn, go forth to their work with some familiar charm-prayer or charm-hymn, often beautifully called “the Blessings,” on their lips. The milkmaid calling her cows or churning her butter, the young girl fearful of the evil-eye, and the cottager sweeping up her hearth in the evening, laying herself down to sleep at night, or rising up in the morning, soothe their fears or smooth their way by some whispered *paider* or *ortha*, a prayer or a verse or a blessing. The deep religious feeling of the Celtic mind, with its far-stretching hands groping towards the mysterious and the infinite, comes out in these spontaneous and simple [xxxvii] ejaculations; I have therefore endeavoured to bring together a few others to add to the groups gathered by Dr. Hyde in the west of Ireland and by Dr. Carmichael in the Western Hebrides; but in their original Gaelic they are the fruit of others’ collections, not of my own. [8] They are the thoughts of such humble people as the poor farm-servant who “had so many things to do from dark to dark” that she had no time for long prayers, and knew only a little prayer taught her by her mother, which laid “our caring and our keeping and our saving on the Sacred Trinity.”

I desire to inscribe here my sincere gratitude to the living authors and authoresses who have kindly given me permission to use their work, and my gratitude to those authors who have gone, that they have left us so much good work to use. Especially I desire to thank my friends, Mr. Alfred Perceval Graves and Mr. Ernest Rhys, for permitting the use of unpublished poems.

Many friends have given a ready helping hand in elucidating difficult words and phrases, and it is a pleasant task to thank them here. Dr. D. Hyde, Rev. Michael Sheehan, Rev. P. S. Dinneen, Mr. Tadhg O’Donoghue, Mr. R. Flower, Miss Hayes, especially, have always readily come to my assistance; to Miss Eleanor Knott I am indebted for valuable help in the translation of the “*Saltair na Rann*,” and to Dr. R. Thurneysen for suggesting some readings in this difficult poem.

I gratefully acknowledge permission accorded to me by the following publishing houses to include poems or extracts from books published by them:—

[xxxviii]

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FOOTNOTES:[1] Printed in Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, iii. Appen. 2, p. 410, from a seventeenth century copy belonging to William Hennessy, compared with the copy in the *Book of Fermoy*.

[2] *Duanaire Finn*, edited by John MacNeill, pp. 34, 134 (Irish Texts Society, 1904).

[3] For this poem see *Duanaire Finn*, edited by John MacNeill (Irish Texts Society, 1904), pp. 21, 118.

[4] O'Grady's Catalogue of *Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum*, p. 451.

[5] Dr. Kuno Meyer's *Ancient Irish Poetry* (Constable, 1911), p. 9.

[6] *Ancient Irish Poetry*, p. 19.

[7] *King and Hermit* (1901); *Liadan and Curithir* (1902); *Four Songs of Summer and Winter* (1903); all published by D. Nutt.

[8] Chiefly of Dr. Michael Sheehan's collections in Co. Waterford, and those made by Mr. Fionan M'Collum and others in West Kerry (see Notes).

[1]

THE SALTIR NA RANN, OR PSALTER OF THE VERSES

[2]

The Saltair na Rann, or Psalter of the Verses, so-called because it is divided into 150 poems in imitation of the Psalms of David, is undoubtedly the most important religious poem of early Ireland. It may justly be regarded as the Irish Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained, for it opens with an account of the Creation of the Universe, the founding of Heaven and Hell, the fall of Lucifer, the creation of the Earthly Paradise and of man, the temptation and fall and the penance of Adam and Eve. After this it sketches the Old Testament History, leading up to the birth and life of Christ and closing with His death and resurrection. Though in general it follows the Bible narrative, it is peculiarly Irish in tone, and its additions and variations are of the greatest interest to students of mediæval religious literature. The conception of the universe in the first poem, with its ideas of the seven heavens, the coloured and fettered winds, and the sun passing through the opening windows of the twelve divisions of the heavens, is curious; the earth, enclosed in the surrounding firmament, "like a shell around an egg," being regarded as the centre of the universe.

In the portions which relate the life of Adam and Eve, the author evidently had before him the Latin version of the widely known *Vita Adæ et Euvæ*, which he follows closely, introducing from it several Latin words into his text; but even here the colouring is purely Irish. The poem is ascribed to Oengus the Culdee, who lived early in the ninth century; but its language is later, probably the end of the tenth century.

In 1883 Dr. Whitley Stokes published [9] the text from the only existing complete copy, that contained in the Bodleian MS. Rawl. B. 502, but no part of it has hitherto been published in English. The present translation of the sections dealing with the Creation and with the life of Adam and Eve is purely tentative; the poem presents great difficulties, and we suffer from the lack of a second copy with which to compare it. [10] Miss Eleanor Knott has read the translations and has helped me with many difficulties; and I had the advantage of reading parts of the poem in class with Dr. Kuno Meyer. For the errors which the translation must undoubtedly contain, I am myself, however, alone responsible.

FOOTNOTES:[9] In *Anecdota Oxoniensia* (Med. and Mod. Series), vol. i. part iii.[10] The *Leabar Brecc* gives poem x., and a prose version of portions of poems ii., iv., vi., viii., ix., xi.

[3]

THE SALTIR NA RANN, OR PSALTER OF THE VERSES

Attributed to Oengus the Culdee, ninth century; but the date is probably the close of the tenth century.

I. THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE

My own King, King of the pure heavens,
without pride, without contention,
who didst create the folded [11] world,
my King ever-living, ever victorious.
King above the elements, surpassing the sun,
King above the ocean depths,
King in the South and North, in the West and East,
with whom no contention can be made.
King of the Mysteries, who wast and art,
before the elements, before the ages,
King yet eternal, comely His aspect,
King without beginning, without end.

[4]

King who created lustrous heaven,
who is not arrogant, not overweening,
and the earth, with its multitudinous delights,
strong, powerful, stable.
King who didst make the noble brightness,
and the darkness, with its gloom;
the one, the perfect day,
the other, the very perfect night.
King who fashioned the vast deeps
out of the primary stuff of the elements,
who ...
the wondrous formless mass.
King who formed out of it each element,
who confirmed them without restriction, a lovely mystery,
both tempestuous and serene,
both animate and inanimate.
King who hewed, gloriously, with energy,
out of the very shapely primal stuff,
the heavy, round earth,
with foundations, ... length and breadth. [12]
King who shaped within no narrow limits
in the circle of the firmament
the globe, fashioned
like a goodly apple, truly round.

[5]

King who formed after that with fixity
the fresh masses about the earth;
the very smooth currents above the world
of the chill watery air.
King who didst sift the cold excellent water
on the earth-mass of the noble cliffs
into rills, with the reservoirs [13] of the streams,
according to their measures, with moderation.
Creation of the winds with their colours
King who ordained the eight winds
advancing without uncertainty, full of beauty,
the four prime winds He holds back,
the four fierce under-winds.
There are four other under-winds,

as learned authors say,
this should be the number, without any error,
of the winds, twelve winds.
King who fashioned the colours of the winds,
who fixed them in safe courses,
after their manner, in well-ordered disposition,
with the varieties of each manifold hue.
The white, the clear purple,
the blue, the very strong green,
the yellow, the red, sure the knowledge,
in their gentle meetings wrath did not seize them.

[6]

The black, the grey, the speckled,
the dark and the deep brown,
the dun, darksome hues,
they are not light, easily controlled.
King who ordained them over every void,
the eight wild under-winds;
who laid down without defect
the bounds of the four prime winds.
From the East, the smiling purple,
from the South, the pure white, wondrous,
from the North, the black blustering moaning wind,
from the West, the babbling dun breeze.
The red, and the yellow along with it,
both white and purple;
the green, the blue, it is brave,
both dun and the pure white.
The grey, the dark brown, hateful their harshness,
both dun and deep black;
the dark, the speckled easterly wind
both black and purple.
Rightly ordered their form,
their disposition was ordained;
with wise adjustments, [14] openly,
according to their position and their fixed places.

[7]

The twelve winds,
Easterly and Westerly, Northerly and Southerly,
the King who adjusted them, He holds them back,
He fettered them with seven curbs.
King who bestowed them according to their posts,
around the world with many adjustments,
each two winds of them about a separate curb,
and one curb for the whole of them.
King who arranged them in habitual harmony,
according to their ways, without over-passing their limits;
at one time, peaceful was the space,
at another time, tempestuous.
Measurements of the Universe
King who didst make clear the measure of the slope [15]
from the earth to the firmament,
estimating it, clear the amount,
along with the thickness of the earth-mass.

He set the course of the seven Stars [16]
from the firmament to the earth,
Saturn, Jupiter, Mercury, Mars,
Sol, Venus, the very great moon.

[8]

King who numbered, kingly the space,
from the earth to the moon;
twenty-six miles with a hundred miles,
they measure them in full amount.
This is that cold air
circulating in its aerial series(?)
which is called ... with certainty
the pleasant, delightful heaven.
The distance from the moon to the sun
King who measured clearly, with absolute certainty,
two hundred miles, great the sway,
with twelve and forty miles.
This is that upper ethereal region,
without breeze, without greatly moving air, [17]
which is called, without incoherence,
the heaven of the wondrous ether.
Three times as much, the difference is not clear(?)
between the firmament and the sun,
He has given to calculators; [18]
my King star-mighty! most true is this!
This is the perfect Olympus,
motionless, immovable,
(according to the opinion of the ancient sages)
which is called the Third Holy Heaven.

[9]

Twelve miles, bright boundary,
with ten times five hundred miles,
splendid the star-run course, separately
from the firmament to the earth.
The measure of the space
from the earth to the firmament,
it is the measure of the difference
from the firmament to heaven.
Twenty-four miles
with thirty hundred miles
is the distance to heaven,
besides the firmament.
The measure of the whole space
from the earth to the Kingly abode,
is equal to that from the rigid earth
down to the depths of hell.
King of each Sovereign lord, vehement, ardent,
who of His own force set going the firmament
as it seemed secure to Him over every space,
He shaped them from the formless mass.

The poem goes on to speak of the division of the universe into five zones, a torrid, two temperate, and two frigid zones, and of the earth revolving in the centre of the universe, with the firmament about it, “like a shell encircling an egg.” The passage of the sun through the constellations is then described, each

of the twelve divisions through which it passes being provided with six windows, with close-fitting shutters, and strong [10] coverings, which open to shed light by day. The constellations are then named, and the first section of the poem ends as follows:—

For each day five items of knowledge
are required of every intelligent person,
from every one, without appearance of censure, [19]
who is in ecclesiastical orders.
The day of the solar month, the age of the moon,
the sea-tide, without error,
the day of the week, the festivals of the perfect saints,
after just clearness, with their variations.

FOOTNOTES:

[11] Whitley Stokes gives “lawful.”

[12] Comp. the parallel passage in *Senchus mòr*, *Ancient Laws of Ireland*, vol. i. intro. p. 26.

[13] This is Dr. Whitley Stokes' reading. Dr. R. Thurneysen reads "sextarii."

[14] It is not clear what the word glés, gléssib, which occurs frequently in the following passage, means. In mod. Irish, gléas, in one meaning, is a means or instrument for doing a thing. The verb gléasaim=“to harness.” It seems to have some such meaning here. The winds were apparently harnessed, curbed, or fettered two and two, the whole being held together in one fetter. In another sense gléas means “harmony.”

[15] Or “track.”

[16] i.e. the Planets.[17]

Or “impure air”?[18]

Cf. the parallel passage in the *Senchus mór* astronomical tract, *Anc. Laws of Ireland*, vol. i., Introduction, p. 28.

[19] Perhaps “boasting.”

[11]

II. THE HEAVENLY KINGDOM

My own King who formed the pure Heaven, l. 337
with its boundaries, according to His pleasure,
a habitation choice, songful, safe,
for the wondrous host of Archangels.

Heaven with its multitude of hosts,
noble, durable, exceeding spacious,
a strong mighty city with a hundred graces,
a tenth of it the measure of the world.

Therein are three ramparts undecaying,
fixedly they surround heaven,
a rampart of emerald crystal,
a rampart of gold, a rampart of amethyst. [20]

A wall of emerald, without obscurity, outside,
a wall of gold next to the city,
between the two, with bright fair glory,
a mighty rampart of stainless purple.

[12]

There, with a strong-flowing sea (?)
is a spacious, perfect city,
in it, with the light of peace, [21]
is the eternal way of the four chief doors.

The measure of each door severally
of the four chief doorways,
(placed) side by side, by calculation,
is a mile across each single door.

In each doorway a cross of gold
before the eyes of the ever-shining host;
the King wrought them without effort,
they are massive, very lofty.

Overhead, on each cross, a bird of red gold,
full-voiced, not unsteady;
in every cross
a great gem of precious stone.

Every day an archangel
with his host from Heaven's king,
with harmony, with pure melody,
(gather) around each several cross.

Before each doorway is a lawn,
fair ..., of sure estimation,
I liken each one of them in extent [22]
to the earth together with its seas.

[13]

The circuit of each single lawn
with its silvern soil, [23]
with its swards, covered with goodly blossom,
with its beauteous plants.

Vast though you may deem
the extent of the spacious lawns,
a rampart of silver, undecaying,
has been formed about each several lawn.

The portals of the walls without
around the fortress on every side,
with its dwellings soundly placed,
affording abodes (?) for many thousands.

Eight portals in a series
so that they come together around the city,
I have not, in the way of knowledge, [24]
a simile for the extent of each portico.

Each portal abounding in plants,
with their bronze foundations,
a rampart of fair clay has been established
strongly about each portal.

Twelve ramparts—perfect the boundary (?)
of the portals, of the lawns,
without counting the three ramparts that are outside
around the chief city.

[14]

There are forty gateways in the heavenly habitation
with its kingly thrones;
three to each tranquil lawn,
and three to each portal.

Gratings (or doors) of silver, fair in aspect,
to each gateway of that lawn,
gracious bronze doors
to the gateways of the portals.

l. 409

The corresponding walls from the fortress outwards
of all the portals
are comparable in height [25]
(to the distance) from the earth to the moon.

The ramparts of the lawns, as is meet,
wrought of white bronze,
their height—mighty in brilliance—
is as that from the earth to the pure sun.

The measure of comparison of the three ramparts
which surround the chief city,
their height shows (a distance equal
to that) from the earth to the firmament.

The entrance bridges [26] of the perfect gates,
a fair way, shining with red gold,
they are irradiated—pure the gathering—
each step ascending above the other.

l. 465

[15]

From step to step—brave the progress,
pleasant the ascent into the high city;
fair is that host, on the path of attainment (?)
many thousands, a hundred of hundreds.

In the circuit of the ramparts—great its strength (?)—
in the interior of the chief city,
bright glossy galleries,
firm red-gold bridges.

Therein are flowering lands
ever fresh in all seasons,
with the produce of each well-loved fruit
with their thousand fragrances.

The nine grades of heaven,
around the King of all causation,

l. 553

without loss of glory, with vigour of strength,
without pride, without envy.

In abundant profusion (?) under the lawful King
this their exact number,
seventy-two excellent hosts
in each grade of the grades.

The number of each host, unmeasured gladness,
there is none that could know it,
except the King should know it
who created them out of nothing.

A majestic King over them all,
King of flowery heaven,
a goodly, righteous, steadfast King,
King of royal generosity in His regal dwelling.

[16]

King very youthful, King aged long ago, [27]
King who fashioned the heavens about the pure sun,
King of all the gracious saints,
a King gentle, comely, shapely.

The King who created the pure heavenly house
for the angels without transgression,
land of holy ones, of the sons of life, [28]
a plain fair, long, spacious.

He arranged a noble, peaceful [29] abode,
stable, under the regal courses,
a comely, clear, perfect, bright circuit,
for the wondrous folk of penitence.

My King from the beginning over the host,
“sanctus Dominus Sabaoth,”
to whom is chanted upon the heights, with loving guidance, (?)
the melody of the four-and-twenty white-robed saints.

The King who ordained the perfect choir
of the four-and-twenty holy ones,
sweetly they chant the chant to the host
“sanctus Deus Sabaoth.”

[17]

King steadfast, bountiful, goodly, noble,
abode of peace, ... (?)
with whom is the flock of lambs
around the Pure Spotless Lamb.

Bright King, who appointed the Lamb
to move forward upon the Mount (of Sion) [30]
four thousand youths following Him,
(with) a hundred and forty (thousand) in a pure progress

A perfect choir, with glories of form,
of the stainless virgins,
chants pure music along with them
following after the shining Lamb.

Equal in beauty, in swiftness, in brightness,
across the Mount surrounding the Lamb;
the name inscribed on their countenances, with grace,
is the name of the Father.

The King who ordained the voice
of the heavenly ones by inspiration,
full, strong-swelling,
as the mighty wave of many waters;

Or like the voice of sound-loving harps
they sing, without fault, full tenderly,
(like) multitudinous great floods over every land,
or like the mighty sound of thunder. [31]

[18]

King of the flowering tree of life,
a way for the ranks of the noble grades;
its top, its droppings, on every side,
have spread across the broad plain of heaven.

On which sits the splendid bird-flock
sustaining a perfect melody of pure grace,
without decay, with gracious increase
of fruit or of foliage.

Beauteous the bird-flock which sustains it, (i.e. the melody)
each choice bird with a hundred wings;
they chant without guile, in bright joyousness,
a hundred melodies for every wing.

King who created many splendid dwellings, [32]
many comely, just, perfect works,
through (the care of) my rich King, [33] over every sphere,
no lack is felt by any of the vast array.

His are the seven heavens, perfect in might,
without prohibition, without evil, whitely moving
around the earth, great the wonder (?)
with the names of each heaven.

Air, ether, over all
Olympus, the firmament,
heaven of water, heaven of the perfect angels,
the heaven where is the fair-splendid Lord.

[19]

The amount of good which our dear God,
has for His saints in their holy dwelling,
according to the skill of the wise(?)
there is none who can relate a hundredth part of it.

1. 649

The Lord, the head of each pure grade,
who gathered (?) the host to everlasting life,
may He save me after my going out of the body of battles,
the King who formed Heaven.

King who formed the pure Heaven.

FOOTNOTES:

[20] Lit. “green,” “gold,” and “purple,” but they seem to imply special stones.[21]Or peaceful light.

[22] This is the L. B. reading; the text gives “excellence” or “fertility,” which does not make good sense.

[23]The L. B. reading is *fond d’argut futhib*, which seems to point to some such meaning as “base,” “foundation.”

[24] Reading uncertain.

[25] This is the L. B. reading; our text seems to mean “in renown.”

[26] Or “thresholds.”

[27] Perhaps Ancient of Days.

[28] *Mac bethad* may mean “a sinless man,” as *mac ódis*, “son of death,” means a sinful man.

[29] We take *síd* to be an adjective; it might also mean “a fairy mound,” but this is hardly applicable here.

[30] Rev. xiv. i.

[31] “I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder; and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps” (Rev. xiv. 2).

[32] “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John xiv. 3).

[33] *Rogmar* (mod. Ir. *roghmhar*) means “bulky” or “fortunate” or “fat”; here it refers to God as possessor of all.

[20]

III. THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT. (vii.)

Prince who gave a clear admonition to Eve and to Adam,
that they should eat of the produce of Paradise
according to God’s command:

l. 1081

“Eat ye of them freely,
of the fruits of Paradise—sweet the fragrance—
many, all of them (a festival to be shared) [34]
are lawful for you save one tree.

“In order that you may know that you are under authority,
without sorrow, without strife,
without anxiety, without long labour,
without age, evil, or blemish;

“Without decay, without heavy sickness;
with everlasting life, in everlasting triumph
on your going to heaven (joyous the festival)
at the choice age of thirty years.”

[21]

A thousand years
and six hours of the hours,
without guile, without danger, it has been heard,
Adam was in Paradise. [35]

O God our help, whom champions prove,
who fashioned all with perfect justice,
not bright the matter of our theme (?) [36]
the King who spake an admonition with them.

Prince who gave a clear admonition.

(The figures in brackets after the title of the chapters are the numbers of the poems or cantos in the text.)

FOOTNOTES:

[34] Lit. “share of a festival”; this is one of those chevilles which are frequent in this poem, often introduced without much sense to fill out a line, or to give a rhyming word. We have omitted a few of them in the translation.

[35] There seems to be some error here. According to Gen. v. 3, Adam lived altogether nine hundred and thirty years, as the poet states further on (p. 43).

[36] The meaning of this line is not clear. The above is conjectural.

[22]

IV. THE FALL AND EXPULSION FROM PARADISE. (viii.)

The Devil was jealous thereat
with Adam and his children,
their being here, without evil,
in their perfect bodies (on their passage) to heaven. 1. 1105

All the living creatures in the flesh
my Holy King has created them,
outside Paradise without strife
Adam it is who used to order them.

At the time when out of every quarter
the hosts of the seven heavens used to gather round my High King,
every fair corporeal creature
used to come together to Adam.

Each of them out of this place cheerfully, [37]
at his call to adore him;
to Adam, joyous the custom,
they used to come to delight him.

[23]

From heaven God ruled
all the living things
that they should come out of every district without fierceness [38]
till they arrived before (the gate of) Paradise.

Then they would return right-hand-wise
without seed of pride or any murmuring,
each of them to its very pure abode
after taking leave of Adam.

The very fierce, double-headed beast,
was subtle and watchful, with (his) twenty hosts,
how under heaven he shall find a way
to bring about the destruction of Adam.

Lucifer, many his clear questions, [39]
went amongst the animals,
amongst the herds outside Paradise
until he found the serpent.

Is it not useless (i.e. unworthy of you) thy being outside?”
said the Devil to the serpent;

“with thy dexterous cunning,
with thy cleverness, with thy subtlety?

“Great was the danger and the wickedness
that Adam should have been ordained over thee;
the downfall [40] of him, the youngest of created things,
and his destruction, would be no crime to us.

[24]

“Since thou art more renowned in warfare,
first of the twain thou wast created,
thou art more cunning, more agreeable in every way (?)
do not submit to the younger!

“Take my advice without shrinking, [41]
let us make an alliance and friendship;
listen to my clear reasoning:
do not go forth to Adam.

“Give me a place in thy body,
with my own laws, with my own intellect,
so that we both may go from the plain
unexpectedly [42] to Eve.

“Let us together urge upon her
the fruit of the forbidden tree,
that she afterwards may clearly
press the food upon Adam.

“Provided that they go together
beyond the commandment of his Lord,
God will not love them here,
they will leave Paradise in evil plight.” [43]

“What reward is there for me above every great one?”
said the serpent to the devil;
“on my welcoming thee into my fair body,
without evil, as my fellow-inhabitant?

[25]

“For guiding thee on that road
to destroy Eve and Adam,
for going with thee truly to the attack
whatever act thou mayest undertake?” [44]

(LUCIFER replies)

“What greater reward shall I give to thee
according to the measure of our great crime
(than that) our union in our habits, in our wrath,
shall be for ever spoken of?”

When he found a place for the betrayal
in the likeness of the serpent’s shape,
slowly he went tarrying [45]
directly to the gate of Paradise.

The serpent called outside,
“dost thou hear me, O wife of Adam?

come and converse with me, O Eve of the fair form,
beyond [46] every other.”

“I have no time to talk with anyone,”
said Eve to the serpent;
“I am going out to feed
the senseless animals.”

“If you are the Eve whose fame was heard
with honour in Paradise,
wife of Adam, beautiful, wide-minded,
in her I desire [47] my full satisfaction.” [48]

[26]

(EVE speaks)

“Whenever Adam is not here,
I am guardian of Paradise,
without weariness, O smooth, pale creature,
I attend to the needs of the animals.”

(The SERPENT speaks)

“How long does Adam go from thee,
on which side does he make his fair circuit,
when at any time he is not here
feeding the herds in Paradise?”

“He leaves it to me, bright jewel;
I feed the animals,
while he goes with pure unmeasured renown
to adore the Lord.”

“I desire to ask a thing of thee,”
said the slender, very affable serpent,
“because bright and dear is thy clear reasoning,
O Eve, O bride of Adam!”

“Whatever it be that you contemplate saying,
it will not vex me, O noble creature;
certainly there will be no obscurity here,
I will narrate it to thee truthfully.”

[27]

“Tell me, O glorious Eve,
since it chances that we are discoursing together,
in your judgment, is the life in Paradise,
with your lordship here, pleasant?”

(Eve replies)

“Until we go faultless in our turn, (or “ranks”)
in our bodies to heaven,
we do not ask here greater lordship
than what there is of good in Paradise.

“Every good thing, [49] as it was heard,
that God created in Paradise,
save one tree, all without reserve,
is thus under our control. [50]

“It is He, the dear God, who committed to us,
O pale, bashful creature,
Paradise as a solace [51] for His people (?)
except the fruit of the one tree.

“‘Let alone the very pure tree,’
He cautioned myself and Adam,
‘the fruit of the rough tree, if thou eatest of it
against my command, thou shalt die.’”

[28]

(The SERPENT speaks)

“Though on the plain [52] you be equal,
yourself and Adam, O Eve,
you are not more intelligent, O gentle, pure one,
than any of the beasts.

“However great be the host under you outside
it is lamentable that you are without minds,
like to any of the ignorant animals;
thus you are under one law (with them). [53]

“Except as regards possessions only,
your lordship has not been complete;
since nothing of evil has been sent to you,
the worse is your understanding.

“Great is the lack of wisdom;
God is deceiving you:
because it is of the one tree of good and evil,
that you are not permitted to eat.

“For this purpose the brave tree was invented,
in order that it should not be allowed you;
that you should not have the intelligence
to distinguish between good and evil.

“Do not hesitate, go to the tree,
to test it as regards one apple;
the discernment between good and evil
will be as the High Prince instructed you.”

[29]

(EVE speaks)

“How good soever thy intelligence,
however favourable [54] and gracious thy counsel,
to go to the tree I dare not,
lest we die.

“Go thou thyself to the tree, O serpent,
and bring from it one apple;
but if that apple come to me
I shall share it between myself and Adam.

“Before all the multitudes we shall be endowed with knowledge,
if we but eat the apple,

(this is) thy tale without mockery;
perchance what thou sayest is true.”

(The SERPENT speaks)

“O Eve, untrammelled light,
open before me the gate of Paradise;
provided I arrive without misfortune yonder
I will bring from the tree the apple.”

(EVE speaks)

“Though I open before thee that thou mayest go yonder,
though from the tree you bring me an apple,
there will be no delay on thee here,
(by) thy lingering in Paradise?”

[30]

(SATAN speaks)

“If I bring the apple to thee,
that thou mayest discern good and evil
without any fail I will go out,
unless bondage or fetters befall me.”
Eve opened secretly
the door before the serpent,
without difficulty [55] it went (it was not obsequious),
on its course to the one tree.

Eve took the perfect apple
from the apple-tree (most woeful the tale),
Eve carried off the half, it was not well,
she left the other half for Adam.

King who drave from Thee the host of hell,
who hast made them fast in equal wretchedness under trembling service,
He (God) wounded in battle, though it was laborious,
the keen wolf who was jealous.
The Devil was jealous thereat.

FOOTNOTES:

[37] Lit. “prosperously.”

[38] Lit. “without attack.”

[39] This seems to be a cheville; lit. “number of clear questions.”

[40] Lit. “his consuming.”

[41] Lit. “without grief” or “sorrow.”

[42] Lit. “under attack.”

[43] Lit. “without bloom”?

[44] Lit. “rise to.”

[45] Or “steadily.”

[46] Or perhaps “apart from” every other.

[47] Or “I beseech.”

[48] Or “need.”

[49] This is the L. B. reading; the text has fia. Is it fiadh, of which one meaning is “meat,” or “food”?

[50] Or “it is thus according to rule,” i.e. laid down for us.

[51] Donad seems to be used in the same way as didnad, “solace” or “consolation,” v.n. of didonaim, “I console.”

- [52] i.e. outside in the fields among the animals.
 [53] i.e. on the same level with the beasts.
 [54] Or “full of grace.”
 [55] Cith means a “shower” (metaph. “of tears”); also “hardship.”[31]

V. THE PENANCE OF ADAM AND EVE. (xi.)

King who bestowed the pleasurable earth
 upon Adam after the fall,
 he had no (reason for) displeasure towards God,
 save that he should perish after a time. [56] l. 1469

Adam was a week yet
 after his expulsion out of Paradise,
 weary, without fire, without dwelling,
 without drink or food or clothing.

Because they were impoverished
 they went into the midst of the field,
 great was the mutual reproach perpetually
 between Eve and Adam.

“O Eve of the just fair form,
 sorrowful are we through thy impenitence; (?)
 through thy misdeeds, through thy transgression,
 alas! we have been cast out of Paradise.

“Much did we relinquish of good
 when we vexed our High Prince;
 Paradise was ours under perfect command [57]
 with every reverence.

[32]

“Youth [58] and joy, by us it has been heard,
 health, playfulness, delight,
 bordered [59] lands, most perfect of form,
 wondrous plants, harmonies.

“Noble satisfaction, singular wholesome peace,
 a festival of holiness for souls,
 ... [60] many the habitations,
 frequent intercourse with angels.

“Lasting life, continually at God’s right hand,
 for ever in the brughs of Paradise,
 in which, under fair aspect,
 God’s creatures were doing us reverence.

“All the living things under heaven
 which my faithful dear God created,
 under (our) control over every high place,
 we it was who used to order them.

“Fire would not burn us,
 water would not drown us,
 nor sharp edge ... [61]
 nor (was there) pestilence nor consuming disease.

[33]

“There was not among the elements of dear God,
one that would come, in heaven or earth,
against our will, to destroy us,
save only the wicked Lucifer.

“Even Lucifer
could not harm us,
while we were under law (in a) perfect course
according to mandate, according to command.

“Because we wronged dear God
who gave us everything,
on every height, all creatures together,
are (now) in opposition to us.

“It is not God who has been evil towards us,
O Eve, ruddy, gentle fair one;
it is we who have wronged the Prince,
though He provided us with lasting good.”
Eve spake, for she was in distress, [62]

in sorrow, after the fall;
“O Adam, marvellous over every wild,
why do you not kill me for my sins?
“It is I who transgressed the law,
it is I who committed the transgression,
it would then be right that thou should'st slay me,
O my Lord, O Adam!

[34]

“Provided that I fall (just the measure)
for my sins, for my transgression,
clearly the greater mercy
will thy God shew towards thee.”
“Greatly have we offended the King,”
said he, said Adam, without contempt,
“O Wife, I will not commit murder on thee,
though I be famished, though I be naked.

“I will not lift my hand
upon my own blood, my own flesh;
how great soever thy crime,
it is from my body thou art.

“It is not fitting for us in any way
to outrage Him again;
so that the true Prince, O wife,
may not cut us off and utterly destroy us.

“That we go not from Him a distant journey
with demons into the abyss of torment,
nor that God give us back
into the power of Lucifer.”

“There is no good in our life, [63]
O Adam,” said she, said Eve;
“without clothing, without warm dwelling,
without food, we shall perish of hunger.

“We had food, we had garments,
as long as we were without sin;
since our fall and our going astray,
we have neither clothing nor good food.

[35]

“O Husband, make a circuit without fail
by a pleasant path on every hand,
to learn if thou canst get as a feast (?)
of food for us something that we would eat.”

Adam went on a well-marked course
near by, and far away;
he did not find, after all,
any wholesome food but herbs of the ground.

Herbs of the soil, green their colour,
food of the senseless animals;
they are not tender for us as a meal,
after the pleasant food of Paradise.

(ADAM speaks)

“O Eve, let us with sincerity
make lasting penance and repentance,
that we might cleanse away before the King of Justice
something of our sins, of our transgressions.”

(EVE replies)

“Give me instruction about that,
O my Lord, O Adam,
because I know not before the great world [64]
how one should do penance.

“Instruct me clearly,
according to thy understanding, according to thy clear sense,
that I do not exceed,
neither that I fall short in any way.”

[36]

(ADAM speaks)

“Let us adore the Lord together
in silence, without intercourse;
thou into the strong river Tigris,
and I will go into the River Jordan.

“Thirty-three days
thou should'st be in the River Tigris,
myself in Jordan under correction
forty-seven clear days.

“Take with thee a firm flag of stone,
(place it) under thy sitting, under thy gentle feet,
and I shall take with me another stone
equal to it, resembling it exactly.

“Dispose the stone in the river,
bathe thyself on it;

thou wilt be chosen as thou hast strength to endure
until the water rises to thy throat.

“Thy locks spread luxuriantly on every hand,
upon the stream on every side;
be thou silent with grief and special sadness,
thy keen eyes towards the heavenly ones.

“Lift thy two hands every canonical hour [65]
towards the heavenly Lord of the nine grades;
pray ..., even at the beginning,
forgiveness for thy transgression.

[37]

“We are not pure to converse with God,
since (our) transgression, since (our) impurity,
for our false, polluted mouths
are not clean, stainless, bright.

“Let us beseech the whole of the creatures
formed by God through His pure mysteries,
that they implore with us to the King of Justice
that our transgression be forgiven.

“Perform in this manner thy good work,
and beseech the true Prince;
until He determine clearly
do not stir thyself, do not move.”

Forty and seven days without woe
was Adam in the River Jordan;
thirty and three days was gentle Eve
in the stream of the River Tigris.

Angels of God each day from heaven
from God to succour Adam,
instructing him, as was permitted,
to the end of nineteen days.

Then Adam sought a mighty boon
upon the River Jordan;
that it would “fast” with him upon dear God,
with its multitude of creatures.

The stream stood still
in its course, in its onward motion;
the kingly stream paused from its flow
that He might give forgiveness to Adam.

[38]

Then the stream gathered together
every living creature that was in its womb,
until the whole number of the living creatures
were around Adam.

All of them prayed,
Adam, the stream, and the multitude of animals;
mournfully they poured forth their noble lamentation
to the perfect host of the nine holy grades.

That all the grades, openly,
might beseech their Lord on their behalf
that God should give full forgiveness,
and should not destroy Adam. [66]

The nine grades with their array
prayed to God who controls them
for forgiveness now for Adam
for his peril, for his sin.

God gave to His grades
full pardon for the sin of Adam,
and the habitation of the earth at all times
with heaven, holily noble, all-pure.

And He pardoned after that
their descendants and their peoples,
save him alone who acts unrighteously
and transgresses the will of God unlawfully.

[39]

When the black Devil heard
that forgiveness had been bestowed on Adam,
(he said) "I will go in a distinguished brilliant form
to Eve again.

"That I may bring her out of the stream through weakness,
that I may put her on a course of death;
so that I may drown (i.e. destroy) something of her work
and disturb her devotion."

Lucifer went with joyful speed,
the fierce, astute wolf,
like a swan, in the shape of a white angel,
to Eve in the River Tigris.

The angel who destroyed them spake with her,
in pity for her, as it seemed to her,
"O modest Eve of the bright form,
long hast thou tarried in the River Tigris.

"Ah Woman, though bright was thy beauty,
thou hast grown pale [67] in the rough stream;
without vigour ..., it is evident
thou hast slain thyself, thou hast destroyed thyself.

"O Woman, come out for the sake of thy God,
remain no longer in the cruel river;
thy valiant King sent me journeying,
from Him have I come to show pity to thee."

[40]

Then comes Eve out of the river,
and was on the shore, drying herself;
a cloud (i.e. a faintness) fell on her then,
so that she was almost dead without life.

Bright Eve did not recognise
Lucifer with his manifold snares;

the matchless woman was perplexed, [68]
her mind was in doubt.

(LUCIFER speaks)

“O Eve, what has come to thee?
greatly art thou considering;
clearly I came to thee from heaven,
at the command of the steadfast God.

“Let us go hence to Adam.
O Woman! do not be wavering;
we have all prayed to dear God
to pardon you for your sins.”

Then they went vigorously
as far as the River Jordan,
to Adam, chief of tribes;
noble Eve and Lucifer.

[41]

When Adam perceived from the river
Eve and Lucifer,
trembling took hold upon him, (though) he was courageous,
horror of the Devil's countenance filled him.

“My grief! O wandering Eve,
thy guide is betraying thee;
the man who comes journeying with thee here,
it is he who deceived thee in Paradise.

“Ah, sad Eve, without dear form, [69]
what brought thee from the River Tigris
without the warrant of the King of Justice,
without a pure accompanying angel?”

When Eve heard that,
the reproaches of Adam,
she fell to the ground,
she came near to speedy death.

(A long conversation follows between Adam and the Devil; Adam demands why the Devil pursues them with such perpetual hatred and, in reply, Lucifer recounts his fall from heaven, which he says was caused by his refusal to obey the command of God that he should worship Adam.

[42]

This command he refused, because he, as the first-created, felt it unworthy of him to adore Adam, the youngest-born of created things. He details his present miseries, and his determination to take revenge on Adam and Eve. The poem or canto ends with the coming of Adam out of the river, and the history of their children, Seth, Cain, and Abel.)

FOOTNOTES

[56] i.e. instead of passing in his body direct to heaven, without dying, his days henceforth were numbered.

[57] Lit. “summons.”

[58] The word is óetiu, probably óitíu="youth"; L. B. has áitte aille ocus slanti cen galar, "beautiful places and health without sickness."

[59] Balthai (?). There is a word baltadh, "a border" (O'R); L. B. has blathi, "blooming" or "prosperous."

[60] Aithbi derrit?

[61] Fédim?

[62] Or possibly "famished."

[63] Lit. "gatherings" or "proceedings."

[64] Lit. "before every quarter" (i.e. of the world).

[65] Like the mention of "cross-vigil" later on, the mention of canonical hours is a quaint anachronism in the history of Adam and Eve.

[66] Or possibly "without stint to Adam"; but the reading above seems better to bear out the meaning.

[67] Lit. "thou hast changed thy complexion in the rough stream."

[68] Lit. "it was difficult to the matchless woman."

[69] i.e. "whose form has been changed by her sojourn in the river."

[43]

VI. THE DEATH OF ADAM. (xii.)

A.

dam's lifetime was not short; . 1.2021
that ye may know, without risk (of error),
thirty years had he, it was exactly proven,
with nine hundred years. [70]

Then came a complete sickness to Adam,
such as comes to everyone,
his wife Eve with every goodness
was receiving his last bequests.

Adam knew his destiny,
he spake to splendid Eve:
"I have parted from thee and from thy children;
of this sickness I die."

"It is hard of God,"
said she, said Eve, to Adam,
"that thou art not sojourning here,(?)
that it is not I who go first.

[44]

"My grief! that thou should'st change,"
said she, said Eve to Adam;
"that I should be here sorrowful without strength,
that thou should'st go first."

"O Eve of the pure clear form,
understand clearly in thy mind;
thou wilt not be any length, it is clear,
here in pain after my departure.

"Short was the time, though it be without deception,
between thy creation and mine,
thou wilt not be in danger of attack, [71] bright is the outlook,
but nine months after me."

“Tell me without error, O Husband,
what I shall do with thy fair dear body?
since thou deemest thy death is certain,
O my Lord, O Adam!”

“Let not foot or hand touch me,
let not any interfere with me,
till one is sent from God from heaven
to arrange my fair dear body.

“Leave my body (fair the fashion),
in its bonds without disturbance;
I am certain that the noble Artificer who formed me
will provide for the needs of my body.

[45]

“Arise, O Eve, cheerfully,
and begin a ‘cross-vigil’; [72]
send thou from thee, O Wife, to God’s right hand
my pure soul to holy heaven.

“The soul that God created in me,
it is He who recalled it in its uncleanness;
let it go to him perfectly to His dwelling
with the accompanying of angel-hosts.

“O Wife, I am not bold, in truth,
concerning the actions of my good King;
the wrath that He showed (pure His sway),
was an act of affection and mercy.”

(EVE kneels and prays to God. A heavenly messenger is sent to her, to tell her that the soul of Adam is parted from the body, and that it is safe in the charge of the hosts of the archangel Michael.)

Then Eve went
quickly towards Adam;
until she found Adam (great the love)—
no longer inhaling breath.

l. 2105

When she heard not
the voice of Adam speaking to her with fair beauty,
her senses out of measure overpowered her,
with long lamentations, with lasting sorrow.

[46]

(The heavenly messenger speaks)

“O Eve, lift up thine eyes,
and suffer us to instruct thee;
set thy keen pure glance
upwards clearly to the heavenly ones.

“O Woman, raise thy pure face,
to behold the soul of Adam,
as it is uplifted brightly
between hosts of archangels.”

On that Eve turned
to behold the soul of Adam,

and she saw the beautiful peaceful soul
of Adam in the company of Michael.

While Eve was thus
recognising the soul of Adam,
she beheld coming towards it along the ways
hosts of angels chorus-singing.

Eve beheld a Seraph
moving nobly in front of the host
on three golden wings;
fair was the beloved thing [73] which he bore.

Then Eve beheld
three white shining birds
(which) across the sky from holy heaven
had arrived (?) in their lustre.

[47]

While she was watching the birds,
Eve herself without great trouble,
as with a flash of the full sun,
she became unable to look at them.

Up unto cloudy heaven was heard
the choir of the holy angels around Michael;
they spread their pleasant ranks then
circling about the altar of Adam.

The angels sustained a fitting harmony
round about the altar;
before all the host they burned a herb
which is called "ornamentum."

The strong smoke [74] spread
directly through the air;
the doors of the firmament opened
without any force (?) [75]

God came in holiness from heaven
to the service of Adam's soul;
the Soverain King over every sphere
sat down on His royal throne.

There went before the pure King
a noble angel of the angels;
he sounded melodiously a clear, shrill note,
its beautiful report was heard throughout the seven heavens. [76]

[48]

Towards the sound of the trumpet, purely splendid,
went the host of the nine holy grades;
truly strong were their clear numbers,
before the royal throne of the Creator!

(The hosts unite in praising the Lord for His mercy to Adam)

Then the King of Wisdom [77]
sent from Him quickly a Seraph

l. 2177

across the slopes of the great mass of the hosts
with wings of red gold.

Until they took the soul of Adam without pain,
so that it was bathed
in the unpassable (?) river of the ever-living host [78]
“indatinum ciriasu.”

So that he brought with him Adam’s pure, clear soul
thus out of the stream,
then he placed himself as at the first
before the presence of the Creator.

Then the King laid His hand,
without any consuming (?) upon the soul of Adam.
He commended it to Michael,
fair is the tale!

“Be thou not harsh, O Michael,
towards its great bliss,
place thou the soul of Adam here
in Paradise.

[49]

“Bear the bright pure soul
of splendid Adam with his accompanying bands,
place it ...
in the third kingly division of Paradise.”

“‘In the third heaven,’ said God,
‘which is called Ficconicia;
let it be there without sign of pain
till the time of the Resurrection.’”

All the grades in every sphere
both of angels and archangels,
sweet was their pure chorus
praising the Creator;

For the remission to the soul of Adam
from its sins, from its vices;
that it should be brought
again to Paradise.

Let the oil of mercy
and the herb “ornamentum” be bestowed
about the body of Adam
to cleanse it from its vileness.

Around the body of Adam
let three wholesome linen cloths, of special honour, be arranged;
and let it be buried exactly
at the side of Abel’s sepulchre.[50]

The body of our fore-father Adam,
according to writings of manifold genius,
from afar, under the heavy, sorrowful bonds of death,
was buried in Hebron.

“So the youth cast a spell upon the wave, that it might reveal to him the cause of its moaning.”—*Book of Leinster*, 186a. [53]

THE SOURCE OF POETIC INSPIRATION

A Colloquy between the Old Poet and the Young Poet. Time: The beginning of the Christian era.

The old poet spake to the young poet:

“Who is this sage around
whom is wrapped the robe of splendour?
and whence comes he?”

The young poet answered:

“I spring from the heel of a wise man,
From the meeting-place of wisdom I come forth;
From the place where goodness dwells serene.
From the red sunrise of the dawn I come,
Where grow the nine hazels of poetic art.
From the wide circuits of splendour
Out of which, according to their judgment, truth is weighed.
There is a land where righteousness is instilled,
And where falsehood wanes into twilight.

[54]

There is a land of varied colours [82]
Where poems are bathed anew.
And thou, O well-spring of Knowledge, whence comest thou?”

“Well can the answer be given:
I move along the columns of age,
Along the streams of inspiration,
Along the elf-mound of Nechtan’s wife,
Along the forearm of the wife of Nuada, [83]
Along the fair land of knowledge
The bright country of the sun;
Along the hidden land which by day the moon inhabits;
Along the first beginnings of life.
I demand of thee, O wise youth, what it is that lies before thee?”

“That I can answer thee.
I travel towards the plain of age,
Through the mountain-heights of youth.
I go forward to the hunting-grounds of old age,
Into the sunny dwelling of a king (death?),
Into the abode of the tomb;
Between burial and judgment,
Between battles and their horrors
Among Tethra’s mighty men. [84]
And thou, O master of Wisdom, what lies before thee?”

[55]

“I pass into the lofty heights of honour,
Into the community of knowledge,
Into the fair country inhabited of noble sages,
Into the haven of prosperities,
Into the assembly of the king’s son.

Into contempt of upstarts,
Into the slopes of death where great honour lies.
O Son of Instructions, whose son art thou?"

"I am the son of Poetry,
Poetry son of investigation,
Investigation son of meditation,
Meditation son of lore,
Lore son of research,
Research son of enquiry,
Enquiry son of wide knowledge,
Knowledge son of good sense,
Good sense son of understanding,
Understanding son of wisdom,
Wisdom son of the three gods of Poetry.
O Fount of Wisdom, of whom art thou the son?"

[56]

"I am the son of the man who has lived, but has never been born;
Of him who was buried in the womb of his own mother; [85]
Of him who was baptized after his death. [86]
He of all living, was first betrothed to death,
His is the first name uttered by the living,
His the name lamented by all the dead:
Adam, the High One, is his name." [87]

FOOTNOTES:

[82] The colours denote the qualities of the inhabitants.

[83] Two poetic names for the River Boyne; Nuada was the deified ancestor of the Kings of Leinster. In the Boyne dwelt the "salmon of knowledge," which the poet must consume, and at its source grew the hazels of poetic inspiration. Its tumuli were believed to be the haunts of gods or fairies.

[84] Tethra was god of the assemblies of the dead.

[85] Explained in the gloss to mean "the Earth."

[86] i.e. "in the Passion of Christ."

[87] The above translation is founded on Dr. Whitley Stokes edition of the Colloquy (see note, p. 349).[57]

AMORGEN'S SONG

Amorgen sang:
I am the wind on the sea (for depth);
I am a wave of the deep (for weight);
I am the sound of the sea (for horror);
I am a stag of seven points (? for strength);
I am a hawk on a cliff (for deftness);
I am a tear of the sun (for clearness);
I am the fairest of herbs;
I am a boar for valour;
I am a salmon in a pool (i.e. the pools of knowledge);
I am a lake on a plain (for extent);
I am a hill of Poetry (and knowledge);

I am a battle-waging spear with trophies (for spoiling or hewing);
I am a god, who fashions smoke from magic fire for a head (to slay therewith);
(Who, but I, will make clear every question?)
Who, but myself, knows the assemblies of the stone-house [88] on the mountain of
Slieve Mis?
Who (but the Poet) knows in what place the sun goes down?

[58]

Who seven times sought the fairy-mounds without fear?
Who declares them, the ages of the moon?
Who brings his kine from Tethra's house? [89]
Who segregated Tethra's kine?

(For whom will the fish of the laughing sea be making welcome, but for me?)
Who shapeth weapons from hill to hill (wave to wave, letter to letter, point to point)?

Invoke, O people of the waves, [90] invoke the satirist, that he may make an
incantation for thee!
I, the druid, who set out letters in Ogham;
I, who part combatants;
I, who approach the fairy-mounds to seek a cunning satirist, that he may compose
chants with me.

I am the wind on the sea.

FOOTNOTES:

[88] Or dolmen? Professor John MacNeill, on whose readings the above is founded, notes that a dolmen near Slieve Mis in Co. Antrim is called Ticloy (toigh cloiche), and in the local Scotch dialect "the stane-hoose."

[89] See note, p. 349.

[90] i.e. the fish, here also called "Tethra's kine"; this poem is generally followed by an incantation for good fishing, to which these phrases doubtless refer.

[59]

THE SONG OF CHILDBIRTH

Oness, let all men stand,
The hour of thy peril is at hand;
Pale daughter of old Eochad Buidhe the mild
We rise to greet thy child!

Wife of the ruddy palms
Let not thy mind be filled with terror's qualms;
The head of hosts, the one
Whom thousands shall extol, shall be thy son.

In the same timely hour upon this earth
He and the King of the World have their birth;
Through the long ages' gloom
Now and to the day of doom.

Praises shall echo through the realm of life.
Heroes, at sight of him, cease their strife;
Hostages they twain shall never be
The Christ and he.

On the plain of Inisfail he shall come forth,
On the flagstone of the meadow to the North.

[60]

Hostages every battle-chief to him will send,
Through the great world his glory will extend;

The king of grace is he,
The Hound of Ulster he;
But and if he falls,
Darkness and woe descend on Erin's halls.

Conchobhar, son of Ness "ungentle," is his name;
Raids and red routs his valour will proclaim.
There he will find his death
Where the expiring breath

Of the suffering God his vengeful sword demands,
In the dark hour upon the Holy Lands; [91]
Shining his red sword's track,
Over the sloping plain of Liam's back.

FOOTNOTES:

[91]King Conchobhar was believed to be born in the same year as Jesus Christ, and to have met his death in endeavouring to avenge the death of Christ.

[61]

GREETING TO THE NEW-BORN BABE

Welcome, little stranger,
Born in pain and danger,
He will be our gracious Lord,
Son of gentle Cathva.

Son of gentle Cathva,
From the fort of Brug na Brat;
Son of valorous Ness the Young,
My son, and my grandson.

My son, and my grandson,
Of the world the shining One,
He of old Rath Line the king,
Poet-prince, my offspring.

Poet-prince, my offspring,
Overseas thy hosts thou wilt fling;
Little songster from the Brug,
Little kid, we welcome you.

[62]

WHAT IS LOVE?

From the “Wooing of Etain.”

A love much-enduring through a year is my love,
It is grief close-hidden, [92]
It is stretching of strength beyond its bounds,
It is (fills?) the four quarters of the world;
It is the highest height of heaven;
It is breaking of the neck,
It is battle with a spectre,
It is drowning with water,
It is a race against heaven,
It is champion-feats beneath the sea,
It is wooing the echo;
So is my love, and my passion, and my devotion to her to whom I gave them.

FOOTNOTES:

[92] Lit. “beneath the skin.”

[63]

SUMMONS TO CUCHULAIN

From the “Sickbed of Cuchulain.”

Arise, O Champion of Ulster!
In joyous health mayest thou awake;
Look thou on Macha’s King, beloved,
Thy heavy slumber likes him not.

Behold his shoulder full of brightness,
Behold his horns for battle-array, [93]
Behold his chariots sweeping the glens,
Behold the movement of his chess-warriors. [94]

Behold his champions in their might,
Behold his maiden-troop, tall and gentle,
Behold his kings—a storm of war—
Behold his honourable queens.

Look forth! the winter has begun!
Note thou each wonder in its turn,
Behold, for it avails thee well,
Its cold, its length, its want of colour!

[64]

This heavy slumber is decay, it is not good;
Exhaustion from unequal strife;
Repose too lengthened is “a drop when one is filled,” [95]
Weakness like this is next to death. [96]

Awake from sleep, the peace which drinkers seek,
With mighty ardour throw it off;
Many smooth speeches woo thee here,
Arise, O Champion of Ulster!

FOOTNOTES:

[93] Or “his drinking-horns filled with ale” according to another reading.

[94] Lit. “chess-Fians.”

[95] This seems to be a proverb or saw.

[96] Tanaisi d’éc, lit. “second to death.” The “tanist” stood next to the chief, and was his successor.[65]

LAEGH’S DESCRIPTION OF FAIRY-LAND

From the “Sickbed of Cuchulain.”

I came with joyous sprightly steps,
—Wondrous the place, though its fame was known,—
Till I reached the cairn where, ‘mid scores of bands,
I found Labra of the flowing hair.

I found him seated at the cairn,
Ringed round by thousands of weaponed men,
Yellow the hair on him, beauteous its hue,
A ball of ruddy gold enclosing it.

After a time he recognised me,
In the purple, five-folded mantle,
He spake to me, “Wilt thou come with me
To the house wherein is Failbe Fand?”

Two kings are in the house,
Failbe Fand and Labra,
Three fifties surround each one of them,
That the full sum of the one house.

[66]

Fifty beds on the right side,
With fifty nobles (?) in them,
Fifty beds on the left side,
With fifty in them also.

Copper are the borders of the beds,
White the pillars overlaid with gold;
This the candle in their midst,
A lustrous precious stone.

At the door westward
In the place where sets the sun,
Stand a herd of grey palfreys, dappled their manes,
And another herd purple-brown.

There stand at the Eastern door
Three ancient trees of purple pure,

From them the sweet, everlasting birds
Call to the lads of the kingly rath.

At the door of the liss there is a tree,
Out of which there sounds sweet harmony,
A tree of silver with the shining of the sun upon it,
Its lustrous splendour like to gold.

Three twenties of trees are there,
Their crests swing together but do not clash,
From each of those trees three hundred are fed
With fruits many-tasted, that have cast their rind.

There is a well in the noble (?) sídh;
There are thrice fifty mantles of various hue,
And a clasp of gold, all lustrous,
Holds the corner [97] of each coloured cloak.

[67]

A vat there is of heady mead
Being dispensed to the household;
Still it lasts, in unchanged wise,
Full to the brim, everlastingly.

There is a maiden in the noble (?) house
Surpassing the women of Éire,
She steps forward, with yellow hair,
Beautiful, many-gifted she.

Her discourse with each in turn
Is beauteous, is marvellous,
The heart of each one breaks
With longing and love for her.

The noble maiden said:
“Who is that youth whom we do not know?
If thou be he, come hither awhile—
The gillie of the Man from Murthemne.” [98]

I went to her slowly, slowly,
Fear for my honour seized me,
She asked me, “Comes he hither,
The famous son of Dechtire?”

(Laegh *addresses* Cuchulain)

Alas, that he [99] went not long ago,
And every person asking it,
That he might see, as it is,
The mighty house that I have seen.

[68]

If all Éire were mine,
And the kingdom of Magh Breg of gold,
I would give it (no small test)
Could I frequent the place where I have been!

FOOTNOTES:

[97] Lit. "ear."

[98] i.e. Cuchulain, whose home-lands lay in the Plain of Murthemne, in the district of Co. Louth; Laegh was Cuchulain's charioteer.

[99] i.e. Cuchulain himself.

[69]

THE LAMENTATION OF FAND WHEN SHE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE CUCHULAIN

From the "Sickbed of Cuchulain."

It is I who must go on this journey,
O great necessity were best for me;
Though another should have an equal fame
Happier for me could I remain.

Happier it were for me to be here,
Subject to thee without reproach,
Than to go,—though strange it may seem to thee,—
To the royal seat of Aed Abrat.

The man is thine, O Emer,
He has broken from me, O noble wife,
No less, the thing that my hand cannot reach,
I am fated to desire it.

Many men were seeking me
Both in shelters and in secret places;
My tryst was never made with them,
Because I myself was high-minded.

[70]

Joyless she who gives love to one
Who does not heed her love;
It were better for her to be destroyed
If she be not loved as she loves.

With fifty women hast thou come hither,
Noble Emer, of the yellow locks,
To overthrow Fand, it were not well
To kill her in her misery.

Three times fifty have I there,
—Beautiful, marriageable women,—
Together with me in the fort:
They will not abandon me.

[71]

MIDER'S CALL TO FAIRY-LAND

From the "Wooing of Etain."

O Befind, wilt thou come with me,
To the wondrous land of melody?
The crown of their head like the primrose hair,
Their bodies below as the colour of snow.

There in that land is no “mine” or “thine,”
White the teeth there, eyebrows black,
Brilliant the eyes—great is the host—
And each cheek the hue of the foxglove.

How heady soever the ale of Inis Fál
More intoxicating is the ale of the Great Land;
A marvel among lands the land of which I speak,
No young man there enters on old age.

Like the purple of the plains each neck,
Like the ousel’s egg the colour of the eye;
Though fair to the sight are the Plains of Fál
They are a desert to him who has known the Great Plain.

[72]

Warm, sweet streams across the country,
Choice of mead and wine,
Distinguished beings who know no stain,
Conception without sin, without lust.

We behold everyone on every side,
And none beholds us;
The gloom of Adam’s transgression it is
Conceals us from their reckoning.

O Woman, if thou come among my strong people,
A golden top will crown thy head;
Fresh swine-flesh, new milk and ale for drink
Thou shalt have with me, O woman fair!

[73]

THE SONG OF THE FAIRIES

When they made the road across the bog of Lamrach for Mider, their King.

Pile on the soil; thrust on the soil:
Red are the oxen around who toil:
Heavy the troops that my words obey;
Heavy they seem, and yet men are they.
Strongly, as piles, are the tree-trunks placed:
Red are the wattles above them laced:
Tired are your hands, and your glances slant;
One woman’s winning this toil may grant!

Oxen ye are, but revenge shall see;
Men who are white shall your servants be;
Rushes from Teffa are cleared away;
Grief is the price that the man shall pay:
Stones have been cleared from the rough Meath ground;

Where shall the gain or the harm be found?
Thrust it in hand! Force it in hand!
Nobles this night, as an ox-troop, stand;
Hard is the task that is asked, and who
From the bridging of Lamrach shall gain, or rue.

A. H. Leahy.

[74]

THE GREAT LAMENTATION OF DEIRDRE FOR THE SONS OF USNA

“As to Deirdre, she was a year in the household of Conchobar, after the death of the Sons of Usna. And though it might be a little thing to raise her head or to bring a smile over her lip, never once did she do it through all that space of time.... She took not sufficiency of food or sleep, nor lifted her head from her knee. When people of amusement were sent to her, she would break out into lamentation:—

Splendid in your eyes may be the impetuous champions
Who resort to Emain after a foray;
More brilliant yet was the return
Of Usna's heroes to their home!

Noisi bearing pleasant mead of hazel-nuts;
I myself bathed him at the fire;
Ardan bore an ox or boar of goodly size,
Ainle, a load of faggots on his stately back.

Sweet though the excellent mead be found
Drunk by the son of Ness of mighty conflicts;
I have shared ere now, from a chase on the borders,
Abundant provender more delicious!

[75]

When for the cooking-hearth noble Noisi
Unbound the faggots on the forest hero-board,
More pleasant than honey was each food,
Better than all other the spoil brought in by Usna's sons.

How melodious soever at every time
May be the sound of pipes and horns,
Here to-day I make my confession,
I have heard music sweeter far!

Here with Conchobar the king
Sweet the sound of pipes and horns;
More melodious to me the music,
Famous and entrancing, of Usna's sons.

The sound of the wave was the voice of Noisi,
Melodious music that wearied not ever;
Mellow the rich-toned notes of Ardan,
Or the deep chant of Ainle through the hunting-booth.

They have laid Noisi in the grave;
Woeful to me was that convey, [100]

The company whose act poured out for them
The venom'd draught from which they died.

Loved one of the well-trimmed beard! most fair is thy renown!
Shapely one, though thy renown be fair!
Alas! to-day I rise not up
To greet the coming of Usna's sons.

[76]

Beloved thy firm and upright mind!
Beloved, high champion, modest-hearted,
After our wandering through the forests of Fál, [101]

Gentle the caress of midnight.

Dear the grey eye, a woman's love;
Though stern of aspect to the foe!
As we passed through the trees to the simple tryst,
Delightful thy deep notes across the sombre woods!

I sleep no more!
No more I stain my finger-nails with red;
No greeting comes to me who watch—
The sons of Usna return no more.

I sleep not!
Through half the wakeful night
My mind is wandering out amongst the hosts;
Yet more than that, I neither eat nor smile.

For me to-day no instant of deep joy,
Nor noble house, nor rich adornments please;
In Emain's gatherings of her mighty men
I find no peace, nor pleasure, nor repose.

Splendid as in your eyes may be the impetuous champions
Who resort to Emain after a foray;
More brilliant yet was the return
Of Usna's heroes to their home!"

[77]

When King Conchobar sought to soothe her, she would answer:

"What, O Conchobar, of thee?
To me nought but tears and lamentation hast thou meted out;
This is my life, so long as life shall last;
Thy love for me is as a flame put out. [102]

He who to me was fairest under heaven,
He who was most beloved,
Thou hast torn him from me, great was the injury,
I see him not until I die.

The secret of my grief, that it is gone,
The form of Usna's son revealed to me;
A pile I see dark-black above a corpse,
Bright and well known to me beyond all else.

Break not, my heart, to-day!
I sink ere long into an early grave;

Like to the strong sea-wave
The grief that binds me, if thou but knowest, O King!

What, O Conchobar, of thee?
To me nought but tears and lamentation hast thou meted out;
This is my life, so long as life shall last;
Thy love, methinks, is as a flame put out.”

FOOTNOTES:

[100] i.e. Fergus mac Roy and his sons, who induced the sons of Usna to return with them to Ireland, where they were slain by King Conchobar.

[101] Fál is a poetic name for Ireland; Inisfáil means “the Island of destiny” or of “knowledge.”

[102] Lit. “is not lasting.”

[78-79]

OSSIANIC POETRY

[80]

“Were but the brown leaf which the wood sheds from it gold—were but the white billow silver—
Fionn would have given it all away.”—*The Colloquy with the Ancients*.

[81]

FIRST WINTER-SONG

Take my tidings!
Stags contend;
Snows descend—
Summer’s end!

A chill wind raging;
The sun low keeping,
Swift to set
O’er seas high sweeping.

Dull red the fern;
Shapes are shadows:
Wild geese mourn
O’er misty meadows.

Keen cold limes
Each weaker wing.
Icy times—
Such I sing!
Take my tidings

Alfred Perceval Graves.

[82]

SECOND WINTER-SONG

Cold till Doom!
Glowers more fearfully the gloom!
Each gleaming furrow is a river,
A loch in each ford's room.

Each pool is deepened to a perilous pit,
A standing-stone each plain, a wood each moor;
The clamouring flight of birds no shelter finds,
White snow winds towards the door.

Like to a spectral host each sharp slim shape,
Each leaping lake swelled to a mighty main;
Wide as a wether's skin each falling flake,
Shield-broad, each drop of rain.

Swift frost again hath fastened all the ways,
It strove and struggled upwards o'er the wold,
About Colt's standing-stone the tempest sways,
Shuddering, men cry, "'Tis cold!"

[83]

IN PRAISE OF MAY

Ascribed to Fionn mac Cumhaill.

May-day! delightful day!
Bright colours play the vale along.
Now wakes at morning's slender ray
Wild and gay the blackbird's song.

Now comes the bird of dusty hue,
The loud cuckoo, the summer-lover;
Branchy trees are thick with leaves;
The bitter, evil time is over.

Swift horses gather nigh
Where half dry the river goes;
Tufted heather clothes the height;
Weak and white the bogdown blows.

Corncrake sings from eve to morn,
Deep in corn, a strenuous bard!
Sings the virgin waterfall,
White and tall, her one sweet word.

Loaded bees with puny power
Goodly flower-harvest win;
Cattle roam with muddy flanks;
Busy ants go out and in.

[84]

Through the wild harp of the wood
Making music roars the gale—

Now it settles without motion,
On the ocean sleeps the sail.

Men grow mighty in the May,
Proud and gay the maidens grow;
Fair is every wooded height;
Fair and bright the plain below.

A bright shaft has smit the streams,
With gold gleams the water-flag;
Leaps the fish, and on the hills
Ardour thrills the leaping stag.

Loudly carols the lark on high,
Small and shy, his tireless lay,
Singing in wildest, merriest mood,
Delicate-hued, delightful May.

T. W. Rolleston.

[85]

THE ISLE OF ARRAN

Arran of many stags!
Her very shoulders washed by ocean's foam;
Of companies of hardy men the home,
Whose blue spears reddened oft along her crags
Where the quick-leaping deer doth roam.
Beneath her russet oaks the acorns fall,
Cool water in her streams, and, scattered all,
Dark berries lurk, like down-dropped hidden tears,
Beneath her slowly-moving grasses tall.

Greyhounds there were in her, and beagles brown;
And, when the winding horn her stillness shocks,
From out the friendly shelter of her rocks
The startled stag leaps down.
Around her noble crags, in thickening flocks,
To one another wheeling sea-mews cry;
Yet, all unmoved, the fawns feed silently,
Unconscious of the storm-cloud's gathering frown
That spreads across the leaden autumn sky.

Smooth were her level lands and sleek her swine,
Cheerful her fields (true is the tale I tell)
The heavy hazel-boughs remembered well,
The purple crop, where bramble-trails entwine.

[86]

Above the nestling homesteads of the dell.
Her whispering streams, her clear deep pools I miss,
Where brown trout browse beneath the fairy liss;
Pleasant thine isle, Arran of bounding stags,
On such a sultry summer's day as this.

[87]

THE PARTING OF GOLL FROM HIS WIFE

When they are shut up by Fionn on a sea-girt rock, without chance of escape.

A DIALOGUE

(GOLL speaks)

The end is come; upon this narrow rock
To-morrow I must die;
Wife of the ruddy cheeks and hair of flame,
Leave me to-night and fly.

Seek out the camp of Fionn and of his men
Upon the westward side;
Take there, in time to come, another mate.
Here I abide.

(GOLL'S WIFE replies)

Which way, O Goll, is my way, and thou perished?
Alas! few friends have I!
Small praise that woman hath whose lord is gone
And no protector nigh!

[88]

What man should I wed? I whom great Goll cherished
And made his wife?
Where in the East or West should one be sought
To mend my broken life?

Shall I take Oísin, son of Fionn the Wise?
Or Carroll of the blood-stained hand?
Shall I make Angus, son of Hugh, my prize?
Or swift-foot Corr, chief of the fighting-band?

I am as good as they; aye, good and better,
Daughter of Conall, Monarch of the West,
Fostered was I with Conn the Hundred-Fighter,
Best among all the best.

Thee out of all I loved, thee my first master,
Gentlest and bravest thou;
Seven years we lived and loved, through calm and tumult,
And shall I leave thee now?

From that night till to-night I found thee never
Of harsh and churlish mind;
And here I vow, no other man shall touch me,
Kind or unkind.

Here on this narrow crag, foodless and sleepless,
Thou takest thy last stand;
A hundred heroes, Goll, lie rotting round thee,
Slain by thy dauntless hand.

In the wide ocean near us, life is teeming;
Yet on this barren rock
I sink from hunger, and the wild briny waters
My thirst-pangs mock.

[89]

Fierce is our hunger, fierce are the five battalions
Sent here to conquer thee;
But fiercer yet the drought that steals my beauty
Midst this surrounding sea.

Though all my dear loved brothers by one caitiff
Lay slaughtered in my sight,
That man I'd call my friend, yea, I would love him,
Could my thirst ease to-night.

Eat, Son of Morna, batten on these dead bodies,
This is my last behest;
Feast well, gaunt Goll, then quench thy awful craving
Here at my breast.

Nought is there more to fear, nought to be hoped for,
Of life and all bereft
High on this crag, abandoned and forsaken,
Nor hope nor shame is left.

(GOLL speaks)

King Conall's daughter, cease this mad entreaty,
Cease thou, I pray;
Never have I a woman's counsel asked for,
Far less to-day.

Oh! pitiful how this thing hath befallen,
Little red mouth!
Lips that of old made speech and happy music,
Now dry and harsh with drouth.

[90]

Ever I feared this end; my haunting terror
By wave and land
Was to be caught by Fionn and his battalions
On some stark, foodless strand.

Depart not yet; upon this barren islet,
Beneath this brazen sky,
Sweet lips and gentle heart, we sit together
Until we die.

[91]

YOUTH AND AGE

From the "Poem-book of Fionn."

Once I was yellow-haired, and ringlets fell,
In clusters round my brow;
Grizzled and sparse to-night my short grey crop,
No lustre in it now.

Better to me the shining locks of youth,
Or raven's dusky hue,
Than drear old age, which chilly wisdom brings,
If what they say be true.

I only know that as I pass the road,
No woman looks my way;
They think my head and heart alike are cold—
Yet I have had my day.

[92]

CHILL WINTER

Nipping this winter's night, the snow drifts by,
Below the hill the boisterous billows roar;
'Tis bitter cold to-night the mountain o'er,
Yet still the ungovernable stag bells forth his cry.

To-night laid not his side upon the ground
The deer of Slievecarn of the hundred fights;
He, with the stag of Echtge's frozen heights,
Caught the wolves' snarl, and quivered at the sound.

I, Caoilte, wakeful lie, and Dermot Donn,
We, with keen Oscar of the footsteps fleet,
Watch the slow hours of moving night retreat,
Whilst the dread pack of hungry wolves comes on.

Well rests the ruddy deer in dawn's dim light,
Deep breathing near the covering earthen mound,
Hidden from sight, as 'twere beneath the ground,
All in the latter end of chilly night.

[93]

I sit to-night amongst the ancient race,
And of the younger men but few I know,
Though, in the ice-bound mornings long ago,
From my firm grasp the javelin flew apace.

I thank Heaven's King, I thank sweet Mary's Son,
My hand it was that silenced countless men;
They lie stretched out beneath us in the glen,
Colder than we, death-cold, lies many and many an one.

[94]

THE SLEEP-SONG OF GRAINNE OVER DERMUID

When fleeing from Fionn, from the "Poem-book of Fionn."

Sleep a little, a little little, thou needest feel no fear or dread,
Youth to whom my love is given, I am watching near thy head.

Sleep a little, with my blessing, Dermuid of the lightsome eye,
I will guard thee as thou dreamest, none shall harm while I am by.

Sleep, O little lamb, whose homeland was the country of the lakes,
In whose bosom torrents tremble, from whose sides the river breaks.

Sleep as slept the ancient poet, Dedach, minstrel of the South,
When he snatched from Conall Cernach Eithne of the laughing mouth.

[95]

Sleep as slept the comely Finncha 'neath the falls of Assaroe,
Who, when stately Slaine sought him, laid the Hardhead Failbe low.

Sleep in joy, as slept fair Aine, Gailan's daughter of the west,
Where, amid the flaming torches, she and Duvach found their rest.

Sleep as Degha, who in triumph, ere the sun sank o'er the land,
Stole the maiden he had craved for, plucked her from fierce Deacall's hand.

Fold of Valour, sleep a little, Glory of the Western world;
I am wondering at thy beauty, marvelling how thy locks are curled.

Like the parting of two children, bred together in one home,
Like the breaking of two spirits, if I did not see you come.

Swirl the leaves before the tempest, moans the nightwind o'er the lea,
Down its stony bed the streamlet hurries onward to the sea.

In the swaying boughs the linnet twitters in the darkling light,
On the upland wastes of heather wings the grouse its heavy flight.

[96]

In the marshland by the river sulks the otter in his den;
While the piping of the peewee sounds across the distant fen.

On the stormy mere the wild-duck pushes outward from the brake,
With her downy brood beside her seeks the centre of the lake.

In the east the restless roe-deer bellows to his frightened hind;
On thy track the wolf-hounds gather, sniffing up against the wind.

Yet, O Dermuid, sleep a little, this one night our fear hath fled,
Youth to whom my love is given, see, I watch beside thy bed.

[97]

THE SLAYING OF CONBEG

A beloved hound of Fionn's which Goll mac Morna drowned in despite of Fionn.

Caoilte sang this:

Mournful to me the slaying of Conbeg, [103]
Little hound, great was his brightness;
Never was one more deft of paw
Seen in the chase of swine or deer.

Tribulation to me the slaying of Conbeg,
Little hound, of the baying voice;
Never was one more deft of paw
Found in the running down of the deer.

Tribulation to me the drowning of Conbeg
Upon the mighty grey-green seas;
His cruel loss, it brought contention, [104]
A “fill of sorrow” was his death.

FOOTNOTES:

[103]Conbeg means “little hound.”

[104] i.e. between Fionn and Goll; Goll was leader of the Connacht Fians and the deadly enemy of Fionn.

[98]

THE FAIRIES' LULLABY

My mirth and merriment, soft and sweet art thou,
Child of the race of Conn art thou;
My mirth and merriment, soft and sweet art thou,
Of the race of Coll and Conn art thou.

My smooth green rush, my laughter sweet,
My little plant in the rocky cleft,
Were it not for the spell on thy tiny feet
Thou wouldst not here be left,
Not thou.

Of the race of Coll and Conn art thou,
My laughter, sweet and low art thou;
As you crouch on my knee,
I would lift you with me,
Were it not for the mark that is on your feet
I would lift you away,
and away,
with me.

[99]

SONG OF THE FOREST TREES

O man that for Fergus of the feasts dost kindle fire,
Whether afloat or ashore burn not the king of woods.

Monarch of Innisfail's forests the woodbine is, whom none may hold captive;
No feeble sovereign's effort is it to hug all tough trees in his embrace.

The pliant woodbine if thou burn, wailings for misfortune will abound,
Dire extremity at weapons' points or drowning in great waves will follow.

Burn not the precious apple-tree of spreading and low-sweeping bough;
Tree ever decked in bloom of white, against whose fair head all men put forth the
hand.

The surly blackthorn is a wanderer, a wood that the artificer burns not;
Throughout his body, though it be scanty, birds in their flocks warble.

The noble willow burn not, a tree sacred to poems;
Within his bloom bees are a-sucking, all love the little cage.

[100]

The graceful tree with the berries, the wizard's tree, the rowan, burn;
But spare the limber tree; burn not the slender hazel.

Dark is the colour of the ash; timber that makes the wheels to go;
Rods he furnishes for horsemen's hands, his form turns battle into flight.

Tenterhook among woods the spiteful briar is, burn him that is so keen and green;
He cuts, he flays the foot, him that would advance he forcibly drags backward.

Fiercest heat-giver of all timber is green oak, from him none may escape unhurt;
By partiality for him the head is set on aching, and by his acrid embers the eye is made
sore.

Alder, very battle-witch of all woods, tree that is hottest in the fight—
Undoubtedly burn at thy discretion both the alder and whitethorn.

Holly, burn it green; holly, burn it dry;
Of all trees whatsoever the critically best is holly.

Elder that hath tough bark, tree that in truth hurts sore;
Him that furnishes horses to the armies from the sídh burn so that he be charred.

[101]

The birch as well, if he be laid low, promises abiding fortune;
Burn up most sure and certainly the stalks that bear the constant pods.

Suffer, if it so please thee, the russet aspen to come headlong down;
Burn, be it late or early, the tree with the palsied branch.

Patriarch of long-lasting woods is the yew, sacred to feasts, as is well-known;
Of him now build ye dark-red vats of goodly size.

Ferdedh, thou faithful one, wouldst thou but do my behest:
To thy soul as to thy body, O man, 'twould work advantage.

Standish Hayes O'Grady.

[103]

EARLY CHRISTIAN POEMS

[105]

ST. PATRICK'S BREASTPLATE

I arise to-day
Through the strength of heaven:
Light of sun,
Radiance of moon,
Splendour of fire,
Speed of lightning,
Swiftiness of wind,
Depth of sea,
Stability of earth,
Firmness of rock.
I arise to-day
Through God's strength to pilot me:
God's might to uphold me,
God's wisdom to guide me,
God's eye to look before me,
God's ear to hear me,
God's word to speak for me,
God's hand to guard me,
God's way to lie before me,
God's shield to protect me,
God's host to save me
From snares of devils,
From temptations of vices,

[106]

From every one who shall wish me ill,
Afar and anear,
Alone and in a multitude.

Christ to shield me to-day
Against poison, against burning,
Against drowning, against wounding,
So that there may come to me abundance of reward.

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.

I arise to-day
Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity,
Through belief in the threeness,
Through confession of the oneness
Of the Creator of Creation.

Kuno Meyer.

[107]

PATRICK'S BLESSING ON MUNSTER

Blessing from the Lord on High
Over Munster fall and lie;
To her sons and daughters all
Choicest blessings still befall;
Fruitful blessing on the soil
That supports her faithful toil!

Blessing full of ruddy health,
Blessing full of every wealth
That her borders furnish forth,
East and west and south and north;
Blessings from the Lord on high
Over Munster fall and lie!

Blessing on her peaks in air,
Blessing on her flag-stones bare;
Blessing from her ridges flow
To her grassy glens below;
Blessings from the Lord on High
Over Munster fall and lie!

As the sands upon her shore
Underneath her ships, for store,

[108]

Be her hearths, a twinkling host
Over mountain, plain and coast!
Blessing from the Lord on High
Over Munster fall and lie!

Alfred Perceval Graves.

[109]

COLUMCILLE'S FAREWELL TO ARAN OF THE SAINTS

St. Columcille, or Columba, was born 521, died 597 a.d.

Farewell from me to Ara's Isle,
Her smile is at my heart no more,
No more to me the boon is given
With hosts of heaven to walk her shore.

How far, alas! How far, alas!
Have I to pass from Ara's view,
To mix with men from Mona's fen,
With men from Alba's mountains blue.

O Ara, darling of the West,
Ne'er be he blest who loves not thee!
O God, cut short her foeman's breath,
Let hell and death his portion be.

O Ara, darling of the West,
Ne'er be he blest who loves not thee,
Herdless and childless may he go,
In endless woe his doom to dree.

[110]

O Ara, darling of the West,
Ne'er be he blest who loves thee not,
When angels wing from heaven on high,
And leave the sky for this dear spot.

Douglas Hyde.

[111]

ST. COLUMBA IN IONA

From an Irish MS. in the Burgundian Library, Brussels.

Delightful would it be to me
On a pinnacle of rock,
That I might often see
The face of the ocean;
That I might watch its heaving waves
Over the wide sea
When they chant music to their Father
Upon the world's course;
That I might see its level sparkling strand,
It would be no cause of sorrow;
That I might hear the song of the wonderful birds,
Source of happiness;
That I might hear the thunder of the clamorous waves
Upon the rocks;
That I might hear the roar by the side of the church
Of the surrounding sea;
That I might watch its noble bird-flocks
Flying over the watery surf;
That I might see the ocean-monsters,
Greatest of all wonders;
That I might observe its ebb and flood
In their cycles;

[112]

That my mystical name might be, i' faith,
"Cul ri Erin."
That on my heart contrition might fall
On looking upon her;
That I might bewail my evils all,
Though it were not easy to number them;
That I might bless the Lord
Who orders all;
Heaven with its countless bright orders
Land, strand and flood;
That I might search in all the books
That which would help my soul;
At times kneeling to the Heaven of my heart,
At times singing psalms;

At times meditating on the King of Heaven,
 Chief of the Holy Ones;
 At times at work without compulsion
 This would be delightful.
 At times plucking duilisc from the rocks;
 At other times fishing;
 At times distributing food to the poor,
 At times in a hermitage;
 The best guidance from the presence of God
 Has been vouchsafed to me;
 The King whom I serve will keep from me
 All things that would deceive me.

Eugene O'Curry.

[113]

HYMN TO THE DAWN

Ascribed to St. Cellach of Killala, when imprisoned in a hollow oak on the morning before his murder by his old comrades, circa 540.

Hail to the morning fair, that falls as a flame on the greensward;
 Hail, too, unto Him who bestows her, the morn ever fruitful in blessings.

 Robed in her pride she comes, the brilliant sun's little sister,
 Hail to thee, Dawn, thrice hail! that lightest my book of the hours.

 Thou searchest the secret dwelling, on clansman and kindred thou shinnest;
 White-necked, beautiful, hail! who makest thine uprising golden!
 The chequered page of my booklet tells me my life was erring;
 Melcroin, 'tis thee whom I fear, 'tis from thee that shall come my undoing.

 Scallcrow, thou paltry fowl, sharp-beaked, grey-coated and cruel,
 Full well do I guess thy desire, no friendship hast thou unto Cellach.

[114]

Raven, O Raven, that croakest, from the top of the rath thou art watching,
 Wait but awhile, bird of death, and most surely my flesh will suffice thee.

 Fiercely the kite of Cluain Eo will take his part in the scramble,
 His talons filled with my flesh, flying off to his haunt in the yew-tree.

 Swift through the darkling woodland the foxes will scent out my slaughter,
 They on the confines trackless my flesh and my blood will devour.

 The mighty wolf from his lair 'neath the rath on the East of Drumm Dara,
 To the banquet of bones will betake him, prime chief of the curs he will boast him.

 Wednesday night past I saw visions, the wild dogs troubled my slumbers,
 Hither and thither they dragged me through russet ferns of the coppice.

 'Twas in a dream I saw it; to the lonely green glen men bore me;
 Five men were we who went thither, I saw only four returning.[105]

[115]

'Twas in a dream I saw it; to their dwelling my comrades allured me;
They poured out the cup of old friendship, they quaffed to my luck and long living.

Scant is thy tail, tiny wren; thy doleful pipe is prophetic;
Perhaps it is thou art the traitor; thou, and not they, my destroyer.

For why should Mac Deora deceive me? His father and mine were brothers;
Oh! monstrous deed and unholy, that he should desire to harm me!

Or why should Meldalua hurt me? my cousin, is he by his mother;
Twin sisters his mother and mine, yet in truth it was he who betrayed me.

What ill can I get from Melsenig? For a pure man's son I have held him;
Melsenig, the son of Melibar, 'tis he who hath plotted my downfall.

Melcroid, my playfellow Melcroid, the crime of thy act is yet deeper;
For ten thousand ingots of gold would not Cellach have stooped to betray thee.

[116]

Vain self hath allured thee, O Melcroid, the love of this world's fleeting pleasures,
For the guerdon of hell hast thou sold me, hast sold me, thy friend and thy brother!
All precious things that I had, my treasures, my sleek-coated horses,
Would I have given to Melcroid, to win him away from this treason!
Yet in high heaven above me, the great Son of Mary is speaking;
"Thou art forsaken on earth; but a welcome awaits thee in heaven."

FOOTNOTES:

[105] Compare "So the two brothers and their murdered man rode past fair Florence," in Keats' *Isabella or the Pot of Basil*, Stanza xxvii.

[117]

THE SONG OF MANCHAN THE HERMIT

Abbot of Liath Manchan, now Lemanaghan, in King's Co. Died 665 a.d.

I wish, O Son of the Living God, O Ancient Eternal King,
For a hidden hut in the wilderness, a simple secluded thing.

The all-blithe lithe little lark in his place, chanting his lightsome lay;
The calm, clear pool of the Spirit's grace, washing my sins away.

A wide, wild woodland on every side, its shades the nursery
Of glad-voiced songsters, who at day-dawn chant their sweet psalm for me.

A southern aspect to catch the sun, a brook across the floor,
A choice land, rich with gracious gifts, down-stretching from my door.

[118]

Few men and wise, these I would prize, men of content and power,
To raise Thy praise throughout the days at each canonical hour.

Four times three, three times four, fitted for every need,
To the King of the Sun praying each one, this were a grace, indeed.

Twelve in the church to chant the hours, kneeling there twain and twain;
And I before, near the chancel door, listening their low refrain.

A pleasant church with an Altar-cloth, where Christ sits at the board,
And a shining candle shedding its ray on the white words of the Lord.

Brief meals between, when prayer is done, our modest needs supply;
No greed in our share of the simple fare, no boasting or ribaldry.

This is the husbandry I choose, laborious, simple, free,
The fragrant leek about my door, the hen and the humble bee.

Rough raiment of tweed, enough for my need, this will my King allow;
And I to be sitting praying to God under every leafy bough.

[119]

A PRAYER

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart,
Naught is all else to me, save that Thou art.
Thou my best thought by day and by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
Be Thou my Wisdom, Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee, Thou with me, Lord.
Thou my great Father, I thy dear son;
Thou in me dwelling, I with Thee one.
Be Thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight,
Be Thou my dignity, Thou my delight.
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower;
Raise Thou me heavenward, Power of my power.
Riches I heed not or man's empty praise,
Thou mine inheritance now and always.
Thou, and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my treasure Thou art.

[120]

King of the seven heavens, grant me for dole,
Thy love in my heart, Thy light in my soul.
Thy light from my soul, Thy love from my heart,
King of the seven heavens, may they never depart.
With the High King of heaven, after victory won,
May I reach heaven's joys, O Bright heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

[121]

THE LOVES OF LIADAN AND CURITHIR

St. Cummine, in whose days the lovers lived, died 661. The language is of the ninth century. A young poet and poetess of Connaught were betrothed; but during the year's interval preceding their marriage, Liadan, for some unexplained reason, took the veil. When Curithir returned to fetch her to his home, he found that by her vows she had for ever separated herself from him. In his despair he determined to follow her example and become a monk. The lovers placed themselves together

under the direction of St. Cummine, a severe and hard man, who permitted them to meet, with the object of accusing them of wrong-doing. Finally, he gave Curithir the choice of seeing Liadan without speaking to her, or speaking to her without seeing. He chooses the latter, and henceforth they wander round each other's cells, speaking together through the wattled walls, but never looking on each other's faces. The time comes when this can be no longer borne, and Curithir sails away to strange lands on pilgrimage, so that Liadan saw him no more. She died upon the flagstone on which Curithir was wont to pray, and was buried beneath it.

The poem is in the form of a dialogue.

[122]

(LIADAN speaks)

Curithir, maker of sweet song,
By me beloved, you do me wrong!
Dear master of the two Grey Feet, [106]
Is it like this we meet?

(CURITHIR speaks)

Of late,
Since I and Liadan understood our fate,
Each day hath been a month of fasting days,
Each month a year of doubting of God's ways.

I had my choice
To see her gentle form, or hear her voice;
"Some comfort yet may reach her from my speech,"
I said; "we have been ever looking each at each."

(LIADAN speaks)

His voice comes up to me again,
Is it in blame, or is it pain?
I catch its accents strained and deep,
And cannot sleep.

The flagstone where he bent the knee,
Beside the wattled oratory,
'Tis there, at eve, each lonely day,
I go to pray.

[123]

Never for him dear hearth or wife,
Homestead, or innocent baby life;
No mate at his right hand
Will ever stand.

CUMMINE accuses her of wrong and she turns on him:

Cleric, thy thought is ill;
Not with my will you link my name with his,
From Loch Seng's borderland he comes, I wis,
I from Iar-Conchin's Cill.
We met, you say;
But sure, no honeyed pastures of the flock
Where lover's arms in lover's arms enlock,
Was ours that May.
If Curithir is gone to-day

To teach the little scholars of the school,
Small help he'll get who does not know his rule;
Curithir's thoughts are very far away.

At length the news is brought to her that Curithir is gone for ever, and she breaks out into a passionate lament.

The Cry of LIADAN after CURITHIR

'Tis done!
Joyless the victory I have won,
The tender heart of him I loved I wrung!

He called me near
A little space to please him, but the fear
Of God in heaven withheld me, and I would not hear.

[124]

Great gain
To us the way love pointed plain,
To win the gates of Paradise through pain.

Reckless and vain
The whim that caused my lover's love to dim;
Great ever was my gentleness to him.

Liadan am I,
And Curithir I loved; it is no lie,
He would not doubt me now if he were by.

Short while were we
Together in the closest intimacy,
Sweet was the time to him, and sweet to me.

The music of the lightly waving tree,
When Curithir was here, would sing to me,
With the deep voice of the empurpled sea.

Surely to-day
No whim of mine would turn his heart away,
No senseless act or speech, do what I may.

And to myself I say,
My love to him was given, my heart, unshriven,
At his dear feet I lay.

My heart is flame,
A tempest heat no ice on earth can tame,
I cry "I was to blame! I was to blame!"

FOOTNOTES:

[106] A play on Curithir's patronymic, Mac Doborchon, i.e. "Son of the Otter."

[125]

THE LAY OF PRINCE MARVAN

In praise of his hermit life. A reply to his brother, King Guaire, of Connaught, when asked by him why he did not dwell in the Palace.

King Guaire died 662; but the poem, as we have it, is of the tenth century.

There is a shieling hidden in the wood
Unknown to all save God;
An ancient ash-tree and a hazel-bush
Their sheltering shade afford.
Around the doorway's heather-laden porch
Wild honeysuckles twine;
Prolific oaks, within the forest's gloom,
Shed mast upon fat swine.

[126]

Many a sweet familiar woodland path
Comes winding to my door;
Lowly and humble is my hermitage,
Poor, and yet not too poor.

From the high gable-end my lady's throat
Her trilling chant outpours,
Her sombre mantle, like the ousel's coat,
Shows dark above my doors.

From the high oakridge where the roe-deer leaps
The river-banks between,
Renowned Mucraime and Red Roigne's plains
Lie wrapped in robes of green.

Here in the silence, where no care intrudes,
I dwell at peace with God;
What gift like this hast thou to give, Prince Guaire,
Were I to roam abroad?
The heavy branches of the green-barked yew
That seem to bear the sky;
The spreading oak, that shields me from the storm,
When winds rise high.

Like a great hostel, welcoming to all,
My laden apple-tree;
Low in the hedge, the modest hazel-bush
Drops ripest nuts for me.

[127]

Round the pure spring, that rises crystal clear,
Straight from the rock,
Wild goats and swine, red fox, and grazing deer,
At sundown flock.

The host of forest-dwellers of the soil
Trysting at night;

To meet them foxes come, a peaceful troop,
For my delight.

Like exiled princes, flocking to their home,
They gather round;
Beneath the river bank great salmon leap,
And trout abound.

Rich rowan clusters, and the dusky sloe,
The bitter, dark blackthorn,
Ripe whortle-berries, nuts of amber hue,
The cup-enclosed acorn.

A clutch of eggs, sweet honey, mead and ale,
God's goodness still bestows;
Red apples, and the fruitage of the heath,
His constant mercy shows.

The goodly tangle of the briar-trail
Climbs over all the hedge;
Far out of sight, the trembling waters wail
Through rustling rush and sedge.

[128]

Luxuriant summer spreads its coloured cloak
And covers all the land;
Bright blue-bells, sunk in woods of russet oak,
Their blooms expand.

The movements of the bright red-breasted men,
A lovely melody!
Above my house, the thrush and cuckoo's strain
A chorus wakes for me.

The little music-makers of the world
Chafers and bees,
Drone answer to the tumbling torrent's roar
Beneath the trees.

From gable-ends, from every branch and stem,
Sounds sweetest music now;
Unseen, in restless flight, the lively wren
Flits 'neath the hazel-bough.

Deep in the firmament the sea-gulls fly,
One widely-circling wreath;
The cheerful cuckoo's call, the poult's reply,
Sound o'er the distant heath.

The lowing of the calves in summer-time,
Best season of the year!
Across the fertile plain, pleasant the sound,
Their call I hear.

Voice of the wind against the branchy wood
Upon the deep blue sky;
Most musical the ceaseless waterfall,
The swan's shrill cry.

[129]

No hired chorus, trained to praise its chief,
Comes welling up for me;
The music made for Christ the Ever-young,
Sounds forth without a fee.

Though great thy wealth, Prince Guaire, happier live
Those who can boast no hoard;
Who take at Christ's hand that which He doth give
As their award.

Far from life's tumult and the din of strife
I dwell with Him in peace,
Content and grateful, for Thy gifts, High Prince,
Daily increase.

(Guaire replies)

Wisely thou choosest, Marvan; I a king
Would lay my kingdom by,
With Colman's glorious heritage I'd part
To bear thee company!

[130]

THE SONG OF CREDE, DAUGHTER OF GUARE

(In the battle of Aidne, Crede, the daughter of King Guaire of Aidne, beheld Dinertach of the HyFidgenti, who had come to the help of Guaire, with seventeen wounds upon his breast. Then she fell in love with him. He died and was buried in the cemetery of Colman's Church.)

These are the arrows that murder sleep
At every hour in the night's black deep;
Pangs of Love through the long day ache,
All for the dead Dinertach's sake.

Great love of a hero from Roigny's plain
Has pierced me through with immortal pain,
Blasted my beauty and left me to blanch
A riven bloom on a restless branch.

Never was song like Dinertach's speech
But holy strains that to Heaven's gate reach;
A front of flame without boast or pride,
Yet a firm, fond mate for a fair maid's side.

A growing girl—I was timid of tongue,
And never trysted with gallants young,
But since I have won into passionate age,
Fierce love-longings my heart engage.

[131]

I have every bounty that life could hold,
With Guaire, arch-monarch of Aidne cold,

But, fallen away from my haughty folk,
In Irluachair's field my heart lies broke.

There is chanting in glorious Aidne's meadow,
Under St. Colman's Church's shadow;
A hero flame sinks into the tomb—
Dinertach, alas my love and my doom!
Chaste Christ! that now at my life's last breath
I should tryst with Sorrow and mate with Death!
At every hour of the night's black deep,
These are the arrows that murder sleep.

Alfred Perceval Graves.

[132]

THE STUDENT AND HIS CAT

The Irish of this playful poem was written by a student of the Monastery of Carinthia on a copy of St. Paul's Epistles about the close of the eighth century.

I and Pangur Bán, my cat,
'Tis a like task we are at;
Hunting mice is his delight,
Hunting words I sit all night.

Better far than praise of men
'Tis to sit with book and pen;
Pangur bears me no ill-will,
He, too, plies his simple skill.

'Tis a merry thing to see
At our tasks how glad are we,
When at home we sit and find
Entertainment to our mind.

Oftentimes a mouse will stray
In the hero Pangur's way;
Oftentimes my keen thought set
Takes a meaning in its net.

[133]

'Gainst the wall he sets his eye
Full and fierce and sharp and sly;
'Gainst the wall of knowledge I
All my little wisdom try.

When a mouse darts from its den,
O! how glad is Pangur then;
O! what gladness do I prove
When I solve the doubts I love.

So in peace our task we ply,
Pangur Bán, my cat, and I;
In our arts we find our bliss,
I have mine, and he has his.

Practice every day has made
Pangur perfect in his trade;
I get wisdom day and night,
Turning darkness into light.

Robin Flower.

[134]

THE SONG OF THE SEVEN ARCHANGELS

Now, Gabriel, be with my heart
On this first day of seven,
He, first of the Archangels;
And Thou, High King of Heaven.

Michael be mine, if Monday dawn,
Michael I call upon,
There is none like thee, Michael,
None but Jesu, Mary's Son.

And oh if Tuesday sorrow bring,
Let Raphael help it forth,
One of the seven that hears us weep,
Sad women of this earth.

And Uriel hear, if Wednesday wake,
In his nobility,
And heal our wounds and care for us
And calm this wind-torn sea.

And Sariel, should Thursday come
With wilder wind and seas,
On Sariel I cry aloud
For that solace which is his.

[135]

For sorrow's fast on Friday,
Out of my need I cry
On Rumiel, my heart's near friend,
Though Heaven I know is nigh.

And Saturday, on Panchel,
While this yellow world is mine,
I call on him while shake the leaves
And the yellow sun doth shine.

The Trinity protect me still—
Oh blessed Trinity,
And be my stay in danger's hour;
Protect and prosper me.

Ernest Rhys.

[136]

THE FÉILIRE OF ADAMNAN

Ancient Irish Litany.

Though ascribed to St. Adamnan, Abbot of Iona (died 704), the biographer of St. Columba, the piece, judging by its language, is later.

Saints of Four Seasons!
Saints of the Year!
Loving, I pray to you; longing, I say to you:
Save me from angers, dreeings, and dangers!
Saints of Four Seasons!
Saints of the Year!
Saints of Green Springtime!
Saints of the Year!
Patraic and Grighair, Brighid be near!
My last breath gather with God's Foster Father!
Saints of Green Springtime!
Saints of the Year!
Saints of Gold Summer!
Saints of the Year!
(Poesy wingeth me! Fancy far bringeth me!)
Guide ye me on to Mary's Sweet Son!

[137]

Saints of Gold Summer!
Saints of the Year!
Saints of Red Autumn!
Saints of the Year!

Lo! I am cheery! Michil and Mary
Open wide Heaven to my soul bereaven!
Saints of Red Autumn!
Saints of the Year!

Saints of Grey Winter
Saints of the Year!
Outside God's Palace fiends wait in malice—
Let them not win my soul going in!

Saints of Grey Winter!
Saints of the Year!
Saints of Four Seasons!
Saints of the Year!

Waking or sleeping, to my grave creeping,
Life in its Night, hold me God's light!
Saints of Four Seasons!
Saints of the Year!

P. J. McCall.

[138]

THE FEATHERED HERMIT

Blackbird, who pourest praise,
Deep hidden 'neath the bough,
No bell to call the Hours
Thou needest, thou;

Each hour, O hermit, from thy throat,
Wells thy sweet, soft, peaceful note.

AN APHORISM

Time was, I was not here;
Short the time for me, I fear!
Death comes, that is clear;
It is not clear when death is near.

[139]

THE BLACKBIRD

High trees close me round
Far from the ground the blackbird sings,
Trilling, it chants its lay
Above my well-lined book to-day.

In its soft veil of grey
The wayward cuckoo calls aloud;
Within my wall of green,
My God shrouds me, all unseen.

[140]

DEUS MEUS

By Mael-Isu ("Servant of Jesus"), of Derry, obit. 1038.

Deus meus adiuva me,
Give me thy love, O Christ, I pray,
Give me thy love, O Christ, I pray,
Deus meus adiuva me.

In meum cor ut sanum sit,
Pour, loving King, Thy love in it,
Pour, loving King, Thy love in it,
In meum cor ut sanum sit.

Domine, da ut peto a te,
O, pure bright sun, give, give to-day,
O, pure bright sun, give, give to-day,
Domine, da ut peto a te.

Hanc spero rem et quaero quam
Thy love to have where'er I am,
Thy love to have where'er I am,
Hanc spero rem et quaero quam.

Tuum amorem sicut uis,
Give to me swiftly, strongly, this,

Give to me swiftly, strongly, this,
Tuum amorem sicut uis.

[141]

Quaero, postulo, peto a te,
That I in heaven, dear Christ, may stay,
That I in heaven, dear Christ, may stay,
Quaero, postulo, peto a te.

Domine, Domine, exaudi me,
Fill my soul, Lord, with Thy love's ray,
Fill my soul, Lord, with Thy love's ray,
Domine, Domine, exaudi me.

Deus meus adiuva me,
Deus meus adiuva me.

George Sigerson.

[142]

THE SOUL'S DESIRE

(Author and date unknown.)

It were my soul's desire
To see the face of God;
It were my soul's desire
To rest in His abode.

It were my soul's desire
To study zealously;
This, too, my soul's desire,
A clear rule set for me.

It were my soul's desire
A spirit free from gloom;
It were my soul's desire
New life beyond the Doom.

It were my soul's desire
To shun the chills of hell;
Yet more my soul's desire
Within His house to dwell.

It were my soul's desire
To imitate my King,
It were my soul's desire
His ceaseless praise to sing.

[143]

It were my soul's desire
When heaven's gate is won
To find my soul's desire
Clear shining like the sun.

Grant, Lord, my soul's desire,
Deep waves of cleansing sighs;
Grant, Lord, my soul's desire
From earthly cares to rise.

This still my soul's desire
Whatever life afford,—
To gain my soul's desire
And see Thy face, O Lord.

[144]

TEMPEST ON THE SEA

The original of the following poem was ascribed to Ruman mac Colmáin, an Irish poet of the seventh century, whom the Book of Leinster generously styles “the Homer and Virgil of Ireland.” It has been edited and exquisitely translated in prose by Professor Kuno Meyer in vol. ii. of *Otia Merseiana*. He attributes it to the eleventh century. The old prose account says that it was made by Ruman, when challenged by the Danes of Dublin to sing of the sea.

Tempest on the great sea-borders,
Hear my tale, ye viking swords!
Winter smites us, wild winds crying
Set the salty billows flying,
Wind and winter, fierce marauders.

Lir's vast host of shouting water
Comes against us, charged with slaughter,
None can tell the dread and wonder
Speaking in the ocean thunder
And the tempest, thunder's daughter.

With the wind of east at morning
All the waves' wild hearts are yearning
Westward over wastes of ocean,
Till they stay their eager motion
Where the setting sun is burning.

[145]

When the northern wind comes flying,
All the press of dark waves crying,
Southward surge and clamour, driven
To the shining southern heaven,
Wave to wave in song replying.

When the western wind is blowing
O'er the currents wildly flowing,
Eastward sets its mighty longing
And the waves go eastward thronging
Far to find the sun-tree growing.

When the southern wind comes raining
Over shielded Saxons straining,
Waves round Skiddy isle go pouring,
On Caladnet's beaches roaring,
In grey Shannon's mouth complaining.

Full the sea and fierce the surges,
Lovely are the ocean verges,
On the showery waters whirling,
Sandy winds are swiftly swirling,
Rudders cleave the surf that urges.

Hard round Eire's cliffs and nesses,
Hard the strife, not soft the stresses,
Like swan-feathers softly sifting,
Snow o'er Milidh's folk is drifting,
Manann's wife shakes angry tresses.

[146]

At the mouth of each dark river
Breaking waters surge and shiver,
Wind and winter met together
Trouble Alba with wild weather,
Countless falls on Dremon quiver.

Son of God, great Lord of wonder,
Save me from the ravening thunder,
By the feast before Thy dying,
Save me from the tempest crying
And from Hell, tempestuous under.

Robin Flower.

[147]

THE OLD WOMAN OF BEARE

Eleventh century (?)

Ebbtide to me!
My life drifts downward with the drifting sea;
Old age has caught and compassed me about,
The tides of time run out.

The "Hag of Beare!"
'Tis thus I hear the young girls jeer and mock;
Yet I, who in these cast-off clouts appear,
Once donned a queenly smock.

Ye love but self,
Ye churls! to-day ye worship pelf!
But in the days I lived we sought for men,
We loved our lovers then!

Ah! swiftly when
Their splendid chariots coursed upon the plain,
I checked their pace, for me they flew amain,
Held in by curb and rein.

I envy not the old,
Whom gold adorns, whom richest robes enfold,
But ah! the girls, who pass my cell at morn,
While I am shorn!

[148]

On sweet May-morn
Their ringing laughter on the breeze is borne,
While I, who shake with ague and with age,
In Litanies engage.

Amen! and woe is me!
I lie here rotting like a broken tree;
Each acorn has its day and needs must fall,
Time makes an end of all!

I had my day with kings!
We drank the brimming mead, the ruddy wine,
Where now I drink whey-water; for company more fine
Than shrivelled hags, hag though I am, I pine.

The flood-tide thine!
Mine but the low down-curling ebb-tide's flow,
My youth, my hope, are carried from my hand,
Thy flood-tide foams to land.

My body drops
Slowly but sure towards the abode we know;
When God's High Son takes from me all my props
It will be time to go!

Bony my arms and bare
Could you but see them 'neath the mantle's flap,
Wizened and worn, that once were round and fair,
When kings lay in my lap.

[149]

'Tis, "O my God" with me,
Many prayers said, yet more prayers left undone;
If I could spread my garment in the sun
I'd say them, every one.

The sea-wave talks,
Athwart the frozen earth grim winter stalks;
Young Fermod, son of Mugh, ne'er said me nay,
Yet he comes not to-day.

How still they row,
Oar dipped by oar the wavering reeds among,
To Alma's shore they press, a ghostly throng,
Deeply they sleep and long.

No lightsome laugh
Disturbs my fireside's stillness; shadows fall,
And quiet forms are gathering round my hearth,
Yet lies the hand of silence on them all.

I do not deem it ill
That a nun's veil should rest upon my head;
But finer far my feast-robe's various hue
To me, when all is said.

My very cloak grows old;
Grey is its tint, its woof is frayed and thin;
I seem to feel grey hairs within its fold,
Or are they on my skin?

[150]

O happy Isle of Ocean,
Thy flood-tide leaps to meet the eddying wave
Lifting it up and onward. Till the grave
The sea-wave comes not after ebb for me.

I find them not
Those sunny sands I knew so well of yore;
Only the surf's sad roar sounds up to me,
My tide will turn no more.

[151]

GORMLIATH'S LAMENT FOR NIAL BLACK-KNEE

“a.d. 946. Gormliath, daughter of Fiann, Queen of Nial Glundubh, or “Black-knee,” died after intense penance for her sins and transgressions.”—*Annals of the Four Masters*.

Move, O Monk, thy foot away!
Lift it from the grave of Nial!
All too high thou heap'st the pile;
All too deep thou diggest the clay.

Brown-haired Monk, most gentle friend,
Press not with thy foot the soil
Nial to cover, heavy toil,
Of thy labours make an end.

Mournful priest, thy prayers delay,
Close not yet the prince's tomb,
Make an opening, for I come;
Move, O Monk, thy foot away!

Not my will that brought thee bound,
Black-kneed Nial, with heart of gold!
When mine arms his form enfold,
Raise his stone, and smooth his mound.

[152]

Gormliath I, a Queen commands,
Daughter of King Flann the brave;
Press not then upon his grave;
Move, O Monk, thy foot away!

[153]

THE MOTHER'S LAMENT AT THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS

Then, as the executioner plucked her son from her breast, one of the women said:

“Why are you tearing
Away to his doom,
The child of my caring,

The fruit of my womb.
Till nine months were o'er
His burden I bore,
Then his pretty lips pressed
The glad milk from my breast,
And my whole heart he filled,
And my whole life he thrilled.

All my strength dies,
My tongue speechless lies,
Darkened are my eyes!
His breath was the breath of me;
His death is the death of me."

Then another woman said:

"'Tis my own son that from me you wring,
I deceived not the King.

[154]

But slay me, even me,
And let my boy be.

A mother most hapless,
My bosom is sapless,
Mine eyes one tearful river,
My frame one fearful, shiver,
My husband sonless ever,
And I a sonless wife
To live a death in life.

O my son! O God of Truth!
O my unrewarded youth,
O my birthless sicknesses
Until doom without redress.

O my bosom's silent nest,
O the heart broke in my breast."

Then said another woman:

"Murderers, obeying
Herod's wicked willing,
One ye would be slaying,
Many are ye killing.

Infants would ye smother?
Ruffian, ye have rather
Wounded many a father,
Slaughtered many a mother.

Hell's black jaws your horrid deed is glutting,
Heaven's white gate against your black souls shutting.
Ye are guilty of the Great Offence!
Ye have spilled the blood of Innocence."

[155]

And yet another woman said:
"O Lord Christ, come to me!

Nay, no longer tarry!
With my son home to Thee
My soul quickly carry.

O Mary great, O Mary mild,
Of God's One Son the Mother,
What shall I do without my child?
For I have now no other.

For Thy Son's sake my son they slew,
Those murderers inhuman;
My sense and soul they slaughtered too,
I am but a crazy woman.

Yea, after that most piteous slaughter,
When my babe's life ran out like water,
The heart within my bosom hath become
A clot of blood from this day till the Doom!"

Alfred Perceval Graves.

[156]

CONSECRATION

By Murdoch O'Daly, called Murdoch "the Scotchman" (Muredach Albanach), on account of his affection for that country; born in Connaught towards the close of the twelfth century.

How great the tale, that there should be,
In God's Son's heart, a place for me!
That on a sinner's lips like mine,
The cross of Jesus Christ should shine!

Christ Jesus, bend me to Thy will,
My feet to urge, my griefs to still;
That even my flesh and blood may be
A temple sanctified to Thee.

No rest, no calm, my soul may win,
Because my body craves to sin,
Till Thou, dear Lord, Thyself impart
Peace to my head, light to my heart.

May consecration come from far,
Soft shining like the evening star!
My toilsome path make plain to me,
Until I come to rest in Thee.

[157]

TEACH ME, O TRINITY

By the same Poet.

Teach me, O Trinity,
All men sing praise to Thee,

Let me not backward be,
Teach me, O Trinity.

Come Thou and dwell with me,
Lord of the holy race;
Make here thy resting-place,
Hear me, O Trinity.

That I Thy love may prove,
Teach Thou my heart and hand,
Ever at Thy command
Swiftly to move.

[158]

Like to a rotting tree
Is this vile heart of me;
Let me Thy healing see,
Help me, O Trinity.

Sinful, beholding Thee;
Yet clean from theft and blood
My hands; O Son of God,
For Mary's love, answer me.

In my adversity
No great man stooped to me,
No good man pitied me,
God ope'd His heart to me.

Lied I, as others lie,
They deceived, so have I,
On others' lie I built my lie—
Will my God pass this by?

Truth art Thou, truth I crave,
If on a lie I rest, I'm lost;
My vow demands my uttermost;
Save, Trinity, O save!

[159]

THE SHAVING OF MURDOCH

When he and Cathal of the Red Hand, King of Connaught, entered the monastic life together.

Murdoch, whet thy knife, that we may shave our crowns to the Great King,
Let us sweetly give our vow, and the hair of both our heads to the Trinity.
I will shave mine to Mary, this is the doing of a true heart,
To Mary shave thou these locks, well-formed, soft-eyed man.

Seldom hast thou had, handsome man, a knife on thy hair to shave it,
Often has a sweet, soft queen, comb'd her hair beside thee.
Whenever it was that we did bathe, with Brian of the well-curled locks,
And once on a time that I did bathe, at the well of the fair-haired Boroimhe,
I strove in swimming with Ua Chais, on the cold waters of the Fergus.

When he came ashore from the stream, Ua Chais and I strove in a race.

[160]

These two knives, one to each, were given us by Duncan Cairbreach,
No knives of knives were better; shave gently then, Murdoch.
Whet your sword, Cathal, which wins the fertile Banva,
Ne'er was thy wrath heard without fighting, brave, red-handed Cathal,
Preserve our shaved heads from cold and from heat, gentle daughter of Joachim,
Preserve us in the land of heat, softest branch, Mary.

Standish Hayes O'Grady.

[161]

EILEEN AROON

Carol O'Daly, early thirteenth century.

"Come, love, and dwell with me,
Eileen aroon;
I'll roam the world with thee,
Eileen aroon!
Down to Terawley free,
From this sad house we'll flee,
If thou wilt wed with me,
Eileen aroon!

"We'll seek a home of peace,
Eileen aroon;
All fear and doubt shall cease,
Eileen aroon.
If thou wilt seek my side,
If thou wilt be my bride,
All matters not beside,
Eileen aroon.

"Then, wilt thou fly or stay,
Eileen aroon?
Ah! do not say me nay,
Come to me soon."[

162]

"I come, I come to thee,
Life of the world to me,
Nought holds me, for I flee
Thus to thy home."
"Welcome thy steps before,
Eileen aroon.

Fling wide our cottage door,
Eileen aroon.
Oh! welcome evermore,
My darling and my store,
Thou shalt go out no more,
Eileen aroon!"

[163]

POEMS OF THE DARK DAYS

[164]

“I do not know of anything under the sky
That is friendly or favourable to the Gael,
But only the sea that our need brings us to,
Or the wind that blows to the harbour
The ship that is bearing us away from Ireland;
And there is reason that these are reconciled with us,
For we increase the sea with our tears,
And the wandering wind with our sighs.”

Lady Gregory.

[165]

THE DOWNFALL OF THE GAEL

By O’Gnive, bard of Shane O’Neill, circa 1560.

My heart is in woe,
And my soul deep in trouble,—
For the mighty are low,
And abased are the noble.

The Sons of the Gael
Are in exile and mourning,
Worn, weary, and pale,
As spent pilgrims returning;

Or men who, in flight
From the field of disaster,
Beseech the black night
On their flight to fall faster;

Or seamen aghast
When their planks gape asunder,
And the waves fierce and fast
Tumble through in hoarse thunder;

[166]

Or men whom we see
That have got their death-omen—
Such wretches are we
In the chains of our foemen!

Our courage is fear,
Our nobility vileness,
Our hope is despair,
And our comeliness foulness.

There is mist on our heads,
And a cloud chill and hoary
Of black sorrow sheds
An eclipse on our glory.

From Boyne to the Linn
Has the mandate been given,
That the children of Finn
From their country be driven.

That the sons of the king—
Oh, the treason and malice!—
Shall no more ride the ring
In their own native valleys

No more shall repair
Where the hill foxes tarry,
Nor forth to the air
Fling the hawk at her quarry;

[167]

For the plain shall be broke
By the share of the stranger,
And the stone-mason's stroke
Tell the woods of their danger;

The green hills and shore
Be with white keeps disfigured,
And the Moat of Rathmore
Be the Saxon churl's haggard!

The land of the lakes
Shall no more know the prospect
Of valleys and brakes—
So transform'd is her aspect!

The Gael cannot tell,
In the uprooted wild-wood
And red ridgy dell,
The old nurse of his childhood;

The nurse of his youth
Is in doubt as she views him,
If the wan wretch, in truth,
Be the child of her bosom.

We starve by the board,
And we thirst amid wassail—
For the guest is the lord,
And the host is the vassal!

[168]

Through the woods let us roam,
Through the wastes wild and barren;
We are strangers at home!
We are exiles in Erin!

And Erin's a bark
O'er the wide waters driven!
And the tempest howls dark,
And her side planks are riven!

And in billows of might
Swell the Saxon before her,—

Unite, oh, unite!
Or the billows burst o'er her!

Sir Samuel Ferguson.

[169]

**ADDRESS TO BRIAN O'ROURKE "OF THE BULWARKS" TO AROUSE HIM AGAINST
THE ENGLISH [107]**

By his bard, Teig Dall O'Higgin, about 1566.

"And first for Owryrke: I found hym the proudest man that ever I delt with in Irelande." (Sir Henry Sydney to the Privy Council, from Dublin, 1576.)

"The man of war is he who dwells in safety,"
A well-worn adage that shall never cease,
Save only when it girdeth on its armour
May many-wooded Banba hope for peace.

Why sit ye still? the Clans of valorous Eoghan,
The Clans of Conn and Conor round you stand;
Do ye not hear the troops of Saxon England
March o'er your plains and trample down your land?

[170]

Let Brian, son of Brian, out of Brefney,
Beware the sweetness of their honeyed tongue,
Their greed and need, their indigence and riches,
Two-handed spoil from Ireland's sons have wrung.

Let Brian, son of Brian, son of Eoghan,
Ponder if one man ever came away,—
Who put his trust in England's perjured honour,—
Unscathed by guile, unharmed by treachery?

As waters rising 'neath the snows of winter,
As hamlets flaming from one secret spark,
So shall the chiefs of Erinn rally round him,
When Brian's star arises on the dark.

Then shall wild creatures find their surest covert
Among the broken homesteads of the Pale;
The wolves' deep snarl be heard beside her mansions,
On grass-green Tara's slopes the children's wail.

Where once arose their lightsome lime-washed dwellings,
Where once were precious things of price displayed,
Be thenceforth whispered, in affrighted accents,
That such things had been, ere O'Rourke's fierce raid.

By him be felled their rich fruit-bearing orchards,
Each open highway clothed with ragged weeds;
Long ere the harvest-hour their crops be scattered
By his and Connaught's sons' death-dealing deeds.

[171]

Leave hungry famine in Boyne's fertile borders,
Bir of the spreading-boughs bend 'neath his smart,
So that a mother on Meath's richest pastures
Shall munch the morsel of her first child's heart.

Right up to Taillte's very walls and towers
Their villages be levelled with the earth;
Their mills and kilns and haggarts swept before them;
Where wealth and plenty reigns, dread want and dearth.

Smooth into desert wastes fair Usna's mountains,
Pile into hills each widespread pleasant plain;
So that a wandering man may seek her cities,
So he may search her high cross-roads in vain.

By such and such an one let this be treasured
(A tale of wonder for the passing guest)
That on the plain was heard a heifer lowing,
A tinkling cow-bell from the headland's crest.

Shrink not, O desperate band, from weapon-wounding,
Stand as one body, man by brother man;
Had but the clans of Erin cleaved together
Your land and you had not been under ban.

Arouse thee, valiant Brian of the Bulwarks!
And God be with the champions of the Gael!
The children of the seed of Conn and Eoghan
Stand round thee;—canst thou fail?

FOOTNOTES:

[107] O'Rourke, Prince of Brefney, was a man whom Elizabeth and her representatives in Ireland found it hard to tackle. His handsome presence, his dignity and pride, gave rise to stories of his ascendancy over Elizabeth herself. When lying prisoner in the Tower of London, he is said to have sent to ask Elizabeth the favour of being hung, if hang he must, with a gad or withe, after his country's fashion, a request which Cox, who relates the story, says was doubtless willingly granted him. He was executed in 1597. (Cox's *Hibernia Anglicana*, ed. 1689, p. 399; cf. Bacon's reference to the story in his essay "Of Custom and Education.")

[172]

O'HUSSEY'S ODE TO THE MAGUIRE

Eochadh O'Hosey or Hussey was bard of the Maguires of Fermanagh. The campaign of Hugh Maguire, celebrated in this poem, was undertaken in 1599-1600 into Munster.

Where is my chief, my master, this bleak night, mavrone?
O cold, cold, miserably cold is this bleak night for Hugh!
Its showery, arrowy, speary sleet pierceth one thro' and thro',
Pierceth one to the very bone.

Rolls real thunder? Or was that red vivid light
Only a meteor? I scarce know; but through the midnight dim
The pitiless ice-wind streams. Except the hate that persecutes him,
Nothing hath crueller venomy might.

An awful, a tremendous night is this, meseems!
The flood-gates of the rivers of heaven, I think, have been burst wide;
Down from the overcharged clouds, like to headlong ocean's tide,
Descends grey rain in roaring streams.

[173]

Tho' he were even a wolf ranging the round green woods,
Tho' he were even a pleasant salmon in the unchainable sea,
Tho' he were a wild mountain eagle, he could scarce bear, he,
This sharp sore sleet, these howling floods.

O mournful is my soul this night for Hugh Maguire!
Darkly as in a dream he strays. Before him and behind
Triumphs the tyrannous anger of the wounding wind,
The wounding wind that burns as fire.

It is my bitter grief, it cuts me to the heart
That in the country of Clan Barry this should be his fate!
O woe is me, where is he? Wandering, houseless, desolate,
Alone, without or guide or chart!

Medreams I see just now his face, the strawberry-bright,
Uplifted to the blackened heavens, while the tempestuous winds
Blow fiercely over and round him, and the smiting sleet-shower blinds
The hero of Galang to-night!

Large, large affliction unto me and mine it is
That one of his majestic bearing, his fair stately form,
Should thus be tortured and o'erborne; that this unsparing storm
Should wreak its wrath on head like his!

[174]

That his great hand, so oft the avenger of the oppressed,
Should this chill churlish night, perchance, be paralysed by frost;
While through some icicle-hung thicket, as one lorn and lost,
He walks and wanders without rest.

The tempest-driven torrent deluges the mead,
It overflows the low banks of the rivulets and ponds;
The lawns and pasture-grounds lie locked in icy bonds,
So that the cattle cannot feed.

The pale-bright margins of the streams are seen by none;
Rushes and sweeps along the untamable flood on every side;
It penetrates and fills the cottagers' dwellings far and wide;
Water and land are blent in one.

Through some dark woods, 'mid bones of monsters, Hugh now strays,
As he confronts the storm with anguished heart, but manly brow,
O what a sword-wound to that tender heart of his, were now
A backward glance at peaceful days!

But other thoughts are his, thoughts that can still inspire
With joy and onward-bounding hope the bosom of MacNee;

[175]

Thoughts of his warriors charging like bright billows of the sea,
Borne on the wind's wings, flashing fire!

And tho' frost glaze to-night the clear dew of his eyes,
And white ice-gauntlets glove his noble fine fair fingers o'er,
A warm dress is to him that lightening-garb he ever wore,
The lightening of his soul, not skies.

Avran.

Hugh marched forth to fight: I grieved to see him so depart.
And lo! to-night he wanders frozen, rain-drenched, sad betrayed;
But the memory of the lime-white mansions his right hand hath laid
In ashes, warms the hero's heart!

James Clarence Mangan.[176]

A LAMENT FOR THE PRINCES OF TYRONE AND TYRCONNEL

Buried in San Pietro Montorio at Rome

Addressed to Nuala, the O'Donnell's sister, by Owen Roe mac an Bhaird (or Ward), the family Bard, in 1608-9.

O woman of the piercing wail,
Who mournest o'er yon mound of clay
With sigh and groan,
Would God thou wert among the Gael!
Thou would'st not then from day to day
Weep thus alone.
'Twere long before around a grave
In green Tyrconnel, one could find
This loneliness;
Near where Beann-Boirche's banners wave,
Such grief as thine could ne'er have pined
Companionless.[177]

Beside the wave in Donegal,
In Antrim's glens, or fair Dromore,
Or Killilee,
Or where the sunny waters fall
At Assaroe, near Erna shore,
This could not be.
On Derry's plains, in rich Drumcliff,
Throughout Armagh the Great, renowned
In olden years,
No day could pass but woman's grief
Would rain upon the burial-ground
Fresh floods of tears!

O no!—From Shannon, Boyne, and Suir,
From high Dunluce's castle-walls,
From Lissadill,
Would flock alike both rich and poor:
One wail would rise from Cruachan's halls
To Tara hill;
And some would come from Barrow-side,
And many a maid would leave her home
On Leitrim's plains,
And by melodious Banna's tide,
And by the Mourne and Erne, to come
And swell thy strains!

Oh, horses' hoofs would trample down
The mount whereon the martyr-saint
Was crucified;
From glen and hill, from plain and town,
One loud lament, one thrilling plaint,
Would echo wide.
There would not soon be found, I ween,

[178]

One foot of ground among those bands
For museful thought,
So many shriekers of the keen
Would cry aloud, and clap their hands,
All woe-distraught!

Two princes of the line of Conn
Sleep in their cells of clay beside
O'Donnell Roe:
Three royal youths, alas! are gone,
Who lived for Erin's weal, but died
For Erin's woe.
Ah, could the men of Ireland read
The names those noteless burial-stones
Display to view,
Their wounded hearts afresh would bleed,
Their tears gush forth again, their groans
Resound anew!

The youths whose relics moulder here
Were sprung from Hugh, high prince and lord
Of Aileach's lands;
Thy noble brothers, justly dear,
Thy nephew, long to be deplored
By Ulster's bands.
Theirs were not souls wherein dull time
Could domicile decay, or house
Decrepitude!
They passed from earth ere manhood's prime,
Ere years had power to dim their brows,
Or chill their blood.[179]

And who can marvel o'er thy grief,
Or who can blame thy flowing tears,
Who knows their source?
O'Donnell, Dunnasava's chief,
Cut off amid his vernal years,
Lies here a corse
Beside his brother Cathbar, whom
Tyrconnell of the Helmets mourns
In deep despair:
For valour, truth, and comely bloom,
For all that greatens and adorns,
A peerless pair.

Oh, had these twain, and he, the third,
The Lord of Mourne, O'Niall's son
(Their mate in death,
A prince in look, in deed, and word),

Had these three heroes yielded on
The field their breath,
Oh, had they fallen on Criffan's plain,
There would not be a town or clan
From shore to sea,
But would with shrieks bewail the slain,
Or chant aloud the exulting rann
Of jubilee!

What do I say? Ah, woe is me!
Already we bewail in vain
Their fatal fall!
And Erin, once the great and free,
Now vainly mourns her breakless chain,
And iron thrall.

[180]

Then, daughter of O'Donnell, dry
Thine overflowing eyes, and turn
Thy heart aside,
For Adam's race is born to die,
And sternly the sepulchral urn
Mocks human pride.

Look not, nor sigh, for earthly throne,
Nor place thy trust in arm of clay,
But on thy knees
Uplift thy soul to God alone,
For all things go their destined way
As He decrees.

Embrace the faithful crucifix,
And seek the path of pain and prayer
Thy Saviour trod;
Nor let thy spirit intermix
With earthly hope, with worldly care,
Its groans to God!

[108]

And Thou, O mighty Lord! whose ways
Are far above our feeble minds
To understand,
Sustain us in these doleful days,
And render light the chain that binds
Our fallen land! [181]

Look down upon our dreary state,
And thro' the ages that may still
Roll sadly on,
Watch Thou o'er hapless Erin's fate,
And shield at least from darker ill
The blood of Conn!

James Clarence Mangan.

FOOTNOTES:

[108] The literal translation of this stanza runs as follows:—

“For God’s sake, thy weighty sorrow banish away, O daughter of O’Donnell! Short time till thou in self-same guise must tread the way; the same path’s weariness awaits thee. In hand of clay put not thy trust.... Think on the cross that stands beside thee, and, in lieu of thy vain sorrowing, from off the sepulchre lift up thine arm and bid thy grief begone.” O’Grady’s *Cat. of MSS. in the Brit. Mus.*, pp. 372-73.

[182]

THE COUNTY OF MAYO

Or the “Lament of Thomas Flavell, or Lavell,” c. 1660.

On the deck of Patrick Lynch’s boat I sat in woeful plight,
Through my sighing all the weary day, and weeping all the night,
Were it not that full of sorrow from my people forth I go,
By the blessed sun! ’tis royally I’d sing thy praise, Mayo!

When I dwelt at home in plenty, and my gold did much abound,
In the company of fair young maids the Spanish ale went round—
’Tis a bitter change from those gay days that now I’m forced to go,
And must leave my bones in Santa Cruz, far from my own Mayo.

They are altered girls in Irrul now; ’tis proud they’re grown and high,
With their hair-bags and their top-knots—for I pass their buckles by;
But it’s little now I heed their airs, for God will have it so,
That I must depart for foreign lands, and leave my sweet Mayo.[183]

Tis my grief that Patrick Loughlin is not Earl of Irrul still,
And that Brian Duff no longer rules as Lord upon the hill;
And that Colonel Hugh MacGrady should be lying dead and low,
And I sailing, sailing swiftly from the county of Mayo.

George Fox.

[109]

FOOTNOTES:

[109] Lady Ferguson, in her *Life* of her husband, says that he was the true author of this poem, but that as Fox had a hand in it, he allowed it to be attributed to him. Sir Samuel dedicated his poems to Fox in 1880.

[184]

THE OUTLAW OF LOCH LENE

Oh, many a day have I made good ale in the glen,
That came not of stream or malt—like the brewing of men.
My bed was the ground; my roof, the greenwood above,
And the wealth that I sought, one far kind glance from my love.

Alas! on that night when the horses I drove from the field,
That I was not near from terror my angel to shield.

She stretched forth her arms—her mantle she flung to the wind,
And swam o'er Loch Lene her outlawed lover to find.

Oh would that a freezing, sleet-winged tempest did sweep,
And I and my love were alone, far off on the deep!
I'd ask not a ship, or a bark, or pinnace, to save,—
With her hand round my waist I'd fear not the wind or the wave.

[185]

'Tis down by the lake where the wild-tree fringes its sides
The maid of my heart, my fair one of Heaven resides;
I think as at eve she wanders its mazes along,
The birds go to sleep by the sweet, wild twist of her song.
Jeremiah Joseph Callanan.

[186]

THE FLOWER OF NUT-BROWN MAIDS

Seventeenth century.
If thou wilt come with me to the County of Leitrim,
Flower of Nut-brown Maids—
Honey of bees and mead to the beaker's brim
I'll offer thee, Nut-brown Maid.
Where the pure air floats o'er the swinging boats of the strand,
Under the white-topped wave that laves the edge of the sand,
There without fear we will wander together, hand clasped in hand,
Flower of Nut-brown Maids.

My heart never gave you liking or love,
Said the Flower of Nut-brown Maids;
Though sweet are your words, there's black famine above,
Said the Flower of Nut-brown Maids;
Will gentle words feed me when need and grim hunger come by?
Better be free than with thee to the woodlands to fly;
What gain to us both if together we famish and die?
Wept the Flower of Nut-brown Maids.

[187]

I saw her coming towards me o'er the face of the mountain
Like a star glimmering through the mist;
In the field of furze where the slow cows were browsing
In pledge of our love we kissed;
In the bend of the hedge where the tall trees play with the sun,
I wrote her the lines that should bind us for ever in one;
Had you a right to deny me the dues I had won,
O Flower of Nut-brown Maids?

My grief and my torment that thou art not here with me now,
Flower of Nut-brown Maids!
Alone, all alone, it matters not where or how,
O Flower of Nut-brown Maids;
On a slender bed, O little black head, strained close to thee,
Or a heap of hay, until break of day, it were one to me,

Laughing in gladness and glee together, with none to see,
My Flower of Nut-brown Maids.

[188]

ROISÍN DUBH

There's black grief on the plains, and a mist on the hills;
There is fury on the mountains, and that is no wonder;
I would empty the wild ocean with the shell of an egg,
If I could be at peace with thee, my Ros geal dubh.

Long is the course I travelled from yesterday to to-day,
Without, on the edge of the hill, lightly bounding, as I know,
I leapt Loch Erne to find her, though wide was the flood,
With no light of the sun to guide my path, but the Ros geal dubh.

If thou shouldst go to the Aonach to sell thy kine and stock,
If you go, see that you stay not out in the darkness of the night;
Put bolts upon your doors, and a heavy reliable lock,
Or, in faith, the priest will be down on you, on my Ros geal dubh!

O little Rose, sorrow not, nor be lamenting now,
There is pardon from the Pope for thee, sent straight home from Rome,
The friars are coming overseas, across the heaving wave,
And Spanish wine will then be thine, my Ros geal dubh.

[189]

There is true love in my heart for thee for the passing of a year,
Love tormenting, love lamenting, heavy love that wearies me,
Love that left me without health, without a path, gone all astray,
And for ever, ever, I did not get my Ros geal dubh!

I would walk Munster with thee and the winding ways of the hills,
In hope I would get your secret and a share of your love;
O fragrant Branch, I have known it, that thou hast love for me,
The flower-blossom of wise women is my Ros geal dubh.

The sea will be red floods, and the skies like blood,
Blood-red in war the world will show on the ridges of the hills;
The mountain glens through Erinn and the brown bogs will be quaking
Before the day she sinks in death, my Ros geal dubh!

[110]

FOOTNOTES:

[110] Ros geal dubh means the "Fair-dark Rose," here used as a love-title for Ireland; Roisín Dubh means "Little black or dark Rose." The above is a literal translation of the Irish poem upon which Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen" was formed. The opening quatrain is found in Petrie's Ancient Music of Ireland, but not in O'Daly's collection.

[190]

MY DARK ROSALEEN

O my dark Rosaleen,
Do not sigh, do not weep!
The priests are on the ocean green,
They march along the deep.
There's wine from the royal Pope
Upon the ocean green;
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
Shall give you health, and help, and hope,
My Dark Rosaleen!
Over hills and thro' dales,
Have I roamed for your sake;
All yesterday I sailed with sails
On river and on lake.
The Erne at its highest flood
I dashed across unseen,

[191]

For there was lightning in my blood,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
O there was lightning in my blood,
Red lightning lightened thro' my blood,
My Dark Rosaleen!
All day long, in unrest,
To and fro, do I move.
The very soul within my breast
Is wasted for you, love!

The heart in my bosom faints
To think of you, my queen,
My life of life, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
To hear your sweet and sad complaints,
My life, my love, my saint of saints,
My Dark Rosaleen!

Woe and pain, pain and woe,
Are my lot, night and noon,
To see your bright face clouded so,
Like to the mournful moon.
But yet will I rear your throne
Again in golden sheen;
'Tis you shall reign, shall reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

'Tis you shall have the golden throne,
'Tis you shall reign, and reign alone,
My Dark Rosaleen!

[192]

Over dews, over sands,
Will I fly for your weal:
Your holy delicate white hands
Shall girdle me with steel.
At home in your emerald bowers,
From morning's dawn till e'en,
You'll pray for me, my flower of flowers,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My fond Rosaleen!

You'll think of me thro' daylight hours,
My virgin flower, my flower of flowers,
My Dark Rosaleen!
I could scale the blue air,
I could plough the high hills,
O I could kneel all night in prayer,
To heal your many ills!
And one beamy smile from you
Would float like light between
My toils and me, my own, my true,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My fond Rosaleen!

Would give me life and soul anew,
A second life, a soul anew,
My Dark Rosaleen!
O the Erne shall run red
With redundance of blood,
The earth shall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal and slogan-cry
Wake many a glen serene,

[193]

Ere you shall fade, ere you shall die,
My Dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!
The Judgment Hour must first be nigh,
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,
My Dark Rosaleen!

James Clarence Mangan.

[194]

THE FAIR HILLS OF EIRE

Donnchad Ruadh MacNamara, about 1730.

Take my heart's blessing over to dear Eire's strand—
Fair Hills of Eire O!
To the Remnant that love her—our Forefathers' land!
Fair Hills of Eire O!
How sweet sing the birds, o'er mount there and vale,
Like soft sounding chords, that lament for the Gael,—

And I, o'er the surge, far, far away must wail
The Fair Hills of Eire O!

How fair are the flow'rs on the dear daring peaks,
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Far o'er foreign bowers I love her barest reeks,
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Triumphant her trees, that rise on ev'ry height,
Bloom-kissed, the breeze comes odorous and bright,
The love of my heart!—O my very soul's delight!
The Fair Hills of Eire O!

Still numerous and noble her sons who survive,
Fair Hills of Eire O!
The true hearts in trouble, the strong hands to strive—
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Ah, 'tis this makes my grief, my wounding and my woe,

[195]

To think that each chief is now a vassal low,
And my Country divided amongst the Foreign Foe—
The Fair Hills of Eire O!

In purple they gleam, like our High Kings of yore,
The Fair Hills of Eire O!
With honey and cream are her plains flowing o'er,
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Once more I will come, or my very life shall fail,
To the heart-haunted home of the ever-faithful Gael,
Than King's boon more welcome the swift swelling sail
For the Fair Hills of Eire O!

The dewdrops sparkle, like diamonds on the corn,
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Where green boughs darkle the bright apples burn
Fair Hills of Eire O!
Behold, in the valley, cress and berries bland,
Where streams love to dally, in that Wondrous Land,
Where the great River-voices roll in music grand
Round the Fair Hills of Eire O!

O, 'tis welcoming, wide-hearted, that dear land of love!
Fair Hills of Eire O!
New life unto the martyred is the pure breeze above
The Fair Hills of Eire O!
More sweet than tune flowing o'er the chords of gold
Comes the kine's soft lowing from the mountain fold,—
O, the Splendour of the Sunshine on them all, Young and Old,
'Mid the Fair Hills of Eire O!

George Sigerson.

[196]

SHULE AROON

A Brigade Ballad

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy says that the date of this ballad is not positively known, but it appears to be early in the eighteenth century, when the flower of the Catholic youth of Ireland were drawn away to recruit the ranks of the Irish Brigade abroad. It is accompanied by an air of deep sentiment and touching simplicity.—Ballad Poetry of Ireland.

I would I were on yonder hill,
'Tis there I'd sit and cry my fill,
And every tear would turn a mill,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!
Siubhail, siubhail, siubhail, a ruin!
Siubhail go socair, agus siubhail go ciuin,
Siubhail go d-ti an doras agus eulaigh liom,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!

[111]

I'll sell my rock, I'll sell my reel,
I'll sell my only spinning-wheel,
To buy for my love a sword of steel,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!
Siubhail, siubhail, siubhail a ruin! &c.

[197]

I'll dye my petticoats, I'll dye them red,
And round the world I'll beg my bread,
Until my parents shall wish me dead,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!
Siubhail, siubhail, siubhail, a ruin! &c.

I wish, I wish, I wish in vain,
I wish I had my heart again,
And vainly think I'd not complain,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!
Siubhail, siubhail, siubhail, a ruin! &c.

But now my love has gone to France,
To try his fortune to advance;
If he e'er come back, 'tis but a chance,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!
Siubhail, siubhail, siubhail, a ruin!
Siubhail go socair, agus siubhail go ciuin,
Siubhail go d-ti an doras agus culaigh liom,
Is go d-teidh tu, a mhurnin, slan!

FOOTNOTES:

[111] Dr. Sigerson renders the chorus in English verse, as follows:—

“Come, come, come, O Love!
Quickly come to me, softly move;
Come to the door, and away we'll flee,
And safe for aye may my darling be!”

[198]

LOVE'S DESPAIR

Dermot O'Curnan, born 1740.
I am desolate,
Bereft by bitter fate;
No cure beneath the skies can save me,
No cure on sea or strand,
Nor in any human hand—
But hers, this paining wound who gave me.

I know not night from day,
Nor thrush from cuckoo gray,
Nor cloud from the sun that shines above thee—
Nor freezing cold from heat,
Nor friend—if friend I meet—
I but know—heart's love!—I love thee

Love that my Life began,
Love, that will close life's span,
Love that grows ever by love-giving:
Love, from the first to last,
Love, till all life be passed,
Love that loves on after living!
This love I gave to thee,
For pain love has given me,

[199]

Love that can fail or falter never—
But, spite of earth above,
Guards thee, my Flower of love,
Thou marvel-maid of life for ever.
Bear all things evidence,
Thou art my very sense,
My past, my present, and my morrow!

All else on earth is crossed,
All in the world is lost—
Lost all—but the great love-gift of sorrow.
My life not life, but death;
My voice not voice—a breath;
No sleep, no quiet—thinking ever
On thy fair phantom face,
Queen eyes and royal grace,
Lost loveliness that leaves me never.

I pray thee grant but this—
From thy dear mouth one kiss,
That the pang of death-despair pass over:
Or bid make ready nigh
The place where I shall lie,
For aye, thy leal and silent lover.

George Sigerson.

[200]

THE CRUISKEEN LAWN

O sons of noble Erinn,
I've tidings of high daring
To brighten now your faces pale and wan:
Then hearken, gather nearer,
In Gaelic ringing clearer,
We'll pledge them in a cruiskeen lán, lán, lán,
We'll pledge them in a cruiskeen lán!
 Olfameed an cruiskeen,
 Sláinte gal mo vuirneen! [112]

In motion, over ocean, slán, slán, slán!
In exile dark and dreary,
Wandering far and weary,
With friends that never failed, I have gone,

[201]

The trusted and true-hearted,
Would God we'd never parted,
 Our brothers, boys, a cruiskeen lán, lán, lán!
 Our heroes in a cruiskeen lán.

Heav'n speed them over ocean,
With breeze of rapid motion,
The ships that King Charles sails upon;
With troops the frank and fearless,
To win our Freedom peerless,
 Our Freedom, boys, a cruiskeen lán, lán, lán!
 Our Freedom, in a cruiskeen lán!

Young men who now are sharing
The toast we raise to Erinn,
With hope that the King is coming on,
Grasp your guns and lances
For swift his host advances,
 We'll toast them in a cruiskeen lán, lán, lán!
 We'll toast them in a cruiskeen lán!

The tribe who would destroy all
Our rightful princes royal
Shall hence end their rule and begone;
The Gael shall live in gladness,
And banished be all sadness.
To that time, then, a cruiskeen lán, lán, lán!
That time, boys, a cruiskeen lán!
 Olfameed an cruiskeen,
 Sláinte gal mo vuirneen,
In motion, over ocean, slán, slán, slán!

George Sigerson.

FOOTNOTES:

[112]i.e. "Let us drink the cruiskeen ('little jug'); fair health to my darling!"

[202]

The Outlaw's Song

“Who is that without
With voice like a sword,
That batters my bolted door?”
“I am Eamonn an Chnuic,
Cold, weary, and wet
From long walking mountains and glens.”

“O dear and bright love,
What would I do for you
But cover you with a skirt of my dress.
For shots full thick
Are raining on you,
And together we may be slaughtered!”

“Long am I out
Under snow, under frost,
Without comradeship with any;
My team unyoked,
My fallow unsown,
And they lost to me entirely;
Friend I have none
(I am heavy for that)

[203]

That would harbour me late or early;
And so I must go
East over the sea,
Since ‘tis there I have no kindred!”

P. H. Pearse.

[204]

O DRUIMIN DONN DILISH

“O Druimin donn dilish, [113]
True Flower of the Kine,
Say, where art thou hiding,
Sad Mother of mine?”
“I lurk in the wild wood,
No human ear hears
(Save my brave lads around me)
My fast-falling tears.

“Gone my broad lands and homesteads,
My music and wine,
No chieftains attend me
No hostings are mine.
Stale bread and cold water
The whole of my hoard,
While the warm wine flows freely
Round the enemy's board.”

“Could we utter our minds
To those smart English rogues,

[205]

We would beat them as soundly
As we beat our old brogues!
We would whip them through thorns
On a damp, foggy day,
O’er the cliffs, my Donn dilish,
We would chase them away!”

FOOTNOTES:

[113] A poetic name for Ireland; druimshionn donn dileas, lit. “the beloved white-backed dun cow.”

[206]

DO YOU REMEMBER THAT NIGHT?

Do you remember that night
When you were at the window,
With neither hat nor gloves
Nor coat to shelter you?
I reached out my hand to you,
And you ardently grasped it,
I remained to converse with you
Until the lark began to sing.

Do you remember that night
That you and I were
At the foot of the rowan-tree,
And the night drifting snow?
Your head on my breast,
And your pipe sweetly playing?
Little thought I that night
That our love ties would loosen!

Beloved of my inmost heart,
Come some night, and soon,
When my people are at rest,
That we may talk together.
My arms shall encircle you
While I relate my sad tale,

[207]

That your soft, pleasant converse
Hath deprived me of heaven.

The fire is unraked,
The light unextinguished,
The key under the door,
Do you softly draw it.
My mother is asleep,
But I am wide awake;

My fortune in my hand,
I am ready to go with you.

Written down by O'Curry for Dr. George Petrie.

[208]

THE EXILE'S SONG

Composed by an emigrant named MacAmbrois.

Oh! were I again on my native bay,
By the curving hills that are far away,
I scarcely would wander for half a day
From the Cuckoo's Glen of a Sunday!
For, och, och, Eire, O!
Lone is the exile from Eire, O!
'Tis my heart that is heavy and weary!

O many a Christmas in Ireland,
I would race with the boys on the pleasant strand,
With my hurling-stick in my baby hand,
And but little sense to guide me!
And, och, och, Eire, O!
Sad is the exile from Eire, O!
'Tis my heart that is heavy and weary!

Lonely and drear is this foreign plain,
Where I hear but my own voice back again,
No call of the corncrake, cuckoo, or crane,
Now awakens me on a Sunday!
Then, och, och, Eire, O!
Lost is the exile from Eire, O!
'Tis my heart that is heavy and weary!

[209]

O, had I a boat and a single oar,
With the help of God I'd reach Erin's shore,
Nay, the very tide might drift me o'er,
To die at home in Erin!
Now, och, och, Eire, O!
Would I were back in Eire, O!
'Tis my heart that is heavy and weary!

[210]

THE FISHERMAN'S KEEN

Or the lamentation of O'Donoghue of Affadown ("Roaring Water"), in the west of Co. Cork, for his three sons and his son-in-law, who were drowned.

O loudly wailed the winter wind, the driving sleet fell fast,
The ocean billow wildly heaved beneath the bitter blast;

My three fair sons, ere break of day, to fish had left the shore,
The tempest came forth in its wrath—they ne'er returned more.

Cormac, 'neath whose unerring aim the wild duck fell in flight,
The plover of the lonesome hills, the curlew swift as light!
My firstborn child! the flower of youth! the dearest and the best!
O would that thou wert spared to me, though I had lost the rest!

And thou, my handsome Felix! in whose eye so dark and bright
The soul of courage and of wit looked forth in laughing light!

[211]

And Daniel, too, my fair-haired boy, the gentle and the brave,
All, all my stately sons were 'whelmed beneath the foaming wave.

Upon the shore, in wild despair, your aged father stood,
And gazed upon his Daniel's corse, too late snatched from the flood!
I saw him pale and lifeless lie, no more to see the light—
And cold, and dumb, and motionless, my heart grew at the sight!

My children, my loved children! do you view my bitter grief?
Look down upon your poor old sire, whose woe knows no relief!
The sunshine of mine eyes is gone, the comfort of my heart;
My life of life, my soul of soul, I've seen from earth depart!

What am I now? an aged man, to earth by sorrow bowed,
I weep within a stranger's home; lone, even in a crowd;
There is no sorrow like to mine, no grief like mine appears,
My once blithe Christmas is weighed down with anguish and with tears.

My sons! my sons! abandoned to the fury of the waves!
Would I could reach the two who lie in ocean's darksome caves;

[212]

'Twould bring some comfort to my heart in earth to see them laid,
And hear in Affadown the wild lamentings for them made.

O would that like the gay "Wild Geese" my sons had left this land,
From their poor father in his age, to seek a foreign strand;
Then might I hope the Lord of Heaven in mercy would restore,
My brave and good and stately sons in time to me once more!

Anonymous.

[213]

BOATMAN'S HYMN

Bark that bare me through foam and squall,
You in the storm are my castle wall:
Though the sea should redden from bottom to top,
From tiller to mast she takes no drop;
 On the tide-top, the tide-top,
 Wherry aroon, my land and store!

On the tide-top, the tide-top,
She is the boat can sail *go leor*.

She dresses herself, and goes gliding on,
Like a dame in her robes of the Indian lawn;
For God has bless'd her, gunnel and whale,
And oh! if you saw her stretch out to the gale,
On the tide-top, the tide-top, &c.

Whillan, ahoy! old heart of stone,
Stooping so black o'er the beach alone,
Answer me well—on the bursting brine
Saw you ever a bark like mine?

On the tide-top, the tide-top, &c.
Says Whillan—"Since first I was made of stone,
I have looked abroad o'er the beach alone—

[214]

But till to-day, on the bursting brine,
Saw I never a bark like thine,"
On the tide-top, the tide-top, &c.

"God of the air!" the seamen shout,
When they see us tossing the brine about:
"Give us the shelter of strand or rock,
Or through and through us she goes with a shock!"
On the tide-top, the tide-top,
Wherry aroon, my land and store!
On the tide-top, the tide-top,
She is the boat can sail *go leor*!

Sir Samuel Ferguson.

[215]

DIRGE ON THE DEATH OF ART O'LEARY

Shot at Carraganime, Co. Cork, May 4, 1773 - By Dark Eileen, his wife.

I
My closest and dearest!
From the first day I saw you
From the top of the market-house,
My eyes gave heed to you,
My heart gave affection to you,
I fled from my friends with you,
Far from my home with you,
No lasting sorrow this to me.

II
Thou didst bring me to fair chambers,
Rooms you had adorned for me;

[216]

Ovens were reddened for me,
Fresh trout were caught for me,
Roast flesh was carved for me
From beef that was felled for me;
On beds of down I lay
Till the coming of the milking-time,
Or so long as was pleasing to me.

III

Rider of the white palm!
With the silver-hilted sword!
Well your beaver hat became you
With its band of graceful gold;
Your suit of solid homespun yarn
Wrapped close around your form;
Slender shoes of foreign fashion,
And a pin of brightest silver
Fastened in your shirt.
As you rode in stately wise
On your slender steed, white-faced,
After coming over seas,
Even the Saxons bowed before you
Bowed down to the very ground;
Not because they loved you well
But from deadly hate;
For it was by them you fell,
Darling of my soul.

IV

My friend and my little calf!
Offspring of the Lords of Antrim,

[217]

And the chiefs of Immokely!
Never had I thought you dead,
Until there came to me your mare
Her bridle dragged beside her to the ground;
Upon her brow your heart-blood splashed,
Even to the carven saddle flowing down
Where you were wont to sit or stand.
I did not stay to cleanse it—
I gave a quick leap with my hands
Upon the wooden stretcher of the bed;
A second leap was to the gate,
And the third leap upon thy mare.

V

In haste I clapped my hands together,
I followed on your tracks
As well as I could,
Till I found you laid before me dead
At the foot of a lowly bush of furze;
Without pope, without bishop,
Without cleric or priest
To read a psalm for thee;
But only an old bent wasted crone
Who flung over thee the corner of her cloak.

VI

My dear and beloved one!
When it will come to me to reach our home,
Little Conor, of our love,
And Fiac, his toddling baby-brother,

[218]

Will be asking of me quickly
Where I left their dearest father?
I shall answer them with sorrow
That I left him in Kill Martyr;
They will call upon their father;
He will not be there to answer.

VII

My love and my chosen one!
When you were going forward from the gate,
You turned quickly back again!
You kissed your two children,
You threw a kiss to me.
You said, "Eileen, arise now, be stirring,
And set your house in order,
Be swiftly moving.
I am leaving our home,
It is likely that I may not come again."
I took it only for a jest
You used often to be jesting thus before.

VIII

My friend and my heart's love!
Arise up, my Art,
Leap on thy steed,
Arise out to Macroom
And to Inchegeela after that;
A bottle of wine in thy grasp,
As was ever in the time of thy ancestors.
Arise up, my Art,
Rider of the shining sword;

[219]

Put on your garments,
Your fair noble clothes;
Don your black beaver,
Draw on your gloves;
See, here hangs your whip,
Your good mare waits without;
Strike eastward on the narrow road,
For the bushes will bare themselves before you,
For the streams will narrow on your path,
For men and women will bow themselves before you
If their own good manners are upon them yet,
But I am much a-feared they are not now.

IX

Destruction to you and woe,
O Morris, hideous the treachery
That took from me the man of the house,

The father of my babes;
Two of them running about the house,
The third beneath my breast,
It is likely that I shall not give it birth.

X

My long wound, my bitter sorrow,
That I was not beside thee
When the shot was fired;
That I might have got it in my soft body
Or in the skirt of my gown;
Till I would give you freedom to escape,
O Rider of the grey eye,
Because it is you would best have followed after them.

[220]

XI

My dear and my heart's love!
Terrible to me the way I see thee,
To be putting our hero,
Our rider so true of heart,
In a little cap in a coffin!
Thou who used to be fishing along the streams,
Thou who didst drink within wide halls
Among the gentle women white of breast;
It is my thousand afflictions
That I have lost your companionship!
My love and my darling,
Could my shouts but reach thee
West in mighty Derrynane,
And in Carhen of the yellow apples after that;
Many a light-hearted young horseman,
And woman with white spotless kerchief
Would swiftly be with us here,
To wail above thy head
Art O'Leary of the joyous laugh!
O women of the soft wet eyes,
Stay now your weeping,
Till Art O'Leary drinks his drink
Before his going back to school;
Not to learn reading or music does he go there now,
But to carry clay and stones.

XII

My love and my secret thou.
Thy corn-stacks are piled,

[221]

And thy golden kine are milking,
But it is upon my own heart is the grief!
There is no healing in the Province of Munster,
Nor in the Island smithy of the Fians,
Till Art O'Leary will come back to me;
But all as if it were a lock upon a trunk
And the key of it gone straying;
Or till rust will come upon the screw.

XIII

My friend and my best one!
Art O'Leary, son of Conor,
Son of Cadach, son of Lewis,
Eastward from wet wooded glens,
Westward from the slender hill
Where the rowan-berries grow,
And the yellow nuts are ripe upon the branches;
Apples trailing, as it was in my day.
Little wonder to myself
If fires were lighted in O'Leary's country,
And at the mouth of Ballingeary,
Or at holy Gougane Barra of the cells,
After the rider of the smooth grip,
After the huntsman unwearied
When, heavy breathing with the chase,
Even thy lithe deerhounds lagged behind.
O horseman of the enticing eyes,
What happened thee last night?
For I myself thought
That the whole world could not kill you
When I bought for you that shirt of mail.

[222]

XIV

My friend and my darling!
A cloudy vision through the darkness
Came to me last night,
At Cork lately
And I alone upon my bed!
I saw the wood glen withered,
I saw our lime-washed court fallen;
No sound of speech came from thy hunting-dogs
Nor sound of singing from the birds
When you were found fallen
On the side of the hill without;
When you were found in the clay,
Art O'Leary;
With your drop of blood oozing out
Through the breast of your shirt.

XV

It is known to Jesus Christ,
I will put no cap upon my head,
Nor body-linen on my side,
Nor shoes upon my feet,
Nor gear throughout the house;
Even on the brown mare will be no bridle,
But I shall spend all in taking the law.
I will go across the seas
To speak with the king;
But if they will give no heed to me,
It is I that will come back again
To seek the villain of the black blood

[223]

Who cut off my treasure from me.
O Morrison, who killed my hero,
Was there not one man in Erin
Would put a bullet through you?

XVI

The affection of this heart to you,
O white women of the mill,
For the edged poetry that you have shed
Over the horseman of the brown mare.
It is I who am the lonely one
In Inse Carriganane.

[224]

THE MIDNIGHT COURT

Prologue

Brian Merriman, died in Limerick, 1808.

Full often I strolled by the brink of the river,
On the greensward soaked by the heavy dew,
Skirting the woods in the bays of the mountains,
No care in my heart, while the day was new.

My soul would light up when I saw Loch Gréine
Lie blue on the breast of the landscape green,
The heaven's expanse o'er the ring of the mountains,
Peak beckoning to peak o'er the ridges between.

Ah, well might the weakling, the sport of misfortune,
Spent of his vigour, embittered with pain,
His birthright wasted, his pockets empty,
Gaze long on that scene and take heart again.

On its mistless bosom the wild duck settled,
Two followed by two rode the stately swan,
In wanton gladness the perch leaped upward,
Ruddy their scales when the bright sun shone!

[225]

Peaceful the scene, as the azure waters
In ripples swept circling in to the shore;
Strange is its change in the winter quarter,
Its thunderous crash, its hollow roar.

Bright birds in the trees make a melody mirthful,
The doe bounds down, the hunt flashes by,
I hear the shrill horns, they are close upon me!
Brave Reynard in front, and the hounds in full cry!

[227]

RELIGIOUS POEMS OF THE PEOPLE

[229]

HYMN TO THE VIRGIN MARY

Conor O'Riordan, about 1750.

Queen of all Queens, oh! Wonder of the loveliness of women,
Heart which hath held in check for us the righteous wrath of God;
Strong Staff of Light, and Fosterer of the Bright Child of heaven,
Pray thou for us as we now pray that we may be forgiven.

She of the King of Stars beloved, stainless, undefiled,
Christ chose as His Mother-nurse, to Him, the stainless Child;
Within her breast, as in a nest, the Paraclete reposes,
Lily among fairest flowers, Rose amid red roses.

She, the bright unsheathed sword to guard our souls in anguish,
She, the flawless limber-branch, to cover those that languish;

[230]

Where her healing mantle flows, may I find my hiding,
'Neath the fringes of her robe constantly abiding.

Hostile camps upon the plain, sharp swords clashed together,
Stricken fleets across the main stressed by wintry weather;
Weary sickness on my heart, sinful thoughts alluring,
All the fever of my soul clings to her for curing.

She the Maid the careful king of the wide wet world chooses,
In her speech forgiveness lies, no suppliant she refuses;
White Star of our troubled sea, on thy name I'm crying,
That Christ may draw in His spread net the living and the dying.

[231]

CHRISTMAS HYMN

Hail to thee, thou holy Babe,
In the manger now so poor,
Yet so rich Thou art, I ween,
High within the highest door.

Little Babe who art so great,
Child so young who art so old,
In the manger small His room
Whom not heaven itself could hold.

Motherless, with mother here,
Fatherless, a tiny span,

Ever God in heaven's height,
First to-night becoming man.

Father—not more old than thou?
Mother—younger, can it be!
Older, younger is the Son,
Younger, older, she than He.

Douglas Hyde

[232]

O MARY OF GRACES

O Mary of Graces
And Mother of God,
May I tread in the paths
That the righteous have trod.

And mayest thou save me
From evil's control,
And mayest thou save me
In body and soul.

And mayest thou save me
By land and by sea,
And mayest thou save me
From tortures to be

May the guard of the angels
Above me abide,
May God be before me
And God at my side.

Douglas Hyde.

[233]

THE CATTLE-SHED

O Trinity of the glorious saints, I marvel
that the White Prince of the Kingdom did descend
as a child into the pure womb of Mary.
Nine months the Master of the Angels stayed
in humility and in great lowliness with her,
lighting a furnace of love within her.
He came down to earth,
the White Lamb, our loosener from sin.
O Mother, who found not a dwelling in the city,
till thou didst come to the stable to seek a bed;
there wast thou lying in poverty,
without wine, without flesh, or one taste in thy mouth;
on the mean barley chaff in the cattle-shed,
she brought forth the only Son of God of the Apostles.

Cold and misery you complained not of as your portion,
and was it not the holy sight in the manger of the ass?

[234]

HAIL TO THEE, O MARY

Hail to thee, O Mary,
Full of holy graces,
Thou our loving Mother
Whom the child embraces.
Hail to thee, O Mary,
Where are our alarms?
Is the little Child not blessed,
Lying in thine arms?

TWO PRAYERS

A low prayer, a high prayer, I send through space.
Arrange them Thyself, O Thou King of Grace.

[235]

O MARY, O BLESSED MOTHER

O Mary, O blessed Mother,
praise from my heart I sing,
it is thou didst bear our Saviour,
our Lord and our King.
In the stable of Bethlehem's city,
at the hour of middle-night,
was not sweet the brave song of the angels
for the King who was born that night?

O King of Kings, a thousand glories to Thee,
it is Thou who didst bear the cross
out to Calvary's hill,
and Thou wounded in every spot.
We will take courage from the pouring of the blood,
and we will follow our Saviour,
our Lord and our King,
to the city of Glory,
along with the throng,
Saints, Apostles, and Angels,
to the dwelling of God's Son.

[236]

I REST WITH THEE, O JESUS

I rest with Thee, O Jesus,
And do Thou rest with me.
The oil of Christ on my poor soul,
The creed of the Twelve to make me whole,
Above my head I see.
O Father, who created me,
O Son, who purchased me,
O Spirit Blest, who blessest me,
Rest ye with me.

THANKSGIVING AFTER FOOD

Great Giver of the open hand,
We stand to thank Thee for our meat,
A hundred praises, Christ, 'tis meet,
For all we drink, for all we eat.

[237]

THE SACRED TRINITY

Three folds of the cloth, yet one only napkin is there,
Three joints in the finger, but still only one finger fair;
Three leaves of the shamrock, yet no more than one shamrock to wear.
Frost, snow-flakes and ice, all in water their origin share,
Three Persons in God; to one God alone we make prayer.

O KING OF THE WOUNDS

O King of the Wounds! who found death on the top of the tree,
By the hand of the blind was Thy heart's blood riven from Thee;
By the blood from Thy wounds flowing down in a pool on the field,
O bear us to Paradise, Thou, 'neath the shade of Thy shield.

[238]

PRAYER BEFORE GOING TO SLEEP

The cross of the angels
On the bed where I lie;
The robe of the kingdom,
May it come very nigh;
O Glorious Virgin,
My thousand loves thou,
My helpful supporter,
My affection thou.
My woman-physician,
Ill or well, thou,

My firm faithful helper
In the Kingdom of graces, thou.
 O gentle Jesus,
 O Jesus, most gentle,
O Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us;
O glorious Virgin, pray thou also for us;
O Mother of God, O Bright Star of Knowledge,
O Queen of Paradise, watch thou and ward us,
The light of glory obtain from thy Child for us,
A sight of thy house, by thy great power's might, for us
The Light of all lights, and a sight of the Trinity,
And the grace of long patience in days of adversity.

[239]

I LIE DOWN WITH GOD

I lie down with God, and may God lie down with me;
The right hand of God under my head,
The two hands of Mary round about me,
The cross of the nine white angels,
From the back of my head
To the sole of my feet.
May I not lie with evil,
And may evil not lie with me.
Anna, mother of Mary,
Mary, mother of Christ,
Elizabeth, mother of John Baptist,
I myself beseech these three
To keep the couch free from sickness.
The tree on which Christ suffered
Be between me and the heavy-lying (nightmare),
And any other thing that seeks my harm.
With the will of God and the aid of the glorious Virgin.

[240]

THE WHITE PATERNOSTER

On going to sleep, think that it is the sleep of death, and that you may be summoned to the Day of the Mountain (i.e. the Day of Judgment), and say:—

I myself lie down with God,
May God lie down with me!
The protection of God above my head,
And the cross of the angels beneath my body.
Where wilt thou lie down to-night?
Between Mary and her Son,
Between Brigit and her mantle,
Between Columcille and his shield,
Between God and His right hand.
Where wilt thou arise on the morrow?
I will arise with Patrick.
Who are they in front of us?
Two hundred angels.
Who are they behind us?

As many again of the people of God.
Shut the forts of hell,
And open the gates of the kingdom of God.
Let the mighty radiance out,
And lead the sorrowful soul within.
O God, have mercy upon us!
O Son of the Virgin, may our souls be found by thee!

Glory to the Father, glory to the Son, glory to the Holy Ghost of power; as it was in the beginning,
so it is now, and shall be for ages of ages. Glory to thee, O Lord.

[241]

ANOTHER VERSION

I
Welcome to thee, O White Paternoster!
And welcome to thyself!
Where didst thou sleep last night?
As He slept, the King of Light.
Where wilt thou sleep again?
As the poor will sleep, in want and pain.
And the night after that, where wilt thou sleep?
At the feet of St. Patrick my rest shall be deep.

II
Who are they out before thee I see?
Twelve fair angels defending me.
Who are they behind thee west?
The twelve apostles ever blest.
What may that at thy right hand be?
Holy water that Mary gave me,
That it might lead me, with guidance wise,
From this door to the door of Paradise.

III
The key of Paradise, that I need;
The vat of gold stands there, indeed,
With its cover above it, golden-bright;
Yonder where candles blaze alight;
Candles that cannot be removed
Till the full of my two hands shall be
The flowing fulness of stream and sea.

[242]

IV
O Men of the World who are shedding tears,
I put Mary with her Son between you and your fears,
Brigit with her mantle,
Michael with his shield,
And the two long white hands of God from behind folding us all,
Between you and each grief
All the years,
From this night till a year from to-night,
And this night itself, with God.

[243]

A NIGHT PRAYER

May the will of God be done by us,
May the death of the saints be won by us,
And the light of the kingdom begun in us;
May Jesus, the Child, be beside my bed,
May the Lamb of mercy uplift my head,
May the Virgin her heavenly brightness shed,
And Michael be steward of my soul!

MARY'S VISION

“Are you asleep, Mother?”
“I am not, indeed, my son.”
“How is that, Mother?”
“Because of a vision I have of thee.”
“What vision is that, Mother?”
“There came a slim dark man on a slender black steed,
A sharp lance in his left hand,
Which pierced thy right side,
Letting thy sacred blood pour down upon thee.”
“True is that vision, Mother.”

[244]

THE SAFE-GUARDING OF MY SOUL

The safe-guarding of my soul be Thine,
O Father Ever-mighty;
O Blessed Mary,
Nurse of the King of Glory;
Michael the angel,
Their peaceful messenger,
The twelve apostles, and
The Lord of Mercy,
So that they may be
Safe-guarding my soul
Unto the city of Glory.

ANOTHER VERSION

I lie on this bed
As I lie in the tomb.
Firmly, O Jesus,
I make my confession to Thee.
Through deeds of my flesh,
Through thoughts of my heart,
Through sight of my eyes,

[245]

Through hearing of my ears,
Through speech of my lips,
Through movements of my feet,
Through everything spoken
Which was not true;
Through each thing promised
And not fulfilled;
Each thing that I did against Thy law,
Or against Thy sacred will,
I ask forgiveness from Thee,
O King of Glory.

[246]

THE STRAYING SHEEP

Fair Jesu, guide Thy straying sheep
Along the fragrant valleys,
And where the meadow-grass grows deep,
Guard from the wild wolf's sallies;
No sickness unto death be theirs,
But sickness unto healing,
Our sickness be for love to Thee
O King of all the living.

BEFORE COMMUNION

O Saviour, who lightest the sun's blessed ray,
Remit my offences, this day and alway,
Above my deserving, or all I could pay;
Then with joy I receive my Redeemer to-day.

[247]

MAY THE SWEET NAME OF JESUS

May the sweet name of Jesus
Be lovingly graven
In my heart's inmost haven.

O Mary, Blest Mother,
Be Jesus my Brother,
And I Jesu's lover.

A binding of love
That no distance can sever,
Be between us for ever.

Yea, O my Saviour,
For ever and ever.

[248]

O BLESSED JESUS

O Blessed Jesus, and O Nurse of the fair white Lamb,
In the dread hour of death it is under your shelter I am;
Saints and angels about me in every time, in all places,
Leading my soul to the home of the King of the Graces.

ANOTHER VERSION

O Jesus, and Mary who fostered the King of Grace,
Be ye the friends of my soul, in every time and place,
Cold as a stone lies my soul, unheeding the things above,
Smooth Thou my path in Thy time, Lord of my love.

[249]

MORNING WISH

O Jesu, in the morning, I cry and call on Thee,
Blessed only Son who hast purchased us dearly;
Safeguard my soul under the protection of Thy holy cross,
May sin and loss be kept from me through the course of this day.

ON “COVERING” THE FIRE FOR THE NIGHT [114]

Let us preserve this fire, as Christ preserves all,
Christ at the top of this house and Brigit in the midst;
The twelve apostles of greatest power in the heavens
Guarding and preserving this house till day.

FOOTNOTES:

[114] It is the custom in the West of Ireland and in the Hebrides to place a piece of peat on the fire before going to bed, to preserve the “seed” of the fire till morning; this act is accompanied with the recital of some fragment of prayer or verse. There are many of these “covering” or “sparing” ranns in existence.

[250]

THE MAN WHO STANDS STIFF

The man who stands stiff in a short-lived world
He knows not how long is the lease of his clod.
With Death he must reckon, when Death shall beckon
The soul must knock at the door of God.

Then Christ shall come and shall ask of the soul,
“O Soul, say how hast thou spent thy day?
I gave to thee power and self-control,
Thou fool, hast thou given thyself away?”

(The Sinner answers)

“I thought I had time before me still,
And space to return beneath Thy shield,
But Death came first, and against my will,
Ere I knew it, to Death I was forced to yield.”

To the Trinity’s presence the soul must mount,
To the judgment it comes, and its sins it bears,
And nought that it pleads for itself shall count
Save fasting, and giving of alms, and prayers.

If you gave but a glass of the water cold
(The simplest drink on the green earth’s sod),

[251]

Your reward is before you, a thousand-fold,
If the thing has been done for the sake of God.

Three things there be, the reward of man
For offending God—’tis a risk to run—
Misfortune’s fall, and a shortened span,
And the pains of hell when all is done.

Douglas Hyde.

[252]

CHARM AGAINST ENEMIES

Three things are of the Evil One—
An evil eye,
An evil tongue,
An evil mind;
Three things are of God, and these three are what Mary
told to her Son, for she heard them in heaven—
The merciful word,
The singing word,
And the good word.
May the power of these three holy things be on all the
men and women of Erin for evermore.

Lady Wilde.

CHARM FOR A PAIN IN THE SIDE

“God save you, my three brothers, God save you! And how far have ye to go, my three brothers?”

“To the Mount of Olivet, to bring back gold for a cup to hold the tears of Christ.”

“Go then, gather the gold, and may the tears of Christ fall on it, and thou wilt be cured both body and soul.”

Lady Wilde.

[253]

CHARM AGAINST SORROW

A Charm set by Mary for her Son, before the fair man and the turbulent woman laid Him in the grave.

The charm of Michael with the shield,

Of the palm-branch of Christ,

Of Brigit with her veil.

The charm which God set for Himself when the divinity within Him was darkened.

A charm to be said by the cross when the night is black and the soul is heavy with sorrow.

A charm to be said at sunrise, with the hands on the breast, when the eyes are red with weeping, and the madness of grief is strong. A charm that has no words, only the silent prayer.

Lady Wilde.

[254]

THE KEENING OF MARY

“O Peter, O Apostle, hast thou seen my bright love?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“I saw Him even now in the midst of His foemen,”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“Come hither, two Marys, till ye keen my bright love.”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“What have we to keen if we keen not His bones?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“Who is that stately man on the tree of the Passion?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“Dost thou not know thy Son, O Mother?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“And is that the little Son I carried nine months?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“And is that the little Son that was born in the stable?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“And is that the little Son that was nursed at Mary’s breast?”

M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

“Hush, O Mother, and be not sorrowful.”
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

[255]

“And is that the hammer that struck home nails through Thee?
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“And is that the spear that went through Thy white side?
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“And is that the crown of thorns that crowned Thy beauteous head?”
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“Hush, O Mother, be not sorrowful.
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“Hush, O Mother, and be not sorrowful,
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“The women of my keening are yet unborn, little Mother.”
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“O woman, who weepest by this My death,
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!
“There will be hundreds to-day in the Garden of Paradise!”
M’óchón agus m’óchón, Ó!

P. H. Pearse.

Taken down from Mary Clancy of Moycullen, who keened it with great horror in her voice, in a low sobbing recitative.

[257]

LOVE SONGS AND POPULAR POETRY

[259]

CUSHLA MA CHREE

Before the sun rose at yesterdawn,
I met a fair maiden adown the lawn;
The berry and snow
To her cheek gave its glow,
And her bosom was fair as the sailing swan;
Then, Pulse of my heart! what gloom is thine?
Her beautiful voice more hearts hath won
Than Orpheus’ lyre of old hath done;
Her ripe eyes of blue
Were crystals of dew
On the grass of the lawn before the sun;
And, Pulse of my heart! what gloom is thine?

Edward Walsh.

[260]

THE BLACKTHORN

There is never a merrier lad in the town or a wilder lad on the fells,
Till I fall to dreaming and thinking of the place where my lost love dwells,
Winter snow on Slieve na m-Ban, and it evermore drifting above
The small blossom of the blackthorn who is my own true love.

Were I but down below in a boat I would float out over the sea,
And many and many a line of love I would waft o'er the wave to thee;
My lasting sorrow, wound of my heart, that we are not together found
In the mountain glens at sunrise when the dew lies on the ground.

I myself leave you my thousand farewells in the townland of the trees,
And in every place I have travelled going up and down from the seas;
There is many a weary miry road and crooked damp boreen,
Parting me from the cabin of my own Storeen.

[261]

Oh! Paddy, would you think ill of me if you saw that I was crying?
And oh! Paddy, would you think ill of me if you knew me to be dying?
Oh! Paddy of the bound black hair, your mouth and your words were sweet,
But I knew not the hundred twists in your heart, nor the thousand turns on your feet.

Deep down in my pocket is lying the ribbon you wound in my hair,
The men of Erin together could not tear it away from there;
All, all is over between us, you and I have said our say,
And I'll soon be lying quiet in the cold damp clay.

He is the foolish man, indeed, who would spring at the ditch that is steep,
If close at his hand lay the fence of furze he could take at a single leap;
Though the rowan-berry swings high, it is bitterest out of the top,
While thick from the lowliest shrubs the ripe rasps and the blackberries drop.

O Virgin beloved! I am lost if his face should be now turned away;
What knowledge have I how to reach his house and his kinsfolk this day?
My mother bent double with age, and my father long laid in the tomb,
And mad anger on my people towards me, and my love fled home.

[262]

Are you going from me for ever, honey mouth, hair of flame?
If you come not back, avourneen, you leave me blind, dumb, and lame;
No skiff have I to bring you back, I am broken life and limb;
The raging ocean rolls between us and I have no strength to swim!

[263]

PASTHEEN FINN

A Connaught song.

Oh, my fair Pastheen is my heart's delight,
Her gay heart laughs in her blue eye bright;
Like the apple blossom her bosom white,
And her neck like the swan's, on a March morn bright!
Then, Oro, come with me! come with me! come with me!

Oro, come with me! brown girl, sweet!
 And oh! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet!
 Love of my heart, my fair Pastheen!
 Her cheeks are red as the rose's sheen,
 But my lips have tasted no more, I ween,
 Than the glass I drank to the health of my queen!
 Then, Oro, come with me! come with me! come with me!
 Oro, come with me! brown girl, sweet!
 And oh! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet!
 Were I in the town, where's mirth and glee,
 Or 'twixt two barrels of barley bree,

[264]

With my Pastheen upon my knee,
 'Tis I would drink to her pleasantly!
 Then, Oro, come with me! come with me! come with me!
 Oro, come with me! brown girl, sweet!
 And oh! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet!
 Nine nights I lay in longing and pain
 Betwixt two bushes, beneath the rain,
 Thinking to see you, love, once again;
 But whistle and call were all in vain!
 Then, Oro, come with me! come with me! come with me!
 Oro, come with me! brown girl, sweet!
 And oh! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet!
 I'll leave my people, both friend and foe;
 From all the girls in the world I'll go;
 But from you, sweetheart, oh, never! oh, no!
 Till I lie in the coffin, stretch'd cold and low!
 Then, Oro, come with me! come with me! come with me!
 Oro, come with me! brown girl, sweet!
 And oh! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet!
 Sir Samuel Ferguson.

[265]

SHE
 The white bloom of the blackthorn, she,
 The small sweet raspberry-blossom, she;
 More fair the shy, rare glance of her eye,
 Than the wealth of the world to me.

My heart's pulse, my secret, she,
 The flower of the fragrant apple, she;
 A summer glow o'er the winter's snow,
 'Twixt Christmas and Easter, she.

[266]

HOPELESS LOVE

Since I know
Hopeless of thy love I go,
Since from me each dear delight
takes flight:
Ere we end
Ways we might together wend,
Ere the light from out mine eyes
dies:
Give some sign
One regretful thought is thine,
Lest I count my story told,
overbold.

For I hold,
Time may yet some joy unfold,
Joy such as the lifelong blind
find;
If entwined
In the fabric of the mind,
Dwells the memory of thy tear,
dear!

[267]

THE GIRL I LOVE

The girl I love is comely, straight, and tall;
Down her white neck her auburn tresses fall;
Her dress is neat, her carriage light and free—
Here's a health to that charming maid, whoe'er she be!

The rose's blush but fades beside her cheek;
Her eyes are blue, her forehead pale and meek;
Her lips, like cherries on a summer tree—
Here's a health to the charming maid, whoe'er she be!

When I go to the field no youth can lighter bound,
And I freely pay when the cheerful jug goes round;
The barrel is full; but its heart we soon shall see—
Come! here's to that charming maid, whoe'er she be!

Had I the wealth that props the Saxon's reign,
Or the diamond crown that decks the King of Spain,
I'd yield them all if she kindly smiled on me—
Here's a health to the maid I love, whoe'er she be!

Five pounds of gold for each lock of her hair I'd pay,
And five times five, for my love one hour each day,
Her voice is more sweet than the thrush on its own green tree—
Then, my dear, may I drink a fond, deep health to thee!

Jeremiah Joseph Callanan.

[268]

WOULD GOD I WERE

Would God I were the tender apple-blossom
That floats and falls from off the twisted bough,
To lie and faint within your silken bosom,
As that does now.

Or would I were a little burnished apple,
For you to pluck me, gliding by so cold,
While sun and shade your robe of lawn will dapple,
And your hair's spun gold.

Yea, would to God I were among the roses
That lean to kiss you as you float between,
While on the lowest branch a bud uncloses
To touch you, queen.

Nay, since you will not love, would I were growing,
A happy daisy, in the garden path,
That so your silver foot might press me going,
Even unto death.

Katharine Tynan-Hinkson.

[269]

BRANCH OF THE SWEET AND EARLY ROSE

Branch of the sweet and early rose
That in the purest beauty flows,
So passing sweet to smell and sight,
On whom shalt thou bestow delight?

Who in the dewy evening walk
Shall pluck thee from the tender stalk?
Whose temples blushing shalt thou twine,
And who inhale thy breath divine?

Dr. Drennan.

[270]

IS TRUAGH GAN MISE I SASANA

'Tis a pity I'm not in England,
Or with one from Erin thither bound,
Out in the midst of the ocean,
Where the thousands of ships are drowned.

From wave to wave of the ocean
To be guided on with the wind and the rain—
And, O King! that Thou might'st guide me
Back to my love again!

Thomas MacDonagh.

[271]

THE YELLOW BITTERN

The yellow bittern that never broke out
In a drinking-bout, might well have drunk;
His bones are thrown on a naked stone
Where he lived alone like a hermit monk.

O yellow bittern! I pity your lot,
Though they say that a sot like myself is curst—
I was sober a while, but I'll drink and be wise
For fear I should die in the end of thirst.

It's not for the common birds that I'd mourn,
The blackbird, the cornrake or the crane,
But for the bittern that's shy and apart
And drinks in the marsh from the lone bog-drain.

Oh! if I had known you were near your death,
While my breath held out I'd have run to you,
Till a splash from the Lake of the Son of the Bird
Your soul would have stirred and waked anew.

My darling told me to drink no more
Or my life would be o'er in a little short while;
But I told her 'tis drink gives me health and strength,
And will lengthen my road by many a mile.

[272]

You see how the bird of the long smooth neck,
Could get his death from the thirst at last—
Come, son of my soul, and drain your cup,
You'll get no sup when your life is past.

In a wintering island by Constantine's halls,
A bittern calls from a wineless place,
And tells me that hither he cannot come
Till the summer is here and the sunny days.

When he crosses the stream there and wings o'er the sea,
Then a fear comes to me he may fail in his flight—
Well, the milk and the ale are drunk every drop,
And a dram won't stop our thirst this night.

Thomas MacDonagh.

[273]

HAVE YOU BEEN AT CARRACK?

Have you been at Carrack, and saw you my true-love there?
And saw you her features, all beautiful, bright, and fair?
Saw you the most fragrant, flowering, sweet apple-tree?
O! saw you my lov'd one, and pines she in grief like me?
I have been at Carrack, and saw thy own true-love there;
And saw, too, her features, all beautiful, bright, and fair;

And saw the most fragrant, flowering, sweet apple-tree—
 I saw thy lov'd one—she pines not in grief, like thee!
 Five guineas would price every tress of her golden hair—
 Then think what a treasure her pillow at night to share,
 These tresses thick-clustering and curling around her brow—
 O, Ringlet of Fairness! I'll drink to thy beauty now!
 When seeking to slumber, my bosom is rent with sighs—
 I toss on my pillow till morning's blest beams arise;
 No aid, bright Beloved! can reach me save God above,
 For a blood-lake is formed of the light of my eyes with love!

[274]

Until yellow Autumn shall usher the Paschal day,
 And Patrick's gay festival come in its train alway—
 Until through my coffin the blossoming boughs shall grow,
 My love on another I'll never in life bestow!
 Lo! yonder the maiden illustrious, queen-like, high,
 With long-flowing tresses adown to her sandal-tie—
 Swan, fair as the lily, descended of high degree,
 A myriad of welcomes, dear maid of my heart, to thee!
 Edward Walsh.

[275]

CASHEL OF MUNSTER

(Air: "Clár bog déil")

I'd wed you without herds, without money, or rich array,
 And I'd wed you on a dewy morning at day-dawn grey;
 My bitter woe it is, love, that we are not far away
 In Cashel town, though the bare deal board were our marriage-bed this day.

Oh, fair maid, remember the green hill side,
 Remember how I hunted about the valleys wide;
 Time now has worn me; my locks are turned to grey,
 The year is scarce and I am poor, but send me not, love, away!
 Oh, deem not my birth is of base strain, my girl,
 Oh, deem not my birth was as the birth of a churl;
 Marry me, and prove me, and say soon you will,
 That noble blood is written on my right side still!
 My purse holds no red gold, no coin of the silver white,
 No herds are mine to drive through the long twilight!
 But the pretty girl that would take me, all bare though I be and lone,
 Oh, I'd take her with me kindly to the county Tyrone.

[276]

Oh, my girl, I can see 'tis in trouble you are,
 And, oh, my girl, I see 'tis your people's reproach you bear;
 "I am a girl in trouble for his sake with whom I fly,
 And, oh, may no other maiden know such reproach as I!"
 Sir Samuel Ferguson.

[277]

THE SNOWY-BREASTED PEARL

T

here's a colleen fair as May,

For a year and for a day
I've sought by every way her heart to gain.

There's no art of tongue or eye
Fond youths with maidens try
But I've tried with ceaseless sigh, yet tried in vain.

If to France or far-off Spain
She'd cross the watery main,
To see her face again the sea I'd brave.

And if 'tis heaven's decree
That mine she may not be
May the son of Mary me in mercy save!
O thou blooming milk-white dove,
To whom I've given true love,
Do not ever thus reprove my constancy.

There are maidens would be mine,
With wealth in hand and kine,
If my heart would but incline to turn from thee.

[278]

But a kiss with welcome bland,
And a touch of thy dear hand,
Are all that I demand, would'st thou not spurn;
For if not mine, dear girl,
O Snowy-Breasted Pearl!
May I never from the fair with life return!
George Petrie.

[279]

THE DARK MAID OF THE VALLEY

(Bean dubh an Gleanna)

Oh, have you seen or have you heard, my treasure of bright faces,
Some dark glen roving, while in gloom I pine here day and night?
Far from her voice, far from her eyes, my cloud of woe increases—
My blessing on that glen and her, for aye and aye alight.

'Tis many's the time they've put in print, to beauty doing homage,
Her figure tall, her eyebrows small, her thin-lipped mouth of truth,
Her snowy hands, as fair and fine as silk on wild bird's plumage—
My bitter sigh to think that I am here, a lonely youth!
One little glance, once at her face, a flame lit in my bosom,
Oh, snowy-hearted, white-toothed one, whose ringlets are of gold,
More dear art thou than Deirdre, leaving lovers mourning woesome,
Or Blanaid, meshing thousands with her winning eyes of old!

[280]

Oh, bloom of women! spurn me not for this rich suitor hoary—
This boorish, noisy, songless man, who comes between us twain;
It's I would sweetly sing beneath the harvest moon's gold glory,
For thee full many a Fenian lay and bold Milesian strain!
P. J. McCall.

[281]

THE COOLUN

Oh, had you seen the Coolun, walking down by the cuckoo's street,
With the dew of the meadow shining on her milk-white twinkling feet,
My love she is, and my coleen oge, and she dwells in Bal'nagar;
And she bears the palm of beauty bright, from the fairest that in Erin are.

In Bal'nagar is the Coolun, like the berry on the bough her cheek;
Bright beauty dwells for ever on her fair neck and ringlets sleek;
Oh, sweeter is her mouth's soft music, than the lark or thrush at dawn,
Or the blackbird in the greenwood singing farewell to the setting sun.

Rise up, my boy! make ready my horse, for I forth would ride,
To follow the modest damsel, where she walks on the green hill side;
For, ever since our youth were we plighted, in faith, troth, and wedlock true—
She is sweeter to me nine times over than organ or cuckoo!

[282]

For, ever since my childhood I loved the fair and darling child;
But our people came between us, and with lucre our pure love defiled;
Oh, my woe it is, and my bitter pain, and I weep it night and day,
That the coleen bawn of my early love is torn from my heart away.

Sweetheart and faithful treasure, be constant still, and true;
Nor for want of herds and houses leave one who would ne'er leave you:
I'll pledge you the blessed Bible, without and eke within,
That the faithful God will provide for us, without thanks to kith and kin.

Oh, love, do you remember when we lay all night alone,
Beneath the ash in the winter-storm, when the oak wood round did groan?
No shelter then from the blast had we, the bitter blast and sleet,
But your gown to wrap about our heads, and my coat around our feet.

Sir Samuel Ferguson.

[283]

CEANN DUBH DHILEAS [115]

Put your head, darling, darling, darling,
Your darling black head my heart above;
Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,
Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?

Oh, many and many a young girl for me is pining,
Letting her locks of gold to the cold wind free,
For me, the foremost of our gay young fellows;
But I'd leave a hundred, pure love, for thee!

Then put your head, darling, darling, darling,
Your darling black head my heart above;
Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,
Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love?

Sir Samuel Ferguson.

FOOTNOTES:

[115]"Beloved Dark Head."

[284]

RINGLETTED YOUTH OF MY LOVE

Ringleted youth of my love,
With thy locks bound loosely behind thee,
You passed by the road above,
But you never came in to find me;
Where were the harm for you
If you came for a little to see me,
Your kiss is a wakening dew
Were I ever so ill or so dreamy.

If I had golden store
I would make a nice little boreen
To lead straight up to his door,
The door of the house of my storeen;
Hoping to God not to miss
The sound of his footfall in it,
I have waited so long for his kiss
That for days I have slept not a minute.

I thought, O my love! you were so—
As the moon is, or sun on a fountain,
And I thought after that you were snow,
The cold snow on top of the mountain;

[285]

And I thought after that, you were more
Like God's lamp shining to find me,
Or the bright star of knowledge before,
And the star of knowledge behind me.

You promised me high-heeled shoes,
And satin and silk, my storeen,
And to follow me, never to lose,
Though the ocean were round us roaring;
Like a bush in a gap in a wall
I am now left lonely without thee,
And this house I grow dead of, is all
That I see around or about me.

Douglas Hyde.

[286]

I SHALL NOT DIE FOR YOU
O

woman, shapely as the swan,
On your account I shall not die,
The men you've slain—a trivial clan—
Were less than I.

I ask me shall I die for these,
For blossom-teeth and scarlet lips?
And shall that delicate swan-shape

Bring me eclipse?
Well shaped the breasts and smooth the skin,
The cheeks are fair, the tresses free;
And yet I shall not suffer death,
God over me!
Those even brows, that hair like gold,
Those languorous tones, that virgin way;
The flowing limbs, the rounded heel
Slight men betray.

[287]

Thy spirit keen through radiant mien,
Thy shining throat and smiling eye,
Thy little palm, thy side like foam—
I cannot die!
O woman, shapely as the swan,
In a cunning house hard-reared was I;
O bosom white, O well-shaped palm,
I shall not die.

Padraic Colum

[288]

DONALL OGE

Were I to go to the West, from the West I would come not again,
The hill that is highest I would climb, at the cord that is toughest I would strain;
The branch I would soonest pluck is far out of my reach in the hollow,
And the track of my lover's feet is the track that my heart would follow.

My heart is as dark as the sloe in a crack of the mountain gorge;
Or a burnt-out cinder fallen down at the back of the blazing forge;
As the stain of a miry shoe on the marble steps of a palace,
As the stain of a drowning fly in the wine of the Holy chalice. [116]

My heart is a cluster of nuts with every kernel dropped,
My heart is the ice on the pond above, where the mill has stopped;
A mournful sadness is breaking over my running laughter
Like the mirth of a maid at her marriage and the heavy sorrow after.

[289]

You have taken the East from me and you have taken the West,
You have taken the path before me and the path that is behind;
The moon is gone from me by night and the sun is gone by day,
Alas! I greatly dread you have stolen my God away!
By the Well of Loneliness I sit and make my moan;
I hear no sound in the depths below from the fall of the dropping stone;
I see the cold wide world, but my lad I do not see,
Your shadow no longer lying between God and me.

The colour of the blackberry is my old lover's colour;
Or the colour of the raspberry on a bright day of summer;
Or the colour of the heathberry where the bog-grass is rarest—
Ah! the blackest head is often on the form that's fairest.

I heard the dog speak of you last night and the sun gone down,
I heard the snipe calling aloud from the marshlands brown;
It is you are the lonely bird flitting from tree to tree—

May you never find your mate if you find not me!
It is time for me to leave this cruel town behind,
The stones are sharp in it, the very mould unkind;

The voice of blame is heard like the muttering of the sea—
The heavy hand of the band of men backbiting me.

[290]

I denounce love; she who gave it to him is now all undone;
Little he understood, yon black mother's son.

That my heart is turned to stone, what mattered that to you?
What were you caring for, but to get a cow or two?

FOOTNOTES:

[116] This line is not in the original.

[291]

THE GRIEF OF A GIRL'S HEART

Some of the verses in this poem are identical with those found in "Donall Oge," and also with the poem called "Breed Astore" in Dr. Hyde's Love Songs of Connaught. I have omitted those which occur in the former poem and added one quatrain from the latter, which it would be a pity to leave out. They seem to have been all parts of the same long poem. Here again we have Donall Oge or "Young Donall" as the lover.

O Donall Oge, if you will go across the sea,
Bring myself with you, and do not forget it;
There will be a "faring" for thee on fine days and market-days,
And the daughter of the King of Greece as your bedfellow at night.

If you go over seas, there is a token I have of you,
Your bright top-knot and your two grey eyes,
Twelve ringlets on your yellow curling head,
Like the cowslip or the rose-leaf in the garden.

You promised me, but you spoke a lie to me,
That you would be before me at the fold of the sheep;
I let a whistle out and three hundred shouts for you,
But I found nothing in it but a lamb a-bleating.

[292]

You promised me, a thing that was hard for you,
A ship of gold under a mast of silver,
Twelve great towns of the world's market-towns,
And a fine white court beside the sea.

You promised me, a thing that was not possible,
You would give me gloves of fishes' skin,
You would give me shoes of the feathers of birds,
And gowns of silk the richest in Erinn.

O Donall Oge, it were better for thee I to be with thee,
Than a high-born, arrogant, wasteful lady;
I would milk your cows and I would churn for you,
And if it went hard with you, I would strike a blow with you.

Och, ochone, it is not the hunger,
Nor want of food and drink, nor want of sleep,
That has left me wasting and weary;
The love of a young man it is that has sickened me.

Early in the morning I saw the young man
On the back of his horse going along the road;
He did not move over to me nor take any heed of me,
And on my coming home, it is I who wept my fill.

When I myself go to the Well of Loneliness
I sit down and I go through my trouble,
When I see the world and I see not my lad;
There was the shadow of amber upon his hair.

[293]

It was a Sunday that I gave my love to you,
The Sunday before Easter Sunday exactly;
I myself on my knees a-reading the Passion,
My two eyes giving love to you ever after.

Oye, little mother, give myself to him,
And give him what is yours of goods entirely,
Out with yourself a-begging alms
And do not be going East and West seeking me.

My little mother said to me not to speak with you
To-day or to-morrow or on Sunday,
It is in the bad hour she gave me that choice,
It is "shutting the door after the theft."

And you passed me by, dark and late,
And you passed me by, and the light of the day in it;
If you would come in yourself and see me
Never a word at all would I have with you. [117]

FOOTNOTES:

[117] This last stanza is from Dr. Hyde's "Breed Astore" (Love Songs, p. 77), where the third stanza is also found.

[294]

DEATH THE COMRADE

When I rose up in the morning early
On a sunny day in the burst of spring,
My step was lithe, and my form was burly,
I felt as blithe as a bird on the wing;
As I was going out my way
Who should stand in the path but Death;

I knew he was strong, and would not be said nay,
So I wished him "Good-morrow,"—but I caught my breath,
When, "Hurry on, Shawn, for I'm wanting you to come with me," he saith.

Oh, then, Maura, is it parting I am from you,
My thousand loves for ever on earth?

I who would plant the potatoes for you,
I whom you needed to cut the turf!
I who would buy you the young milch cow,
I who would croon you to sleep with a rann,
I who at eve would lie down with your leave—
What ever would you do without your man?
O Maura, keep me with you a little, little longer, if you can!
“There’s many an old man down in the town,
And no manner of use or abuse in him more;

[295]

There’s little Dominic, wizened and brown,
Begging his scraps from door to door;
And his wife and children famished with cold
Trying to find him his bit of bread;
O Death, ‘tis your right to take the old—
And they say that Dominic’s wrong in his head—
O Death, take Dominic with you, for ‘tis badly I’m wanted here,” I said.

“It’s a fine man you are, but you stand in my way,
I’d be thankful you’d let me get on to my fields;”
He raised his arm, it was cold as clay,
And strong as the flail the thresher wields.

I tried to push him out of my road,
But his bony fingers clutched me tight;
“I am your comrade henceforth,” he said,
“Another man tends your sheep to-night;
Hurry home, Shawn, I call for you again before the morning’s light.”

[296]

MUIRNEEN OF THE FAIR HAIR F

or a year my love lies down,
In a little western town,
And the sun upon the corn is not so sweet;
At the chill time of the year,
On the hills where roams my dear,
There is honey in the traces of her feet.

If my longing I could get,
I would take her in a net,
And would ease my aching sorrow for a while;
And though all men say me nay
I shall wed her on a day,
She my darling of the sweet and sunny smile.

I have finished with the plough,
And must sow my seedlands now,
I must labour in the face of wind and weather;
But in rain and frost and snow,
Always as I come and go,
I am thinking she and I should be together.

[297]

O love my heart finds fair!
It is little that you care
Though I perish in the blackness of my grief;
But may you never tread
God's Heaven overhead,
If you scorn me and refuse my love relief.

I would count them little worth,
All the women of the earth,
And myself alone to have the choice among them;
For in books I read it clear,
That the beauty of my dear,
It has wrestled with their beauties and has flung them.

Robin Flower.

[298]

THE RED MAN'S WIFE

'Tis what they say,
Thy little heel fits in a shoe.

'Tis what they say,
Thy little mouth kisses well, too.

'Tis what they say,
Thousand loves that you leave me to rue;
That the tailor went the way
That the wife of the Red man knew.

Nine months did I spend
In a prison closed tightly and bound;
Bolts on my smalls
And a thousand locks frowning around;
But o'er the tide
I would leap with the leap of a swan,
Could I once set my side
By the bride of the Red-haired man.

I thought, O my life,
That one house between us, love, would be;
And I thought I would find
You once coaxing my child on your knee;

[299]

But now the curse of the High One
On him let it be,
And on all of the band of the liars
Who put silence between you and me.

There grows a tree in the garden
With blossoms that tremble and shake,
I lay my hand on its bark
And I feel that my heart must break.

On one wish alone
My soul through the long months ran,
One little kiss
From the wife of the Red-haired man.

But the Day of Doom shall come,
And hills and harbours be rent;
A mist shall fall on the sun
From the dark clouds heavily sent;
The sea shall be dry,
And earth under mourning and ban;
Then loud shall he cry
For the wife of the Red-haired man.

Douglas Hyde.

[300]

ANOTHER VERSION

Salutation to thee,
O Seagull, who flew to my bosom,
As the Maid of the West
Winged her way o'er the waves of the sea; [118]

In wrath I will ravage the country
Right up to the ridge of Roscuain;
But when I turn home again,
Back to my bird again,
'Tis I who am conquered then,
Conquered by thee.

Whiter thy neck, thousand loves,
Than the swan that floats out on the billow;
Redder thy cheek
Than the rose-blossom dropped from the tree;
Softer thy voice
Than the cuckoo's low call from the willow,
And smoother than silk,
The fine silk of the silkworm,
The silkworm in spinning,
The fair locks of thee.

Maid without spot, matchless maiden,
How lovely the bloom of thy forehead!
Where is the fortunate youth
I would care to betroth to thee?

[301]

Why should I hide or conceal it?
The gloom of my soul I reveal it;
The mists round me thicken,
With death I am stricken,
'Twas the Red Man who smote
When he stole thee from me.

Blossom of beauty, my blossom,
Ten thousand blessings before thee,
Sick to the death is my heart
For sorrowful lack of thee.

If I could coax thee and tell thee
How lonely I am and weary,
Thy wild eyes would soften,
Would soften in sorrow,
At the pain of my loss,
By the Red Man and thee.

Though in a gaol I were fast,
There below in the old Down quarter,
Bolts on my wrist, and my waist
Fastened tight under lock and key;
Swift as the flight of the falcon
Or the swan swooping down on the harbour,
I'd find thee and bind thee,
In my arms I'd entwine thee,
Ere the Red Man could part us,
Could part thee from me.

FOOTNOTES:

[118] i.e. Deirdre, who fled with the sons of Usnach to Scotland.

[302]

MY GRIEF ON THE SEA

My grief on the sea,
How the waves of it roll!
How they heave between me
And the love of my soul!

Abandoned, forsaken,
To grief and to care,
Will the sea ever waken
Relief from despair?

My grief, and my trouble!
Would he and I were
In the province of Leinster,
Or county of Clare.

Were I and my darling—
Oh, heart-bitter wound!—
On board of the ship
For America bound.

On a green bed of rushes
All last night I lay,

[303]

And I flung it abroad
With the heat of the day.

And my love came behind me—
He came from the South;

His breast to my bosom,
His mouth to my mouth.

Douglas Hyde.

[304]

ORÓ MHÓR, A MHÓIRÍN

O dear is Paudheen, blithe and gay,
Upon a fair or market day;
But far more dear a March morn clear,
As in his boat he singeth gay!

Oró wore, a-woreen!
Oró wore, love, will you go,
Oró wore, a-woreen!
Golden hair, out for a row?

He said and said—what did he say?—
He said he'd come on Brigid's Day!
But shirt and sock were in the crock;
And so he couldn't speed away!

Oró wore, &c.

He said and said—what did he say?—
He said he'd come on Patrick's Day!
But coat and stock were under lock;
And so he couldn't steal away!

Oró wore, &c

He said and said—what did he say?—
He said he'd come on Sheela's Day! [119]

[305]

But Borna Rock fell with a shock
Upon him, so he stayed away!
Oró wore, &c.

He said and said—what did he say?—
He said he'd come on Easter Day!
But at the knock he met a flock
Of geese, that frightened him away!
Oró wore, &c.

He said and said—what did he say?—
He said he'd come this very day!
If he should mock, I pray some rock
May wreck his corrach on the way!

Oró wore, a-woreen!
Oró wore, love, will you go,
Oró wore, a-woreen!
Golden hair, out for a row?

P. J. McCall.

FOOTNOTES:

[119] The day after St. Patrick's Day.

[306]

THE LITTLE YELLOW ROAD

Taken down in Co. Mayo from Michael Mac Rudhraighe.

I am sick, sick,
No part of me sound;
The heart in my middle
Dies of its wound,
Pining the time
When she did stand
With me shoulder to shoulder
And hand in hand.

I travelled west
By the little yellow road
In the hope I might see
Where my Secret abode.
White were her two breasts,
Red her hair,
Guiding the cow
And the weaned calf, her care.

Until wind flows
From this stream west,
Until a green plain spreads
On the withered crest,

[307]

And white fields grow
The heather above,
My heart will not find
Kindness from my love.

There's a flood in the river
Will not ebb till day,
And dread on me
That my love is away.
Can I live a month
With my heart's pain
Unless she will come
And see me again?

I drink a measure
And I drink to you,
I pay, I pay,
And I pay for two.
Copper for ale
And silver for beer—
And do you like coming
Or staying here?

Seosamh mac Cathmhaoil.

[308]

REPROACH TO THE PIPE

Taken down from a man named William O’Ryan, of Newcastle, Upper Galway.

I’ve a story to tell you,
My little Duideen,
As ugly a story
As ever was seen;
The days are gone by
When I held my head high,
And that this is your doing,
You cannot deny.

It is you, without doubt,
Stole my means and my wealth,
My name and my fortune,
My friends and my health;
But if only I were
In new lands far from Clare,
I’d be scraping and saving
With the best of them there!

While you are well-filled,
Cleaned up, and kept trim,
There’s no bread on my plate
And no strength in my limb;

[309]

Were I hung as a scarecrow,
In the fields over-night,
Sure, not only the birds
But my friends would take flight!

I might buy a laced hat
For your handsome young head,
That would pass with O’Hara,
When all’s done and said;
But to you ‘tis no odds
Though I fast day and night,
Your mouth is wide open
Still asking its light.

When I go out to Mass
My best coat is in slashes,
And quite half my food
Has been burnt in the ashes;
My heels may go cold,
‘Tis for you, I allege,
The tobacconist’s shop
Has my breeches in pledge!

The time that poor Nora
Thought me down at the loom,
Throwing the shuttle
Or doing a turn;

I'd be lighting my pipe
About old Joseph's door;
Discoursing and drinking
An hour or more.

[310]

O, my little duideen,
My little duideen,
You're the cunningest rogue
That ever was seen!
But I'm done with you quite,
Off, out of my sight!
With O'Kelly the weaver
I'm away at daylight!

[311]

LAMENT OF MORIAN SHEHONE FOR MISS MARY BOURKE

From an Irish Keen.

"There's darkness in thy dwelling-place and silence reigns above,
And Mary's voice is heard no more, like the soft voice of love.
Yes! thou art gone, my Mary dear! And Morian Shehone
Is left to sing his song of woe, and wail for thee alone.
Oh! snow-white were thy virtues!—the beautiful, the young,
The old with pleasure bent to hear the music of thy tongue;
The young with rapture gazed on thee, and their hearts in love were bound,
For thou wast brighter than the sun that sheds its light around.
My soul is dark, O Mary dear! thy sun of beauty's set;
The sorrowful are dumb for thee—the grieved their tears forget;
And I am left to pour my woe above thy grave alone;
For dear wert thou to the fond heart of Morian Shehone.

[312]

"Fast-flowing tears above the grave of the rich man are shed,
But they are dried when the cold stone shuts in his narrow bed;
Not so with my heart's faithful love—the dark grave cannot hide
From Morian's eyes thy form of grace, of loveliness, and pride.
Thou didst not fall like the sere leaf, when autumn's chill winds blow—
'Twas a tempest and a storm-blast that has laid my Mary low.
Hadst thou not friends that loved thee well? hadst thou not garments rare?
Wast thou not happy, Mary? wast thou not young and fair?
Then why should the dread spoiler come, my heart's peace to destroy,
Or the grim tyrant tear from me my all of earthly joy?
Oh! am I left to pour my woes above thy grave alone?
Thou idol of the faithful heart of Morian Shehone!

"Sweet were thy looks and sweet thy smiles, and kind wast thou to all;
The withering scowl of envy on thy fortunes dared not fall;
For thee thy friends lament and mourn, and never cease to weep—
Oh! that their lamentations could awake thee from thy sleep!
Oh! that thy peerless form again could meet my loving clasp!

[313]

Oh! that the cold damp hand of Death could loose his iron grasp!
Yet, when the valley's daughters meet beneath the tall elm tree,
And talk of Mary as a dream that never more shall be,
Then may thy spirit float around, like music in the air,
And pour upon their virgin souls a blessing and a prayer.
Oh! am I left to pour my wail above thy grave alone?"
Thus sinks in silence the lament of Morian Shehone.

Anonymous.

[314]

MODEREEN RUE; OR, THE LITTLE RED ROGUE [120]

Och, Modereen Rue, you little red rover,
By the glint of the moon you stole out of your cover,
And now there is never an egg to be got,
Nor a handsome fat chicken to put in the pot.
Och, Modereen Rue!

With your nose to the earth and your ear on the listen,
You slunk through the stubble with frost-drops aglisten,
With my lovely fat drake in your teeth as you went,
That your red roguish children should breakfast content.
Och, Modereen Rue!

Och, Modereen Rue, hear the horn for a warning,
They are looking for red roguish foxes this morning;
But let them come my way, you little red rogue,
'Tis I will betray you to huntsman and dog.
Och, Modereen Rue!

The little red rogue, he's the colour of bracken,
O'er mountains, o'er valleys, his pace will not slacken,
Tantara! Tantara! he is off now, and, faith!
'Tis a race 'twixt the little red rogue and his death.
Och, Modereen Rue!

[315]

Och, Modereen Rue, I've no cause to be grieving
For the little red rogues with their tricks and their thieving.
The hounds they give tongue, and the quarry's in sight,
The hens on the roost may sleep easy to-night.
Och, Modereen Rue!

But my blessing be on him. He made the hounds follow
Through the woods, through the dales, over hill, over hollow,
It was Modereen Rue led them fast, led them far,
From the glint of the morning till eve's silver star.
Och, Modereen Rue!

But he saved his red brush for his own future wearing,

He slipped into a drain, and he left the hounds swearing.
Good luck, my fine fellow, and long may you show
Such a clean pair of heels to the hounds as they go.
Och, Modereen Rue!

Katherine Tynan-Hinkson.

FOOTNOTES:

[120] The fox.

[316]

THE STARS STAND UP

The stars stand up in the air,
The sun and the moon are set,
The sea that ebb'd dry of its tide
Leaves no single pebble wet;
The cuckoo keeps saying each hour
That she, my Storeen, is fled,—
O Girl of the brave, free tresses,
Far better had you struck me dead!

Three things have I learned through love,
Sorrow, and death, and pain,
My mind reminding me daily
I never shall see you again;
You left me no cure for my sickness,
Yet I pray, though my night be long,—
My sharp grief! and my heart is broken,—
That God may forgive your wrong.

[317]

She was sweeter than fiddle and lute,
Or the shining of grass through the dew,
She was soft as the blackbird's flute
When the light of the day is new;
From her feet on the lone hill-top
I have heard the honey dropping;
Why, Girl, did you come to my door?
Or why could you not be stopping?

[318]

THE LOVE SMART

This weariness, this gnawing pain,
Are moving greatly through my brain;
The tears down-dropping from my eyes,
The full of my two shoes with sighs.
I think the Sunday long, and pray
You may come stepping down my way;

Twice over I my lover lack,—
When he departs—till he come back.

My thousand treasures and my love,
At break of summer let us rove,
And watch the flickering twilight dwell
Above the windings of the dell.
I claim no gift of cows and sheep;
But if I ask of thee to keep
My hand within thy circling arm,
Where were the harm? where were the harm?

Farewell! Farewell! the fading light,
Would that last night were still to-night!
Would that my darling, with his smile,
Would coax me to his knee awhile!
Bend down and hear, my tale I'll tell,
Could you but keep my secret well:
I fear my lover's gone from me;
O God and Mary, can this be?

[319]

WELL FOR THEE

Well for thee, unsighted bard,
Not half so hard thy plight as mine;
Hadst thou seen her for whom I pine,
Sickness like mine were thy reward.

O would to God I had been blind
Or e'er her twined locks caught my eye,
Her backward glance as she passed by—
Then had my fate been less unkind.

Till my grief outgrew all griefs,
I had pitied sightless men;
Now hold I them happy and envy them—
In the snare of her smile ensnared I lie.

Oh! woe that ever her face was seen!
And woe that I see her not every day!
Woe to him who is knotted to her alway,
Woe to him who is loosed from the knot, I ween.

Woe to him when she comes, woe to him when she goes,
To the lover who wins her, his love is but pain;
To the lover she flies who would call her again,
To him and to me, it is woe of all woes!

[320]

I AM RAFTERY

Anthony Raftery died at Craughwell, Co. Galway, October 1835.

I am Raftery the Poet
Full of hope and love,
With eyes that have no light,
With gentleness that has no misery.

Going west upon my pilgrimage
By the light of my heart,
Feeble and tired
To the end of my road.

Behold me now,
And my face to the wall,
A-playing music
Unto empty pockets.

Douglas Hyde.

[321]

DUST HATH CLOSED HELEN'S EYE

Anthony Raftery.

Going to Mass, by the will of God
The day came wet and the wind rose;
I met Mary Haynes at the cross of Kiltartan
And I fell in love with her then and there.

I spoke to her kind and mannerly
As by report was her own way;
And she said, "Raftery, my mind is easy,
You may come to-day to Baile-laoi."

When I heard her offer I did not linger,
When her talk went to my heart my heart rose.
We had only to go across the three fields,
We had daylight with us to Baile-laoi.

[322]

The table was laid with glasses and a quart measure;
She had fair hair and she sitting beside me,
And she said, "Drink, Raftery, and a hundred welcomes,
There is a strong cellar in Baile-laoi."

O star of light, and O sun in harvest,
O amber hair, O my share of the world,
Will you come with me upon Sunday
Till we agree together before all the people?

I would not grudge you a song every Sunday evening,
Punch on the table or wine if you would drink it,
But, O King of Glory, dry the roads before me,
Till I find the way to Baile-laoi.

There is a sweet air on the side of the hill
When you are looking down upon Baile-laoi;
When you are walking in the valley picking nuts and blackberries
There is music of the birds in it and music of the sidhe.

What is the worth of greatness till you have the light
Of the flower of the branch that is by your side?

There is no good to deny it or to try to hide it,
She is the sun in the heavens who wounded my heart.

There is no part of Ireland I did not travel
From the rivers to the tops of the mountains,
To the edge of Loch Gréine whose mouth is hidden,
And I saw no beauty that was behind hers.

[323]

Her hair was shining and her brows were shining, too;
Her face was like herself, her mouth pleasant and sweet.
She is my pride, and I give her the branch,
She is the shining flower of Baile-laoi.

It is Mary Haynes, the calm and easy woman,
Her beauty in her mind and in her face.
If a hundred clerks were gathered together,
They could not write down a half of her ways.

Lady Gregory.

The title is added by Mr. W. B. Yeats to an article written by him on this poem in *The Dome* (New Series, vol. iv.). Lady Gregory informs me that Mr. Yeats has slightly worked over her translation.

[324]

THE SHINING POSY

Anthony Raftery.

There is a bright posy on the edge of the quay
And she far beyond Deirdre with her pleasant ways
Or if I would say Helen, the queen of the Greeks,
On whose account hundreds have fallen at Troy.

The flame and the white in her mingled together,
And sweeter her mouth than cuckoo on the bough,
And the way she has with her, where will you find them
Since died the pearl that was in Ballylaoi?

If you were to see the sky-maiden decked out
On a fine sunny day in the street, and she walking,
The light shining out from her snow-white bosom
Would give sight of the eyes to a sightless man.

The love of hundreds is on her brow,
The sight of her as the gleam of the Star of Doom;
If she had been there in the time of the gods
It is not to Venus the apple would have gone.

Her hair falling with her down to her knees,
Twining and curling to the mouth of her shoe;
Her parted locks, with the grey of the dew on them,
And her curls sweeping after her on the road;

[325]

She is the coolun is brightest and most mannerly
Of all who ever opened eye or who lived in life;
And if the country of Lord Lucan were given me,
By the strength of my cause, the jewel should be mine.

Her form slender, chalk-white, her cheeks like roses,
And her breasts rounded over against her heart;
Her neck and her brow and her auburn hair,
She stands before us like the dew of harvest.

Virgil, Cicero, nor the power of Homer,
Would not bring any to compare with her bloom and gentle ways;
O Blossom of Youth, I am guilty with desire of you,
And unless you come to me I shall not live a month.

Walking or dancing, if you were to see the fair shoot,
It is to the Flower of the Branches you would give your love,
Her face alight, and her heart without sorrow,
And were it not pleasant to be in her company?

The greatness of Samson or Alexander
I would not covet, surely, in place of my desire;
And if I do not get leave to talk to Mary Staunton
I am in doubt that short will be my life.

She bade me "Good-morrow" early, with kindness,
She set a stool for me, and not in the corner,
She drank a drink with me, she was the heart of hospitality,
At the time that I rose up to go on my way.

I fell to talking and discoursing with her,
It was mannerly she looked at me, the apple-blossom,
And here is my word of mouth to you, without falsehood,
That I have left the branch with her from Mary Brown.

[326]

LOVE IS A MORTAL DISEASE

My grief and my pain! a mortal disease is love,
Woe, woe unto him who must prove it a month or even a day,
It hath broken my heart, and my bosom is burdened with sighs,
From dreaming of her gentle sleep hath forsaken mine eyes.

I met with the fairy host at the liss beside Ballyfinnane;
I asked them had they a herb for the curing of love's cruel pain.
They answered me softly and mildly, with many a pitying tone,
"When this torment comes into the heart it never goes out again."

It seems to me long till the tide washes up on the strand;
It seems to me long till the night shall fade into day;
It seems to me long till the cocks crow on every hand;
And rather than the world were I close beside my love.

Do not marry the grey old man, but marry the young man, dear;
Marry the lad who loves you, my grief, though he live not out the year;

[327]

Youthful you are, and kind, but your mind is not yet come to sense,
And if you live longer, the lads will be following you.

My woe and my plight! where to-night is the snowdrift and frost?
Or even I and my love together breasting the waves of the sea;

Without bark, without boat, without any vessel with me,
But I to be swimming, and my arm to be circling her waist!

[328]

I AM WATCHING MY YOUNG CALVES SUCKING

Douglas Hyde.

I am watching my young calves sucking;
Who are you that would put me out of my luck?
Can I not be walking, can I not be walking,
Can I not be walking on my own farm-lands?

I will not for ever go back before you,
If I must needs be submissive to thee, great is my grief;
If I cannot be walking, if I cannot be walking,
If I cannot be walking on my own farm-lands.

Little heed I pay, and 'tis little my desire,
Thy fine blue cloak and thy bright bird's plumes,
If I cannot be walking, if I cannot be walking,
If I cannot be walking on my own farm-lands!

There is a day coming, it is plain to my eyes,
When there will not be amongst us the mean likes of you;
But each will be walking, each will be walking,
Wherever he will on his own farm-lands.

[329]

THE NARROW ROAD

Douglas Hyde.

Once I was happy,
And joyous with that,
Now I am sorrowful
Weary and sick.

Thinking on the colleen
By night and by day,
Hurt by the colleen,
Wounded with love.

The sight of her eyes,
The sweetness of her voice,
It is these that have stricken me
And left me without guidance.

A colleen like she is
Is not in this life,
And she herself has left
Myself without sense.

[330]

A colleen like she is
Is not in this world;
Vein of my own heart
Whom I have chosen.

Little hand of my love—
It is whiter than snow;
She hath left us with wounds
And with wandering of the mind.

Three long months
Almost, am I lying;
I am pierced with her arrows
And my heart in torment.

O God of Graces,
Listen to my prayer,
Give death to me
Or give me her.

Look on my lamentations,
Look on my tears;
Were not my thoughts on thee, Storeen,
All these years?

Look on my lamentations,
Listen to me, Aroon,
I am as a sheep,
A sheep without its lamb!

Wilt thou be hard,
Colleen, as thou art tender?
Wilt thou be without pity
On us for ever?

[331]

Listen to me, Noireen,
Listen, Aroon;
Put some word of healing
From thy quiet mouth.

I am in the pathway
That is dark and narrow,
The little path that has guided
Thousands to slumber.

[332]

FORSAKEN

Douglas Hyde.

Oh, if there were in this wide world
One little place at all,
To be my own, my own alone,
My own over all;

Great were the joy, the comfort great,
And me so lone,

With no place in the world to say
“This is my own.”

Sad it is to be knowing this,
For any man, and woe,
That there is not in life for him
Liking or love below;

That there is not in the world for him
A hand or a head
That would be doing a turn for him
Alive or dead.

Sharp it is and sorrowful,
And bitter is the grief,

[333]

Sad it is and sorrowful
Past all belief.
‘Tis all the same how you are
To the passer-by,
‘Tis all the same to you, at last,
To live or die.

[334]

I FOLLOW A STAR

Seosamh mac Cathmhaoil.

I follow a star
Burning deep in the blue,
A sign on the hills
Lit for me and for you!

Moon-red is the star,
Halo-winged like a rood,
Christ’s heart in its heart set,
Streaming with blood.

Follow the gilly
Beyond to the west;
He leads where the Christ lies
On Mary’s white breast.

King, priest, and prophet—
A child, and no more—
Adonai the Maker!
Come, let us adore.

Translation by the author.

[335]

LULLABIES AND WORKING SONGS

[337]

NURSE'S SONG

Traditional.

Sleep, my child, my darling child, my lovely child, sleep!
The sea sleepeth on the green fields,
The moon sleepeth on the blue waters,
Sleep, my child, my darling child, my lovely child, sleep!
Sleep, my child!

The morning sleepeth upon a bed of roses,
The evening sleepeth on the tops of the dark hills;
Sleep, my child, my darling child, child of my heart's love, sleep!
Sleep, my child!

The winds sleep in the rocky caverns,
The stars sleep on their pillow of clouds,
Sleep, my child, my darling child, my little child, sleep!

[338]

Sleep, my child!
The mist sleepeth on the bosom of the valley,
The broad lake beneath the shade of the trees,
Sleep, my child, my darling child, my tender child, sleep!
Sleep, my child!

The flower sleeps, while the night-dew falls,
The wild birds sleep upon the mountains;
Sleep, my child, my darling child, my blessed child, sleep!
Sleep, my child!

The burning tear sleepeth upon the cheek of sorrow
But thy sleep is not the sleep of tears,
Sleep, my child, my darling child, child of my bosom, sleep!
Sleep, my child!

Sleep in quiet, sleep in joy, my darling,
May thy sleep be never the sleep of sorrow!
Sleep, my child, my darling child, my lovely child, sleep!

[339]

A SLEEP SONG

Traditional

.
Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
The brown bittern speaks in the bog;
Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
The night-jar is abroad on the heath.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
Kine will go west at dawn of day;
Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
And my child will go to the pasture to mind them.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
Moon will rise and sun will set;
Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
Kine will come east at end of day.

Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
I will let my child go gathering blackberries,
Deirín dé, Deirín dé!
If he sleep softly till the ring of day!

P. H. Pearse.

[340]

THE CRADLE OF GOLD

I'd rock my own sweet childie to rest
In a cradle of gold on the bough of the willow,
To the shoheen ho! of the Wind of the West
And the lulla lo! of the blue sea billow.
Sleep, baby dear!
Sleep without fear!
Mother is here beside your pillow.

I'd put my own sweet childie to float
In a silver boat on the beautiful river,
Where a shoheen! whisper the white cascades
And a lulla lo! the green flags shiver.
Sleep, baby dear!
Sleep without fear!
Mother is here with you for ever!

Shoheen ho! to the rise and fall
Of mother's bosom, 'tis sleep has bound you!
And oh, my child, what cosier nest
For rosier rest could love have found you?
Sleep, baby dear!
Sleep without fear!
Mother's two arms are close around you!

Alfred Perceval Graves.

[341]

RURAL SONG

I wish the shepherd's pet were mine,
I wish the shepherd's pet were mine,
I wish the shepherd's pet were mine,
The pretty white lamb in the clover.
And oh! I hail, I hail thee,
And oh! I hail, I hail thee,
The love of my heart for ever thou art,
Thou little pet of thy mother.

I wish that scores of kine were mine,
I wish that scores of kine were mine,
I wish that scores of kine were mine,
And Kathleen, the love of her mother.
 And oh! I hail, I hail thee,
 And oh! I hail, I hail thee,
 The love of my heart for ever thou art,
 Thou little pet of thy mother.

[342]

PLOUGHING SONG

TAILSMAN.

Goad her, and whip her, and drive,
The old woman's little brown mare,
Stand up on the plough, look alive,
And see if our dinner is there.

HEADSMAN.

The corn is a-reaping,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
The stooks are a-heaping,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
The corn is a-binding,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
In the mill it is grinding,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
We soon shall be feeding,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
For the flour is a-kneading,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
The bread is a-baking,
Goad her and whip her and drive.
Our dinner we are taking,—
She's the best little mare alive!

[343]

TAILSMAN.

Whistle and shout with zest!
The little brown mare is good!
Unyoke her, and give her a rest,
While we're stretching and getting our food.

[344]

A SPINNING-WHEEL DITTY

These verses, improvised to the hum of the wheel, are flung from girl to girl as they sit spinning. The references are purely personal, and the refrain, which is sung by all the spinners, has no special meaning.

FIRST GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,

I crossed the wood as the day was dawning;
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

SECOND GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
No doubt John O'Connell had had good warning!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

FIRST GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
Oh! John may go hang, it's not me he will catch!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

[345]

SECOND GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
You mannerless girl, he'll be more than your match!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

FIRST GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
Come, come now, leave off, or get me my own man!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

SECOND GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
Well, what do you think of Thomas O'Madigan?
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

FIRST GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
I hail him, and claim him, may we never be parted!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

SECOND GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
Go east or go west, may you still be true-hearted!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

THIRD GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
Go east and go west, and find me my love, too!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

[346]

FOURTH GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
There's Donall O'Flaherty, but I doubt will he take you!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

FIFTH GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
The man is too good, he'll be courting elsewhere!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

THIRD GIRL.
Mallo lero, and eambo nero,
There's no tree in the wood, but its equal is there!
Mallo lero, and eambo nero.

NOTES

“The Colloquy of the Two Sages,” edited by Dr. Whitley Stokes from the *Book of Leinster*, p. 186a, is one of the most archaic pieces in tone that have come down to us. It represents the discussion between an aged poet and a young aspirant as to the sources of poetic inspiration, and shows us that the gifts of the bard were highly regarded as the direct endowment of the gods. Original in *Rev. Celtique*, No. xxviii. As in the following poem, I have made use of the scribal glosses or explanations wherever they seemed to throw light upon the original.

“Amorgen sang.” Professor John MacNeill has most kindly made a fresh collation of the manuscripts containing this obscure poem for my use. Parts, especially from line 20 onward, are doubtful. I have incorporated with the text such of the glosses as appear to make the meaning more intelligible, but the glosses themselves are mere scribes’ guesses, often bad ones, at the sense of a text they did not understand. This poem, though ascribed to the earliest traditional poet of Ireland, is, Prof. MacNeill considers, rather pseudo-archaic, than of really great antiquity. The allusion to “Tetra’s kine,” which is explained in the gloss to mean “the fish of the sea,” alludes to Tetra as Ruler of the Ocean; in the “Colloquy” we found him ruling in the assemblies of the dead. The connection between the ocean and the invisible world is constant in Irish tradition. The poem appears to be an assertion of the Druid’s powers, preparatory to the incantation for good fishing which follows [350] immediately in most manuscripts. The final lines are an inquiry into the origin of created things, matter on which the bard or Druid claimed superior enlightenment.

“The Song of Childbirth” and the succeeding “Greeting to the New-born Babe” are taken from the piece known as “The Birth of Conchobhar” (*Compert Conchobhar*), edited from Stowe MS. 992, by Prof. Kuno Meyer in *Rev. Celt.* vi. pp. 173-182.

“What is Love?” From the story called the “Wooring of Etain” (*Tochmarc Etaine*). Original in *Irishche Texte*, i. p. 124.

“Summons to Cuchulain.” From the “Sickbed of Cuchulain” (*Serglige Conculaind*). Original, *ibid.*, p. 216. Overcome with fairy spells, the hero lies fast bound in heavy slumber; the song is an appeal to him to throw off the charm and to arise.

“Laegh’s Description of Fairy-land.” From the same story, *ibid.*, p. 218. Laegh is Cuchulain’s charioteer, who went into fairy-land instead of his master, and returns to extol its beauty.

“The Lamentation of Fand when she is about to leave Cuchulain.” From the dramatic incident in the same story, in which Fand, Queen of Fairy-land, and Emer, Cuchulain’s mortal wife, struggle for the affection of the hero, after Cuchulain’s return from fairy-land. Each woman fully recognises the nobility of the other; and Fand’s parting song, in which she restores him to Emer, is one of lofty renunciation.

“Midir’s Call to Fairy-land.” From the story called the “Wooring of Etain” (*Tochmarc Etaine*), *ibid.*, p. 132.

“Song of the Fairies.” From A. H. Leahy’s *Heroic Romances of Ireland* (D. Nutt, 1905), p. 29, taken from the same tale. Etain was wife of Eochad (pron. Yochee), King of Ireland, but Mider, King of Fairy-land, fell in love with her. He won an entry into the palace by [351] playing chess with her husband, who demanded from Mider as the stake for which they played that the fairy hosts should clear away the rocks and stones from the plains of Meath, remove the rushes which made the land barren, build a causeway across the bog of Lamrach, and perform other services useful to his realm. The song is sung by the fairies while they are performing this heavy task. The final stake is won by Mider, who asks Etain as his prize.

"The Lamentation of Deirdre," when her husband and two sons had been slain by King Conchobhar. She recalls the happy days spent with her husband in Alba or Scotland, on Lough Etive, and compares it to her present misery in the house of the King. Original, *Irische Texte*, i. pp. 77-81. In all the above poems there are many difficult and obscure passages.

"Take my Tidings." A ninth century poem, edited and translated by Dr. Kuno Meyer in his *Four Songs of Summer and Winter* (D. Nutt, 1903), and by Dr. Whitley Stokes in *Rev. Celt.* xx. p. 258. It is ascribed to Fionn in the commentary on the "Amra Coluim Cille." Mr. Graves' poem will be found in his *Irish Poems*, i. p. 1 (Maunsel & Co., Dublin).

"Second Winter Song." Text and translation in Dr. Kuno Meyer's *Four Songs of Summer and Winter*. A longer poem on similar lines is to be found in the tale called the "Hiding of the Hill of Howth," *Rev. Celt.* xi. p. 125, reprinted in his *Ancient Irish Poetry* (Constable), p. 57; but in the former version the complaint of the lazy servant-lad is answered by a fine song in which Fionn praises the signs of coming spring in earth and air.

"In Praise of May." Original and translation published by Dr. K. Meyer from the tale called "The Boyish Exploits of Finn" in *Rev. Celt.* v. p. 195. It is said to have been composed by Fionn after he received inspiration by eating the "Salmon of Knowledge" at the River [352] Boyne. Mr. Rolleston's poem is to be found in his *Sea-Spray* (Maunsel, 1909).

"The Isle of Arran." The Arran here spoken of is the Scottish island of that name. The Fianna were accustomed to spend part of the autumn and winter hunting in that island. The poem occurs in the long Ossianic tract called "The Colloquy of the Ancients," published by Standish Hayes O'Grady in *Silva Gadelica* (Williams and Norgate, 1892). Text, p. 102; translation, p. 109.

"The Parting of Goll with his Wife." From *Duanaire Finn*, edited by Prof. John MacNeill (Irish Texts Soc, vii., 1908), pp. 23 and 121. Goll was leader of the Connaught Fians and was opposed to Fionn, the chief of the Leinster warriors. He is described as a man of lofty disposition and great valour. In this poem he is standing, driven to bay by his enemies, on a bare rocky promontory, his wife only beside him, cut off from all hope of escape. Few poems relating to Goll remain in Ireland, but a good many survive in the Western Highlands of Scotland.

"Youth and Age." *Ibid.*, pp. 80 and 194. It is Oisín (Ossian) who here laments his departed youth.

"Chill Winter." From the "Colloquy of the Ancients," *Silva Gadelica*, text, p. 172; translation, p. 192.

"The Sleep-song of Grainne." From *Duanaire Finn*, pp. 85 and 198. Dermot, who has carried off Grainne, the wife of Fionn, is lying down to rest in the forest, when Grainne hears the approach of their pursuers. She sings over him this passionate lullaby, in which the restless activities and foreboding terrors of the animal world are aptly used to heighten the sense of their own danger.

"The slaying of Conbeg, Fionn's beloved hound." Original in *Gaelic Journal*, ix. No. 104, Feb. 1899, p. 328; the poem occurs in the "Colloquy of the Ancients," where the readings are slightly different (*Silva Gadelica*, text, p. 143).

[353]

"The Fairies' Lullaby." Original in *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*, Argyleshire Series, No. iv. (David Nutt, 1891). It was collected in Argyleshire by John Gregorson Campbell.

"The Lay of the Forest Trees." Original in *Silva Gadelica*, i. p. 245; trans., ii. p. 278. This curious poem, which contains much folklore regarding forest-trees, arose out of the gathering of wood for a fire in the open air, by a servant or "Man of Smoke," as he is called. He accidentally threw upon it a block around which woodbine had twined. This called forth a protest from the onlookers, who declared that the burning of the woodbine would certainly bring ill-luck.

"St. Patrick's Breastplate." See Dr. Kuno Meyer's *Ancient Irish Poetry* (Constable), pp. 25-7. Original in Stokes' and Strachan's *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii. p. 354. Probably eighth century.

“Patrick’s Blessing on Munster,” ninth century. Original in Dr. Whitley Stokes’ *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, p. 216; literal translation in Dr. Kuno Meyer’s *Ancient Irish Poetry*, p. 29. The present poetic rendering, kindly contributed to my book by Mr. A. P. Graves, has not hitherto been published.

“Columcille’s Farewell to Aran.” See Dr. Douglas Hyde’s *Three Sorrows of Story-telling* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1895), pp. 146-8.

“Columba in Iona.” Printed in William Skene’s *Celtic Scotland*, ii. p. 92, from an Irish manuscript in the Burgundian Library, Brussels. It bears the ascription “Columcille fecit,” and was transcribed and translated by O’Curry for Dr. Todd. Many poems are ascribed to the Saint, but the language of most of them is later than his time.

“Hymn to the Dawn.” From *Silva Gadelica*, by Standish Hayes O’Grady (Williams & Norgate); original, vol. i. p. 56; literal trans., ii. p. 59. The hymn was [354] composed by St. Cellach on the morning on which he was slain by his old friends and fellow-students, who had been bought over to destroy him.

“The Song of Manchan the Hermit.” Original in *Ériu*, i. p. 39. A ninth century poem, with translation by Dr. Kuno Meyer.

“A Prayer.” Original and literal translation by Miss Mary E. Byrne in *Ériu*, ii., Part i. p. 89.

“The Loves of Liadan and Curithir.” This touching poem illustrates the tyrannical use sometimes made of their authority by the monks of the ancient Irish Church. St. Cummine, who was the confessor or “soul-friend” of the lovers, seems to have been a hard and censorious man. He lived in the first half of the seventh century. The poem, as we have it, is of the ninth century. Edited with translation by Dr. Kuno Meyer (D. Nutt, 1902). The love song has been reprinted in his *Ancient Irish Poetry*.

“The Lay of Prince Marvan.” This song takes the form of a colloquy between Marvan, who had left his royal station to adopt a hermit life, and his brother King Guaire of Connaught (d. 662). Guaire, visiting him in his retirement, inquires why he prefers to sleep in a hut rather than in the comfort of a kingly palace; in reply Marvan bursts forth into a song in praise of his retired woodland life. Original in *King and Hermit*, edited by Dr. Kuno Meyer (D. Nutt, 1901); translation reprinted in *Ancient Irish Poetry*, p. 47.

“The Song of Crede.” Text and translation in *Ériu*, ii. p. 15; its editor, Dr. Kuno Meyer, ascribes it to the tenth century. I have to thank Mr. A. P. Graves for most kindly giving me permission to use his unpublished poem.

“The Student and his Cat,” eighth or ninth century. Written on the margin of a codex of St. Paul’s Epistles, in the monastery of Carinthia. Original and translation [355] in Stokes’ and Strachan’s *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, ii. p. 293.

“Song of the Seven Archangels.” Original in *Ériu*, ii., Part i. pp. 92-4, with literal translation by Thomas P. O’Nowlan. Mr. Ernest Rhys’ poetical version, kindly contributed by him to this book, has not hitherto been published.

“Saints of Four Seasons.” Original in *Ériu*, i., Part ii. pp. 226-7, with translation by Miss Mary E. Byrne. Mr. P. J. McCall’s poetical version is printed in his *Irish Fireside Songs* (M. H. Gill, Dublin, 1911).

“The Feathered Hermit.” Original printed by Dr. K. Meyer in *Gaelic Journal*, iv., No. 40, February 1892, from a marginal note on Harl. MS. 5280 (Brit. Mus.).

“An Aphorism.” Ibid.; also from a marginal note.

“The Blackbird.” Marginal note from a copy of Priscian in the monastery of St. Gall in Switzerland. Original in Stokes’ and Strachan’s *Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus*, p. 290.

“Deus Meus.” Printed by Dr. Whitley Stokes in the *Calendar of Aengus*, clxxxv. It is found written on the margin of the Leabhar Breac, facs., p. 101, and is there ascribed to Maelisu ua Brolcan (d. 1086).

Dr. George Sigerson's poetical rendering will be found in his *Bards of the Gael and Gall* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), p. 193.

"The Soul's Desire." Original and literal translation by Dr. Kuno Meyer in the *Gaelic Journal*, vol. v., No.6, 1894, p. 95. Though printed from comparatively late copies, the hymn gives the impression of being ancient.

"Song of the Sea." Original and literal translation by Dr. Kuno Meyer in *Otia Merseiana* (Liverpool), ii. p. 76. It is ascribed to the poet Ruman, who died 707, but the editor believes it to be of the eleventh century.

"Lament of the Old Woman of Beare." From Dr. [356] Kuno Meyer's text and translation in *Otia Merseiana*, i. p. 119 ff. It has since been reprinted in the author's *Selections from Early Irish Poetry*, pp. 88-91. The editor would put the poem down to the late tenth century.

"Gormliath's Lament for Nial Black-knee." From the Scottish Book of the Dean of Lismore, edited by Rev. Thos. M'Lauchlan.

"The Mother's Lament." First printed by Rev. Edmund Hogan in his *Latin Lives of the Irish Saints* (Todd Lectures, V., 1894); see also *Gaelic Journal*, iv. p. 89, and Kuno Meyer's *Ancient Irish Poetry*, p. 42. Eleventh century? Mr. Graves has kindly given me permission to use his excellent unpublished version.

"Consecration." Original from the Book of the Dean of Lismore, a collection of poems made in the Western Islands about 1512 by Sir James McGregor, Dean of Lismore, Argyshire, p. 121. It contains many Irish poems. This and the two following poems are ascribed to Murdoch O'Daly, called "Muredach Albanach," or Murdoch the Scot, on account of his long residence in that country. He is styled "Bard of Erin and Alba." He was a Connaught poet, who ended a stormy career by retiring to the Irish monastery of Knockmoy. It is probable that these religious poems, if not actually written by him, were composed about his period.

"Teach me, O Trinity," *ibid.*, p. 123.

"The Shaving of Murdoch," *ibid.*, p. 158 note, from a translation made by Standish H. O'Grady. This curious poem refers to the tonsuring of the bard and his contemporary Connaught chieftain, Cathal of the Red Hand, when they entered the monastery of Knockmoy together. In Scotland Murdoch is remembered as the first of the Macvurrachs, bards to the Macdonalds of Clanranald. He lived 1180-1225, and Cathal of the Red Hand, 1184-1225.

"Eileen Aroon." Original in Hardimen, i. p. 264; it [357] should be compared with the version, *ibid.*, p. 211. The present is the oldest form. Carol O'Daly, who composed it, was an accomplished Connaught gentleman, whose desire to marry Eileen Kavanagh was frustrated by her friends. He fled the country, but returned, disguised as a harper, on the eve of her marriage to another suitor, and entered the guest-chamber. He poured out this impassioned appeal with such good effect, that Eileen fled with him that night. The last lines are a welcome to her in response to her avowal of love. The air is very ancient; in Scotland it is known as "Robin Adair."

"The Downfall of the Gael." Original in Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy*, ii. p. 102. O'Gnive, bard of the O'Neills of Clandaboy, accompanied Shane O'Neill to London in 1562, on the occasion of that chief's visit to Queen Elizabeth. The poem is a lament over the condition of Ireland and the inaction of the chiefs. Sir Samuel Ferguson's rendering will be found in *Lays of the Western Gael* (Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1888), p. 136.

"Address to Brian O'Rourke of the Bulwarks" (na murtha), a poem of seventy quatrains from Egerton MS. iii., art. 85. Dr. Standish Hayes O'Grady has given specimens of this poem in his valuable Catalogue of Irish MSS. in the British Museum, pp. 412-20. Another poem addressed to the same chief will be found in Hardiman, ii. pp. 266-305, by John mac Torna O'Mulchonaire. The writer of the present poem, Teigue O'Higgin, called Teigue "Dall," i.e. the Blind, on account of his blindness, is one of the best of

all the tribal poets of Ireland. He was poet to the chiefs of Co. Sligo, but he came to an untimely end on account of a satire made by him on the O'Haras, who had ill-used him, some time before 1617. In the poem we give, he endeavours to arouse Brian to action, and calls on him to unite the clans against England, a challenge which O'Rourke did not fail to obey. It is a good sample of much bardic poetry of the period.

"Ode to the Maguire," by Eochadh O'Hosey or Hussey, the last bard of the Maguires, whose strongly fortified [358]castle still frowns upon the waters of the Upper and Lower Lochs Erne, at Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh. His young chief, Hugh Maguire, had marched into Munster in the depth of the winter of 1599-1600, with 2500 foot and 200 horse on a warlike foray; the bard, sitting at home in Fermanagh, bewails the hardships which he feels sure the chief and his followers are enduring in the open camps during the winter's weather. A fine copy of this poem is found in the O'Gara manuscript in the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, of which Egerton III is a copy (and see O'Grady's Catalogue, p. 451).

"A Lament for the Princes of Tyrone and Tyrconnel," by the family bard, Red Owen Mac Ward, in the form of an address of comfort to O'Donnell's sister, Nuala, who is supposed to be weeping over her brother's grave in Rome, where he had taken refuge after his flight from Ireland. He lies buried, beside Hugh O'Neill, in the Church of San Pietro Montorio, on the Janiculum. The bard imagines the clans of the North of Ireland gathering to bewail the dead and share Nuala's grief. Though Mangan's broken metre imparts a fervour and fire to the original, he adds nothing to its slow monotonous impressiveness. For original see Egerton III, Art. 48 (Brit. Mus.), and translation of extracts in O'Grady's Catalogue, pp. 371-3. Mangan's version has been often reprinted.

"Co. Mayo." There are many versions of this favourite song. That given here is said to have been composed by a bard named Thomas Flavell, a native of Bophin on the Western Seaboard. Hardiman gives the Irish of this song, i. p. 337; and also another version by David O'Murchadh, or Murphy, *ibid.*, pp. 229-33. Flavell was a poor dependent on the fourth Earl of Mayo, and lived about the middle of the seventeenth century. For a different song of the same name, see Dr. Hyde's *Poems of Raftery*, p. 96.

"The Flower of Nut-brown Maids" is the oldest of the numerous songs written to the air "Uileacán Dubh O." This poem dates from the seventeenth century, and it is [359]said to be an invitation addressed by one of the unfortunate landowners, driven out of Ulster during the plantation of James I, to his lady, to follow him to Leitrim. It seems to refer to a time of famine, and is, like many other love-songs, in the form of a colloquy. Original in Hardiman, i. p. 258.

"Roisín Dubh," from the original in O'Daly's *Poets and Poetry of Munster*, where two versions are given. It is the poem on which Mangan founded his "Dark Rosaleen." The poem is an address to Ireland, veiled as a woman. Hardiman gives some quatrains in vol. i. pp. 254-61.

"The Fair Hills of Éire" is one of several sets of words attached to the tender old air "Uileacán Dubh O," or "Oh, the heavy lamentation." One, rendered familiar in Dr. Samuel Ferguson's version, beginning, "A plenteous place is Ireland for hospitable cheer," is said to have been written by an Irish student in one of the colleges of France probably early in the seventeenth century, when most of the promising Irish youths went abroad for their education. The version here given in Dr. Sigerson's fine rendering was written by Donnchad Ruadh MacNamara about 1730. It has also been rendered into English by Mangan. For the original, see *Poems by Donnchadh Ruadh MacNamara*, edited by Tomás O'Flanngháile (1897). Dr. George Sigerson's poem will be found in his *Bards of the Gael and Gall* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1897), p. 245.

"Love's Despair" (*ibid.*, p. 339). This touching poem was written by a young farmer of Cork who, near the time of his marriage, had gone into the city to buy the wedding-dress for his betrothed. On his way back he heard that she had been married to another man. In despair he flung his presents into the fire. His reason gave way, and he roamed the country henceforth, ever singing the cruelty of Mary and his own misfortunes. His story was well known in Co. Waterford, where he lived a great part of his life. Original in *Gaelic Journal*, vol. iii., 1887, p. 22.

The literal translation of the second stanza runs as follows:—

“No one knows my case, or how I may find life,
But only the woman who has made me ill;
My cure is not on sea or shore, nor in herb or skill of hand,
My cure is only in the Flower of Youth.
I know not hen from cuckoo, I know not heat from cold,
At no time do I know my friends;
I know not night from day,—but my heart would know its love,
Should she come in time to save me.”

“The Cruiskeen Lawn.” Dr. Sigerson’s version (*ibid.*, p. 258), here reproduced, shows that this popular air, better known in connection with O’Keeffe’s rollicking drinking song, was also used as a Jacobite political poem. The chorus and name of the air, i.e. “The little full jug,” show that its true intent is bacchanalian. We find this chorus, like many others, attached to songs of different significance. Petrie, in his collection of *Ancient Irish Music*, p. 37, attaches it to a verse of a lullaby:—

“My love is upon the river,
And he rocking from wave to wave;
A tree without foliage over his head—
And what does my Love want a-straying there?”

(see also *Gaelic Journal*, viii., 1898, p. 224).

“Eamonn an Chnuic” or “Ned of the Hill” is founded on the history of a famous outlaw named Edmund O’Ryan, born in Shanbohy, Co. Tipperary, late in the seventeenth century. His father possessed considerable property in his native county, but his wild career led to his outlawry. The piercing note of the words and of the air of the same name is typical of much of the poetry of the period. “Ned of the Hill” lies buried near Fáill an Chluig in the barony of Kilnemanagh, Co. Tipperary. Some versions give several other verses, of a different character. It is a love-song as given by Hardiman, “A chúil áluinn [361] deas,” i. p. 268, and by Mangan in his *Poets and Poetry of Munster*, p. 264. The literal translation here printed is from Mr. P. H. Pearse’s contributions in the *Irish Review*, Dublin (November 1911), p. 437. Mr. Pearse says, “‘Eamonn an Chnuic’ is commonly looked upon as a love-song, but I feel sure that to its shaper and to those who first heard it, the figure of the outlaw, driven by rain-storm and bullet-storm and beating against the closed door, mystically symbolised the lonely cause of Ireland.”

“O Druimin donn dileas,” an early Jacobite song, sometimes supposed to apply to Prince James Charles Edward, but more probably to Ireland itself under the symbolic name of the “Beloved white-backed dun cow.” Original in Hardiman, ii. p. 145. See also in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 116, a translation by O’Curry.

“Do you remember that night?” Original in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 142. He says it was written down for him by O’Curry. The account given by him of its origin does not seem to suit the words.

“The Exile’s Song.” Original in *Gaelic Journal*, vol. vi., No. 7, 1895, p. 108. Composed by an emigrant named M’Ambrois (Mac Cambridge), and taken down from James M’Auley of Glengariff and James M’Naughten of Cushendall.

“The Fisherman’s Keen.” From Crofton Croker’s *The Keen in the South of Ireland* (Percy Society, 1844), p. 77. It was communicated to Mr. Croker by Mr. Maurice O’Connell. A literal translation, taken down from the lips of Mrs. Harrington, a professional “keener” of Co. Cork, is given in the same author’s *Researches in the South of Ireland*. Unfortunately the original Irish is not preserved by him, nor is the name of the lady given who, he tells us, wrote the poetical rendering.

“The Boatman’s Hymn.” Taken from Sir Samuel Ferguson’s *Lays of the Western Gael*, 1888, pp. 162-3. Original in Hardiman, ii. p. 383.

[362]

“Keen on Art O’Leary” by his wife. Original published in Mrs. Morgan J. O’Connell’s *The Last Colonel of the Irish Brigade* (Kegan Paul, 1892), vol. ii., Appendix A., and reprinted with some corrections in the *Gaelic Journal* (vol. vii., Old Series, No. 74, May 1896), p. 18. Some corrections and additions are made in the following number (June 1896). Crofton Croker, in his *Keens of the South of Ireland*, tells us that he endeavoured to recover this dirge but without success. It is a true example of the spontaneous “keen,” with its short broken lines, containing in quick, natural succession, appeals, reminiscences, laments; moving backwards and forwards as the irregular promptings of grief and affection dictate without form or premeditation. It is, however, lifted into the sphere of fine poetry by its exceeding simplicity, and by the passion of grief expressed in its lines.

The circumstances in which the poem had its origin are particularly tragic. Art O’Leary had been an officer in the Hungarian service, but he returned to Ireland, where he had a considerable property in Co. Cork, and where his handsome person and distinguished manners made him very popular. He married, against the wish of her parents, Eileen of the Raven Locks, as she was called from her dark hair, a daughter of Daniel O’Connell of Derrynane, grandfather of “the Liberator.” The popularity of Art O’Leary excited the jealousy of a neighbour, a Mr. Morris, whose horse had been beaten in a race by O’Leary’s beautiful mare. Taking advantage of the Penal Laws, which did not permit a Catholic to possess a horse valued at more than £5, he demanded the mare from Capt. O’Leary for this sum. O’Leary refused, saying that he “would surrender his mare only with his life.” A local magistrate immediately proclaimed him an outlaw; soldiers were sent to lie in wait for him as he was returning home at night, and he was shot through the heart near Carrig-a-nimmy, in May 1773. His wife was informed of her husband’s death by the return of the mare without its rider. It was many years before his body was even allowed to be buried in consecrated ground. Morris was tried for the murder, but [363]acquitted; he was soon after shot in his house by Arthur’s brother. Art O’Leary’s grave is to be seen in the nave of Kilcrea Abbey, Co. Cork; the inscription states that he was only twenty-six years of age when he died.

“Prologue to ‘The Midnight Court’” (*Cuirt an Mheadhon Oidhche*), by Bryan Merrymann. The long satire of which we give the Prologue has been published by Mr. Richard Foley (Riscard O Foghludha) (Hodges, Figgis & Co.).

“Hymn to the Virgin Mary.” Original in *The Poems of Egan O’Rahilly* (1st ed., Irish Texts Society, vol. iii., 1900), p. 290. The author, Conchubhar or Conor O’Riordan was a native of Co. Cork, where he taught the classics and other subjects to the youths of his district. He wrote, about the same time as Gray, a “Meditation in a Country Churchyard,” to which this very beautiful address to the Virgin forms the Epilogue or “Binding” (ceangal as it is called in Irish). The whole poem is included in the appendix to Rev. P. S. Dinneen’s edition of O’Rahilly’s poems.

“Christmas Hymn.” Original in Dr. Douglas Hyde’s *Religious Songs of Connacht* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1906), vol. ii. pp. 224-6; from an old North of Ireland manuscript.

“O Mary of Graces.” Ibid., p. 161. Taken down by Miss Agnes O’Farrelly from a lad in the Aran Islands, Co. Galway.

“The Cattle-shed.” Original in *Timthirid Chroidhe neamhtha Iosa or The Messenger* (published by Gill & Son, Dublin), p. 90. The following nine poems and fragments are from the same publication, vol. i., Parts 1-4.

“The White Paternoster.” Ibid., p. 58. The two versions of this favourite charm here given, of which the second is translated from the original in a Kerry journal, *An Lochran* (October 1900), should be compared with the copies printed by Dr. D. Hyde in his *Religious Songs*, vol. i. pp. 362-70.

[364]

“A Night Prayer.” This fragment and the eleven succeeding prayers were taken down in Irish among the Decies of Co. Waterford by Rev. M. Sheenan, D.Ph., and have been published by him in his *Cnó Cóilleadh Craobhaighe* (Gill & Son, Dublin, 1907).

“The Man who Stands Stiff.” From Dr. D. Hyde’s *Religious Songs of Connacht*, vol. i. p. 101, taken down from the mouth of Martin Rua O’Gillarna (in English, Red Martin Forde) of Lisaniska, Co. Galway. He spoke no English. This poem is a sample of much of the popular religious poetry dealing with the approach of death and the danger of continuing in evil courses.

“Charm for a Sprain.” This and the succeeding charms are taken from Lady Wilde’s *Legends, Charms, and Cures of Ireland* (Chatto & Windus). It is unfortunate that Lady Wilde does not give either her originals or her authorities.

“Before the sun rose at yesterdawn.” Original in Walsh’s *Irish Popular Songs*, 2nd ed. (Gill & Son, Dublin), p. 146. Edward Walsh, who translated into English verse a great number of Irish popular songs, lived between the years 1805-50.

“The Blackthorn.” One of those favourite old songs of which there are many versions, and verses in one that are not in another. Like many another Irish song, it seems to be a colloquy between a maid and her lover, and it is often difficult to tell if it is the lad or the girl who is speaking. My version is the one printed in Miss Borthwick’s *Ceól Sidhe*, ii. p. 18 (an excellent collection of old Irish songs), with two verses added from the version in Dr. D. Hyde’s *Love-Songs of Connacht* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p. 30. The poem is sad and troubled. Dr. Hyde says, “There was an old woman in it, long ago, who used to sing it to me, and she never came to the verse—

‘Although the rowen-berry tree is high, &c.,’

that she used not to shed tears from her eye.” We can [365]well believe it. Hardiman (i. p. 234) has published a different version, and Miss Brooke another in her *Reliques* (1816), p. 306.

“Pastheen Finn,” or “Fair little Child.” Original in Hardiman’s *Irish Minstrelsy*, i. p. 217. Dr. Hyde gives a quite different version in his *Love-Songs*, p. 65. We find the *curfa* or chorus attached to different songs. Sir Samuel Ferguson’s version will be found in his *Lays of the Western Gael* (Sealy, Bryers, Dublin, 1888), p. 152. Hardiman considers that it is an address to the son of James II, under a secret name.

“She.” Original in Miss Brooke’s *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, p. 232.

“Hopeless Love.” Given as an example of an old Irish metre called *Dibide baise fri toin*, but this poem was not actually written in this metre.

“Would God I were.” Original in Hardiman, i. p. 344. Mrs. Hinkson’s setting of the Irish words will be found in her *Irish Love-Songs* (T. Fisher Unwin, Cameo Series, 1892).

“Branch of the sweet and early rose.” William Drennan, M.D. (b. 1754), died in Belfast in 1820.

“’Tis a Pity.” Original in *Cláirseach na n-Gaedhil*, Part ii., 1902 (Gaelic League Publications). *Ceól-sídhe* (p. 92) gives a different version. There are several other verses.

“The Yellow Bittern” (An bunán buidhe). Original in *Cláirseach na n-Gaedhil*, Part v., and *Ceól-sídhe*, p. 12. This translation appeared in the *Irish Review*, Dublin, November 1911.

“Have you been at Carrack?” Original in Mangan’s *Poets and Poetry of Munster* (J. Duffy), p. 344. Walsh thinks it is a song from the South of Ireland.

“Cashel of Munster.” There are various versions of [366]this popular song, set to its air “Clár bog déil.” One used by Walsh was, he tells us, given to him by a lady of Co. Clare. Ferguson’s version is taken from Hardiman, i. p. 238.

“The Snowy-breasted Pearl.” Original in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 11. Petrie was born in Dublin in 1789 and died in 1866.

“The Dark Maid of the Valley” (Bean dubh an Gleanna). There are two versions and airs of this name. The original of Mr. P. J. McCall’s poem is to be found in Miss Brooke’s *Reliques*, p. 319. His own rendering was published in his *Irish Nónins* (Sealy, Bryers & Walker, 1894), p. 59.

“The Coolun.” Original in Hardiman, i. p. 250. Two other versions will be found in Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs of Connacht* (1893), pp. 71-3. One of these beginning, “A honey mist on a day of frost, in a dark oak wood” is very tender and sweet. Its air is among the most beautiful that Ireland has produced. The “Coolun” was a lock of hair which, having been forbidden by statute, it became a mark of national sentiment to adopt. It was usually worn by youths, but in these poems the address is to a woman.

“Ceann dubh dileas,” or the “Beloved Dark Head.” Original in Hardiman, i. p. 262. Dr. Hyde gives an additional verse in his *Love-Songs*. Burns claimed the air for Scotland, and Corri published it under the name of “Oran Gaoil,” but it is undoubtedly Irish.

“Ringleted Youth of my Love.” From Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs of Connacht* (T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p. 40.

“I shall not die for you.” Original, *ibid.*, p. 138.

“Donall Oge.” This pathetic song and the one following it, “The Grief of a Girl’s Heart,” seem to be portions of one long song, to the original nucleus of which quatrains have been added from time to time. Six stanzas were published by Dr. Hyde in his *Love-Songs* (pp. 4-6) under [367] the title, “If I were to go West”; it would seem that his “Breed Astore” (p. 76) may also be a portion of the same poem. Mr. P. H. Pearse, who published several other stanzas under the title of “Donall Oge,” or “Young Donall,” in the *Irish Review* of August 1911, tells us that he wrote it down from the words of Denis Dorgan of Carrignavar, Co. Cork. The Irish will be found printed in his and Mr. Tadhg O’Donoghue’s *An t-Aithriseóir* (Gaelic League, 1902), p. 7. In all these versions there are some stanzas alike and some different to the others. We have printed nearly the whole of them here under the two titles of “Donall Oge” and “The Grief of a Girl’s Heart.” Both are full of the most heartrending expression of loss and loneliness. Lady Gregory, in her *Poets and Dreamers*, published a literal translation of the latter poem.

“Death the Comrade.” Original in Dr. Hyde’s *Religious Songs*, ii. pp. 288-90.

“Muirneen of the Fair Hair.” Original in Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs*, pp. 10-12. Cf. another Munster version on p. 16, and one given by Hardiman, i. p. 354.

“The Red Man’s Wife.” A popular theme on which there are many variations. We give two, the originals of both being taken from Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs*, pp. 92 and 94. The first is a Galway version, the second from Co. Meath. The latter was first printed in the *Oban Times*. Yet another version is given in Dr. Hyde’s edition of Raftery’s *Poems*, p. 210.

“My Grief on the Sea.” Original in Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs*. It was taken down by him from an old woman named Biddy Cusruaidh or Crummy, living in the midst of a bog in Co. Roscommon.

“Oró Mhór, a Mhóirín.” Original in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 120. It was obtained by him from Teigue MacMahon, a peasant of Co. Clare. Mr. P. J. McCall’s poem was printed in his *Pulse of the Bards* (Gill & Son, 1904), p. 50.

[368]

“The Little Yellow Road.” Original taken down by Prof. John MacNeill in Co. Mayo in July 1894, and printed by him in the *Gaelic Journal* for that year (vol. v., No. 6), p. 91. There are several versions of An Bóithrín buidhe; see for another, Petrie’s *Ancient Music*, p. 24. Mr. Campbell’s translation, kindly contributed to this collection, has not been published before.

“Reproach to the Pipe” (*Másladh an Phíopa*). The original, taken down in Galway, will be found in the *Gaelic Journal* (vol. vi., No. 5), p. 73.

“Modereen Rue.” Mrs. Tynan-Hinkson’s poem is not a direct translation, but a spirited free version of the favourite Gaelic song of this name; it was published in *The Wind in the Trees* (Grant Richards, 1898), p. 98.

“The Stars Stand Up” (Táid na realta ‘n-a seasadh ar an aer). Original in *Ceól-sídhe*, Part iv., p. 50, among other places. I have altered the last four lines.

“The Love Smart.” Original in Dr. Hyde’s *Love-Songs*, p. 22.

“Well for Thee.” Original, *ibid.*, p. 130.

“I am Raftery the Poet.” From Dr. Hyde’s edition of Raftery’s *Poems* (H. M. Gill & Son, Dublin, 1903), p. 40.

“Dust hath closed Helen’s eye.” Original, *ibid.*, p. 330. Mr. W. B. Yeats has slightly worked over Lady Gregory’s rendering. Mary Hynes, who “died of fever before the famine,” has left a tradition of beauty behind her in her own country. “She was the finest thing that was ever shaped,” said an old fiddler who remembered her well. Baoile laoi (Ballylee) is a little village of some half-dozen houses in the barony of Kiltartan. Lady Gregory’s beautiful rendering was published in an article by Mr. W. B. Yeats in *The Dome*, New Series, vol. iv. p. 161.

[369]

“The Shining Posy” or “Mary Stanton,” *ibid.*, p. 320. We must remember that poor Raftery, who praises so warmly the beauty of women, saw them only with the eyes of his imagination, for he was blind. His verses seem to have been impromptu compositions. The classical allusions are very characteristic of the wandering bards, who liked to show off their acquaintance with the heroes of bygone ages.

“Love is a Mortal Disease” (Is claidhte an galar an grádh). Original in *Smoílín na Rann*, a collection of Connaught songs made by Mr. Fionan McCollum, “Finghin na Leamhna” (Gaelic League, 1908).

“I am watching my young calves sucking.” This and the two following poems, “The Narrow Road” and “Forsaken,” are translated from Dr. Douglas Hyde’s little collection of original Irish songs called *Ubhla de’n Chraoibh, or Apples of the Bough* (Gill & Son, Dublin).

“I Follow a Star.” Translated by Seosamh mac Cathmhaoil (James Campbell) from his own Irish poem, and published by him in *The Gilly of Christ* (Maunsell & Co., Dublin).

“Nurse’s Song.” Published by Mr. Alfred M. Williams in his *The Poets and Poetry of Ireland* (Houghton, Mifflin and Co., Boston and New York). The song is traditional, and its author is unknown.

“A Sleep Song.” Original in *Gaelic Journal*, May 1911, p. 141. The song was partly taken down from Mr. McAuley Lynch in West Cork, and partly recollected from childhood by Mr. P. H. Pearse, the translator.

“The Cradle of Gold.” From Mr. Alfred P. Graves’ *Irish Poems*, ii. p. 117 (Maunsel & Co.). Original in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 146. [370] “Rural Song.” Original in Petrie’s *Ancient Music of Ireland*, p. 43. Joyce’s *Irish Music* gives some extra stanzas.

“Ploughing Song.” Original, *ibid.*, p. 30.

“A Spinning-wheel Ditty.” *Ibid.*, p. 85.

THE END

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[371]

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[Gutenberg Project] Transcriber's notes: Inconsistent use of accents across text, titles and poems in the original has been retained.

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