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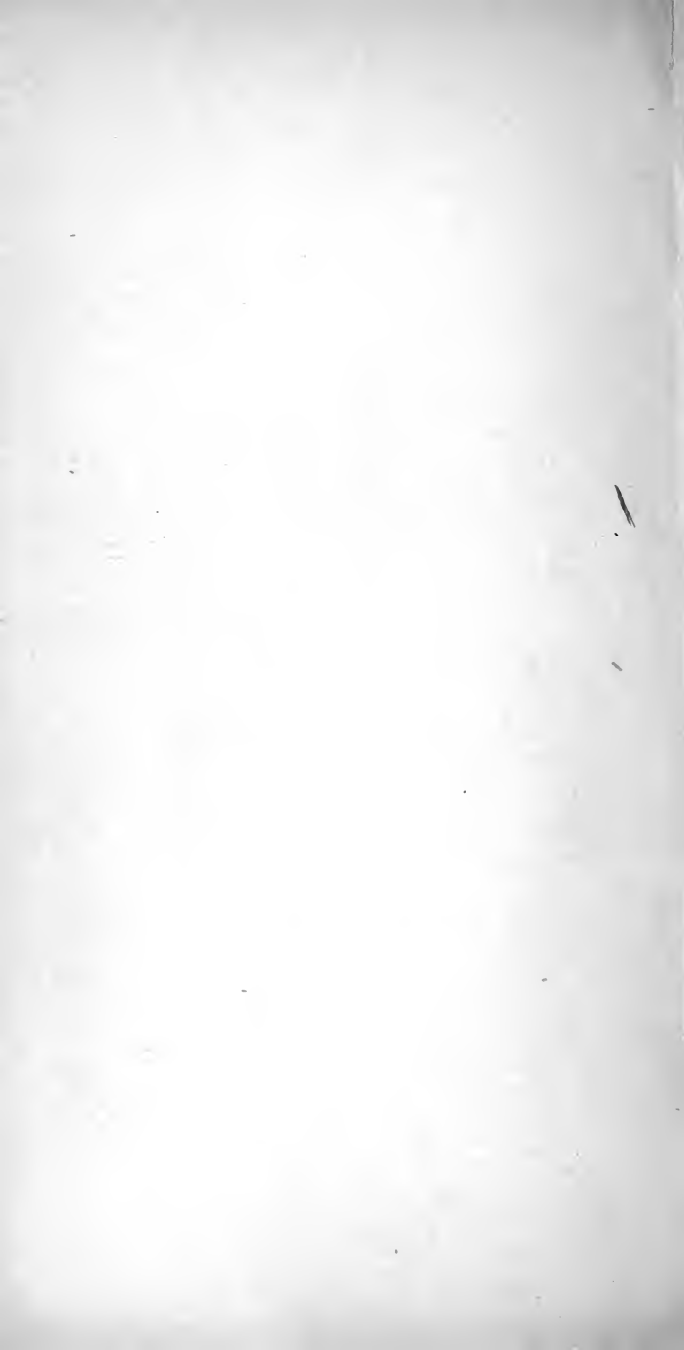


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**The
Countess Kathleen**







CUCHULLIN FIGHTING THE WAVES.

THE
Countess Kathleen

And Various Legends and Lyrics.

by
W. B. YEATS.

*"He who tastes a crust of bread
tastes all the stars and all
the heavens"*
Paracelsus ab Hohenheim.

CAMEO SERIES

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W. L. Shoemaker

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I Dedicate

THIS PLAY

TO

MY FRIEND,

Miss Maud Gonne,

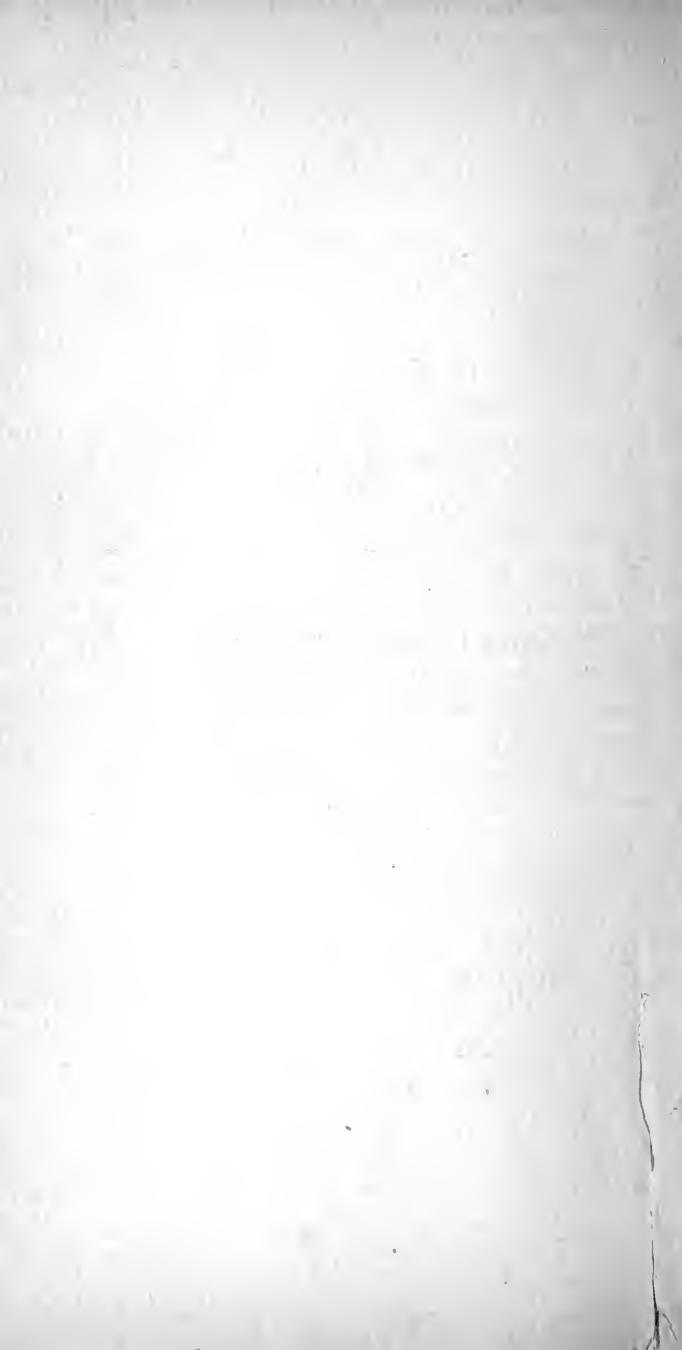
AT WHOSE SUGGESTION

IT WAS

PLANNED OUT AND BEGUN

SOME

THREE YEARS AGO.



Preface.



THE greater number of the poems in this book, as also in "The Wanderings of Oisín," are founded on Irish tradition. The chief poem is an attempt to mingle personal thought and feeling with the beliefs and customs of Christian Ireland; whereas the longest poem in my earlier book endeavoured to set forth the impress left on my imagination by the Pre-Christian cycle of legends. The Christian cycle being mainly concerned with contending moods and moral motives needed, I thought, a dramatic vehicle. The tumultuous and heroic Pagan cycle, on the other hand, having to do with vast and shadowy activities and with the great impersonal emotions, expressed itself naturally—or so I imagined—in epic and epic-lyric measures. No lyric method seemed sufficiently minute and

subtle for the one, and no dramatic method elastic and all-containing enough for the other.

Ireland having a huge body of tradition behind her in the depths of time, will probably draw her deepest literary inspiration from this double fountain-head if she ever, as is the hope of all her children, make for herself a great distinctive poetic literature. She has already many moving songs and ballads which are quite her own. "The Countess Kathleen," like "The Wanderings of Oisín," is an attempt to unite a more ample method to feeling not less national, Celtic, and distinctive.

A number of the "legends and lyrics" originally appeared in *The National Observer*, and I have to thank the proprietors for leave to reprint them here.

W. B. YEATS.

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The Countess Kathleen.

"The sorrowful are dumb for thee."

The Lament of Morian Shehona for Mary Bourke.



The Countess Kathleen.

AN IRISH DRAMA.



PERSONS.

SHEMUS RUA, *Keeper of an hostelry known as "The Lady's Head."*

TEIG, *His son, aged fourteen.*

MAURTEEN, *A gardener.*

MICHAEL, *A servant.*

A Herdsman.

KEVIN, *A young bard.*

Peasants, &c.

Two demons, disguised throughout as merchants.

THE COUNTESS KATHLEEN.

OONA, *Her foster-mother.*

MARY, *Wife of Shemus Rua.*

Peasant women, &c.

Angelical beings, spirits and fairies.

The Scene is laid in Ireland in the Sixteenth Century.

SCENE I.

[*The Inn of SHEMUS RUA ; a wood of oak, hazel and quicken trees is seen through the window, half hidden in vapour and twilight. The door*

is in the centre of the wall at the back. The window is at the right side of it, and a little catholic shrine hangs at the other. To the right is a pantry door and to the left a dim fire of bogwood. MARY watches TEIG who fills a pot with water. He stops as if to listen, and spills some of the water.]

MARY.

You are all thumbs.

TEIG.

How yon dog bays,
 And how the grey hen flutters in the coop.
 Strange things are going up and down the land
 These famine times. By Tubber-vanach cross
 roads,
 A woman met a man with ears spread out,
 And they moved up and down like wings of
 bats.

MARY.

Shemus stays late.

TEIG.

By Carrick-orus churchyard,
 A herdsman met with one who had no mouth,
 Nor ears, nor eyes—his face a wall of flesh.
 He saw him plainly by the moonlight.

MARY [*going over to the little shrine*].

Virgin,
Bring Shemus safe home from the hateful forest ;
Save Shemus from the wolves—Shemus is
reckless ;
And save him from the demons of the woods
Who have crept out and pace upon the roads
Deluding dim-eyed souls now newly dead,
And those alive who have gone crazed with
famine.
Save him, dear Mary.

[*A knock at the door. She kneels and looks
through the keyhole.*]

Who is knocking ?

SHEMUS [*without*].

Shemus.

TEIG.

May he bring better food than yesterday ;
No one dines merrily on a carrion crow.

[*MARY opens the door, and SHEMUS comes in with
a dead wolf on his shoulder.*]

MARY.

You are late home. You have been lounging
And chattering with some one, idling somehow.
You know dreams trouble me, and how I pray,
Yet all day you lie sweating on the hill side,
Or stand else in the gutter with all passers,
Gilding your tongue with the calamitous times.

SHEMUS.

You'd rail my head off. There's good dinner
here.

[*Throwing the wolf on to the floor.*]

A lean wolf's more than a lean carrion crow.
I searched all day : the mice, and rats, and
hedgehogs
Seem to be dead, and I could hardly hear
A wing moving in all the famished woods,
Though the dead leaves and clauber of four
forests
Cling to my foot-sole. I came home despairing,
And found sniffing the floor in a bare cow-house
This young wolf here. The cross-bow brought
him down.

MARY.

Praised be the saints.

[*After a pause.*]

Why did the house dog bay ?

SHEMUS.

He heard me coming and smelt food—what else.
What food's within ?

MARY.

A pan half full of milk,
Some oatmeal in a corner of the bag.

SHEMUS.

And we have Madge, the hen.

TEIG.

Bog-wood were softer ;
She has grown sleepy with old age.

MARY.

Before you came,
She made a great noise in the hencoop, Shemus.

SHEMUS.

The dog scared her. Well we'll not starve at
once.

[*Hangs his crossbow up, and then catching sight
of the shrine pauses.*]

Red briony berries in a little jar,
And ivy green as a drake's poll—no use.

Why, dame, we'll all be dead soon ; [*Pointing to the shrine*] she's asleep.

I passed by Margaret Nolan's : for nine days
Her mouth was green from eating dock and
nettles.

Now they have waked her.

MARY.

I shall go the next.

Our parents' cabins bordered the same field.

SHEMUS.

God and God's mother nod and sleep—at last
They have grown weary of the prayers and
candles,

And Satan pours the famine from his bag,
He does not nod, nor sleep, nor droop his eye-
lids ;

I am half mindful to go pray to him
To cover all this table with red gold.
Teig, will you dare me to it ?

TEIG.

Not I, father.

MARY.

O Shemus hush, maybe your mind might pray
Though your mouth prayed not. Think upon
your soul.

What made that noise ?

TEIG.

Two horned owls made it ;
They have been blinking on the window-sill
Since father came. I had gone softly over
To lift the crossbow down and shoot at them,
When father's loud voice made them flutter off.

[SHEMUS *begins unfastening the feet of the wolf
from a branch to which they had been tied.*]

MARY.

That's quicken wood.

SHEMUS.

Yes, wife. He swayed about
And so I tied him to a quicken branch,
And slung him from my shoulder.

[*He takes up the branch to throw it on the fire.*]

MARY [*taking it from him*].

Shemus ! Shemus !

What, would you burn the blessed quicken
wood ?

A spell to ward off demons and ill fairies.
You know not what the owls were that peered in,
For evil wonders live in this old wood,

And they can show in what shape please them
best.

And we have had no milk to leave o' nights
To keep our own good people kind to us.
I fear the wood things, Shemus.

SHEMUS.

Famine fear
Addles your mind. I'll chew the lean dog-wolf
With no less mirth if, chaired beside the hearth,
Rubbing its hands before the bogwood flame,
Be Pooka, Sowlth, or demon of the pit.

[*A step outside.*]

MARY [*listening*].

Who knows what evil you have brought to us.
I fear the wood things, Shemus.

[*She hides the wolf in the pantry. A knock at
the door. The shrine falls from the wall.*]

Do not open.

[*She points to the fallen shrine.*]

See! see!

SHEMUS.

I told you that the nail was loose.

[*He opens the door. Two merchants stand without. They have bands of gold round their foreheads, and each carries a bag upon his shoulder.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

This is an inn ?

SHEMUS.

Aye, aye, "The Lady's Head,"
Called from the Countess Kathleen—her face, sir,
Is painted in four colours on the sign.

SECOND MERCHANT.

And have you food for two tired merchants,
here ?

SHEMUS.

Sir, such rude victuals as the forest gives.
Come in, kind sirs—for a full score of evenings
This threshold, worn away by many feet,
Has been passed only by the snails, and birds,
And our own footfalls.

MARY.

Sirs, do not come in,
We have no food, none even for ourselves.

FIRST MERCHANT.

A wolf lies on the third shelf in the cupboard.

[*They enter.*]

SHEMUS.

Forgive her, gentles. She's not used to quality,
And is half mad with being much alone.
How did you know I'd taken a young wolf?
Fine wholesome food though somewhat strong
i' the flavour.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT sits down by the fire and begins rubbing his hands. The FIRST stands looking at the quicken bough on the chair.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

I would rest here. The night is somewhat
chilly,
And my feet footsore going up and down
From land to land and nation unto nation.
The fire burns dimly ; feed it with this bough.

[*SHEMUS throws the bough into the fire. The FIRST MERCHANT sits down in the chair. The MERCHANTS' chairs are on each side of the fire.*]

The table is between them. Each lays his bag before him on the table. The night has closed in somewhat, and the main light comes from the fire.]

MARY.

What have you in the bags?

SHEMUS.

Gentles, forgive.

Women grow curious and feather-thoughted
Through being in each others company
More than is good for them.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Our bags are full

Of golden pieces to buy merchandize.

[They empty the bags on the table. It is covered with the gold pieces. They shine in the fire-light. MARY goes to the door of the pantry, and watches the MERCHANTS, muttering to herself.]

TEIG.

These be great gentlemen.

FIRST MERCHANT [*drawing a stone bottle from the depth of his bag*].

Come round the bogwood,
And here is wine more fragrant than all roses.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Wine that can hush asleep the petty war
Of good and evil, and awake instead
A scented flame flickering above that peace
The bird of prey knows well in his deep heart.

SHEMUS [*bringing drinking cups*].

I do not understand you, but your wine
Sets me athirst—its praise made your eyes
lighten.

May I, too, taste it ?

FIRST MERCHANT.

Aye, come drink and drink,
I bless all mortals who drink long and deep.
My curse upon the salt-strewn road of monks.

[TEIG and SHEMUS sit down at the table and
drink.]

TEIG.

You must have seen rare sights and done rare things.

FIRST MERCHANT.

What think you of the master whom we serve?

SHEMUS.

I have grown weary of all life, merchants,
Because I do not serve him.

FIRST MERCHANT.

More of this

When we have eaten.

SHEMUS.

Boil that dog-wolf, Mary.

MARY [*coming towards the fire*].

The water will not boil for you.

[*The FIRST MERCHANT whispers to the water.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

It boils.

MARY.

I will not cook for you.

B

SHEMUS.

Mary's gone mad.

[TEIG and SHEMUS stand up and stagger about.]

SHEMUS.

That wine's the suddenest wine man ever tasted.

MARY.

I will not cook for you. You are not human.
Before you came two horned owls peered at us ;
The dog bayed, and the tongue of Shemus
maddened.

When you came in the Virgin's blessed shrine
Fell from its nail, and when you sat down here
You poured out wine as the wood shegues do
When they'd entice a soul out of the world.
Why did you come to us ? Was not death near ?

FIRST MERCHANT.

We are two merchants.

MARY.

If you be not demons
Go and give alms among the starving poor,
You seem more rich than any under the moon.

FIRST MERCHANT.

If we knew where to find deserving poor,
We would give alms.

MARY.

Then ask of Father John.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We know the evils of mere charity,
And would devise a more considered way.
Let each man bring one piece of merchandize.

MARY.

The starving have no piece of merchandize.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We do but ask what each man has.

MARY.

Merchants,
Their swine and cattle, fields and implements,
Are sold and gone.

FIRST MERCHANT.

They have not sold all yet.

MARY.

What have they?

FIRST MERCHANT.

They have still their souls.

[MARY shrieks. *He beckons to TEIG and SHEMUS.*]

Come hither.

See you these little golden heaps? Each one
Is payment for a soul. From charity
We give so great a price for those poor flames.
Say to all men we buy men's souls—away.

[*They do not stir.*]

This pile for you and this for you.

SHEMUS.

We go.

[TEIG and SHEMUS go out.]

MARY [*kneeling*].

Destroyers of souls, may God destroy you quick.

FIRST MERCHANT.

No curses injure the immortal demons.

MARY.

You shall at last dry like dry leaves, and hang
Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Woman, you shall be ours. This famine shall
not cease.

You shall eat grass, and dock, and dandelions,
And fail till this stone threshold seem a wall,
And when your hands can scarcely drag your
body
We shall be near you.

[To SECOND MERCHANT.]

Bring the food out.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT brings the bag of meal
from the bantry.*]

Burn it.

[MARY *faints.*]

Now she has swooned, our faces go unscratched;
Bring me the grey hen too.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT goes out through the door and returns with the hen strangled. He flings it on the floor. While he is away the FIRST MERCHANT makes up the fire. The FIRST MERCHANT then fetches the pan of milk from the pantry, and spills it on the ground. He returns, and brings out the wolf, and throws it down by the hen.*]

These need much burning.
This stool and this chair here will make good
fuel.

[*He begins breaking the chair.*]

END OF SCENE I.

SCENE II.

[*A great hall in the castle of the* COUNTESS KATHLEEN. *There is a large window of partly-coloured glass at the further end. The wall to the right juts out slightly, cutting off an angle of the room. A flight of stone steps leads up to a small arched door in the jutting wall. Through the door can be seen a little oratory. The hall is hung with tapestry representing the wars and loves and huntings of the Finian and Red-branch warriors. There are doors to the right and left. On the left side OONA sits as if asleep in a large oak chair. The COUNTESS KATHLEEN stands looking through the window. She leaves it and goes over to OONA on tiptoe.*]

KATHLEEN.

You were asleep.

OONA.

No, child, I was but thinking
Why you have grown so sad.

KATHLEEN.

The famine frets me.

OONA.

I have lived now near ninety winters, child,
And I have known three things no doctor
cures—

Love, loneliness, and famine—nor found refuge
Other than growing old and full of sleep.
See you where Oisin and young Niam ride
Wrapped in each other's arms, and where the
Finians

Follow their hounds along the fields of tapestry,
How merry they lived once, yet men died then.
I'll sing the ballad young bard Kevin sang
By the great door, the light about his head,
When he bid you cast off this cloud of care.

KATHLEEN.

Sing how King Fergus in his brazen car
Drove with a troop of dancers through the
woods.

*[She crouches down on the floor and lays her
head upon OONA'S knees.]*

OONA.

You always loved old things—loved best the tale,
Told many times. Dear, wherefore should you
sadden

For wrongs you cannot hinder. The great God
Smiling condemns the lost. Be mirthful : He
Bids youth be merry and old age be wise.

[*A voice without.*]

You may not see the Countess.

[*Another voice.*]

I must see her.

[*Sound of a slight struggle. A servant enters
from door to R.*]

SERVANT.

The gardener is resolved to speak with you.
I cannot stay him.

KATHLEEN.

You may come, Maurteen.

[*The gardener, an old man, comes in from the
R, and the servant goes out.*]

B*

GARDENER.

Forgive my clay-soiled coat—my muddy shoes.
I bring ill words, your ladyship—too bad
To send with any other.

KATHLEEN.

These bad times
Can any news be bad or any good ?

GARDENER.

A crowd of ugly lean-faced rogues last night
—And may God curse them—climbed the garden
wall.

There's scarce an apple now on twenty trees,
And my asparagus and strawberry beds
Are trampled into clauber, and the boughs
Of beech and plum trees broken and torn down
For some last fruit that hung there. My dog, too,
My old blind Simon, he who had no tail,
They murdered—God's red anger seize them.

KATHLEEN.

I know how pears and all the tribe of apples
Are daily in your love—how this ill chance
Is sudden doomsday fallen on your year ;
So do not say no matter. I but say

I blame the famished season, and no more.
Then be not troubled.

GARDENER.

Thanks, your ladyship.

KATHLEEN.

What portents and what rumours of the dearth ?

GARDENER.

The yellow vapour, in whose folds it came,
That creeps along the hedges at nightfall,
Makes my new shrubs and saplings poor and
sickly.

I pray against it.

[He goes towards the door, then pauses.]

If her ladyship
Would give me an old crossbow, I would watch
Behind a bush and guard the pears o' nights
And make a hole in somebody I know of.

KATHLEEN.

They'll give you a long draught of ale below.

[The gardener goes out.]

OONA.

What did he say ; he stood on my deaf side ?

KATHLEEN.

His apples are all stolen. Pruning time,
The rounding and ripening of his pears and
apples,
For him's a long heart-moving history.

OONA.

Now lay your head once more upon my knees.
I'll sing how Fergus drove his brazen cars.

[*She chants with the thin voice of age.*]

*Who will go drive with Fergus now,
And pierce the deep wood's woven shade,
And dance upon the level shore?
Young man, lift up your russet brow,
And lift your tender eyelids, maid,
And brood on hopes and fears no more.*

You have dropped down again into your trouble.
You do not hear me.

KATHLEEN.

Ah, sing on, old Oona,
I hear the horn of Fergus in my heart.

OONA.

I do not know the meaning of the song.
I am too old.

KATHLEEN.

The horn is calling, calling.

OONA.

*And no more turn aside and brood
Upon Love's bitter mystery ;
For Fergus rules the brazen cars,
And rules the shadows of the wood,
And the white breast of the dim sea
And all dishevelled wandering stars.*

[*The servant's voice without.*]

The Countess Kathleen must not be disturbed.

[*Another voice.*]

Man, I must see her.

KATHLEEN.

Who now wants me, Michael ?

SERVANT (*from the door.*)

A herdsman and his history.

KATHLEEN.

He may come.

[*The herdsman enters from door to R.*]

HERDSMAN.

Forgive this dusty gear. I have come far.
My sheep were taken from the fold last night.
You will be angry. I am not to blame.
Go blame these robbing times.

KATHLEEN.

No blame's with you ;
I blame the famine.

HERDSMAN.

Kneeling, I give thanks.
When gazing on your face the poorest, Lady,
Forget their poverty ; the rich their care.

KATHLEEN.

What rumours and what portents of the famine ?

HERDSMAN.

As I came down the lane by Tubber-vanach
A boy and man sat cross-legged on two stones.
With moving hands and faces famine-thin,
Gabbling to crowds of men and wives and boys
Of how two merchants at "The Lady's Head"
Buy souls for hell, giving a price so great
That men may live through all the dearth in plenty.
The vales are famine crazy—I'm right glad
My home is on the mountain near to God.

[*He turns to go.*]

KATHLEEN.

They'll give you ale and meat before you go.
You must have risen at dawn to come so far.
Keep your bare mountain—let the world drift by,
The burden of its wrongs rests not on you.

HERDSMAN.

I am content to serve your ladyship.

[*He goes.*]

OONA.

What did he say ; he stood on my deaf side ?
He seemed to give you word of woeful things.

KATHLEEN.

O, I am sadder than an old air, Oona ;
My heart is longing for a deeper peace
Than Fergus found amid his brazen cars :
Would that like Adene my first forebear's
 daughter,
Who followed once a twilight piercing tune,
I could go down and dwell among the shee
In their old ever-busy honeyed land.

OONA.

You should not say such things—they bring
ill-luck.

KATHLEEN.

The image of young Adene on the arras,
Walking along, one finger lifted up,
And that wild song of the unending dance
Of the dim Danaan nations in their raths,
Young Kevin sang for me by the great door,
Has filled me full of all these wicked words.

*[The servant enters hastily, followed by three
men. Two are peasants.]*

SERVANT.

The steward of the castle brings two men
To talk with you.

STEWARD.

And tell the strangest story
Man's mouth has uttered.

KATHLEEN.

More food gone ;
Yet learned theologians have laid down
That he who has no food, offending no way,
May take his meat and bread from too-full larders.

FIRST PEASANT.

We come to make amends for robbery.
I stole five hundred apples from your trees,
And laid them in a hole. And my friend here
Last night stole two large mountain sheep of
yours
And hung them on a beam under his thatch.

SECOND PEASANT.

His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT.

Since then our luck has changed.
As I came down the lane by Tubber-vanach
I fell on Shemus Rua and his son,
And they led me where two great gentlemen
Buy souls for money, and they bought my soul.
I told my friend here—my friend also trafficked.

SECOND PEASANT.

His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT.

Now people throng to sell,
Noisy as seagulls tearing a dead fish.
There soon will be no man or woman's soul
Unbargained for in fivescore baronies.

SECOND PEASANT.

His words are true.

FIRST PEASANT.

When we had sold we talked,
And having no more comfortable life
Than this that makes us warm—our souls being
bartered
For all this money.

SECOND PEASANT.

And this money here.

[*They bring handfuls of money from their
pockets. KATHLEEN starts up.*]

And fearing much to hang for robbery,
We come to pay you for the sheep and fruit.
How do you price them ?

KATHLEEN.

Gather up your money.
Think you that I would touch the demons' gold ?
Begone, give twice, thrice, twenty times their
money,
And buy again your souls. I will pay all.

FIRST PEASANT.

Nay, for we go now to be drunk and merry.

[*They go.*]KATHLEEN [*to servant*].

Follow and bring them here again—beseech them.

[*The servant goes.*][*To Steward.*]Steward, you know the secrets of this house.
How much have I in gold?

STEWARD.

A hundred thousand.

KATHLEEN.

How much have I in castles?

STEWARD.

As much more.

KATHLEEN.

How much have I in pastures?

STEWARD.

As much more.

KATHLEEN.

How much have I in forests?

STEWARD.

Fifty thousand.

KATHLEEN.

Keeping alone this house, sell all I have ;
Buy ships of grain and meal—long herds of cows,
And hasten here once more. And while you're
gone,
Bid some one give out gold to all who come.

STEWARD.

God's blessing light upon your ladyship ;
You will have saved the land.

KATHLEEN.

Make no delay,
And bid them house here all the old and ailing.

[*He goes.*]

[*Re-enter servant.*]

How did you thrive? Say quickly. You are
pale?

SERVANT.

When I came near, the tallest of the rogues
Said he'd be no more stared at, and struck out.

KATHLEEN.

Will no one bring them to me ?

SERVANT.

No one dare.

Their eyes burn like the eyes of birds of prey
Now they are angry.

KATHLEEN.

May God pity them.

SERVANT.

I ran, for they have power not born of us.

KATHLEEN.

My world is withering. Leave me—leave me
now.

[The servant goes out, and KATHLEEN goes over to OONA and lays her head upon her knees.]

OONA.

What, child, dear, did they talk so much about,
And whence came all the money ?—my deaf side.
Why, you are weeping—and such tears ! Such
tears !

Look, child, how big they are.

Thy shadow falls
O Weeping Willow of the World, O Eri,
On this the loveliest daughter of thy race,
Thy leaves blow round her.

I give God great thanks
That I am old—lost in the sleep of age.

END OF SCENE II.

SCENE III.

[*The hall in the castle of the COUNTESS KATHLEEN, as before. Midnight. The TWO MERCHANTS enter, cautiously, with empty bags over their shoulders.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

And whence now, brother ?

SECOND MERCHANT.

Tubber-vanach cross roads,
 Where I in image of a nine-monthed bonyeen
 Sat down upon my haunches. Father John
 Came, sad and moody, murmuring many prayers.
 I seemed as though I came from his own sty.
 He saw the one brown ear—the breviary dropped—
 He ran—I ran—I ran into the quarry ;
 He fell a score of yards. The man was dead.
 And then I thrust his soul into the bag,
 And hurried home. His right hand, on the way—
 The hand that blessed the poor and raised the
 host—

Tore through the leather with sharp piety,
And he escaped me.

FIRST MERCHANT.

With this priest John dead,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-
morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT.

My chosen venture was to kill this man,
And yours to rob the Countess. You fare ill.
I found you sitting drowsed and motionless,
Your chin bowed to your knees, while on all
sides,
Bat-like, from bough, and roof, and window
ledge,
Clung evil souls of men, and in the woods,
Like streaming flames, floated upon the winds
The elemental creatures.

FIRST MERCHANT.

.I fare ill!

This holy Countess prayed so long and hard,
That doors and windows barred with piety
Defied me and my drudges out of Hell.
But now she's fallen asleep over her prayers ;

[*He points to the oratory door. They peer through cautiously.*]

She lies worn out upon the altar steps :
A labourer, tired of ploughing His hard fields,
And deafening His closed ears with cries on cries
Hoping to draw His hands down from the stars
To take the people from us.

SECOND MERCHANT.

We must hurry.

We would half stifle if she woke and prayed.

[*They go out by the left-hand door, and enter again almost immediately, carrying full bags upon their shoulders.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

Brave thought, brave thought—a shining thought
of mine !

She now no more may bribe the poor—no more
Cheat our great master of his merchandize,
While our heels dangle at “The Lady’s Head,”
And grass grows on the threshold, and snails
crawl

Along the window-pane and the mud floor.

Brother, where wander all these dwarfish folk,
Hostile to men—the sheogues of the tides?

SECOND MERCHANT [*opening the great windows,
and showing the tops of the trees*].

There are none here. They tired and strayed
from hence—
Unwilling labourers.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I will draw them in.

[*He cries through the window.*]

Come hither, hither, hither, water folk :
Come all you elemental populace ;
Leave lonely the long-boarding surges : leave
The cymbals of the waves to clash alone,
And shaking the sea tangles from your hair,
Gather about us.

[*After a pause.*]

I can hear a sound
As from waves beating upon distant strands ;
And now the sheogues, like a surf of light,

Pour eddying through the pathways of the oaks;
And as they come, the sentient grass and leaves
Bow towards them, and the tall, drouth-jaded
oaks

Fondle the murmur of their flying feet.

SECOND MERCHANT.

The green things love unknotted hearts and
minds,

And neither one with angels or with us,
Nor risen in arms with evil or with good,
In laughter roves, the litter of the waves.

*[A crowd of faces fill up the darkness outside the
window. A sheogue separates from the others,
and standing in the window, speaks.]*

THE SHEOGUE.

We come unwillingly, for she whose gold
We must now carry to "The Lady's Head"
Is dear to all our race. On the green plain
Beside the sea a hundred shepherds live,
To mind her sheep; and when the nightfall
comes

They leave a hundred pans of white ewes' milk
Outside their doors, to feed us on our way

From dancing with land sheogues in their raths,
Driven homeward by the dawn.

FIRST MERCHANT (*making a sign upon the air*).

Obey or suffer.

THE SHEOGUE.

The sign of evil burns upon our hearts,
And we obey.

[*They crowd through the window, and take out of the bags a small bag each. They are less than the size of men and women, and are dressed in green jackets, with red caps, trimmed with shells.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

And now begone—begone!

[*They go.*]

I bid them go for being garrulous
And flighty creatures—they had soon begun
To deafen us with their sea gossip. Now
We must go bring more money. Brother,
brother,
I long to see my master's face again,
For I turn homesick.

SECOND MERCHANT.

I too tire of toil.

[*They go out, and return as before, with their bags full.*]

SECOND MERCHANT [*pointing to the oratory*].

How may we gain this woman for our lord ?
This pearl, this turquoise fastened in his crown
Would make it shine like His we dare not name.
Now that the winds are heavy with our kind,
Might we not kill her, and bear off her spirit
Before the mob of angels were astir ?

[*A number of little bags fall from his big leather one.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

Who tore the bag ?

SECOND MERCHANT.

The finger of priest John,
When he fled through the leather. I had
thought
Because his was an old and little spirit
The tear would hardly matter.

FIRST MERCHANT.

This comes, brother,
Of stealing souls that are not rightly ours.
If we would win this turquoise for our lord,
It must go dropping down of its free will.

[*He listens.*]

The noise wakened the household. While you
spoke
I heard chairs moved, and heard folk's shuffling
feet.
We still have time—they search the distant
rooms.
Call hither now the sowlths and tevishies.

SECOND MERCHANT [*going to the window*].
There are none here. They tired and strayed
from hence—
Unwilling labourers.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I will draw them in.

[*He cries through the window.*]

Come hither, you lost souls of men, who died
In drunken sleep, and by each other's hands,

When they had bartered you away to us
At Shemus Rua's. Hither, tevishies,
Who mourn among the scenery of your sins,
Turning to animal and reptile forms
—The visages of passions. Hither, sowlths ;
Leave marshes and the reed-encumbered pools,
You shapeless fires, that once were souls of men,
And are a fading wretchedness.

SECOND MERCHANT.

They come not.

FIRST MERCHANT [*making a sign upon the air*].
Come hither, sowlths and tevishies.

SECOND MERCHANT.

I hear

A crying as of storm-distempered reeds.
And now the sowlths and tevishies rise up
Like steam out of the earth ; the grass and leaves
Shiver and shrink away and sway about,
Blown by unnatural gusts of ice-cold air.

FIRST MERCHANT.

One are they with all forces of decay—
Ill longings, madness, lightning, hail and drouth.

[*The darkness fills with vague forms, some animal shapes, some human, some mere nebulous lights.*]

Come you—and you—and you, and lift these bags.

A TEVISH.

We are too violent—mere shapes of storms.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Come you—and you—and you, and lift these bags.

A SOWLTH.

We are too feeble, fading out of life.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Come you, and you, who are the latest dead,
And still wear human shape—the shape of power.

[*The two robbing peasants of the last act come forward. Their faces have withered from much pain.*]

Now, brawlers, lift the bags of gold.

FIRST PEASANT.

Aye, aye!

Unwillingly, unwillingly ; for her,
Whose gold we bear upon our shoulders thus,

Has endless pity even for lost souls
In her good heart. At moments, now and then,
When plunged in horror, brooding each alone,
A memory of her face floats in on us.
It brings more plumed miseries, half repose,
And we wail one to other—we obey,
For heaven's many-angled star reversed
—Now sign of evil—burns into our hearts.

FIRST MERCHANT.

When these last bags lie at "The Lady's Head
The burning shall give over—now begone.

[*They go, and the forms and lights vanish also.*]

I bid them go, for they are lonely things,
And when they see ought living love to sigh.

[*Pointing to the oratory.*]

Brother, I hear a sound in there—a sound
That troubles me.

SECOND MERCHANT [*going to the door of the
oratory and peering through it*].

Upon the altar steps
The Countess tosses, murmuring in her sleep
A broken paternoster.

[*The FIRST MERCHANT goes to the door and stands beside him.*]

She's grown still.

FIRST MERCHANT.

A great plan floats into my mind—no wonder,
For I come from the ninth and mightiest Hell,
Where all are kings. I'll wake her from her
sleep,
And mix with all her thoughts, a thought to
serve.

[*He calls through the door.*]

May we be well remembered in your prayers.

[*The COUNTESS KATHLEEN wakes, and comes to the door of the oratory. The MERCHANTS descend into the room again. She stands at the top of the stone steps.*]

KATHLEEN.

What would you, sirs?

FIRST MERCHANT.

We are two merchant men,
New come from foreign lands. We bring you
news.

Forgive our sudden entry—the great door
Was open, we came in to seek a face.

KATHLEEN.

The door stands always open to receive,
With kindly welcome, starved and sickly folk,
Or any who would fly the woeful times.
Merchants, you bring me news.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We saw a man
Heavy with sickness in the bog of Allan,
Whom you had bid buy cattle. Near Fair Head
We saw your grain ships lying all becalmed
In the dark night, and not less still than they
Burned all their mirrored lanthorns in the sea.

KATHLEEN.

My thanks to God, to Mary, and the angels,
I still have bags of money, and can buy
Meal from the merchants who have stored it up,
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
You have been far, and know the signs of things :
When will this yellow vapour no more hang
And creep about the fields, and this great heat
Vanish away—and grass show its green shoots ?

FIRST MERCHANT.

There is no sign of change—day copies day,
Green things are dead—the cattle too are
 dead,
Or dying—and on all the vapour hangs
And fattens with disease and glows with heat.
In you is all the hope of all the land.

KATHLEEN.

And heard you of the demons who buy souls ?

FIRST MERCHANT.

There are some men who hold they have wolves'
 heads,
And say their limbs, dried by the infinite flame,
Have all the speed of storms ; others again
Say they are gross and little ; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled, like us, lady.
Yet all agree there's power in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor flames—their spirits—
 only
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

KATHLEEN.

Praise be to God, to Mary, and the angels,
That I am wealthy. Wherefore do they sell?
Is the green grave so terrible?

FIRST MERCHANT.

Some sell
Because they will not see their children die,
And some because their neighbours sold before,
And some because there is a kind of joy
In casting hope away, in losing joy,
In ceasing all resistance, in at last
Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
In casting all sails out upon the wind :
To this—full of the gaiety of the lost—
Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

KATHLEEN.

There is a something, merchant, in your voice
That makes me fear. When you were telling how
A man may lose his soul and lose his God,
Your eyes lighted, and the strange weariness
That hangs about you, vanished. When you told
How my poor money serves the people—both—
Merchants, forgive me—seemed to smile.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Man's sins

Move us to laughter only, we have seen
So many lands and seen so many men.
How strange that all these people should be
 swung
As on a lady's shoe-string—under them
The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

KATHLEEN.

There is a something in you that I fear—
A something not of us. Were you not born
In some most distant corner of the world?

[*The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening at the door to the right, comes forward, and as he comes, a sound of voices and feet is heard through the door to his left.*]

SECOND MERCHANT [*aside to FIRST MERCHANT*].
Away now—they are in the passage—hurry,
For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts
With Ave Marias, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Farewell—we must ride
Many a mile before the morning come ;
Our horses beat the ground impatiently.

[*They go out to R.*]

[*A number of peasants enter at the same moment
by the opposite door.*]

KATHLEEN.

What would you ?

A PEASANT.

As we nodded by the fire,
Telling old shannachus we heard a noise
Of falling money. We have searched in vain.

KATHLEEN.

You are too timid. I heard naught at all.

AN OLD MAN.

Aye, we are timid, for a rich man's word
Can shake our houses, and a moon of drouth
Shrivel our seedlings in the barren earth ;
We are the slaves of wind, and hail, and flood ;
Fear jogs our elbow in the market-place,
And nods beside us on the chimney-seat.

Ill-bodings are as native to our hearts
As are their spots unto the woodpeckers.

KATHLEEN.

You need not shake with bodings in this house.

[OONA enters from the door to L.]

OONA.

The treasure-room is broken in—mavrone—
mavrone
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

[*The peasants raise a lamenting cry.*]

KATHLEEN.

Be silent.

[*The cry ceases.*]

Saw you any one ?

OONA.

Mavrone,

That my good mistress should lose all this money.

KATHLEEN.

You three upon my right hand, ride and ride ;
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

[*A man with keys at his girdle has entered while she was speaking.*]

A PEASANT.

The porter trembles.

THE PORTER.

It is all no use ;
Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone nich, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

AN OLD MAN.

God forsakes us.

KATHLEEN.

Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
For a most sad resolve wakes in my heart :
But always I have faith. Old men and women
Be silent ; He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull, and shapeless ease ;
At times it crumbles—and a nation falls,
Now moves awry—and demon hordes are born.

[*The peasants cross themselves.*]

But leave me now, for I am desolate,
I hear a whisper from beyond the thunder.

[*She steps down from the oratory door.*]

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again
I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take
These two—the larder and the dairy keys.

[*To a peasant.*]

But take you this. It opens the small room
Of herbs for medicine—of helebore,
Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal,
And all the others ; and the book of cures
Is on the upper shelf. You understand
Because you doctored goats and cattle once.

THE PEASANT.

Why do you do this, lady—did you see
Your coffin in a dream ?

KATHLEEN.

Ah, no, not that,
A sad resolve wakes in me. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
And I must go down, down, I know not where.

Pray for the poor folk who are crazed with
famine ;

Pray, you good neighbours.

[*The peasants all kneel. The COUNTESS KATHLEEN ascends the steps to the door of the oratory, and turning round, stands there motionless for a little, and then cries in a loud voice.*]

Mary, queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell.

END OF SCENE III.

SCENE IV.

[*The Inn of Shemus Rua, as in SCENE I. The TWO MERCHANTS are sitting, one at each end of the table, with rolls of parchment and many little heaps of gold before them.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

The woman may keep robbing us no more,
For there are only mice now in her coffers.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Last night, closed in the image of an owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw, creeping on the uneasy surge,
Those ships that bring the woman grain and
meal ;
They are five days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I hurried East,
A gray owl flitting, flitting in the dew,
And saw nine hundred oxen toil through Meath,
Driven on by goads of iron. They, too, brother,
Are full five days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Five days for traffic,

[*While they have been speaking the peasants have come in, led by TEIG and SHEMUS, who take their stations, one on each side of the door, and keep them marshalled into rude order and encourage them from time to time with gestures and whispered words.*]

Here throng they ; since the drouth they go in
 throngs,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds
Come, deal--come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Who will come deal with us ?

SHEMUS.

They're out of spirit, sir, with lack of food,
Save four or five. Here, sir, is one of these ;
The others will gain courage in good time.

A MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

I come to deal if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in a parchment.*)

John Maher, a man of substance, with dull
mind,

And quiet senses and unventurous heart.

The angels think him safe. Two hundred crowns,
All for a soul, a little whiff of gas.

THE MAN.

I ask three hundred crowns. You have read
there,

That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT.

There's something more writ here—often at
night

He's wakeful from a dread of growing poor.

There is this crack in you—two hundred crowns.

[THE MAN *takes them and goes.*]

SECOND MERCHANT.

Come, deal—one would half think you had no
souls.

If only for the credit of your parishes,

Come, deal, deal, deal, or will you always starve?
A woman lived here once, she would not deal—
She starved—she lies in there with red wall-
flowers,
And candles stuck in bottles, round her head.

A WOMAN.

What price now will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT.

Aye, aye,
Soft, handsome, and still young—not much, I
think.

[*Reading in the parchment.*]

She has a little jar of new love-letters
On a high shelf between the pepper-pot
And wood-cased hour-glass.

WOMAN.

Oh, the scandalous parchment !

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading*].

She hides them from her husband, who buys
horses,

And is not much at home. You're almost safe.
I give you fifty crowns.

[*She turns to go.*]

A hundred, then.

[*She takes them, and goes into the crowd.*]

Come—deal, deal, deal. 'Tis but for charity
We buy such souls at all. A thousand sins
Made them our master's long before we came.
Come, deal—come, deal. You seem resolved to
starve
Until your bones show through your skin.
Come, deal,
Or live on nettles, grass, and dandelion.
Deal. Do you dream the famine shall go by?
The famine's hale and hearty—it is mine
And my great master's—it shall no wise cease
Until our purpose end. The yellow vapour
That brought it bears it over your dried fields
And fills with violent phantoms of the lost,
And grows more deadly as day copies day.
See how it dims the daylight. Is that peace
Known to the birds of prey so dread a thing?

They, and the souls obedient to our master,
And those who live with that great other spirit
Have gained an end, a peace, while you but toss
And swing upon a moving balance beam.

KEVIN [*a young man, who carries a harp with
torn wires*].

Here, take my soul, for I am tired of it ;
I do not ask a price.

FIRST MERCHANT [*reading*].

A man of songs—

Alone in the hushed passion of romance,
His mind ran all on sheogues, and on tales
Of Finian labours and the Red-branch kings,
And he cared nothing for the life of man :
But now all changes.

KEVIN.

Aye, because her face,
The face of Countess Kathleen dwells with me.
The sadness of the world upon her brow—
The crying of these strings grew burdensome,
Therefore I tore them—see—now take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

KEVIN.

Ah, take it—take it. It nowise can help her,
And, therefore, do I tire of it.

FIRST MERCHANT.

No—no—

We may not touch it.

KEVIN.

Is your power so small,
Must I then bear it with me all my days?
May scorn close deep about you.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Lead him hence;

He troubles me.

[TEIG and SHEMUS lead the young man into the
crowd.]

SECOND MERCHANT.

His gaze has filled me, brother,
With shaking and a dreadful fear.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Lean forward
And kiss my crown here where my master's lips

Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither—
You will have peace once more.

[*The SECOND MERCHANT kisses the gold band that
is about the head of the FIRST MERCHANT.*]

SHEMUS.

He is called Kevin,
And has been crazy now these many days ;
But has no harm in him : his fits soon pass,
And one can go and lead him like a child.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal—are you
dumb ?

SHEMUS.

They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I offer this great price—a thousand pieces
For an old woman who was ever ugly.

[*An old woman comes forward, and he takes up
a parchment, and reads.*]

There is but little set down here against her ;
She stole fowl sometimes when the harvest
failed.

But always went to chapel twice a week,
And paid her dues when prosperous. Take your
money.

THE OLD WOMAN [*curtseying*].
God bless you, sir.

[*She screams.*]

O, sir, a pain went through me.

FIRST MERCHANT.

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.
Begone [*she goes*]. See how the red gold pieces
glitter.
Deal. Do you fear because an old hag screamed?
Are you all cowards?

A PEASANT.

Nay, I am no coward.
I will sell half my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT.

How half your soul?

THE PEASANT.

Half of my chance of heaven.

FIRST MERCHANT.

'Tis writ here

This man in all things takes the moderate course,
He sits on midmost of the balance beam,
And no man has had good of him or evil.
Begone, we will not buy you.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Deal, come deal.

FIRST MERCHANT.

What, will you keep us from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry? Come, deal,
And we will hence to our great master. Deal,
Come, deal, deal.

THE PEASANTS SHOUT.

The Countess comes! The Countess!

KATHLEEN [*entering*].

And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT.

In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire
eyes?

KATHLEEN.

I have a soul to sell, but it is dear.

FIRST MERCHANT.

What matter, if the soul be precious !

KATHLEEN.

Merchants,

These people starve, and therefore do they come
Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them,
And it is in my ears by night and day,
And I would have five hundred thousand crowns,
That I may feed them till the dearth goes by ;
And all the wretched spirits you have bought
For your gold crowns, released, and sent to God.
The soul that I would sell is mine.

A PEASANT.

Do not—

Do not, dear lady, what do our souls matter ?
They are not dear to God as your soul is.
O ! what would heaven do without you, lady ?

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Look how their claws clutch in their leathern
gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Five hundred thousand crowns—we give the price,
The gold is here—the spirits, while you speak,
Begin to labour upward, for your face
Sheds a great light on them and fills their hearts
With those unveilings of the fickle light,
Whereby our heavy labours have been marred
Since first His spirit moved upon the deeps
And stole them from us. Even before this day
The souls were but half ours, for your bright
eyes
Had pierced them through and robbed them of
content.
But you must sign, for we do all in order,
In buying such a soul—sign with this quill ;
It was a feather growing on the cock
That crowed when Peter had denied his Master ;
Tis a great honour thus to write with it.

[KATHLEEN *leans forward to sign.*]

KEVIN [*rushing forward and snatching the parchment from her*].

You shall yet know the love of some great chief,

And children gathering round your knees. Leave
you
The peasants to the builder of the heavens.

KATHLEEN.

I have no thoughts. I hear a cry—a cry.

KEVIN [*casting the parchment on the ground*].

I had a vision under a green hedge,
A hedge of hips and haws—men yet shall hear
Archangels rolling over the high mountains
Old Satan's empty skull.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Take him away.

[TEIG and SHEMUS lead him away. KATHLEEN
*picks up the parchment and signs, and then
turns towards the peasants.*]

KATHLEEN.

Take up the money, and now come with me.
When we are far from this polluted place
I will give each one of you what he needs.

[*She goes out, the peasants crowding round her
and kissing her dress. The TWO MERCHANTS
are left alone.*]

FIRST MERCHANT.

Now are our days of heavy labour done.

SECOND MERCHANT.

We have a precious jewel for Satan's crown.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We must away, and wait until she dies,
Sitting above her tower as twin grey owls, -
Watching as many years as may be, guarding
Our precious jewel—waiting to seize her soul.

SECOND MERCHANT.

And we shall not wait long. I saw a look
That seemed the dimness of the tomb in her,
And she walks slowly, as with leaden slippers,
And has her eyes fixed often on the ground,
As though she saw the worms a-beckoning.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Away! Now leap we feathered on the air.

[*They rush out.*]

END OF SCENE IV.

SCENE V.

[*The room in the castle of COUNTESS KATHLEEN, as in SCENES II. AND III. Dawn breaks faintly through the large window. A number of peasants enter hastily, half dressed, as though aroused suddenly from sleep. OONA is among them.*]

FIRST PEASANT.

There's nothing here.

SECOND PEASANT.

It could not be far off,
A screeching noise—I heard it plain. Neal heard
it.

NEAL [*an old peasant*].

I sleep alone in the room under this.

Last night was cold and windy, I had stuffed
My muffler underneath the door, and pushed
My great cloak up the chimney, yet the wind
Sang through the keyhole.

FIRST PEASANT.

But the noise—

NEAL.

The noise—

I'm coming to the noise. I lay awake
Thinking I should catch cold and surely die,
And wondering if I could close up the keyhole
With an old piece of cloth shaped like a tongue
That hangs over a tear here in my coat,
When right above there came a screech of birds,
A sound of voices and a noise of blows,
It surely came from here, and yet all's empty.

THIRD PEASANT.

And I am sure the noise was further off.

FIRST PEASANT.

We will go search the northern tower.

[*They all go except OONA and a YOUNG PEASANT.*]

YOUNG PEASANT [*going close up to OONA*].

Oona,

I peered out through the window in the passage,
And saw bard Kevin wandering in the wood ;

Sometimes he laid his head upon the ground.
They say he hears the sheogues down below
Nailing four boards.

OONA.

For love has made him crazy,
And loneliness and famine dwell with him.

YOUNG PEASANT.

Then, is not love a thing of bitterness?

OONA.

The years like great black oxen tread the world,
And God, the herdsman, goads them on behind,
When one has lain long under their hard hoofs,
One falls forgetting.

YOUNG PEASANT.

I have not known love,
I am too young ; I will go ask old Neal.

[*He goes.*]

OONA [*alone*].

They wake one up with some mad cry of thieves
Or fire, because they dream—now all folk dream
From being so long hungry.

[*She listens.*]

My dear mistress
Must have dropped off to sleep. All night
She has been pacing in the chapel there.

*[She goes over to the oratory steps and finds them
covered with feathers.]*

I know what clamour frightened them—some bird,
Some hawk or kestrel, chased its prey to this ;
These are owls feathers. I will go and see
What window has swung open over-night.

*[She goes into the oratory and returns hastily,
leaving the door open. A bright light streams
through the open door.]*

My hour has come, oh blessed queen of heaven,
I am to die, for I have seen a vision.
O, they are coming, they are coming, coming.

*[A row of spirits carrying the lifeless body of the
COUNTESS KATHLEEN descend slowly from the
oratory. OONA has crouched down upon the
floor. The spirits lay the body upon the ground
with the head upon the knees of OONA. While
descending from the oratory they sing.]*

SONG.

*All the heavy days are over ;
Leave the body's coloured pride
Underneath the grass and clover
With the feet laid side by side.*

*One with her are mirth and duty,
Bear the gold embroidered dress—
For she needs not her sad beauty—
To the scented oaken press.*

*Hers the kiss of mother Mary,
The long hair is on her face,
Still she goes with footsteps wary,
Full of earth's old timid grace.*

*She goes down the floor of heaven,
Shining bright as a new lance,
And her guides are angels seven,
While young stars about her dance.*

OONA.

Who are you, sirs.

FIRST SPIRIT.

We are angelical.

She gave away her soul for others—God,
Who sees the motive and the deed regards not,
Bade us go down and save her from the demons,
Who do not know the deed can never bind.
We came and waited ; some score minutes since,
As mortals measure time, her body died,
For her heart broke. The demons, as two owls,
Came sweeping hither, murmuring against God.
We drove them hence ; and half our company
Bore the bright spirit to the floors of peace,
And half now give the body to your care.
Let it have noble burial ; build a high
And ample tomb, for she who died and lives
Was noble in her life and in her beauty ;
And when men gaze upon the flying dawn,
We bid them dream of her.

[*While he is speaking the other spirits ascend the steps and pass into the oratory. Last of all he, too, ascends the steps and stands in the doorway for a moment, gazing at OONA.*]

You shall soon follow :
Farewell ! the red rose by the seat of God,

Which is among the angelic multitude
What she, whose body lies here, was to men,
Is brightening in my face, I bear no more
The heavy burden of your mortal days.

[*He enters the oratory, and the bright light fades away. OONA for a time remains silent.*]

OONA [*with a sudden shriek*].
The Countess Kathleen is dead.

[*The peasants come running in.*]

Look, she is dead.

[*She raises one of the arms and lets it fall again.*]

FIRST PEASANT [*wringing his hands*].
O, she was the white lily of the world.

SECOND PEASANT.
Ah, never shall another be so good.

THIRD PEASANT.
She was more beautiful than the great stars.

OONA.

Be silent. Do you dare to keene her? Dare
To set your grief by mine? Stoop—lift her up;
Now carry her and lay her on her bed,
When I have keened I will go be with her,
I will go die, for I have seen a vision.

[They go out carrying the body.]

THE END.



Legends and Lyrics.

"The souls are threshed and the stars threshed from their husks."

(From an unpublished MS. by William Blake.)



*To the Rose upon the Rood of
Time.*



*RED ROSE, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my
days,*

*Come near me while I sing the ancient ways—
Cuchullin battling with the bitter tide ;
The druid, grey, wood nurtured, quiet eyed,
Who cast round Fergus dreams and ruin untold ;
And thine own sadness, whereof stars grown old
In dancing silver sandaled on the sea,
Sing in their high and lonely melody.*

*Come near, that no more blinded by man's fate,
I find under the boughs of love and hate,
In all poor foolish things that live a day,
Eternal Beauty wandering on her way.*

*Come near, come near, come near—Ah, leave me
still*

A little space for the rose-breath to fill,

*Lest I no more hear common things that crave,
The weak worm hiding down in its small cave—
The field mouse running by me in the grass,
And heavy mortal hopes that toil and pass,
But seek alone to hear the strange things said
By God to the bright hearts of those long dead,
And learn to chant a tongue men do not know.
Come near—I would before my time to go,
Sing of old Eri and the ancient ways,
Red Rose, proud Rose, sad Rose of all my days.*

Fergus and the Druid.



FERGUS.

THE whole day have I followed in the rocks,
And you have changed and flowed from
shape to shape.

First as a raven on whose ancient wings
Scarcely a feather lingered, then you seemed
A weasel moving on from stone to stone,
And now at last you take on human shape—
A thin grey man half lost in gathering night.

DRUID.

What would you, king of the proud Red
Branch kings?

FERGUS.

This would I say, most wise of living souls :
Young subtle Concohar sat close by me

When I gave judgment, and his words were wise,
And what to me was burden without end,
To him seemed easy, so I laid the crown
Upon his head to cast away my care.

DRUID.

What would you, king of the proud Red
Branch kings ?

FERGUS:

I feast amid my people on the hill,
And pace the woods, and drive my chariot wheels
In the white border of the murmuring sea ;
And still I feel the crown upon my head.

DRUID.

What would you ?

FERGUS.

I would be no more a king,
But learn the dreaming wisdom that is yours.

DRUID.

Look on my thin grey hair and hollow cheeks,
And on these hands that may not lift the sword,
This body trembling like a wind-blown reed.
No maiden loves me, no man seeks my help,
Because I be not of the things I dream.

FERGUS.

A wild and foolish labourer is a king,
To do and do and do and never dream.

DRUID.

Take, if you must, this little bag of dreams,
Unloose the cord and they will wrap you round.

FERGUS [*having unloosed the cord*].

I see my life go dripping like a stream
From change to change ; I have been many
things—

A green drop in the surge, a gleam of light
Upon a sword, a fir-tree on a hill,
An old slave grinding at a heavy quern,
A king sitting upon a chair of gold,
And all these things were wonderful and great ;
But now I have grown nothing, being all,
And the whole world weighs down upon my
heart—

Ah ! Druid, Druid, how great webs of sorrow
Lay hidden in the small slate-coloured bag !

The Rose of the World.

WHO dreamed that beauty passes like a
dream ?

For these red lips with all their mournful
pride,

Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by :—
Amid men's souls that day by day gives place,
More fleeting than the sea's foam fickle face,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

Bow down archangels in your dim abode :
Before ye were or any hearts to beat,
Weary and kind one stood beside His seat,
He made the world, to be a grassy road
Before her wandering feet.



The Peace of the Rose.

IF Michael, leader of God's host
 When Heaven and Hell are met,
 Looked down on you from Heaven's door-post,
 He would his deeds forget.

Brooding no more upon God's wars
 In his Divine homestead,
 He would go weave out of the stars
 A chaplet for your head ;

And all folk seeing him bow down,
 And white stars tell your praise,
 Would come at last to God's great town,
 Led on by gentle ways ;

And God would bid His warfare cease,
 Saying all things were well,
 And softly make a rosy peace,
 A peace of Heaven with Hell.



The Death of Cuchullin.



A MAN came slowly from the setting sun
 To Emer of Borda, in her clay-piled dun,
 And found her dyeing cloth with subtle care,
 And said, casting aside his draggled hair,
 "I am Aileel, the swineherd, whom you bid
 Go dwell upon the sea cliffs, vapour hid,
 But now my years of watching are no more."

Then Emer cast the web upon the floor,
 And stretching out her arms, red with the dye,
 Parted her lips with a loud sudden cry.

Looking on her, Aileel, the swineherd, said
 "Not any god alive nor mortal dead,
 Has slain so mighty armies, so great kings,
 Nor won the gold that now Cuchullin brings."

“Why do you tremble thus from feet to crown?”

Aileel, the swineherd, wept and cast him down
Upon the web-heaped floor, and thus his word,
“With him is one sweet throated like a bird,
And lovelier than the moon upon the sea ;
He made for her an army cease to be.”

“Who bade you tell these things upon my floor?”

Then to her servants, “Beat him from the door
With thongs of leather.” As she spake it was ;
And where her son, Finmole, on the smooth grass
Was driving cattle came she with swift feet,
And cried out to him, “Son, it is not meet
That you stay idling here with flocks and
herds.”

“Long have I waited mother for those words,
But wherefore now ? ”

“There is a man to die,
You have the heaviest arm under the sky.”

“My father,” made he smiling answer then,
“Still treads the world amid his armed men.”

“Nay, you are taller than Cuchullin, son.”

“He is the mightiest man in ship or dun.”

“Nay, he is old and sad with many wars,
And weary of the crash of battle cars.”

“I only ask what way my journey lies,
For God who made you bitter made you wise.”

“The Red Branch kings a tireless banquet keep,
Where the sun falls into the Western deep.
Go there and dwell on the green forest rim,
But tell alone your name and house to him
Whose blade compels, and bid them send you
 one
Who has a like vow from their triple dun.”

Between the lavish shelter of a wood
And the grey tide, the Red Branch multitude
Feasted, and with them old Cuchullin dwelt,
And his young dear one close beside him knelt,
And gazed upon the wisdom of his eyes,
More mournful than the depth of starry skies,
And pondered on the wonder of his days,
And all around the harp string told his praise,
And Concohar, the Red Branch king of kings,
With his own finger touched the brazen strings.

At last Cuchullin spake, "A young man strays
Driving the deer along the woody ways.
I often hear him singing to and fro,
I often hear the sweet sound of his bow.
Seek out what man he is."

One went and came.

"He bade me let all know he gives his name
At the sword point and bade me bring him one,
Who had a like vow from our triple dun."

"I only of the Red Branch hosted now."
Cuchullin cried, "have made and keep that vow."

After short fighting in the leafy shade,
He spake to the young man, "Is there no maid
Who loves you, no white arms to wrap you
round,
Or do you long for the dim sleepy ground,
That you come here to meet this ancient
sword?"

"God only sees what doom for me lies stored."

"Your head a while seemed like a woman's
head
That I loved once."

Again the fighting sped,
But now the war rage in Cuchullin woke,
And through the other's shield his long blade
 broke,
And pierced him.

 "Speak before your breath is done."

"I am Finmole, mighty Cuchullin's son."

"I put you from your pain. I can no more."

While day its burden on to evening bore,
With head bowed on his knees Cuchullin
 staid,

Then Conco-bar sent that sweet throated maid
And she to win him, his grey hair caressed—
In vain her arms, in vain her soft white breast.
Then Conco-bar, the subtlest of all men,
Sent for his druids twenty score and ten,
And cried, "Cuchullin will dwell there and
 brood,

For three days more in dreadful quietude,
And then arise, and raving slay us all.
Go, cast on him delusions magical,
That he may fight the waves of the loud sea."
Near to Cuchullin, round a quicken tree,

The druids chanted, swaying in their hands
Tall wands of alder and white quicken wands.

In three days time he stood up with a moan,
And he went down to the long sands alone,
For four days warred he with the bitter tide,
And the waves flowed above him and he died.

The White Birds.



I WOULD that we were, my beloved, white
 birds on the foam of the sea,
 We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can
 pass by and flee ;
 And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung
 low on the rim of the sky,
 Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness
 that never may die.

A weariness comes from those dreamers, dew
 dabbled, the lily and rose,
 Ah, dream not of them, my beloved, the flame of
 the meteor that goes,
 Or the flame of the blue star that lingers hung
 low in the fall of the dew :
 For I would we were changed to white birds on
 the wandering foam—I and you.

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many
a Danaan shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow
come near us no more,
Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of
the flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed
out on the foam of the sea.

Father Gilligan.



THE old priest Peter Gilligan
 Was weary night and day,
 For half his flock were in their beds
 Or under green sods lay.

Once while he nodded on a chair,
 At the moth-hour of eve,
 Another poor man sent for him,
 And he began to grieve.

“I have no rest, nor joy, nor peace,
 For people die and die ;”
 And after cried he, “God forgive !
 My body spake, not I !”

And then, half-lying on the chair,
 He knelt, prayed, fell asleep ;
 And the moth-hour went from the fields,
 And stars began to peep.

They slowly into millions grew,
And leaves shook in the wind ;
And God covered the world with shade,
And whispered to mankind.

Upon the time of sparrow chirp
When the moths came once more,
The old priest Peter Gilligan
Stood upright on the floor.

“ Mavrone, mavrone ! the man has died,
While I slept on the chair ” ;
He roused his horse out of its sleep,
And rode with little care.

He rode now as he never rode,
By rocky lane and fen ;
The sick man's wife opened the door :
“ Father ! you come again ! ”

“ And is the poor man dead ? ” he cried.
“ He died an hour ago.”
The old priest Peter Gilligan
In grief swayed to and fro.

“When you were gone he turned and died,
As merry as a bird.”

The old priest Peter Gilligan
He knelt him at that word.

“He who hath made the night of stars
For souls who tire and bleed
Sent one of His great angels down
To help me in my need.

“He who is wrapped in purple robes,
With planets in his care,
Had pity on the least of things
Asleep upon a chair.”

Father O'Hart.



GOOD Father John O' Hart
 In penal days rode out
 To a shoneen who had free lands
 And his own snipe and trout.

In trust took he John's lands—
 Sleiveens were all his race—
 And he gave them as dowers to his daughters,
 And they married beyond their place.

But Father John went up,
 And Father John went down ;
 And he wore small holes in his shoes,
 And he wore large holes in his gown.

All loved him, only the shoneen,
 Whom the devils have by the hair,
 From the wives, and the cats, and the children,
 To the birds in the white of the air.

The birds, for he opened their cages
As he went up and down ;
And he said with a smile, " Have peace now,"
And went his way with a frown.

But if when any one died
Came keeners hoarser than rooks,
He bade them give over their keening,
For he was a man of books.

And these were the works of John,
When weeping score by score,
People came into Coloony,
For he'd died at ninety-four.

There was no human keening ;
The birds from Knocknarea
And the world round Knocknashee
Came keening in that day.

The young birds and old birds
Came flying, heavy, and sad,
Keening in from Tiraragh,
Keening from Ballinafad ;

Keening from Innismurry,
Nor stayed for bite or sup ;
This way were all reproved
Who dig old customs up.

When you are Old.

WHEN you are old and grey and full of sleep,
 And nodding by the fire, take down this
 book

And slowly read and dream of the soft look
 Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep.

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
 And loved your beauty with love false or true,
 But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
 And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars
 Murmur, a little sad, "From us fled Love.
 He paced upon the mountains far above,
 And hid his face amid a crowd of stars."



The Sorrow of Love.

THE quarrel of the sparrows in the eaves,
The full round moon and the star-laden
sky,
And the loud song of the ever-singing leaves
Had hid away earth's old and weary cry.

And then you came with those red mournful lips,
And with you came the whole of the world's
tears,
And all the sorrows of her labouring ships,
And all burden of her myriad years.

And now the sparrows warring in the eaves,
The crumbling moon, the white stars in the
sky,
And the loud chanting of the unquiet leaves,
Are shaken with earth's old and weary cry.



*The Ballad of the Old Fox-
hunter.*



“ **N**OW lay me in a cushioned chair,
 And carry me ye four,
With cushions here and cushions there,
 To see the world once more.

“ And some one from the stable bring
 My Dermot dear and brown,
And lead him gently in a ring,
 And slowly up and down.

“ Now leave the chair upon the grass,
 Bring hound and huntsman here,
And I on this strange road will pass
 Filled full of ancient cheer.”

His eyelids droop, his head falls low,
His old eyes cloud with dreams ;
The sun upon all things that grow,
Pours round in sleepy streams.

Brown Dermot treads upon the lawn,
And to the armchair goes,
And now the old man's dreams are gone,
He smooths the long brown nose.

And now moves many a pleasant tongue,
Upon his wasted hands,
For leading aged hounds and young
The huntsman near him stands.

“ Now huntsman Rody, blow thy horn,
And make the hills reply.”
The huntsman loosens on the morn,
A gay and wandering cry.

A fire is in the old man's eyes,
His fingers move and sway,
And when the wandering music dies,
They hear him feebly say,

“ Now huntsman Rody, blow thy horn,
And make the hills reply.”

“ I cannot blow upon my horn,
I can but weep and sigh.”

The servants round his cushioned place
Are with new sorrow wrung ;
The hounds are gazing on his face,
The old hounds and the young.

“ Now huntsman Rody, blow thy horn—”
Die off the feeble sounds :
And gazing on his visage worn,
Are old and puppy hounds ;

The oldest hound with mournful din,
Lifts slow his wintry head :—
The servants bear the body in—
The hounds keen for the dead.

A Fairy Song.

*Sung by the "Good People" over the outlaw Michael Dwyer
and his bride, who had escaped into the mountains.*

WE who are old, old and gay,
 O so old,
 Thousands of years, thousands of years,
 If all were told :

Give to these children new from the world
 Silence and love,
 And the long dew-dropping hours of the night
 And the stars above :

Give to these children new from the world
 Rest far from men.
 Is anything better, anything better ?
 Tell it us then :

Us who are old, old and gay,
 O so old,
 Thousands of years, thousands of years,
 If all were told.



The Pity of Love.

A PITY beyond all telling,
Is hid in the heart of love ;
The folk who are buying and selling,
The stars of God where they move,
The mouse-grey waters on flowing,
The clouds on their journey above,
And the cold wet winds ever blowing,
All threaten the head that I love.



The Lake Isle of Innisfree.

I WILL arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and
wattles made ;

Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the
honey bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace
comes dropping slow,

Dropping from the veils of the morning to
where the cricket sings ;

There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple
glow,

And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by
the shore ;

While I stand on the roadway or on the pave-
ments gray,

I hear it in the deep heart's core.



A Cradle Song.

“Coth yani me von gilli beg,
 'N heur ve thu more a creena.”

THE angels are bending
 Above your white bed,
 They weary of tending
 The souls of the dead.

God smiles in high heaven
 To see you so good,
 The old planets seven
 Grow gay with his mood.

I kiss you and kiss you,
 With arms round my own,
 Ah, how shall I miss you,
 When, dear, you have grown.



*The Man who Dreamed of
Fairylan*



I

HE stood among a crowd at Drumahair,
 His heart hung all upon a silken dress,
 And he had known at last some tenderness
 Before earth made of him her sleepy care ;
 But when a man poured fish into a pile,
 It seemed they raised their little silver heads
 And sang how day a Druid twilight sheds
 Upon a dim, green, well-beloved isle,
 Where people love beside star-laden seas ;
 How Time may never mar their fairy vows
 Under the woven roofs of quicken boughs ;—
 The singing shook him out of his new ease.

II

As he went by the sands of Lisadill,
 His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
 And he had known at last some prudent years
 Before they heaped his grave under the hill ;
 But while he passed before a plashy place,
 A lug-worm with its gray and muddy mouth
 Sang how somewhere to north or east or south
 There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race ;
 And how beneath those three times blessed skies
 A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons
 And as it falls awakens leafy tunes ;—
 And at that singing he was no more wise.

III

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,
 He mused upon his mockers. Without fail
 His sudden vengeance were a country tale
 Now that deep earth has drunk his body in
 But one small knot-grass growing by the rim
 Told where—ah, little, all-unneeded voice !—
 Old Silence bids a lonely folk rejoice,
 And chaplet their calm brows with leafage dim,

And how, when fades the sea-strewn rose of day,
A gentle feeling wraps them like a fleece,
And all their trouble dies into its peace ;—
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

IV

He slept under the hill of Lugnagall,
And might have known at last unhaunted sleep
Under that cold and vapour-turbaned steep,
Now that old earth had taken man and all :
Were not the worms that spired about his bones
A-telling with their low and reedy cry,
Of how God leans His hands out of the sky,
To bless that isle with honey in His tones,
That none may feel the power of squall and wave,
And no one any leaf-crowned dancer miss
Until He burn up Nature with a kiss ;—
The man has found no comfort in the grave.

Dedication of "Irish Tales."



THERE was a green branch hung with many
 a bell
 When her own people ruled in wave-worn Eri,
 And from its murmuring greenness, calm of
 faery
 —A Druid kindness—on all hearers fell.

It charmed away the merchant from his guile,
 And turned the farmer's memory from his
 cattle,
 And hushed in sleep the roaring ranks of battle,
 For all who heard it dreamed a little while.

Ah, Exiles wandering over many seas,
 Spinning at all times Eri's good to-morrow,
 Ah, world-wide Nation, always growing Sorrow,
 I also bear a bell branch full of ease.

I tore it from green boughs winds tossed and
 hurled,
 Green boughs of tossing always, weary, weary,
 I tore it from the green boughs of old Eri,
 The willow of the many-sorrowed world.

Ah, Exiles, wandering over many lands,
 My bell branch murmurs : the gay bells bring
 laughter,
 Leaping to shake a cobweb from the rafter ;
 The sad bells bow the forehead on the hands.

A honied ringing, under the new skies
 They bring you memories of old village faces,
 Cabins gone now, old well-sides, old dear places,
 And men who loved the cause that never dies.

The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner.

I HAD a chair at every hearth,
When no one turned to see,
With "look at that old fellow there,
And who may he be?"
And therefore do I wander on,
And the fret lies on me.

The road-side trees keep murmuring.
Ah, wherefore murmur ye,
As in the old days long gone by,
Green oak and poplar tree?
The well-known faces are all gone
And the fret lies on me.



When you are Sad.

WHEN you are sad,
The mother of the stars weeps too,
And all her starlight is with sorrow mad,
And tears of fire fall gently in the dew.

When you are sad,
The mother of the wind mourns too,
And her old wind that no mirth ever had,
Wanders and wails before my heart most true

When you are sad,
The mother of the wave sighs too,
And her dim wave bids man be no more glad,
And then the whole world's trouble weeps
with you.



The Two Trees.

BELOVED, gaze in thine own heart,
 The holy tree is growing there ;
 From joy the holy branches start,
 And all the trembling flowers they bear.
 The changing colours of its fruit
 Have dowered the stars with merry light ;
 The surety of its hidden root,
 Has planted quiet in the night ;
 The shaking of its leafy head,
 Has given the waves their melody,
 And made my lips and music wed,
 Murmuring a wizard song for thee.
 There, through bewildered branches, go
 Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
 Tossing and tossing to and fro
 The flaming circle of our life.

When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care :—
Beloved gaze in thine own heart.

Gaze no more in the bitter glass
The demons with their subtle guile
Lift up before us as they pass,
Or only gaze a little while ;
For there a fatal image grows,
With broken boughs and blackened leaves
And roots half hidden under snows
Driven by a storm that ever grieves.
For all things turn to barrenness
In the dim glass the demons hold—
The glass of outer weariness,
Made when God slept in times of old.
There, through the broken branches, go
The ravens of unresting thought ;
Peering and flying to and fro,
To see men's souls bartered and bought.
When they are heard upon the wind,
And when they shake their wings—alas !
Thy tender eyes grow all unkind :—
Gaze no more in the bitter glass.

*They went forth to the Battle,
but they always fell.*



ROSE of all Roses, Rose of all the World,
The tall thought-woven sails that flap unfurled

Above the tide of hours, rise on the air,
And God's bell buoyed to be the waters' care,
And pressing on, or lingering slow with fear,
The throngs with blown wet hair are gathering
near.

"Turn if ye may," I call out to each one,
"From the grey ships and battles never won.
Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
For him who hears Love sing and never cease
Besides her clean swept hearth, her quiet shade ;
But gather all for whom no Love hath made
A woven silence, or but came to cast
A song into the air, and singing past

To smile upon her stars ; and gather you,
 Who have sought more than is in rain or dew,
 Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,
 Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,
 Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips,
 And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
 The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
 To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell,
 God's bell has claimed them by the little cry
 Of their sad hearts that may not live nor die."

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World,
 You, too, have come where the dim tides are
 hurled

Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring
 The bell that calls us on—the sweet far thing.
 Beauty grown sad with its eternity,
 Made you of us and of the dim grey sea.
 Our longships loose thought-woven sails and wait,
 For God has bid them share an equal fate ;
 And when at last defeated in His wars,
 They have gone down under the same white
 stars,

We shall no longer hear the little cry
 Of our sad hearts that may not live nor die.

An Epitaph.

I DREAMED that one had died in a strange
place

Near no accustomed hand,
And they had nailed the boards above her face,
The peasants of that land,
And wondering, planted by her solitude
A cypress and a yew.

I came and wrote upon a cross of wood

—Man had no more to do—

“She was more beautiful than thy first love
This lady by the trees,”

And gazed upon the mournful stars above
And heard the mournful breeze.



*Apologia addressed to Ireland
in the coming days.*



*KNOW that I would accounted be
True brother of that company
Who sang to sweeten Irelana's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song ;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red rose bordered hem
Of her whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page,
For in the world's first blossoming age
The light fall of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat,
And still the starry candles flare
To help her light foot here and there,
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood,
Upon her holy quietude.*

*Nor may I less be counted one
 With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
 Because to him who ponders well
 My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
 Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
 That God gives unto man in sleep.
 For round about my table go
 The magical powers to and fro.
 In flood and fire and clay and wind,
 They huddle from man's pondering mind,
 Yet he who treads in austere ways
 May surely meet their ancient gaze.
 Man ever journeys on with them
 After the red rose bordered hem.
 Ah, fairies, dancing under the moon,
 A druid land, a druid tune !*

*While still I may I write out true
 The love I lived, the dream I knew.
 From our birthday until we die,
 Is but the winking of an eye.
 And we, our singing and our love,
 The mariners of night above,
 And all the wizard things that go
 About my table to and fro,
 Are passing on to where may be,*

*In truth's consuming ecstasy,
No place for love and dream at all,
For God goes by with white foot-fall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you in the dim coming times
May know how my heart went with them
After the red rose bordered hem.*

Notes.



"*The Countess Kathleen.*" The play is founded on a West of Ireland folk tale.

Page 16, line 12. "Clauber" is a Sligo word for thick and clinging mud.

Page 19, line 1. The horned owl is associated in popular belief with evil fairies.

Page 20, line 8. The "Pooka" is a spirit that rarely takes human form, but appears commonly as a bull, horse, goat, eagle, or ass. The "Sowlth" is a formless, luminous apparition.

Page 32, line 6. Oisín, the poet of the Finian age, and son to Fin-ma-cool, crossed the sea on an enchanted horse with Niam, his fairy bride, and lived three hundred years in *Tier-nan-oge*, or fairyland.

Page 32, line 13. Fergus, poet of the Conorian age, had been king of all Ireland, but gave up his throne that he might live at peace hunting in the forests.

Page 39, lines 11-13. Adene was a famous legendary queen who went away from the world and dwelt among the "shee," as the fairies are called in the old poems and in contemporary folk lore.

Page 40, line 5. "Danaan" is a common abbreviation of Tuatha-de-Danaan, the name of the gods of Celtic Ireland in old days, and of the fairies in mediæval literature, and modern folk lore.

Page 47, line 2. A "bonyeen" is a little pig.

Page 50, line 2. A "sheogue" is a diminutive, and means "a little fairy."

Page 55, line 2. A "tevis" is an earth-bound and earth-wandering ghost.

Page 63, line 5. "Shannachus" is a Gaelic word meaning "stories." It is, or was a common word among the peasantry, both Gaelic and English speaking.

Page 73, line 9. "Red Branch" was the name of the circle of warriors who preceded the Finian circle by about two hundred years, according to bardic chronology, and gathered round "Conobar" or "Conor," as the later circle gathered round Fin.

"*To the Rose upon the Rood of Time.*" The rose is a favourite symbol with the Irish poets. It has given a name to more than one poem, both Gaelic and English, and is used, not merely in love poems, but in addresses to Ireland, as in De Vere's line, "The little black rose shall be red at last," and in Mangan's "Dark Rosaleen." I do not, of course, use it in this latter sense.

"*The Death of Cuchullin.*" Cuchullin (pronounced Cuhoolin) was the great warrior of the Conorian cycle. My poem is founded on a West of Ireland legend given by Curtin in "Myths and Folk lore of Ireland." The bardic tale of the death of Cuchullin is very different.

"*The White Birds.*" The birds of fairyland are white as snow. The "Danaan shore" is, of course, *Tier-nan-oge*, or fairyland.

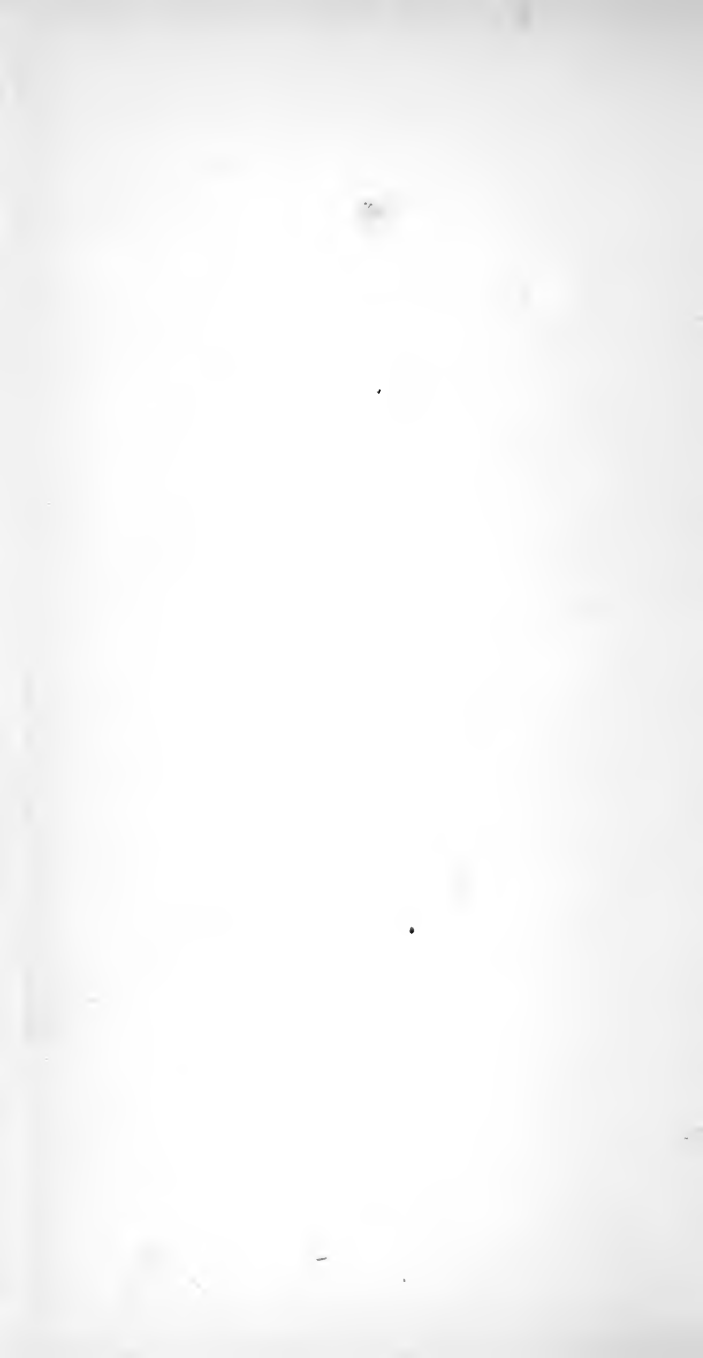
"*Father Gilligan.*" This ballad is founded on the Kerry version of an old folk tale.

"*Father O'Hart.*" This ballad is founded on the story of a certain "Father O'Hart," priest of Coloony in the last century, told by the present priest of Coloony in his most interesting "History of Ballisodare and Kelvarnet." The robbery of the lands of Father O'Hart was one of

those incidents which occurred sometimes, though but rarely, during the time of the penal laws. Catholics, who were forbidden to own landed property, evaded the law by giving some honest Protestant nominal possession of their estates. There are instances on record in which poor men were nominal owners of unnumbered acres.

"*The Ballad of the Old Fox Hunter.*" This ballad is founded on an incident—probably in its turn a transcript from Tipperary tradition—in Kickham's "Knockangow."

"*The Lamentation of the Old Pensioner.*" This small poem is little more than a translation into verse of the very words of an old Wicklow peasant.





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