



George C. S. Ferguson



# POEMS.

BY

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## THE MORNING'S HINGES.

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*A solis ortûs cardine.*

—SEDULIUS.

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### I.

Where the Morning's hinges turn,  
Where the fires of sunset burn,  
Where the Pole its burthen weighty  
Whirls around the starry hall;  
Beings, wheresoe'er ye are,  
Ether, vapour, comet, star,  
There art Thou, Lord God Almighty,  
Thou that mad'st and keep'st them all.

### II.

Where, on earth, battalions foes  
In the deadly combat close;  
Where the plagues have made their stations,  
Dropped from Heaven's distempered air;  
Where, within the human breast,  
Rising hints of thought suggest  
Sin's insane hallucinations,  
Dread One, Thou art also there.

III.

O most Mighty, O most High,  
Past Thought's compass, what am I  
That should dare Thy comprehending  
In this narrow, shallow brain?  
Yea, but Thou hast given a Soul  
Well capacious of the whole,  
And a Conscience ever tending  
Right-ward, surely not in vain.

IV.

Yea, I'd hinder, if I could,  
Wrath and pain and spilling blood;  
I would tell the cannon loaded  
"Fire not"! and the sabre stay  
Mid-cut: but the matter brute  
Owns its own law absolute;  
And the grains will be exploded,  
And the driven iron slay.

V.

Deaf the nitre; deaf the steel:  
And, if I the Man appeal,  
Answer Soldier and Commander,  
"We, blind engines, even as these,  
"Do but execute His plan,  
"Working since the world began,  
"Towards some consummation grander  
"Than your little mind can seize."

VI.

What! does all, then, end in this,  
That, amid a world amiss,  
Man must ever be but parcel-  
Imperfection? and the soul  
Ever thus in poise between  
Things contrariant, rest, a mean  
Averaged of the universal  
Good and ill that make the whole?

VII.

No, a something cries within;  
No; I am not of your kin  
Broods of evil! all the forces  
Of my nature answer No!  
Though the world be overspread  
With the riddle still unread  
Of your being, of your sources,  
This with sense supreme I know;

VIII.

That, behoves me, and I can,  
Work within the inner man  
Such a weeding, such a cleansing  
Of this moss-grown home-plot here,  
As shall make its herbage meet  
For the soles of angels' feet,  
And its blooms for eyes dispensing  
Light of Heaven's own atmosphere.



*The Morning's Hinges.*

## IX.

"Yea, what thou hast last advanced,  
 "Creature, verily thou canst."  
 (Hark, the Master!) "Up. Bestir thee;  
 "And, that thou may'st find the way,  
 "Things inscrutable laid by,  
 "Be content to know that I,  
 "Hoping, longing, waiting for thee,  
 "Stand beside thee, every day."

## X.

Lord, and is it Thou, indeed,  
 Takest pity on my need,  
 Who nor symbol show nor token  
 Vouching aught of right in me?  
 "I, dear soul," the Master said,  
 "Come to some through broken bread;  
 "Come to some through message spoken;  
 "Come in pure, free grace to thee."

*Bird and Brook.*

## BIRD AND BROOK.

Bird that pipest on the bough,  
 Would that I could sing as thou;  
 Runnel gurgling on beneath,  
 Would I owned thy liquid breath;  
 I would make a lovely lay  
 Worthy of the pure-bright day.

Worthy of the freshness spread  
 Round my path and o'er my head;  
 Of the unseen airs that rise  
 Incensing the morning skies  
 As from opening buds they spring  
 In the dew's evanishing.

Brighter yet, and even more clear  
 Than that blue encasing sphere,  
 Worthy of the gentle eyes  
 Opening on this paradise,  
 With their inner heavens as deep,  
 Fresh from youth's enchanted sleep.

*Bird and Brook.*

Worthy of the voices sweet  
 That my daily risings greet,  
 And, to even-song addressed,  
 Ere we lay us down to rest,  
 Lift my spirit's laggard weight  
 Half-way to the heavenly gate.

I would make it with a dance  
 Of the rhythmic utterance,  
 With a gambit and retreat  
 Of the counter-trilling feet  
 And a frolic of the tone  
 To the song-bird only known.

With a soft transfusing fall  
 Would I make my madrigal,  
 Full as rills that, as they pass,  
 Shake the springing spikes of grass,  
 And that ample under-speech  
 Only running waters reach.

I would sing it loud and well,  
 Till the spirits of Amabel,  
 And of Ethel, from their nests,  
 Caught with new delicious zests  
 Of the soul's life out-of-door,  
 Forth should peep, and crave for more.

But, because I own not these,  
 Oh, ye mountains and ye trees,

*Bird and Brook.*

Oh, ye tracts of heavenly air,  
 Voices sweet, and sweet eyes fair  
 Of my darlings, ye must rest  
 In my rhyme but half-expressed.

Yea, and if I had them all,  
 Voice of bird and brook at call,  
 And could speak as winds in woods  
 Or with tumult of the floods,  
 Yet a theme there would remain  
 I should still essay in vain.

For my soul would strive to raise,  
 If it might, a song of praise,  
 All unworthy though it were,  
 To the Maker of the air,  
 To the Giver of the life  
 Breathing round me joyous-rife.

Giver of that general joy  
 Brightening face of girl and boy,  
 Sender of those soul-reliefs  
 Hidden in our boons of griefs,  
 Lest with surfeit and excess  
 We surcharge life's blessedness.

Such a lay to frame aright,  
 Waft me to some mountain-height  
 Far from man's resort, and bring,  
 From the world's environing,



*Bird and Brook.*

All that lives of sweet and strong  
To the dressing of the song.

I would clothe its mighty words  
With the lowings of the herds  
Loosed to pasture ; with the shout  
Of the monsoon bursting out  
Past the Himalayan flanks  
O'er the empty Indian tanks.

With a noise of many waves  
Would I fill the sounding staves ;  
Yea, the great sea-monsters make  
Of my rapture to partake,  
Till their gambollings they'd lend  
To the hymn's triumphant end.

But, oh God, at thought of Thee  
And of Thine immensity,  
All my fancy's gathered powers  
Droop and faint as summer flowers  
By the high meridian sun  
In his glory glanced upon.

And, behold, this earth we tread,  
Though the thin film o'er it spread,  
Called by men the atmosphere,  
Thrill with life's vibrations clear,  
Yet achieves its ordered round  
Through the heavens, without a sound.

*Bird and Brook.*

And the worlds that further are  
Hold not converse, star with star ;  
And the comets speeding hither  
Through the parted deeps of ether,  
Teach through all their lives of law,  
Silence is the speech of awe.

So, in awe and wonder mute,  
Let the throstle's warbling flute  
And the stream's melodious babble  
Hint the thoughts unutterable,  
Till Himself do touch the wire  
Of another David's lyre.

## THREE THOUGHTS.

## I.

Come in, Sweet Thought, come in ;  
 Why linger at the door ?  
 Is it because a shape of sin  
 Defiled the place before ?  
 'Twas but a moment there ;  
 I chased it soon away ;  
 Behold, my breast is clean and bare—  
 Come in, Sweet Thought, and stay.  
 The Sweet Thought said me "No ;  
 "I love not such a room ;  
 "Where uncouth inmates come and go,  
 "And back, unbidden, come.  
 "I rather make my cell  
 "From ill resort secure,  
 "Where love and lovely fancies dwell  
 "In bosoms virgin-pure."

## II.

Oh, Pure Thought, then I said,  
 Come thou, and bring with thee  
 This dainty Sweetness, fancy-bred,  
 That flouts my house and me.

No peevish pride hast thou,  
 Nor turnest glance of scorn  
 On aught the laws of life allow  
 In man of woman born.  
 Said he, "No place for us  
 "Is here : and, be it known,  
 "You dwell where ways are perilous  
 "For them that walk alone.  
 "There needs the surer road,  
 "The fresher-sprinkl'd floor,  
 "Else are we not for your abode"—  
 And turned him from my door.

## III.

Then, in my utmost need,  
 Oh, Holy Thought, I cried,  
 Come thou, that cleansest will and deed,  
 And in my breast abide.  
 "Yea, sinner, that will I,  
 "And presently begin" ;  
 And ere the heart had heav'd its sigh,  
 The Guest Divine came in.  
 As in the pest-house ward  
 The prompt Physician stands,  
 As in the leagur'd castle yard  
 The Warden with his bands,  
 He stood, and said, "My task  
 "Is here, and here my home ;  
 "And here am I who only ask  
 "That I be asked to come."



*Three Thoughts.*

## IV.

See how in huddling flight  
 The ranks of darkness run,  
 Exhale and perish in the light  
 Stream'd from the risen sun ;  
 How, but a drop infuse  
 Within the turbid bowl,  
 Of some elixir's virtuous juice,  
 It straight makes clear the whole ;  
 So from before his face  
 The fainting phantoms went,  
 And, in a fresh and sunny place,  
 My soul sat down content ;  
 For—mark and understand  
 My ailment and my cure—  
 Love came and brought me, in his hand,  
 The Sweet Thought and the Pure.

*Three Seasons.*

## THREE SEASONS.

## I.

My breast was as a briary brake  
 I lacked the rake and shears to trim ;  
 Or like a deep, weed-tangl'd lake,  
 Where man can neither wade nor swim :  
 So full of various discontent  
 At things I had not height to scan,  
 Nor breadth nor depth to comprehend,  
 It seemed as though creation's end  
 Were but enigma, and God's plan  
 One knotted, hard entanglement.

## II.

Oh ! glad the morning light we greet,  
 That shows the pathway newly found ;  
 And grateful to the oaring feet  
 The touch, at last, of solid ground.  
 A breath : beheld in clearer air,  
 The path surmounts the mountain sides ;  
 A touch : the knots asunder fall ;  
 And from the smooth uncoiling ball,  
 With easy play the shuttle glides  
 To weave the robe the righteous wear.

*Three Seasons.*

## III.

Ah me ! for such a robe unfit,  
 How shall I let my face be shown,  
 Or venture at the feet to sit  
 Of them that sit around the Throne ?  
 He who upon the darken'd eyes  
 Has breathed, and touched the chords within,  
 Will order all aright. Till then,  
 Here let me, in the ways of men,  
 Walk meekly ; and essay to win  
 The righteous joy this life supplies.

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## TWO VOICES.

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Two voices in my breast  
 Heard I debate, ere slumber o'er me stole :  
 Conscience was one ; and urgent she addressed  
 The Intellectual Soul.

## CONSCIENCE.

Soul, if the day were come  
 When thou must part the body's company,  
 What recompence, thinkest thou, of final doom  
 Hath the just God for thee ?

## SOUL.

In Recompence's scales  
 How shall I place in counterpoise aright  
 The faults wherein the finite creature fails  
 And goodness infinite ?

## CONSCIENCE.

Goodness there cannot be  
 That is not perfect-just. Put also in  
 Justice of God, in like infinity,  
 Then poise, and weigh the sin.



SOUL.

Justice is measured forth ;  
Therefore not infinite. That word, which fills  
The wide ear, taken at what its sense is worth,  
Avails—three syllables.

CONSCIENCE.

Thou touchest but detail  
Of accident and quantity. Lay by  
The canvassing of things collateral,  
And give the main reply.

SOUL.

Of final doom ? In truth  
Nought know I final underneath the sun :  
All things through all things permeate ; and death  
Is but new life begun.

CONSCIENCE.

Deem not, suspicious soul,  
The question put for thy ensnaring plann'd :  
Let be finality ; and give thy whole  
Thought to the thing in hand.

SOUL.

Of what avail were thought  
Skilled but to marshal what the senses yield  
Of comparable images, when brought,  
Naked, so far a-field ?

CONSCIENCE.

But, if a promised day  
Clothe her afresh with new receptive eyes ?—  
And ears to hear what haply I shall say  
Of certain memories ?—

SOUL.

New senses may prepare  
Of future judgments fresh material ;  
Till then, for aught beyond, as never there,  
I answer not at all.

CONSCIENCE.

Thou ownest an earth's pole,  
Yet thou nor other ever yet has been  
There, to report of it : then wherefore, Soul,  
Reject because unseen ?

SOUL.

The things myself have known  
Induce belief in others of their kind  
Such as this thing thou namest. For these alone  
Own I the judging mind.

CONSCIENCE.

Evade not, Soul ; but give  
Answer direct : bethink thyself, and say  
What doom is that thou lookest to receive  
At the accounting day ?

*Two Voices.*

SOUL.

Accounts from contract spring  
Where bargaining equals on agreement fall :  
What room exists for such a reckoning  
Where one is all in all ?

CONSCIENCE.

Soul, thou wouldst still dispute  
With captious art on things beside the main  
And substance of the matter that I moot :  
Judge, and reply again.

SOUL.

For me to judge, and say  
What God in justice should adjudge of me,  
Makes me the judge of God. I put away  
That fond impiety.

CONSCIENCE.

Prevaricating sprite,  
Thou shalt no more in feats evasive glory ;  
No more with crafty doublings turn and slight  
The interrogatory.  
What *feel'st* thou ?—

SOUL.

There indeed  
Pinches the point I can no more refuse :  
I feel—I feel—whatever be decreed,  
I much shall need excuse.

## THE HYMN OF THE FISHERMEN.

I.

To God give foremost praises,  
Who, 'neath the rolling tides,  
In ocean's secret places,  
Our daily bread provides ;  
Who in His pasture grazes  
The flat fish and the round,  
And makes the herring '*maces*'  
In shoaling heaps abound.

II.

Who, in the hour of trial,  
When, down the rattling steep  
The tempest's wrathful vial  
Is poured upon the deep,  
Gives courage, calm and steady,  
Through every form of fear,  
And makes our fingers ready  
To hand, and reef, and steer.



*The Hymn of the Fishermen.*

## III.

Who, when through drift and darkness  
 The reeling hooker flies,  
 And rocks, in ridgy starkness,  
 Athwart our bows arise,  
 Prompt to the helm's commanding,  
 Brings round the swerving tree,  
 Till, into harbour standing,  
 We anchor safe and free.

## IV.

And, great and small sufficing,  
 Before that equal law,  
 That rules the sun's uprising,  
 And makes the mainsail draw,  
 Brings round his erring creatures  
 To seek salvation's ways,  
 By laws surpassing Nature's—  
 To God give foremost praise.

## BY THE ISIS.

JANUARY 1, 1865.

## I.

When the Empress o'er the ice\*  
 Fled before insulting Stephen,  
 This was artful Maud's device,  
 Hinted by the wintry heaven ;  
 Clad in white, amid the snow,  
 All unseen the Queen did go.

## II.

Clad in white her maidens all  
 O'er the Isis trooped beside her ;  
 Round Oxonia's leagured wall  
 Scout or sentry none espied her :  
 If the robes gleamed white, they thought  
 These were snows the wind had brought :

## III.

Flakes, belike, of driven snow,  
 Sifting down the night-wind's eddies ;

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\* *Matildis imperatrix regem Stephanum delusit. . . . .* Exeutores regis castrum obsidentis arte deludens feminea, nocte per Tamensem fluvium, glacie tunc constrictum ac nive dealbatum, albis circumamicta vestibus, cum quibusdam sodalibus per posticum illac clam de nocte exivit de castello ; nec est visa a vigilibus vel exploratoribus, præ similitudine nivis et candidi muliebris vestimenti.—*Mat. Par. Hist. Ang., ad an. 1141.*

*By the Isis.*

Little deemed they there did go  
 Knights renowned and noble ladies,  
 Till the cold, grey, tardy morn  
 Showed them gates and towers forlorn.

## IV.

Go they hence? Is what we see  
 Snowy robe of Priest and Deacon  
 O'er the Isis silently  
 Stealing from a rite forsaken?  
 Or are these but clouds and shadows  
 Drifting o'er the Iffley meadows?

## V.

Drift of words that turn and gleam,  
 Wavering down through Thought's abysses,  
 Till the airy shapes, that seem  
 Regents of these wildernesses,  
 In a pool of mental night  
 Fall dissolved and vanish quite?

## VI.

Isis, by thy frozen marge,  
 So to ask did once betide me;  
 Many souls had he in charge  
 Who, that morning, walked beside me,\*  
 And, as town and tower he eyed,  
 Gazed on all with loving pride.

\* Rev. Arthur G. Livingstone, formerly Curate of Bisley and Anglican Chaplain at Rome, now Vicar of Mildenhall.

*By the Isis.*

## VII.

But, for me, past Magd'len tower,  
 Radcliffe dome and roofs Bodleian,  
 Even in that wintry hour,  
 Mounting up the empyrean  
 Rose the vision of the dome  
 O'er the palace-tops of Rome;

## VIII.

Such as from the Pincian height,  
 Past the broad-eav'd roofs Borghesan,  
 Dawns it on the pilgrim's sight,  
 Robed in morning's amber blazon,  
 With its wide-armed colonnade  
 For mankind's embracing made.

## IX.

Such as from the Martian vale  
 Oft aloft I've seen it swelling,  
 Grave, serene, majestic,  
 O'er the mundane High Priest's dwelling;  
 He who binds, in judgment strong,  
 True and false, and right and wrong

## X.

Yea, and to my visioned eye,  
 Where the half-thawed lock did bubble,  
 Very Tiber darted by,  
 Like a topaz, like an opal;  
 Even as when its lustrous wave  
 These once-sinewy shoulders clave;



## XI.

While, above, the Archangel's tower,  
 With brazen clang and detonation,  
 Answered to the words of power  
 Of the Dogma's proclamation ;  
 And the kings with widening ear,  
 Leant from all their thrones to hear.

## XII.

Arthur, from your Cotswold hill  
 Looking o'er Stroud's busy hollow,  
 Tell me, does remembrance still  
 Down the lengthening vista follow  
 Any footsteps of our walk,  
 With its silence, with its talk ?

## XIII.

You, since then, have served the Lord  
 Where the gold Archangel glitters ;  
 Preached the modest English word,  
 'Neath the shadow of Saint Peter's ;  
 Where the sister rite resorts  
 Safe in comity of courts.

## XIV.

As from one who understands,  
 As from one to whom 'twas given  
 Thus to touch with temper'd hands,  
 Touch, and not absorb, the leaven,  
 Would that I might know from you  
 That the vision was not true.

## THE WIDOW'S CLOAK.

## I.

There's a widow Lady worthy of a word of kindly tone  
 From all who love good Neighbourhood, and true allegiance own  
 To motherly Humanity in love and sorrow tried,  
 Who lives some season of the year

Adown Dee-side.

## II.

To her sister in the cottage, to the Highland hut, comes she ;  
 She takes the old wife by the hand, she shares her cup of tea ;  
 She loves the lowly people: years of life have taught her well,  
 In God's great household, they, the bulk  
 Of inmates, dwell.

## III.

She loves the Highland nature; and, the Dalriad deeps beyond,  
 To every pressure of her palm the Irish hearts respond.  
 What though we seldom see her St. Patrick's Hall within,  
 The Gael her presence yearly cheers  
 Are kith and kin.

## IV.

The Castle of Balmoral stands proudly on its hill;  
 This simple widow Lady has a finer castle still,—  
 Where hill-big keep and chapel soar up the southern sky,  
 Above the woods of Windsor,

And Thames swells by.

## V.

The iron castles on the shore that sentry Portsea beach—  
 The iron castles on the sea, their guns a shipload each,  
 That ride at Spithead anchorage—the ordnance great and small,  
 Of Woolwich and of London Tower,

She owns them all.

## VI.

Ten thousand are her men-at-call, that ride in golden spurs;  
 The cited margins of the seas, half round the world, are hers;  
 And mightiest monarchs fain to sit at her right hand are seen:  
 For she's the Queen of the Three-Joined-Realm.

God save the Queen!

## VII.

And sons she has, good plenty, and daughters, if need were  
 For issue of the lawful line, to sit Saint Edward's chair:  
 But God has filled the quiver; and, with countenance elate,  
 He, next in awful right, may speak

His foe in gate,

## VIII.

With Denmark's gracious daughter, at head of that array—  
 Our darling, ever welcome as flowers that come in May—  
 God, shield the precious creature beneath Thy angels' wings,  
 And send her lovely nature

Down lines of kings!

## IX.

Fine men the princely brothers; and time is coming, when,  
 By sea and land, they all may show that they are manly men;  
 Alert, at clear-eyed Honour's call, to give their duty-day  
 Afield—on deck—in battery—

Come who come may.

## X.

Now mark you, Kings and Emperors who rule this peopled ball  
 That nourishes us, man and beast, and graveward bears us all,  
 The blood of horses and of men, and lives of men, will lie  
 Main heavy on their souls that break

Her amity.

## XI.

Victoria's sheltering mantle is over India spread;  
 Who dare to touch the garment's hem, look out for men in red:  
 Look out for gun and tumbril a-crash through mound and hedge,  
 For shot and shell and Sheffield shear-

Steel, point and edge!



## XII.

The fires are banked: in road and port the seaman-heart swells large;  
 The horses from the Irish fields are champing for the charge;  
 Stand back! keep off! the changing cheek of Peace has lost its smile,  
 And grave her eyes, and grave her prayer,

To heaven the while:—

## XIII.

“Maker, Preserver of Mankind, and Saviour that Thou art,  
 Assuage the rage of wrathful men; bring down their haughty heart;  
 Or, if not so Thy holy will—suppress the idle sigh,  
 And God Sabaoth be the name

We know Thee by!”

## THE SINKING OF THE MONITOR.

31ST DECEMBER, 1862.

## I.

Rodney Brown mann'd the Rhode-Island's cutter;  
 Gallant men with Rodney Brown leap'd on board, fourteen:  
 Able seamen, all, to handle oar or rudder,  
 Messmates true as ever stood decks between:  
 And, buoyant, defiant, as floats the stormy petrel,  
 Sped tow'rd the fitful blue-light, through the dark,  
 Where captain and officer and loyal fellow Federal  
 Lay prison'd in their sinking iron ark:—  
 Sped away to the rescue of officer and senator  
 And messmate going down—going down—a-board the Monitor.

## II.

Ah! the change from that day in Roads of Hampton,  
 When the Merrimac came out in her armour of steel,  
 And the Cumberland, like criminal an elephant had tramp'd on,  
 Broke asunder as she slid beneath her keel;  
 When—while all stood rapt in wonder—came the swimming turret  
 showering  
 New thunder-bolts of battle, up the bay,

And the sea-ram, reeling back, from the shot-strokes overpowering,  
 With sullen-ported helm turn'd away ;—  
 Now, to-night, with seams a-drown under all her groaning batteries,  
 Going down—oh, going down—in the sea-way off Cape Hatteras !

## III.

Through the sea-wash her decks over-sweeping,  
 One boat's-crew, in the broken launch's half-sunk wreck,  
 Had already, from the portals of their iron tomb escaping,  
 Reached the shelter of the Rhode-Island's deck :  
 Half sunk and half afloat, through the sea-wash and the hurricane,  
 Had reached the floating oak, safe and free ;  
 When, cried Boatswain Brown, "Brave hearts, where's the loyal North  
 American  
 "Will pull an oar to yon sheer hulk with me,  
 "And give our sinking mates yet a chance for their delivery ?"  
 "I," and "I," was your reply, rescued boats-crew, all and every !

## IV.

They went ; they reached the blue-light ; they boarded ;  
 And, with all a-board the Monitor, that hour, went down ;  
 Leaving not a name on earth to be recorded  
 Of the noble crew, but yours, Rodney Brown !  
 But known the names and fames and the glories and the services  
 Of them that give you greeting where you go ;  
 Where the Dutch Van Tromps and Hudsons, and the English Drakes  
 and Jervises,  
 And the Genoese High-Admiral, rising slow  
 From their beds of honour, beckon, as you tell the shadowy janitor—  
 "We came down, returned to drown with our messmates in the  
 Monitor."

## V.

And, as oft as of your names men shall question,  
 Every mother and each sister of your sunk ship's crew  
 Shall answer, from the heart's proud suggestion,  
 "My dear one was amongst them, too !  
 For, he," she'll say, "be sure, with his brave impetuosity,  
 His strong-accomplish'd seaman-hands expert,  
 Would be first in feat of daring and devoted generosity."—  
 And so, ye unknown youths, in your desert,  
 By love's omnipotent illusions multiplied and magnified,  
 Be Ship's-crew, and Service, and the Cause you died for, dignified.



## MESGEDRA:

## A LAY OF THE WESTERN GAEL.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

Irish heroic tradition revolves in two chief cycles, separated by an interval of about two centuries and a-half. In the first, Conor, King of Ulster, living about the commencement of the Christian era, occupies the central place; surrounded by Cuchullin, Conall Carnach, and the heroes of the Red Branch. The fortunes of Deirdre and the sons of Usnach connect him with Scotland; those of his Amazonian rival, Maeve, with Connaught, and those of Cúri and Blanaid with Munster. In the second cycle, Cormac son of Art must be regarded as the central figure, though eclipsed by the more heroic forms of Finn and Ossian. We are here in the third century, and the dawn of the coming change to Christianity tinges all the characters with a greater softness and humanity, as in the romance of the elopement of Dermid and Grania, and in many of the Ossianic fragments. But the better defined and more characteristic forms of grandeur, with the stronger accompaniments of pity and terror, must be sought for in the earlier story. There, we are amongst the *rudera* of such a barbaric kind of literature as the great tragedians turned to immortal dramas in Greece, and Ovid converted into beautiful legends in Italy. In the Conorian cycle, the egg of Leda, so to speak, is the trophy taken from the dead Mesgedra by Conall Carnach, under the circumstances which form the subject of this piece. It furnishes the missile with which the main action of the cycle is wound up in the assassination of Conor by the slinger Keth, as related in the "Healing of Conall Carnach" (*Lays of the Western Gael*). If we inquire into its nature, or ask how the trophy of a dead man could supply materials for a missile from a sling, we enter on shocking details such as deform the traditions of this as well as every other old country which has preserved its literary rudiments. A British King built a prison for his captives of a concrete composed of lime and the bones of his enemies. As late as the beginning of the 13th century the chess-men of the O'Neills of Tyrone were formed of the polished *tibiae* of the men of Leinster. But these revolting features need no more repel us from seeing what is behind, than Medea's cauldron or the supper of Thyestes should induce us to ignore the materials supplied by the Classical Dictionary. The oppressive exactions of the Bards in their visitations (the origin, probably, of the Herald's visitations of later times), form the subject of a note to "Congal" (p. 175), where the same abuses are shown to exist at the present day among the native tribes of India.

Ill fare it still with lay-profaning Bard  
Who, heedless of the heavenly gift sincere,  
Sings, or sings not, to purchase wealth's reward  
From flattered Pride or tributary Fear.

## MESGEDRA.

When glades were green where Dublin stands to-day,  
And limpid Liffey, fresh from wood and wold,  
Bridgeless and fordless, in the lonely Bay  
Sank to her rest on sands of stainless gold;

Came Bard Atharna with his spoils of song  
From rich, reluctant lords of Leinster wrung;  
Flocks and fat herds, a far-extending throng,  
Bondsmen and handmaids beautiful and young:

And,—for the dusky deeps might ill be pass'd,  
And he impatient to secure his store,—  
A hurdle-causeway o'er the river cast,  
And bore his booty to the further shore:

Which ill-enduring, Leinster's king, the brave  
Mesgedra, following in an angry quest,  
On Tolka bank of damsel and of slave  
Despoiled the spoiler now no more a guest;

Who, being bard and ministering priest  
Of those vain demons then esteemed divine,  
Invoked a curse on Leinster, man and beast,  
With rites of sacrifice and rhymes malign;



And sang so loud his clamorous call to war  
 That all the chiefs of bard-protecting fame  
 Throughomt Ulidia, arming near and far,  
 Came, and, to aid him, Conall Carnach came ;

And, where the city now sends up her vows  
 From holy Patrick's renovated fane,  
 (Small surmise then that one of Conall's house  
 Should there, thereafter, such a work ordain),

Joined Leinster battle : till the southern lords,  
 Their bravest slain or into bondage led,  
 At sunset broke before the Red-Branch swords,  
 And, last, Mesgedra climbed his car and fled.

Alone, in darkness, of one hand forlorn,  
 Naas-ward all night he held his journey back  
 Through wood and fen, till ill-befriending morn  
 Showed him fell Conall following on his track.

So chanced it, as the doleful daylight broke,  
 That, wandering devious with disordered rein,  
 His steeds had reached beside the Sacred Oak  
 On Liffey's bank, above the fords of Clane.

Glad to the Tree-God made he grateful vows  
 Who deigned that green asylum to bestow ;  
 Kissed the brown earth beneath the moss-green boughs,  
 And waited, calm, the coming of his foe.

He, as a hawk, that, in a housewife's coop  
 Spying his quarry, stoops upon the wing,  
 Came on apace, and, when in middle swoop,  
 Declining sidelong from the sacred ring,

Wheeled, swerving past the consecrated bounds :—  
 Then thus, between him and the asylum'd man,  
 While nearer brush'd he still in narrowing rounds,  
 The grave, unfriendly parle of death began.

"Come forth, Mesgedra, from the sheltering tree,  
 And render fight : 'tis northern Conall calls."

"Not from an equal combat do I flee,  
 O Conall, to these green, protecting halls ;

"But, mutilated, weak from many wounds,  
 Here take I sanctuary, where none will dare  
 With impious wheel o'erdrive my measured bounds,  
 Or cast a weapon through the spell-wall'd air."

"No impious man am I ; I fear the Gods ;  
 My wheels thy sacred precinct do but graze ;  
 Nor, in the strife I challenge, ask I odds,  
 But lot alike to each of death or praise."

"See, then, one arm hangs idly by my side :  
 Let, now, one answering arm put also by  
 From share of battle, to thy belt be tied ;  
 So shall thy challenge soon have meet reply."



Then Conall loosed his war-belt's leathern band ;  
 Buckle and belt above his arm he closed ;  
 And, single-handed, to the single hand  
 Of maimed Mesgedra, stood in fight opposed.

They fought, with clashing intermixture keen  
 Of rapid sword-strokes, till Mesgedra's blade,  
 Belt and brass corslet glancing sheer between,  
 Wide open all the trammelling closure laid.

"Respect my plight : two-handed chief, forbear !"  
 "Behold, I spare ; I yield to thy appeal ;  
 And bind this hand again ; but, well beware  
 Again it owe not freedom to thy steel !"

Again they fought, with close-commingling hail  
 Of swifter sword-strokes, till the fated brand  
 Of doom'd Mesgedra, glancing from the mail,  
 Again cut loose the dread, man-slaughtering hand.

No prayer might now hot Conall's fire assuage ;  
 No prayer was uttered ; from his scattered toils  
 Bounding in headlong, homicidal rage,  
 He flew, he threw, he slew, and took the spoils :

Then up, all glorying, all imbrued in gore,  
 Sprang to the chariot-seat, and north amain  
 Chariots and steeds and ghastly trophy bore  
 Through murmuring Liffey, o'er the fords of Glane.

There, softly glancing down the hawthorn glades,  
 Like phantom of the dawn and dewy air,  
 There met him, with a troop of dames and maids,  
 A lovely woman delicate and fair.

They, at their vision of the man of blood,  
 Rightward and left fled fluttering in alarm ;  
 She in his pathway innocently stood  
 As one who thinks not, and who fears not, harm.

"Who thou, and whence, and who the woman-train ?"  
 "Buäna, King Mesgedra's wife, am I,  
 From vows returning sped at Tlacta's fane :  
 These dames and maids my serving company.

"And, one moon absent, long the time appears  
 Till back in Naas's halls I lay at rest  
 My dreams ill-omening and my woman's fears  
 That daily haunt me, on my husband's breast."

"Mount here. Thy husband speaks his will through me."  
 "Through thee ! Thy token of my husband's will ?"  
 "The royal car, the royal coursers see :  
 Perchance there rests a surer token still."

"My king Mesgedra is a bounteous lord,  
 And many a war-car doth his chariot-pen,  
 And many a swift steed do his stalls afford  
 For oft bestowal upon divers men."



"See then," he said, "my certain warrant here."

Ah, what a deed ! and showed the severed head.  
She paled, she sickened with a mortal fear,  
Reached her white arms and sank before him, dead.

No passing swoon was hers : he saw her die ;  
Saw death's pale signet set on cheek and brow :—  
Up through his raging breast there rose a sigh ;  
And, "Sure," he said, "a loving wife wast thou !

"And I—my deeds to-day shall live in song :  
Bards in the ears of feasting kings shall tell  
How keen Mesgedra cut the trammelling thong,  
And unbound Conall used his freedom well.

"For, what I've done, by rule of warrior-law  
Well was I justified and bound to do ;  
And poets hence a precedent shall draw  
For future champion-compacts just and true.

"Done, not because I love the sight of blood,  
Or, uninstructed, rather would destroy  
Than cherish ; or prefer the whirling mood  
Of battle's turbulent and dreadful joy

"To peaceful life's mild temper ; but because  
Things hideous, which the natural sense would shun,  
Are, by the sanction of religious laws,  
Made clean, and pure, and righteous to be done.

"Ye, in whose name these awful laws are given,  
Forgive the thought this woman's looks have raised ;—  
Are broken hearts acceptable to Heaven ?  
Is God by groans of anguish rightly praised ?

"I, at your law's commandment, slew her lord,  
And, at your law's commandment, would have borne  
Herself, a captive, to a land abhorr'd,  
To spend her widowhood in pain and scorn.

"But now, since friendlier death has shut her eyes  
From sight of bondage in an alien home,  
No law forbids to yield her obsequies,  
Or o'er her raise the green sepulchral dome.

"Or—for her love was stronger than her life—  
To place beside her, in her narrow bed,—  
It's lawful tribute rendered to my knife—  
The much-loved, life-lamented, kingly head.

"No law forbids—all sanguinary dues  
Paid justly—that the heart-wrung human vow  
Your sterner rites, dread Deities, refuse,  
Some gentler Demon's ritual may allow :

"That yet, ere Time of Mankind make an end,  
Some mightier Druid of our race may rise ;  
Some milder Messenger from Heaven descend ;  
And Earth, with nearer knowledge of the Skies,



"See, past your sacrificers' grisly bands,  
Past all the shapes that servile souls appal,  
With fearless vision, from a thousand lands,  
One great, good God behind and over all.

"Raise, then, her mound": the gathering hosts he spake  
That, thronging to o'ertake their venturous king,  
Poured from the ford through fen and crackling brake,  
And hailed their hero in acclaiming ring:—

"Raise, too, her stone, conspicuous far and near;  
And let a legend on the long stone tell,  
'Behold, there lies a tender woman here,  
Who, surely, loved a valiant husband well.'

"And let the earth-heap'd, grass-renewing tomb  
A time-long token eloquent remain  
Of Pity and of Love for all who come  
By murmuring Liffey and the banks of Clane."

Delicious Liffey! from thy bosoming hills  
What man who sees thee issuing strong and pure,  
But with some wistful, fresh emotion fills,  
Akin to Nature's own clear temperature?

And, haply, thinks:—on this green bank 'twere sweet  
To make one's mansion, sometime of the year;  
For Health and Pleasure on these uplands meet,  
And all the isle's amenities are here.

Hither the merry music of the chase  
Floats up the festive borders of Kildare;  
And slim-bright steeds extending in the race  
Are yonder seen, and camping legions there.

These coverts hold the wary-gallant fox;  
There the park'd stag waits his enlarging day;  
And there, triumphant o'er opposing rocks,  
The shooting salmon quivers through thy spray.

The heath, the fern, the honey-fragrant furze  
Carpet thy cradling steep: thy middle flow  
Laves lawn and oak-wood: o'er thy downward course  
Laburnums nod and terraced roses blow.

To ride the race, to hunt, to fowl, to fish,  
To do and dare whate'er brave youth would do,  
A fair fine country as the heart could wish,  
And fair the brown-clear river running through.

Such seemest thou to Dublin's youth to-day,  
Oh clear-dark Liffey, mid the pleasant land;  
With life's delights abounding, brave and gay,  
The song, the dance, the softly-yielded hand,

The exulting leap, the backward-flying fence,  
The whirling reel, the steady-levelled gun;—  
With all attractions for the youthful sense,  
All charms to please the manly mind, but one,



For, thou, for them, alas ! nor History hast  
 Nor even Tradition ; and the Man aspires  
 To link his present with his Country's past,  
 And live anew in knowledge of his sires ;

No rootless colonist of alien earth,  
 Proud but of patient lungs and pliant limb,  
 A stranger in the land that gave him birth,  
 The land a stranger to itself and him.

Yet, though in History's page thou may'st not claim  
 High places set apart for deeds sublime  
 That hinge the turnings of the gates of Fame  
 And give to view the avenues of Time ;

Not all inglorious in thy elder day  
 Art thou, Moy-Liffey ; and the loving mind  
 Might round thy borders many a gracious lay  
 And many a tale not unheroic find.

Sir Almeric's deeds might fire a youthful heart  
 To brave contention mid illustrious peers ;  
 Tears into eyes as beautiful might start  
 At tender record of Isolda's tears ;

Virtue herself uplift a loftier head,  
 Linked through the years with Ormond's constancy,  
 And airs from Runnymede around us spread,—  
 Yea, all the fragrance of the Charter Tree

Wafted down time, refresh the conscious soul  
 With Freedom's balms, when, firm in patriot zeal,  
 Dublin's De Londres, to Pandolfo's scroll  
 Alone of all refused to set his seal ;

Or when her other Henry's happier eyes  
 Up-glancing from his field of victory won,  
 Beheld, one moment, 'neath adoring skies,  
 The lifted isle lie nearer to the sun.—

For others, these. I, from the twilight waste  
 Where pale Tradition sits by Memory's grave,  
 Gather this wreath, and, ere the nightfall, haste  
 To fling my votive garland on thy wave.

Wave, waft it softly : and when lovers stray  
 At summer eve by stream and dimpling pool,  
 Gather thy murmurs into voice and say,  
 With liquid utterance passionate and full,

Scorn not, sweet maiden, scorn not, vigorous youth,  
 The lay, though breathing of an Irish home,  
 That tells of woman-love and warrior-ruth  
 And old expectancy of Christ to come.



## FERGUS WRY-MOUTH:

## A LAY OF THE WESTERN GAEL.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

As the Laws of the Lombards are prefaced by the story of Freya's deception of Woden,—she turned his bed while he slept, so that, on awakening, he first beheld, and by a previous vow became bound to give the victory to, the Long-beards, then about to engage their enemies;—and as the Welsh code of Howel the Good begins with the story of the Men of Arvon, so the Irish Brehon Laws have for their preface, in their first gloss, this tale of Fergus the Stud-feeder, one of the early provincial kings of Ulster, who dwelt at Emania. (See "The Twins of Macha," *post.*) Fergus's misdeed in killing Dorn, his handmaid, gave rise to a claim for *eric* by her kindred, which was afterwards pleaded as a set-off against a demand of Fergus's descendants for *eric* of a certain nobleman entitled to Fergus's protection who had been slain by a son of Dorn; and, as land had been given in mortgage to secure the latter debt, the proceedings for redemption, involving all the common-law elements of actions of replevin and ejectment, with many niceties of the law of distress, supplied the materials for what may be regarded as the leading case in this branch of Brehon judicature. (See *On the Elements of the Common Law discoverable in the Senchus Mor*, Trans. R. I. A., vol. xxiv.) Among the ancient Irish, certain personal blemishes in favour of the Angles among the Romans, and for both the kingly and sacerdotal functions among the Persians. Marcus Sergius when maimed, in the service of his country, in the wars, had to give up the ministry of the altar at Rome; and Cormac son of Art losing an eye, by the hand of Angus "Dread-spear," was obliged to abjure the regal state at Tara, and to lead a life of retirement at Sletty on the Boyne, where he incurred the vengeance of his Druids by blaspheming the rites of their God, Crom, as related in "The Burial of King Cormac."—(*Lays of the Western Gael.*)

One day, King Fergus, Leidé Luthmar's son,  
Drove by Loch Rury; and, his journey done,  
Slept in his chariot, wearied. While he slept,  
A troop of fairies o'er his cushions crept.

And, first, his sharp, dread sword they filched away;  
Then bore himself, feet-forward, to the bay.  
He, with the chill touch, woke; and, at a snatch,  
It fortun'd him, in either hand to catch  
A full-grown sprite; while, 'twixt his breast and arm,  
He pinned a youngling. They, in dire alarm,  
Writhed hard and squealed. He held the tighter. Then  
"Quarter!" and "Ransom!" cried the little men.  
"No quarter;" he: "Nor go ye hence alive,  
"Unless ye gift me with the art to dive,  
"Long as I will: to walk at large, and breathe  
"The seas, the lochs, the river-floods beneath."  
"We will." He loosed them. Herbs of virtue they  
Stuff'd in his ear-holes. Or, as others say,  
A hood of fairy texture o'er his head,  
Much like a cleric's *cochal*, drew; and said  
"Wear this, and walk the deeps. But well beware  
"Thou enter nowise in Loch Rury there."  
Clad in his cowl, through many deeps he went,  
And saw their wonders; but was not content  
Unless Loch Rury also to his eyes  
Revealed its inner under-mysteries.  
Thither he came; and plunged therein; and there  
The *Muirdris* met him. Have you seen a pair  
Of blacksmith's bellows open out and close  
Alternate 'neath the hand of him that blows?  
So swelled it, and so shrunk. The hideous sight  
Clung all his visage sidewise with affright.  
He fled. He gained the bank. "How seems my cheer,  
"Oh Mwena?" "Ill!" replied the Charioteer.



"But rest thee. Sleep thy wildness will compose."  
 He slept. Swift Mwena to Emania goes.  
 "Whom, now, for King; since Fergus' face awry  
 "By law demeans him of the sovereignty?"  
 "Hush!"—and his sages, and physicians wise  
 In earnest council sit; and thus advise.  
 "He knows not of his plight. To keep him so,  
 "As he suspect not that, he ought not know,—  
 "For, so the mind be straight, and just awards  
 "Wait on the judgment, right-read Law regards  
 "No mere distortion of the outward frame  
 "As blemish barring from the Kingly name:—  
 "And, knew he all the baleful fact you tell,  
 "An inward wrench might warp his mind as well:  
 "Behoves it, therefore, all of idle tongue,  
 "Jesters, and women, and the witless young,  
 "Be from his presence sent. And when at morn  
 "He takes his bath, behoves his bondmaid, Dorn,  
 "Muddy the water; lest, perchance, he trace  
 "Lost kingship's token on his imaged face."  
 Three years they kept him so: till, on a day,  
 Dorn with his face-bath-ewer had made delay;  
 And fretted Fergus, petulant and rash,  
 A blow bestowed her of his horse-whip lash.  
 Forth burst the woman's anger. "Thou a King!  
 "Thou sit in Council! thou adjudge a thing  
 "In Court of Law! Thou, who no kingship can,  
 "Since all may see, thou art a blemished man;  
 "Thou wry-mouth!" Fergus thereon slew the maid;  
 And, to Loch Rury's brink in haste conveyed,

Went in at Fertais. For a day and night  
 Beneath the waves he rested out of sight:  
 But all the Ultonians on the bank who stood,  
 Saw the loch boil and redden with the blood.  
 When next at sunrise skies grew also red,  
 He rose—and in his hand the *Muirdris'* head.—  
 Gone was the blemish. On his goodly face  
 Each trait symmetric had resumed its place:  
 And they who saw him marked in all his mien,  
 A King's composure ample and serene.  
 He smiled; he cast his trophy to the bank,  
 Said, "I, survivor, Ulstermen!" and sank.

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# THE TWINS OF MACHA :

## A LAY OF THE WESTERN GAEL.

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE earthworks called the Navan, near Armagh, are the remains of the old fortress-dwelling of the petty kings of Ulster. For so insignificant a place, it possesses what few other sites in Western Europe can boast of. It has a history, more or less fabulous, extending from the year 330 before, to the year 336 after Christ. Its greatest glories are associated with the days of Conor son of Nessa, in whose time, by one account, it received the name by which it has since been known; for it is to be noted that Navan is the abbreviated form of *An-Emain-Macha*, rendered in this legend *The Twins of Macha*. Terrible as this story is, it is not repulsive, like that of the earlier Macha, who in the other legend is made the original founder, and it forms a necessary part of the introduction to the great epic romance of the Tain or Cattle-spoil of Quelgné. Cuchullin would not have had the opportunity of winning glory by defending the passes of Ulster singlehanded as he is there represented to have done, had not Conor and his powerful chiefs been disabled for the field by the plague visited on them in vengeance of Macha's sufferings. The original is a good example of that conciseness and simplicity united with dramatic power which characterises the *Dinnsenchus* class of poems.

Whence *Emain Macha*? And the pangs intense  
That long were wont to plague the Ultonians, whence?  
Not hard to tell. Once, ere that pest began,  
Crunn of the Herds, the son of Agnoman,  
Tending his flocks dwelt lonely in the wild.  
Dead was his wife: and many a squalid child,  
Ill-cared for, clamoured in the dwelling bare.  
Now, on a day, when sitting sadly there,  
Crunn was aware a woman stood beside,  
Of gracious aspect, sweet and dignified.

She, as familiar there had been her life,  
At once assumed the office of the wife:  
Unasked, presided; dealt the children bread;  
And drew their loves forth, in the mother's stead.  
Long while she tarried. Neither wholesome food,  
Nor seemly raiment, nor aught else of good  
Wherewith the housewife's hand makes glad a home,  
Was wanting with them; till the time was come  
When Ulaidh all were wont to make repair  
With annual pomp to celebrate their Fair.  
Thither they flock; man, woman, youth, and maid;  
And, with the others, Crunn his limbs arrayed  
In festive garb, to go. Fear seized her soul.  
"Ah, go not, rash one! Thou wilt ne'er control  
"Some word ill-timed, may mar our life's content."  
"Tush! Fear me not," said Crunn; and, jocund, went.

The fair is filled. The grooms of Conor lead  
The royal car and coursers o'er the mead.  
The woods and lawns with loud applauses ring;  
The flattering courtiers buzz about. "The thing  
"Lives not, for swiftmess, that can near them come."  
"Swifter," said Crunn, "my own good wife at home."  
Scarce said,—the wretch, by wrathful Conor caught,  
Is captive. Tidings to the wife are brought.  
"Woe's me," she cried, "must aid him now, and I  
"So soon to bear my own maternity!"  
"Woe thee, indeed!" the savage grooms return.  
"Make good his boasting, or prepare his urn."



"As mothers bore you, spare!" she cries aghast;  
 "Or yield me respite till my pains are past."  
 No respite. "Good, then, if it must be so,  
 "My pains shall work you, men of Ulster, woe,  
 "Now and hereafter." Brought before the King—  
 "Thy name?" "My name,—*our* name,—*the* name shall cling  
 "To this thy fair-green and thy palace-hall  
 "Till the just God give judgment upon all;—  
 "MACHA, my name; daughter of Sanrad, son  
 "Of Imbad. Now, release him, and I run."

She ran; the steeds contended. Long ere they  
 Attained the goal, already there, she lay,  
 A mother, dying. Twin the birth. So came  
 Of *Emain Macha*, "Macha's Twins," the name.

## THE NAMING OF CUCHULLIN:

A LAY OF THE WESTERN GAEL.

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

ONE of the stories introductory to the *Tain*, and, of them all, the most dramatic. The name (*Cu-Chullain*) signifies the Hound of Cullan. *Cu*, in this meaning, is a common element of Celtic proper names. Whether the armourer of Slieve Gullen was another Wayland Smith may amuse the ethnological enquirer. He will at least live in the renown of his chain-hound as long as Celtic literature endures.

#### CONOR.

Setanta, if bird-nesting in the woods  
 And ball-feats on the play-green please thee not  
 More than discourse of warrior and of sage,  
 And sight of warrior-weapons in the forge,  
 I offer an indulgence. For we go,—  
 Myself, my step-sire Fergus, and my Bard,—  
 To visit Cullan, the illustrious smith  
 Of Quelgné. Come thou also if thou wilt.

#### SETANTA.

Ask me not, good oh Conor, yet to leave  
 The play-green; for the ball-feats just begun  
 Are those which most delight my playmate-youths,  
 And they entreat me to defend the goal:



*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

But let me follow ; for, the chariot-tracks  
Are easy to discern ; and much I long  
To hear discourse of warrior and of sage,  
And see the nest that hatches deaths of men,  
The tongs a-flash, and Cullan's welding blow.

CONOR.

Too late the hour ; too difficult the way.  
Set forward, drivers : give our steeds the goad.

CULLAN.

Great King of Emain, welcome. Welcome, thou,  
Fergus, illustrious step-sire of the King :  
And, Seer and Poet, Cathbad, welcome too.  
Behold the tables set, the feast prepared.  
Sit. But, before I cast my chain-hound loose,  
Give me assurance that ye all be in.  
For, night descends ; and perilous the wild ;  
And other watchman none of house or herds,  
Here, in this solitude remote from men,  
Own I, but one hound only. Once his chain  
Is loosened, and he makes three bounds at large  
Before my door-posts, after fall of night,  
There lives not man nor company of men  
Less than a cohort, shall, within my close  
Set foot of trespass, short of life or limb.

CONOR.

Yea ; all are in. Let loose, and sit secure.  
Good are thy viands, Smith, and strong thine ale.  
Hark, the hound growling.

*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

CULLAN.

Wild dogs are abroad.

FERGUS.

Not ruddier the fire that laps a sword  
Steel'd for a king, oh Cullan, than thy wine  
Hark, the hound baying.

CULLAN.

Wolves, belike, are near.

CATHBAD.

Not cheerfuller the ruddy forge's light  
To wayfarer benighted, nor the glow  
Of wine and viands to a hungry man,  
Than look of welcome pass'd from host to guest.  
Hark, the hound yelling !

CULLAN.

Friends, arise and arm !  
Some enemy intrudes ! Tush ! 'tis a boy.

SETANTA.

Setanta here, the son of Suäiltam.

CONOR.

Setanta, whom I deemed on Emain green  
Engaged at ball-play, on our track, indeed !

SETANTA.

Not difficult the track to find, oh King,  
But difficult, indeed, to follow home.



*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

Cullan, 'tis evil welcome for a guest  
 This unwarn'd onset of a savage beast,  
 Which, but that 'gainst the stone-posts of thy gate  
 I three times threw him, leaping at my throat,  
 And, at the third throw, on the stone-edge, slew,  
 Had brought on thee the shame indelible  
 Of bidden guest, at his host's threshold, torn.

CONOR.

Yea, he was bidden : it was I myself  
 Said, as I passed him with the youths at play,  
 This morning, Come thou also if thou wilt.  
 But little thought I,—when he said the youths  
 Desired his presence still to hold the goal,  
 Yet asked to follow ; for he said he longed  
 To hear discourse of warrior and of sage,  
 And see the nest that hatches deaths of men,  
 The tongs a-flash, and Cullan's welding blow ;—  
 That such a playful, young, untutor'd boy  
 Would come on this adventure of a man.

CULLAN.

I knew not he was bidden ; and I asked,  
 Ere I cast loose, if all the train were in.  
 But, since thy word has made the boy my guest,—  
 Boy, for his sake who bade thee to my board,  
 I give thee welcome : for thine own sake, no.  
 For thou hast slain my servant and my friend,  
 The hound I loved, that, fierce, intractable  
 To all men else, was ever mild to me.

*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

He knew me ; and he knew my uttered words,  
 All my commandments, as a man might know :  
 More than a man, he knew my looks and tones  
 And turns of gesture, and discerned my mind,  
 Unspoken, if in grief or if in joy.  
 He was my pride, my strength, my company,  
 For I am childless ; and that hand of thine  
 Has left an old man lonely in the world.

SETANTA.

Since, Cullan, by mischance, I've slain thy hound,  
 So much thy grief compassion stirs in me,  
 Hear me pronounce a sentence on myself.  
 If of his seed there liveth but a whelp  
 In Uladh, I will rear him till he grow  
 'To such ability as had his sire  
 For knowing, honoring, and serving thee.  
 Meantime, but give a javelin in my hand,  
 And a good buckler, and there never went  
 About thy bounds, from daylight-gone till dawn  
 Hound watchfuller, or of a keener fang  
 Against intruder, than myself shall be.

CULLAN.

A sentence, a just sentence.

CONOR.

Not myself  
 Hath made award more righteous. Be it so.  
 Wherefore what hinders that we give him now  
 His hero-name, no more Setanta called,  
 But now Cuchullin, chain-hound of the Smith ?



*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

SETANTA.

Setanta I, the son of Suäiltam,  
Nor other name assume I, or desire.

CATHBAD.

Take, son of Suäiltam, the offered name.

SETANTA.

Setanta, I. Setanta let me be.

CONOR.

Mark Cathbad.

FERGUS.

'Tis his seer-fit.

CATHBAD.

To my ears

There comes a clamour from the rising years,  
The tumult of a torrent passion-swollen,  
Rolled hitherward; and, mid its mingling noises,  
I hear perpetual voices

Proclaim to laud and fame

The name,

CUCHULLIN!

Hound of the Smith, thy boyish vow  
Devotes thy manhood, even now,  
To vigilance, fidelity, and toil:  
'Tis not alone the wolf, fang-bare to snatch,  
Not the marauder from the lifted latch  
Alone, thy coming footfall makes recoil.

*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

The nobler service thine to chase afar  
Seditious tumult and intestine war,  
Envy, and unfraternal hate,  
From all the households of the state:  
To hunt, untiring, down  
The vices of the lewd-luxurious town,  
And all the brood  
Of Wrong and Rapine, ruthlessly pursued,  
Forth of the kingdom's bounds exterminate.

Thine the out-watch, when, down the darkening skies,  
The coming thunder of invasion rolls;  
When doubts and faint replies  
Dissolve in dread the shaken People's souls;  
And Panic waits, behind her bolted gate,  
The unseen stroke of Fate.

Unbolt! Come forth! I hear  
His footsteps drawing near,  
Who smites the proud ones, who the poor delivers:  
I hear his wheels hurl through the dashing rivers:  
They fill the narrowing glen;  
They shake the quaking causeways of the fen;  
They roll upon the moor;  
I hear them at the door:—  
Lauds to the helpful Gods, the Hero-Givers,  
Here stands he, man of men!

Great are the words he speaks;  
They move through hearts of kindreds and of nations.

*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

At each clear sentence, the unseemly pallor  
 Of fear's precipitate imaginations  
 Avoids the bearded cheeks,  
 And to their wonted stations  
 On every face  
 Return the generous, manly-mantling colour  
 And reassuring grace  
 Of fixed obedience, discipline, and patience,  
 Heroic courage, and protecting valour.

The old true-blooded race shall not be left  
 Of captaincy bereft;  
 No, not although the ire of angry heaven  
 Grow hot against it, even.  
 For Gods in heaven there are  
 Who punish not alone the omitted pray'r,  
 Who punish not alone the slighted sacrifice :  
 Humanity itself, at deadly price,  
 Has gained admission to the juster skies,  
 And vindicates on man man's inhumanities.  
 See how the strong ones languish  
 And groan in woman-anguish,  
 Who in the ardor of their sports inhuman  
 Heard not the piteous pleadings of the woman.

CONOR.

Ah me, the fatal foot-race ! Macha's pangs  
 Do yet torment us.

*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

FERGUS.

Evil was the deed.  
 Happy was I who did not witness it,  
 And happy you, I absent.

CATHBAD.

On their benches,  
 Even in the height and glory of the revel,  
 Struck prone, they writhe :  
 Who now will man the trenches ?  
 Who, on the country's borders,  
 Confront the outland swordsmen,—  
 King, priest, and lord, a swathe before the scythe  
 Of plague, laid level ?  
 He,—he,—no looker-on  
 At heaven-aborred impieties is he,  
 The pure, the stainless son  
 Of Dectiré,  
 The wise, the warlike, the triumphant one  
 Who holds your forest-passes and your fords  
 Against the alien hordes,  
 Till from beneath heaven's slow-uplifted scourge  
 The chastened kings emerge,  
 And, grappling once again to manly swords,  
 Roll the invader-hosts  
 For ever from your coasts.

Great is the land and splendid :  
 The borders of the country are extended :



*The Naming of Cuchullin.*

The extern tribes look up with wondering awe  
 And own the central law.  
 Fair show the fields, and fair the friendly faces  
 Of men in all their places.  
 With song and chosen story,  
 With game and dance, with revelries and races,  
 Life glides on joyous wing—  
 The tales they tell of love and war and glory,  
 Tales that the soft-bright daughters of the land  
 Delight to understand,  
 The songs they sing  
 To harps of double string,  
 To gitterns and new reeds,  
 Are of the glorious deeds  
 Of young Cuchullin in the Quelgnian foray.

Take, son of Suäiltam, the offered name.  
 For at that name the mightiest of the men  
 Of Erin and of Alba shall turn pale :  
 And, of that name, the mouths of all the men  
 Of Erin and of Alba shall be full.

SETANTA.

Yea, then ; if that be so—Cuchullin here !

*Conary.*

CONARY.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE old Irish bardic tale of the Destruction of the House (*bruidin*) of Da-Derga—for my first acquaintance with which I am indebted to Mr. W. M. Hennessy—furnishes the groundwork of this piece; but it will not be understood that “Conary” pretends to be a full reproduction of the *Togail bruidin da dergae*, or that all its incidents are drawn from that source.

The *Bruidin* is generally regarded as having been a kind of Caravanserai; and there seem good grounds for accepting the idea of the late ingenious Mr. Crowe that it represents, in the west of Europe, the *Prytaneum* or house of state-hospitality of the ancient Greeks. There appear to have been six principal places of this kind in Ireland at the commencement of the Christian era; and one of these, called *Bruidin-Da-Derga*, is said to have been the scene of the death of King Conary Mor, whose reign is made to synchronise with the close of the Pagan period, under the circumstances related in the tale.

The old story affords a curious insight into the beliefs—or what were regarded by the author or authors of the *Togail* as having been the beliefs—of the ethnic Irish. We read of God, and of Gods, but not of altars or sacrifices; and of certain sacred injunctions called *Gesa* (*gaysha*), the violation of which was attended with temporal punishment. The agents in inflicting such retribution appear in the form of fairies, men, that is, of the *sidhs*\* or fairy-hills, those mounts in which the wizards and sorcerers of the *Tuatha de Danaan* were thought to enjoy an under-ground existence and to preserve the arts of music and metallurgy. These *gaysha*—seemingly very similar to the *taboo* of modern ethnic populations, and to those prohibitions which were called *religiosa* by the ancient Romans—were of an arbitrary and trivial kind. Those enjoined on the monarch and on the provincial kings continued to be solemnly registered down to the completion of the Book of Rights, but under the sanction of the names of Patrick and Benignus.

The classical reader will find in the *Togail* a curious—probably an unexpected—illustration of the old eastern method of computing the losses in a military expedition. There, the forces, before departing on their campaign, cast each man an arrow into a common receptacle; from which, on their return, each man withdrew an arrow; and the weapons remaining represented the dead and missing. (*Procop. de bell. Pers. l. i., c. ii.*) The actors in

\* *Fear-sidhe*, pronounced *Fearee* = *fairy*; *ban-sidhe* (i.e., the woman of the *sidh*), pronounced *banshee*.



the *Togail* cast, every man, a stone into a common heap, or cairn, and what remained after each survivor had withdrawn his stone, served as the census and memorial of the slain.

The singular and terrible properties ascribed to the Spear of Keltar in the *Togail* may not be without some bearing on Homer's expression *μάλνεται ἐν παλάμῃσι* in reference to the Spear of Diomede.

The *Togail* also contributes its evidence to the great antiquity of the leading lines of highway. There were five of these "Streets" radiating from Tara, the two mentioned in the tale together corresponding pretty nearly with the old post-road from Dublin to the north. The author of the *Togail* places the site of Bruidin-Da-Derga on the River Dodder, in the ancient territory of Cualann, near Dublin, where *Bohernabreena*, or "Road of the Bruidin," still preserves the name. The fact of a sea-invasion corresponding in its main features with the descent of the pirates on the coasts of Meath and Dublin, is chronicled in the Book of Howth, and still lives very vividly in local oral tradition about Balrothery and Balbriggan.

The theatre appears to have been unknown among the early Irish; but no one can peruse the bardic tales without being struck by the dramatic form of their construction. In the *Togail*, as in many other examples, where one actor describes and another interprets, we are reminded of the scene of Helen on the wall; and the dialogue often carries on the action independently of narrative. We must, however, in the originals of all ancient Irish story, be prepared for one peculiarity of these pieces designed for recitation before mixed audiences of high and low, in a common hall. The infantine mind delights in wonder; and exaggeration was one of the chief agencies employed by the bards to excite that kind of pleasure among the children of Nature whom they addressed.

Full peace was Erin's under Conary,  
Till—though his brethren by the tender tie  
Of fosterage—Don Dessa's lawless sons,  
Fer-ger, Fer-gel, and vengeful Fergobar,  
For crimes that justly had demanded death,  
By judgment mild he sent in banishment;  
Yet wrung his own fraternal heart the while.  
Whose brothers, Ferragon and Lomna Druth,  
Drawn by affection's ties, and thinking scorn  
To stay behind while others led the way  
To brave adventure, in their exile joined.

Banished the land of Erin, on the sea  
They roamed, and, roaming, with the pirate-hordes  
Of British Ingcel leagued; and this their pact:  
The spoil of Britain's and of Alba's coasts  
To fall to them; and Erin's counter-spoil  
To fall to Ingcel. Britain's borders first  
They ravaged; and in one pernicious raid  
Of sack and slaughter indiscriminate,  
Ingcel's own father and his brethren seven  
By chance sojourning with the victims, slew.  
Then, Alba sack'd, said Ingcel, "Steer we now  
"For Erin, and the promised counter-spoil."

"'Tis just; and welcome to our souls as well  
"For outrage unavenged," said Fergobar.  
"'Tis just: it is thy right," said Ferragon.  
"'Tis just, and woe it is!" said Lomna Druth.

'Twas then that Conary from strife composed  
By kingly counsel, 'twixt contending lords  
Of distant Thomond, held his journey home.  
But, when in sight of Tara, lo, the sky  
On every side reflected rising flame  
And gleam of arms. "What this?" cried Conary.

A certain druid was there in the train  
Who answered, "Often did I warn thee, King,  
"This journey at this season was ill-timed,  
"As made in violation of the *gaysh*  
"That King of Tara shall not judge a cause  
"Except in Tara's proper judgment hall  
"From Beltane-day to May-day."



"Yea, in truth,

"I do remember now," said Conary,  
 "Amongst my prohibitions that is one,  
 "Which thoughtlessly I've broken. Strange it is  
 "That act for speedy justice and for peace  
 "Accomplished, should, with God, be disesteem'd.  
 "But, since Religion's awful voice forbids,  
 "I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven,  
 "Whose anger at my fault too plain I see,  
 "And vow atonement at thy own award.  
 "But, which way now?"

"Ride northward to the track

"Where Street Midluachra and Street Cualann join;  
 "There, choice of highway waits us, north or south."  
 Northward they rode. "What be these moving brakes  
 "Before us? Nay, 'tis but a running drove  
 "Of antler'd stags. Whence come they? and whence come  
 "These darkening flights of fowl above our heads?"

"These the wild brood of Clane-Milcarua's dens:"

Replied the druid. "It is another *gaysh*  
 "For Tara's King to see them leave their lairs  
 "After mid-day: and ill will come of it."  
 "Omens of evil gather round my path,  
 "Though thought of evil in my breast is none,"  
 Said Conary, and heaved a heavy sigh;  
 "Yet, since I reign by law, and holy men  
 "Charged with the keeping of the law, declare  
 "Thou shalt not so-and-so, at such a time  
 "Do or leave undone, it beseems not me  
 "To question for what end the law is so:

"Though, were it but a human ordinance,  
 "Twere, haply, counted childish: but, go to,  
 "I own another violated *gaysh*;  
 "I pray forgiveness of offended Heaven;  
 "And, since some fierce invading enemy—  
 "Misguided brothers, that it be not you!—  
 "Bars our approach to Tara, let us choose  
 "Cualann highroad; for Cualann-ward there dwells  
 "One whom I once befriended; and I know  
 "His home will give me shelter for to-night,  
 "Knew I aright the way that leads to it."

"Name of the man, oh King?" demanded Cecht  
 (Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
 Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the King!)  
 The biggest man yet gentlest-countenanced  
 Of all that rode in Conary's company.  
 "Da-Derga he," said Conary.

"Ride on,"

Said Cecht. "Street Cualann whereon now we are  
 "Leads straight to Bru'n-Da-Derga, and leads straight  
 "Through and beyond it. 'Tis a house of rest  
 "For all that come and go; where ready still  
 "The traveller finds the wind-dried fuel stack'd,  
 "The cauldron slung, and ale-vat on the floor.  
 "A strong, fast mansion. Seven good doors it has,  
 "And seven good benches betwixt door and door,  
 "And seven good couches spread 'twixt bench and bench.  
 "All that attend thee now, and all that come—  
 "See where they come along Midluachra track,  
 "The host of Emain, in good time I judge,



"Journeying south—shall nothing want for room.  
 "I shall go forward : for my duty it is  
 "To enter first at nightfall, when my king  
 "Comes to his lodging ; and with flint and steel  
 "Kindle the fire whose flame shall guide him home."

Then forth, at gallop of his steeds, went Cecht ;  
 While, slower following, Conary was aware  
 Of three that rode before them on the way.  
 Red were their coursers and their mantles red,  
 Red, too, their caps, blood-red—

"Another *gaysh*,"

Said Conary. "I also call to mind  
 "Amid my prohibitions this is one,  
 "To follow three red riders on the way ;  
 "Injunction idle, were it not divine.  
 "After them, Ferflath ; stay them till we pass."

Then the light lad young Ferflath, Conary's son  
 Sprang forth at gallop on the red men's track,  
 And called his message shrilly from behind,  
 But failed to overtake them. He who rode  
 Last of the triad sang him back a lay—

"Water, oh youth, oh slight swift-riding youth,  
 "On back, on neck, on shoulder lightly borne.  
 "Water will quench ; fire burn ; and shocks of hair  
 "At horrid tidings, upon warriors' heads  
 "Bristle as reeds in water ; water ; ho !"

Ferflath returned, and told to Conary  
 The lay the red man sang ; "and, sir," he said,  
 "I rode, I think, as seemly as himself,  
 "And know not what he meant : but sure I am

"These are not men of mankind, as we are,  
 "But fairy-men and ministers of ill."

"Now then," said Conary, "let every *gaysh*  
 "That dread Religion with hard-knotting hand  
 "Binds on the King of Tara, for to-day  
 "Be broken ! Let them go. They may precede ;  
 "May tie their red steeds at the great hall door,  
 "And choose their seats within ; and I, the King,  
 "May follow, and accept the traveller's place  
 "Last to attain the inn. Well, be it so :  
 "Respect departs with fortune's one-day change.  
 "But, friends, despond not, you. Though few we be  
 "In midst of these marauders (oh, my heart  
 "Forbid the rising thought that these be they !),  
 "Yet shall we soon be many ; for they come,  
 "They whom on Street Midluachra late we saw,  
 "Now following on Street Cualann. In good time  
 "They join us ; for, be sure such chariot-throng  
 "Leaves not the borders of the warlike North,  
 "But champions good come with it. Let us in."

While thus fared Conary, the pirates' scouts  
 Who watched the coast, put off to where the fleet,  
 Stay'd on the heaving ridges of the main,  
 Lay off Ben-Edar. Ingcel's galley reached,  
 High on the prow they found him looking forth,  
 As from a crag o'er-hanging grassy lands  
 Where home-bred cattle graze, the lion glares  
 A-hungred ; and, behind, as meaner beasts  
 That wait the lion's onset for their share,  
 Outlaw'd and reprobate of many a land,



The ravening crew. Beside him, right and left,  
 Stood Lomna, Ferragon, and Fergobar ;  
 Which Lomna in the closure of his cloak  
 Wore a gold brooch embossed with flashing gems  
 Choicest by far of all their spoils yet won :  
 And Ingcel thus demanded of the spies—

“What saw ye, say?”

“A chariot-cavalcade  
 “Along Street Cualann moving from the North.  
 “Splendid the show of lofty-pacing steeds  
 “And glittering war-cars : chariots seventeen  
 “We counted. In the first were reverend men,  
 “Poets, belike, or judges. After these  
 “Heralds, it seem’d, or high apparitors  
 “That give the world to know a great one comes.  
 “He in the third car rode ; an aged man,  
 “Full-gray, majestic, of face serene,  
 “Followed by household numerous and strong,  
 “Cooks, butlers, door-wards, cup-bearers and grooms.”  
 “What heard ye?”

“From a vast hall’s open doors  
 “The stroke of steel on flint, at kindling fire ;  
 “And every stroke so sounded as the arm  
 “That gave it were a giant’s, and every shower  
 “Of sparks it shed—as if a summer sky  
 “Lightened at eve—illumed the dusk around.”

“What this, good Ferragon, who best of all  
 “Knowest Erin hill and valley, things and men?”

Said Ingcel. Ferragon made answer slow,  
 (For, first, his soul said this within himself,  
 “Oh, royal brother, that it be not thou!”)—

“I know not what may be this open hall  
 “With fire at hand unless, belike, it be  
 “Da-Derga’s guest-house, which, for all who come  
 “By Cualann Street, stands open, wherein still  
 “Firewood stands stack’d and brazen cauldron hangs  
 “Slung ready, and clear water running through ;  
 “Bruidin-Da-Derga.”

“And the man who strikes  
 “The flint and steel to kindle fire therein?”

“I know not if it be not that he be  
 “Some king’s fore-runner, sent before a king  
 “To kindle fire ere yet the king himself  
 “And royal household reach their resting-place.”

“And he who in the thirdmost chariot rode,  
 “He who is grey, serene, majestic?”

“I know not if it be not that he be  
 “Some king of Erin’s sub-kings who, to-night,  
 “Rests in Da-Derga’s hospitable hall.”

“Up sail ! To shore !” cried Ingcel ; and the fleet,  
 As flight of wild-geese startled from a fen,  
 Displayed their wings of white, and made the land.

’Twas at Troy Furveen, and the sun was down ;  
 But, from Da-Derga’s hall so streamed the light,  
 It shone at distance as a ruddy star ;  
 And thitherward the host o’er moor and fell  
 Marched straight : but when behind a sheltering knoll



Hard by, but still concealed, the ranks were drawn,  
 "Make now our Carn," said Ingeel, and the host  
 Defiling past him, cast, each man, his stone  
 All in one heap.

"When this night's work is done,"  
 Said Ingeel, "he who shall return alive  
 Shall take his stone again. Who not returns,  
 His stone shall here remain his monument.  
 And now, before we make the trial of who  
 Returns, and who stays yonder, let us send  
 Scout Milscoth—for he bears the boast of sight  
 And far-off hearing far above us all—  
 To spy the house and bring us speedy word  
 Of all he sees and hears, outside and in :  
 So shall we judge how best to win the same."

Forth went the spy : they waited by their Carn,  
 Till, gliding as a shadow, he returned :  
 And round him, as he came, they drew a ring,  
 Round him and Ingeel and Don Dessa's sons,  
 And round their destined stones of memory.

"What sawest thou outward?"

"Outward of the house

"I saw, drawn up at every guarded door,  
 Full seventeen chariots ; and, between the spokes,  
 Spying, I saw, to rings of iron tied,  
 At end and side wall, thrice a hundred steeds  
 Groom'd sleek, ear-active, eating corn and hay."

"What means this concourse, think'st thou, Ferragon?"

"I know not if it be not that a host  
 Resorting, it may be, to games or fair  
 At Tara or at Taltin, rest to-night  
 In the great guest-house. 'Twill be heavier cost  
 Of blows and blood to win it than it seem'd."

"A guest-house, whether many within or few,  
 Is as the travellers' temple, and esteemed  
 In every civil land a sanctuary.  
 'Twere woe to sack the inn," said Lomna Druth.  
 "Lomna," said Ingeel, "when we swore our oaths  
 We made not reservation of the inn :  
 And, for their numbers, fear not, Ferragon ;  
 The more, the more the spoil. Say on, and tell  
 What heard'st thou?"

"Through the open doors I heard

"A hum as of a crowd of feasting men.  
 Princely the murmur, as when voices strong  
 Of far-heard captains on the front of war  
 Sink low and sweet in company of queens."

"What think'st thou, Ferragon?"

"The gentlest speech

"Within doors gives the loudest cheer afield.  
 Methinks to spoil this house will try our strength."  
 "And it shall try it : and our strength shall bear  
 That and worse trial. Say, what sawest thou next  
 Within the house? Begin from the right hand."  
 "To rightward of the great door in the midst  
 A bench I saw : ten warriors sat thereon.  
 The captain of the ten was thus. His brow



"Thick and high arching o'er a gray clear eye :  
 "A face long-oval, broader-boned above :  
 "A man whose look bespoke adventure past  
 "And days of danger welcome yet to come,  
 "Though sadden'd somewhat, haply by remorse  
 "For blood ill-spilt or broken vows or both.  
 "His mantle green, his brooch and sword-hilt gold."  
 "What captain this, conceiv'st thou, Ferragon ?"  
 "I know him ; verily a man of might ;  
 "A man of name renown'd in field and hall ;  
 "Cormac Condlongas, long the banish'd son  
 "Of Conor son of Nessa. When his sire  
 "Through love of Deirdre broke his guarantees  
 "Pledged to his step-sire, Fergus son of Roy,  
 "For Usnach's sons' safe-conduct, Cormac, he,  
 "Through love of Fergus and through stronger love  
 "Of kingly-plighted honour undefiled,  
 "Abjured his father's councils and his court,  
 "And in the hostile halls of western Meave  
 "Spent many a year of heart-corroding care,  
 "And many a man of Ulster, many a man  
 "Of his own kin, in alien service, slew.  
 "If he be there, methinks to-night's assault  
 "Will leave the stones of some here unremoved."  
 Said Ingeel, "I shall know him, when I see  
 "That pale remorseful visage by and by,  
 "And that same brooch and sword-hilt shall be mine.  
 "What of the nine ?"  
 "The nine he sat among  
 "Were men of steadfast looks, that at his word,

"So seemed it me, would stay not to enquire  
 "Whose kindred were they he might bid them slay."  
 "Knowest thou, oh friend, the serviceable nine ?"  
 "I know them also," answered Ferragon.  
 "Of them 'tis said they never slew a man  
 "For evil deed, and never spared a man  
 "For good deed ; but, as ordered, duteous, slew  
 "Or slew not. Shun that nine, unless your heads  
 "Be cased in casquets made of adamant ;  
 "Else shall the corpse of many a valiant man  
 "Now present, on Da-Derga's threshold lie."  
 "Nine for his nine !" said Ingeel. "Think not thou  
 "By tongue-drawn dangers and deterrent phrase  
 "Exaggerate, to shake my settled soul  
 "From that which is my right. Say on : what next ?"  
 "A bench of three : thick-hair'd, and equal-long  
 "The hair on poll and brow. Black cloaks they wore,  
 "Black their sword-sheaths, their hafted lances black ;  
 "Fair men, withal, themselves, and ruddy-brown."  
 "Who these, oh Ferragon ?" "I know not, I,  
 "Unless, it may be, these be of the Picts  
 "Exiled from Alba, who in Conor's house  
 "Have shelter ; and, if these indeed be they,  
 "Three better out of Alba never came  
 "Or sturdier to withstand the brunt of blows."  
 "Blows they shall have," said Ingeel ; "and their home,  
 "Rid of their presence well, shall not again



"Have need to doom them to a new exile.  
 "What further sawest thou?"

"On the bench beside  
 "I saw three slender, three face-shaven men,  
 "Robed in red mantles and with caps of red.  
 "No swords had they, nor bore they spear or shield,  
 "But each man on his knee a bagpipe held  
 "With jewelled chanter flashing as he moved,  
 "And mouth-piece ready to supply the wind."  
 "What pipers these?"

"These pipers of a truth  
 "If so it be that I mistake them not,  
 "Appear not often in men's halls of glee :  
 "Men of the *Sidhs* they are ; and I have heard  
 "When strife fell out in Tara Luachra's hall  
 "Around Cuchullin and the butchering bands  
 "Of treacherous Maeve and Ailill, they were there."  
 "To-night their pipes shall play us to our ships  
 "With strains of triumph ; or their fingers' ends  
 "Shall never close the stops of music more,"  
 So Ingcel ; but again said Ferragon,  
 "Men of the *Sidhs* they are : to strike at them  
 "Is striking at a shadow. If 'tis they,  
 "Shun this assault ; for I have also heard  
 "At the first tuning of these elvish pipes  
 "Nor crow nor cormorant round all the coasts  
 "But hastens to partake the flesh of men."

"Flesh ye shall have, of Ingcel's enemies,  
 "All fowl that hither flap the wing to-night !

"And music too at table, as it seems.  
 "What further sawest thou?"

"On a broader bench  
 "Three vast-proportioned warriors, by whose side  
 "The slender pipers showed as small as wrens.  
 "In their first greyness they ; grey-dark their robes,  
 "Grey-dark their swords enormous, of an edge  
 "To slice the hair on water. He who sits  
 "The midmost of the three, grasps with both hands  
 "A spear of fifty rivets, and so sways  
 "And swings the weapon as a man might think  
 "The very thing had life, and struggled strong  
 "To dash itself at breasts of enemies :  
 "A cauldron at his feet, big as the vat  
 "Of a king's kitchen ; in that vat a pool,  
 "Hideous to look upon, of liquor black :  
 "Therein he dips and cools the blade by times."

"Resolve us who be these three, Ferragon."

"Not hard to tell ; though hard, perchance, to hear  
 "For those who listen, and who now must know  
 "What foes their fortune dooms them cope withal,  
 "If this assault be given while these be here.  
 "These three are Sencha son of Olioll,  
 "Called 'Half-the-battle' by admiring men ;  
 "Duftach, for fierceness named the Addercop ;  
 "And Govnan son of Luigneach ; and the spear  
 "In hands of Duftach is the famous '*lann*'  
 "Of Keltar son of Utechar, which erst



"A wizard of the Tuath De Danaan brought  
 "To battle at Moy Tury, and there lost :  
 "Found after. And these motions of the spear,  
 "And sudden sallies hard to be restrained,  
 "Affect it, oft as blood of enemies  
 "Is ripe for spilling ; and a cauldron then  
 "Full of witch-brewage needs must be at hand,  
 "To quench it, when the homicidal act  
 "Is by its blade expected ; quench it not,  
 "It blazes up, even in the holder's hand,  
 "And through the holder, and the door-planks through,  
 "Flies forth to sate itself in massacre.  
 "Ours is the massacre it now would make :  
 "Our blood it maddens for : sirs, have a care  
 "How ye assault where champions such as these  
 "Armed with the *lann* of Keltar, wait within."  
 "I have a certain blade," said Ingcel, "here ;  
 "Steel'd by Smith Wayland in a Lochlann cave,  
 "Whose temper has not failed me ; and I mean  
 "To cut the foul head off this Addercop,  
 "And snap his gadding spear across my knee.  
 "Go on, and say what more thou sawest within."  
 "A single warrior on a separate bench  
 "I saw. Methinks no man was ever born  
 "So stately-built, so perfect of his limbs,  
 "So hero-like as he. Fair-haired he is  
 "And yellow-bearded, with an eye of blue.  
 "He sits apart and wears a wistful look,  
 "As if he missed some friend's companionship."  
 Then Ferragon, not waiting question, cried,

"Gods ! all the foremost, all the valiantest  
 "Of Erin's champions, gathered in one place  
 "For our destruction, are assembled here !  
 "That man is Conall Carnach ; and the friend  
 "He looks for vainly with a wistful eye  
 "Is great Cuchullin : he no more shall share  
 "The upper bench with Conall ; since the tomb  
 "Holds him, by hand of Conall well avenged.  
 "The foremost this, the mightiest champion this  
 "Left of the Red Branch, since Cuchullin's fall.  
 "Look you, as thick as fragments are of ice  
 "When one night's frost is crackled underfoot,  
 "As thick as autumn leaves, as blades of grass,  
 "Shall the lopp'd members and the cloven half-heads  
 "Of them that hear me, be, by break of day,  
 "Before Da-Derga's doors, if this assault  
 "Be given, while Conall Carnach waits within !"  
 "Pity to slay that man," said Lomna Druth.  
 "That is the man who, matched at fords of Clane,  
 "With maimed Mesgedra, though no third was near,  
 "Tied up his own right hand, to fight him fair.  
 "A man both mild and valiant, frank and wise,  
 "A friend of men of music and of song,  
 "Loved of all women : were there only one  
 "Such hero in the house, for that one's sake  
 "Forego this slaughter !"  
 "Lomna," Ingcel said,  
 "Not without reason do men call thee fool ;  
 "And, Ferragon, think not that fear of man  
 "The bravest ever born on Irish soil



" Shall make its shameful entrance in the breast  
 " Of one of all who hear us. Spy, say on,  
 " What further sawest thou ?"

" Three brave youths I saw ;

" Three brothers, as I judge. Their mantles wide  
 " Were all of Syrian silk ; and needle-work  
 " Of gold on every hem. With ivory combs  
 " They smoothed the shining ridges of their hair  
 " That spread and rippled to their shoulder-tips,  
 " And moved with every motion of their brows.  
 " A slender, tender boy beside them slept,  
 " His head in one attendant's lap, his feet  
 " In lap of other one ; and, couched beside,  
 " A hound I saw, and heard him ' Ossar ' called."  
 " Whose be these Syrian silks shall soon be mine,  
 " Oh Ferragon ? and wherefore weep'st thou, say ?"  
 " Alas, too well I know them ; and I weep  
 " To think that where they are, he must be near  
 " Their father, Conary, himself, the king :  
 " And woe it is that he whose infant lips  
 " Suck'd the same breast as ours, should now be there !"

" What, Conary, the arch-king of the realm  
 " Of Erin here ? Say, sawest thou there a king ?"

" I know not if a king ; but one I saw  
 " Seated apart : before his couch there hung  
 " A silver brodered curtain : grey he was,  
 " Of aspect mild, benevolent, composed.  
 " A cloak he wore of colour like the haze  
 " Of a May morning when the sun shines warm  
 " On dewy meads and fresh-ploughed tillage land,

" Variously beautiful, with border broad  
 " Of golden woof that glittered to his knee  
 " A stream of light. Before him on the floor  
 " A juggler played his feats : nine balls he had,  
 " And flung them upward, eight in air at once,  
 " And one in hand : like swarm of summer bees  
 " They danced and circled, till his eye met mine ;  
 " Then he could catch no more ; but down they fell  
 " And rolled upon the floor. ' An evil eye  
 " ' Has seen me,' said the juggler ; and the child  
 " Who slept beside, awoke, and cried aloud,  
 " ' Ossar ! good dog, hie forth and chase the thieves !'  
 " Then judged I longer to remain were ill,  
 " But, ere I left, discharged a rapid glance  
 " Around the house, beholding many a band  
 " Of able guardsmen corsleted and helm'd,  
 " Of captains, carriers, farriers, charioteers,  
 " Horseboys and laqueys, all in order set,  
 " All good men of their hands, and weapon'd well."

Said Ferragon, " If my advice were given,  
 " 'Twould be to leave this onset unessayed."

" Pity to slay this king," said Lomna Druth :  
 " Since he has reigned there has not fallen a year  
 " Of dearth, or plague, or murrain on the land :  
 " The dew has never left the blade of grass  
 " One day of Conary's time, before the noon ;  
 " Nor harsh wind ruffled hair upon the side  
 " Of grazing beast. Since he began his reign



"From mid-spring to mid-autumn cloud nor storm  
 "Has dimm'd the daily-shining, bounteous sun ;  
 "But each good year has seen its harvests three,  
 "Of blade, of ear, of fruit, apple and nut.  
 "Peace until now in all his realm has reigned,  
 "And terror of just laws kept men secure.  
 "What though, by love constrained, in passion's hour,  
 "I joined my fortunes to the desperate fates  
 "Of hapless kinsmen, I repent it now,  
 "And wish that rigorous law had had its course  
 "Sooner than this good king should now be slain."

"Not spoken like a brother," Ingcel said,  
 "Nor one who feels for brothers by the side  
 "Of a grey father butchered, as I feel."

"'Twas blind chance-medley, and we know them not,  
 "For kin of thine," said Ferragon ; "but he,  
 "This king, is kin of ours ; and that thou knowest  
 "With seasonable warning : it were woe  
 "To slay him."

"Woe it were, perchance, to thee ;  
 "To me, 'twere joy to slay both him and them ;  
 "'Twere blood for blood, and what my soul desires.  
 "My father was a king : my brethren seven  
 "Were princely nurtured. Think'st thou I for them  
 "Feel not compassion ? nourish not desire  
 "Of vengeance ? No. I stand upon the oaths  
 "Ye swore me ; I demand my spoil for spoil,  
 "My blood for blood."

"'Tis just," said Fergobar,  
 "We promised and will make the bargain good."

"Yet take the spoil we own to be thy right  
 "Elsewhere," said Ferragon ; "not here nor now.  
 "We gave thee license, and we grant it still,  
 "To take a plunder : look around and choose  
 "What trading port, what dealers' burgh ye will,  
 "We give it, and will help you to the gain."

"We gave thee licence," Lomna said,—“and I  
 "Grieve that we gave it, yea, or took the like,—  
 "To take a plunder ; but we gave thee not  
 "Licence to take the life, the soul itself  
 "Of our whole nation, as you now would do.  
 "For, slay our reverend sages of the law,  
 "Slay him who puts the law they teach in act ;  
 "Slay our sweet poets, and our sacred bards,  
 "Who keep the continuity of time  
 "By fame perpetual of renowned deeds ;  
 "Slay our experienced captains who prepare  
 "The youth for martial manhood, and the charge  
 "Of public freedom, as befits a state  
 "Self-governed, self-sufficing, self-contained ;  
 "Slay all that minister our loftier life,  
 "Now by this evil chance assembled here,  
 "You leave us but the carcass of a state,  
 "A rabble ripe to rot, and yield the land  
 "To foreign masters and perpetual shame."



Said Ingcel, "This night's plunder is my own,  
 "And paid for. I shall take it here and now.  
 "I heed not Lomna's airy rhetoric ;  
 "But this I say, and mark it, Ferragon :  
 "Let him who would turn craven, if he will,  
 "Take up his stone and go : and take withal  
 "Contempt of valiant men."

Said Lomna Druth,

"He is no craven, Ingcel; nor am I.  
 "His heart misgives him, not because he fears  
 "To match himself in manly feat of arms  
 "With any champion, but because he fears  
 "To do an impious act, as I too fear."

"I own it true," said Ferragon, "my heart  
 "Is full of anguish and remorseful love  
 "Towards him, my sovereign, who did never wrong.  
 "Save in not meting justice to the full,  
 "Against these violators of his law,  
 "Who now repay his clemency with death."

"Call it not clemency," said Fergobar :  
 "He drove us naked from ancestral homes  
 "To herd with outlaws and with desperate men."

"Outlaws we are ; and so far desperate,"  
 Said Ingcel, "that we mean to sack this house,  
 "And for the very reason that he says,  
 "Because the richest jewels, both of men  
 "And gold, the land affords, are gathered there."

Then Lomna from his mantle took the brooch,  
 And said "Oh Ingcel, this and whatso else  
 "Of other plunder fallen to my share  
 "Lies in the ships, I offer. Take it all,  
 "But leave this house unsack'd."

Said Ferragon,

"Take also all my share ; but spare the king."

But Ingcel roughly pushed the brooch away,  
 And said "Have done. The onset shall be given."

"The onset shall be given, unless the earth  
 "Open and swallow us!" said Fergobar.

"The onset shall be given, unless the heavens  
 "Fall solid on us!" answered Ger and Gel.

"The onset shall be given!" replied they all.

Then Lomna,—laying his brooch upon the heap,—  
 "Who first returns—but I shall not return—  
 "To take his stone again, take also this ;  
 "And, for the rest of what my sword has gained,  
 "Share it among you. I forgive you all,  
 "And bid you all farewell ; for nothing now  
 "Remains for me but death : " and with the word  
 He struck his dagger in his heart, and fell.

"Kings, lords, and men of war," said Ferragon,  
 "Comrades till now, the man whose body lies  
 "Before us, though we used to call him fool  
 "Because his heart was softer and his speech



"More delicate than ours, I now esteem  
 "Both wise and brave, and noble in his death.  
 "He spoke me truly, for he knew my heart  
 "Unspoken, when he said 'twas not through fear  
 "Of death I spoke dissuading; but through fear  
 "Of conscience: but your hearts I better knew  
 "Leaving unspoken what was in my own;  
 "For well indeed I knew how vain it were  
 "To talk of pity, love, or tenderness  
 "To bloody-minded and to desperate men.  
 "Therefore I told you, and I told you true,  
 "What loss to reckon of your wretched lives,  
 "Entering this dragons' den; but did not tell  
 "The horror and the anguish sharp as death  
 "In my own bosom entering as I knew  
 "The pictured presence of each faithful friend,  
 "And of that sire revered, ye now consign  
 "To massacre and bloody butchery.  
 "And that 'twas love that swayed me, and not fear,  
 "Take this for proof:" and drew and slew himself.  
 "Comrades and valiant partners," Ingcel cried,  
 "Stand not nor pause to wonder or lament  
 "These scrupulous companions; rest them well!  
 "But set your spirits to achieve the end  
 "That brought us hither. Now that they are gone  
 "And nothing hinders, are we all agreed  
 "To give this onset bravely and at once?"

"I speak for all," said Fergobar. "Agreed!  
 "Ready we are and willing, and I myself,

"Having my proper vows of vengeance,  
 "Will lead you, and be foremost of you all."

They raised the shout of onset: from his seat  
 Leaped Cecht, leaped Cormac, Conall Carnach leaped,  
 And Duftach from the cauldron drew his spear;  
 But Conary with countenance serene  
 Sat on unmoved. "We are enough," he said,  
 "To hold the house, though thrice our number came;  
 "And little think they, whoso'er they are,  
 "(Grant, gracious ones of Heaven, it be not they!)  
 "That such a welcome waits them at the hands  
 "Of Erin's choicest champions. Door-keepers,  
 "Stand to your posts, and strike who enters down!"

The shout came louder, and at every door  
 At once all round the house, the shock began  
 Of charging hosts and battery of blows;  
 And through the door that fronted Conary's seat  
 A man burst headlong, reeling, full of wounds,  
 But dropped midway, smote by the club of Cecht.

"What, thou? oh Fergobar!" cried Conary;  
 "Say, ere thou diest, that thou art alone—  
 "That Ferragon and Lomna whom I love  
 "Are not among you."

"King," said Fergobar,  
 "I die without the vengeance that I vowed.  
 "Thou never lovedst me: but the love thou gavest  
 "My hapless brothers, well have they returned,



"And both lie outside, slain by their own hands  
 "Rather than join in this just cause with me."

"The gods between us judge," said Conary.  
 "Cast not his body forth. I loved him once,  
 "And burial he shall have, when, by and by,  
 "These comrades of his desperate attempt  
 "Are chased away."

But swiftly answered Cecht,  
 "King, they bring fire without: and, see, the stream  
 "Runs dry before our feet, damm'd off above."  
 "Then, truly, lords," said Conary, "we may deign  
 "To put our swords to much unworthy use.  
 "Cormac Condlongas, take a troop with thee,  
 "And chase them from the house; and, strangers, ye  
 "Who rode before me without licence asked,  
 "I see ye be musicians; take your pipes  
 "And sound a royal pibroch, one of you,  
 "Before the chief."

"Yea, mighty king," said one,  
 "The strain I play ye shall remember long,"  
 And put the mouthpiece to his lips. At once—  
 It seemed as earth and sky were sound alone,  
 And every sound a maddening battle-call,  
 So spread desire of fight through breast and brain,  
 And every arm to feat of combat strung.  
 Forth went the sallying hosts: the hosts within  
 Heard the enlarging tumult from their doors  
 Roll outward; and the clash and clamour heard  
 Of falling foes before; and, over it,

The yelling pibroch; but, anon, the din  
 Grew distant and more distant; and they heard  
 Instead, at every door new onset loud,  
 And cry of "Fire!" "Bring fire!"

"Beloves us make

"A champion-circuit of the house at large,"  
 Said Conary. "Thou, Duftach, who, I see,  
 "Can'st hardly keep the weapon in thy hand  
 "From flying on these caitiffs of itself,  
 "Lead thou, and take two cohorts of the guard,  
 "And let another piper play you on."  
 "I fear them, these red pipers," said the boy.  
 "Peace, little Ferflath, thou art but a child,"  
 Said Duftach. "Come, companions (—patience, spear!—)  
 "Blow up the pibroch; warriors, follow me!"

And forth they went, and with them rushed amain  
 Senchad and Govnan and the thick-hair'd three  
 Of Pictland with a shout; and all who heard  
 Deemed that the spear of Keltar shouted too  
 The loudest and the fiercest of them all.  
 So issued Duftach's band: the hosts within  
 Heard the commotion and the hurtling rout  
 Half round the house, and heard the mingling scream  
 Of pipes and death-cries far into the night;  
 But distant and more distant grew the din,  
 And Duftach came not back: but thronging back  
 Came the assailants, and at every door  
 Joined simultaneous battle once again.  
 Then Conall Carnach, who, at door and door,



Swift as a shuttle from a weaver's hand,  
Divided help, cried,

"King, our friends are lost

"Unless another sally succour them!"

"Take then thy troop," said Conary; "and thou

"Red-capp'd companion, see thou play a strain

"So loud our comrades straying in the dark

"May hear, and join you."

"Evil pipes are theirs.

"Trust not these pipers. I am but a child,"

Said Ferflath; "but I know they are not men

"Of mankind, and will pipe you all to harm."

"Peace, little prince," said Conall. "Trust in me:

"I shall but make one circuit of the house,

"And presently be with thee; come, my men,

"Give me the *Brierin Conaill*, and my spear,

"And sound Cuchullin's onset for the breach."

And issuing, as a jet of smoke and flame

Bursts from a fresh-replenished furnace-mouth,

He and his cohort sallied: they within

Heard the concussion and the spreading shock

Through thick opposing legions overthrown,

As, under hatches, men on shipboard hear

The dashing and the tumbling waves without,

Half round the house; no more: clamour and scream

Grew fainter in the distance; and the hosts

Gazed on each other with misgiving eyes,

And reckoned who were left: alack, but few!

"Gods! can it be," said Conary, "that my chiefs

"Desert me in this peril!"

"King," said Cecht,

"Escape who will, we here desert thee not."

"Oh, never will I think that Conall fled,"

Said Ferflath. "He is brave and kind and true,

"And promised me he would return again.

"It is these wicked sprites of fairy-land

"Who have beguiled the chiefs away from us."

"Alack," the Druid cried; "he speaks the truth:

"He has the seer's insight which the gods

"Vouchsafe to eyes of childhood. We are lost;

"And for thy fault, oh Conary, the gods

"Have given us over to the spirits who dwell

"Beneath the earth."

"Deserted I may be,

"Not yet disheartened, nor debased in soul,"

Said Conary. "My sons are with me still,

"And thou, my faithful sidesman, and you all

"Companions and partakers of my days

"Of glory, and of power munificent.

"I pray the Gods forgiveness if in aught,

"Weighty or trifling, I have done amiss;

"But here I stand, and will defend my life,

"Let come against me power of earth or hell,

"All but the gods themselves the righteous ones,

"Whom I revere."

"My king," said Cecht, "the knaves

"Swarm thick as gnats at every door again,

"Behoves us make a circuit, for ourselves,



"Around the house ; for so our fortune stands  
 "That we have left us nothing else to choose  
 "But, out of doors, to beat them off, or burn  
 "Within doors : for they fire the house anew."

Then uprose kingly Conary himself  
 And put his helmet on his sacred head,  
 And took his good sharp weapon in his hand,  
 And braced himself for battle long disused.  
 Uprose his three good sons, and doff'd their cloaks  
 Of Syrian purple, and assumed their arms  
 Courageously and princely, and uprose  
 Huge Cecht at left-hand of the king, and held  
 His buckler broad in front. From every side,  
 Thinn'd though they were, guardsman and charioteer,  
 Steward and butler, cupbearer and groom,  
 Thronged into martial file, and forth they went  
 Right valiantly and royally. The band  
 They left behind them, drawing freer breath,—  
 As sheltering shepherds in a cave who hear  
 The rattle and the crash of circling thunder,—  
 Heard the king's onset and his hearty cheer,  
 The tumult, and the sounding strokes of Cecht,  
 Three times go round the house, and every time  
 Through overthrow of falling enemies,  
 And all exulted in the kindling hope  
 Of victory and rescue, till again  
 The sallying host returned : all hot they were ;  
 And Conary in the doorway entering last  
 Exclaimed, "A drink, a drink !" and cast himself  
 Panting upon his couch.

"Ye cupbearers,"

Cried Cecht, "be nimble : fetch the king a drink :  
 "Well has he earned this thirst." The cupbearers  
 Ran hither, thither ; every vat they tried,  
 And every vessel—timber, silver, gold,—  
 But drink was nowhere found, nor wine nor ale  
 Nor water. "All has gone to quench the fire.  
 "There is not left of liquor in the house  
 "One drop ; nor runs there water, since the stream  
 "Was damm'd and turned aside by Ingeel's men,  
 "Nearer than Tiprad-Casra ; and the way  
 "Thither is long and rugged, and the foe  
 "Swarms thick between."

"Who now among you here  
 "Will issue forth, and fetch your king a drink ?"  
 Said Cecht. One answered,

"Wherefore not thyself ?"  
 "My place is here," said Cecht, "by my king's side :  
 "His sidesman I."

"Good papa Cecht, a drink,  
 "A drink, or I am sped !" cried Conary.

"Nay then," said Cecht, "it never shall be said  
 "My royal master craved a drink in vain,  
 "And water in a well, and life in me.  
 "Swear ye to stand around him while ye live  
 "And I with but this goblet in one hand,  
 "And this good weapon in the other, will forth  
 "And fetch him drink ;—alone, or, say, with whom ?"



None answered but the little Ferflath ; he  
 Cried, "Take me with thee, papa Cecht, take me!"  
 Then Cecht took up the boy and set him high  
 On his left shoulder with the golden cup  
 Of Conary in his hand ; he raised his shield  
 High up for the protection of the child,  
 And, forth the great door, as a loosened rock  
 (Fly ye, foes all, fly ye before the face  
 Of Cecht, the battle-sidesman of the king !)  
 That from a hill side shoots into a brake,  
 Went through and through them with a hunter's bound ;  
 And with another, and another, reached  
 The outer rim of darkness, past their ken.  
 Then down he set the lad, and hand in hand,  
 They ran together till they reached the well  
 And filled the cup.

"My little son, stay here,  
 Said Cecht, "and I will carry, if I may,  
 "His drink to Conary."

"Oh, papa Cecht,  
 "Leave me not here," said Ferflath ; "I shall run  
 "Beside thee, and shall follow in the lane,  
 "Thou'lt make me through them."

"Come then," answered Cecht,  
 "Bear thou the cup, and see it spill not : come !"

But ere they ran a spear-throw, Ferflath cried  
 "Ah me, I've stumbled, and the water's spilt."

"Alas," said Cecht. "re-fill, and let me bear."

But ere they ran another spear-throw, Cecht  
 Cried "Woe is me ; this ground is all too rough  
 "For hope that, running, we shall ever effect  
 "Our errand ; and the time is deadly short."

Again they filled the cup, and through the dawn  
 Slow breaking, with impatient careful steps  
 Held back their course, Cecht in his troubled mind  
 Revolving how the child might bear his charge  
 Behind him, when *his* turn should come for use  
 Of both his hands to clear and keep that lane ;  
 When, in the faint light of the growing dawn,  
 Casting his eyes to seaward, lo, the fleet  
 Of Ingcel had set sail ; and, gazing next  
 Up the dim slope before him, on the ridge  
 Between him and Da-Derga's mansion, saw  
 Rise into view a chariot-cavalcade  
 And Conall Carnach in the foremost car.  
 Behind him Cormac son of Conor came  
 And Duftach bearing now a drooping spear,  
 At head of all their sallying armament.  
 Wild, pale, and shame-faced were the looks of all,  
 As men who doubted did they dream or wake,  
 Or were they honest, to be judged, or base.  
 "Cecht, we are late," said Conall, "we and thou.  
 "He needs no more of drink who rides within."

"Is the king here ?"

"'Tis here that was the king."



"We found him smothered under heaps of slain  
"In middle floor."

"Thou, Ferflath, take the cup  
"And hold it to thy father's lips," said Cecht.

The child approached the cup; the dying king  
Felt the soft touch and smiled, and drew a sigh;  
And, as they raised him in the chariot, died.

"A gentle and a generous king is gone,"  
Said Cecht, and wept. "I take to witness all  
"Here present, that I did not leave his side  
"But by his own command. But how came ye,  
"Choice men and champions of the warlike North,  
"Tutors of old and samplers to our youth  
"In loyalty and duty, how came ye  
"To leave your lawful king alone to die?"

"Cecht," answered Conall, "and thou, Ferflath, know,—  
"For these be things concern both old and young—  
"We live not of ourselves. The heavenly Gods  
"Who give to every man his share of life  
"Here in this sphere of objects visible  
"And things prehensible by hands of men,  
"Though good and just they are, are not themselves  
"The only unseen beings of the world.  
"Spirits there are around us in the air  
"And elvish creatures of the earth, now seen,  
"Now vanishing from sight; and we of these  
"(But whether with, or whether without the will

"Of the just Gods I know not,) have to-night  
"By strong enchantments and prevailing spells,—  
"Though mean the agents and contemptible,—  
"Been fooled and baffled in a darkling maze  
"And kept abroad despite our better selves,  
"From succour of our king. We were enough  
"To have brushed them off as flies: and while we made  
"Our sallies through them, bursting from the doors,  
"We quelled them flat: but when these wicked sprites,—  
"For now I know, men of the *Sidhs* they were—  
"Who played their pipes before us, led us on  
"Into the outer margin of the night,  
"No man amongst us all could stay himself,  
"Or keep from following; and they kept us there,  
"As men who walk asleep, in drowsy trance  
"Listening a sweet pernicious melody,  
"And following after in an idle round  
"Till all was finished, and the plunderers gone.  
"Haply they hear me, and the words I speak  
"May bring their malice also upon me  
"As late it fell on Conary. Yet, now  
"The spell is off me, and I see the sun,  
"By all my nation's swearing-Gods I swear  
"I do defy them; and appeal to you  
"Beings of goodness perfect, and to Thee  
"Great unknown Being who hadst made them all,  
"Take ye compassion on the race of men;  
"And, for this slavery of *gaysh* and *sidh*  
"Send down some emanation of yourselves



"To rule and comfort us! And I have heard  
 "There come the tidings yet may make us glad  
 "Of such a one new born, or soon to be.  
 "Now, mount beside me, that with solemn rites  
 "We give the king, at Tara, burial."

## DEIRDRE.

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE *Aidedh* or Tragical Fate of the Sons of Usnach, in the various forms in which it has been handed down to us, is one of the best known of all the old Irish bardic stories. Besides prose translations, by O'Flanagan in the Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society, and by O'Curry in the *Atlantis*, it has furnished MacPherson with the theme of his *Darthula*; and has recently been made the subject of a fine romantic poem, also entitled "*Deirdre*," by Dr. Robert Joyce. Therefore, it is hardly necessary to premise that this piece, though grounded on the same original, does not affect to be, in any sense, a reproduction of it. It might, without impropriety, be called a Monodrame; because, though the actors are more than one, the action is unbroken, and the principal figures remain in sight throughout, moving in a progressive scene, which extends from Glen Etive in the Western Highlands of Scotland to the House of the Red Branch at Emania, the old residence of the provincial kings of Ulster. The remains of Emania still exist near Armagh ("Lays of the Western Gael," p. 235). The name only of the Red Branch survives in the adjoining town-land of Creeveroe; but local tradition points out some earthworks there as the site of the King's Stables. The *Aidedh*, or—as I believe I might, with philological sanction, call it—the *Edda* of Clan-Usnach is one of the cyclic tales leading up to the great epic of the *Tain-bo-Cuailgne*, which, in order of time, should come between it and "Conary." Those to whom the poems of the Conorian cycle may begin to possess interest enough to induce a regard to their mutual dependence and illustration of one another, will obtain their relative bearings by taking them in the following order:—

The Twins of Macha (*ante*, p. 48).  
 The Naming of Cuchullin (*ante*, p. 51).  
 The Abdication of Fergus Mac Roy ("Lays," p. 27).  
 Mesgedra (*ante*, p. 32).  
 Deirdre (*here*).  
 [Place of the Tain].  
 Conary (*ante*, p. 61).  
 The Healing of Conall Carnach ("Lays," p. 36).  
 The Tain-Quest ("Lays," p. 6).



## DEIRDRE.

## ACTORS.

NAISI SON OF USNACH, a Refugee from the Court of Conor, King of Ulster.

AINLÉ

ARDAN

} Brothers of Naisi, in exile with him.

FERGUS MAC ROY, Ex-King of Ulster.

BUINO BORB

ILLAN FINN

} Sons of Fergus.

BARACH, a Brother of the Red Branch.

CORMAC, Son of Conor.

PURSUIVANT.

DEIRDRE, Wife of Naisi.

LÉVARCAM, her Nurse.

TIME—First century. SCENE—Glen Etive in Scotland to Emania in Ulster.

## DEIRDRE.

SCENE OPENS AT GLEN ETIVE, IN SCOTLAND.

*Deirdre, Naisi.*

DEIRDRE.

Thou'rt sad.

NAISI.

Not sad.

DEIRDRE.

Say not thou art not sad,

Else I, more sad, shall say thou lov'st me not.

NAISI.

I love thee, Deirdre; ever: only thee.

DEIRDRE.

Whence, then, that naughty knitting of the brow  
And turning of the eye away from mine?

NAISI.

Not wholly sadness; but, I own, at times,  
My mind is fretted with impatience  
Of longer exile in these Alban wilds



DEIRDRE.

And, wretched me! I am the cause of it.

NAISI.

Think not I would reproach thee. Were't to do  
Again, again I'd do it; and defy  
Conor's worst malice. Justly he may rage  
Losing his destined jewel, which to wear,  
I glory; though but few its splendour see.

DEIRDRE.

Enough for me the wearer. Were the world  
Peopled by but us two, I were content.

NAISI.

Not so with me. Love makes the woman's life  
Within-doors and without; but, out of doors,  
Action and glory make the life of man.  
Here I have room for neither: here there's room  
Only for solitudes interminable,  
For desert vastness and vacuity.  
I see yon wave that never felt a keel  
Since first it rose, break white along the beach  
So far beneath my feet, I hear it not.  
The winds that whistle by me through the grass  
Bring never sound of life but 'tis a beast  
Or bird that sends it; save, perchance, at times  
My brothers' or my house-knave's hunting-cry  
May stir the silence to a moment's life.  
I am impatient to consort again

With men, my equals: once again to speak  
My thoughts in council, or in public court,  
Swaying the judgments of attending throngs,  
And charming minds to unanimity  
With manly, warm-persuasive argument;  
Or in the front ranks of embattled hosts  
To interchange the casts of flying spears  
'Mong bloody Mars's high competitors,  
With poets to record us standing by.  
Nay, at the fair, the games, the feasting-board,  
To look on friendly faces and to grasp  
The trusted hands of other men, were joy  
Worth even daring the worst; and back again  
Taking my customed place on Eman Green,  
Though there he sat, and all his hosts were there.

DEIRDRE.

Alas, infatuate, who would shelter me  
When thou, fast bound, shouldst see me dragged away  
To death it might be, or to worse than death?

NAISI.

Renowned Cuchullin never would sit by  
And see thee wronged. Were Conall Carnach there,  
Or his own step-sire, Fergus son of Roy,  
No man should do my Deirdre injury.

DEIRDRE.

Cuchullin do I trust, and Conall too;  
But Fergus gave his kingdom for a toy.

NAISI.

For love of Nessa laid he kingship down.  
A lovelier Nessa, for the love of me,  
Spurned the same crown when it was offered her.

DEIRDRE.

Nessa now dead, he haunts the drinking-hall  
More than is seemly in a nobleman.

NAISI.

Hall or hill-side, would we were with him now !

DEIRDRE.

Here we are safe ; keep to our shelter here.  
Here we have both been blest, and yet may be,  
Forgetting Conor, and beyond his reach.

NAISI.

My loving, loyal brothers, too : they left  
Home, pleasure, and renown, to follow me  
In this elopement. I must think of them.  
Are they to waste their bloom of manly youth  
Here in this desert, without hope to wive ?

DEIRDRE.

They ask but to partake their brother's lot ;  
Happy if he be happy. Me indeed  
They love as a true sister. Never yet  
Have I beheld on either gentle face  
Gloom or reproachful look ; though, were it there,  
'Twere not for me to wonder or complain :  
For I, alas ! am she that tempted you

To that rash, rapturous, defiant deed  
That wraps us all in bonds of banishment.  
No, never have they shown themselves to me  
Other than sweet, affectionate, and gay.

NAISI.

Thou would'st not have them lose their joy of life  
To keep us happy ?

DEIRDRE.

Happy in thy love,  
I can but think of that estate alone.  
Love is all-selfish. Love, but thinks of one.  
Its own fulfilment is love's world to love.  
But here comes gentle Ainle from the chase.

NAISI.

Good brother, welcome : what is next afoot ?

AINLE.

We hunt to-morrow in the corrie, sir.

NAISI.

Ay, I have hunted in the corrie oft,  
And there seen buck and doe, but never a man.  
And when I've slain my quarry, I have said,  
"Beast, thou wast happy as compared with me,  
"For thou wast of a good town citizen,  
"And mingledst antlers bravely with thy peers."

AINLE.

What ails our brother ?



*Deirdre.*

DEIRDRE.

'Tis a fond regret,  
Bred of the solitary life we lead.

AINLE.

Not solitary. I were well content,  
In such good company as still we have,  
To spend my days a-hunting ; and at eve  
Sing to the harp, or listen to old tales  
Of love, and lovers' perils, hopes and joys ;  
While Ardan and Lord Naisi seated by,  
Beguiled the swift time in their chess-play-wars.

DEIRDRE.

Lo, Ardan comes in haste. He wears the look  
Of one who presently has news to tell.  
No news were now good news. I pray the Gods  
We're not found out !

ARDAN.

A sail, I've seen a sail.  
Unless the sea-fog cheats my sight, a sail.

DEIRDRE.

A flight of sea birds, haply ; not a sail.

NAISI.

Nay, wherefore, not a sail ? Were't Conor himself  
And all his ships, I'd hail the face of man.  
Let's forth and see it, whatsoe'er it be.

*Deirdre.*

AINLE.

Hark, heard ye not a cry ?

DEIRDRE.

No. Keep within,  
'Tis the fox barking, haply ; not a cry.

ARDAN.

'Tis a man's cry ; a hunter's hallo, hark !

NAISI.

I know the call ; an Ulster man is he  
Who gives it. If my old and glorious friend  
Fergus, the son of Roy, yet walks the earth,  
It is his hunting-call. Ho, Fergus, ho !

DEIRDRE.

Vain my contention. Here, alas, he comes.

FERGUS.

Found in good hour. Hail, sons of Usnach, hail !

NAISI.

Comest thou, Fergus, enemy or friend ?

FERGUS.

Friend as of old ; to well loved friends I come,  
And welcome may the message be I bring.

NAISI.

From whom and what the message ? Sends he peace ?

FERGUS.

Conor sends peace and pardon, I myself  
Your warrantor and convoy.

NAISI.

Favouring Gods !

What spell has wrought him to forgive my wrong ?

DEIRDRE.

We did him not a wrong. The wrong was his.  
He kept me as a dainty for his use,  
Locked in a prison-garden shamefully ;  
Beast, who might well have been my grandfather !  
Till Naisi gave me freedom, and I gave  
Naisi the love was only mine to give.

FERGUS.

What, daughter : thou shalt come as well as he,  
And have him for thyself, be it wrong or right.  
'Tis fixed and warranted ; and here's the hand  
Will make it good. Naisi, the case stood thus :  
My politic, learned step-son found his Maev  
A partner somewhat over-arrogant,  
And broke the marriage. Maev, imperial jade,  
Has wed with Ailill, Tinne's son, and reigns  
With him o'er the Connacians : in his halls  
Of battlemented Croghan nursing hate  
'Gainst now-detested Conor ; and from wilds  
Of Irrus drawing Gamanradian braves  
And fierce Damnonian swordsmen, sends them forth

'Gainst the Ultonian borders, host on host,  
Pressing the Red Branch with perpetual war.  
We've fought them, and we've chased them oft, but still  
They issue from their heathy western hives  
As thick as summer midges, and our swords  
Are dulled with slaughter, and our arms are tired.  
We've missed thee, Naisi, and thy brothers here ;  
There's the plain truth. We missed and needed you.  
And we,—Cuchullin, Conall, and myself,—  
Avowed it in full council. And, said I,  
“ Sir, give me liberty to carry them  
“ Thy royal message, with assurance firm  
“ Of pardon and safe-conduct both for her  
“ And him, and them, and all their company,  
“ And, ere this present rounding moon come full,  
“ I'll fetch the troop of truants back again.”  
“ Ah, ha,” said he, “ thou knowest then where they hide ?”  
“ Well do I know,” I answered, “ but not tell,  
“ Till first in open court thou'st said me yea.”

NAISI.

What said he then to that ?

FERGUS.

He sat awhile,

Revolving in his mind I know not what,  
And something whispered Barach sitting by.  
“ Say yea,” said Conall. Said Cuchullin, “ King,  
“ Say yea, and we will be their sureties.”  
“ Yea, then,” said Conor, and the thing was done ;



And here am I ; and there my galley rides  
Will land us safely this same afternoon  
At Bon-a-Margy, upon Irish ground.

NAISI.

Oh noble Fergus, let me kiss thy hand !

AINLE.

Our dear befriender and deliverer !

ARDAN.

In whose safe-conduct we do all confide.

FERGUS.

What say'st thou, daughter Deirdre, shall we go ?

DEIRDRE.

Ah me, among you all, what voice have I ?  
Ye leap like fishes to the baited hook,  
And like young salmons will be drawn to land.  
I knew 'twas Fergus ere I saw his face,  
And knew he came a messenger of ill ;  
For I am daughter of a seër sire,  
And prescience of disaster came on me  
With first announcement of his sail on shore.

NAISI.

Say not disaster ; Fergus brings a boon ;  
Even when, unpardoned, I'd have risked return,  
Our pardon, on condition of return.

DEIRDRE.

Ay, by a time is now impossible,  
Under the very wording of the boon.  
The moon, then rounding, rises full to-night :  
How then return before the moon be full ?

NAISI.

'Tis our return, and placing of ourselves  
At Conor's orders, not the hour precise  
Of our return, that will entitle us  
To that which he has promised in return.

ARDAN.

And, say that time were of the bargain part,  
Enough if by to-night we reach his realm,  
Returning, so, in jurisdiction.

AINLE.

Lord Fergus here stands as in Conor's place,  
And here we yield us freely to his will  
To stay or to return as he commands.

DEIRDRE.

After to-night his function's at an end,  
And he no longer Conor's deputy.

FERGUS.

Why, Deirdre, thou'rt chief justice of the court !  
Had I but had thee by me on the bench,  
I ne'er had ceased to rule for lack of law.

But lay these puzzling niceties aside ;  
 You journey back on my protection  
 And warrant of safe-conduct, all of you.

DEIRDRE.

What warrant did false Conor ever allow  
 To stand between him and his own desires ?  
 Thou deem'dst his sureties good when in thy place  
 Thou sett'st him for a year, and thought he'd yield  
 The loaned dominion when the time was out.  
 Thou hadst the sighs of Nessa and his oath  
 For surety then ; but when the day was come  
 To yield thee back the sceptre, robe, and crown,  
 He king'd it still ; and rates thee, ever since,  
 His valiant subject and good stepfather.

NAISI.

Injurious Deirdre, thou art beautiful,  
 But hast a bitter and unguarded tongue.  
 Fergus allowed young Conor to retain  
 The sovereignty he lent him, not because  
 Conor demanded, but himself so will'd.  
 For who would fill a royal judgment-seat  
 Must study close the law's intricacies,  
 And leave delights untasted, Fergus loves  
 Better than balancing litigious scales,  
 And hearing false oaths bear the jargon out  
 Of wrangling pleaders. Nature him has framed  
 For love, for friendship, and for poesy ;  
 Nor rules there king in Erin, not himself,

Th' arch-king of Tara, Conary, glorious son  
 Of Ederscal, would venture, or have power,  
 To violate safe-conduct given by him.

FERGUS.

Daughter, thou art the wife of my good friend ;  
 I therefore hear not any word ill-timed,  
 If such were spoken. But beseech you, come.  
 The tide now serves us, and the wind sits fair.  
 Array ye quick, and let us seek the shore.

NAISI.

Bring forth my chess-board and its furniture,  
 My battle-tackle, and my hunting-gear,  
 For glad I am, and full resolved to go.

DEIRDRE.

Call me nurse Levarcam, and bring my harp.  
 Sirs, I am ready. Yes, I knew thy cry,  
 Fergus, for, I remember, once you rode  
 To hunt with Nessa close beneath my bower :  
 And I could tell you still what robes ye wore,  
 And what the several names ye called your hounds.  
 'Twas then I heard it, and I know it still,  
 But feigned I knew it not ; and to no end.  
 Yes, from that turret on my garden wall  
 I oft have viewed the Brethren of the Branch,  
 And learned their cries of combat and of chase ;  
 And there I oft saw him my eyes preferred,  
 As my heart prizes still above all men.  
 And where he goes, I go along with him.



FERGUS.

See here our galley. Send us forth a plank.  
 Hold by my hand. Deirdre, I swear to you,  
 My heart is lighter now you are on board ;  
 For a good ending shall our journey have,  
 And I am sure thou'lt thank me for it yet.  
 Cast off! Up sail! She feels the wind. We fly.

NAISI.

The hills race past us. See, we leave the lake  
 And breast the sea. There Jura bares her paps  
 Amid her cloudy sucklings, nurse of storms.  
 We steer betwixt her and the mainland here,  
 For outside lies the whirlpool in whose gulf  
 Breacan of old and all his ships went down.  
 Dance, sparkling billows, as my spirits dance!  
 Mine now were perfect joy were thou but gay.

DEIRDRE.

Give me my harp, and let me sing a song ;  
 And, nurse, undo the fastenings of my hair ;  
 For I would mingle tresses with the wind  
 From Etive side, where happy days were mine.

I.

Harp, take my bosom's burthen on thy string,  
 And, turning it to sad, sweet melody,  
 Waste and disperse it on the careless air.

II.

Air, take the harp-string's burthen on thy breast,  
 And, softly thrilling soulward through the sense,  
 Bring my love's heart again in tune with mine.

III.

Bless'd were the hours when, heart in tune with heart,  
 My love and I desired no happier home  
 Than Etive's airy glades and lonely shore.

IV.

Alba, farewell! Farewell, fair Etive bank!  
 Sun kiss thee; moon caress thee; dewy stars  
 Refresh thee long, dear scene of quiet days!

FERGUS.

'Tis loved companionship makes nature fair;  
 And scenes as fair as Etive wait thee yet.  
 Thou soon shalt have that company thou wouldst,  
 And choice of Ulad to enjoy it in:  
 For, see, the capes of Erin heave in sight,  
 Fair Foreland yonder on his eastern watch,  
 And there Dunseverick. Lo, the warning fire  
 That gives the signal we are seen from shore.

NAISI.

What concourse this that waits us on the beach?

FERGUS.

Methinks 'tis Barach's ensign I discern,  
 Our well-loved, valiant Brother of the Branch.

Yea, it is he : and yonder, by my life,  
Two not unworthy, hopeful candidates  
For brotherly admittance, my own sons,  
Dark Buino Borb, and Illan Finn the Fair.

BARACH.

Welcome to Fergus. Push the plank to shore.  
Descend, fair daughter. Sons of Usnach, hail !

FERGUS.

My noble brother Barach ! Nay, great sir,  
'Tis not for thee to be our cup-bearer.

BARACH.

To better use could none commend the cup,  
Nor goblet offer from a riper cask.

FERGUS.

Wine, this, the king of the world might drink and die.

BARACH.

Drink, and long live. And, noble Naisi, thou  
Drink too.

NAISI.

This cup to health and thanks : no more.

BARACH.

What, Fergus, thou must sup with me to-night ?

FERGUS.

I pray thee, Barach, hold me as excused.  
We journey hastily, as thou may'st see.  
Fetch forth the chariots. Have the posts been warned ?

BUINO.

Relays are ready, and the inns prepared.

FERGUS.

Mount, daughter Deirdre. Fill the cup again,  
And fair farewells and healths to all of you.

BARACH.

Fergus, thou wilt not pass a brother's door ?  
We wait thee at Dunseverick. Let thy wards  
Take the protection of thy own good sons.  
They'll see them safe. To that end Buino Borb  
Is this same morning from Emania come,  
And here finds Illan by a lucky chance  
Journeying thither with his company.  
Thy honor shall not suffer in their hands.

DEIRDRE.

Fergus, thou'rt pledged to us. Say nay to him.

BARACH.

He shall not say me nay. My board is spread ;  
The choicest Brethren of the Branch are there,  
And much would marvel should his place be void.  
His sons are well-sufficient in his room.  
What though ye journeyed to the Branch alone,  
None dare molest you, such a sheltering shield  
Is the pledged word of Fergus ; and they know,  
From post to post, 'tis on his guarantee



And pass-word that ye travel ; since the king  
On his assurances has pardoned you.

DEIRDRE.

Fergus, I put thee under bond and vow,  
Pledged but to-day, that thou desert us not.

BARACH.

Fergus, I put thee under bond and vow,  
Pledged when we made thee Brother of the Branch,  
Thou pass not further till thou sup with me.

FERGUS.

I pray thee, Barach, to forbear thy suit.

BARACH.

No : neither will I that forbear, nor bear  
This public scorn that Deirdre puts on me.

FERGUS.

Naisi, what answer wouldst thou I should make ?  
I cannot halve myself : but these, my sons,  
Are part of me, and will not shame the rest.  
They cannot fill my place at Barach's board,  
But, at your side, for convoy, well they can.

NAISI.

Where vow conflicts with vow, first-vow'd prevails.  
Therefore, though Barach's be a churlish choice,  
Made against women and way-faring men,  
I judge him best entitled. Sup with him.  
Buino, I have not known thee until now,

But deem thy father's son must needs be true,  
Courteous, and valiant. Illan I have known  
Since childhood, and in saying that, say all  
That commendation vouches in a man.  
What then, young nobles—are ye ready, say,  
To be our convoy in your father's room,  
From hence to Eman gate, and thenceforward  
Till Fergus do rejoin us ?

BUINO AND ILLAN.

Ready, sir.

NAISI.

I ask no oaths. I read in eyes of both  
Bright honor's pledge ; and so commit myself,  
My wife, my brethren, and my serving train  
Into your keeping. Mount, and let us ride.

FERGUS.

Sons, play the part of men, and show me well  
In your presentment of me at the court.  
Thou, Buino, have my spear : and, Illan, thou  
Take this good sword of mine. There spreads not shield  
Before the breast of champion of the Branch  
But it will pierce it ; Conor's own except :  
For it was forged by smiths of fairyland,  
And all the voices of the floods and seas,  
When loudest raised, are welded in its rim.  
But in this errand that I send you on  
No need will either have of sword or spear.

NAISI.

Mount, Deirdre. Sons of Fergus, ride beside ;  
Set forward cheerly : son of Roy, adieu !

DEIRDRE.

'Tis hard to fancy fraud behind an eye  
So open blue. Ride near me, Illan Finn ;  
And, as our chariot glides along the mead,  
Tell me the mountains and the streams we pass,  
The lakes, the woods, and mansions by the way.  
What hills be these around us ?

ILLAN.

That, Knocklayd

To rightward, girded with his chalky belt ;  
Lurgeden yonder, smoothly-back'd to us,  
But browed like frowning giant toward the sea ;  
And now to leftward, haunted by the fays,  
Glenariff's birchen bowers and clear cascade.

DEIRDRE.

And in the distance, glittering to the west ?

ILLAN.

Our silver river, that ; the humming Bann.

DEIRDRE.

Why humming ?

ILLAN.

'Tis a pretty country tale—  
How one who played the pipes to please his love,

Was, by a jealous water-sprite, drawn in :  
And, when the river buzzes through his reeds,  
They say 'tis he that still would pipe to her,  
But that the fairy has his chanter hid,  
And left him but the drone. An idle tale.

DEIRDRE.

Nay, nought is idle that records true love.  
From Neägh's lake, methinks, that river runs ?

ILLAN.

Yea truly.

DEIRDRE.

And they tell another tale  
How that was once dry champaign, do they not ?

ILLAN.

Yes ; 'twas young Liban's task to watch the well,  
And duly close its covering-lid at eve,  
Lest something evil there inhabiting  
Should issue forth : but, on an afternoon,  
Walking with her true lover, with a mind  
That thought of nothing evil, she forgot  
Well and well-lid ; and so the under-sea  
Burst through and drowned the valley : but the Gods,  
Who favour constant lovers, spared their lives ;  
And there, beneath a glassy dome they dwell,  
Still pleased in one another's company.  
The lake lies yonder : we shall see it soon.



DEIRDRE.

Mark how the simple country people deck  
Each natural scene with graceful tales of love,  
While the strong castles and the towns of men  
Are by the poets and historians  
Stuck full of tragedies and woes of war.

ILLAN.

Those are but tales to pass away the time,  
Invented by the fancies of poor swains  
And rustic maidens : but the chroniclers,  
Who note the deeds done in the haunts of men,  
Have oft but wicked actions to record.

DEIRDRE.

And therefore thou ?—

ILLAN.

Would rather, if I might,  
Frequent the open country, and converse  
With shepherds, hunters, and such innocents.

DEIRDRE.

Yet wouldst thou not shun martial deeds of arms ?

ILLAN.

I dare not shun them, did they challenge me,  
For that were base, unmanly cowardice ;  
But I would rather win the smiles I love  
By mild humanity and gentleness.

DEIRDRE.

Thou lovest, then ?

ILLAN.

A peerless maid I love,  
And, for her sake, methinks, love all the world ;  
For all the world's perfections are in her.

DEIRDRE.

Long be thou happy in believing so ;  
Have me in kind regard as I have thee,  
And prythee let thy brother take thy place.  
Dark though he be, as thou art flaxen fair,  
I trust I may esteem him equally.  
Ride near me, Buino : let me talk with thee :  
Say, wherefore, do men call thee Buino Borb ?

BUINO.

A something haughty that they find in me,  
—Or, as I fancy, fancy that they find,—  
Not unbeseeming in the eldest born  
Of him who once wore crown of all we see,  
Led some at first to call me by that name,  
Which now, by oft repeating, clings to me.

DEIRDRE.

Conor's young Cormac and thyself, methinks,  
Are of an age, and, haply, by and by,  
For that same crown may be competitors.

BUINO.

Small were my fear, were there but I and he.

DEIRDRE.

Why hold him, prythee, in that light esteem ?

*Deirdre.*

BUINO.

Because, too nice, and over-scrupulous,  
He weighs his actions in a tedious scale,  
Nor strikes when favouring fortune gives the ball.

And thou?—

DEIRDRE.

BUINO.

I've won already from his sire  
Promise half-ratified of rents and lands,  
Will make me higher in estate than he.  
'Twas not by letting fair occasion slip  
I won that promise, let me promise thee.

DEIRDRE.

How called, the promised principality?

BUINO.

Dalwhinny 'twill be, when the land is mine.

DEIRDRE.

But, ere the gift's complete, behoves thee snatch  
Some fresh occasion to commend thyself?

BUINO.

Which doubtless yet will come.

DEIRDRE.

Turn here thy eyes,

And tell me, Buino, of thy courtesy,  
What do they under yonder aged tree,  
Itself a grove, a leafy temple-court?

*Deirdre.*

BUINO.

That is renown'd Crevilly's sacred ash,  
And they beneath it are its worshippers.  
Small the return their worship's like to bring,  
Made to dead wood and early-dropping leaves.

DEIRDRE.

Thou deemest, then, there is no God in it?

BUINO.

No more than in the fountain or the carn,  
The pillar-circle or the standing stone,  
Where other worshippers perform their rounds.

DEIRDRE.

Nor in the sun, or wind, or elements?

BUINO.

No more.

DEIRDRE.

But thou believest in the Gods,  
Who, whether present under forms of things  
Perceptible to sense, or whether lodged  
Apart in secret chambers of the air,  
Take notice of the impious acts of men  
As murders, treasons, lovers' broken vows?

BUINO.

Sunshine and dew fall equal on the fields  
Of this man and of that: the thunderbolt  
Strikes, indiscriminating, good and bad.



*Deirdre.*

DEIRDRE.

How, then, oblige men to the oaths they swear ?

BUINO.

Each nation has its proper swearing-Gods,  
Whom invoking, if one speak the lie,  
Being found out, he's punishable here.

DEIRDRE.

But there ?

BUINO.

I know not : I was never there,  
Nor ever yet met anyone who was.  
But all these things may be as thou hast said.  
I know not : but allow it possible.

DEIRDRE.

Oh ! yonder see the lake in prospect fair,  
It lies beneath us like a polished shield.  
Ah, me ! methinks, I could imagine it  
Cast down by some despairing deity  
Flying before the unbelief of men.  
There, in the vale below, a river clear  
Runs by a mounded mansion steep and strong.  
Know'st thou the name and story of the place ?

BUINO.

'Tis called Rathmore, and nothing more know I.  
Illan belike has got some old romance,  
Passing with poets for its history.

*Deirdre.*

DEIRDRE.

Illan, what king was he dwelt here of yore ?

ILLAN.

Fergus, the son of Leidé Lithe-o'-limb,  
Ere yet he reigned at Eman, did dwell here.

DEIRDRE.

What, Fergus Wry-mouth ? I have heard of him,  
And how he came by his ill-favoured name,  
And struck his bond-maid, and should pay for it.  
'Tis a fair valley. And 'twas here he lived ?  
Methinks I see him when he rose again  
From combat with the monster, and his face,  
That had that blemish till love wiped it off,  
Serene and ample-featured like a king.

ILLAN.

Not love, but anger, made him fight the beast.

DEIRDRE.

No, no, I will not have it anger. Love  
Prompts every deed heroic. 'Tis the fault  
Of him who did compose the tale at first,  
Not to have shown 'twas love unblemish'd him.  
And so 'tis here we cross Ollarva's fords,  
And, with our wheels still dripping, skirt the lake ?  
No longer shows it like the ample shield  
I pictured it, when gazing from above.  
'Tis now a burnished falchion half-unsheathed  
From cover of the woods and velvet lawns.

Oh ! happy fancy, what a friend art thou,  
 That, with thy unsubstantial imagery,  
 Effacest solidest and hardest things,  
 And mak'st the anxious and o'er-burthened mind  
 Move, for a while forgetful of itself,  
 Amid its thick surrounding obstacles,  
 As easy as a maiden young and gay  
 Moves through the joyous mazes of the dance !  
 Thanks, gracious Illan, for thy fair discourse  
 That has beguiled the way so happily,  
 Till now, when almost nearing to the goal.  
 Buino, thou 'rt from Emania newly come :  
 Say shall we find renowned Conall there ?

BUINO.

A messenger from Leinster late arrived  
 Reports Athairne, primate of the bards,  
 Maltreated of Mesgedra, King of Naas ;  
 And Conall has departed to his aid.

DEIRDRE.

And where Cuchullin ?

BUINO.

At Dundegalga he,  
 Repressing tumult of his borderers there.

DEIRDRE.

How lies Emania ; and Dundegalga how ?

BUINO.

Straight on, Dundegalga : Eman to the right.

DEIRDRE.

My lord, I counsel that we journey on  
 Straight to Cuchullin's mansion.

BUINO.

Surely no.

Our charge is to conduct you to the king.

DEIRDRE.

We are not prisoners, Buino, in thy hands.  
 Naisi, beseech thee, let's not trust ourselves  
 At court of Conor, till our friends be there.

BUINO.

Your friends are here : faith-worthy friends as they.

NAISI.

Let's on to Eman : 'twere a heinous slight  
 Put on these frank and brave young noblemen  
 To doubt their will and full ability  
 For our protection, were protection claimed.  
 But none will call in question or impugn  
 The word of Fergus for our safety pledged.  
 Thy fears are groundless.

DEIRDRE.

Fergus is not here :

Fergus has found occasion not to be  
 Where our occasions do most call for him :  
 Fergus consorts with whispering Barach now :  
 He shifts us on his proxies, young and raw ;



And thou hast heard on what support we lean,  
Trusting the faithless faith of one of them.

NAISI.

Thou wrong'st him, Deirdre.

BUINO.

Yea, she does me wrong.

But not for that will I be false to you.

DEIRDRE.

Yea, not for that wilt thou be false to us.

ILLAN.

We both will spend our lives to see you safe.

DEIRDRE.

Thou wouldst. I well believe it ; but, for him  
To whom the Gods are possibilities,  
May-be's, perchances, I've no trust in him.

NAISI.

Deirdre, forbear. Buino, good cause hast thou  
For thy displeasure ; but it rests with me  
To order our proceeding, not with her.

DEIRDRE.

Oh rash, insensate, weakly-credulous,  
That thinkest all men honest as thyself !

NAISI.

One must be master ; and that one am I ;  
And I must judge this case for all of you.

Man lives by mutual trust. The commonwealth  
Falls into chaos if man trust not man.  
For then all joint endeavours come to nought,  
And each pursues his separate intent,  
Backed by no other labour than his own.  
Which confidence, which bond of social life,  
Is bred in some of just experience,  
Of oaths and terror of the Gods in some,  
But, in the most, of natural honesty  
That God has planted in the breast of man,  
Thereby distinguishing him from the beasts.  
And where I find it, ground it as it may,  
In use, religion, or mere manliness,  
There do I love, revere, and cherish it.  
And since these courteous, brave young gentlemen  
Have taken it on their honor and their truth  
To hold us harmless, though we near the gates  
Of one who bears me great and just ill-will,  
I'll trust them wholly ; nor affront their faith  
With any scrupulous, unhandsome show  
Of base suspicion, diffidence, or fear.  
Drive on to Eman, therefore. Rightward drive.  
It is my will, and I will have it so.

DEIRDRE.

Nurse Levarcam, rememberest thou the time  
We sat together on that hill we see  
There where the sky-line has a streak of gray,  
And snow was on the ground ?

LEVARCAM.

Aye, well indeed

Do I remember, darling ; it was there  
 Thou sawest him first, and said the sifted snow  
 Was hardly fairer.

DEIRDRE.

He has frowned on me  
 Thrice, now, who never frowned on me before.  
 Yet am I prouder to be ruled by him,  
 And, for that noble justice of his mind,  
 Do love him better, were that possible  
 Where love was always best, than e'er before.

LEVARCAM.

My pet, my precious one, we know not yet  
 But that the king may treat us honestly.  
 If to the Red Branch lodging we be sent,  
 Mistrust him : but, elsewhere, set face to face,  
 And other champions of the province by,  
 He durst not venture such a villany  
 As thy dark-omening spirit shudders at.  
 But, see, we near the town. The sun sets red,  
 And turns the low-hung awning of the clouds  
 Into a lowering, crimson canopy.

DEIRDRE.

Blood-red it hangs. I know the augury.  
 But knowledge and forewarning now come late.

NAISI.

We near the palace. See, a steward comes  
 To lead us to our lodging. Sir, precede :  
 We follow. 'Tis the Red Branch, as I see,  
 We are assigned to. Often in this hall  
 Have I been merry, and will be again.  
 Here's supper laid. Beseech you sit ye down,  
 And let's refresh ourselves.

DEIRDRE.

I cannot eat.

NAISI.

Nor I, in truth. I have been somewhat chafed.  
 Give me some wine ; and set the chess-tables.  
 Ardan will play with me, to pass the time,  
 Till haply Conor send us his commands.  
 And, Ainle, thou be umpire of the game.

AINLE.

Before we sit, sir, shall we set the watch ?

NAISI.

No. We are here in charge of trusted friends,  
 And what is needful to be done they'll do.

DEIRDRE.

Nurse, while in this defiant confidence  
 He sits, disdaining fortune, steal thou forth,  
 And, mingling with the concourse in the hall,  
 Observe what Conor does : and fetch me word.



NAISI.

Who's he who at the window there peeps in ?  
 Begone, base fellow, whosoe'er thou art !  
 I love not such espial. Play again.  
 Deirdre, set forth thy harp ; and let the air  
 Be brave and cheerful. We have nought to fear.

DEIRDRE.

I play my best ; though that be ill enough.  
 My heart is heavy at my fingers' ends.

NAISI.

How ! What ! Our spying overseer again !  
 Take that, thou villain, for thy impudence !

DEIRDRE.

What has disturbed my lord ?

NAISI.

A spying knave  
 At yonder window, that, with brutal eyes,  
 Surveyed us as we sat, and took thee in  
 As he'd appraise thy beauties, charm by charm.  
 None here shall pry into our privacy.  
 Lords, think it not in your disparagement,  
 But I would crave to have that casement closed,  
 And, if it please you, let my battle-arms  
 Be placed beside me, ready to my hand.  
 There, Deirdre, see, thy nurse would speak with thee.

LEVARCAM.

My sweet, my darling, I am here again.  
 He means us ill. I've seen and spoke with him.  
 He sat at table with his judges by,  
 And made this question with them, whether we  
 Not rendering ourselves before the full o' the moon,  
 His promise made to Fergus Royson, held ?  
 The judges differed. Half of them affirmed  
 His promise was, in that, conditional,  
 And, the condition failing, it held not.  
 The other half as stiffly did maintain  
 The point of time was nothing to the point,  
 And that, though Fergus might be late a day,  
 The pardon granted us did yet hold good.  
 With these young Cormac, sitting by, agreed,  
 And, to confirm his argument, did swear  
 That, saving still the duty of a son  
 Defending father, were his sire assailed,  
 He never would raise weapon 'gainst poor guests  
 Drawn in to jeopardy of life and limb  
 By plotted covin and duplicity.  
 Whereat—what I had never seen before—  
 Conor, who, ever, was as temperate  
 As his brave step-sire jovial, swallowed down  
 Two mighty cups of wine ; and, spying me,  
 He called me up, and, there before them all,  
 Demanded many things concerning thee,  
 And did thy beauty live upon thee still ?  
 "No," said I ; "she is wrinkled, lean, and old,  
 "And nothing like the Deirdre that she was"

—The Gods forgive me for the loving lie!—  
 But while I spoke, one entering cried, " 'Tis false !  
 " There lives not beauty on the earth's expanse  
 " Fit to compare with her's. I saw her sit,"  
 The insolent eaves-dropper did go on,  
 " A perfect goddess, lovely to behold,  
 " Upon a silken couch : she flung her arms,  
 " No ivory fairer, o'er her golden harp,  
 " And played a merry and delightful air  
 " So sweet, I stood as in an ecstasy ;  
 " When that strong traitor who consorts with her,  
 " Spying me, snatched a chessman from the board  
 " And flung it full at me : see here the wound."  
 With that he showed his cheek besmeared with blood,  
 —I would the just Gods it had been his brains.—  
 And Conor, rising, cried to fetch his arms,  
 And vowed he would avenge his messenger ;  
 Then some cried " treason " ; others that denied.  
 And Cormac called out, " Never better hap  
 " Befall a cranny-haunting, mousing spy ! "  
 Whereat I judged it well to come away,  
 And there I left them wrangling noisily.

DEIRDRE.

It is a crafty pretext for a quarrel ;  
 That quarrel to be pretext for his death,  
 And my deliverance into hands abhorred.

BUINO.

Who here ?

PURSUIVANT.

A messenger from Conor, I.

BUINO.

His will ?

PURSUIVANT.

He wills that thou deliver up  
 Naisi the son of Usnach, who stands charged  
 With wounding to effusion of the blood.

BUINO.

Under safe conduct is Lord Naisi here,  
 And we, as sons and lawful deputies  
 Of his great surety, Fergus son of Roy,  
 Are answerable for him.

PURSUIVANT.

Yield him up.

BUINO.

We will not yield him. There I plant the spear  
 Of Fergus. Pass it, and I strike thee dead.

PURSUIVANT.

Buino, a message for thy private ear.

BUINO.

Deliver it without. I follow thee.

DEIRDRE.

It is the confirmation of the grant  
 That bribes him to betray us.



*Deirdre.*

ILLAN.

Oh, no, no !  
If that were possible, I'd die of shame.

NAISI.

Await him : he'll return.

DEIRDRE.

Oh trustful breast,  
Incapable of comprehending guile,  
As is the goblet of true crystal stone  
To hold the poisoned draught that shivers it,  
Would I could bear thy heart-break, now at hand !

AINLE.

He comes not back. Sir, shall we take our arms ?

NAISI.

What, Illan, wouldst thou that we deem ourselves  
Discharged the duty to rely on thee ?

ILLAN.

Not while I live, and these, my father's men,  
Are here to make the pledge of Fergus good.

NAISI.

The move is with thee, Ardan. Play again.  
Lord Buino will come back to us anon.

DEIRDRE.

Dalwhinny's lord, he never will come back.

*Deirdre.*

NAISI.

I hear one coming.

DEIRDRE.

Oh my heart ! not he.

PURSUIVANT.

In the king's name, yield ye my prisoner up,  
Or Conor's self will fetch him. He's at hand.

ILLAN.

We will not yield him up, to thee or him.

PURSUIVANT.

Thy brother Buino spoke as brave as thou,  
And he has done his homage gratefully,  
And now is lord of lands and seigniories.

NAISI.

We're not betrayed ?

ILLAN.

Oh Naisi, what a word !  
Thou soon shalt see I am not worthy it.

PURSUIVANT.

Illan, I bear a message for thee too.

ILLAN.

Out with it.

PURSUIVANT.

Let me have thy private ear.

ILLAN.

What, tampering villain, wouldst thou bribe me too?  
Up, comrades; thrust the fellow from the door.  
They shall not live who offer Illan shame.

PURSUIVANT.

Assistance, ho, without!

DEIRDRE.

They force the door.

ILLAN.

We'll meet, and drive them to their barracks back.  
Throw the door open! Charge upon the knaves!

LEVARCAM.

Oh ye good heavens, what a man is here  
We counted but an hour ago a boy!  
He darts upon them fiercer than a hawk  
Striking at pigeons. With a swifter whirl  
Than arms of windmills and than grinding wheels  
He makes the red rout through and over them.  
Hah! from his strokes they tumble and rebound  
As shocks that jump upon the threshing floor.  
There's Fergus's true blood! The other one  
Is none of his: there Fergus was played false.  
Oh, well done, Illan! Glorious youth, well done!

DEIRDRE.

'Twas tender of dishonor set aflame  
His soul's unconscious reservoirs of wrath

That, blazing forth, do so transfigure him,  
And of the soft-affection'd, gentle youth  
Make the heroic, formidable man.  
He fires the very moonlight with his blade,  
Flash upon flash.

LEVARCAM.

Oh, hark the dreadful clang!

DEIRDRE.

He fights with Conor. It is Conor's shield  
Screams, clamours, and resounds beneath his blows.  
Speed him, kind Gods! Ah me, who strikes between?

LEVARCAM.

'Tis Cormac to his father's rescue come.  
Alack, young Illan cannot combat both.  
He falls: he's slain: his broken band return.

DEIRDRE.

Leaderless remnant of brave friends, come in.

NAISI.

Now, noble brothers, we may arm ourselves,  
Nor wound protecting pride. Make fast the doors.  
Give me my corselet.

DEIRDRE.

Let me brace it on.

The helmet, Levarcam.



*Deirdre.*

LEVARCAM.

We'll dress our lord  
Most like a royal champion.

DEIRDRE.

Like a god  
We'll send him forth to trample all things base.

NAISI.

Oh dear-loved Deirdre, thy advice was good.  
I had been wiser, had I taken it,  
And all of us, I dread, had safer been.  
Yet thou dost not reproach me.

DEIRDRE.

No reproach  
From lips of Deirdre shalt thou ever hear.  
All that my noble lord has done was right,  
Wise, and magnanimous.

NAISI.

I did my best,  
Though that but ill, for Honor.

DEIRDRE.

I, my best,  
Though that but weak and petulant, for Love :  
And now for Love will do whate'er remains.

NAISI.

Ardan, learn for us what they do without.

*Deirdre.*

ARDAN.

They've summoned fresh battalions. Till these come  
They siege us at a distance.

NAISI.

Then, we strike  
Before their aids come up. Thou'rt ready, dear,  
To share this venture ?

DEIRDRE.

Ready, if near thee.

NAISI.

Ardan and Ainle, to your tender care  
I give my Deirdre. Fence her, right and left,  
With cover of your bodies and your shields.  
I take the front. Our cohort will make head  
For the King's Stables. There at least we'll find  
A shelter we may better hope to hold  
Till Fergus's return ; or, happily,  
Conveyance, and the chance of full escape.

DEIRDRE.

Stay, Levarcam. They will not harm thee. Stay.

LEVARCAM.

Alack, I'm hurt, and stay against my will.

NAISI.

Friends, keep together. Deirdre, thou shalt see  
What Love can do, if Honor were unwise.  
Cast wide the portal. Be the Gods our aid !

## LEVARCAM.

I cannot see their onset. I but hear  
 The hurrying and the clashing. Oh, ye Gods,  
 Shield ye my darling one, or send her death  
 Rather than life with loathing and despair !  
 I saw her, ere she left, prepare a cup ;  
 What, and for what, I guess indeed too well.  
 Would I could give it her, were that to do :  
 'Twere my last service, and would be my best.  
 How dreadful 'tis to hear men dealing death,  
 And not to know who falls and who keeps up !  
 The tumult slackens. We are saved or lost.  
 One side returns victorious. Deirdre comes :  
 But ah, her sidesmen are not those they were !  
 'Tis Cormac leads her ; these are Conor's men  
 That bear the burthens in. Oh, heavy sight !  
 Ardan and Ainle and Lord Naisi dead !

## DEIRDRE.

Ye need not hold me. I am wholly calm.  
 Thanks, gentle Cormac, who hast won for me  
 The boon to see these nobles buried.  
 Give them an honorable sepulture ;  
 And, while ye dig their grave, let me begin  
 My lamentable death-song over them.

## I.

O sons of Usnach, stretched before me, dead,  
 Ye were, in life, Ulidia's chosen three  
 For every gift and grace of manly Nature,  
 For wisdom, valour, courtesy, and song.

## II.

Naisi, my husband, O my slaughtered lord,  
 O pierced by cruel swords that pierced not me,  
 Thou Honor's Sanctuary, thou Tower of Justice,  
 By sacrilegious treason beaten down !—

## III.

Thou wast the one, with counsel of a sage,  
 That kept Ulidia happy-homed in peace,  
 The one, with onsets of a kingly lion,  
 That left Ulidia glory-crowned in war.

## IV.

Thou wast the one, with prudent-generous sway,  
 That kept thy household and thy festive hall,—  
 The one, with mildness and with manly patience,  
 That kept thy wilful helpmate, ordered well.

## V.

Ainle and Ardan, brothers of my heart,  
 O shapely as young salmons, where ye lie,  
 Melodious voices, breaths of youthful ardour  
 In life's high chorus, cold and silent now !—

## VI.

Ye were the two, with fleetness of your feet,  
 That took the bounding creatures of the plain,—  
 The two, with sweetness of your soft addresses,  
 That took the daughters of the land, in thrall.



## VII.

The wolf may now, and now the forest boar,  
Roam free : the hunters from the hill are gone :  
Invasion proudly now may leap the border  
The sons of Usnach stand to guard no more.

## VIII.

Smiles, rest ye now beneath dejected cheeks,  
Sink, maiden blushes, back on burthened hearts ;  
Delight and dalliance in the dust are lying,  
Before the clay-piled margin of the grave.

## IX.

Oh, greedy grave-dug earth, that swallowest  
The strength and loveliness of all that lives,  
Thou shalt not always hide from hopes immortal  
The coldly-hoarded treasures of thy clay !

## X.

A day shall come, the May-day of Mankind,  
When, through thy quickening clods and teeming pores,  
The sunward-mounting, vernal effluences  
Shall rise of buried Loves and Joys re-born.

## XI.

Dig the grave deep, that, undisturbed till then,  
They rest, past reach of mortal hate and fear ;  
Past the knave's malice and the tyrant's anger,  
And past the knowledge of what rests for me.

## XII.

Dig the grave deep. Cast in their arms of war,  
Cast in the collars of their hounds of chase,  
To deck their chamber of expectant slumber,  
And make the mansion wide enough for four.

## CORMAC.

Deirdre, 'tis time that I conduct thee hence.

## DEIRDRE.

Sir, I am, sudden, faint. That cup of wine  
Is still untasted. Pray thee hand it me.  
I would but kiss my nurse and say farewell.  
Now give me this refreshment.

## LEVARCAM.

She'll not thirst  
More in this world ; now well past reach of harm.

## CORMAC.

Ay ; so. 'Twas poisoned. She has freed herself.  
Oh, wretched king, who now canst only hear  
That all for nothing thou hast been forsworn !  
Fair corpse, I'll have thee by thy husband laid.  
Thou art her nurse, and thou shalt see to it.

## LEVARCAM.

Sir, I have heard a shout which I know well.  
'Tis Fergus who approaches. Stay not here.

CORMAC.

To save a father vile and fraudulent  
 I've slain the noblest youth in all the world.  
 For him I fight no more. I fear to face  
 The grief of guileless Fergus whom I love,  
 More even than his wrath. I'll get me hence,  
 And, in the west, will seek a guardsman's pay  
 With Maev and Ailill, till this storm be passed.

FERGUS.

Where are my wards, my wards that I have bailed?  
 Where are my sons who had my wards in charge?  
 Their danger was revealed me ere I sat,  
 And hot upon their track I'm here, to find  
 Confusion, horror, blood, and treachery.  
 Where are my wards, the wards of Fergus, where?

LEVARCAM.

Too blind with passion to perceive them lie  
 Here almost at his feet, he hurries past.  
 Unhappy Fergus, what atrocious pangs  
 Of rage and self-reproach will sting thee through  
 When presently thou shalt have learned it all!  
 Ay, big with bitter knowledge, back he comes.

FERGUS.

Fire, bring me fire! bring ropes and grapple-hooks!  
 I'll pull his proud aspiring palace-roof

Down to the ground and burn it over him.  
 I'll take such vengeance on this traitor king  
 All Erin, shore to shore, shall ring with it,  
 And poets in the ages yet to come  
 Make tales of wonder of it for the world.



## THE GASCON O'DRISCOL:

## A LAY OF THE WESTERN GAEL.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE O'Driscolls have long ceased to be a ruling family in West Cork, where they once bore sway as petty kings of Corca Laidhe, a territory corresponding pretty nearly to the Diocese of Ross. Their power was broken at the battle of Tralee, where "The Gascon" and many of his house fell before the lances of the Anglo-Norman chivalry, A.D. 1235. He was Aulay, fourth son of Domnach Mor, whose pedigree to Ith, uncle of Milesius, may be read at large in the Genealogies of the Corca Laidhe (Miscellany of the Celtic Society, Dublin, 1849), a tract enriched with curious matter by the late Dr. John O'Donovan, and by the present learned Rector of Donoughmore, the Rev. Dr. John Quarry. Not the least curious item in the pedigree is the note which states how young Aulay got his surname, furnishing the foundation for the following ballad:—*Is aire a débhradh in Gasguineach de: a n-gill re fin tucadh h-é do lucht luingi cendaigh a cind a dá bhliadhan déc, agus do bhí thoir no cor cuireadh do fhuairi fhína h-é, cor dearbhadh air beith na fhuil uasail, agus tánic in fin cen uireasbaidh re na lind, agus da h-indlaicedh ar a ais h-é chum a thiri bodhen.* Here observe, that, while no one is more verbose than the Irish Celt in his high-flown bardic compositions, so no one can tell his story in fewer words where the facts have to be recounted by way of chronicle or family history. The form of this ballad is that of a large class of Irish legendary poems devoted to local and personal history under the generic name of *Dinnsenchus*. Pieces of this kind (e.g., "The Twins of Macha," *ante*) begin by proposing the subject as a question to which the answer is *nín* (= *ní innsa*), i.e., "not difficult." Then follows the relation in verse; and the legend winds up with a repetition of the initial words of the first line.

## I.

In old O'Driscol's pedigree,  
 "Mong lords of ports and galleys,  
 "The Gascon" whence? and who was he  
 First bore the surname? tell us.  
 Not difficult the task  
 To answer what you ask.

## II.

The merchants from the Biscay sea  
 To ports of Munster sailing,  
 With wines of Spain and Gascony  
 Supplied carouse unfailing  
 To guests of open door,  
 Of old, at Baltimore.

## III.

Till when against one festal day  
 O'Driscol stock'd his cellars,  
 He found not but of gold to pay  
 In part, the greedy dealers;  
 And, for the surplusage,  
 Gave this good son in pledge.

## IV.

They bore the boy to fair Bayonne,  
 Where vines on hills were growing;  
 And, when the days of grace were gone,  
 And still the debt was owing,  
 The careful merchant's heart  
 Grew hard with angry smart.

## V.

"The wine I sold the Irish knave  
 "Is spent in waste and surfeit;  
 "The pledge for payment that he gave  
 "Remains, a sorry forfeit:—  
 "Bring forth the hostage boy  
 "And set him on employ."

## VI.

"Now, youth, lay by the lettered page,  
 "Leave Spanish pipe and tabor  
 "To happier co-mates of thy age,  
 "And put thy hands to labour.  
 "Ten ridged rows of the vine  
 "To dress and till, be thine."

## VII.

From solar-chamber came the lad;  
 In sooth, a comely creature  
 As e'er made eye of mother glad  
 In well-shaped limb and feature.  
 As 'mid the vines he stepp'd,  
 His cheek burned, and he wept.

## VIII.

"The grief that wrings this pungent tear  
 "Springs not from pride or anger;  
 "Let be the hoe my hunting-spear,  
 "The pruning-knife my hanger:  
 "The work ye will I'll do,  
 "But, deem my kinsmen true.

## IX.

"Be sure, in some unknown resort  
 "Their messengers have tarried;  
 "Some head-wind held their ship in port,  
 "Some tribute-ship miscarried;  
 "Else never would they leave  
 "Their pledge without reprieve.

## X.

"I've seen when, round the banquet board  
 "From stintless-circling beaker  
 "To all the Name our butlers pour'd  
 "The ruby-royal liquor,  
 "And every face was bright  
 "With mirth and life's delight.

## XI.

"And, as the warming wine exhaled  
 "The shows of outward fashion,  
 "Their very hearts I've seen unveil'd  
 "In gay and frank elation;  
 "And not a breast but grew  
 "More trusty, more seen through.

## XII.

"These vineyards grew the grape that gave  
 "My soul that fond assurance;  
 "And if for them I play the slave,  
 "I grudge not the endurance,  
 "Nor stronger mandate want  
 "To tend the truthful plant."

## XIII.

The seniors of the sunny land  
 Beheld him daily toiling,—  
 (Old times they were of instincts bland  
 The pagan heart assoiling)—  
 And this their frequent speech  
 And counsel, each with each:—



## XIV.

" A patient boy, with gentle grace  
 " He bears his yoke of trouble ;  
 " Serenely grave the ample face,  
 " The gesture large and noble,  
 " Erect, or stooping low,  
 " Along the staky row.

## XV.

" Where'er he moves, the serving train,  
 " Accord him their obeisance ;  
 " The very vintagers refrain  
 " Their rude jests in his presence ;  
 " And—what is strange indeed—  
 " His vines their vines exceed.

## XVI.

" The tendrils twine, the leaves expand,  
 " The purpling bunches cluster  
 " To pulpier growth beneath his hand,  
 " As though 'twere formed to foster,  
 " By act of mere caress,  
 " Life, wealth, and joyousness.

## XVII.

" It seems as if a darkling sense  
 " In root and stem were native ;  
 " As if an answering effluence  
 " And virtue vegetative  
 " (Anointed kings own such)  
 " Went outward from his touch

## XVIII.

" Behold, his nation's sages say  
 " A righteous king's intendance  
 " Is seen in fishy-teeming bay  
 " And corn-fields' stook'd abundance,  
 " In udder-weighted cows  
 " And nut-bent hazel boughs.

## XIX.

" These Scots, apart in ocean set  
 " Since first from Shinar turning,  
 " Preserve the simple wisdom yet  
 " Of mankind's early morning,  
 " While God with Adam's race  
 " Still communed, face to face.

## XX.

" Not in the written word alone  
 " He woos and warns the creature ;  
 " His will is still in wonders shown  
 " Though manifesting Nature ;  
 " And Nature here makes plain  
 " This youth was born to reign.

## XXI.

" Ill were it, for a merchant's gains,  
 " To leave, at toil appointed  
 " For horny-handed village swains,  
 " God's designate anointed :  
 " But good for him and us  
 " The act magnanimous.

xxvi.  
And, even as from the harbour mouth  
They northward went careering,  
There passed to windward, steering south,  
O'Driscol's galley bearing,  
From Baltimore, the gold  
Of ransom safe in hold.  
in (h)old.



## PAUL VERONESE.

## THREE SONNETS.

*(To the Memory of the Marquis Carlotti.)*

JUNE, 1878.

## I.

Paul, let thy faces from the canvas look  
 Haply less clearly than Pietro's can,  
 Less lively than in tints of Titian,  
 Or him who both the bay-wreath-chaplets took :  
 Yet shalt thou therefore have no harsh rebuke  
 Of me whom, while with eager eyes I ran  
 O'er painted pomps of Brera and Vatican,  
 The first delight thou gavest ne'er forsook.  
 For in thy own Verona, long ago,  
 Before one masterpiece of cool arcades,  
 I made a friend ; and such a friend was rare.—  
 For him, I love thy velvet's glorious show,  
 Thy sheens of silk 'twixt marble balustrades,  
 Thy breathing-space and full translucent air.

## II.

Loved for themselves, too. Oft as I behold,  
 Adown the curtain'd gallery's sumptuous gloom,  
 A separate daylight shining in the room,

There find I still thy groupings manifold  
 Of holy clerks, of nobles grave and bold,  
 Swart slaves, brave gallants, maidens in their bloom,  
 With what of Persian and Ligurian loom  
 May best consort with marble dome and gold :  
 There find thy dog, whose teeth Time's teeth defy  
 To raze the name from less enduring leaves  
 Of loved Canossa : there, in cynic ease,  
 Thy monkey : and beneath the pearly sky  
 See lovely ladies wave their handkerchiefs,  
 And lend sweet looks from airy balconies.

## III.

They err who say this long-withdrawing line  
 Of palace-fronts Palladian, this brocade  
 From looms of Genoa, this gold-inlaid  
 Resplendent plate of Milan, that combine  
 To spread soft lustre through the grand design,  
 Show but in fond factitious masquerade  
 The actual feast by leper Simon made  
 For that great Guest, of old, in Palestine.  
 Christ walks amongst us still ; at liberal table  
 Scorns not to sit : no sorrowing Magdalene  
 But of these dear feet kindly gets her kiss  
 Now, even as then ; and thou, be honorable,  
 Who, by the might of thy majestic scene,  
 Bringest down that age and minglest it with this.

## TO A LADY

WITH EDWARD DOWDEN'S POEMS.

Henrietta, in whose face  
We a soul's experience trace  
Through the working lines of grace ;

Here is one in words who tries  
To express the ecstasies  
That inform your cheeks and eyes ;

Springing ecstasies, controll'd,  
Lest the world too much behold ;  
As befits one of the fold.

I would think, if I might guess,  
That this holy rapturousness  
Which both he and you express,

He with words, and you with looks,  
Drawing, as with shepherd-crooks,  
Thirsty souls to living brooks ;

Though from one same fountain sent,  
And with one benign intent,  
Comes through channels different.

God is one. His gifts of grace  
Flow to man through countless ways ;  
So the greater be His praise.

## THE LITTLE MAIDEN.

1878.

## I.

Little maiden, in the rain,  
On the mountain road,  
Never bloom of healthier grain  
On a wet cheek glowed ;  
Never active little feet  
Hastened footsteps more discreet.

## II.

Plain it is it was not play  
Brought thee out of doors,  
This tempestuous autumn day,  
O'er the windy moors :  
Something thou hast had to do,  
Deemed of trust and moment too.

## III.

Now, the errand duly done,  
Home thou hiest fast,  
Through the flying gleams of sun,  
Through the laden blast,  
With the light of purpose high  
Kindling bravely in thine eye.



## IV.

Oh, 'twas fearful at the top,  
 While it rained and blew ;—  
 Till the dark cloud lifted up  
 And the sun beamed through,  
 Showing all the country's side  
 Spread beneath thee, grand and wide.

## V.

Wond'rous wide the world extends !  
 Thought'st thou, as thy glance  
 Travelled to the welkin's ends  
 O'er the bright expanse,  
 Stubble fields and browning trees,  
 Spires, and foreign parishes !

## VI.

Other children's homes are there  
 Sheltered from the storm ;  
 Others' mothers' arms prepare  
 Claspings welcomes warm ;  
 Others' fathers' fields are made  
 Fertile by the plough and spade :

## VII.

Men and horses on the land,  
 Maidens in the byre ;  
 Boys and girls, a merry band,  
 Round the evening fire :—  
 Such the world, for thee, and, lo,  
 There it lay in glorious show.

## VIII.

Round thee, in the glittering rays  
 By the rain-drops shed,  
 Shone the blossom'd furze a-blaze,  
 Shone the fern-brake red ;  
 Rough but lovely, as thy own  
 Life's ideal, little one !

## IX.

Then a glowing thought there came,  
 Guess I not aright ?—  
 That the furze's yellow flame  
 Could not shine so bright  
 Nor the fern-leaves spread so fair  
 If the good God were not there.

## X.

Rightly to that thought I trace  
 All the courage high  
 Flushing through thy wetted face,  
 Mounting in thine eye,  
 Now the cloud and driving rain  
 Close around thy path again.

## XI.

Could these purblind eyes of mine,  
 Past the curtain, see  
 Things unseen and things divine,  
 Sure it seems to me  
 I would see an Angel glide  
 Down the mountain by thy side.

## NATURE'S TEACHINGS.

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FROM the Latin of Marbod, Bishop of Rheims (twelfth century). For the original leonine hexameters, *Moribus esse feris, prohibet me gratia veris*, see Archbishop Trench's learned and beautiful volume, "Sacred Latin Poetry," Introduction, p. 47. It was a favourite notion of the author of *Cosmos* that the love of scenic beauty and the capacity of deriving a moral enjoyment from its contemplation were sentiments unknown to the ancients, and that we must ascribe their existence among us to the æsthetic influences of Christianity and the poetry of the cloister. If this were so, these verses of Marbodius, which breathe a genuine sweetness and delicacy hard to reproduce, might be cited as a brilliant illustration; but the fact appears to have been otherwise. See "Congal," p. 233.

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The graciousness of spring  
 Forbids my murmuring :  
 The world, in tune designed,  
 Doth harmonize my mind :  
 Nature, for this my state,  
 I thee congratulate.

Flowers myriad-hued abound,  
 Sweet grasses clothe the ground ;  
 We see the green tree put  
 Its leaf forth, and its fruit ;  
 See how the garden grows  
 Illustrious with the rose.

He who beholds such fair  
 And bright things everywhere,  
 And turns not from his ways  
 Morose, to joy and praise,  
 In his own bosom hath  
 A root of strife and wrath.

Who loves and lauds not these  
 Mundane amenities,  
 Thee, God, doth vilipend,  
 Whose praises without end  
 Spring, Summer, Autumn yield  
 Frost, Snow, and Flowers a-field.

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## DEAR WILDE.

AN ELEGY.

1876.

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

THE late Sir William Wilde will be best known by the noble collection of Celtic antiquities which he was the chief instrument in assembling, and has the sole credit of having so far catalogued, at the Royal Irish Academy House. The Government Department of Science and Art has now, after long resistance by the Academy, acquired the property in this collection for future exhibition in a State Museum, where it is to be hoped that a bust of Wilde will be placed near that of its other founder, Petrie. Wilde had a sweet poetic sentiment, largely influenced by the pastoral scenery and pursuits of his native county, Roscommon.

Dear Wilde, the deeps close o'er thee ; and no more  
Greet we or mingle on the hither shore,  
Where other footsteps now must print the sand,  
And other waiters by the margin stand.  
Gone ; and, alas ! too late it wrings my breast,  
The word unspoken, and the hand unpress'd ;  
Yet will affection follow, and believe  
The sentient spirit may the thought receive,  
Though neither eye to eye the soul impart  
Nor answering hand confess the unburthen'd heart.  
Gone ; and alone rests for me that I strive  
In song sincere to keep thy name alive,

Though nothing needing of the aids of rhyme,  
While they who knew thee tread the ways of time,  
And cherish, ere their race be also run,  
Their memories of many a kindness done—  
Of the quick look that caught the unspoken need  
And back returned the hand's benignant deed  
In help and healing, or with ardour high  
Infused the might of patriot-sympathy.  
And when we all have followed, and the last  
Who loved thee living shall have also passed,—  
This crumbling castle, from its basement swerved,  
Thy pious under-pinning skill preserved ;  
That carven porch from ruined heaps anew  
Dug out and dedicate by thee to view  
Of wond'ring modern men who stand amazed,  
To think their Irish fathers ever raised  
Works worthy such a care ; this sculptured cross  
Thou gathered'st piecemeal, every knop and boss  
And dragon-twisted symbol, side by side  
Laid, and to holy teachings re-applied ;  
Those noble jewels of the days gone by  
The goldsmith's and the penman's art supply,  
With rarest products of progressive man  
Since civil life in Erin first began,  
Described by thee, where'er their destined place,  
Whether, still sharing Academic grace  
And Cyclopædic union, they retain  
Their portion in the high clear-aired domain  
Of arc and sine and critic-judgment heard



*Dear Wilde.*

Alternate with the searcher's symbol-word,  
 Historic aids, to little arts unknown,  
 Heirlooms of all our Past, and all our own,  
 Or whether, at despotic power's command,  
 They bow their beauty to a stranger's hand,  
 Mid various wares in halls remote display'd  
 To swell a programme or promote a trade ;—  
 These all will speak thee : and, dear Wilde, when these,  
 In course of time, by swift or slow degrees,  
 Are also perished from the world, and gone,  
 The green grass of Roscommon will grow on ;  
 And, though our several works of hand and pen  
 Our names and memories be forgotten then,  
 Oft as the cattle in the dewy ray  
 Of tender morn, by Tusk or Castlereau,  
 Crop the sweet herbage, or adown the vale  
 The ruddy milkmaid bears her evening pail ;  
 Oft as the youth to meet his fair one flies  
 At labour's close, where sheltering hawthorns rise  
 By Suck's smooth margin ; or the merry round  
 Of dancers foot it to the planxty's sound,  
 And some warm heart, matched with a mind serene,  
 Shall drink its full refreshment from the scene,  
 With thanks to God whose bounty brings to pass  
 That maids their sweethearts, and that kine their grass  
 Find by His care provided, and there rise  
 Soft and sweet thoughts for all beneath the skies ;—  
 Then, though unknown, thy spirit shall partake  
 Refreshment, too, for old communion's sake.

*To Mr. Butt.*

## TO MR. BUTT.

*(On the result of the Ballot at the Royal Irish Academy, 13th November, 1876.)*

WHILE the Academy, refusing to submit itself to the control of the Department of Science and Art, even at the peril of losing its annual vote, had laid its case before the House of Commons by Petition, and stood in its extremest need of support from parliamentary and public opinion, Mr. Butt, whose membership ought to have been deemed an honor and advantage at any time, was proposed as a member, and rejected.

Isaac, the generous heart conceives no ill  
 From frank repulse. The marriage-suit denied  
 Turns love to hatred only where 'tis Pride,  
 Not true Love, woos : Love holds her lovely still,  
 Let sharp Remembrance bring what stings it will ;  
 And when he sees her children by her side,  
 For her, for them, for him with them allied,  
 Blessings and prayers the manly breast will fill.  
 Lovely she stands, though she has said thee nay,  
 And sad expectance clothes her brow in gloom,  
 While guardians tyrannous withhold her dower ;  
 Now show the soul's magnanimous assay,  
 And when her day in that High Court shall come,  
 Plead in your old love's cause with double power.



## NOTE TO CONARY.

A DISCOVERY lately made near Dublin may serve to fix the site of Da Derga's mansion. It appears by distinct indications in the text to have been seated on the River Dodder, and at the particular point on that stream where it was crossed by the high road leading from Dublin to the district called Cualann. Cualann was that part of the now County of Wicklow corresponding to the southern half-barony of Rathdown. Two king's highways are mentioned in records of the reign of Henry III., as leading from Dublin in that direction; one near the sea-shore, and the other by Donnybrook. Booterstown is regarded as preserving the name of the "bothar" or main line of road towards which they appear to have converged. The author of the *Togail* represents the light from the mansion of Da Derga as visible from the galleys, and the sounds from the shore as audible at it. These *indicia* would correspond with a site either at Ball's Bridge or at Donnybrook; but would not be applicable to the site at *Bohernabreena*, near the source of the Dodder, among mountains, and in a direction declining from the direct route to Cualann. The choice, then, seems to be narrowed between Ball's Bridge and the bridge at Donnybrook; and a recent discovery of a very remarkable kind made within 100 yards of the latter, and close to the old line of highway leading to Merrion, seems to incline the balance definitely in its favour. In preparing the land there for building purposes, the workmen laid bare a deposit of skeletons—men, women, and children,—most of them decapitated, and all bearing marks of violent death. An iron sword and spear-head of antique pattern were found with the remains. It was known that the battle of Baggot-Rath had been fought in that neighbourhood in Cromwell's time, and, at first, the remains were popularly supposed to be those of the slain in that engagement. But the evidences of a massacre were too plain to admit of that supposition. Then, if a massacre, the next question that presented itself was—Were these the remains of the citizens of Dublin slain on "Black Monday," A.D. 1209, while enjoying their Easter holiday in Cullenswood, by the Wicklow Irishry? and this theory was not without its attractions, until Dr. William Frazer, M.R.I.A., laid a selection of the remains, together with the weapons, on the table of the Royal Irish Academy, and demonstrated to the satisfaction of the members who heard him, that not only were the weapons, but the remains also, of a people of very early type. The form of the sword having been accepted as Danish, the idea of a Danish massacre of native Irish, some time previous to the Conquest, was generally adopted. The form of the sword, however, is really as Irish as Danish, as may be judged by the swords in the hands of the sculptured figures on the great cross at Clonmacnoise; and, with the light of the story of the massacre of Conary and his household by the sons of Don Dessá and Ingeel Cæch, to direct us, it may not improbably be surmised that in these remains we have the very corporal forms and weapons of the actors in that tragedy.

