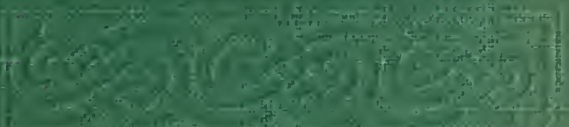


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SAMUEL JOHNSON.



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:: Poems of Sir ::
Samuel Ferguson



SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON.

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General Editors : ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES, M.A.

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POEMS OF SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES, M.A.

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IN MEMORY

OF

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON.

“ Strong Son of Fergus, with thy latest breath
Thou hast lent a joy unto the funeral knell,
Welcoming with thy whispered ‘ All is well ’
The awful aspect of the Angel Death :
As strong in life, thou couldst not brook to shun
The heat and burthen of the fiery day,
Fronting defeat with stalwart undismay,
And wearing meekly honours stoutly won.
Pure lips, pure hands, pure heart were thine, as aye
Erin demanded from her bards of old,
And therefore on thy harp-strings of pure gold
Has waked once more her high heroic lay.
What shoulders now shall match the mighty fold
Of Ossian’s mantle ? Thou hast passed away.”

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES.

BIOGRAPHICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE.

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON, sixth and youngest child of John Ferguson and his wife Agnes Knox, was born in Belfast, in the house of his maternal grandfather, on March 10, 1810.

The Ferguson family had emigrated to the North of Ireland from Scotland about the year 1640, and we find Samuel Ferguson, Sir Samuel's grandfather, resident at Standing Stone, in the County of Antrim. The younger Samuel was educated in Belfast and at Trinity College, Dublin. He was called to the Irish Bar in 1838, and to the Inner Bar in 1859.

In 1867 he retired from the practice of his profession to become the first Deputy Keeper of the Records of Ireland. But while only in his twenty-first year he wrote "The Forging of the Anchor," and "Willy Gilliland," and contributed prose such as "The Wet Wooing" and "The Return of Claneboy" to *Blackwood*. A little later, in the early thirties, he published "The Fairy Thorn," "The Forester's Complaint," and a series of papers on Hardiman's IRISH MINSTRELSY, containing verse translations from the Gaelic. A long series of historic tales—the Hibernian Nights' Entertainments—followed in *The Dublin University Magazine*. Overwrought at the Bar, he recruited his health by spending the year 1845-46 on the Continent, employing much

of his time in a diligent examination of the museums, libraries, and architectural remains of the principal places in Europe where traces of the early Irish scholars and missionaries might be looked for. His notebooks are in consequence enriched with exquisite sketches of scenery and antiquities and pen-and-ink etchings of foreign cathedrals.

Thus his travels added largely to his knowledge of art, archæology, and history.

He married in 1848 Mary Catherine, eldest daughter of Mr. Robert R. Guinness, and soon settled permanently at 20 North Great George's Street, Dublin. In the same year he founded the Protestant Repeal Association to aid the Young Ireland movement, but subsequently withdrew altogether from active politics. In 1865, after the publication of his *Lays of the Western Gael*, he received the degree of LL.D. *honoris causâ* from Dublin University, and in 1874 was made an honorary member of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. His knighthood was conferred on him in 1878, he was made president of the Royal Irish Academy in 1881, and at the tercentenary of the University of Edinburgh in 1884 he received the honorary degree of LL.D.

During these years he was a busy writer on literary and archæological questions, and as an evidence of the variety of his work at this time may be mentioned his famous *jeu d'esprit* "Father Tom and the Pope," afterwards reprinted in "Tales from Blackwood," and his letter to Hallam the historian, which appeared in *The Dublin University Magazine* and led to the erection of a statue in the new Houses of Parliament to Henri de Londres, Archbishop of Dublin, in the thirteenth century, whose

just claim to that distinction would otherwise have been overlooked.

Many of Ferguson's articles in magazines and reviews at the time deal with such general subjects as the poetry of Burns and Mrs. Browning, Ruskin's "Stones of Venice and Seven Lamps of Architecture," Layard's "Nineveh," and Chesney's volume on "Artillery."

But the work which was distinctly his, and to which his best faculties were given, was concerned with Ireland, and covered a wide field. For we find him now dealing with Irish music, now with Irish architecture; or again with Irish annals, Irish law, and Irish antiquities—Pagan and Christian—and yet attending to such subjects of modern importance as the attractions and capabilities of his country. And here it may be said that he was an ardent explorer of Irish scenery as well as of the remains of the old Irish ecclesiastical establishments, as his two charming papers—the results of a tour made by him to Clonmacnois, Clare, and Aran—convincingly prove. To these prose works he was meantime adding his "Lament for Thomas Davis," his "Inheritor and Economist," "Dublin: a satire after Juvenal," "Westminster Abbey," and his "Cromlech on Howth," exquisitely illustrated and illuminated with initial letters from the Book of Kells by his friend Miss Margaret Stokes. Ferguson published his epic "Congal" (founded on the ancient bardic tale of the Battle of Moy-Rath)—which he himself considered his *magnum opus*—in 1872, though a subsequent volume of poems containing "Conary" and "Deirdre" and "The Naming of Cuchullin," and published in 1880, has met with more popular acceptance. A small book, "Shakespearean Breviates"—condensations of some of Shakes-

peare's plays for the use of Shakespeare Reading Societies, the broken plots being skilfully woven together, with explanatory verses—was also brought out during Ferguson's lifetime. Two posthumously published volumes are "Ogham Inscriptions of Ireland, Wales, and Scotland," and "The Remains of St. Patrick," a verse rendition of the writings of our national saint. "Lays of the Red Branch," published after his death by Lady Ferguson, is a collection from different volumes of all the poems dealing with the Conorian cycle of Irish heroic literature, arranged in historical order and furnished with an historical introduction by his wife who shared his literary and antiquarian tastes and proved herself as devoted a Vanithee as any Irishman could hope to have.

Sir Samuel Ferguson, after an illness of some months' duration—a failure of the heart's action—passed away on August 9, 1886, at Shand Lodge, Howth. His personal popularity attested to by many friendships, formed through life amongst old and young of every persuasion and party, was confirmed at his death by the commingling of all classes and creeds at his funeral as it passed to St. Patrick's Cathedral. For thither, besides many private friends, followed the officers and members of the Royal Irish Academy, with their mace draped in crape for their dead president; whilst the staff of the Record Office, down to the humblest workman connected with it, joined the procession.

The Archbishop of Dublin, Lord Plunket, delivered a touching address after the service, which contained these words: "Do we not all feel that by the death of our dear brother departed in the Lord we have all of us as Irishmen suffered an irreparable loss? In whatever

light we may regard the character of him who has been taken from us—whether as a scholar, a poet, or a patriot, or a God-fearing servant of his Master—we must all feel that Ireland has suffered a loss which it will be impossible to repair, and which cannot be confined merely to those who belong to any one class or any one creed amongst us.”

My uncle, Robert Perceval Graves, one of the Fergusons' best friends, much gratified Lady Ferguson and her friends by his elegiac sonnet, in which he testifies so truly to the intimate spiritual and intellectual bonds that linked the poet and his wife to the last.

LADY FERGUSON.

Thus spake he when he saw her rising tear :

“ Mary, you must be brave. ' Though now we part,
We shall be reunited ! ” and her heart

Drank in with sad delight the tender cheer.

Nor could she but be sad, when he was near

Who soon would be so far ; when every art

To keep him here was baffled ; when the dart
Of ruthless Death must strike a life so dear.

In all things she was Partner of his Mind ;

Felt with him as a Poet, with her own

His joy in Shakespeare matched ; nor fell behind

His quest of Bardic lay and Ogham stone.

And partner is she still ; to her is given

His “ All is well ! ” to breathe in hope of Heaven.

INTRODUCTION.

SIR SAMUEL FERGUSON was unquestionably the Irish poet of the past century who has most powerfully influenced the literary history of his country. It was in his writings that was decisively begun the great work of restoring to Ireland the spiritual treasure it had sacrificed in losing the Gaelic tongue. He was, however, no mere antiquarian. He was also a scholar, and a patriot in the highest sense of the word. He had friends in all parties, for he was in no sense a political partisan. Indeed, though with strong Irish National feeling—of which he gave evidence in some of his earlier ballads, and which came to the front in his successful defence of Richard D'Alton Williams, the Young Ireland poet, when tried for treason-felony—he felt that the highest duty he owed his country was that of a poet and prose writer above party. But in his poetic capacity, as pointed out by Mr. W. B. Yeats, "he was wiser than Young Ireland in the choice of his models; for while drawing not less than they from purely Irish sources, he turned to the great poets of the world for his style," and notably to Homer: and the result is that, as Roden Noel puts it, "*Congal* and his shorter Irish heroic poems combine in a striking manner the vague, undefined shadowy grandeur, the supernatural glamour of northern romance, with the self-restraint, distinct symmetrical outline, ordered pro-

portion and organic construction of the Greek classic." More than this, as his brother poet and friend, Aubrey de Vere, urges, "its qualities are those characteristic of the noble, not the ignoble poetry—viz., passion, imagination, vigour, an epic largeness of conception, wide human sympathies, vivid and truthful description—while with them it unites none of the vulgar stimulants for exhausted or morbid poetic appetite, whether the epicurean seasoning, the sceptical, or the revolutionary."

Ferguson differs from those who regard the realm of poetry as another world detachable from this—a life mystical, non-human, non-moral—the life, if you will, of fairy, demon, or demi-god. Indeed, he was in no danger of falling into this illusion. He was absolutely human and practical; broad and sympathetic-minded both. Yet for entire success as a poet in his particular day he had to struggle against difficulties constitutional, accidental, and of his own seeking. His very versatility rendered difficult that entire devotion of his energies to his art, of which Tennyson is the great modern example. He could not spare the time, even had he possessed the taste, for that fastidious word-for-word finish in verse to which the late Laureate accustomed the critics, and through them the educated public, which undoubtedly, for the time being, militated against the success of Ferguson's poetry.

Then he was deliberately facing the fact that the Irish themes he had set his heart upon had no public behind them. A generation before they would have had the support of a cultured and unprovincialised Irish upper class; a generation later they would have claimed atten-

tion, in Ferguson's hands, as the noblest outcome of the Irish literary revival. He was therefore both before and after his time, and realised his position to the full. Indeed, when I once spoke to him with regret of the neglect of all but Irish political literature, he acknowledged it, but with the quiet expression of his confidence that "his time would come." Edward Dowden explains the fact that *Congal* had not hit the popular taste in the following passage of a letter to Sir Samuel :

"A poem with epic breadth and thews is not likely to be popular now. A diseased and over-sensitive nerve is a qualification for the writing of poetry at present, much more than a thoughtful brain or strength of muscle. Some little bit of novel sensibility, a delight in such colours as French milliners send over for ladies' bonnets, or the nosing of certain curious odours, is enough to make the fortune of a small poet. What seems to me most noteworthy in your poems is the union of culture with simplicity and strength. Their refinement is large and strong, not curious and diseased ; and they have spaces and movements which give one a feeling like the sea or the air on a headland. I had not meant to say anything of *Congal*, but somehow this came and said itself."

Nothing could be more truly appreciative of Ferguson's work than this. That fine saying, "Your poems have spaces and movements which give one a feeling like the sea or the air on a headland," may be here illustrated by one of the greatest passages in *Congal*, indeed, it in all probability suggested the criticism to Dr. Dowden. It may be quoted, moreover, as a telling example of how Ferguson's careless or rough treatment of detail

is carried off by the largeness of his conception and movement :

He looking landward from the brow of some great
 sea-cape's head,
Bray or Ben Edar—sees beneath, in silent pageant grand,
Slow fields of sunshine spread o'er fields of rich, corn-
 bearing land,
Red glebe and meadow margin green commingling to
 the view
With yellow stubble, browning woods, and upland
 tracts of blue ;
Then, sated with the pomp of fields, turns seaward
 to the verge
Where, mingling with the murmuring wash made by
 the far-down surge,
Comes up the clangorous song of birds unseen, that,
 low beneath,
Poised off the rock, ply underfoot ; and, 'mid the
 blossoming heath,
And mint-sweet herb that loves the ledge rare-air'd, at
 ease reclined,
Surveys the wide pale-heaving floor crisped by a curling
 wind ;
With all its shifting, shadowy belts, and chasing scopes
 of green,
Sun-strewn, foam-freckled, sail-embossed, and black-
 ening squalls between,
And slant, cerulean-skirted showers that with a drowsy
 sound,
Heard inward, of ebullient waves, stalk all the horizon
 round ;

And, haply, being a citizen just 'scaped from some
 disease
 That long has held him sick indoors, now, in the brine-
 frèsh breeze,
 Health-salted, bathes ; and says, the while he breathes
 reviving bliss,
 " I am not good enough, O God, nor pure enough for
 this !"

The ear educated to Tennyson's or Swinburne's verse would be jarred by the heavy aggregation of consonants here and there in the passage. But as a presentment of country, cliff, and ocean, it is alike so broad and delicate in colour and movement that it rises visibly before us, till the echo of the sea is in our ears, and we breathe and smell its keen savours. Then the human note with which it closes is inexpressibly touching.

It is not, however, implied that Ferguson is wanting in the musical ear or the appreciation of fine poetical craftsmanship, but rather suggested that, unlike Tennyson and other writers, he is not *sectus ad unguem* in everything he attempts, because he is not careful to be so. Moreover, like Wordsworth, he did not always write when his best mood was upon him. And hence like Wordsworth and, I may add, Browning, he will live in selections, though large selections, from his works, rather than in their entirety. Yet, *The Forging of the Anchor* is a remarkably finished achievement for a young man of one-and-twenty, and *The Fairy Thorn*, another early poem, is exquisite wizardry itself. True, it appears to have been conceived and executed with a rapidity which was inspiration, and is indeed one of Ferguson's gems without flaw.

Next come Ferguson's Translations from the Irish which arose from his study of his country's language along with John O'Hagan, afterwards an Irish Judge, and above all George Fox, a young Belfast man, of whom he writes in after life :

" His discourse possessed a fascination equal to all that I have heard ascribed to that of Coleridge, and under his influence my poetic faculty, which had already shown itself in the ballad of *Willy Gilliland* acquired strength for the production of "*The Forging of the Anchor*," published in *Blackwood* in May, 1832. We had formed a private class for the study of Irish. The early history of Ulster had already seized on my imagination, and the *Return of Claneboy*, a prose romance which I contributed about that time to *Blackwood*, may be regarded as the first indication of my ambition to raise the native elements of Irish History to a dignified level ; and this ambition, I think, may be taken as the key to almost all the literary work of my subsequent life."

George Fox probably died young. " He left Belfast to push his fortunes in British Guiana," writes Lady Ferguson in her memoirs of her husband, and no doubt succumbed to its unhealthy climate. His youthful friends heard no more of him. They spared no efforts, through a long period of years, to learn his fate.

When Ferguson, in 1864, published in his *Lays of the Western Gael*, his *Versions from the Irish*, which had appeared first in the *Dublin University Magazine* of 1834 in the form of translations with a Commentary from Hardiman's *Irish Minstrelsy*, he would not include one of the best among them, as he considered George Fox entitled to share in the authorship of *The County Mayo*,

and when almost fifty years had passed since his early friend had been heard of, and he, in 1880, published his Poems, the Volume bore this brief and touching dedication—*Georgio, Amico, Condiscipulo, Instaturatori.*

Ferguson's translations from the Irish differ from Miss Brooke's and Miss Balfour's versions and those of other translators preceding him, by their assimilation of Irish idioms and the Irish spirit into English verse without violence—indeed, with a happy judgment which lends a delightful effect to these lyrics. Edward Walsh has scarcely excelled Ferguson in this field; and Dr. Sigerson and Dr. Hyde, though they come much closer to the original metres, rarely go past him in poetical feeling and passion.

For the very character of the originals calls for simple treatment, and high polish would have spoilt Ferguson's verse translations from the Irish.

Ferguson was now casting round for nobler themes to work upon, whilst keeping his hand in at these translations from the Irish. Patriotic to the core, he was above all things eager to achieve something lofty in literature for Ireland's sake—something that might help to lift her from the intellectual flats upon which she had fallen.

Moreover, another Belfast friend and mentor, Dr. Robert Gordon, was keeping him up to his highest poetical self by a series of memorable letters, extracts from which Lady Ferguson gives in her Biography of Sir Samuel, as thus :

“ You rejoice me, I speak seriously, by saying you are ‘doing.’ To be and to do. O Ferguson, those little words contain the sum of all man's destiny. You are strong, and I would have you strike some note that

will reverberate down the vista of time. Will you, Ferguson ? ”

In the course of his delightful New Year's Epistle to Robert Gordon, M.D., dated 1st of January, 1845, Ferguson thus responds to his friend's appeal :

“ For ilka day I'm growin' stranger
To speak my mind in love or anger ;
And, heh ! ere it be muckle langer,
You'll see appearin'
Some offerin's o' nae cauld harranguer,
Put out for Erin.

“ Lord, for ane day o' service done her !
Lord, for ane hour's sunlight upon her !
Here, Fortune, tak' world's wealth and honour,
You're no' my debtor,
Let me but rive ae link asunder
O ! Erin's fetter !

“ Let me but help to shape the sentence
Will put the pith o' independence,
O' self-respect in self-acquaintance,
And manly pride
Intil auld Eber-Scot's descendants—
Take a' beside !

“ Let me but help to get the truth
Set fast in ilka brother's mouth,
Whatever accents, north or south,
His tongue may use,
And there's ambition, riches, youth ;
Tak' which you choose !

But before he had ripened for the full outcome of his genius Ferguson anticipated it by one of the noblest laments in our language, *Thomas Davis: an Elegy*, 1845, a poignant expression of his grief at the death of his friend, the famous young National leader.

Sir Charles Gavan Duffy tells us that "Ferguson, who lay on a bed of sickness when Davis died, impatient that for the moment he could not declare it in public, asked me to come to him, that he might ease his heart by expressing in private his sense of what he had lost. He read me fragments of a poem written under these circumstances, the most Celtic in structure and spirit of all the elegies laid on the tomb of Davis. The last verse sounded like a prophecy; it was, at any rate, a powerful incentive to take up our task anew."

This poem, which has not been as yet included in Ferguson's published works, and is in many respects especially typical of his genius, now follows at length. The modern Irish Celt has indeed inherited a wonderful gift for the elegy, as Moore's lines on the death of Sheridan, Dr. Sigerson's to the memory of Isaac Butt and Thomas Davis' own immortal lament for Owen Roe O'Neill abundantly demonstrate.

LAMENT FOR THOMAS DAVIS.

I walked through Ballinderry in the spring-time,
When the bud was on the tree;
And I said, in every fresh-ploughed field beholding
The sowers striding free,
Scattering broadside forth the corn in golden plenty
On the quick seed-clasping soil:

“ Even such, this day, among the fresh-stirred hearts of
Erin,
Thomas Davis, is thy toil ! ”

I sat by Ballyshannon in the summer,
And saw the salmon leap ;
And I said, as I beheld the gallant creatures
Spring glittering from the deep,
Through the spray, and through the prone heaps striving
onward
To the calm clear streams above,
“ So seekest thou thy native founts of freedom, Thomas
Davis,
In thy brightness of strength and love ! ”

I stood on Derrybawn in the autumn,
And I heard the eagle call,
With a clangorous cry of wrath and lamentation
That filled the wide mountain hall,
O'er the bare deserted place of his plundered eyrie ;
And I said, as he screamed and soared,
“ So callest thou, thou wrathful soaring Thomas Davis,
For a nation's rights restored ! ”

And alas ! to think but now, and thou art lying,
Dear Davis, dead at thy mother's knee ;
And I, no mother near, on my own sick-bed,
That face on earth shall never see ;
I may lie and try to feel that I am dreaming,
I may lie and try to say, “ Thy will be done ”—
But a hundred such as I will never comfort Erin
For the loss of the noble son !

Young husbandman of Erin's fruitful seed-time,
In the fresh track of danger's plough !
Who will walk the heavy, toilsome, perilous furrow
Girt with freedom's seed-sheets now ?
Who will banish with the wholesome crop of knowledge
The daunting weed and the bitter thorn,
Now that thou thyself art but a seed for hopeful planting
Against the Resurrection morn ?

Young salmon of the flood-tide of freedom
That swells round Erin's shore !
Thou wilt leap against their loud oppressive torrent
Of bigotry and hate no more ;
Drawn downward by their prone material instinct,
Let them thunder on their rocks and foam—
Thou hast leapt, aspiring soul, to founts beyond their
raging,
Where troubled waters never come !

But I grieve not, Eagle of the empty cyrie,
That thy wrathful cry is still ;
And that the songs alone of peaceful mourners
Are heard to-day on Erin's hill ;
Better far, if brothers' war be destined for us,
(God avert that horrid day, I pray),
That ere our hands be stained with slaughter fratricidal
Thy warm heart should be cold in clay.

But my trust is strong in God, Who made us brothers,
That He will not suffer their right hands
Which thou hast joined in holier rites than wedlock
To draw opposing brands.

Oh, many a tuneful tongue that thou mad'st vocal
 Would lie cold and silent then ;
 And songless long once more, should often-widowed Erin
 Mourn the loss of her brave young men.

Oh, brave young men, my love, my pride, my promise,
 'Tis on you my hopes are set,
 In manliness, in kindness, in justice,
 To make Erin a nation yet,
 Self-respecting, self-relying, self-advancing,
 In union or in severance, free and strong—
 And if God grant this, then, under God, to Thomas Davis
 Let the greater praise belong.

The Irish potato famine now intervened, and drove Ferguson into the *sæva indignatio* of Juvenal at the Government mismanagement, which had multiplied its horrors a hundredfold.

No one knew this better than himself, for he was secretary to the Irish Council, whose wise advice, tendered to the English Parliament, was rejected in favour of futile experimental legislation in the way of relief-road making and so forth. Convinced that a Parliament after Grattan's model would have saved the country, he became a Repealer and one of the poets of Repeal.

Deem not, O generous English hearts, who gave
 Your noble aid our sinking Isle to save,
 This breast, though heated in its Country's feud,
 Owns aught towards *you* but perfect gratitude.

But frankly, while we thank you all who sent
 Your alms, so thank we not your Parliament,

Who, what they gave, from treasures of our own
 Gave, if they call it giving, this half loan,
 Half gift from the recipients to themselves .
 Of their own millions, be they tens or twelves ;
 Our own as well as yours : our Irish brows
 Had sweated for them ; though your Commons' House,
 Forgetting your four hundred millions debt,
 When first in partnership our nations met,
 Against our twenty-four (you then two-fold
 The poorer people), call them British Gold.

No ; for these drafts on our United Banks
 We owe no gratitude, and give no thanks !
 More than you'd give to us, if Dorsetshire
 Or York a like assistance should require ;
 Or than you gave us when, to compensate
 Your slave-owners, you charged our common state
 Twice the amount : no, but we rather give
 Our curses, and will give them while we live,
 To that pernicious blind conceit and pride,
 Wherewith the aids we asked you misapplied.

Sure, for our wretched country's various ills
 We've got, a man would think, enough of bills—
 Bills to make paupers, bills to feed them made ;
 Bills to make sure that paupers' bills are paid ;
 Bills in each phrase of economic slang ;
 Bills to transport the men they dare not hang.
 (I mean no want of courage physical,
 'Tis Conscience doth make cowards of us all !).

Allowance must be made for the passionate bitterness
 of this invective from the circumstances that Ferguson

had seen the Irish peasantry he loved dying of starvation before his very eyes and because of the neglect of the British Government of ordinary precautions for "more than a third of the potato crop throughout the island was gone, in some districts more than half, and at the same time the bulk of the remaining supplies, cattle and corn, butter, beef and pork, which would have fed all the inhabitants, continued to be exported to England to pay the rent of farms which would no longer yield the cultivators their ordinary food."

Ferguson, however, lived to turn this fine power of literary invective against the successors of the Young Ireland poets and patriots with whom he had sympathised when he found them descending from the high aspirations and manly action of Davis and Duffy to what he characterised as "a sordid social war of classes carried on by the vilest methods."

In his satiric poems *The Curse of the Joyces* and *At the Polo Ground*—an analysis in Browning's manner of Carey's frame of mind before giving the fatal signal to the assassins of Mr. Burke and Lord Frederick Cavendish—and in his Dublin eclogue *In Carey's Footsteps*, he exposes the cruelties of the boycotting system of political agitation with unsparing severity.

In 1864 appeared Ferguson's *Lays of the Western Gael*, a gratifying surprise even to many of his friends, owing to the inclusion in it of fresh and finer work than he had yet achieved. Their point of departure is thus well described by Mr. A. M. Williams, the American critic :

"The *Lays of the Western Gael* are a series of ballads founded on events in Celtic history, and derived from the Early Chronicles and poems. They are original in

form and substance, the ballad form and measure being unknown to the early Celtic poets of Ireland ; but they preserve in a wonderful degree the ancient spirit, and give a picture of the ancient times with all the art of verity. They have a solemnity of measure like the voice of one of the ancient bards chanting of

Old forgotten far-off things
And battles long ago,

and they are clothed with the mists of a melancholy age. They include such subjects as *The Tain Quest*, the search of the bard for the lost lay of the great cattle-raid of Queen Maeve of Connaught, and its recovery, by invocation, from the voice of its dead author, who rises in misty form above his grave ; *The Healing of Conall Carnach*, a story of violated sanctuary and its punishment ; *The Welshmen of Tirawley*, one of the most spirited and original, and which has been pronounced by Mr. Swinburne as amongst the finest of modern ballads, telling of a cruel mulct inflicted upon the members of a Welsh Colony and its vengeance ; and other incidents in early Irish history. In his poems, rather than in Macpherson's *Ossian* or in the literal translations, will the modern reader find the voice of the ancient Celtic bards speaking to the intelligence of to-day in their own tones, without false change and dilution, or the confusion and dimness of an ancient language."

Of the longer lays thus far published, *The Tain Quest* found the greatest acceptance with his poetic compeers, and the most notable criticism of it was that of Thomas Aird, the fine Scottish poet, author of *The Devil's Dream on Mount Aksbeck* :

“ In all respects *The Tain Quest* is one of the most striking poems of our day. Specially do I admire the artistic skill with which you have doubled the interest of the Quest itself by introducing in the most natural and unencumbering way so many of the best points of the *Great Cattle Foray*, the subject-matter of the *Tain*. The shield has long been grand in poetry ; you have made it grander. The refusal of Fergus to stir to the force of private sympathy, but his instantaneous recognition of the patriotic necessity of song, is a just and noble conception.

“ The power of the Bard over the rude men of Gort ; the filial piety of the sons of Sanchan, and their brotherly love ; that mysterious Vapour, and that terrible blast of entrance, are all very notable towards the consummation of effect. As for the kissing of the champions in the pauses of the fight, I know of nothing in the reaches of our human blood so marvellously striking and sweet ; you have now made it immortal in song. However admirably expressed, the last stanza is an error in art. Surely you spoil the grand close, and the whole piece, by appending your own personality of interference as a commentator on the malediction.”

The sting in the tail of Aird's fine judgment is deserved, and it is curious to observe that Ferguson has been similarly unlucky in *The Welshmen of Tirawley* in this attempt to tag a comment on to the end of a tale which he has so nobly adorned. That magnificently savage lay should end with the antepenultimate stanza, and as this volume is a selection, not a collection, of Ferguson's poems, I have, in the exercise of my editorial discretion, got rid of these two moralising tags in the condensed

version of *The Tain Quest* and the otherwise uncut text of *The Welshmen of Tirawley*, to be found within these pages.

This tendency to act at times as a commentator on his own work and to present it at others in a too ponderously Latinised form, as well as the careless, not to say bluff, disregard for verbal delicacies into which he now and again lapses, are the only proclivities to which exception can be taken in Ferguson's technique. For his method is uniformly manly, and his occasional periods of majestic inspiration sweep our minor critical objections before them, as the blast from his Mananan's mantle swept the chieftain and his hound into the valley like leaves before the wind.

We have taken Ferguson to our hearts as we take our best brother, loving his very ponderosities and carelessnesses as part and parcel of his greatness, as we love the kindred qualities in Samuel Johnson—for the sake of the man and the gentleman.

In 1872 appeared *Congal*, which Ferguson describes in a letter to Father Russell as an epic poem of greater length and higher literary pretension than his *Lays of the Western Gael*.

An epic requires a great subject, and he who writes it must have vision and manliness closely allied to his nature, else how can he realise the heroic ideal? These are Ferguson's pre-eminent qualities. He is manly. His heroes proclaim it in their every action, their every utterance; and his tender portrait of Lafinda could only have been drawn by a gallant gentleman. He has vision. The terrible shapes and Celtic superstitions—the Giant Walker, the Washer of the Ford—loom monstrously before us as

he sings, and he marshals the contending hosts at Moyra with a magnificent realism to which we know no modern parallel.

His subject is a great old-world tale of love and hate, and ambition and jealousy, and craft and courage—a splendid story of the last heroic stand made by Celtic Paganism against the Irish Champions of the Cross.

But great though much of *Congal* undoubtedly is, Ferguson's genius was to break into finest flower at the last.

The volume of 1880 contains some striking verse of a religious, philosophical and personal kind, including the searching *Two Voices*, the trenchant and yet more touching *Three Thoughts*, the noble lines entitled *The Morning's Hinges*, and the lofty *Hymn of the Fishermen*—a poem written after a surmounted danger of shipwreck. But in *Deirdre* and *Conary* he reaches his fullest height as a poet, and the best that has been said or could well be said about them comes from William Allingham and Aubrey de Vere—the two Irishmen of his time whose opinion should interest, if not influence, us most.

Allingham wrote on receipt of the volume: "Many thoughts of my own swarmed about the pages, as I turned them, like bees in a lime-tree. In your style high culture is reconciled with simplicity, directness, and originality, and nothing can be happier than your enrichment of English speech with Irish forms without the least violence. All the Irish poems are very remarkable, but *Deirdre* I count the chief triumph. Its peculiar form of unity is perfectly managed, while in general effect it recalls nothing so much as a Greek play."

Mr. Aubrey de Vere and Mr. Yeats, and perhaps the

larger proportion of the other leading Irish critics, prefer *Conary* to *Deirdre*.

“It would be difficult,” writes De Vere, “to find, amid our recent literature, a poem which at once aims as high as *Conary*, and as adequately fulfils its aim. . . . Novel to English readers as is such a poetic theme, and embarrassing as are a few of the Gaelic names, the work belongs to the ‘great’ style of poetry—that style which is characterised by simplicity, breadth of effect, a careless strength full of movement, but with nothing of the merely sensational about it, and an entire absence of those unclassic tricks that belong to meaner verse. It has caught thoroughly that epic character so remarkable in those Bardic Legends which were transmitted orally through ages when Homer must have been a name unknown in Ireland.”

To sum up: though at times over-scholarly and nodding now and again—as all the great unconscious poets, from Homer down, will occasionally nod, as opposed to the little self-conscious ones who are never caught napping—Ferguson is always human, always simple, always strong. Sense ever goes before sound with him. He is no mere reed for blowing music through. He takes you into no gorgeous jungle of colour and scent, and stealing serpent and ravening beast, where perspective is lost and will paralysed, and passion riots unrestrained. No! What Mr. W. B. Yeats finely wrote of him in 1886 is still true to-day:

“The author of these poems is the greatest poet Ireland has produced, because the most central and most Celtic. Whatever the future may bring forth in the way of a truly great and national literature—and now that the race is so

large, so widely spread, and so conscious of its unity, the years are ripe—will find its morning in these three volumes of one who was made by the purifying flame of national sentiment the one man of his time who wrote heroic poetry—one who, among the somewhat sybaritic singers of his day, was like some aged sea-king sitting among the inland wheat and poppies—the savour of the sea about him and its strength.”

I have already suggested that this volume is a selection, not a collection, of his poems. Generally speaking, they are arranged in the chronological order of their production, and where this has been occasionally departed from it has been due to a regard for their historical sequence. Here I have followed the example set me by Lady Ferguson in her edition of Sir Samuel’s Lays of the Red Branch. Condensation has been necessary in order to include *Congal* and other poems, and I hope not unacceptably so. For *Congal*, at its full length, suffers by the intrusion of introductory and side excursions into the regions of history and archæology. Dramatic action is thus too long delayed and the superabundant use of similes further interrupts it. I shall probably be blamed by some critics for my cutting down of *The Tain Quest*. My excuse must be that the material excised appears in other forms elsewhere in the volume, and that, for the purpose of dramatic reading or recitation, the poem gains by this treatment of it. Finally, I have endeavoured in this selection to represent every side of Ferguson’s genius but that of his gift for satire, and a specimen of this will be found earlier in this introduction.

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Elder & Co., and Mr. Elkin Mathews, and I am greatly indebted to Mr. H. S. H. Guinness, the owner of the copyright of Ferguson's later poems, for having placed them so generously at my disposal.

ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES.

RED BRANCH HOUSE,

WIMBLEDON,

St. Patrick's Day, 1916.

Lays of the Western Gael

THE BURIAL OF KING CORMAC.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[Cormac, son of Art, son of Con Cead-Catha,* enjoyed the sovereignty of Ireland through the prolonged period of forty years, commencing from A.D. 213. During the latter part of his reign, he resided at Sletty on the Boyne, being, it is said, disqualified for the occupation of Tara by the personal blemish he had sustained in the loss of an eye, by the hand of Angus "Dread-Spear," chief of the Desi, a tribe whose original seats were in the barony of Deece, in the county of Meath. It was in the time of Cormac and his son Carbre, if we are to credit the Irish annals, that Finn, son of Comhal, and the Fenian heroes, celebrated by Ossian, flourished. Cormac has obtained the reputation of wisdom and learning, and appears justly entitled to the honour of having provoked the enmity of the Pagan priesthood, by declaring his faith in a God not made by hands of men.]

"CROM CRUACH and his sub-gods twelve,"
Said Cormac, "are but carven treene;
The axe that made them, haft or helve,
Had worthier of our worship been.

"But He who made the tree to grow,
And hid in earth the iron-stone,
And made the man with mind to know
The axe's use, is God alone."

* *i.e.*, Hundred-Battle.

Anon to priests of Crom was brought—
Where, girded in their service dread,
They minister'd on red Moy Slaught—
Word of the words King Cormac said.

They loosed their curse against the king ;
They cursed him in his flesh and bones ;
And daily in their mystic ring

They turn'd the maledictive stones,

Till, where at meat the monarch sate,

Amid the revel and the wine,

He choked upon the food he ate,

At Sletty, southward of the Boyne.

High vaunted then the priestly throng,

And far and wide they noised abroad

With trump and loud liturgic song

The praise of their avenging God.

But ere the voice was wholly spent

That priest and prince should still obey,

To awed attendants o'er him bent

Great Cormac gather'd breath to say,—

“ Spread not the beds of Brugh for me

When restless death-bed's use is done :

But bury me at Rossnaree

And face me to the rising sun.

“ For all the kings who lie in Brugh

Put trust in gods of wood and stone ;

And 'twas at Ross that first I knew

One, Unseen, who is God alone.

“ His glory lightens from the east ;
His message soon shall reach our shore ;
And idol-god, and cursing priest
Shall plague us from Moy Slaughter no more.”

Dead Cormac on his bier they laid :—

“ He reign'd a king for forty years,
And shame it were,” his captains said,
“ He lay not with his royal peers.

“ His grandsire, Hundred-Battle, sleeps
Serene in Brugh : and, all around,
Dead kings in stone sepulchral keeps
Protect the sacred burial ground.

“ What though a dying man should rave
Of changes o'er the eastern sea ?
In Brugh of Boyne shall be his grave,
And not in noteless Rosnaree.”

Then northward forth they bore the bier,
And down from Sletty side they drew,
With horsemen and with charioteer,
To cross the fords of Boyne to Brugh.

There came a breath of finer air
That touch'd the Boyne with ruffling wings,
It stirr'd him in his sedgy lair
And in his mossy moorland springs.

And as the burial train came down
With dirge and savage dolorous shows,
Across their pathway, broad and brown
The deep, full-hearted river rose ;

From bank to bank through all his fords,
 'Neath blackening squalls he swell'd and boil'd ;
And thrice the wondering gentile lords
 Essay'd to cross, and thrice recoil'd.

Then forth stepp'd grey-hair'd warriors four :
 They said, " Through angrier floods than these,
On link'd shields once our king we bore
 From Dread-Spear and the hosts of Deece.

" And long as loyal will holds good,
 And limbs respond with helpful thews,
Nor flood, nor fiend within the flood,
 Shall bar him of his burial dues."

With slanted necks they stoop'd to lift ;
 They heaved him up to neck and chin ;
And, pair and pair, with footsteps swift,
 Lock'd arm and shoulder, bore him in.

'Twas brave to see them leave the shore ;
 To mark the deep'ning surges rise,
And fall subdued in foam before
 The tension of their striding thighs.

'Twas brave, when now a spear-cast out,
 Breast-high the battling surges ran ;
For weight was great, and limbs were stout,
 And loyal man put trust in man.

But ere they reach'd the middle deep,
 Nor steadying weight of clay they bore,
Nor strain of sinewy limbs could keep
 Their feet beneath the swerving four.

And now they slide, and now they swim,
And now, amid the blackening squall,
Grey locks afloat, with clutching grim,
They plunge around the floating pall.

While, as a youth with practised spear
Through justling crowds bears off the ring,
Boyne from their shoulders caught the bier
And proudly bore away the king.

At morning, on the grassy marge
Of Rossnaree, the corpse was found,
And shepherds at their early charge
Entomb'd it in the peaceful ground.

A tranquil spot : a hopeful sound
Comes from the ever youthful stream,
And still on daisied mead and mound
The dawn delays with tenderer beam.

Round Cormac Spring renews her buds :
In march perpetual by his side,
Down come the earth-fresh April floods,
And up the sea-fresh salmon glide ;

And life and time rejoicing run
From age to age their wonted way ;
But still he waits the risen Sun,
For still 'tis only dawning Day.

AIDEEN'S GRAVE.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[Aideen, daughter of Angus of Ben-Edar (now the Hill of Howth), died of grief for the loss of her husband, Oscar, son of Ossian, who was slain at the battle of Gavra (*Gowra*, near Tara in Meath), A.D. 284. Oscar was entombed in the rath or earthen fortress that occupied part of the field of battle, the rest of the slain being cast in a pit outside. Aideen is said to have been buried on Howth, near the mansion of her father, and poetical tradition represents the Fenian heroes as present at her obsequies. The Cromlech in Howth Park has been supposed to be her sepulchre. It stands under the summits from which the poet Atharne is said to have launched his invectives against the people of Leinster, until, by the blighting effect of his satires, they were compelled to make him atonement for the death of his son.]

THEY heaved the stone ; they heap'd the cairn :
 Said Ossian, " In a queenly grave
 We leave her, 'mong her fields of fern,
 Between the cliff and wave.

" The cliff behind stands clear and bare,
 And bare, above, the heathery steep
 Scales the clear heaven's expanse, to where
 The Danaan Druids sleep.

" And all the sands that, left and right,
 The grassy isthmus-ridge confine,
 In yellow bars lie bare and bright
 Among the sparkling brine.

“ A clear pure air pervades the scene,
In loneliness and awe secure ;
Meet spot to sepulchre a Queen
Who in her life was pure.

“ Here, far from camp and chase removed,
Apart in Nature’s quiet room,
The music that alive she loved
Shall cheer her in the tomb.

“ The humming of the noontide bees,
The lark’s loud carol all day long,
And, borne on evening’s salted breeze,
The clanking sea bird’s song

“ Shall round her airy chamber float,
And with the whispering winds and streams
Attune to Nature’s tenderest note
The tenor of her dreams.

“ And oft, at tranquil eve’s decline
When full tides lip the Old Green Plain,
The lowing of Moynalty’s kine
Shall round her breathe again,

“ In sweet remembrance of the days
When, duteous, in the lowly vale,
Unconscious of my Oscar’s gaze,
She fill’d the fragrant pail,

“ And, duteous, from the running brook
Drew water for the bath ; nor deem’d
A king did on her labour look,
And she a fairy seem’d.

- “ But when the wintry frosts begin,
And in their long-drawn, lofty flight,
The wild geese with their airy din
Distend the ear of night,
- “ And when the fierce De Danaan ghosts
At midnight from their peak come down,
When all around the enchanted coasts
Despairing strangers drown ;
- “ When, mingling with the wreckful wail,
From low Clontarf’s wave-trampled floor
Comes booming up the burthen’d gale
The angry Sand-Bull’s roar ;
- “ Or, angrier than the sea, the shout
Of Erin’s hosts in wrath combined,
When Terror heads Oppression’s rout,
And Freedom cheers behind :—
- “ Then o’er our lady’s placid dream,
Where safe from storms she sleeps, may steal
Such joy as will not misbeseem
A Queen of men to feel :
- “ Such thrill of free, defiant pride,
As rapt her in her battle car
At Gavra, when by Oscar’s side
She rode the ridge of war,
- “ Exulting, down the shouting troops,
And through the thick confronting kings,
With hands on all their javelin loops
And shafts on all their strings ;

“ E'er closed the inseparable crowds,
No more to part for me, and show,
As bursts the sun through scattering clouds,
My Oscar issuing so.

“ No more, dispelling battle's gloom
Shall son for me from fight return ;
The great green rath's ten-acred tomb
Lies heavy on his urn.

“ A cup of bodkin-pencill'd clay
Holds Oscar ; mighty heart and limb
One handful now of ashes grey :
And she has died for him.

“ And here, hard by her natal bower
On lone Ben Edar's side, we strive
With lifted rock and sign of power
To keep her name alive.

“ That while, from circling year to year,
Her Ogham-letter'd stone is seen,
The Gael shall say, ' Our Fenians here
Entomb's their loved Aideen.'

“ The Ogham from her pillar stone
In tract of time will wear away ;
Her name at last be only known
In Ossian's echo'd lay.

“ The long forgotten lay I sing
May only ages hence revive,
(As eagle with a wounded wing
To soar again might strive,)

“ Imperfect, in an alien speech,
When, wandering here, some child of chance
Through pangs of keen delight shall reach
The gift of utterance,—

“ To speak the air, the sky to speak,
The freshness of the hill to tell,
Who, roaming bare Ben Edar’s peak
And Aideen’s briary dell,

“ And gazing on the Cromlech vast,
And on the mountain and the sea,
Shall catch communion with the past
And mix himself with me.

“ Child of the Future’s doubtful night,
Whate’er your speech, whoe’er your sires,
Sing while you may with frank delight
The song your hour inspires.

“ Sing while you may, nor grieve to know
The song you sing shall also die ;
Atharna’s lay has perish’d so,
Though once it thrill’d this sky.

“ Above us, from his rocky chair,
There, where Ben Edar’s landward crest
O’er eastern Bregia bends, to where
Dun Almon crowns the west :

“ And all that felt the fretted air
Throughout the song-distemper’d clime,
Did droop, till suppliant Leinster’s prayer
Appeased the vengeful rhyme.

- “ Ah me, or e'er the hour arrive
Shall bid my long-forgotten tones,
Unknown One, on your lips revive,
Here, by these moss-grown stones,
- “ What change shall o'er the scene have cross'd ;
What conquering lords anew have come ;
What lore-arm'd, mightier Druid host
From Gaul or distant Rome !
- “ What arts of death, what ways of life,
What creeds unknown to bard or seer,
Shall round your careless steps be rife,
Who pause and ponder here ;
- “ And, haply, where yon curlew calls
Athwart the marsh, 'mid groves and bowers
See rise some mighty chieftain's halls
With unimagined towers :
- “ And baying hounds, and coursers bright,
And burnish'd cars of dazzling sheen,
With courtly train of dame and knight,
Where now the fern is green.
- “ Or, by yon prostrate altar-stone
May kneel, perchance, and, free from blame,
Hear holy men with rites unknown
New names of God proclaim.
- “ Let change as may the Name of Awe,
Let rite surcease and altar fall,
The same One God remains, a law
For ever and for all.

“ Let change as may the face of earth,
Let alter all the social frame,
For mortal men the ways of birth
And death are still the same.

“ And still, as life and time wear on,
The children of the waning days,
(Though strength be from their shoulders gone
To lift the loads we raise,)

“ Shall weep to do the burial rites
Of lost ones loved ; and fondly found,
In shadow of the gathering nights,
The monumental mound.

“ Farewell ! the strength of men is worn ;
The night approaches dark and chill :
Sleep, till perchance an endless morn
Descend the glittering hill.”

Of Oscar and Aideen bereft,
So Ossian sang. The Fenians sped
Three mighty shouts to heaven ; and left
Ben Edar to the dead.

THE DEATH OF DERMID.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[King Cormac had affianced his daughter Grania to Finn, son of Conhal, the Finn Mac·Coole of Irish, and Fingal of Scottish tradition. In addition to his warlike accomplishments, Finn was reported to have obtained the gifts of poetry, second-sight, and healing in the manner referred to below. On his personal introduction, his age and aspect proved displeasing

to Grania, who threw herself on the gallantry of Dermid, the handsomest of Finn's attendant warriors, and induced him reluctantly to fly with her. Their pursuit by Finn forms the subject of one of the most popular native Irish romances. In the course of their wanderings, Dermid, having pursued a wild boar, met the fate of Adonis, who appears to have been his prototype in the Celtic imagination. Finn, arriving on the scene just before his rival's death, gives occasion to the most pathetic passage of the tale. The incidents of the original are followed in the piece below, which, however, does not profess to be a translation. The original may be perused in the spirited version of Mr. O'Grady,—“Publications of the Irish Ossianic Society,” vol. iii. p. 185. It is from this Dermid that Highland tradition draws the genealogy of the clan Campbell,—

“The race of brown Dermid who slew the wild boar.”]

FINN on the mountain found the mangled man,
 The slain boar by him. “Dermid,” said the king,
 “It likes me well at last to see thee thus.
 This only grieves me, that the womankind
 Of Erin are not also looking on :
 Such sight were wholesome for the wanton eyes
 So oft enamour'd of that specious form :
 Beauty to foulness, strength to weakness turn'd.”
 “Yet in thy power, if only in thy will,
 Lies it, oh Finn, even yet to heal me.”

“How ?”

“Feign not the show of ignorance, nor deem
 I know not of the virtues which thy hand
 Drew from that fairy's half-discover'd hall,
 Who bore her silver tankard from the fount,
 So closely follow'd, that ere yet the door
 Could close upon her steps, one arm was in ;
 Wherewith, though seeing nought, yet touching all,

Thou grasped'st half the spiritual world ;
 Withdrawing a heap'd handful of its gifts,—
 Healing, and sight prophetic, and the power
 Divine of poesy : but healing most
 Abides within its hollow :—virtue such
 That but so much of water as might wet
 These lips, in that hand brought, would make me
 whole.

Finn, from the fountain fetch me in thy palms
 A draught of water, and I yet shall live.”

“ How at these hands canst thou demand thy life,
 Who took'st my joy of life ? ”

“ She loved thee not :
 Me she did love and doth ; and were she here
 She would so plead with thee, that, for her sake,
 Thou wouldst forgive us both, and bid me live.”

“ I was a man had spent my prime of years
 In war and council, little bless'd with love ;
 Though poesy was mine, and, in my hour,
 The seer's burthen not desirable ;
 And now at last had thought to have man's share
 Of marriage blessings ; and the King supreme,
 Cormac, had pledged his only daughter mine ;
 When thou, with those pernicious beauty-gifts,
 The flashing white tusk there hath somewhat spoil'd,
 Didst win her to desert her father's house,
 And roam the wilds with thee.”

“ It was herself,
 Grania, the Princess, put me in the bonds

Of holy chivalry to share her flight.

'Behold,' she said, 'he is an aged man,
 (And so thou art, for years will come to all ;)
 And I, so young ; and at the Beltane games,
 When Carbry Liffacher did play the men
 Of Brea, I, unseen, saw thee snatch a hurl,
 And thrice on Tara's champions* win the goal ;
 And gave thee love that day, and still will give.'
 So she herself avow'd. Resolve me, Finn,
 For thou art just, could youthful warrior, sworn
 To maiden's service, have done else than I ?
 No : hate me not—restore me—give me drink."

" I will not."

" Nay, but, Finn, thou hadst not said
 ' I will not,' though I'd ask'd a greater boon,
 That night we supp'd in Breendacoga's lodge.
 Remember : we were faint and hunger-starved
 From three day's flight ; and even as on the board
 They placed the viands, and my hand went forth
 To raise the wine-cup, thou, more quick of ear,
 O'erheardst the stealthy leaguer set without ;
 And yet should'st eat or perish. 'Then 'twas I,
 Fasting, that made the sally ; and 'twas I,
 Fasting, that made the circuit of the court ;
 'Three times I cours'd it, darkling, round and round ;
 From whence returning, when I brought thee in
 The three lopp'd heads of them that lurk'd without—

* "On Tara's champions," *ar ghasra Teamhrach*. The idiom is preserved.

Thou hadst not then, refresh'd and grateful, said
 ' I will not,' had I ask'd thee, ' Give me drink.' "

" There springs no water on this summit bald."

" Nine paces from the spot thou standest on,
 The well-eye—well thou knowest it—bubbles clear."

Abash'd, reluctant, to the bubbling well
 Went Finn, and scoop'd the water in his palms ;
 Wherewith returning, half-way, came the thought
 Of Grania, and he let the water spill.

" Ah me," said Dermid, " hast thou then forgot
 Thy warrior-art that oft, when helms were split,
 And buckler-bosses shatter'd by the spear,
 Has satisfied the thirst of wounded men ?
 Ah, Finn, these hands of thine were not so slack
 That night, when, captured by the king of Thule,
 Thou layest in bonds within the temple gate
 Waiting for morning, till the observant king
 Should to his sun-god make thee sacrifice.
 Close-pack'd thy fingers then, thong-drawn and
 squeezed,
 The blood-drops oozing under every nail,
 When, like a shadow, through the sleeping priests
 Came I, and loos'd thee : and the hierophant
 At day-dawn coming, on the altar-step,
 Instead of victim straighten'd to his knife,
 Two warriors found, erect, for battle arm'd."

Again abash'd, reluctant to the well
 Went Finn, and scoop'd the water in his palms,

Wherewith returning, half-way, came the thought
That wrench'd him ; and the shaken water spill'd.

“ False one, thou didst it purposely ! I swear
I saw thee, though mine eyes do fast grow dim.
Ah me, how much imperfect still is man !
Yet such were not the act of Him, whom once
On this same mountain, as we sat at eve—
Thou yet mayst see the knoll that was our couch,
A stone's throw from the spot where now I lie—
Thou showedst me, shuddering, when the scer's fit,
Sudden and cold as hail, assail'd thy soul
In vision of that Just One crucified
For all men's pardoning, which, once again,
Thou sawest, with Cormac, struck in Rossnaree.”

Finn trembled ; and a third time to the well
Went straight, and scoop'd the water in his palms ;
Wherewith in haste half-way return'd, he saw
A smile on Dermid's face relax'd in death.

THE WELSHMEN OF TIRAWLEY.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[Several Welsh Families, associates in the invasion of Strongbow, settled in the west of Ireland. Of these, the principal whose names have been preserved by the Irish antiquarians were the Walshes, Joyces, Heils (*a quibus* Mac Hale), Lawlesses, Tomlyns, Iynotts, and Barretts, which last draw their pedigree from Walynes, son of Guyndally, the *Ard Maor*, or High Steward of the Lordship of Camelot, and had their chief seats in the territory of the two Baes, in the barony of Tirawley, and county of Mayo. *Cloch-an-na-n'all*,

i.e. "the Blind Men's Stepping-stones," are still pointed out on the Duvowen river, about four miles north of Crossmolina, in the townland of Garrauard; and *Tubber-na-Scorney*, or "Scragg's Well," in the opposite townland of Carns, in the same barony.]

SCORNA BOY, the Barretts' bailiff, lewd and lame,
 To lift the Lynotts' taxes when he came,
 Rudely drew a young maid to him;
 Then the Lynotts rose and slew him,
 And in Tubber-na-Scorney threw him—
 Small your blame,
 Sons of Lynott!

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Then the Barretts to the Lynotts proposed a choice,
 Saying, "Hear, ye murderous brood, men and boys,
 For this deed to-day ye lose
 Sight or manhood: say and choose
 Which ye keep and which refuse;
 And rejoice
 That our mercy
 Leaves you living for a warning to Tirawley."

Then the little boys of the Lynotts, weeping, said,
 "Only leave us our eyesight in our head."
 But the bearded Lynotts then
 Made answer back again,
 "Take our eyes, but leave us men,
 Alive or dead,
 Sons of Wattin!"

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

So the Barretts, with sewing-needles sharp and smooth,
 Let the light out of the eyes of every youth,
 And of every bearded man
 Of the broken Lynott clan ;
 Then their darken'd faces wan
 Turning south
 To the river—

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley !

O'er the slippery stepping-stones of Clochan-na-n'all
 They drove them, laughing loud at every fall,
 As their wandering footsteps dark
 Fail'd to reach the slippery mark,
 And the swift stream swallow'd stark,
 One and all,
 As they stumbled—

From the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Of all the blinded Lynotts one alone
 Walk'd erect from stepping-stone to stone :
 So back again they brought you,
 And a second time they wrought you
 With their needles ; but never got you
 Once to groan,
 Emon Lynott,

For the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

But with prompt-projected footstep sure as ever,
 Emon Lynott again cross'd the river,
 Though Duvowen was rising fast,
 And the shaking stones o'ercast
 By cold floods boiling past ;

Yet you never,
 Emon Lynott,
 Faltered once before your foemen of Tirawley !

But, turning on Ballintubber bank, you stood,
 And the Barretts thus bespoke o'er the flood—

“ Oh, ye foolish sons of Wattin,
 Small amends are these you've gotten,
 For, while Scorna Boy lies rotten,

I am good
 For vengeance ! ”

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

For 'tis neither in eye nor eyesight that a man
 Bears the fortunes of himself and his clan,

But in the manly mind,
 And loins with vengeance lined,
 That your needles could never find

Though they ran
 Through my heart-strings ! ”

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

“ But, little your women's needles do I reckon :
 For the night from heaven never fell so black,
 But Tirawley, and abroad
 From the Moy to Cuan-an-fod,

I could walk it, every sod,
 Path and track,
 Ford and togher,

Seeking vengeance on you, Barretts of Tirawley !

“ The night when Dathy O'Dowda broke your camp,
 What Barrett among you was it held the lamp—

Show'd the way to those two feet,
 When through wintry wind and sleet,
 I guided your blind retreat

In the swamp
 Of Beäl-an-asa ?

O ye vengeance-destined ingrates of Tirawley ! ”

So leaving loud-shriek-echoing Garranard,
 The Lynott like a red dog hunted hard,
 With his wife and children seven,
 'Mong the beasts and fowls of heaven
 In the hollows of Glen Nephin,

Light-debarr'd,
 Made his dwelling,

Planning vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And ere the bright-orb'd year its course had run,
 On his brown round-knotted knee he nurs'd a son,
 A child of light, with eyes
 As clear as are the skies
 In summer, when sunrise

Has begun ;
 So the Lynott

Nursed his vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And, as ever the bright boy grew in strength and size,
 Made him perfect in each manly exercise,
 The salmon in the flood,
 The dun deer in the wood,
 The eagle in the cloud

To surprise,
 On Ben Nephin,

Far above the foggy fields of Tirawley.

With the yellow-knotted spear-shaft, with the bow,
 With the steel, prompt to deal shot and blow,
 He taught him from year to year
 And train'd him, without a peer,
 For a perfect cavalier,

Hoping so—

Far his forethought—

For vengeance on the Barretts of Tirawley.

And, when mounted on his proud-bounding steed,
 Emon Oge sat a cavalier indeed ;

Like the ear upon the wheat

When winds in Autumn beat

On the bending stems, his seat ;

And the speed

Of his courser

Was the wind from Barna-na-gee o'er Tirawley !

Now when fifteen sunny summers thus were spent,
 (He perfected in all accomplishment)—

The Lynott said, " My child,

We are over long exiled

From mankind in this wild—

—Time we went

Through the mountain

To the countries lying over-against Tirawley."

So, out over mountain-moors, and mosses brown,

And green stream-gathering vales, they journey'd
 down ;

Till, shining like a star,

Through the dusky gleams afar,

The bailey of Castlebar,
 And the town
 Of Mac William
 Rose bright before the wanderers of Tirawley.

“ Look southward, my boy, and tell me as we go,
 What seest thou by the loch-head below.”

“ Oh, a stone-house strong and great,
 And a horse-host at the gate,
 And their captain in armour of plate—

 Grand the show !

 Great the glancing !

High the heroes of this land below Tirawley !

“ And a beautiful Woman-chief by his side,
 Yellow gold on all her gown-sleeves wide ;
 And in her hand a pearl
 Of a young, little, fair-hair'd girl.”—

Said the Lynott, “ It is the Earl !

 Let us ride

 To his presence ! ”

And before him came the exiles of Tirawley.

“ God save thee, Mac William,” the Lynott thus
 began ;

“ God save all here besides of this clan ;

For gossips dear to me

Are all in company—

For in these four bones ye see

 A kindly man

 Of the Britons—

Emon Lynott of Garranard of Tirawley.

“ And hither, as kindly gossip-law allows,
 I come to claim a scion of thy house
 To foster ; for thy race,
 Since William Conquer’s days,
 Have ever been wont to place,
 With some spouse
 Of a Briton,
 A Mac William Oge, to foster in Tirawley.

“ And to show thee in what sort our youth are taught,
 I have hither to thy home of valour brought
 This one son of my age,
 For a sample and a pledge
 For the equal tutelage,
 In right thought,
 Word, and action,
 Of whatever son ye give into Tirawley.”

When Mac William beheld the brave boy ride and run,
 Saw the spear-shaft from his white shoulder spun—
 With a sigh, and with a smile,
 He said,—“ I would give the spoil
 Of a county, that Tibbot* Moyle,
 My own son,
 Were accomplish’d
 Like this branch of the kindly Britons of Tirawley.”

When the Lady Mac William she heard him speak,
 And saw the ruddy roses on his cheek,
 She said, “ I would give a purse
 Of red gold to the nurse

* Tibbot, that is, Theobald.

That would rear my 'Tibbot no worse ;
 But I seek
 Hitherto vainly—
 Heaven grant that I now have found her in 'Tirawley ! ”

So they said to the Lynott, “ Here, take our bird !
 And as pledge for the keeping of thy word,
 Let this scion here remain
 Till thou comest back again :
 Meanwhile the fitting train
 Of a lord
 Shall attend thee
 With the lordly heir of Connaught into 'Tirawley.”

So back to strong-throng-gathering Garranard,
 Like a lord of the country with his guard,
 Came the Lynott, before them all.
 Once again over Clochan-na-n'all,
 Steady-striding, erect, and tall,
 And his ward
 On his shoulders ;
 To the wonder of the Welshmen of 'Tirawley.

Then a diligent foster-father you would deem
 The Lynott, teaching 'Tibbot, by mead and stream,
 To cast the spear, to ride,
 To stem the rushing tide,
 With what feats of body beside,
 Might beseem
 A Mac William,
 Foster'd free among the Welshmen of 'Tirawley.

But the lesson of hell he taught him in heart and mind ;
 For to what desire soever he inclined,
 Of anger, lust, or pride,
 He had it gratified,
 Till he ranged the circle wide
 Of a blind
 Self-indulgence,
 Ere he came to youthful manhood in Tirawley.

Then, even as when a hunter slips a hound,
 Lynott loosed him—God's leashes all unbound—
 In the pride of power and station,
 And the strength of youthful passion,
 On the daughters of thy nation,
 All around,
 Wattin Barrett !

Oh ! the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley !

Bitter grief and burning anger, rage and shame,
 Fill'd the houses of the Barretts where'er he came ;
 Till the young men of the Bac
 Drew by night upon his track,
 And slew him at Cornassack—
 Small your blame,
 Sons of Wattin !

Sing the vengeance of the Welshmen of Tirawley.

Said the Lynott, " The day of my vengeance is drawing
 near,
 The day for which, through many a long dark year,
 I have toil'd through grief and sin—
 Call ye now the Brehons in,
 And let the plea begin

Over the bier
 Of Mac William,
 For an eric upon the Barretts of Tirawley.

'Then the Brehons to Mac William Burk decreed
 An eric upon Clan Barrett for the deed ;
 And the Lynott's share of the fine,
 As foster-father, was nine
 Ploughlands and nine score kine ;
 But no need
 Had the Lynott,
 Neither care, for land or cattle in Tirawley.

But rising, while all sat silent on the spot,
 He said, " The law says—doth it not ?—
 If the foster-sire elect
 His portion to reject,
 He may then the right exact
 To applot
 The short eric."

" 'Tis the law," replied the Brehons of Tirawley.

Said the Lynott, " I once before had a choice
 Proposed me, wherein law had little voice ;
 But now I choose, and say,
 As lawfully I may,
 I applot the mulct to-day ;
 So rejoice
 In your ploughlands
 And your cattle which I renounce throughout Tirawley.

" And thus I applot the mulct : I divide
 The land throughout Clan Barrett on every side

Equally, that no place
 May be without the face
 Of a foe of Wattin's race—
 That the pride
 Of the Barretts
 May be humbled hence for ever throughout Tirawley.

“ I adjudge a seat in every Barrett's hall
 To Mac William : in every stable I give a stall
 To Mac William : and, beside,
 Whenever a Burke shall ride
 Through Tirawley, I provide
 At his call
 Needful grooming,
 Without charge from any hosteler of Tirawley.

“ Thus lawfully I avenge me for the throes
 Ye lawlessly caused me and caused those
 Unhappy shamefaced ones,
 Who, their mothers expected once,
 Would have been the sires of sons—
 O'er whose woes
 Often weeping,
 I have groan'd in my exile from Tirawley.

“ I demand not of you your manhood ; but I take—
 For the Burkes will take it—your Freedom ! for the
 sake
 Of which all manhood's given,
 And all good under heaven,
 And, without which, better even

Ye should make
 Yourselves barren,
 Than see your children slaves throughout Tirawley !

“ Neither take I your eyesight from you ; as you took
 Mine and ours : I would have you daily look
 On one another’s eyes,
 When the strangers tyrannize
 By your hearths, and blushes arise,
 That ye brook,
 Without vengeance,
 The insults of troops of Tibbots throughout Tirawley !

“ The vengeance I design’d, now is done,
 And the days of me and mine nearly run—
 For, for this, I have broken faith,
 Teaching him who lies beneath
 This pall, to merit death ;
 And my son
 To his father
 Stands pledged for other teaching in Tirawley.”

Said Mac William—“ Father and son, hang them
 high ! ”

And the Lynott they hang’d speedily ;
 But across the salt sea water,
 To Scotland, with the daughter
 Of Mac William—well you got her !—
 Did you fly,
 Edmund Lindsay,
 The gentlest of all the Welshmen of Tirawley !

FERGUS WRY-MOUTH.

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
Hung 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 avry
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.

THE GASCON O’DRISCOL.

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.

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.

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.

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.

“ 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.”

“ 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.”

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.

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

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ 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."

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 :—

" 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.

" 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.

" 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.

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ 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.

“ Blest are the friends of lawful kings
To righteous rule consenting :
Secure the blessing that he brings
By clemency preventing ;
And, granting full release,
Return him home in peace.

“ And, ere your topsails take the wind,
Stow ye within his vessel
A pipe the ripest search may find
In cellars of the Castle ;
Of perfume finer yet
Than rose and violet.

“ That, when, at home, his kin shall pour
The welcoming libation,
Such rapture-pitch their souls shall soar
Of sweet exhilaration,
As Bacchus on his pard
With moist eye might regard.”

They stowed the ship ; he stepped on board
In seemly wise attended ;
But this was still his parting word
When farewells all were ended :
“ Be sure my father yet
Will satisfy the debt.”

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.

THE DOWNFALL OF THE GAEL.

O'GNIVE,* BARD OF O'NEILL.

Cir. 1580.

MY heart is in woe,
 And my soul deep in trouble,—
 For the mighty are low,
 And abased are the noble :

The Sons of the Gael
 Are in exile and mourning,
 Worn, weary, and pale,
 As spent pilgrims returning ;

Or men who, in flight
 From the field of disaster,
 Beseech the black night
 On their flight to fall faster ;

Or seamen aghast
 When their planks gape asunder,
 And the waves fierce and fast
 Tumble through in hoarse thunder ;

* O'Gnive, now Agnew.

Or men whom we see
That have got their death-omen—
Such wretches are we
In the chains of our foemen !

Our courage is fear,
Our nobility vileness,
Our hope is despair,
And our comeliness foulness.

There is mist on our heads,
And a cloud chill and hoary
Of black sorrow, sheds
An eclipse on our glory.

From Boyne to the Linn
Has the mandate been given,
That the children of Finn
From their country be driven.

That the sons of the king—
Oh, the treason and malice !—
Shall no more ride the ring
In their own native valleys ;

No more shall repair
Where the hill foxes tarry,
Nor forth to the air
Fling the hawk at her quarry :

For the plain shall be broke
By the share of the stranger,
And the stone-mason's stroke
Tell the woods of their danger ;

The green hills and shore
Be with white keeps disfigured,
And the Mote of Rathmore
Be the Saxon churl's haggard !

The land of the lakes
Shall no more know the prospect
Of valleys and brakes—
So transform'd is her aspect !

The Gael cannot tell,
In the uprooted wild-wood
And red ridgy dell,
The old nurse of his childhood :

The nurse of his youth
Is in doubt as she views him,
If the wan wretch, in truth,
Be the child of her bosom.

We starve by the board,
And we thirst amid wassail—
For the guest is the lord,
And the host is the vassal !

Through the woods let us roam,
Through the wastes wild and barren ;
We are strangers at home !
We are exiles in Erin !

And Erin's a bark
O'er the wide waters driven !
And the tempest howls dark,
And her side planks are riven !

And in billows of might
Swell the Saxon before her,—
Unite, oh, unite !
Or the billows burst o'er her !

O'BYRNE'S BARD TO THE CLANS OF WICKLOW.

Cir. 1580.

GOD be with the Irish host,
Never be their battle lost !
For, in battle, never yet
Have they basely earned defeat.

Host of armour red and bright,
May ye fight a valiant fight !
For the green spot of the earth,
For the land that gave you birth.

Who in Erin's cause would stand,
Brothers of the avenging band,
He must wed immortal quarrel,
Pain and sweat and bloody peril.

On the mountain bare and steep,
Snatching short but pleasant sleep,
Then, ere sunrise, from his eyrie,
Swooping on the Saxon quarry.

What although you've fail'd to keep
Liffey's plain or Tara's steep,
Cashel's pleasant streams to save,
Or the meads of Croghan Maev ;

Want of conduct lost the town,
Broke the white-wall'd castle down,
Moira lost, and old Taltin,
And let the conquering stranger in.

'Twas the want of right command,
Not the lack of heart or hand,
Left your hills and plains to-day
'Neath the strong Clan Saxon's sway.

Ah, had heaven never sent
Discord for our punishment,
Triumphs few o'er Erin's host
Had Clan London now to boast !

Woe is me, 'tis God's decree
Strangers have the victory :
Irishmen may now be found
Outlaws upon Irish ground.

Like a wild beast in his den
Lies the chief by hill and glen,
While the strangers, proud and savage,
Criffan's richest valleys ravage.

Woe is me, the foul offence,
Treachery and violence,
Done against my people's rights—
Well may mine be restless nights !

When old Leinster's sons of fame,
 Heads of many a warlike name,
 Redden their victorious hilts
 On the Gaul, my soul exults.

When the grim Gaul, who have come
 Hither o'er the ocean foam,
 From the fight victorious go,
 Then my heart sinks deadly low.

Bless the blades our warriors draw,
 God be with Clan Ranelagh !
 But my soul is weak for fear,
 Thinking of their danger here.

Have them in Thy holy keeping,
 God be with them lying sleeping,
 God be with them standing fighting,
 Erin's foes in battle smiting !



LAMENT OVER THE RUINS OF THE ABBEY OF TIMOLEAGUE.

JOHN COLLINS, died 1816.

LONE and weary as I wander'd
 By the bleak shore of the sea,
 Meditating and reflecting
 On the world's hard destiny ;

Forth the moon and stars 'gan glimmer,
 In the quiet tide beneath,—
 For on slumbering spray and blossom
 Breathed not out of heaven a breath.

On I went in sad dejection,
Careless where my footsteps bore,
Till a ruin'd church before me
Open'd wide its ancient door,—

Till I stood before the portals,
Where of old were wont to be,
For the blind, the halt, and leper,
Alms and hospitality.

Still the ancient seat was standing,
Built against the buttress grey,
Where the clergy used to welcome
Weary travellers on their way.

There I sat me down in sadness,
'Neath my cheek I placed my hand,
Till the tears fell hot and briny
Down upon the grassy land.

There, I said in woeful sorrow,
Weeping bitterly the while,
Was a time when joy and gladness
Reign'd within this ruin'd pile ;—

There a time when bells were tinkling,
Clergy preaching peace abroad,
Psalms a-singing, music ringing
Praises to the mighty God.

Empty aisle, deserted chancel,
Tower tottering to your fall,
Many a storm since then has beaten
On the grey head of your wall !

Many a bitter storm and tempest
Has your roof-tree turn'd away,
Since you first were form'd a temple
To the Lord of night and day.

Holy house of ivied gables,
That wert once the country's pride,
Houseless now in weary wandering
Roam your inmates far and wide.

Lone you are to-day, and dismal,—
Joyful psalms no more are heard
Where, within your choir, her vesper
Screeches the cat-headed bird.

Ivy from your eaves is growing,
Nettles round your green hearth-stone,
Foxes howl, where, in your corners,
Dropping waters make their moan.

Where the lark to early matins
Used your clergy forth to call,
There, alas! no tongue is stirring,
Save the daw's upon the wall.

Refectory cold and empty,
Dormitory bleak and bare,
Where are now your pious uses,
Simple bed and frugal fare?

Gone your abbot, rule and order,
Broken down your altar stones;
Nought see I beneath your shelter,
Save a heap of clayey bones.

Oh! the hardship, oh! the hatred,
 Tyranny, and cruel war,
 Persecution and oppression,
 That have left you as you are!

I myself once also prosper'd ;—
 Mine is, too, an alter'd plight ;
 Trouble, care, and age have left me
 Good for nought but grief to-night.

Gone, my motion and my vigour,—
 Gone, the use of eye and ear ;
 At my feet lie friends and children,
 Powerless and corrupting here :

Woe is written on my visage,
 In a nut my heart would lie—
 Death's deliverance were welcome—
 Father, let the old man die !



TO THE HARPER O'CONNELLAN.

AFTER THE IRISH.

ENCHANTER who reignest
 Supreme o'er the North,
 Who hast wiled the coy spirit
 Of true music forth ;
 In vain Europe's minstrels
 To honour aspire,
 When thy swift slender fingers
 Go forth on the wire !

There is no heart's desire
Can be felt by a king,
That thy hand cannot match
From the soul of the string,
By its conquering, capturing,
Magical sway,
For, charmer, thou stealest
Thy notes from a fay!

Enchanter, I say,—
For thy magical skill
Can soothe every sorrow,
And heal every ill :
Who hear thee they praise thee ;
They weep while they praise ;
For, charmer, from Fairyland
Fresh are thy lays !

GRACE NUGENT.

CAROLAN.

BRIGHTEST blossom of the Spring,
Grace, the sprightly girl I sing :
Grace, who bore the palm of mind
From all the rest of womankind.
Whomsoe'er the fates decree,
Happy fate ! for life to be
Day and night my Coolun near,
Ache or pain need never fear !

Her neck outdoes the stately swan,
 Her radiant face the summer dawn :
 Ah, happy thrice the youth for whom
 The fates design that branch of bloom !
 Pleasant are your words benign,
 Rich those azure eyes of thine :
 Ye who see my queen, beware
 Those twisted links of golden hair !

This is what I fain would say
 To the bird-voiced lady gay,—
 Never yet conceived the heart
 Joy which Grace cannot impart :
 Fold of jewels ! case of pearls !
 Coolun of the circling curls !
 More I say not, but no less
 Drink you health and happiness !



MILD MABEL KELLY.

CAROLAN.

WHOEVER the youth who by Heaven's decree
 Has his happy right hand 'neath that bright head of
 thine,
 'Tis certain that he
 From all sorrow is free
 Till the day of his death, if a life so divine
 Should not raise him in bliss above mortal degree :

Mild Mabel-ni-Kelly, bright Coolun of curls,
 All stately and pure as the swan on the lake ;
 Her mouth of white teeth is a palace of pearls,
 And the youth of the land are love-sick for her sake !

No strain of the sweetest e'er heard in the land
 That she knows not to sing, in a voice so enchanting,
 That the cranes on the strand
 Fall asleep where they stand ;
 Oh, for her blooms the rose and the lily ne'er wanting
 To shed its mild radiance o'er bosom or hand :
 The dewy blue blossom that hangs on the spray,
 More blue than her eye, human eye never saw,
 Deceit never lurk'd in its beautiful ray,—
 Dear lady, I drink to you, *slainthe go bragh!*

THE FAIR-HAIR'D GIRL.

IRISH SONG.

THE sun has set, the stars are still,
 The red moon hides behind the hill ;
 The tide has left the brown beach bare,
 The birds have fled the upper air ;
 Upon her branch the lone cuckoo
 Is chaunting still her sad adieu ;
 And you, my fair-hair'd girl, must go
 Across the salt sea under woe !

I through love have learn'd three things,
 Sorrow, sin, and death it brings ;

Yet day by day my heart within
 Dares shame and sorrow, death and sin :
 Maiden, you have aim'd the dart
 Rankling in my ruin'd heart :
 Maiden, may the God above
 Grant you grace to grant me love !

Sweeter than the viol's string,
 And the notes that blackbirds sing ;
 Brighter than the dewdrops rare
 Is the maiden wondrous fair :
 Like the silver swans at play
 Is her neck, as bright as day !
 Woe is me, that e'er my sight
 Dwelt on charms so deadly bright !

PASTHEEN FINN.

IRISH RUSTIC SONG.

OH, my fair Pastheen is my heart's delight,
 Her gay hearts laughs in her blue eye bright,
 Like the apple blossom her bosom white,
 And her neck like the swan's, on a March morn bright !
 Then, Oro, come with me ! come with me ! come*
 with me !
 Oro, come with me ! brown girl, sweet !
 And, oh ! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet !

* The emphasis is on "come."

Love of my heart, my fair Pastheen !
Her cheeks are red as the rose's sheen,
But my lips have tasted no more, I ween,
Than the glass I drank to the health of my queen !

Then, Oro, come with me ! come with me ! come
with me !

Oro, come with me ! brown girl, sweet !
And, oh ! I would go through snow and sleet,
If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet !

Were I in the town, where's mirth and glee,
Or 'twixt two barrels of barley bree,
With my fair Pastheen upon my knee,
'Tis I would drink to her pleasantly !

Then, Oro, come with me ! come with me ! come
with me !

Oro, come with me ! brown girl, sweet !
And oh ! I would go through snow and sleet,
If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet !

Nine nights I lay in longing and pain,
Betwixt two bushes, beneath the rain,
Thinking to see you, love, once again ;
But whistle and call were all in vain !

Then, Oro, come with me ! come with me ! come
with me !

Oro, come with me ! brown girl, sweet !
And, oh ! I would go through snow and sleet,
If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet !

I'll leave my people, both friend and foe ;
From all the girls in the world I'll go ;

But from you, sweetheart, oh, never ! oh, no !
 Till I lie in the coffin, stretch'd cold and low !
 Then, Oro, come with me ! come with me ! come
 with me !
 Oro, come with me ! brown girl, sweet !
 And oh ! I would go through snow and sleet,
 If you would come with me, brown girl, sweet !

MOLLY ASTHORE.

IRISH SONG.

OH, Mary, dear, oh, Mary, fair,
 Oh, branch of generous stem,
 White blossom of the banks of Nair,
 Though lilies grow on them !
 You've left me sick at heart for love,
 So faint I cannot see,
 The candle swims the board above,
 I'm drunk for love of thee !
 Oh, stately stem of maiden pride,
 My woe it is, and pain,
 That I, thus sever'd from thy side,
 The long night must remain !

Through all the towns of Innisfail
 I've wander'd far and wide ;
 But from Downpatrick to Kinsale,
 From Carlow to Kilbride,
 'Mong lords and dames of high degree,
 Where'er my feet have gone,

My Mary, one to equal thee
 I've never look'd upon ;
 I live in darkness and in doubt
 Whene'er my love's away,
 But, were the blessed sun put out,
 Her shadow would make day !

'Tis she indeed, young bud of bliss,
 And gentle as she's fair,
 Though lily-white her bosom is,
 And sunny-bright her hair,
 And dewy-azure her blue eye,
 And rosy-red her cheek,—
 Yet brighter she in modesty,
 More beautifully meek !
 The world's wise men from north to south
 Can never cure my pain ;
 But one kiss from her honey mouth
 Would make me whole again !

CASHEL OF MUNSTER.

IRISH RUSTIC BALLAD.

I'd wed you without herds, without money, or rich array,
 And I'd wed you on a dewy morning at day-dawn grey ;
 My bitter woe it is, love, that we are not far away
 In Cashel town, though the bare deal board were our
 marriage-bed this day !

Oh, fair maid, remember the green hill side,
 Remember how I hunted about the valleys wide ;

Time now has worn me ; my locks are turn'd to grey,
 The year is scarce and I am poor, but send me not, love,
 away !

Oh, deem not my blood is of base strain, my girl,
 Oh, deem not my birth was as the birth of the churl ;
 Marry me, and prove me, and say soon you will,
 That noble blood is written on my right side still !

My purse holds no red gold, no coin of the silver white,
 No herds are mine to drive through the long twilight !
 But the pretty girl that would take me, all bare though
 I be and lone,

Oh, I'd take her with me kindly to the county Tyrone.

Oh, my girl, I can see 'tis in trouble you are,
 And, oh, my girl, I see 'tis your people's reproach you bear :
 " I am a girl in trouble for his sake with whom I fly,
 And, oh, may no other maiden know such reproach as I ! "

THE COOLUN.

IRISH RUSTIC BALLAD.

OH, had you seen the Coolun,
 Walking down by the cuckoo's street,
 With the dew of the meadow shining
 On her milk-white twinkling feet.
 My love she is, and my *cailin oge*,
 And she dwells in Bal'nagar ;
 And she bears the palm of beauty bright
 From the fairest that in Erin are.

In Bal'nagar is the Coolun,
Like the berry on the bough her cheek ;
Bright beauty dwells for ever
On her fair neck and ringlets sleek :
Oh, sweeter is her mouth's soft music
Than the lark or thrush at dawn,
Or the blackbird in the greenwood singing
Farewell to the setting sun.

Rise up, my boy ! make ready
My horse, for I forth would ride,
To follow the modest damsel,
Where she walks on the green hill side :
For, ever since our youth were we plighted,
In faith, troth, and wedlock true—
She is sweeter to me nine times over
Than organ or cuckoo !

For, ever since my childhood
I loved the fair and darling child ;
But our people came between us,
And with lucre our pure love defiled :
Oh, my woe it is, and my bitter pain,
And I weep it night and day,
That the *cailin bawn* of my early love
Is torn from my heart away.

Sweetheart and faithful treasure,
Be constant still, and true ;
Nor for want of herds and houses
Leave one who would ne'er leave you :

I'll pledge you the blessed Bible,
 Without and eke within,
 That the faithful God will provide for us,
 Without thanks to kith or kin.

Oh, love, do you remember
 When we lay all night alone,
 Beneath the ash in the winter-storm,
 When the oak wood round did groan ?
 No shelter then from the blast had we,
 The bitter blast or sleet,
 But your gown to wrap about our heads,
 And my coat round our feet.

CEAN DUBH DEELISH.*

IRISH SONG.

PUT your head, darling, darling, darling,
 Your darling black head my heart above ;
 Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,
 Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love ?
 Oh, many and many a young girl for me is pining,
 Letting her locks of gold to the cold wind free,
 For me, the foremost of our gay young fellows ;
 But I'd leave a hundred, pure love, for thee !
 Then put your head, darling, darling, darling,
 Your darling black head my heart above ;
 Oh, mouth of honey, with the thyme for fragrance,
 Who, with heart in breast, could deny you love ?

* Pronounced *cawn dhu deelish*, i.e., dear black head.

BOATMAN'S HYMN.

FROM THE IRISH.

BARK that bears me through foam and squall,
 You in the storm are my castle wall :
 Though the sea should redden from bottom to top,
 From tiller to mast she takes no drop ;
 On the tide-top, the tide-top,
 Wherry *aroon*, my land and store !
 On the tide-top, the tide-top,
 She is the boat can sail *go leor*.*

She dresses herself, and goes gliding on,
 Like a dame in her robes of the Indian lawn ;
 For God has bless'd her, gunnel and whale,
 And oh ! if you saw her stretch out to the gale,
 On the tide-top, the tide-top, etc.

Whillan, † ahoy ! old heart of stone,
 Stooping so black o'er the beach alone,
 Answer me well—on the bursting brine
 Saw you ever a bark like mine ?
 On the tide-top, the tide-top, etc.

Says Whillan,—“ Since first I was made of stone,
 I have look'd abroad o'er the beach alone—
 But till to-day, on the bursting brine,
 Saw I never a bark like thine,”
 On the tide-top, the tide-top, etc.

* *go leor*, i.e., abundantly well

† Whillan, a rock on the shore near Blacksod Harbour.

“ God of the air ! ” the seamen shout,
 When they see us tossing the brine about :
 “ Give us the shelter of strand or rock,
 Or through and through us she goes with a shock ! ”
 On the tide-top, the tide-top,
 Wherry *aroon*, my land and store,
 On the tide-top, the tide-top,
 She is the boat can sail *go leor* !

THE DEAR OLD AIR.

AFTER THE IRISH.

MISFORTUNE'S train may chase our joys,
 But not our love ;
 And I those pensive looks will prize,
 The smiles of joy above :
 Your tender looks of love shall still
 Delight and console ;
 Even though your eyes the tear-drops fill
 Beyond your love's control.

Of troubles past we will not speak,
 Or future woe :
 Nor mark, thus leaning cheek to cheek,
 The stealing tear-drops flow :
 But I'll sing you the dear old Irish air,
 Soothing and low,
 You loved so well when, gay as fair,
 You won me long ago

THE LAPFUL OF NUTS.

FROM THE IRISH.

WHENE'ER I see soft hazel eyes
And nut-brown curls,
I think of those bright days I spent
Among the Limerick girls ;
When up through Cratla woods I went,
Nutting with thee ;
And we pluck'd the glossy clustering fruit
From many a bending tree.

Beneath the hazel boughs we sat,
Thou, love, and I,
And the gather'd nuts lay in thy lap,
Beneath thy downcast eye :
But little we thought of the store we'd won,
I, love, or thou ;
For our hearts were full, and we dare not own
The love that's spoken now.

Oh, there's wars for willing hearts in Spain,
And high Germanic !
And I'll come back, ere long, again,
With knightly fame and fee :
And I'll come back, if I ever come back,
Faithful to thee,
That sat with thy white lap full of nuts
Beneath the hazel tree.

HOPELESS LOVE.

FROM THE IRISH.

SINCE hopeless of thy love I go,
 Some little mark of pity show ;
 And only one kind parting look bestow.

One parting look of pity mild
 On him, through starless tempest wild,
 Who lonely hence to-night must go, exiled.

But even rejected love can warm
 The heart through night and storm :
 And unrelenting though they be,
 Thine eyes beam life on me.

And I will bear that look benign
 Within this darkly-troubled breast to shine,
 Though never, never can thyself, ah me, be mine !

 THE FAIR HILLS OF IRELAND.

OLD IRISH SONG.

A PLENTEOUS place is Ireland for hospitable cheer,
Uileacan dubh O !
 Where the wholesome fruit is bursting from the yellow
 barley ear ;
Uileacan dubh O !
 There is honey in the trees where her misty vales expand,
 And her forest paths, in summer, are by falling waters
 fann'd,

There is dew at high noontide there, and springs i'the
yellow sand,
On the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Curl'd he is and ringletted, and plaited to the knee,
Uileacan dubh O!
Each captain who comes sailing across the Irish sea ;
Uileacan dubh O!
And I will make my journey, if life and health but stand,
Unto that pleasant country, that fresh and fragrant strand,
And leave your boasted braveries, your wealth and high
command,
For the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Large and profitable are the stacks upon the ground,
Uileacan dubh O!
The butter and the cream do wondrously abound,
Uileacan dubh O!
The cresses on the water and the sorrels are at hand,
And the cuckoo's calling daily his note of mimic bland,
And the bold thrush sings so bravely his song i'the forests
grand,
On the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Ballads and Poems

THE FAIRY THORN.

AN ULSTER BALLAD.

“GET up, our Anna dear, from the weary spinning-wheel ;
For your father’s on the hill, and your mother is asleep :
Come up above the crags, and we’ll dance a highland reel
Around the fairy thorn on the steep.”

At Anna Grace’s door ’twas thus the maidens cried,
Three merry maidens fair in kirtles of the green ;
And Anna laid the rock and the weary wheel aside,
The fairest of the four, I ween.

They’re glancing through the glimmer of the quiet eve,
Away in milky wavings of neck and ankle bare ;
The heavy-sliding stream in its sleepy song they leave,
And the crags in the ghostly air :

And linking hand and hand, and singing as they go,
The maids along the hill-side have ta’en their fearless
way,

Till they come to where the rowan trees in lonely beauty
grow

Beside the Fairy Hawthorn grey.

The Hawthorn stands between the ashes tall and slim,
Like matron with her twin grand-daughters at her knee ;
The rowan berries cluster o'er her low head grey and dim
In ruddy kisses sweet to see.

The merry maidens four have ranged them in a row,
Between each lovely couple a stately rowan stem,
And away in mazes wavy, like skimming birds they go,
Oh, never caroll'd bird like them !

But solemn is the silence of the silvery haze
That drinks away their voices in echoless repose,
And dreamily the evening has still'd the haunted braes,
And dreamier the gloaming grows.

And sinking one by one, like lark-notes from the sky
When the falcon's shadow saileth across the open shaw,
Are hush'd the maiden's voices, as cowering down they lie
In the flutter of their sudden awe.

For, from the air above, and the grassy ground beneath,
And from the mountain-ashes and the old whitethorn
between,
A Power of faint enchantment doth through their beings
breathe,
And they sink down together on the green.

They sink together silent, and stealing side to side,
They fling their lovely arms o'er their drooping necks
so fair,
Then vainly strive again their naked arms to hide,
For their shrinking necks again are bare.

Thus clasp'd and prostrate all, with their heads together
 bow'd,
Soft o'er their bosoms' beating—the only human
 sound—

They hear the silky footsteps of the silent fairy crowd,
Like a river in the air, gliding round

No scream can any raise, nor prayer can any say,
But wild, wild, the terror of the speechless three—
For they feel fair Anna Grace drawn silently away,
By whom they dare not look to see.

They feel their tresses twine with her parting locks of
 gold,
And the curls elastic falling, as her head withdraws ;
They feel her sliding arms from their tranced arms unfold,
But they may not look to see the cause :

For heavy on their senses the faint enchantment lies
Through all that night of anguish and perilous amaze ;
And neither fear nor wonder can ope their quivering eyes
Or their limbs from the cold ground raise,

Till out of night the earth has roll'd her dewy side,
With every haunted mountain and streamy vale below ;
When, as the mist dissolves in the yellow morning tide,
The maidens' trance dissolveth so.

Then fly the ghastly three as swiftly as they may,
And tell their tale of sorrow to anxious friends in vain—
They pined away and died within the year and day,
And ne'er was Anna Grace seen again.

WILLY GILLILAND.

AN ULSTER BALLAD.

UP in the mountain solitudes, and in a rebel ring,
He has worshipp'd God upon the hill, in spite of church
and king ;
And seal'd his treason with his blood on Bothwell bridge
he hath ;
So he must fly his father's land, or he must die the
death ;
For comely Claverhouse has come along with grim
Dalzell,
And his smoking rooftree testifies they've done their
errand well.

In vain to fly his enemies he fled his native land ;
Hot persecution waited him upon the Carrick strand ;
His name was on the Carrick cross, a price was on his
head,
A fortune to the man that brings him in alive or dead !
And so on moor and mountain, from the Lagan to the
Bann,
From house to house, and hill to hill, he lurk'd an out-
law'd man.

At last, when in false company he might no longer bide,
He stay'd his houseless wanderings upon the Collon side,
There in a cave all underground he lair'd his heathy
den,
Ah, many a gentleman was fain to earth like hill fox
then !

With hound and fishing-rod he lived on hill and stream
by day ;
At night, betwixt his fleet greyhound and his bonny mare
he lay.

It was a summer evening, and, mellowing and still,
Glenwhirry to the setting sun lay bare from hill to hill ;
For all that valley pastoral held neither house nor tree,
But spread abroad and open all, a full fair sight to see,
From Slemish foot to Collon top lay one unbroken green,
Save where in many a silver coil the river glanced between.

And on the river's grassy bank, even from the morning
grey,
He at the angler's pleasant sport had spent the summer
day :
Ah ! many a time and oft I've spent the summer day
from dawn,
And wonder'd, when the sunset came, where time and
care had gone,
Along the reaches curling fresh, the wimpling pools and
streams,
Where he that day his cares forgot in those delightful
dreams.

His blithe work done, upon a bank the outlaw rested now,
And laid the basket from his back, the bonnet from his
brow ;
And there, his hand upon the Book, his knee upon the
sod,
He fill'd the lonely valley with the gladsome word of God ;

And for a persecuted kirk, and for her martyrs dear,
And against a godless church and king he spoke up loud
and clear.

And now, upon his homeward way, he cross'd the Collon
high,

And over bush and bank and brae he sent abroad his eye ;
But all was darkening peacefully in grey and purple haze,
The thrush was silent in the banks, the lark upon the
braes—

When suddenly shot up a blaze, from the cave's mouth
it came ;

And trooper's steeds and trooper's caps are glancing in
the same !

He couch'd among the heather, and he saw them, as he
lay,

With three long yells at parting, ride lightly east away :
Then down with heavy heart he came, to sorry cheer
came he,

For ashes black were crackling where the green whins
used to be,

And stretch'd among the prickly coomb, his heart's blood
smoking round,

From slender nose to breast-bone cleft, lay dead his
good greyhound !

“ They've slain my dog, the Philistines ! they've ta'en
my bonny mare ! ”—

He plung'd into the smoky hole ; no bonny beast was
there—

He groped beneath his burning bed, (it burn'd him to the
bone,)

Where his good 'weapon used to be, but broadsword
there was none ;

He reel'd out of the stifling den, and sat down on a
stone,

And in the shadows of the night 'twas thus he made his
moan—

“ I am a houseless outcast ; I have neither bed nor board,
Nor living thing to look upon, nor comfort save the Lord :
Yet many a time were better men in worse extremity ;
Who succour'd them in their distress, He now will succour
me,—

He now will succour me, I know ; and, by His holy Name,
I'll make the doers of this deed right dearly rue the same !

“ My bonny mare ! I've ridden you when Claver'se rode
behind,

And from the thumbscrew and the boot you bore me
like the wind ;

And, while I have the life you saved, on your sleek flank,
I swear,

Episcopalian rowel shall never ruffle hair !

Though sword to wield they've left me none—yet Wallace
wight, I wis,

Good battle did on Irvine side wi' waur weapon than this.”

His fishing-rod with both hands he gripped it as he spoke,
And, where the butt and top were spliced, in pieces twain
he broke ;

The limber top he cast away, with all its gear abroad,
But, grasping the tough hickory butt, with spike of
 iron shod,
He ground the sharp spear to a point ; then pull'd his
 bonnet down,
And, meditating black revenge, set forth for Carrick
 town.

The sun shines bright on Carrick wall and Carrick Castle
 grey,
And up thine aisle, St. Nicholas, has ta'en his morning
 way,
And to the North-Gate sentinel displayeth far and
 near
Sea, hill, and tower, and all thereon, in dewy freshness
 clear,
Save where, behind a ruin'd wall, himself alone to
 view,
Is peering from the ivy green a bonnet of the blue.

The sun shines red on Carrick wall and Carrick Castle
 old,
And all the western buttresses have changed their grey
 for gold ;
And from thy shrine, St. Nicholas, the pilgrim of the
 sky
Has gone in rich farewell, as fits such royal votary ;
But, as his last red glance he takes down past black
 Slieve-a-true,
He leaveth where he found it first, the bonnet of the
 blue

Again he makes the turrets grey stand out before the hill ;
Constant as their foundation rock, there is the bonnet
still !

And now the gates are open'd, and forth in gallant show
Prick jeering grooms and burghers blythe, and troopers
in a row ;

But one has little care for jest, so hard bested is he,
To ride the outlaw's bonny mare, for this at last is she !

Down comes her master with a roar, her rider with a
groan,

The iron and the hickory are through and through him
gone !

He lies a corpse ; and where he sat, the outlaw sits again,
And once more to his bonny mare he gives the spur and
rein ;

Then some with sword, and some with gun, they ride and
run amain ;

But sword and gun, and whip and spur, that day they
plied in vain !

Ah ! little thought Willy Gilliland, when he on Skerry
side

Drew bridle first, and wiped his brow after that weary
ride,

That where he lay like hunted brute, a cavern'd outlaw
lone,

Broad lands and yeoman tenantry should yet be there his
own :

Yet so it was ; and still from him descendants not a few
Draw birth and lands and, let me trust, draw love of
Freedom too.

THE FORGING OF THE ANCHOR

COME, see the Dolphin's anchor forged—'tis at a white
heat now :

The bellows ceased, the flames decreased though on the
forge's brow

The little flames still fitfully play through the sable
mound,

And fitfully you still may see the grim smiths ranking
round,

All clad in leathern panoply, their broad hands only bare :
Some rest upon their sledges here, some work the windlass
there.

The windlass strains the tackle chains, the black mound
heaves below,

And red and deep a hundred veins burst out at every
throe :

It rises, roars, rends all outright—O, Vulcan, what a
glow !

'Tis blinding white, 'tis blasting bright—the high sun
shines not so !

The high sun sees not, on the earth, such fiery fearful
show,

The roof-ribs swarth, the candent hearth, the ruddy lurid
row

Of smiths that stand, an ardent band, like men before
the foe,

As, quivering through his fleece of flame, the sailing
monster, slow

Sinks on the anvil :—all about the faces fiery grow ;

“ Hurrah ! ” they shout, “ leap out—leap out ; ” bang,
bang the sledges go :

Hurrah ! the jetted lightnings are hissing high and low—
A hailing fount of fire is struck at every squashing blow ;
The leathern mail rebounds the hail, the rattling cinders
strow

The ground around ; at every bound the sweltering foun-
tains flow,

And thick and loud the swinking crowd at every stroke
pant “ ho ! ”

Leap out, leap out, my masters ; leap out and lay on load !
Let's forge a goodly anchor—a bower thick and broad ;
For a heart of oak is hanging on every blow, I bode :
I see the good ship riding all in a perilous road—
The low reef roaring on her lee—the roll of ocean pour'd
From stem to stern, sea after sea, the mainmast by the
board,

The bulwarks down, the rudder gone, the boats stove at
the chains !

But courage still, brave mariners—the bower yet remains,
And not an inch to flinch he deigns, save when ye pitch
sky high ;

Then moves his head, as though he said, “ Fear nothing—
here am I.”

Swing in your strokes in order, let foot and hand keep
time ;

Your blows make music sweeter far than any steeple's
chime :

But, while you sling your sledges, sing—and let the
burthen be,

The anchor is the anvil-king, and royal craftsmen we !

Strike in, strike in—the sparks begin to dull their rustling
red ;
Our hammers ring with sharper din, our work will soon
be sped.
Our anchor soon must change his bed of fiery rich array,
For a hammock at the roaring bows, or an oozy couch of
clay ;
Our anchor soon must change the lay of merry craftsmen
here,
For the yco-heave-o', and the heave-away, and the sighing
seaman's cheer ;
When, weighing slow, at eve they go—far, far from love
and home ;
And sobbing sweethearts, in a row, wail o'er the ocean
foam.

In livid and obdurate gloom he darkens down at last :
A shapely one he is, and strong, as e'er from cat was
cast :
O trusted and trustworthy guard, if thou hadst life like
me,
What pleasures would thy toils reward beneath the deep
green sea !
O deep-Sea-diver, who might then behold such sights
as thou ?
The hoary monster's palaces ! methinks what joy 'twere
now
To go plumb plunging down amid the assembly of the
whales,
And feel the churn'd sea round me boil beneath their
scourging tails !

Then deep in tangle-woods to fight the fierce sea
unicorn,
And send him foil'd and bellowing back, for all his ivory
horn :
To leave the subtle sworder-fish of bony blade forlorn ;
And for the ghastly-grinning shark, to laugh his jaws to
scorn :
To leap down on the kraken's back, where 'mid Norwe-
gian isles
He lies, a lubber anchorage for sudden shallow'd miles ;
Till snorting, like an under-sea volcano, off he rolls ;
Meanwhile to swing, a-buffeting the far astonished
shoals
Of his back-browsing ocean-calves ; or, haply, in a
cove,
Shell-strown, and consecrate of old to some Undiné's
love,
To find the long-hair'd mermaidens ; or, hard by icy
lands,
To wrestle with the Sea-serpent, upon cerulean sands.

O broad-arm'd Fisher of the deep, whose sports can equal
thine ?
The Dolphin weighs a thousand tons, that tugs thy cable
line ;
And night by night, 'tis thy delight, thy glory day by
day,
Through sable sea and breaker white the giant game to
play—
But shamer of our little sports ! forgive the name I gave—
A fisher's joy is to destroy—thine office is to save.

O lodger in the sea-kings' halls, couldst thou but understand
Whose be the white bones by thy side, or who that
dripping band,
Slow swaying in the heaving wave, that round about thee
bend,
With sounds like breakers in a dream blessing their ancient
friend—
Oh, couldst thou know what heroes glide with larger
steps round thee,
Thine iron side would swell with pride ; thou'dst leap
within the sea !
Give honour to their memories who left the pleasant
strand,
To shed their blood so freely for the love of Father-
land—
Who left their chance of quiet age and grassy churchyard
grave,
So freely, for a restless bed amid the tossing wave—
Oh, though our anchor may not be all I have fondly
sung,
Honour him for their memory, whose bones he goes
among !

THE PRETTY GIRL OF LOCH DAN

THE shades of eve had cross'd the glen
That frowns o'er infant Avonmore,
When, nigh Loch Dan, two weary men,
We stopp'd before a cottage door.

“ God save all here,” my comrade cries,
And rattles on the raised latch-pin ;
“ God save you kindly,” quick replies
A clear sweet voice, and asks us in.

We enter ; from the wheel she starts,
A rosy girl with soft black eyes ;
Her fluttering court’sy takes our hearts,
Her blushing grace and pleased surprise

Poor Mary, she was quite alone,
For, all the way to Glenmalure,
Her mother had that morning gone
And left the house in charge with her.

But neither household cares, nor yet
The shame that startled virgins feel,
Could make the generous girl forget
Her wonted hospitable zeal.

She brought us in a beechen bowl
Sweet milk that smack’d of mountain thyme,
Oat cake, and such a yellow roll
Of butter—it gilds all my rhyme !

And, while we ate the grateful food,
(With weary limbs on bench reclined,)
Considerate and discreet, she stood
Apart, and listen’d to the wind.

Kind wishes both our souls engaged,
From breast to breast spontaneous ran
The mutual thought—we stood and pledged
THE MODEST ROSE ABOVE LOCH DAN.

“ The milk we drink is not more pure,
Sweet Mary—bless those budding charms !
Than your own generous heart, I’m sure,
Nor whiter than the breast it warms ! ”

She turn’d and gazed, unused to hear
Such language in that homely glen ;
But, Mary, you have nought to fear,
Though smiled on by two stranger men.

Not for a crown would I alarm
Your virgin pride by word or sign,
Nor need a painful blush disarm
My friend of thoughts as pure as mine.

Her simple heart could not but feel
The words we spoke were free from guile ;
She stoop’d, she blush’d—she fix’d her wheel,
’Tis all in vain—she can’t but smile !

Just like sweet April’s dawn appears
Her modest face—I see it yet—
And though I lived a hundred years,
Methinks I never could forget.

The pleasure that, despite her heart,
Fills all her downcast eyes with light,
The lips reluctantly apart,
The white teeth struggling into sight,

The dimples eddying o’er her cheek,—
The rosy cheek that won’t be still !—
Oh ! who could blame what flatterers speak,
Did smiles like this reward their skill ?

For such another smile, I vow.

Though loudly beats the midnight rain,
I'd take the mountain-side e'en now,
And walk to Luggelaw again!

ADIEU TO BRITTANY.

RUGGED land of the granite and oak,
I depart with a sigh from thy shore,
And with kinsman's affection a blessing invoke
On the maids and the men of Arvôr.

For the Irish and Breton are kin,
Though the lights of Antiquity pale
In the point of the dawn where the partings begin
Of the Bolg, and the Kymro, and Gael.

But, though dim in the distance of time
Be the low-burning beacons of fame,
Holy Nature attests us, in writing sublime,
On heart and on visage, the same.

In the dark-eye-lash'd eye of blue-grey,
In the open look, modest and kind,
In the face's fine oval reflecting the play
Of the sensitive, generous mind.

Till, as oft as by meadow and stream
With thy Maries and Josephs I roam,
In companionship gentle and friendly I seem,
As with Patrick and Brigid at home.

Green, meadow-fresh, streamy-bright land !
Though greener meads, valleys as fair,
Be at home, yet the home-yearning heart will demand,
Are they blest as in Brittany there ?

Demand not—repining is vain :
Yet, would God, that even as thou
In thy homeliest homesteads, contented Bretagne,
Were the green isle my thoughts are with now !

But I call thee not golden : let gold
Deck the coronal troubadours twine,
Where the waves of the Loire and Garomna are roll'd
Through the land of the white wheat and vine,

And the fire of the Frenchman goes up
To the quick-thoughted, dark-flashing eye :
While Glory and Change quaffing Luxury's cup,
Challenge all things below and on high.

Leave to him—to the vehement man
Of the Loire, of the Seine, of the Rhone,—
In the Idea's high pathways to march in the van,
To o'erthrow, and set up the o'erthrown :

Be it thine in the broad beaten ways
That the world's simple seniors have trod,
To walk with soft steps, living peaceable days,
And on earth not forgetful of God.

Nor repine that thy lot has been cast
With the things of the old time before,
For to thee are committed the keys of the past,
Oh grey monumental Arvôr !

Yes, land of the great Standing Stones,
It is thine at thy feet to survey,
From thy earlier shepherd-kings' sepulchre-thrones
The giant, far-stretching array ;

Where, abroad o'er the gorse-cover'd *lande*
Where, along by the slow-breaking wave,
The hoary, inscrutable sentinels stand
In their night-watch by History's grave.

Preserve them, nor fear for thy charge ;
From the prime of the morning they sprung,
When the works of young Mankind were lasting and large,
As the will they embodied was young.

I have stood on Old Sarum :* the sun,
With a pensive regard from the west,
Lit the beech-tops low down in the ditch of the Dun,
Lit the service-trees high on its crest :

But the walls of the Roman were shrunk
Into morsels of ruin around,
And palace of monarch, and minster of monk,
Were effaced from the grassy-foss'd ground.

Like bubbles in ocean, they melt,
O Wilts, on thy long-rolling plain,
And at last but the works of the hand of the Celt
And the sweet hand of Nature remain.

Even so : though, portentous and strange,
With a rumour of troublesome sounds,

* *Sorbiodunum*, i.e., Service-tree-fort.

On his iron way gliding, the Angel of Change
Spread his dusky wings wide o'er thy bounds,—

He will pass : there'll be grass on his track,
And the pick of the miner in vain
Shall search the dark void : while the stones of Carnac
And the word of the Breton remain.

Farewell : up the waves of the Rance,
See, we stream back our pennon of smoke ;
Farewell, russet skirt of the fine robe of France,
Rugged land of the granite and oak !

WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

ON HEARING WEEK-DAY SERVICE THERE, SEPTEMBER, 1858.

FROM England's gilded halls of state
I cross'd the Western Minster's gate,
And, 'mid the tombs of England's dead,
I heard the Holy Scriptures read.

The walls around and pillar'd piers
Had stood well-nigh seven hundred years ;
The words the priest gave forth had stood
Since Christ, and since before the Flood.

A thousand hearts around partook
The comfort of the Holy Book ;
Ten thousand suppliant hands were spread
In lifted stone above my head

In dust decay'd the hands are gone
That fed and set the builders on ;
In heedless dust the fingers lie
That hew'd and heav'd the stones on high ;

And back to earth and air resolv'd
The brain that plann'd and pois'd the vault :--
But undecay'd, erect, and fair,
To heaven ascends the builded Prayer,

With majesty of strength and size,
With glory of harmonious dyes,
With holy airs of heavenward thought
From floor to roof divinely fraught.

Fall down, ye bars : enlarge, my soul !
To heart's content take in the whole ;
And, spurning pride's injurious thrall,
With loyal love embrace them all !

Yet hold not lightly home ; nor yet
The graves on Dunagore forget ;
Nor grudge the stone-gilt stall to change
For humble bench of Gorman's Grange.

The self-same Word bestows its cheer
On simple creatures there as here ;
And thence, as hence, poor souls do rise
In social flight to common skies.

For in the Presence vast and good,
That bends o'er all our livelihood,
With humankind in heavenly cure,
We all are like, we all are poor.

His poor, be sure, shall never want
For service meet or seemly chant,
And for the Gospel's joyful sound
A fitting place shall still be found ;

Whether the organ's solemn tones
Thrill through the dust of warriors' bones,
Or voices of the village choir
From swallow-haunted caves aspire,

Or, sped with healing on its wings,
The Word solicit ears of kings,
Or stir the souls, in moorland glen,
Of kingless covenanted men.

Enough for thee, indulgent Lord,
The willing ear to hear Thy Word,—
The rising of the burthen'd breast—
And thou suppliest all the rest

THE MORNING'S HINGES.

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.

Where, on earth, battalioned 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.

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.

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.

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."

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

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;

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.

“ 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.”

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 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—

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,
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,
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

And the worlds that further are
Hold no 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.

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."

Oh, Pure Thought, then said I
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-sprinkled floor,
Else are we not for your abode " :
And turned him from my door.

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."

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.

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 span,
Nor breadth nor depth to comprehend,
It seemed as though creation's end
Were but enigma, and God's plan
One knotted, hard entanglement.

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 : behold 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.

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.

THE HYMN OF THE FISHERMEN.

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.

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.

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

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.

THE WIDOW'S CLOAK.

THERE'S a widow Lady worthy of a word of kindly tone
 From all who love good Neighbourhood, and true alle-
 giance own
 To motherly Humanity in love and sorrow tried,
 Who lives some season of the year
 Adown Dee-side.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Ten thousands are her men-at-call, that ride in golden
spurs ;
The citted margins of the seas, half round the world, are
hers ;
The 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 !

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.

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 !

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.

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.

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 !

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 :—

“ 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 ! ”

PAUL VERONESE.

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.

THE LITTLE MAIDEN.

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.

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.

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.

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

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 !

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

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.

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 !

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.

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.

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.

DEAR WILDE.

AN ELEGY ON SIR WILLIAM WILDE.

1876.

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 to 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 to 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 Cyclopaediac union, they retain
Their portion in the high clear-aired domain
Of arc and sine and critic-judgment heard
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 displayed
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 Tulsk or Castlereas,
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.

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 shows the soul'd magnanimous assay,
And when her day in that High Court shall come,
Plead in your old love's cause with double power.

Lays of the Red Branch

THE TWINS OF MACHA.

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 single-handed 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 *Dinn-senchus* 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 swiftness, 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.

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 etymological 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, oh, good 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 :
 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.

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.
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.
 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 ?

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 thy 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 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 bides, 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.
 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 ardour 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.

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 swords,—
King, priest, and lord, a swathe before the scythe
Of plague, laid level ?
He,—he,—no looker-on
At heaven-abhorred 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 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 !

THE ABDICATION OF FERGUS MAC ROY.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[Conor, King of Ulster, contemporary and rival of Maev, Queen of Connaught, reigned at Emania (now the Navan), near Armagh, about the commencement of the Christian era. He owed his first accession to the monarchy to the arts of his mother Nessa, on whom Fergus, his predecessor in the kingly office and

step-father, doted so fondly that she had been enabled to stipulate, as a condition of bestowing her hand, that Fergus should abdicate for a year in favour of her youthful son. The year had been indefinitely prolonged by the fascinations of Nessa aided by the ability of Conor, who, although he concealed a treacherous and cruel disposition under attractive graces of manners and person, ultimately became too popular to be displaced; and Fergus, whose nature disinclined him to the labours of Government, had acquiesced in accepting as an equivalent the excitements of war and chase, and the unrestricted pleasure of the revel. Associating with Cuchullin, Conall Carnach, Naisi, son of Usnach, and the other companions of the military order of the Red Branch, he long remained a faithful supporter of the throne of his step-son, eminent for his valour, generosity, and fidelity, as well as for his accomplishments as a hunter and a poet.

At length occurred the tragedy which broke up these genial associations, and drove Fergus into the exile in which he died.]

ONCE, ere God was crucified,
I was King o'er Uladh wide :
King, by law of choice and birth,
O'er the fairest realm of Earth.

I was head of Rury's race ;
Emain was my dwelling place ;
Right and Might were mine ; nor less
Stature, strength, and comeliness.

Neither lacked I love's delight,
Nor the glorious meeds of fight.
All on earth was mine could bring
Life's enjoyment to a king.

Much I loved the jocund chase,
Much the horse and chariot race :
Much I loved the deep carouse,
Quaffing in the Red Branch House.

But in Council call'd to meet,
Loved I not the judgment-seat ;
And the suitors' questions hard
Won but scantily my regard.

Rather would I, all alone,
Care and state behind me thrown,
Walk the dew through showery gleams
O'er the meads, or by the streams,

Chanting, as the thoughts might rise,
Unimagined melodies ;
While with sweetly-pungent smart
Secret happy tears would start.

Such was I, when in the dance,
Nessa did bestow a glance,
And my soul that moment took
Captive in a single look.

I am but an empty shade,
Far from life and passion laid ;
Yet does sweet remembrance thrill
All my shadowy being still.

Nessa had been Fathna's spouse,
Fathna of the Royal house,
And a beauteous boy had borne him ;
Fourteen summers did adorn him :

Yea ; thou deem'st it marvellous,
'That a widow's glance should thus
'Turn from lure of maidens' eyes
All a young king's fantasies.

Yet if thou hadst known but half
Of the joyance of her laugh,
Of the measures of her walk,
Of the music of her talk.

Of the witch'ry of her wit,
Even when smarting under it,—
Half the sense, the charm, the grace,
Thou hadst worshipp'd in my place.

And, besides, the thoughts I wove
Into songs of war and love,
She alone of all the rest
Felt them with a perfect zest.

“ Lady, in thy smiles to live
Tell me but the boon to give,
Yea, I lay, in gift complete,
Crown and sceptre at thy feet.”

“ Not so great the boon I crave :
Hear the wish my soul would have ; ”
And she glanc'd a loving eye
On the stripling standing by :—

“ Conor is of age to learn ;
Wisdom is a king's concern ;
Conor is of royal race,
Yet may sit in Fathna's place.

“ Therefore, king, if thou wouldst prove
That I have indeed thy love,
On the judgment-seat permit
Conor by thy side to sit,

“ That by use the youth may draw
Needful knowledge of the Law.”

I with answer was not slow,
“ Be thou mine, and be it so.”

I am but a shape of air,
Far removed from love's repair ;
Yet, were mine a living frame
Once again I'd say the same.

Thus, a prosperous wooing sped,
Took I Nessa to my bed,
While in council and debate
Conor daily by me sate.

Modest was his mien in sooth,
Beautiful the studious youth,
Questioning with earnest gaze
All the reasons and the ways

In the which, and why because,
Kings administer the Laws.
Silent so with looks intent
Sat he till the year was spent

But the strifes the suitors raised
Bred me daily more distaste,
Every faculty and passion
Sunk in sweet intoxication.

Till upon a day in court
Rose a plea of weightier sort :
Tangled as a briary thicket
Were the rights and wrongs intricate

Which the litigants disputed,
Challenged, mooted, and confuted ;
Till, when all the plea was ended,
Naught at all I comprehended.

Scorning an affected show
Of the thing I did not know,
Yet my own defect to hide,
I said, " Boy-judge, thou decide ! "

Conor, with unalter'd mien,
In a clear sweet voice serene,
Took in hand the tangled skein
And began to make it plain.

As a sheep-dog sorts his cattle,
As a king arrays his battle,
So, the facts on either side
He did marshal and divide.

Every branching side-dispute
Traced he downward to the root
Of the strife's main stem, and there
Laid the ground of difference bare.

Then to scope of either cause
Set the compass of the laws,
This adopting, that rejecting,—
Reasons to a head collecting,—

As a charging cohort goes
Through and over scatter'd foes—
So, from point to point, he brought
Onward still the weight of thought,

Through all error and confusion
Till he set the clear conclusion
Standing like a king alone,
All things adverse overthrown,

And gave judgment clear and sound :—
Praises fill'd the hall around ;
Yea, the man that lost the cause
Hardly could withhold applause.

By the wondering crowd surrounded
I sat shamefaced and confounded.
Envious ire awhile oppress'd me
Till the nobler thought possess'd me ;

And I rose, and on my feet
Standing by the judgment-seat,
Took the circlet from my head,
Laid it on the bench, and said,

“ Men of Uladh, I resign
That which is not rightly mine,
That a worthier than I
May your judge's place supply.

“ Lo, it is no easy thing
For a man to be a king
Judging well, as should behove
One who claims a people's love.

“ Uladh's judgment seat to fill
I have neither wit nor will.
One is here may justly claim
Both the function and the name.

“Conor is of royal blood ;
 Fair he is ; I trust him good ;
 Wise he is we all may say
 Who have heard his words to-day.

“Take him therefore in my room,
 Letting me the place assume—
 Office but with life to end—
 Of his councillor and friend.”

So young Conor gained the crown ;
 So I laid the kingship down ;
 Laying with it as it went
 All I knew of discontent.

MESGEDRA.

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, Maev, with Connaught, and those of Curi 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 *tibiæ* 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," where the same abuses are shown to exist at the present day among the native tribes of India.]

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
Throughout 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's 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 Clane.

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 Tclacta'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
Then 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 steeps : 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 an 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.

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 of the Ibero-Celtic Society, and by O'Curry in the *Atlantis*, it has furnished MacPherson with the theme of his *Darthula* ; and has 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. The name only of the Red Branch survives in the adjoining townland of Creeveroe; but local tradition points out some earthworks there as the site of the King's Stables. The *Aidedh* 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."]

ACTORS.

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

AINLE }
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.

LEVARCAM, her Nurse.

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

SCENE OPENS AT GLEN ETIVE, IN SCOTLAND.

DEIRDRE.

THOU'RT sad.

NAISI.

Not sad.

DEIRDRE.

Say not thou art not sad,
Else I, more sad, shall say thou lovest 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 cast of flying spears,
 'Mong bloody Mar'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 custom'd 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 to 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.

'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 lover's 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.

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 sworders, 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
 The 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 salmon 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 shall 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 woman 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 no 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 ?

BUINO.

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

DEIRDRE.

And thou ?—

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 ?

BUINO.

That is renowned 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.

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

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'erburthened 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 Dundéalga he,
 Repressing tumult of his borderers there.

DEIRDRE.

How lies Emania ; and Dundéalga how ?

BUINO.

Straight on, Dundéalga : 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.

DERIDRE.

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, disdainful 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 !

*[Hurles the heavy chessman he is playing with at the spy,
 striking him full on the face.]*

DEIRDRE.

What has disturbed my lord ?

NAISI.

A spying knave

At yonder window, that, with brutal^e 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.

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.

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, no, 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 dishonour 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.

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 honour.

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.

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 honour 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.

DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO ALBA

(FROM THE IRISH.)

FAREWELL to fair Alba, high house of the Sun,
 Farewell to the mountain, the cliff, and the Dun ;
 Dun Sweeny adieu ! for my Love cannot stay,
 And tarry I may not when love cries : " Away ! "

Glen Vashan ! Glen Vashan ! where roebucks run free,
 Where my Love used to feast on the red deer with me,
 Where rock'd on thy waters while stormy winds blew,
 My Love used to slumber, Glen Vashan, adieu !

Glendaro ! Glendaro ! where birchen boughs weep
 Honey dew at high noon o'er the nightingale's sleep,
 Where my Love used to lead me to hear the cuckoo,
 'Mong the high hazel bushes, Glendaro, adieu !

Glen Urchy ! Glen Urchy ! where loudly and long
 My Love used to wake up the woods with his song,
 While the Son of the Rock* from the depths of his dell
 Laugh'd sweetly in answer, Glen Urchy, farewell :

Glen Etive ! Glen Etive ! where dappled does roam,
 Where I leave the green sheeling I first call'd a home ;
 Where with me and my true Love delighted to dwell,
 The Sun made his mansion, Glen Etive, farewell !

Farewell to Inch Draynach, adieu to the roar
 Of the blue billow bursting in light on the shore ;
 Dun Fiagh, farewell ! for my Love cannot stay,
 And tarry I may not when love cries : " Away ! "

DEIRDRE'S LAMENT FOR THE SONS OF USNACH.

(FROM THE IRISH.)

THE lions of the hill are gone,
 And I am left alone—alone—
 Dig the grave both wide and deep,
 For I am sick, and fain would sleep !

* Mac an Alla, *i.e.*, Echo.

The falcons of the wood are flown,
And I am left alone—alone—
Dig the grave both deep and wide,
And let us slumber side by side.

The dragons of the rock are sleeping,
Sleep that wakes not for our weeping :
Dig the grave and make it ready ;
Lay me on my true Love's body.

Lay their spears and bucklers bright
By the warriors' sides aright ;
Many a day the Three before me
On their linkèd bucklers bore me.

Lay upon the low grave floor,
'Neath each head, the blue claymore ;
Many a time the noble Three
Redden'd those blue blades for me.

Lay the collars, as is meet,
Of their greyhounds at their feet ;
Many a time for me have they
Brought the tall red deer to bay.

Oh ! to hear my true Love singing,
Sweet as sound of trumpets ringing :
Like the sway of ocean swelling
Roll'd his deep voice round our dwelling.

Oh ! to hear the echoes pealing
Round our green and fairy sheeling,
When the Three, with soaring chorus,
Pass'd the silent skylark o'er us.

Echo now, sleep, morn and even—
 Lark alone enchant the heaven!—
 Ardan's lips are scant of breath,—
 Neesa's tongue is cold in death.

Stag, exult on glen and mountain—
 Salmon, leap from loch to fountain—
 Heron, in the free air warm ye—
 Usnach's Sons no more will harm ye!

Erin's stay no more you are,
 Rulers of the ridge of war ;
 Never more 'twill be your fate
 To keep the beam of battle straight.

Woe is me ! by fraud and wrong—
 Traitors false and tyrants strong—
 Fell Clan Usnach, bought and sold,
 For Barach's feast and Conor's gold !

Woe to Eman, roof and wall !—
 Woe to Red Branch, hearth and hall !—
 Tenfold woe and black dishonour
 To the false and foul Clan Conor !

Dig the grave both wide and deep,
 Sick I am, and fain would sleep !
 Dig the grave and make it ready,
 Lay me on my true Love's body.

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 ground-work 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 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; for 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 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 *μαίνεται ἐν παλάμῃσι* in reference to the Spear of Diomedes.

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.]

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-Milcarna’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, the 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-hungered; 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-grey, 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—illumined 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, majestical ? ”

“ 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 Ingcel, and the host
Defiling past him, cast, each man, his stone
All in one heap.

"When this night's work is done,"
Said Ingcel, "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 Ingcel 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 Ingcel, “ 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 Maeve
 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 Ingcel, "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 Ingcel. “ 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 Ingcel ; “ 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 Luignech ; 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 woman : 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 broidered 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 knew 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 licence, 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 to 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 out number came ;
And little think they, whosoe’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 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 ! "

" Behoves 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 Ingcel'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 the 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 Canary.”

“ 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 samplars 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 hast 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."

THE HEALING OF CONALL CARNACH.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[Conor is said to have heard of the Passion of our Lord from a Roman captain sent to demand tribute at Emania. He died of a wound inflicted by Keth, son of Magach, and nephew of Maev, with a ball from a sling ; having been inveigled within reach of the missile by certain Connaught ladies. His son Forbaid characteristically avenged his death by the assassination of Maev, whom he slew, also with a sling, across the Shannon, while she was in the act of bathing. Notwithstanding the repulsive character of many of the acts ascribed to Conor, such as the cruel enforcement of the foot-race upon Macha (*O licentiam furoris, ægræ reipublicæ gemitu prose-quendam !*) and the betrayal of the sons of Usnach, and abduction of Deirdré, the best part of Irish heroic tradition connects itself with his reign and period, preceding by nearly three centuries the epoch of Cormac Mac Art, and the Fenian or Irish Ossianic romances. The survivor of the men of renown

of Conor's era was Conall Carnach, the hero of many picturesque legends, one of the most remarkable of which affords the groundwork for the following verses.]

O'ER Slieve Few, with noiseless tramping through the
heavy-drifted snow,

Beälcu,* Connacia's champion in his chariot tracks the
foe ;

And anon far off discerneth, in the mountain-hollow white,
Slinger Keth and Conall Carnach mingling, hand to hand
in fight.

Swift the charioteer his coursers urged across the wintry
glade :

Hoarse the cry of Keth and hoarser seem'd to come
demanding aid ;

But through wreath and swollen runnel ere the car could
reach anigh,

Keth lay dead, and mighty Conall bleeding lay at point
to die.

Whom beholding spent and pallid, Beälcu exulting cried,
" Oh thou ravening wolf of Uladh, where is now thy
northern pride ?

What can now that crest audacious, what that pale defiant
brow,

Once the bale-star of Connacia's ravaged fields, avail
thee now ? "

" Taunts are for reviling woman " ; faintly Conall made
reply :

" Wouldst thou play the manlier foeman, end my pain
and let me die.

* Pronounced Bayal-Kú.

Neither deem thy blade dishonour'd that with Keth's
a deed it share,
For the foremost two of Connaught feat enough and
fame to spare."

"No, I will not! bard shall never in Dunseverick hall
make boast
That to quell one northern riever needed two of Croghan's
host.

But because that word thou'st spoken, if but life enough
remains,
Thou shalt hear the wives of Croghan clap their hands
above thy chains

"Yea, if life enough but linger, that the leech may make
thee whole,
Meet to satiate the anger that beseems a warrior's soul,
Best of leech-craft I'll purvey thee; make thee whole
as healing can;
And in single combat slay thee, Connaught man to
Ulster man."

Binding him in five-fold fetter, wrists and ankles, wrists
and neck,
To his car's uneasy litter Beälcu upheaved the wreck
Of the broken man and harness; but he started with
amaze
When he felt the northern war-mace, what a weight it
was to raise.

Westward then through Breiffny's borders, with his
captive and his dead,
Track'd by bands of fierce applauders, wives and shrieking
widows, sped;

And the chain'd heroic carcass on the fair-green of
Moy Slaught

Casting down, proclaim'd his purpose, and bade Lee the
leech be brought

Lee, the gentle-faced physician from his herb-plot came,
and said,

“ Healing is with God's permission : health for life's
enjoyment made :

And though I mine aid refuse not, yet, to speak my
purpose plain,

I the healing art abuse not, making life enure to pain

“ But assure me, with the sanction of the mightiest oath
ye know,

That in case, in this contention, Conall overcome his foe,
Straight departing from the tourney by what path the
chief shall choose,

He is free to take his journey unmolested to the Fews.

“ Swear me further, while at healing in my charge the
hero lies,

None shall through my fences stealing, work him mischief
or surprise ;

So, if God the undertaking but approve, in six months'
span

Once again my art shall make him meet to stand before
a man.”

Crom their god they then attested, Sun and Wind for
guarantees,

Conall Carnach unmolested by what exit he might
please,

If the victor, should have freedom to depart Connacia's
 bounds ;

Meantime, no man should intrude him entering on
 the hospice grounds.

Then his burden huge receiving in the hospice-portal,
 Lee,

Stiffen'd limb by limb relieving with the iron fetter key,
 As a crumpled scroll unroll'd him, groaning deep, till laid
 at length,

Wondering gazers might behold him, what a tower he
 was of strength.

Spake the sons to one another, day by day, of Beälcu—
 " Get thee up and spy, my brother, what the leech and
 northman do."

" Lee, at mixing of a potion : Conall, yet in no wise
 dead,

As on reef of rock the ocean, tosses wildly on his bed."

" Spy again with cautious peeping ; what of Lee and
 Conall now ?"

" Conall lies profoundly sleeping : Lee beside with
 placid brow."

" And to-day ?" " 'To-day he's risen ; pallid as his
 swathing sheet,

He has left his chamber's prison, and is walking on his
 feet."

" And to-day ?" " A ghastly figure on his javelin
 propp'd he goes."

" And to-day ?" " A languid vigour through his larger
 gesture shows."

“ And to-day ? ” “ The blood renewing mantles all
his clear cheek through.”

“ Would thy vow had room for rueing, rashly-valiant
Beälcu ! ”

So with herb and healing balsam, ere the second month
was past,
Life's additions smooth and wholesome circling through
his members vast,
As you've seen a sere oak burgeon under summer showers
and dew,
Conall, under his chirurgeon, fill'd and flourish'd, spread
and grew.

“ I can bear the sight no longer : I have watch'd him
moon by moon :
Day by day the chief grows stronger : giant-strong he
will be soon.
Oh my sire, rash-valiant warrior ! but that oaths have
built the wall,
Soon these feet should leap the barrier : soon this hand
thy fate forestall.”

“ Brother, have the wish thou'st utter'd ; we have sworn,
so let it be ;
But although our feet be fetter'd, all the air is left us
free.
Dying Keth with vengeful presage did bequeath thee sling
and ball,
And the sling may send its message where thy vagrant
glances fall.

“ Forbaid was a master-slinger : Maev, when in her
bath she sank,
Felt the presence of his finger from the further Shannon
bank ;
For he threw by line and measure, practising a constant
cast
Daily in secluded leisure, till he reach'd the mark at
last.

“ Keth achieved a warrior's honour, though 'twas mid
a woman's band,
When he smote the amorous Conor bowing from his
distant stand.
Fit occasion will not fail ye : in the leech's lawn below,
Conall at the fountain daily drinks within an easy throw.”

“ Wherefore cast ye at the apple, sons of mine, with
measured aim ? ”

“ He who in the close would grapple, first the distant
foe should maim.

And since Keth, his death-balls casting, rides no more
the ridge of war,

We, against our summer hosting, train us for his vacant
car.”

“ Wherefore to the rock repairing, gaze ye forth, my
children, tell.”

“ 'Tis a stag we watch for snaring, that frequents the
leech's well.”

“ I will see this stag, though, truly, small may be my
eye's delight.”

And he climb'd the rock where fully lay the lawn exposed
to sight.

Conall to the green well-margin came at dawn and knelt
to drink,

Thinking how a noble virgin by a like green fountain's
brink

Heard his own pure vows one morning far away and
long ago :

All his heart to home was turning ; and his tears began
to flow.

Clean forgetful of his prison, steep Dunseverick's windy
tower

Seem'd to rise in present vision, and his own dear lady's
bower.

Round the sheltering knees they gather, little ones of
tender years,—

Tell us mother of our father—and she answers but with
tears.

Twice the big drops splash'd the fountain. Then he rose,
and turning round,

As across a breast of mountain sweeps a whirlwind o'er
the ground

Raced in athlete-feats amazing, swung the war-mace,
hurl'd the spear ;

Beálcu, in wonder gazing, felt the pangs of deadly fear

Had it been a fabled griffin, suppl'd in a fasting den,
Flash'd its wheeling coils to heaven o'er a wreck of beasts
and men,

Hardly had the dreadful prospect bred his soul more dire
alarms ;

Such the fire of Conall's aspect, such the stridor of his
arms !

“ This is fear,” he said, “ that never shook these limbs
of mine till now.

Now I see the mad endeavour ; now I mourn the boastful
vow.

Yet 'twas righteous wrath impell'd me ; and a sense of
manly shame

From his naked throat withheld me when 'twas offer'd
to my aim.

“ Now I see his strength excelling : whence he buys it :
what he pays :

'Tis a God who has a dwelling in the fount, to whom
he prays.

Thither came he weeping, drooping, till the Well-God
heard his prayer :

Now behold him, soaring, swooping, as an eagle through
the air.

“ O thou God, by whatsoever sounds of awe thy name
we know,

Grant thy servant equal favour with the stranger and
the foe !

Equal grace, 'tis all I covet ; and if sacrificial blood
Win thy favour, thou shall have it on thy very well-brink,
God !

“ What and though I've given pledges not to cross the
leech's court ?

Not to pass his sheltering hedges, meant I to his patient's
hurt.

Thy dishonour meant I never : never meant I to foreswear
Right divine of prayer wherever Power divine invites
to prayer.

“ Sun that warm’st me, Wind that fann’st me, ye that
 guarantee the oath,
Make no sign of wrath against me : tenderly ye touch
 me both.
Yea, then, through his fences stealing ere to-morrow’s
 sun shall rise,
Well-God ! on thy margin kneeling, I will offer sacrifice.”

“ Brother, rise, the skies grow ruddy : if we yet would
 save our sire,
Rests a deed courageous, bloody, wondering ages shall
 admire :
Hie thee to the spy-rock’s summit : ready there thou’lt
 find the sling ;
Ready there the leaden plummet ; and at dawn he seeks
 the spring.”

Ruddy dawn had changed to amber : radiant as the
 yellow day,
Conall issuing from his chamber, to the fountain took
 his way :
There, athwart the welling water, like a fallen pillar,
 spread,
Smitten by the bolt of slaughter, lay Connacia’s champion
 dead.

Call the hosts ! convene the judges ! cite the dead man’s
 children both !—
Said the judges, “ He gave pledges ; Sun and Wind ;
 and broke the oath,

And they slew him : so we've written : let his sons attend
our words."

“ Both, by sudden frenzy smitten, fell at sunrise on their
swords.”

Then the judges, “ Ye who punish man's prevaricating
vow,
Needs not further to admonish : contrite to their will
we bow,
All our points of promise keeping : safely let the chief
go forth.”
Conall to his chariot leaping, turned his coursers to the
north :

In the Sun that swept the valleys, in the Wind's encircling
flight,
Recognizing holy allies, guardians of the Truth and
Right ;
While, before his face, resplendent with a firm faith's
candid ray,
Dazzled troops of foes attendant, bow'd before him on
his way.

But the calm physician, viewing where the white neck
join'd the ear,
Said, “ It is a slinger's doing : Sun nor Wind was actor
here.
Yet till God vouchsafe more certain knowledge of his
sovereign will,
Better deem the mystic curtain hides their wonted demons
still

“ Better so, perchance, than living in a clearer light,
 like me,
 But believing where perceiving, bound in what I hear
 and see ;
 Force and change in constant sequence, changing atoms,
 changeless laws ;
 Only in submissive patience waiting access to the Cause.”

THE TAIN-QUEST.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

[The *Tain*, in Irish Bardic phrase, was an heroic poem commemorative of a foray or plundering expedition on a grander scale. It was the duty of the bard to be prepared, at call, with all the principal *Tains*, among which the *Tain-Bo-Cuailgne*, or Cattle-Spoil of Quelgny, occupied the first place ; as in it were recorded the exploits of all the personages most famous in the earlier heroic cycle of Irish story,—Conor Mac Nessa, Maev, Fergus Mac Roy, Conall Carnach, and Cuchullin.

The earliest copies of the *Tain-Bo-Cuailgne* are prefaced by the wild legend of its loss and recovery in the time of Guary, King of Connaught, in the sixth century, by Murgen, son of the chief poet Sanchan, under circumstances which have suggested the following poem. The Ogham characters, referred to in the piece, were formed by lines cut tally-wise on the corners of stone pillars, and somewhat resembled Scandinavian Runes, examples of which, carved on squared staves, may still be seen in several museums. The readers of the *Tain-Bo-Cuailgne*, as it now exists, have to regret the overlaying of much of its heroic and pathetic material by turgid extravagances and exaggerations, the additions apparently of later copyists.]

“ BEAR the cup to Sanchan Torpest ; yield the bard his
 poet’s meed ;
 What we’ve heard was but a foretaste ; lays more lofty
 now succeed.

Though my stores be emptied well-nigh, twin bright
 cups there yet remain,—
 Win them with the Raid of Cuailgne ; chaunt us, Bard,
 the famous *Tain* ! ”

Thus, in hall of Gort, spake Guary ; for the king, let
 truth be told,
 Bounteous though he was, was weary giving goblets,
 giving gold,
 Giving aught the bard demanded ; but, when for the
Tain he call'd,
 Sanchan from his seat descended ; shame and anger
 fired the Scald.

“ Well,” he said, “ ’tis known through Erin, known
 through Alba, main and coast,
 Since the Staff-Book’s disappearing over sea, the *Tain*
 is lost :

For the lay was cut in tallies on the corners of the staves
 Patrick in his pilgrim galleys carried o’er the Ictian waves.

“ Well ’tis known that Erin’s Ollaves, met in Tara
 Luachra’s hall,
 Fail’d to find the certain knowledge of the *Tain* amongst
 them all,
 Though there sat the sages hoary, men who in their day
 had known
 All the foremost kings of story ; but the lay was lost and
 gone.

“ Wherefore from that fruitless session went I forth
 myself in quest
 Of the *Tain* ; nor intermission, even for hours of needful
 rest,

Gave I to my sleepless searches, till I Erin, hill and
plain,

Courts and castles, cells and churches, roam'd and
ransack'd, but in vain.

For the chief delight of sages and of kings was still the
Tain

“ Made when mighty Maev invaded Cualgna for her
brown-bright bull ;

Fergus was the man that made it, for he saw the war in
full,

And in Maev's own chariot mounted, sang what pass'd
before his eyes,

As you'd hear it now recounted, knew I but where Fergus
lies.

“ Bear me witness, Giant Bouchaill, herdsman of the
mountain drove,

How with spell and spirit-struggle many a midnight
hour I strove.

Back to life to call the author ! for before I'd hear it said,
' Neither Sanchan knew it,' rather would I learn it from
the dead ;

“ Ay, and pay the dead their teaching with the one price
spirits crave,

When the hand of magic, reaching past the barriers of
the grave,

Drags the struggling phantom lifeward :—but the Ogham
on his stone

Still must mock us undecipher'd ; grave and lay alike
unknown.

“ So that put to shame the direst, here I stand and own,
 O King,
 Thou a lawful lay requirest Sanchan Torpest cannot
 sing.
 Take again the gawds you gave me,—cup nor crown
 no more will I ;—
 Son, from further insult save me : lead me hence, and let
 me die.”

Leaning on young Murgén's shoulder—Murgén was
 his youngest son—
 Jeer'd of many a lewd beholder, Sanchan from the hall
 has gone :

But, when now beyond Loch Lurgan, three days thence
 he reach'd his home,
 “ Give thy blessing, Sire,” said Murgén.—“ Whither
 wouldst thou, son ? ”—“ To Rome ;

“ Rome, or, haply, Tours of Martin ; wheresoever over
 ground
 Hope can deem that tidings certain of the lay may
 yet be found.”

Answered Eimena his brother, “ Not alone thou leav'st
 the west,
 Though thou ne'er shouldst find another, I'll be comrade
 of the quest.”

Eastward, breadthwise, over Erin straightway travell'd
 forth the twain,
 Till with many days' wayfaring Murgén fainted by
 Loch Ein :

“ Dear my brother, thou art weary : I for present aid
am flown :
Thou for my returning tarry here beside this Standing
Stone.”

Shone the sunset red and solemn : Murgan, where he
leant, observed
Down the corners of the column letter-strokes of Ogham
carved.
“ ’Tis, belike, a burial pillar,” said he, “ and these shallow
lines
Hold some warrior’s name of valour, could I rightly
spell the signs.”

Letter then by letter tracing, soft he breathed the sound
of each ;
Sound and sound then interlacing, lo, the signs took
form of speech ;
And with joy and wonder mainly thrilling, part a-thrill
with fear,
Murgan read the legend plainly, “ FERGUS, SON OF ROY
IS HERE.”

“ Lo,” said he, “ my quest is ended, knew I but the
spell to say ;
Underneath my feet extended, lies the man that made
the lay :
Yet, though spell nor incantation know I, were the words
but said
That could speak my soul’s elation, I, methinks, could
raise the dead

“ Be an arch-bard’s name my warrant. Murgan, son of
 Sanchan, here,
 Vow’d upon a venturous errand to the door-sills of Saint
 Pierre,
 Where, beyond Slieve Alpa’s barrier, sits the Coärb
 of the keys,
 I conjure thee, buried warrior, rise and give my wander-
 ings ease.

. . .

“ Thou, the first in rhythmic cadence dressing life’s
 discordant tale,
 Wars of chiefs and loves of maidens, gavest the Poem
 to the Gael ;
 Now they’ve lost their noblest measure, and in dark
 days hard at hand,
 Song shall be the only treasure left them in their native
 land.

“ Not for selfish gawds or baubles dares my soul disturb
 the graves :
 Love consoles, but song ennobles ; songless men are
 meet for slaves :
 Fergus, for the Gael’s sake, waken ! never let the scornful
 Gauls
 ’Mongst our land’s reproaches reckon lack of Song within
 our halls ! ”

Fergus rose. A mist ascended with him, and a flash
 was seen
 As of brazen sandals blended with a mantle’s wafture
 green ;

But so thick the cloud closed o'er him, Eimena, return'd
at last,
Found not on the field before him but a mist-heap grey
and vast.

Thrice to pierce the hoar recesses faithful Eimena
essay'd ;
Thrice through foggy wildernesses back to open air he
stray'd ;
Till a deep voice through the vapours fill'd the twilight
far and near,
And the Night her starry tapers kindling, stoop'd from
heaven to hear

Seem'd as though the skiey Shepherd back to earth
had cast the fleece
Envyng gods of old caught upward from the darkening
shrines of Greece ;
So the white mists curl'd and glisten'd, so from heaven's
expanses bare,
Stars enlarging lean'd and listen'd down the emptied
depths of air.

All night long by mists surrounded Murgan lay in
vapoury bars ;
All night long the deep voice sounded 'neath the keen,
enlarging stars :
But when, on the orient verges, stars grew dim and mists
retired,
Rising by the stone of Fergus, Murgan stood a man
inspired

“ Back to Sanchan !—Father, hasten, ere the hour of
power be past,

Ask not how obtain'd but listen to the lost lay found
at last ! ”

“ Yea, these words have tramp of heroes in them · and
the marching rhyme

Rolls the voices of the Era's down the echoing steeps
of Time.”

· · · · ·

So, again to Gort the splendid, when the drinking boards
were spread,

Sanchan, as of old attended, came and sat at table-head.

“ Bear the cup to Sanchan Torpest : twin gold goblets,
Bard, are thine,

If with voice and string thou harpest, *Tain-Bo-Cuailgne*,
line for line.”

“ Yea, with voice and string I'll chant it.” Murgan to
his father's knee

Set the harp : no prelude wanted, Sanchan struck the
master key,

And, as bursts the brimful river all at once from caves
of Cong,

Forth at once, and once for ever, leap'd the torrent of
the song

Floating on a brimful torrent, men go down and banks
go by :

Caught adown the lyric current, Guary, captured, ear
and eye,

Heard no more the courtiers jeering, saw no more the
walls of Gort,
Creeve Roe's meeds instead appearing, and Emania's
royal fort.

Vision chasing splendid vision, Sanchan roll'd the rhyth-
mic scene ;
They that mock'd in lewd derision now, at gaze, with
wondering mien
Sate, and, as the glorying master sway'd the tightening
reins of song,
Felt emotion's pulses faster — fancies faster bound
along.

Pity dawn'd on savage faces, when for love of captive
Crunn,
Macha, in the ransom-races, girt her gravid loins, to
run
'Gainst the fleet Ultonian horses ; and, when Deirdre
on the road
Headlong dash'd her 'mid the corpses, brimming eye-lids
overflow'd.

Light of manhood's generous ardour, under brows
relaxing shone ;
When, mid-ford, on Uladh's border, young Cuchullin
stood alone,
Maev and all her hosts withstanding :—" Now, for love
of knightly play,
Yield the youth his soul's demanding ; let the hosts
their marchings stay,

“ Till the death he craves be given ; and, upon his burial
stone

Champion-praises duly graven, make his name and
glory known ;

For, in speech-containing token, age to ages never gave
Salutation better spoken, than, ‘ Behold a hero’s grave.’ ”

What, another and another, and he still for combat
calls ?

Ah, the lot on thee, his brother sworn in arms, Ferdia,
falls ;

And the hall with wild applauses sobb’d like women
ere they wist,

When the champions in the pauses of the deadly combat
kiss’d.

Now, for love of land and cattle, while Cuchullin in
the fords

Stays the march of Connaught’s battle, ride and rouse
the Northern Lords ;

Swift as angry eagles wing them toward the plunder’d
eyrie’s call,

Thronging from Dun Dealga bring them, bring them
from the Red Branch hall !

Heard ye not the tramp of armies ? Hark ! amid the
sudden gloom,

’Twas the stroke of Conall’s war-mace sounded through
the startled room ;

And while still the hall grew darker, king and courtier
chill’d with dread,

Heard the rattling of the war-car of Cuchullin over-
head.

Half in wonder, half in terror, loth to stay and loth to
fly,
Seem'd to each beglamour'd hearer shades of kings
went thronging by :
But the troubled joy of wonder merged at last in mastering
fear,
As they heard through pealing thunder, " FERGUS, SON
OF ROY IS HERE ! "

Brazen-sandall'd, vapour-shrouded, moving in an icy
blast,
Through the doorway terror-crowded, up the tables
Fergus pass'd :—
" Stay thy hand, oh harper, pardon ! cease the wild
unearthly lay !
Murgen, bear thy sire his guerdon." Murgen sat, a
shape of clay.

C O N G A L

CHARACTERS.

DOMNAL, King of Ireland.—Ruling from Dunangay, on the Boyne.

GARRAD-GANN.—Envoy of King Domnal to Congal Claen.

MALODHAR-MACHA. — Provincial King of Emain-Macha, near Armagh.

ULTAN-LONG-HAND.—Chief of Orior, Louth.

KELLACH, SON OF MALCOVA.—Provincial King of Leinster.

CONAL, SON OF BAEDAN.—Chief of Sil-Setna, North-West Ulster.

CAIRBRE CROM, AULAY OF THE SHIPS, ARGNADACH, AILILL,	}	Chiefs of Leinster, fighting at Moyra on the side of King Domnal.
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FERGUS, ANGUS, ERRIL, CARRIL, COLGU,	}	Sons of King Domnal.
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CUANNA.—The idiot son of Ultan-Long-Hand.

SWEENY, AED-ALEN, AED BUIE, ECCAD BREC.	}	Chiefs of Connaught fighting at Moyra on the side of King Domnal.
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CAENFALLA OLLIOLSON.—A learned Doctor. Fought at Moyra on the side of King Domnal.

FERCAR FINN.—Steward to Ultan-Long-Hand. Fought at Moyra.

MALDUN.—Fought at Moyra on the side of King Domnal.

BISHOPS ERC AND RONAN FINN.—Friends of King Domnal.

CONGAL, CLAEN.—Provincial King of Ulster, son of Scallan Broad Shield, Ruling from Rathmore-Moy-Linny, near Antrim.

KELLACH THE HA'T.—Chief of Mourne. Uncle to Congal Claen.

CU-CARMODA, ANDACH,	}	Sons of Kellach the Ha't, slain at Moyra.
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BRASIL.—Youngest of the seven sons of Kellach the Ha't, slain at Moyra.

SWEENY.—King of Dalaradia, a district of Down, Brother of Lafinda. Ruling from Rathkeltar, near Downpatrick.

ECHAI'D BUIE.—King of the Dalriads of Scotland. Grandfather to Congal Claen.

DOMNAL, BREC, SWEENY, AED GREEN-MANTLE, CONGAL MENN,	}	Sons of Eo- chaid Buie. King of the Dalriads of Alba (Scot- land). Fought at Moyra on the side of Congal Claen.
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CONAN RODD.—Son of the King of Britain. Fought at Moyra on the side of Congal Claen.

CONAN FINN.—Fought at Moyra on the side of Congal Claen.

HOWEL, ARTHUR, REES,	}	Cousins of Conan Finn, slain at Moyra.
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FERMORC BECC.—Fought at Moyra on the side of Congal Claen.

ARDAN.—The Bard.

DROSTAN.—The Druid.

FEMALE CHARACTERS.

LAFINDA.—Sister of Sweeny of Rathkeltar, betrothed to Congal Claen.

LAVARCAM.—Nurse and attendant on Lafinda.

FINGUALA.—Wife of Ultan-Long-Hand.

St. Brigid of Kildare, Daughter of Dubtach.

Nuns and Monks, Servants of St. Brigid.

Wives of Domnal Brec and his Brothers.

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS.

*The Washer of the Ford, | Manannan Mor Mac Lir
Herdsman Borchu.*

Congal

BOOK I.

THE ARGUMENT.

*King Congal, feast-ward bent is turned aside.
Bard Ardan's arts of spleenful song are tried.*

[Congal Claen, Provincial King of Ulster, although dissatisfied at the curtailment of his territory by the Supreme King, Domnal, accepts that monarch's invitation to a banquet at Dunangay on the Boyne. He rides forth from Rath-Keltar, near Downpatrick, the abode of his sub-king Sweeny, to whose sister Lafinda Congal was betrothed; and, on his journey southwards passes through the mountains of Mourne, a district ruled by Kellach the Halt, brother to Congal's father Scallan. Congal is met by the Chief Bard Ardan, sent by his uncle to invite him to feast and rest. Kellach, who is a pagan, has accorded, in Mourne, an asylum to the banished Bards. Garrad, envoy of Domnal, who is accompanying Congal, protests, but without success. Ardan, referring to the ancient tale of "The Sons of Usnach," of "Cuchullin," and of others, succeeds in detaining Congal. He is welcomed by Kellach, who dwells angrily on the wrongs inflicted by King Domnal. He is answered by that king's envoy Garrad. Kellach's Bards, after the feast sing of the early colonization of Ireland, of the richness and wide extent of Ulster, the patrimony of Congal's ancestors now diminished by the arbitrament of Domnal. Congal bestows on the Bard a golden torque, but refuses to break his treaty of peace with the monarch.]

THE Hosting here of Congal Claen. 'Twas loud-lark-
carolling May
When Congal, as the lark elate, and radiant as the day,

Rode forth from steep Rath-Keltar gate : nor marvel
that the King

Should share the solace of the skies, and gladness of the
spring ;

For from her high sun-harboured bower the fortress
gate above

The loveliest lady of the North looked down on him
with love.

“ Adieu, sweet heart ; a short adieu ; in seven days
hence,” he cried,

“ Expect me at your portals back to claim my promised
bride.

My heart at last has full content : my love’s acceptance
heals

All wounds of Fortune : what although Malodhar
Macha steals,

By Domnal’s false arbitrament, my tributes and my
land,

Nor he nor sovereign Domnal’s self can steal Lafinda’s
hand.

Then forward, youths, for Dunangay ; this royal banquet
sped

That binds our truce, remains no more but straightway
back, and wed.”

On went the royal cavalcade, a goodly sight to
see,

As westward, o’er the Land of Light, they swept the
flowery lea ;

Each shining hoof of every steed upcasting high
behind

The gay green turf in thymy tufts that scented all the
wind,

While, crossing at the coursers' heads with intersecting
 bounds,
 As swift as skimming swallows played the joyous barking
 hounds.

First of the fleet resplendent band, the hero Congal
 rode ;
 Dark shone the mighty-chested steed his shapely thigh
 bestrode ;
 Dark, too, at times, his own brow showed that all his
 lover's air
 But mantled with a passing light the gloom of inward
 care.

Beside him, on a bay-bright steed, in yellow garb arrayed,
 Rode Sweeny, King of Dalaray, the brother of the maid ;
 Attendant on his other hand, with eye that never ceased
 Obsequious watch, came Garrad Gann, the envoy of
 the feast ;

A troop of gallant youths behind : 'twas glorious to behold
 The coursers' motions and the flow of graceful forms
 and gold.

So rode they, till, the flowery plain and bushy upland
 pass'd,
 They came at noon where, o'er the woods, Ben-Borcha's
 barriers vast
 Rose in mid-sky : here, where the road divided, at the
 bourne
 That meared the country of the Lord of gloomy-
 mountain'd Mourne,
 Kellach the Halt, the heroes met, in middle of the
 way,
 The Master of the Schools of Mourne, the Arch-Bard
 Ardan ; they

Alighting made him reverence meet ; and Ardan from
his car

Descending, kissed the King and said,

“ Dear youths, ye welcome are
To Kellach’s country Congal Claen, thine uncle’s
herald, I

In virtue of the Red-Branch bond, beseech thy courtesy
This day to rest and feast with him.”

“ From knight to knight,” replied
King Congal, “ ’tis a just request, and ill to be
denied.”

“ Worse to be granted,” Garrad said : “ to Domnal
reconciled,
Behoves thee that thou rather shun one not the Church’s
child ;
And for his bond of brotherhood, a like request was
made
Once, with small good to guest or host, when fraudulent
Barach stayed
With fatal feasts the son of Roy, and from his plighted
charge
Detained him in Dunseverick hall, while Conor, left
at large
To deal as lust or hate might prompt with those who
on the faith
Of weak MacRoy’s safe-conduct came, did Usnach’s
sons to death.”

Said Congal : “ If the son of Roy to this constraining
tie
Yielded, though charged with mighty cares, great blame
it were if I,

Who, unlike Fergus, journey forth with neither charge
nor care,

Should shun my knightly kinsman's cheer with loyal
mind to share."

And, climbing by the Poet's side, they took the left-
hand road,

And through the gap of mountain sought the aged Chief's
abode.

Far on the steep gap's further side a rugged tract
they found,

With barren breasts of murky hills and crags encom-
passed round :

A hollow sound of blustering winds was from the margin
sent,

A river down the middle space with mighty tumult
went ;

And still, as further on they fared, the torrent swifter
flowed,

And mightier and murkier still the circling mountains
showed ;

A dreadful desert as it seemed : till Congal was
aware

Of divers goodly-visaged men and youths resorting
there.

Some by the flood-side lonely walked ; and other some
were seen

Who rapt apart in silent thought paced each his several
green ;

And stretched in dell and dark ravine, were some that
lay supine,

And some in posture prone that lay, and conn'd the
written line

Then to the King's enquiring gaze, where, mounted by
his side,

He sat and eyed the silent throng, the grey Arch-Bard
replied :

“ See in despite the Clerics' hate, where Kellach's
care awards

Rough though it be, a sanctuary to Erin's banished
Bards.

A life-time now is well-nigh spent since first our wandering
feet,

Compelled by that unjust decree enacted at Drum-
keat,

Left home and presidential seat by plenteous board and
fire

To sate the rage of impious Aed, ungrateful Domnal's
sire.

Twelve hundred men, with one consent, from Erin's
utmost ends,

We sought the hills where ruled the Bard's hereditary
friends,

Thy sheltering, song-preserving hills, Ultonia ! cess nor
dues

Craved we ; but sat and touched our harps beside the
Strand-End Yews.

By this they reached the fort, and found the Chieftain
Kellach there :

Before the outer gate he sat, and took the fresher
air :

A very aged senior he ; his hearing well-nigh gone,
Nor walked he longer on his feet, but sat a *tolg*
upon :

A brazen-footed bench it was, whereon his serving train
 Could bear him gently in and out.

“ My love to Congal Claen,”

He said. “ Disabled of my limbs thou find’st me,
 nephew, still ;

But not yet crippled aught in heart or in the loyal
 will

I bear my brother Scallan’s son ; and much my heart
 is grieved

At hearing of the shameful wrongs thou hast of late
 received

At hands of this ungrateful King.”

“ Dear kinsman, grieve no more,”

Congal returned ; “ these wrongs are all forgotten,
 since we swore

The oaths of peace ; for peace is made, and will be
 ratified

By taking of the princess fair, Lafinda, for my bride ;
 And, ere the nuptial knot be tied, on duty’s urgent
 wing

Even now to Dunangay I ride to banquet with the King.”

Said Kellach ; “ Small the good will spring from any
 banquet spread

At Dunangay, where coward Kings, from spacious
 Tara fled,

At threat of imprecating Clerks, crouch in their narrow
 den.

But these are not the days of Kings, nor days of mighty
 men.”

Said Garrad Gann ; “ A servant here of Domnal : and
 I say

No narrow house, oh aged Sire, is that of Dunangay.

But when Saint Ruan, because the King, Brown Dermid,
had profaned
His sanctuary, and his ward, thence ravished, still de-
tained
At Tara contumaciously, denounced by book and bell
His curse against the royal seat,—which righteous judg-
ment well
Did Dermid merit ; for he pressed his fugitive's pursuit
With sacrilegious fury to the very altar foot
Of Lorrh ; and, when Ruan himself stood in the narrow
door
That led to where his ward was hid beneath the chancel
floor,
And Dermid feared to pluck him thence, with pick and
iron crow
Did break the floor before his feet, and from the crypt
below
Dug out Aed Guara,—afterwards, no King at Tara
dare
Longer reside ; but each within his patrimonial share
Ordained the royal seat elsewhere—as south Hy-Niall,
who chose
Loch-Leyne-Fort ; or as north Hy-Niall, Fort-Aileach
and like those
Did Domnal choose, when Erin's voice gave him the
sovereign sway,
By salmon-full abounding Boyne, the house of Dun-
angay.
There, following royal Tara's plan, with dyke and mound
he cast
Seven mighty ramparts round about, to make the mansion
fast ;

And, after the same pattern, did build within the fort
 For him and for his household train, a timbered middle-
 court ;

Also for each Provincial King a fair assembly hall,
 A prison and a Poet's lodge, and, fairest work of
 all,

A single-pillared chamber, like as Cormac, learned
 son

Of Art, at desert Tara in former times had done.

In which capacious mansion, thou and all thy Bards,
 old man,

Could lodge, and no man's room be less : so answers
 Garrad Gann."

" Herald, I hear thy words but ill," said Kellach ;
 " but 'twere well

For Erin, if Dermid Dun, that day he broke the Cleric's
 cell,

As justly by the law he might, his fugitive to win,
 Had, where he took Aed Guara out, put Ruan of Lorrah
 in.

So should our laws have reverence meet ; nor lawless
 Clerks exalt

Their crooked staves above the wand of Justice, through
 the fault

Of such as Dermid. But, oh youths, behold the open
 gates

Where mountain fare on homely boards your courtesy
 awaits."

They entered : in the hall within abundant boards
 were spread,

Bard, Brehon, Smith, in order set, each at his table's
 head ;

But no Priest sat to bless the meat : now, when the feast
was done,

Said Kellach, from his middle place,

“ Oh, learned harmonious one,

Who sittest o'er the Board of Bards of Erin, be our
cheer

Graced with such lay as Rury's sons will not disdain
to hear.”

Then at a sign from Ardan given, a Poet pale and gray
Rose at the table of the Smith, and sang an antique lay.

'Twas Ardan sang : “ To God who made the elements,

I raise

First praises humbly as is meet, and Him I lastly praise ;
Who sea and land hath meted out beneath the ample
sky

For man's inhabitation, and set each family

To dwell within his proper bounds ; who for the race
renowned

Of Rury from old time prepared the fair Ultonian
ground,

Green-valley'd, clear-streamed, fishy-bay'd, with moun-
tain-mirroring lakes

Belted, with deer-abounding woods and fox-frequented
brakes

Made apt for all brave exercise ; that, till the end of
time,

Each true Rudrician fair-hair'd son might from his hills
sublime

Look forth and say, ‘ Lo, on the left, from where tumul-
tuous Moyle

Heaves at Benmore's foot-fettering rocks with ceaseless
surging toil,

And, half escaping from the clasp of that stark chain
of stone,
The soaring Foreland, poised aloft, as eagle newly flown,
Hangs awful on the morning's brow, or rouses armed
Cantyre,
Red kindling 'neath the star of eve the Dalriad's warning
fire ;
South to the salt, sheep-fattening marsh and long-
resounding bay
Where young Cuchullin camped his last on dread Muir-
thevne's day ;
And southward still to where the weird De Danaan kings
lie hid,
High over Boyne, in cavern'd cairn and mountain pyramid;
And on the right hand from the rocks where Balor's
bellowing caves
Up through the funnelled sea-cliffs shoot forth the ex-
ploding waves
South to where lone Gweebarra laves the sifted sands
that strow
Dark Boylagh's banks ; and southward still to where
abrupt Eas-Roe
In many a tawny heap and whirl, by glancing salmon
track't,
Casts down to ocean's oozy gulfs the great sea-cataract,
The land is ours !—from earth to sea, from hell to heaven
above,
It and its increase, and the crown and dignity thereof !'
Therefore to God, who gave the land into our hand,
I sing
First praises, as the law commands ; next to my lawful
King,

Image of God, with voice and string I chaunt the loyal
 strain,
 Though well nigh landless here to-day I see thee, Congal
 Claen ;
 Spoiled of Orgallia's green domain, of wide Tir-Owen's
 woods,
 Of high Tir-Conal's herdful hills and fishy-teeming
 floods ;
 Of all the warm vales, rich in goods of glebe-manuring
 men
 That bask against the morning sun along the Royal Glen.
 These are no longer ours : the brood of Baedan's sons in
 these
 Shoot proudly forth their lawless barques, and sweep
 unhostaged seas
 Through all the swift-keel-clasping gulfs of ocean that
 enfold
 Deep-bay'd Moy Inneray and the shores of Dathi's land
 of gold.
 In law-defying conscious strength aloft in Dunamain
 Rude Ultan Long-hand owns no lord on Orior's pleasant
 plain ;
 While o'er Ardsallagh's sacred height, and Creeve Roe's
 flowery meads,
 Malodhar Macha reigns alone in Emain of the steeds.
 But come ; resound the noble deeds and swell the chant
 of praise
 In memory of the men who did the deeds of other days ;
 The old bard-honoring, fearless days, exulting Ulster
 saw,
 When to great Rury's fair-haired race tall Scallan gave the
 law ;

When, from 'Troy-Rury to Ardstraw was neither fort nor
field,
But yielded tribute to the king that bore the ell-broad
shield.
Hark ! what a shout Ben Evenagh pealed ! how flash
from sea to shore
The chariot sides, the shielded prows, bright blade and
dripping oar ;
How smoke their causeways to our tramp : beneath our
oarsmen's toil
How round the Dalaradian prows, foam down the waves
of Foyle !
Come forth, ye proud ones of 'Tir-Hugh, your eastern
masters wait
To take their tribute-rights anew at broad-stoned Aileach's
gate ;
A hundred steeds, a hundred foals, each foal beside his
dam,
A hundred pieces of fine gold, each broad as Scallan's
palm,
And thick as thumb-nail of a man of churlish birth who
now
The seventh successive seed time holds a fallow-furrowing
plough :
Three hundred mantles ; thirty slaves, all females, young
and fair,
Each carrying her silver cup, each cup a poet's
share
Who sings an ode inaugural.—Alas ! I fondly
rave :
Dead, tribute-levying Scallan lies ; and dead in Scallan's
grave

Glory and might and prosperous days. The very heavens
that pour'd
Abundance on our fields and streams, while that vic-
torious lord
Of righteous judgments ruled the land ; the stars that,
as they ranged
The bounteous heavens, shed health and wealth, above
our heads are changed.
Nor marvel that the sickening skies are altered o'er our
heads,
Nor that from heaven's distempered heights malign
contagion spreads :
For all the life of every growth that springs beneath the
sun
Back to the air returns when once its turn of life is
done :
To it all sighs ascend ; to it, on chariot-wheels of
fire,
All imprecations from the lips of injured men
aspire ;
And when that lofty lodge of life and growth-store of the
world
Is choked with groans from burthened hearts and male-
dictions hurled
In clamorous flight of accents winged with deadlier
strength of song
From livid lips of desperate men who bear enormous
wrong,
Heaven cannot hold it ; but the curse outbursting from
on high
In blight and plague, on plant and man, blasts all beneath
the sky.

Burst, blackening clouds that hang aloof o'er perjured
Domnal's halls !

Dash down, with all your flaming bolts, the fraud-
cemented walls,

Till through your thunder-riven palls heaven's light
anew be pour'd

In Law and Justice, Wealth and Song, on Congal's throne
restored ! ”

Look how the culprit stands confused before the judge,
while one,

Who, passing through the woods unseen, has seen the
foul deed done,

Relates the manner of the fact ; tells how with treacherous
blow

Struck from behind the murdered man sank on the
pathway ; so

With flushing cheek, contracted brow, and restless,
angry eye,

Sat Congal till the lay was closed : then with a mighty
sigh

He breathed his heart ; and standing, spoke ; and,
speaking, he unbent

The golden torque that clasped his neck, and by a butler
sent

The splendid guerdon to the Bard.

“ For what thy lay doth sound
In praise of Rury's glorious race and Uladh's realm
renowned,

Take, Bard, this gift ; but for so much of this untimely
song

As sounds in strife betwixt myself and sovereign Domnal,
long

And far from me, his foster-son, be that disastrous day
 Would break the peace we late have sworn : and there-
 fore for thy lay

I thank thee and I thank thee not."

Then round the tables ran
 Much murmuring through the Poet-throng : and thus
 spoke Garrad Gann :

" The lay is easy that a Bard chaunts at his patron's board,
 With none in presence to repay lewd word with saucier
 word.

See how a boy who spends his time playing alone at ball,
 Loitering, belike, from school, beside some lofty smooth-
 faced wall,

Strikes softly that the ball may fall convenient to his
 blow,

And keeps his private game on foot with easy effort
 so.

But, say, two pairs of players arrive, and join an earnest
 game ;

Lo, all the easy-taken balls, that late high-curving came,
 Now struck by prompt rebutting hands fly past, shot
 in and out,

Direct and rapid, hard to hit, missed once at every
 bout ;

The players at stretch of every limb, like flickering bats
 that ply

Their dumb quest on a summer's eve, to balk each other,
 fly

Hither and thither ; all their chests' heave ; and on every
 brow

The sweat-drops glisten. So, me seems, oh King, this
 minstrel now,

Much like a Cleric in his desk, having none to strive
withal,

His game being wholly with himself, keeps up the easy
ball

Of safe disloyalty : but let this song of his be heard
By Domnal's Bards, in Domnal's hall, and take a true
man's word

Our angry Master here should give his day of harvest-
work,

Ere from the field of fair debate he'd bear his golden
torque."

"Enough," said Kellach. "Now to rest : and with
the earliest ray

Of dawn, my kinsman-king is free to journey on his way."

BOOK II.

THE ARGUMENT.

*The Royal Feast. The unintended slight.
Halt Kellach's Counsel ; and the Aids for fight.*

[Congal continues his journey southwards. He encounters at the fords of the Boyne, the hermit Erc, whose goose eggs have been carried off by the purveyors of Domnal. Erc curses feast and guests. Arrived at Dunangay, Congal is cordially welcomed by the King. Domnal asks as a favour, and in token of reconciliation, that Congal will sit at the banquet on his left hand, next his heart. Congal consents, although the right hand was his privileged place, but is indignant when he sees this assumed by his rival, Malodliar, to whom Armagh and the surrounding territory, formerly his, had been assigned by Domnal. A further insult—the hauding to him of the goose egg on a wooden dish, while the other provincial Kings were served on silver—increases Congal's wrath. He rises, and angrily recounts his grievances ; then leaves the banquet

with his followers. At the fords of the Boyne Congal again meets the hermit Erc, who had cursed the feast and him. He is pushed aside, and stumbling, falls into the river, and is swept down by the current. King Domnal sends in vain to entreat the return of Congal, and to assure him that no insult was intended. Congal sends gifts to the poets, and continues his journey to Mourne. He recounts his injuries to his uncle. Kellach gives his voice for war; promises his aid, and that of his sons; and advises Congal to proceed to Scotland and seek the help of his grandfather, King Eochaid Buie. Congal first visits Lafinda; on his way to Rath-Keltar has a vision of the Herdsman Borchia. He finds his betrothed with her maidens by a running stream fulling a splendid cloak; and tells her that their marriage must be postponed. He sails for Scotland, visits his grandsire, who consents to send forces under command of his sons. These princes, Domnal Brec, Congal Menn, Sweeny, and Aed, with their wives, contend for the honour of entertaining Congal. The Bard Drostan predicts disaster. Congal sails for Britain, arrives at Caer Leon; and finds its King and Queen, whose heir has long been absent, perplexed by the claims of three candidates to be their long lost son. These have been sent to try the ordeal of the Stone Maen Amber, which moved only to the touch of Truth. Congal is deputed to test their pretensions. He decides in favour of Conan Rodd, who is recognised as Prince, and undertakes to lead the British warriors to the aid of Congal Claen.]

AT early blush of morn, the King of Ulster and his
train

Assumed their southern Meath-ward route through
craggy Mourne again.

Herd Borchia's peaks behind them left, by Narrow-Water
side

They rode, and by the Yews that shade Kin-Troya's
refluent tide.

Thence, lifted lightly on their steeds, up through the
desert lone,

Where gloomy Gullion overlooks his realm of quag and
stone,

Passed Brigid's cell ; and, issuing forth high o'er Muir-
thevne's plain,

Where Fochard takes the morning sun, passed Brigid's
cell again.

“ Go where you will, their Saints intrude,” said Congal.

“ Nay, 'twas here,”

Sweeny returned, “ Lafinda, she to both of us so dear,
In all her maid-beseeming arts was nurtured in her
youth

By Brigid's maids, and learned from them the lore of
Heavenly truth.”

“ And for so dear a pupil's sake,” said Congal, “ shall
their schools

Have favor ; and a warrior's arm protect the pious fools.”

Thence by Dun Dealga's belted mound, safe in whose
triple wards

Cuchullin in the days of old caroused his banished Bards,
Abashed in awe the warriors rode : nor drew they bridles-
rein

Till on the woodland height they reached the sacred
walls of Slane ;

And from the verdant Hill of Health, outspread at large
beneath

On all sides to the bounding sky, beheld illustrious Meath,
Cattle and crop, and homes of men, commingling gold
and green

Refulgent in the noontide ray, and sparkling Boyne
between.

As down the hill the warriors rode, to reach the level
fords,

A woman met them by the way. She said—

“ Oh, gentle lords,

Be witness of the shameful wrong the King's purveyors
here

Have done against our hermit, Erc ; he, holy man austere,
Eats not of flesh nor viand else that breath of life informs ;
But when the winter season comes, amid the northern
storms

The wild-geese visit him ; and here, around his guardian
cell,

In safety leave their silly nests and store of eggs as well :
And all our hermit's hoarded store these proud pur-
veyors now

Have taken for the King's repast : be witness, warrior,
thou."

" Good woman," said the courteous King, " this wrong
of thine transcends

My power to help : myself a guest, can make thee no
amends."

And onward passed to reach the fords : here by the
rushing flood

The aged, angry Erc himself in middle causeway stood.
His head was bare, his brow was black, his lips with rage
were wan ;

As stone croup on a storm-bleached rock stood on the
rugged man

The hard grey beard, and with a voice as winter shrill
and strong

He cried,

" Oh, hear my prayer ; oh God ! avenge thy
servant's wrong.

Twice twenty years in pinching fast and wasting vigil here
I've served thine altar : let my prayer now reach thy
favoring ear :

Cursed be the hands that robbed my store, accursed
the board that bears,
The roof that shelters the repast, the bidden guest that
shares."

And raised, to ring, his altar bell : but with his riding-
wand
King Congal struck the empty brass from Erc's uplifted
hand ;

And said,
" For shame, old wicked man ; this impotence of
rage
An angry woman would demean ; and ill beseems a
sage."

And pushed him from his path aside, and went upon
his way,
Regardless, through the flashing fords and up to Dunan-
gay.

Up to the royal gates from all the fords of Boyne that
morn
Was concourse great of bidden guest on car and courser
borne.

And many a chief, as Congal rode the crowded ranks
between,
Would check his steeds and pause to mark the hero's
noble mien.

Within the courtyard of the fort, and at the open gate
That to the spacious wine-hall led, did Domnal's self
await

The festive throngs ; and, when the troop of Congal
Claen drew near,
Advanced before the threshold-step, and with such
gracious cheer

As father might returning son, received him ; kiss'd
his cheek,

And said,

“ Dear Congal, of thy love the boon I first bespeak
Is this ; that, as my foster-son, on this auspicious day,
Which reunites affection's bonds no more to 'part, I pray
Thou wilt, in token to the world of mutual love restored,
Upon my left hand, next my heart, sit at the banquet
board.”

Said Congal, “ Royal Sire, although the law of seats
be thus,

That when the monarch boasts, as thou, the race illus-
trious

Of North Hy-Niall, the privilege of Ulster in that case
Is next the king, on his right hand, at banquet to have
place ;

Yet be it as thy love would prompt.”

Then by a royal groom

The Ulster guests were to their baths brought in an
inner room ;

And so remained until a steward announced the banquet
spread,

And led them to the wine-hall ; there, at Domnal's
table-head,

On the left hand of the royal seat, was Congal's place
assigned,

Young Dalaradian Sweeny's next, and Garrad Gann
behind.

Great was the concourse ; all the seats were full, save
two alone,

The Monarch's, and the vacant chair to rightward of
the throne.

Expecting who should enter next, was heard a herald's
call,

“ The King of Emain Macha here ; and straightway
up the hall

Came proud Malodhar ; round him gazed with calm
audacious air,

And sitting, as of right, assumed the right hand vacant
chair,

The Red-Branch banner from the beam depending o'er
his head.

Then Sweeny to King Congal's ear approached his lips
and said,

“ It bodes no good, oh Congal, that thine ancient rightful
place

This upstart of Ardmacha here obtains before thy
face.”

“ Hush, Sweeny,” answered Garrad Gann ; “ 'tis
Domnal's love alone

That places Congal on his left, to heart-ward of the
throne.”

Ere more was said, the herald's voice again rose loud
and clear,

And all the hall rose with the words—“ The King of
Erin here ! ”

And Domnal from his room came forth : his herald
with him came,

Proclaiming,

“ Erin's Domnal here ; the one son dear to
fame

Of Aed, the son of Ainniry ; which Ainniry for
sire

Had Setna, son of Fergus : he, his race if ye require,

Was son of Conal Gulban, son of Niall the Hostage-
 famed,
 (Nine Kings he held in hostage, and hence was he sur-
 named) ;
 And up from Niall Nine-Hostager we know we may
 ascend
 From King to King to Adam, up to the very end.
 Sprung from which great progenitors is Domnal, for
 whose sake
 Beseech you all with joyous hearts these viands to par-
 take."

The herald ceased, and Domnal, still upstanding by
 his chair,
 Motioned to Bishop Ronan Finn to give the blessing-
 prayer.
 The blessing given, King Domnal sat ; and, smiling
 courteous, spoke,
 " My love to all, both King and Prince ; high Chiefs
 and humble folk
 Of Erin, welcome ! now to all, ye noble butlers, bring
 The Egg of Appetite and place for each Provincial King
 An Egg of Honor, that our feast—all things being duly
 done,
 From egg to apple—happily be ended as begun."

With ready speed the serving men the King's behests
 obeyed,
 And wild-goose eggs before the Kings on silver dishes laid,
 Save only before Congal Claen : by fate, or by mischance,
 Or cook's default, or butler's haste, or steward's ignorance,
 Through transposition of his seat not rightly understood,
 The egg of many ills for him was served on dish of
 wood.

Which, when the men of Ulster saw, they did not deem
it meet

That sons of Rury at that board should longer sit or
eat ;

And Dalaradian Sweeny said, "Thou eatest of thy shame,
Meat sent thee on a platter from a King who hates
thy name !

Methought no lord of Oriall, with Kinel-Owen to boot,
And Kinel-Conal at his back, should sit without dispute
In Congal's place at banquet. I end as I began :
Thou eatest thy dishonour."

Again said Garrad Gann :

"Hush ! 'twas the cook's or steward's default : mar
not the feast's repose."

But Congal said, "Be silent, dog !" and from the table
rose.

Ah ! me, what mighty ills we see from small begin-
nings rise !

Look how a spark consumes the wood a palace-roof
supplies.

Or as a pilgrim lone and poor, without a guide who goes
Through an Alp's gap, where hang aloof the silence-
balanced snows,

Deeming himself alone with God, will break the aerial
poise

With quavering hymn ; the shaken bulks sliding with
dreadful noise

Sheer from their rock-shelved slippery lofts, descend in
ruinous sweep,

And spill their loud ice-cataracts down all the rattling
steep.

The horrid rumble heard remote by shepherd on his
lawn,
He looks, and from the naked peak sees that the snows
are gone ;
'Then sighs, and says, " Perchance but now 'twas some
poor traveller's hap
To journey in the pass beneath." He meanwhile, in
his gap,
Lies lifeless underneath his load of ruin heavy and bare,
And awful silence once again possesses all the air.
And as the heaping-up of snows in mountain sides apart
By winds of many wintry years, so heaped in Congal's
heart
Wrong lay on wrong ; and now at last in wrath's resistless
flood
The long-pent mischief burst its bounds. Up at the
board he stood
And spurned the table with his foot, and from his shoulders
drew
The festal robe, and at his feet the robe and viands
threw,
Rose also eager Garrad Gann. " Oh, King, I pray thee
sit,
And thou shall have attendance due and honour as is
fit."
But angry Congal, turning in the middle of the hall,
Dashed down Gann Garrad to the ground. Amazement
seized on all,
And terror many. But he stood and spoke them :
" Have no fear ;
For grievous though my wrongs have been, I do not
right them here.

But here, before this company of Kings and noble Lords,
I shall recount my wrongs, oh King ; and mark ye
all my words.

Thy royal predecessor, oh King, was Sweeny Menn ;
And him thou didst rebel against ; and into Ulster then
Came, seeking our allegiance, and leagued with us,
and I

Was given thee in fosterage to bind our amity ;
And with thee here was nurtured, till thou before the
might

Of Sweeny Menn, thy rightful King, wast forced to
take thy flight

To Alba's hospitable shore ; where generous Eochaid
Buie,

My mother's father, for her sake, and for his love of me,
Did entertain thee and thy train till summers seven were
flown,

When I, a youthful warrior, and aged Sweeny grown
No longer at the lance expert, nor on the whirling car,
With bent bow able as of old to ride the ridge of war,—
As when through Moin-an-Catha's pools, waist-deep
in shameful mire,

He chased thee on Ollarva's banks,—thou of my mother's
sire

Didst crave and didst obtain a barque, and with thy slender
band

Sett'st sail for Erin secretly ; and where we first made
land

Was at Troy Rury : there we held a council ; and 'twas
there,

Standing on those brown-rippled sands, thou didst protest
and swear,

If I by any daring feat that warrior-laws allow
Of force or stratagem, should slay King Sweeny Menn,
and thou
Thereby attain the sovereignty, thou straightway wouldst
restore
All that my royal forefathers were seized of theretofore.
Relying on which promise to have my kingdom back,
I left thee at Troy Rury ; nor turned I on my track
Till I came to broad-stoned Aileach. There, on the
sunny sward
Before the fort, sat Sweeny Menn, amid his royal guard,
He and his nobles chess-playing. Right through the
middle band
I went, and no man's licence asked, Garr-Congail in
my hand,
And out through Sweeny's body, where he sat against
the wall,
'Twas I that sent Garr-Congail in presence of them all.
And out through Sweeny's body till the stone gave back
the blow,
'Twas I that day at Aileach made keen Garr-Congail go.
But they, conceiving from my cry—for, ere their bounds
I broke,
I gave the warning warrior-shout that justified the stroke
By warrior-law—that Eochaid Buie and Alba's host had
come,
Fled to their fortress, and I sped safe and triumphant
home.
Then thou becamest Sovereign ; and, Scallan Broad-
Shield dead,
I claimed thy promise to be made King in my father's
stead ;

There, still beside the slippery brink, indenting all the
ground

With restless stampings to and fro, the angry Erc they
found.

“ Ah, wretch,” cried Sweeny, “ stand aside : avoid
thy victim’s way :

Thine eggs have hatched us ills enough for one disastrous
day.”

“ I thank thee, God,” cried aged Erc, “ that through
the wastes of air

My voice has reached thy throne, and thou hast heard
thy servant’s prayer.”

“ Go thank the fiend thou call’st thy God, where only
fiends abide,”

Cried Sweeny ; and with furious hand dashed aged
Erc aside :

The tottering senior stumbled back, and from the slippery
verge

Boyne caught him in an onward whirl ; thence through
the battling surge

Below the fords, as ’neath the feet of vigorous youths
at play

A rolling football, Erc was rolled, engulfed and swept away ;
While yet from tawny whirl to whirl, the warriors marked
him cast,

His right hand, as in act to curse, uplifted to the last.

By early noon next day

They stood again at Kellach’s gates. While yet a javelin
flight

From where the senior sat, he reached both hands with
stern delight

To clasp the hand of Congal Claen. "Thank God,"
he cried, "mine eyes
Have seen my brother Scallan's son at last in such a guise
As fits a right Rudrician King ; with back to Slavery's
door
And face to Fortune : come, sit near ; recount me o'er
and o'er
The knave's insidious overtures ; for well I know his wiles
And well I guessed his feast was dressed with snare-
disguising smiles."

Then Congal on the brazen bench sat, and in Kellach's
ear
Disclosed his grounds of wrath at large in accents loud
and clear.
As Congal's tale proceeded from injurious word to word
Old Kellach underneath his gown kept handling with
his sword,
His sword which none suspected that the bed-rid senior
wore,
But which displaying from its sheath, now when the
tale was o'er,
He held it up, and, "Take," said he, "a warrior's word
in pledge,
If thou take other recompense than reckoning at sword-
edge
For these affronts, this sword of mine which, many a
time before
I've sheathed in valiant breasts, shall find a bloody sheath
once more
Here in this breast : for life for me has long while lost
its grace,
By palsied limbs debarred the joy of combat and of chase,

And all my later years I've lived for that great day which
 now
 Seems surely coming : for full cause and warrant good
 hast thou
 For war with Domnal. Far less cause had Broad-
 Shield when he slew
 Cuan of Clech, and set his head on the wall-top to view,
 For calling him ' Shrunk Scallan ' : less cause than this
 by far,
 Though Mordred's Queen had slapped the cheek of
 British Gwynevar,
 Had Arthur when he fought Camlan ; from which
 pernicious fray
 Where joined thrice twenty thousand men, but three
 man came away.

No ! warrant good for war thou hast, and cause of strife
 to spare,
 And kindly-well beseems us all thine enterprise to share.
 Go, summon me my seven good sons ; my young men
 brave and strong
 Shall with their royal kinsman in this Hosting go along.
 And if my limbs would bear me, as they bore me like
 the wind,
 When once I fought by Scallan's side, I would not stay
 behind.
 Nor will I, far as men are found to bear me in the front,
 Decline the face of battle yet, when comes the final
 brunt.
 But for so great a strife as this, dear nephew, thou'lt have
 need
 Of other friends and councillors, and other aids indeed.

So get thee hence to Alba ; to thy grandsire Eochaid
Buie :

Thy mother was his daughter, and thy mother's mother,
she

Was daughter, one and well-beloved, of other Eochaid,
king

Of Britain. Claim the help of each, and here to Erin
bring

Such aids as they will grant to thee ; meantime 'twill
be my care

Our own fraternal warrior tribes for combat to prepare."

This counsel to the King seemed good ; but, ere he
sought the aid

Of Alban Eochaid, he devised to speak the royal maid.

The Princess with her women-train without the fort
he found,

Beside a limpid running stream, upon the primrose
ground,

In two ranks seated opposite, with soft alternate stroke
Of bare, white, counter-thrusting feet, fulling a splendid
cloak

Fresh from the loom : incessant rolled athwart the
fluted board

The thick web fretted, while two maids, with arms
uplifted, poured

Pure water on it diligently ; and to their moving feet
In answering verse they sang a chaunt of cadence clear
and sweet.

Princess Lafinda stood beside ; her feet in dainty shoes
Laced softly ; and her graceful limbs in robes of radiant
hues

Clad delicately, keeping the time : on boss of rushes
made

Old nurse Levarcam near them sat, beneath the hawthorn
shade.

A grave experienced woman she, of reverend years, to
whom

Well known were both the ends of life, the cradle and the
tomb ;

Whose withered hands had often smoothed the wounded
warrior's bed ;

Bathed many new-born babes, and closed the eyes of
many dead.

The merry maidens when they spied the warlike king
in view,

Beneath their robes in modest haste their gleaming feet
withdrew,

And laughing all surceased their task. Lafinda blush-
ing stood

Elate with conscious joy to see so soon again renewed
A converse, ah, how sweet, compared with that of nurse
or maid !

But soon her joy met cruel check

“ Lafinda,” Congal said,

And led her by the hand apart ; “ this banquet of the
King's

Has had an ill result. His feast has been of fare which
brings

Hindrance to all festivity. Great insult has been shown
Me by King Domnal ; such affront as has not yet been
known

By any other royal guest in Erin ; therefore now
I come not, as I thought to come, to ratify the vow

We made at parting, I and thou : our bridal now must
wait

Till this wrong done be made aright : for I to Alba
straight

Am gone to ask my grandsire's aid, and thence returning
go

First and before all other calls in field to meet my foe.

She answered, " For a maid like me, the daughter of a
King

To grieve for nuptial rites deferred, were not a seemly
thing.

Yet, were I one of these, and loved, as humblest maiden
can,

And shame would suffer me to shew my tears to any man
Shed for his sake, I well could weep. Oh, me ! what
hearts ye own,

Proud men, for trivialest contempt in thoughtless moment
shown,

For rash word from unguarded lips, for fancied scornful
eye,

That put your lives and hopes of them you love, in
jeopardy.

Yet deem not I, a Princess, sprung myself from warrior
sires,

Repine at aught in thy behoof that Honor's law requires.
Nor ask I what affront, or how offended, neither where
Blame first may lie. Judge thou of these : these are
a warrior's care.

Yet, oh, bethink thee, Congal, ere war kindles, of the ties
Of nurture, friendship, fosterage ; think of the woeful
sighs

Of widows, of poor orphans' cries ; of all the pains and
griefs

That plague a people in the path of battle-wagering
chiefs.

See, holy men are 'mongst us come with message sweet
of peace

From God himself, and promise sure that sin and strife
shall cease ;

Else wherefore, if with fear and force mankind must
ever dwell,

Raise we the pardon-spreading cross and peace-
proclaiming cell ? ”

“ Raise what we may, Preceptress fair,” the sullen
King replied,

“ Wars were and will be to the end.” And from his
promised bride

Took hurried parting ; for he feared to trust a lover's
lips

With all his secret heart designed. Bealfarsad of the
ships

That night received him ; and, from thence, across the
northern sea

Went Congal Claen to seek the aid of Alban Eochaid
Buie.

Druid Drostan, on the Alban shore, come forth to
view the day,

Beheld the swift ship from the south sweep up the shining
bay,

And hailed the stranger-warriors as they leaped upon
the strand.

“ My love be to the goodly barque, and to the gallant
band :

Say courteous sons, whence come ye ? ”

Congal said, “ From Erin we
Come, seeking aid and counsel of my grandsire, Eochaid
Buie.”

“ Dear Congal,” cried the Druid, “ thou art stately
grown and tall
Since first I nursed thee on my knee in Yellow Eochaid’s
hall.”

And embraced him and carressed him, and conducted
him where sate
Alban Eochaid at the chess-tables before Dun-Money
gate.

He told the King his errand : when the tale of wrongs
was done,
Said Eochaid, “ It shall ne’er be said that Alba’s daugh-
ter’s son
Took affront of Erin’s Domnal without reckoning at
sword-edge
Had duly upon stricken field ; and, though my ancient
pledge
Forbids that I should raise the spear ’gainst one who
’neath my roof
In former times had shelter, not the less in thy
behoof
Shall Alba’s hosts be forward. Four princely sons are
ours,
Thy mother’s brothers ; they shall lead thine allied Alban
powers ;
Domnal, Sweeny, Aed, and Congal Thou shalt tarry
here to-day :
To-morrow, sail for Britain.”

Then said Congal Menn, “ I pray

My nephew-namesake Congal that to-day he feast with
me."

"Nay, rather," answered Domnal Brec, "I, by seniority,
Have better right to feast the King."

"For me," said Sweeny, then,
"Though younger I than either, yet neither Brec nor
Menn

Takes Congal Claen's indignity to heart with warmer
mind."

"And I," said Aed Green-Mantle, "will not fall far
behind,
If by that line ye measure."

"Peace, Princes," said the King:
"Your wives are present; and meseems it were a seemlier
thing

That they before your nephew should advance your
kindly claims;

For good men's praises worthier sound on lips of lovely
dames."

Then said the wife of Domnal Brec, "There has not
yet been found

A man so bountiful as mine on Erse or Alban ground,
If green Slieve Money were of gold, Slieve Money
in a day

From Freckled Domnal's hand would pass: wherefore,
oh King, I pray,

In virtue of the open hand, that thou to-day decree
The feasting of the royal guest to Domnal and to me."

The wife of Congal Menn spoke next. "Of plunder-
ing lords is none

Who knows to turn unlawful spoil to lawful, like the
son

Of Yellow Eochaid, Congal ; he whose sword converts
the prey

To lawful riches in his house, to keep or give away
As best his proper mind may prompt, is he, oh King,
whose plea

Should stand alike in suit of arms and hospitality.”

Said Sweeny’s wife : “ What gold and gems ye find
in Sweeny’s hall

Adorn his drinking-cups, whereof one hundred serve
the call

Of daily guests : what other wealth his liberal hand
provides

Smokes daily on his open board : he makes no claim
besides.”

Aed Green-Cloak’s fair-faced blooming wife spoke
last. “ Let Congal feast

With whom his own free will inclines. In breast of
Aed at least

’Twill breed no grudge nor envy. Aed’s pleasure is
the same,

Feasting, or feasted by his friends.” So spoke the
prudent dame.

Then said the King, “ Good reasons have you given,
my daughters dear ;

But royal Congal, for to-day, feasts with his grandsire here :
And here let Domnal come with gifts, and Congal Menn
with prey,

And Sweeny with his hundred guests invited yesterday ;
And here comes Aed Green-Mantle, with his free un-
grudging mind,

Better than cups and cattle spoil and hundred guests
combined.”

So there the banquet-board was spread. Across the
tables wide

Gazing, the fit on Drostan fell. He stood and prophesied.

“ I see a field of carnage. I see eagles in the air.
Grey wolves from all the mountains. Sons of Eochaid
Buie, beware.

A fair grey warrior see I there. Before him, east and
west,

A mighty host lies scattered.”

But Domnal and the rest
Of Eochaid's sons and courtiers made light of what he
said,

Saying, “ See us happier visions, or we'll get us, in thy
stead,

A clerk of Columb's people from Iona's friendly cell,
Who will cast us better fortunes with his book and sacreing
bell.”

And made their banquet merrily, from jewelled cup and
horn,

Quaffing till sunset.

Soon as light sufficed, at coming morn,
For sharp-eyed husbandman to note, upon his farm-
ward way,

The difference, twixt the aspen leaf and feathery ashen
spray,

Impatient Congal, and the youths of Ulster, once
again,

With salient surge-compressing prow, launched on the
dusky main

Arrived at Caer Leon, and his weighty errand told ;
Said British Eochaid :

“ I myself am waxen, stiff and old

And chief in Eochaid's stead to lead our warriors we
have none,

Till, first, Maen Amber's judgment shall in this behalf
be known.

For here three youths come claiming, each, to be our
Conan Rodd,

Heir of my crown and kingdom, who, journeying abroad
Upon a sudden boyish feud these many years ago,
We deemed him dead, and mourned a loss that made
us lasting woe.

Till, on the sudden, here to-day those youths of noble mien
Are come, perplexing mightily my courtiers and my
Queen :

Each ruddy as the rising morn ; each on his blooming
cheek

Bearing the well-remembered mole that marks the son
we seek ;

Each telling tales of former days to Conan only known :
Wherefore we take this judgment ; for the prudent,
holy Stone

Stirs not at touch of Falsehood, though an hundred pushed
amain ;

But nods at finger-touch of 'Truth.'

Then answered Congal Claen :

" Entrust to me, oh King," said he, " the easy task, to
prove

For which of these three candidates Maen Amber ought
to move."

" Do as thou wilt," replied the King,

Then Congal in the gate,

His short spear in his hand, sat down, the youths' return
to wait.

First came a ruddy youth, who cried, " Make way—
The Amber Stone,
Steadfast as Skiddaw to the rest, moved free for me
alone."

Said Congal, " None may enter here, till first he
answer me
My question : See this gateway wide : now, hero, if
thou be
The royal son thou boast'st thyself ; resolve me with
what sort
Of gate wilt thou, when thou art King, make fast this
royal fort ? "

" When I am King," replied the youth, " my subjects
shall behold
My gates resplendant from afar with plates of yellow
gold."

" A proud Churl's answer," Congal said. " Pretender,
stand aside.
" If false Maen Amber bowed to thee, the juggling
demon lied."

Next came another ruddier youth, saying, " Although
the Stone
Moved but a little at my touch, I am the heir
alone."

Then Congal questioned him in turn ; and prompt
in turn he spoke—
" Steel-studded, cross-barr'd, bolted down on native
heart of oak."

" That thou art not a Churl, as he, thy prompt words
well evince,"
Said Congal ; " but they also show that neither art thou
Prince."

Last came a hero ruddiest and tallest of the three,
Saying, "Although the Amber Stone moved not at
all for me,

I not the less am Conan Rodd."

Then Congal Claen once more
Put him his question, like as put to either youth before.

The hero answered: "Were I King in Britain's
Dragon-den,

The gate planks of my house should be the boardly breasts
of men ;

For kinglier sight by sea or land doth no man's eye
await,

Than faces bright, in time of need, of good men in the
gate."

"Embrace me, Prince," cried Congal. "Thou art
the royal son ;

And thou shalt lead my British aids." And so the thing
was done.

Thence Congal sailed to Frank-land and to Saxon-
land afar,

Aids from the ocean-roaming Kings engaging for the
war ;

Wherewith and with his British aids, and allied Alban
power,

For Erin, from Loch Linnhe side, he sailed in evil hour.



BOOK III.

THE ARGUMENT.

*The rising-out of Erin's guard and Ghosts.
Conan's Resolve; and re-encouraged Hosts.*

[Congal having sought for aids in Frank-land and Saxon-land, returns with them to Ulster. They encounter evil omens. The ships are burned by lightning. Kellach the Halt addresses the discouraged allies. He asserts that the conflagration of the fleet is a good omen. They march inland and encamp. The tramp of giant footsteps is heard at night. Congal leaves the camp; challenges the Spectre, but obtains no answer. He seeks Arden in his tent. The Bard pronounces the Demon to be Manannan Mor Mac Lir, whose office it was in Pagan days to protect from invasion the coasts of Ireland. Those who had courage to interrogate the Demon, learned from him future events, but if unanswered, were doomed to die within the year. Congal heroically accepts his destiny. Next day the hosts reach his Fort of Rathmore. After rest and refreshment they prepare to cross the Ollarva. In the river they encounter a horrible Spectre; a woman steeping in the water bloody mantles and mutilated corpses. She announces herself as the Washer of the Ford, and holds aloft to Congal what seemed his own severed head. The dauntless King, sword in hand, plunges into the ford and swears he will not turn back while a single warrior adheres to him. Conan Rodd follows, and grasps his hand. The Spectre vanishes. Kellach, contemptuous of the auguries, addresses the army. They cross the river, and dejectedly continue their march. At early dawn, Lafinda, attended by an aged woman, approaches in a chariot. She recounts to Congal a vision of St. Brigid, of Kildare, enjoining her to meet the hosts, and tell them to "turn back or perish." Congal is incredulous. Lafinda tenderly appeals to him, but in vain, and intimates that she will take the veil. The horses are turned, lashed by the attendant, who stands revealed as St. Brigid, and with Lafinda all disappear within a wood. Congal springs after, but in vain. The dispirited leaders hold council. Some advise retreat to the coast, there to entrench themselves, till a fleet is fitted out to bear them to their homes. Aed, Conan Rodd, and the King of Lochlan, advise a courageous advance. The Bard

Ardan encourages them. Congal thanking God for the gift of such friends, appeals to the Hosts. They march onward with renewed courage to the battlefield of Moyra.]

THE dusky Dalaradian heights at hand appearing now,
King Congal, as apart he stood, and from his galley's
prow

Beheld the swift ships far dispersed across the ocean
dark,

As harnessed steers, when, for a prize, within some rich
man's park,

They cut in clay, with coulter clean, the onward-reddening
line,

With slant keels ceaseless turning up the white-foam'd
barren brine,

And black, pernicious, woe-charged sides, and tall masts
forward bow'd,

Intent to launch their fatal freight on Erin, groaned
aloud :

And " Much-loved native hills," he said, " I grieve that
thus I come

Not charged with cups or cattle-spoil, nor carrying
captives home,

Nor bearing boast of friends relieved or enemies con-
fused,

As other ship-returning Kings have heretofore been used ;
But laden deep with death and woe, of all my race the
first

To bring the hireling stranger in, I come in hour accurst."

Exclaimed an aged mariner who by the main-mast
stood—

" O'er all the Dalaradian hills there hangs a cloud of
blood.

Gore-drops fall from its edges.”

“Peace, fool,” the King returned,
 “ ’Twas but the early morning mist that in the sunrise
 burned.”

And cried to thrust the barques ashore where in a winding
 bay,

Far camped along the margent foam, the hosts of Ulster
 lay

Expectant. Forth the anchors went ; and shoreward
 swinging round,

The lofty poops of all the fleet together took the
 ground,

Harsh grinding on the pebbly beach : then, like as
 though a witch,

Brewing her charm in cauldron black, should chance
 at owlet’s scritch

Hooting athwart the gloom, to turn her head aside, the
 while

Winds bellow, and the fell contents on all sides over-
 boil ;

So, down the steep, dark galley’s sides leaped they : so,
 spuming o’er,

They crowded from the teeming holds, and spread
 along the shore

In blackening streams. The Ulster hosts with acclama-
 tion loud

Gave welcome ; and the ranks were filled.

But while they stood, a cloud
 Stood overhead ; and, as the thought a dreaming man
 conceives,

Which he, the while, some wondrous thing of import
 vast believes,

Grows folly, when his waking mind scans it ; so, in the
frown
Of that immense, sky-filling cloud the great hills dwindled
down ;
And all the sable-sided hulks that loomed so large
before
Small now as poor men's fisher-craft showed on the
darkened shore.
Awed in the gathering gloom, the hosts stood silent ;
till there came
A clap of thunder, and therewith a sheet of levin-
flame
Dropt in white curtain straight from heaven between
them and the ships :
And when the pale day-light returned, after that keen
eclipse,
In smoke and smouldering flame the barques stood
burning : o'er their sides
The sailors leaped : while moaning deep, sudden, the
refluent tides
Gave all their dry keels to the wind : the wind whose
waftings fair
Had borne them thither through the deep, thence bore
them off through air,
In fire and smoke : through all the host, like flakes of
driving snow,
The embers fell ; and all their cheeks scorched in the
fervid glow.

Then thus exclaimed the Frankish King : “ Our first
step on this land
Is with no cheering omen, friends ; for if Jehovah's
hand

It be that casts this thunderbolt, but small success, I
fear

Attends our enterprise ; but come, give all your labours
here

To quench the galley first that lies to windward of the
fleet ;

For ill betides Invader left without way of retreat.”

Then many a man with rueful eye looked o'er the
naked main,

And wished himself, with neither spoil nor glory, at home
again.

But “ Fear not, friends,” cried Congal Claen. “ Ye
have not sought us here

For stay so short ye need repine if portion of the
year

Be spent in fitting a fleet.

.

No loss but time and care replace.

A stumble at the start is oft the winning of the race.”

So counselled Congal ; and the hosts with better courage
strove

To quench the flames ; but still the flames intenser-
rising drove

Wide through the fleet, from barque to barque : then,
in the midst, a cry

Was heard from Kellach :

“ Lift me up, companions ; raise me high
That all may see me, and my words of all be under-
stood.

Sons, hold your hands. Desist,” he cried. “ Let burn !
The omen's good.

Fire is the sire of Life and Force. The mighty men
of yore
Still burned the barques that landed them on whatsoever
shore
They chose for conquest. Warriors then were men
indeed, and scorned
Alike the thought and means of flight. From battle
none returned
Then but the victors. Heroes then, untaught the art
to yield,
Ere standing fight would slay the steeds that bore them
to the field ;
Ere joining battle by a bridge, would leave the bridge
behind
Broken, lest lightest thought of flight should enter any
mind.

Thus Nuad of the Silver-Hand from Dovar setting sail,
Charged with the King-discerning might of vocal Lia
Fail,
When first for Erin's coasts he steered, and made the
sacred strand,
Waited for no chance lightning-flash, but with his proper
hand
Fired all his long-ships, till the smoke that from that
burning rose
Went up before him, herald-like, denouncing to his foes
Death and despair : they deeming him a necromancer
clad
In magic mists, stood not, but fled : wherefore be rather
glad

Called to his foot his fierce red hound ; athwart his
shoulders cast
A shaggy mantle, grasped his spear, and through the
moonlight passed
Alone up dark Ben-Boli's heights, toward which, above
the woods,
With sound as when at close of eve the noise of falling
floods
Is borne to shepherd's ear remote on stilly upland
lawn,
The steps along the mountain side with hollow fall
came on.
Fast beat the hero's heart ; and close down-crouching
by his knee
Trembled the hound, while through the haze, huge as
through mists at sea,
The week-long-sleepless mariner descries some mountain-
cape,
Wreck-infamous, rise on his lee, appeared a monstrous
Shape
Striding impatient, like a man much grieved, who walks
alone
Considering of a cruel wrong : down from his shoulders
thrown
A mantle, skirted stiff with soil splashed from the miry
ground,
At every stride against his calves struck with as loud
rebound
As makes the mainsail of a ship brought up along the
blast,
When with the coil of all its ropes it beats the sounding
mast.

So striding vast, the giant pass'd ; the King held fast his
breath ;

Motionless, save his throbbing heart ; and chill and
still as death

Stood listening while, a second time, the giant took the
round

Of all the camp : but when at length, for the third time,
the sound

Came up, and through the parting haze a third time
huge and dim

Rose out the Shape, the valiant hound sprang forth and
challenged him

And forth, disdainng that a dog should put him so to
shame,

Sprang Congal, and essayed to speak.

“ Dread Shadow, stand. Proclaim
What would'st thou, that thou thus all night around
my camp should'st keep

Thy troublous vigil ; banishing the wholesome gift of
sleep

From all our eyes, who, though inured to dreadful sounds
and sights

By land and sea, have never yet in all our perilous nights
Lain in the ward of such a guard.”

The Shape made answer none ;
But with stern wafture of his hand, went angrier striding
on,

Shaking the earth with heavier steps. Then Congal
on his track

Sprang fearless.

“ Answer me, thou Churl,” he cried. “ I bid thee
back ! ”

But while he spoke, the giant's cloak around his shoulders grew
 Like to a black bulged thunder-cloud ; and sudden
 out there flew
 From all its angry swelling folds, with uproar unconfined,
 Direct against the King's pursuit, a mighty blast of
 wind :
 Loud flapped the mantle tempest-lined, while fluttering
 down the gale,
 As leaves in Autumn, man and hound were swept into
 the vale,
 And heard, o'er all the huge uproar, through startled
 Dalaray
 The giant went, with stamp and clash, departing south
 away.

The King sought Ardan in his tent ; and to the wakeful
 Bard,
 Panting and pale, disclosed at length what he had seen
 and heard ;
 Considering which a little time, the Master sighed and
 spoke.

“ King, thou describest by his bulk and by his clapping
 cloak
 A mighty demon of the old time, who with much dread
 and fear
 Once filled the race of Partholan ; Manannan Mor Mac
 Lir,
 Son of the Sea. In former times there lived not on the face
 Of Erin a sprite of bigger bulk or potenter to raise
 The powers of air by land and sea in lightning, tempest,
 hail,
 Or magical thick mist, than he ; albeit in woody Fail

Dwelt many demons at that time : but being so huge of
limb,

Manannan had the overward of the coast allotted him,
To stride it round, from cape to cape, daily ; and if
a fleet

Hove into sight, to shake them down a sea-fog from
his feet ;

Or with a wafture of his cloak flap forth a tempest straight
Would drive them off a hundred leagues ; and so he
kept his state

In churlish sort about our bays and forelands, till at last
Great Spanish Miledh's mighty sons, for all he was so
vast,

And fell a churl, in spite of him, by dint of blows, made
good

Their landing, and brought in their Druids : from which
time forth, the brood

Of Goblin people shun the light ; some in the hollow
sides

Of hills lie hid ; some hide beneath the brackish ocean-
tides ;

Some underneath the sweet-well springs. Manannan,
Poets say,

Fled to the isle which bears his name, that eastward
lies halfway

Sailing to Britain ; whence at times he wades the narrow
seas,

Revisiting his old domain, when evil destinies

Impend o'er Erin : but his force and magic might are
gone :

And at such times 'tis said that he who, 'twixt twilight
and dawn,

Meets him and speaks him, safely learns a year's events
to be."

"But he who speaks him," Congal said, "and gains
no answer—he?"

"Within the year, the Seers agree," said Ardan, "he
must die ;

For death and silence, we may see, bear constant com-
pany."

"Be it so, Bard," replied the King. "To die is
soon or late

For every being born alive the equal doom of Fate.

Nor grieve I much ; nor would I grieve if Heaven had
so been pleased

That either I had not been born, or had already ceased,
Being born, to breathe ; but while I breathe so let my
life be spent

As in renown of noble deeds to find a monument."

By this the moonlight paled in dawn ; and onward to
Rathmore

Of green Moy-Linney marched the hosts, and round
King Congal's door

Pitched camp again ; where copious feasts, by Kellach's
care prepared,

Refreshed them, and the gift of sleep their weary eye
lids shared.

And now, at dawn, to cross the fords, hard-by the
royal town,

The fresh, well-ordered, vigorous bands in gallant ranks
drew down :

When, lo, a Spectre horrible, of more than human size,
Full in the middle of the ford took all their wondering
eyes.

A ghastly woman it appeared, with grey dishevelled hair
 Blood-draggled, and with sharp-boned arms, and fingers
 crook'd and spare

Dabbling and washing in the ford, where mid-leg deep
 she stood

Beside a heap of heads and limbs that swam in oozing
 blood,

Whereon and on a glittering heap of raiment rich and
 brave

With swift, pernicious hands she scooped and pour'd
 the crimson'd wave.

And though the stream approaching her ran tranquil,
 clear and bright,

Sand-gleaming between verdant banks, a fair and peaceful
 sight,

Downward the blood-polluted flood rode turbid, strong
 and proud,

With heady-eddying dangerous whirls and surges dashing
 loud.

All stood aghast. But Kellach cried, "Advance me
 to the bank ;

I'll speak the Hag."

But back, instead, his trembling bearers shrank.
 Then Congal from the foremost rank a spear-cast forward
 strode,

And said,

 "Who art thou, hideous one ; and from what
 curst abode

Comest thou thus in open day the hearts of men to
 freeze ;

And whose lopp'd heads and severed limbs and bloody
 vests are these ? "

" I am the Washer of the Ford," she answered ; " and
 my race
 Is of the Tuath de Danaan line of Magi ; and my place
 For toil is in the running streams of Erin ; and my cave
 For sleep is in the middle of the shell-heaped Cairn
 of Maev,
 High up on haunted Knocknarea ; and this fine carnage-
 heap
 Before me, and these silken vests and mantles which
 I steep
 Thus in the running water, are the severed heads and
 hands
 And spear-torn scarfs and tunics of these gay-dressed,
 gallant bands
 Whom thou, oh Congal, ledest to death. And this,"
 the Fury said,
 Uplifting by the clotted locks what seemed a dead man's
 head,
 " Is thine own head, oh Congal."

 Therewith she rose in air,
 And vanished from the warrior's view, leaving the river
 bare
 Of all but running water. But Congal drew his sword
 And with a loud defying shout, plunged mad'y in the ford,
 Probing the empty pools ; then stood, and from the
 middle flood
 Exclaimed :

 " Here stand I, and here swear that till the
 tide of blood
 Thus laves my knees, I will not turn for threat of Devil
 or Ghost,
 Fairy or lying Spirit accurst, while one of all this host

Follows my leading.”

Conan Rodd sprang kindling forth and cried,
 “ I fail thee not, for one, my King : ” and stood by
 Congal’s side,

Grasping his hand. Halt Kellach wept, and cried,

“ Ah, recreant ones,
 Great Rury’s cheek is red for shame, to see Ultonian
 sons

Like goblin-daunted children small, scared at a nurse’s
 lay,

Thus hanging back on Honor’s track, while Britons
 lead the way.

Fear not the Hag ; I know her well, accurst one ! She
 appears

To battle entering warriors once in every seven years ;
 And seven and seven years, exact, it is since last before
 I saw her foul ill-favoured face, the day that Domnal
 Mor

And Scallan Broad-Shield gave the breach on royal
 Sweeny Menn

At red Troy-Brena : ’twas at dawn ; and in the cressy
 fen

By the loch-side, where afterwards, crossing the trea-
 cherous quag,

So many of us sank engulfed, we saw the hideous Hag
 Stoop’d at her washing. Not a man of all the gazing
 host

But shook to see the carnage pile before the grisly ghost ;
 Each deeming that his own lopp’d head, conspicuous
 ’mid the pile,

Lay glaring ; and this very head, gathering defilement
 vile,

Saw I among them ; yet I came from that fight scatheless
forth ;

And therefore hold her prophecies are but of little
worth.

But, would to God, these limbs had then been stiff as
now they are,

Ere I for thankless Domnal's sake had part in such a
war ;

Or now were strong and supple-swift as then indeed
they were,

So should ye never see me here, and British Conan
there."

So Kellach spoke ; and all their hearts grew great
with manly shame ;

And as a flood flows through a flood, up through the
fords they came,

Raising Ollarva : all their shields and shining belts were
wet

With clear, cold, fishy-streaming floods against the strong
bar set

Of limbs heroic and deep chests. But when the fords
were pass'd

And the long columns drew their strength forth on the
champaign vast,

Fear fell again on Congal's host, and much oppressed
with awe,

They pondered what they late had heard, and what,
but now, they saw.

Southward in gloomy-gliding ranks, hushed all in dumb
dismay,

'The hosts across the upland bare, and through the
morning grey,

As drifting cloud at close of day that tracks the heaven
 serene,
Held on their dark unechoing march athwart the Fassagh
 green,
Till on a car afar were seen, by two swift coursers drawn,
Herself, Lafinda, and her Nurse, advancing through
 the dawn,
Swift they approached: the ruddy blaze of sunrise
 round them spread
Seemed with a diadem of rays to crown each radiant
 head.

“Congal,” the royal maiden said, “be not incensed,
 I pray,
That thus in presence of the hosts I cross thy war-like
 way ;
For need admitting no delay impels me ; and the ire
Of one I dare not disobey constrains the message dire.
Last night, at midnight, by my bed an awful form there
 stood,
Whom by her vermeil-lettered book, and by her purple
 hood,
And hoary, glory-beaming locks, that shone like sunlit
 snow,
For Blessed Brigid of Kildare I could not choose but
 know ;
And said, ‘Awake : arise : go forth : thy nurse, Lavar-
 cam, waits
With car and ready-harnessed steeds without the fortress
 gates :
Mount by her side, and northward forth ride fearless
 till the dawn
Show thee an army on its march across the upland lawn ;

Then to the King who leads that host say thus, Oh
 mighty King,
 From Duftach's daughter of Kildare I thee this message
 bring :
 Turn back or perish : thou and all thy Hosting : for
 the path
 From hence to Moyra on both sides is hedged about
 with wrath,
 And paved for foot of every man who in thy conduct
 treads
 With slippery, horror-staring floor of slaughtered heroes'
 heads.'
 So spoke she ; I by strong constraint drawn to the gates,
 obeyed ;
 And here, through shadows of the night, as in a dream
 conveyed,
 Now find myself, but in no dream ; and, horror-filled,
 I see
 These mighty-marching, death-devoted heroes led by
 thee,
 Oh Congal."

Congal, answering, said : " Dear maid,
 thou art deceived :

These visions of the feverish night are not to be
 believed.

But come ; such poor refreshment now as warriors'
 tents afford,

Take ; and when seasonable rest thy strength shall have
 restored,

A noble escort shall attend thy home-returning car,
 Such as befits thy father's child : and when this short-
 lived war

Is ended—for this host shall soon abate the tyrant's
pride—

With Erin for thine escort, thou, a crowned and royal
bride,

I, crowned and happy, by thy side, kings by our bridle-
rein,

Shall up to fair Rath-Keltar ride, never to part again.”

“Congal,” the Princess pale replied, “no bridal
pomp for me

Is destined, if thou harkenest not to Brigid's embassy ;
Save haply such a bridal pomp as, entering Brigid's
cell,

A handmaiden of Christ may hope.”

Said he, “The powers
of hell

Have sought to turn me, and have failed ; and though
in thee I find

My only heaven, yet neither thou shalt bend my steadfast
mind.”

“Damsel,” said Kellach from his chair, “these dreams
that haunt the bed

Of timorous virgins vanish all when once the maids
are wed.

And royally thou shalt be wed, and gallantly be
brought

Home to a dream-defying bed when once this breach
is fought.”

“Ah, aged Scorner,” cried the Nurse, who by the
Princess stood,

“Thou never wanted'st ribald taunt for aught was pure
or good.

Beware, lest on both soul and limb God's angry judgments fall,

For to thy crooked counsellings we owe these mischiefs all."

Said Kellach : " If a withered Hag, with prophecies of death,

Had power to turn sword-girded men back upon Honour's path,

Thou hadst no need to waste thy breath on us who, even now

Are here despite the menaces of an uglier witch than thou."

" Wretch," cried the dame, " abide thy fate ;" and car and coursers wheeled,

Her aspect changing awfully ; and, as she swept the field,

Brigid, they thought, stood plain revealed : and steeds and car became

Bright in her presence as in glow of forge-excited flame

But with a greyhound's bound, the King leaped to the reins, and cried,

" Daughter of Duftach, stay thy steeds : turn back : restore my bride !"

But Brigid lashed the spurning steeds : they by the sharp whip stung,

Off, with a foam-dispersing snort, the baffled hero flung :

But back again fierce Congal sprung, with lion's leap and roar

Terrific, shouting as he ran,

" Thou robber Saint, restore

My bride ! ”

And at the wide-maned steeds, where side by
side they flew

With earth-and-heaven-defying hand, his mortal javelin
threw.

But Brigid motioned with her hand, and from the chariot
seat,

Glancing oblique, the spear returned innocuous to his
feet.

The eyes of all the astonished host Garr-Congail's flight
pursued ;

And, when they looked again, the car was lost within
the wood.

Mute stood the hosts, in awe subdued ; and fear
blanched many a cheek,

Ruddy till then ; then thus began the Frankish King to
speak :

“ God wars against this war, oh Kings ; and pledged
albeit I be

To succour valiant Congal Claen against the enmity
Of Domnal, King of Erin, no promise have I given
To succour valiant Congal Claen 'gainst God the King
of Heaven,

Who, by His Saints, this day declares for Domnal.
Therefore now

Thus I advise : here found we straight a splendid cell,
and vow.

To Brigid whom amongst them all wise men may chiefly
fear

As owning most main power in act ; but, Brigid's wrath
 appeased,
 With gifts of gems and gold in dower she yet may be
 pleased,
 Haply, to aid us ; or, at least, to leave in even scale
 The balanced chances of the war, till greater might
 prevail."

Prince Sweeny Menn spoke next. He said :

"Sirs, since no man can say
 How strife untried may terminate, methinks the wiser way
 Were to prepare against the worst ; which, seeing our
 galleys' loss,
 I thus advise. Draw to the coast. There camp ; and
 dig a fosse,
 With rampart suitable, across some jutting foreland's
 height ;
 So shall we sit secure till friends get warning of our
 plight ;
 And send their ships to aid our flight ; if such be God's
 decree
 That after all our splendid hopes of spoil and victory,
 Flight needs must be our last resource. But here in
 open field,
 Far from supplies, I counsel not to camp, nor yet to
 build."

Said Aed Green-Mantle: "Kings, our plight is even
 as the case

Of venturous fowler who pursues his game into a place,
 High up a slippery sea-rock's face, where jutting rocks
 impend,
 Which, though too steep for going down, a man may
 yet ascend,

Being bold and cautious ; but behoves such climber
that he cast

No backward, hesitating glance on any peril past
Until he gain the level land, where he can stand, and
say,

‘ So have I reached to Safety’s height by Danger’s only
way,’

And so it is ; between the sea and Domnal’s gathering
host,

We climb a precipice where he who looks behind is lost :
But he who, scorning to turn back or make a doubtful
stop,

Looks and strives upward, lays his hand on Safety at
the top.

Wherefore, since doubt is, doubtless, death ; and ways
of flight are none,

For Life’s and Honour’s sake alike, I counsel, up, and
on ! ”

Next Conan Rodd stepped forth to speak ; and as
his head he raised

Men’s hearts rose with him, and the sun with fresh
effulgence blazed.

Said Conan : “ As I judge great Kings and Princes,
’twere but vain

To promise, if the word, gone forth, were now recalled
again

On show of first impediment : and vainer still it were
For warriors to devote themselves forth from their
seventh year

To feats of arms, if when at length indulgent Fates
provide

Heroic opportunity, they left the boon untried.

For me, when first within my breast I felt the generous
 flame,
 And said, ' I'll be a warrior,' my youthful dream of
 fame
 Was all of more than mortal foes, such as great Chiefs
 of yore
 Were wont to meet in desert vast or shadowy forest hoar ;
 Tree-wielding Giants, mighty Churls who, through the
 echoing glades
 Of dreary forests, to their dens, would drag lamenting
 maids ;
 Fell Sorcerers by enchanted gates ; or in his earthy
 hold
 The fire-exhaling wakeful Worm coiled round the guarded
 gold :
 Or haply still more glorious foes, such as, with eager
 joy,
 I've heard our Poets sing were those that fought the
 breach of 'Troy,
 When Gods from Heaven came down in arms, and
 godlike men beneath
 Withstood them, mortal foot to foot immortal, to the
 death.
 Fired by which noble fantasy, ere yet my youthful cheek
 Bore manly down, I left my home, in foreign lands
 to seek
 Glorious adventure : many lands I visited ; and saw
 Many renowned cities of men, each by its proper law
 Governed, and by its proper hosts guarded ; and mighty
 wars
 In all lands waging ; yet I found neither in field of
 Mars,

Nor on the long-shipped deep, nor yet in fell or forest
drear,
The shape or substance could withstand a brave man's
searching spear ;
But, by the keen steel tried, would all confess an equal
birth
Drawn, death-obnoxious as my own, from dust of vulgar
earth.
And, for their mighty miracles and prodigies sublime,
Of antique Gods, and holy Saints, these from the olden
time
Had, as they said, ceased utterly ; and now were only
known
In lays and legends of their Clerks, as idle as our
own.
Wherefore, with glory-thirsting heart, that still insatiate
burned,
I from their barren battle-fields and empty camps
returned,
Resolved amid my native woods, and in the sacred
gloom
Of Stones of power, to seek again some conqueror of the
tomb ;
Great Arthur, with the apple-bloom of green Avallon's
bowers
Still redolent ; or Uther's self from Caër Sidi's towers ;
But sought in vain : my scornful steel on vulgar foes
employed,
Nor dread of Deity conceived, nor love of man enjoyed ;
Till, glorious in a castle gate, like lion in the road,
Couchant, I first saw Congal Claen ; and at first sight
bestowed

Faith and affection on the King ; for never had I seen
 In all the earth a potentate of countenance or mien
 Royal as his, and as a youth amid the virgin throng
 Will move with unembarrassed heart, in gay indifference,
 long ;

Till, in a moment, some one maid's unconscious glance
 constrains

His soul to homage, and he thence bound in her thrall
 remains ;

So I, who all my prime of years 'mongst noblest men
 had passed,

And seen no man I'd deign to call or friend or lord ;
 at last,

Taken in a moment, saw and owned my captain, friend,
 and King ;

In whose just quarrel being engaged, I here to Erin bring
 My British aids ; and here at last, in open day behold
 Immortal beings visibly commingling, as of old,

In mortal struggles. Here at length I find my youthful
 dream

Made real. Here the mighty deeds of antique heroes
 seem

No longer all inimitable. Here Hercul's self might
 own

Fit labour for another Toil, nor ask the task alone.
 Wherefore with awful joy elate, I stand ; and bid thee
 hail,

Last hero-stage of all the world, illustrious Innisfail !
 Land of the lingering Gods ! green land, still sparkling
 fresh and fair

With morning dew of heroism dried up and gone else-
 where !

Wherefore, no penitential cell for me! But rather
raise,

Here, where old Honor stands revived, the Stone of
other days,

Grey, vast, majestic; such as when degenerate men
behold,

They'll say, 'Some noble thing was done here in the days
of old.'

Such as when Poets view, they'll say, when ages hence
are flown,

'Great hearts and mighty hands were theirs who raised
the Standing Stone.' "

He said; and on a great grey rock, half-buried in
the field,

Stood in the flaming of his arms, and waved his golden
shield.

Loud cheered the Welshmen; and the King of Lochlan
to his side

Leaped with a rivalling flash and clash; and caught
his hand, and cried,

"I swear by Woden and the might of hammer-hurling
Thor,

I love thee, Conan; and with thee am henceforth through
this war

True comrade, good or ill betide I, too, have seen
the homes

Of mightiest Caesars; and beneath Byzantium's proudest
domes

Have borne the Waring's guardian axe, in shelter of
whose blade

The laws that bind the Imperial world, both Priest and
King, are made.

But gilded arch, nor marble porch, nor incense-scented
air,
Nor silken couch had ever charm, for me, that could
compare
With home in Lochlan : with the burg beside the Northern
sea,
Where runs the roebuck on the hill, where floats the
pinnacle free :
Where still the ancient Gods receive, in forest and in
cave,
With rites of sacrifice unfeigned, the worship of the
brave ;
And for their smoking altar-meeds sincere, return us
still
The conscious courage dominant, the power and kingly
will
To rule the fore-shores of the world, with all their citted
sides,
Where'er the wandering moons uplift the ship-uplifting
tides.
Ill would beseem the sea-borne kings of Letha's midmost
coasts
Here, in this outer spot of earth, to blench at sight of
ghosts,
Earthmen, or beldames of the cells ; though clad in
shapes of air
And owning shows of strength divine, that martial
men elsewhere
Meet not, nor ever deemed they'd meet, since Woden
to their dens,
In Lappish deserts and the depths of Finmark's icy
fens,

Cast out the Trolls. My sentence then is, march,
 and meet your foes
 Of mortal mould with mortal arms. Let be the feud
 of *those*
 As fate hereafter may dispose. We reck not : neither
 crave
 Their aid prophetic to foresee well-filled, the foeman's
 grave.

This is my sentence.
 Fairy nor Fire-drake
 Keep back the Kemper.
 At home in the burg,
 Leaves he the maiden
 Boon for the bridal ;
 Abroad, on the holme,
 Leaves he the harvest
 Ripe for the reaper ;
 The bowl, on the board
 In the hall of the banquets,
 Leaves he untasted,
 When lances uplift
 The foe in field.
 Noting the Norsemen
 Out on the water-throng,
 Hark ! how the Eagle
 Vaunts to the Vulture.
 ' Spread the wing, Scald-neck,'
 Says she and screams she ;
 ' Seest thou the Sea-Kings,
 Borne o'er the gannet-bath,
 Going to garner
 Every bird's eyrie ?'

Fell from her fishy perch
 Answers the Bald-beak,
 'Scream no more, little one ;
 Feeders are coming.'
 Harkening their colloquy,
 Grins the grey beast,
 The wolf on wold.
 This is my sentence :
 These are the Norseman's
 Pandect and Canon.
 Thyrfing is thirsty ;
 Quern-biter hungers ;
 Shield-walker wearieth
 Shut in the scabbard.
 This is my sentence :
 Bring us to battle."

Fierce response gave three parts of the field ;
 And loud the Eastman's iron axe on many a target
 pealed.

As when the tree-tops of a wood first feel a blast of
 wind,
 One rustling oak begins to stir, then stirs the oak
 behind ;
 Thence on in gradual-deepening grooves, and on in
 widening rings,
 The tree-commingling tumult moves till all the forest
 swings ;
 So battle-impulse through them went ; so, at the bard's
 appeal,
 With thirst of combat, far and wide, they leaped and
 clashed the steel

Then Congal, staying where he strode infuriate to
and fro,
With fair white hand dashed from his cheek the briny
overflow,
And cried,
 " Oh, this it is, oh God, to have, in time of need,
Men in the gate ! and therefore I, though little used
indeed
To call on any name of God, yet, by whatever
name
Men call Thee, Thou who givest to men wives, children,
riches, fame,
And rarer than the worth of wives, and which the wealth
transcends
Of fame, as fame the worth of gold ; who givest a man
his friends,
I thank and praise Thee. Oh, brave friends, what
though this goblin crew
From all their earth-wombs foul, where'er they lurk
from general view,
Be by our coming thus stirred up ; even as I've seen
elsewhere
The coming of a young rich man into a public fair
Set all the banded cheats astir ? 'Tis, that a com-
mon fear
Besets them—being in a bond, leagued and consorting
here,—
That their united reign is o'er, once we achieve the
crown
Of Erin, and set up the law that casts all phantoms
down.

.

Free as the eagle which, indeed, when he has stooped
to prey

His quarry in a hollow vale, at first must make his way
With gyres contracted 'twixt the hills ; till to a level run
With his horizon ; but he then soars straightway at
the Sun :

Or as a seaman, being embayed, heaves oft his swerving
boom

Starboard and larboard ; then, at last, having attained
sea-room,

Lies his straight course, with keel direct cutting the
ocean vast,

While sun and rain, and wind and tide, and day and
night flit past :

So, flitting past our constant march, let these weak
shades troop on :

We, to our own hearts level arisen ; we, Doubt's last
headlands gone,

Launched on our main-sea enterprise, go forth with
steadfast mind,

Nor turn a wavering look aside, nor cast a glance behind,
While God betwixt us and our foes, impartial, leaves
the event :

For no man can contend with God, He being omni-
potent ;

But far removed from human strife, leaves to the daring
man

By force of valour to achieve such conquest as he can,
Whether o'er other mortal men less valiant ; or o'er
those

Inferior demons of the air 'Tis through such over-
throws,

Given in just quarrel, comes renown a man no other
way

Can compass ; for such conqueror, the Bard's heroic lay
Gives perpetuity of fame : the Statue-smith for him
To forms of glory consecrates each marble-moulded
limb :

For him, when on his nation's behalf he rises up to speak,
The council of the wise sit hushed : for him young
Beauty's cheek

Glows with the rose : all lips disclose their smiles for
him whose arm

Protects all life's delights for all : to him in war's alarm,
As to the husband of the State, the trembling mothers
run,

Holding their little ones : to him each generous-nurtured
son

Hurries instinctive ; as at sea when tempests over-
whelm

Faint hearts with horror in the hold, then chiefly round
the helm

Gather brave seamen. But the man whose sullen breast,
exempt

From generous impulse, prompts him forth upon no
brave attempt,

Lives sordidly and dies despised. He dares no stormy
sea.

Outflying Honor upon the wings of wintry tempests
he

Smiles at no spiteful impotent trick malicious Fortune
plays ;

Follows no friend with loyal steps through ghost-
prohibited ways ;

Burns with no emulous thirst of fame, when glowing
tongues declare

Brave aspirations ; as ye now, oh friends stand burning
there.—

For lo, I see on all your cheeks the blush of manly
shame ;

Lo, now I see in all your eyes the generous sparkling
flame,

Presage of conquest. Lo, the path to Moyra, where
the foe

Waits us, lies open. Forward, sons of Rury, forward,
ho !

Grandsons of Woden ; clans of Hû ; before us lies
renown

Safety and strength and native laws, revenge and Erin's
crown."

He said : and while with shouts on shouts the echoing
heavens were rent,

The mighty hosts with courage renewed, all with a one
consent

Moved onward. As a great black barque, compact of
many a tree,

That, on her launch from some high beach, shoots down
at once to sea ;

Or like as when, in time of thaw, a snow-drift deep and
wide,

By strong winds in a hollow place lodged on a mountain
side,

Fetches away with loosening crash ; or like as when, a
cloud

Lumbering the sky, strong winds arise, and all the aerial
crowd

Fall on at once ; it bulges, bursts, rolls out, and over-
spreads

The face of heaven with ominous gloom above amazed
men's heads ;

So ominously, so at once, with clash and muttering jar
Swift, dark, on Moyra's fated field rolled down the
cloud of war.

BOOK IV

THE ARGUMENT.

*King Domnal's muster, ere the fight proceeds.
Mad Sweeny's flight ; and Northern Conal's deeds.*

[Garrad rejoins King Domnal, and tells of the approach of Congal and his forces. He describes to the Monarch their array ; Scottish troops on the right, Northmen on the left, Franks in the centre, with Britons behind ; and, over all, Ulster, with Congal Claen. King Domnal advances to Moyra and takes up his position. The Leinster hosts were on his right, or eastern flank ; those of Connaught on the left ; the household troops of Meath in the centre, in line with those of Lea Moha, or South of Ireland. Behind this eastern wing as most exposed in situation were placed renowned Clan Colla and other Northern clans. The Monarch addresses his hosts. First those of Connaught, whom he reminds of the achievements of Queen Maev, King Dathy, and Owen Bell. Next the descendants of Mainy Mor, fighting under the Crozier of St. Grellan. Afterwards he confides to the Leinster troops his five sons, who are enrolled in their ranks. He reminds the Firbolg soldiers of their ancestry. To his household troops of Meath he repeats the peaceful overtures he had made in vain to Congal. To the Southern contingent he speaks of the heroism of Curoi Mac Daire. To his kinsman of Clan Colla he tells the tale of their champions Colla-Uais, Coll-da-Cree, Colla-Menn, and impresses on Malodhar of Armagh, and Ultan Long-Hand of Orior, that their fortunes depend on the issue of this fight. He recounts to his own Ulster clan the Kinel-Owen, their descent from Niall Nine-Hostager, and reminds them that

they had received St. Patrick's benediction. He calls on God to bless his cause. The hostile armies, now face to face, engage in deadly conflict. Sweeny the brother of Lafinda, fighting on Congal's side, is seized with frenzy; the curse denounced by Ere haunts him, and, in sight of both armies, he flies in terror from the field. His comrades would have slain him for his cowardice, but are assured by Ardan the Bard, that Sweeny's terror was supernatural. The leaders on both sides engage in personal encounters. The four sons of Eochaid of Alba rush on four provincial chiefs of Leinster, who are slain by these Scottish uncles of Congal Claen. Three of King Domnal's sons attack three of the victors; all receive their death wounds. His two younger sons assault Domnal Brec, who surrenders to them. King Domnal on his appeal, though lamenting the death of his sons, admits him to ransom. The subsequent fortunes of Domnal Brec, afterwards King of Scotland. His successors crowned at Scone on the Stone of Destiny, now removed to Westminster for the coronation of British Sovereigns. Congal's Frankish aids encounter, and are defeated by Clan Conail. The victors attack the warriors of Mourne, posted on the hill of Augnafoskar, on whose summit sits Kellach the Halt, borne on his chair. He sends son after son into the thickest of the fight. They fail to break the ranks, and attack Clan-Colla. Congal goes to the aid of Kellach. His friend Conan Rodd, with his contingent from Wales, assaults the Connaught forces. Conan Rodd engages in turn, and slays four of their chiefs. Conan Finn, who had also embraced the cause of Congal, fights with Kellach, son of Malcova, nephew, and afterwards successor of King Domnal, who kills him. Congal Claen, with his Ulster troops, attacks Clan-Conail, led by Conal, son of Baedan. They wrestle together. Conal flings Congal to the ground; Conan Rodd comes to his rescue, and slays Conal. He is attacked by Kellach, son of Malcova, who falls from the impetuosity of his charge. Conan Rodd refrains from taking advantage. Kellach rises and renews the fight; Conan falls. Congal interposes, and challenges Kellach, Ultan-Long-Hand interferes; and the warriors on both sides join in deadly strife.]

SUDDEN as wild-drake from his reeds beside the sedgy
 Bann,
 Forth from his rushy covert flew swift-watchful Garrad
 Gann

Scout of the North ; nor turned aside for dyke or mearing-
 mound,
 Till, in the gorge of green Glen Ree, the King himself
 he found

Said Garrad, " King, Clan-Congail comes : I saw
 Magabra's height

At sunset flaming with his spears ; and all the woods in
 sight

Far as the lake-reflected light their passes gave to
 view

With arms and standards sparkling bright, and war-
 cars thronging through."

" What standards show they ? " said the King, " and
 in what order, say

Does my unhappy foster-son his impious aids array ? "

Said Garrad, " On his battles right the standards
 were to see

Of Alba's hosts in all the fields of frightened Aghalee ;
 While Lochlan's ravens, birds accurst in many a widow's
 dirge

Flapped o'er his far-extended left to green Kilultagh's
 verge.

The ensigns of his middle front shone bright with silken
 sheen ;

White, swarmed with golden bees, they were ; and
 men of warlike mien

Long-hair'd and blue-eyed marched beneath. Once,
 when I sailed beyond

The Ictian sea, and saw, on march, the sons of Phara-
 mond,

('Twas on the Catalaunian plain, in dusty war-cloud
rolled,

They passed me as I rode the route King Dathi took
of old),

Such seemed the ensign, and such seemed the fair,
bee-blazon'd ranks :

Wherefore I deem the centre-front of Congal's host
are Franks ;

Yet little-trusted, as I judge ; for close behind them
came,

Led by a lofty chief whose locks shone red as bickering
flame,

The fierce, sharp-vengeful, savage men of Britain ;
and again

Behind the Britons, over all, Ulster and Congal Claen."

Said Domnal, " While I live and reign, it never shall
be said

The hosts of Erin, with the King of Erin at their head,
Sat in the shelter of a camp, or shunned the open
ground,

While foreign foe or rebel King within the realm was
found.

And since on Moyra openly their hosts encamp to-night,
On Moyra openly at dawn shall Erin give them fight."

Whereon throughout the expectant camp's four quarters,
Domnal sped

The welcome word to arm and march ; and soon the
measured tread

Of tramping legions told there passed by moor and
quaking fen,

From Domnal's camp to Lagan bank, thrice twenty
thousand men.

Arrived on Moyra's southern verge, beneath the stars
they lay,
Wrapped in their warrior cloaks, till morn advanced
her ensigns grey.
Dawn-early, Domnal,—offering done,—athwart the
dusky glade
In long-drawn battle, east and west, the royal host
arrayed.
And this the order of the line. To left of all the field,
Fast flanked by forest and by fen, as by a natural shield,
Connacia kept the western wing : thence stretching to
the right,
The many legioned Leinster hosts prolonged the beam
of fight
To where, in midmost place of all, a plashed imper-
vious wood
Embattled thick around himself Meath's household
phalanx stood.
Lea-Moha next in order fair took up the spiky line,
And bore it with a bristling edge to where your battle-
sign,
Renowned Clan-Colla, flaunted high above the eastern
wing :
Here, on the wide unsheltered wold, the careful-valiant
King
In mutual-succouring order close his Northern strength
arrayed ;
First, Kindred-Owen ; Orgiall next ; to take or tender
aid
When needful ; and beyond them both, as valour's
meet reward,
You clans of Conal, of them all the glory and the guard.

Upon the Sligo's southern bank, throughout a year
and day,
By mere enchantment of his gaze, kept all the North at
bay ;
Nor could their bravest cross the fords so overlooked, until
They stole King Owen from his cairn, and northward
by Loch Gill
Tomb'd him, face downward ; from which time the
disenchanted fords
Are won or lost, as greater might or less impels your
swords.
But here, with better auspices, you keep the battle-wing,
To-day, in presence of a crowned and lawful living
King.”
The Crohan warriors, pleased to hear North-nurtured
Domnal learned
In legends of the distant West, a glorying shout returned.
Next where Hy-Mainy's haughty ranks, 'neath Grellan's
staff arrayed,
Stood ruddy in the reddening morn, the King his
chariot stayed.
“ Brave youths,” said Domnal, “ what although the
breadth of Erin lies
Between us and the splendid seats which under western
skies
Ye wrested, by Saint Grellan's aid, from Bolgic hordes
of yore,
Ere Morne's and Colla's names were merged in name
of Mainy Mor ?
Yet neither lapse of time nor tract of distance can efface
From Ulster's breast the glorious name of Cradle of
your Race

Lo, yonder see the mountains blue, to whose recesses
borne
Your tide of overteeming life flowed out from full
Cremorne,
Ere yet lean Dartry's plenteous loins that mightier swarm
sent forth
To plant beyond smooth Shannon's flood the manhood
of the North ;
Whence now returned, by many a plain and many a
waving wood,
As sea-run salmon that at last ascend the parent flood,
All other bays and forelands pass'd, in needful hour
ye come
Exulting in your strength, to strike for kindred and for
home.
But exhortation none of mine need ye to whet the swords
Oft edged to victory before by better-spoken words—
'Mighty men, sons of Mainy,
By the Staff and its wonders
Ye bear for your banner,
By the Crozier of Grellan,
Hy-Mainy's sole Standard ;
That wand at whose waving
The flower of the Firvolg,
Of old on Moy-Liagh,
For their falsehood sank swallowed,
Thirty hundred together,
In a moment, without remnant,
In the maw of the Moy :
By your taxes, by your tributes,
By your freely-offered firstlings,
On the door-sills of Kilcloony : '

By Grellan's own warrant,
 Saying 'surely while ye pay me
 My taxes and my tributes,
 And exalt me my Crozier,
 God and I will give you conquest.'
 Now remember ye the manhood of the days of Mainy
 Mor."

Then all the pleased Hy-Manian host with loud and
 proud acclaim
 Shouted ; and Domnal to the front of Leinster's legions
 came.

"Lagenians of the palm-broad spears," the Monarch
 said, "and ye
 Fair-tunic'd warriors of Leix and festive Ossory,
 From you, in manhood's joyous prime, my gentle spouse
 I chose ;
 To you, in age, I now assign the guardianship of those
 Five war-accomplished youths, our sons, whom 'mid
 your ranks enrolled,
 In duty's place, with proud delight I even now behold.
 My Fergus Fair ; my Angus dear ; my Erril Open-
 Hand ;
 My Carril, and my Colgu gay Be ye a rallying band
 Impervious round the youths beloved ; that, when our
 work is done,
 The anxious mother may again embrace each princely
 son."

Proud Leinster closer round the youths arrayed her
 spear-thick hedge ;
 And warranted with warrior oaths the safety of the
 pledge.

The light of darkly-kindling eyes and fervid faces
 glanced
 Down all the beaming Bolgic line, while Domnal next
 advanced
 To speak the household Meathian troops.
 “Ye men of Meath,” said he,
 “Are witness that this day’s debate has not been sought
 by me.
 Whate’er a King with honor might, I offered Congal
 Claen ;
 And offered oft ; which he, as oft, rejected with disdain,
 Demanding crowns and kingdoms back which have not,
 since the days
 Of the three Collas, appertained to any of his race.
 Three hundred years and three and one, it is, since, at
 the date
 Three hundred-thirty-three from Christ, these three
 laid desolate
 Emania, Ulster’s royal seat till then, and over-ran
 All that Clan Rury theretofore to westward of the
 Bann
 And southward of the Yewry held ; from which time
 hitherto
 Ultonia’s bounds embrace no more than at this day
 they do,
 From Mourne to Rathlin : small the tract : yet in that
 little space
 Ambition how exorbitant, how huge a pride has place !
 And from Clan-Colla, in their turn, a hundred years
 have flown,
 Since Earca’s son, Murkertach, won Tyrconnell and
 Tyrone ;

O'er which Rudrician ne'er shall reign. So nothing at
our hands

Remains to give King Congal but the battle he de-
mands."

"Battle for battle! Spear for spear!" from thousand
throats upflew

The voice of fight-accepting Meath. The Monarch,
in review,

Thence passed along Lea Moha's line.

"Sons of the South," he said;

"Thus far beneath our Northern stars with fearless
steps ye tread,

Remembering, as beseems your race, the olden glorious
days

When Curoi and his Ernaan Knights divided Erin's
praise

With all our bravest of the Branch. On Cahir-Conroi's
crest

The hero from his tomb looks down where 'neath the
glowing west

The strand of Ventry shines at eve: again the hollow
roar

Of trampling tides is in his ears: locked on the level
floor

The glorious wrestlers stamp the sands: let come the
waves: let burst

All ocean downward on their heads: none parts his
hold, till first

He casts the invader to his feet. The invading galleys
ride

Regardant on the heaving blue, behind the white-maned
tide:

The white-maned, proud-neck-arching tide leaps to their
feet ; it leaps

Around their arms ; it leaps with might above expiring
heaps

Of Gauls and Gaels in mutual clasp washed o'er the wreck-
strewn sands,

Where drowned they rather than desert their first defensive
stands.

Such heroes hath Momonia nursed ; Momonia's sacred
shore

By you defended, grates beneath invading keels no more :

But, driven from hero-guarded coasts, our new invaders
swarm

In Ulster's unprotected ports : yet, even here, thine arm,
Momonia, reaching all the length of Erin through, shall
draw

MacDaire's blade again, and make a Ventry at Moy-rah."

Well pleased, Momonia's warriors heard the Mon-
arch's flattering words ;

And Domnal to Clan-Colla came.

“ Kinsmen, illustrious lords
Of Orgiall,” said he : “ since the day our three fore-
fathers stood

In Tara's wine-hall, to provoke to shedding of their
blood

King Muredach (for 'mongst the four, whiche'er should
first be slain,

With his posterity the crown was destined to remain) ;

No day has risen so full of need for Eochaid Domlan's
race

As this which now above our heads begins to rise apace.

Great lords from all their loins have sprung ; Kings
 from the loins of some,
 And other mightier monarchs thence are destined yet
 to come :

Yea, though perchance in after days forgetful of their
 stem,
 The rulers of the Western world shall draw their race
 from them.

And thou, Malodhar, eldest born, and noblest of them
 all,
 This day must hold or lose the lands won by the mighty
 Coll :

For, other cause of enmity proud Congal Claen has
 none
 Than this, that I refuse to strip Clan Colla of its own ;
 And have confirmed, and do hereby, as far as in me
 lies,

Confirm Malodhar of Armagh in all the seignories
 Won by his sires, as I have told. And, Ultan Long-
 Hand, thou
 Who rul'st Orior. his sub-King, yea, all who hear me
 now,
 Remember, that not mine alone the fortune, that en-
 dures
 Or passes with this day's event, but his, and thine, and
 yours."

" King," said Malodhar, " have no fear : the voice
 of Fate that gave
 The Collas in Cantyre their call to cross the wintry
 wave,
 To thee alike assigns the realms of Erin, and to me
 Orgallia's rule subordinate, in perpetuity.

Nor other change will Erin feel from Congal's mad
essay

Than this, belike, that Orgiall's bounds, meared by
Glen Ree to-day,

May march to-morrow with the sea ; for so her license
ran,

' From proud Emania to the sea ; from Farsad to the
Bann.' "

" Conquer thy wish " ; discreetly said the prudent
King, aloud.

But also said, " This under-King is somewhat over-
proud."

So pondering, to the Kinel-Owen, his own familiar
clan,

He came, and, still his ancient lore recalling, thus began :

" Twin branches of one stately stem are Conal's race
and yours,

Children of Owen ; at one birth our great progenitors
Owen and Conal Gulban, sons of many-hostaged Neal,
Sprang from one womb : one blessing both of holy
Patrick's zeal

Had in one cradle : equal power through Erin far and
wide

By blessed Kernach, from one bed, for both was pro-
phesied ;

When to their hands the dying saint confided Patrick's
Bell

And Columb's Gospels ; charging them, as oft as it
befell

' That either martial tribe should stand in combat's ordered
line,

That Bell or Book should ever be its proper battle-sign.

And promised, oft as either host, arrayed as now ye are,
 Should muster for defensive fight or just aggressive war,
 The Word of saving Truth with them, the Tongue of
 Power with you

Respectively, that victory should all your steps pursue :—
 A prophecy in part fulfilled ; in ampler measure still
 Remaining for a riper day of glory to fulfil.

This present day well nigh brings round an even hundred
 years

Since, in his just aggressive war, Murkertach's western
 spears

Flashed thro' Clan-Colla's broken bounds, in cantred-
 covering sweep,

From Erne to smooth Mayola's meads and proud Ben-
 Evenagh's steep :

And so it is ; one century, if but to-day's event
 March with the words of prophecy, shall see your tribe's
 extent

Meted by mountain, and by sea : for surely never yet
 Was juster war defensive waged than this, wherein,
 beset

As deer in hunter's narrowing ring, or ring'd bull at
 his stake,

We needs must fight for leave to live, if not for glory's
 sake.

Behold, there breathes not on the earth the creature
 born so base

But will, to spending of its life, defend its dwelling-
 place ;

Be it the wolf's leaf-bedded lair, the rook's dark tops
 of trees,

Or bare shelf of the barren rock, where, over yeasty seas,

The artless gull intends her brood ; and baser than
the beasts

Were we, if, having to defend our homes of love, our
feasts

Of joyous friendship, our renown, our freedom, and
above

All else, our heavenly heritage of Christ's redeeming
love,

From this rude inroad unprovoked of Gentile robbers, we
Fought not the fight of valiant men to all extremity.

Up, God ! and let the foes of God, and them that hate
him, fly :

As wax consumes within the fire, as smoke within the
sky,

So let them melt and perish quite : but he who loves
Thy laws

His head in battle cover Thou, and vindicate his cause."

" Amen," Cloc-Patrick's clerks replied ; and clear
above the swell

Of thousand hoarse-applauding throats, was heard the
Standard-Bell.

Last to his own illustrious tribe, though first in power
and fame,

In danger's gap, to right of all the embattled hosts, he
came.

" Kinsmen," he said, " to other tribes I've offered,
on my way,

Words of incitement to renown ; as fitting for the day
Just rising on so great a strife as, since the days of Con
The Hundred-Battled, morning sun has never looked
upon.

But from these hortative harangues,—since vain were
the attempt

To add to valour infinite,—Clan Conail stands exempt.
For why, what says the noble verse?—

' Clan-Conail for the battle

Never needed other prompting

Than the native manly vigour

Of a King-descended people,

Whose own exulting prowess,

Whose own fight-glorying valour,

And old ancestral choler,

And hot blood overboiling,

Are war-goats self-sufficing.

Would'st see them war-excited ?

Would'st see the Clans of Enna

Let loose their native fury ?

Would'st see the Sons of Conang

How they look in time of slaughter ?

Sil-Angus at their spear-sport,

Sil-Fidrach at their sword-play,

Sil-Ninid rout enforcing,

Sil-Setna panic-pouring ?

Set before them then the faces

Of foemen in their places,

With lances levelled ready,

And the battle, grim and bloody,

Coming onward o'er the tramp-resounding plain :

But insult not Conal's nation

With a battle-exhortation

When with battle's self their hands you entertain.'

And lo, the very valour-rousing sight the Bard prescribes

Presents itself before our eyes ; for yonder Congal's tribes

Begin to move. Up Book, and march! God and
Columba be

Your wanted warrant that ye march to glorious victory!"

And, as when fire by chance has caught a furzy moun-
tain-side,

Behind its bickering front of flame, in blackness swift
and wide,

The spreading ruin onward rolls; so down King Dom-
nal's van,

Flashed back from glittering helm and shield, the morning
radiance ran;

So, dark behind their fiery front, in far evolving throng
The enlarging legions spread, and poured their serried
strength along.

And as, again, when Lammas floods from echoing
uplands go.

Down hurrying to the quaking vale that toils in foam
below;

So wide, so deep, so terrible, so spreading, swift and vast,
With tempest-tramp from Congal's camp the adverse
columns pass'd:

Every phalanx like a castle; every captain, at its head,
Like pillar of a castle-gate, when camping Kings have
spread

Their leaguer to the rampart-foot, and pick and broad-
axe play

Rebounding on the sounding plank that holds the war
at bay.

Ah! many a brave young son was there, to hang on
whose broad breast

Was joy to the proud mother; many a brother much
caressed

By white-arm'd smiling sisters ; many a lover who yet
bore
'The parting kiss from virgin lips his lips should meet
no more ;
And sons who stood by fathers' sides, with pious ardour
warm,
Each deeming death were well-incurred to shield *that*
head from harm,
Blooming in love and manly strength ; and many a
faithful pair
Of milk-united fosterers and ancient friends was
there.
Swiftly they cleared the narrowing space of plain ground
interposed ;
And, bearing each an even front, from wing to wing
they closed.
A shudder at the closing shock thrill'd through the
grassy plain,
And all the sedgy-sided pools of Lagan sighed
again.
In balanced scale, in even fight,—no thought on
either side
Of yielding back,—the eager hosts their work of battle
plied,
Stern, dark, intense, incessant, as forging smiths that
smite
In order on the stithy head through spark-showers
hailing white.
And, as when woodsmen to their work, through copse
and stubble go,
Grasping the supple red-skinned twigs with darting
bill-hooks, so

With frequent grasp and deadly grip, plucked from their
slippery stand,

They went continual to the earth: the grassy-vestured land,
Stamped into dust, beneath them glowed; the clear
fresh morning air

Vexed with the storm of twirling arms, and tossing heads
and hair,

Around them reeked; while, overhead, in dense un-
wholesome pall,

A sweat-and-blood-engendered mist rose steaming over all.

Dire was the front-rank warriors' case; nor, in their
deadly need,

Did son of father longer think, or friend of friend take
heed;

But each deemed all the strength and skill his prowess
could command

But scant enough to serve the need that claimed his
proper hand;

Fresh hands with deadlier-wielded blades, new foes
with angrier frown,

Succeeding ceaseless in the front, fast as the old went
down.

Fed from behind the ranks renewed; from these
continual fed

The intermediate heaps increased. Still no man turned
or fled

Till on the Dalaradian King, unhappy Sweeny, fell

The terrors of a dreadful fate, in manner strange to tell.

To Sweeny, as the hosts drew near, ere yet the fight
should join,

Seemed still as if between them rolled the foam-strown
tawny Boyne:

And as the swiftly nearing hosts consumed the narrow-
ing space,
And arrow-flights and javelin-casts and sword-strokes
came in place,
Through all the rout of high-raised hands and wrathful
glaring eyes,
Erc's look of wrath and lifted hand before him seemed
to rise ;
Through all the hard-rebounding din from breasts of
Gaels and Gauls,
That jarred against the vault of heaven, when clashed
the brazen walls,
Through all the clangorous battle-calls and death-shouts
hoarse and high,
Erc's shriller curse he seemed to hear and Erc's despairing
cry.
Much did the hapless warrior strive to shake from breast
and brain
The illusion and the shameful wish fast rising, but in
vain ;
The wish to fly seized all his limbs ; the stronger dread
of shame
Contending with the wish to fly, made spoil of all his
frame.
His knees beneath him wavered, as if shaken by the
stress
Of a rapid-running river ; his heart, in fear's ex-
cess,
Sprang to and fro within him, as a wild-bird newly
caged,
Or a stream-ascending salmon in a strong weir's trap
engaged.

Room for escape the field had none : and Sweeny there
had died

Perforce in front ; his shame unknown ; his name a
word of pride

To all his race, for many a feat of valour nobly done,
And much renown from conquered Chiefs in former
battles won ;

But that the terror in his soul at length to madness grew,
And, with a maniac's strength of ten, he burst the rere
rank through

And fled in presence of both hosts.

So light and swift he ran,
It seemed as if exalting fear had left, of all the man,
Only the empty outward show. Then many cried to
slay

The flying Chief ; but Ardan stood between :

“ Insane ones, stay
Your idle impious shafts,” he cried ; “ no coward's flight
is here ;

But sacred frenzy sent from Heaven. The wings of
vulgar fear

Ne'er lifted weight-sustaining feet along the airy ways
In leaps like these : but ecstasies there be of soul, that
raise

Men's bodies out of Earth's constraint ; and, so exalted,
he

Acquires the sacred Omad's name, and gains immu-
nity

From every earthly violence. 'Twas thus Wood Merlin
gained

His seership on Arderidd field : else Britain had re-
mained

Still unenriched of half her lore. So, turn you, and
engage

Your spears where men who fly you not, await your
juster rage."

So Ardan counselled ; and the line of battle stood
renewed,

While Sweeny o'er the distant plain his lonely flight
pursued,

Noiseless, as flits, at daylight gone, the level-coasting
crane.

Meantime, on Moyra, shout and clang of battle rose
again,

As singling from the vulgar sort, the chiefs of note began
In feats of separate hardihood, to mingle in the van.

And first the royal sons who led the allied Alban host,
Despite the strength of circling quags and Dathi's guardian
ghost,

Thrice on Connacia's line of fight, four island ospreys flew,
And twice and thrice with grasp of might broke Grellan's
staff in two.

But at their third swift-swooping charge, where Leinster
stood arrayed

Beneath her four Provincial Kings, their course was
rudely stayed.

Which four illustrious Kings who led the Broadspear
ranks, were these ;

First, Cairbre Crom, the wealthy lord of tunic-bleaching
Leix ;

Next, haughty Aulay of the Ships, who exercised his
rule

Where hurdle-causeways span the mire of Liffey's dusky
pool ;

Argnadach next, whose grassy dun o'er green Hy-Drone
presides

Where bright by brown Bahana wood the fishful Barrow
glides ;

And lastly Ailill, hapless lord of wide domains, for whom
Hy-Faily's serfs no more need till the sunny slopes of
Bloom.

These four before the Albanian four their armoured
breasts opposed,

And straight the eight in fell debate, for life and glory,
closed

But valiant though these Leinster Kings, and war-
accomplished too,

'Twas not for them the royal hope of Alba to subdue,
Who oft had trained adventurous arms on Saxon and
on Gaul,

With brass-hook'd halbard oft had plucked the Briton
from his wall ;

And oft, twixt beetling brow above and slippery brink
below,

Had wrestled with the Fortren Pict, knee-deep in
Grampian snow.

Argnadach, first, beneath the spear of Aed Green-
Mantle died ;

Tall Ailill next lay stretched in death, by Sweeny, at
his side ;

To Domnal of the Freckled Brow imperious Aulay then
Resigned his head ; and Cairbre Crom succumbed to
Congal Menn.

When Domnal's own illustrious sons beheld the
carnage made

Of Leinster's leaders, to the front they also sprang in aid ;

Fergus and Angus side by side ; young Erril Open
 Hand,
 Carril and Colgu ; five to four : the war-flushed con-
 quering band
 Of Alban brothers, four to five, as loud the Princes
 cried
 “ Sons of the King of Erin here,” with louder shout
 replied,
 “ Sons here of Alba’s mightier King, to match them,
 man to man.”
 And, three at once selecting three, an equal strife began ;
 Equal in youth ; in royal birth in eager warlike will,
 Equal ; and in the athlete’s art and warrior’s deadly skill,
 Alas ! too equal ; for, ere long, by many a mutual wound,
 Each slain by each, three princely pairs pressed all the
 equal ground
 But Domnal Brec, by Carril and by Colgu both assailed,
 Although ’gainst either single foe he had in fight pre-
 vailed,
 Withstood not their conjoint attack : but, casting down
 his shield,
 Said, “ Cousins, I claim benefit of gossipred, and yield.”
 So, leaving there the princely six stretched ’mongst the
 common dead,
 Carril and Colgu to the King their Alban captive led.
 Then thus the captive Domnal said,
 “ Oh, King, these youthful sons
 Have done me warrior-wrong in both assailing me at
 once ;
 Which is no deed of princely-nurtured youths : and
 therefore, I
 Am put to plea of fosterage and consanguinity ;

Which neither Prince might contravene, though for the
issue loth,
In equal single combat had the conquest of them
both ;
Yet neither slew ; but gave their lives in barter of his
own :
Which Freckled Domnal afterwards sat on the Alban
throne,
A famous sovereign : and his race in Yellow Eochaid's
hall
Reigned after him ; till Selvach, son of Fercar, named
the Tall,
To proud Dunolly's new-built burg transferred the
royal chair.
('Twas in his time Columba's Clerks, because they
would not bare
The head-top to the tonsuring shears of Ceolfrid, neither
count
Their Easters by the Roman moons, were sent beyond
the Mount
By Necton and his Fortren Picts ; when, in the Gael's
despite,
His Saxon builders, from the Tyne, brought North the
general rite.)
And after Selvach, once again to shift the wandering
throne,
Came conquering Kenneth Alpinson, the first who sat
at Scone,
Full King of Scotland, Gael and Pict ; whose seat to-day
we see
A third time moved, there permanent and glorious to
be,

Where, in Westminster's sacred aisles, the 'Three-Joined-
 Realm awards

Its meed of solemn sepulture to Captains and to Bards ;
 And to the hands pre-designate of awful right, confides
 The Sceptre that confers the sway o'er half of ocean's
 sides.

But Domnal's brothers in one grave on Irish Moyra
 lie ;

And to this day the place from them is called Cairn-
 Albany.

The hardy Saxon little recks what bones beneath decay,
 But sees the cross-signed pillar stone, and turns his
 plough away.

So on the battle's western verge the doubtful strife
 was waged :

Meantime, upon King Congal's left, the Frankish host
 engaged

Clan-Conail ; and Clan-Conail marched o'er prostrate
 Franks, until

They pressed the battle to the plain beneath the very
 hill

Where ranked the warrior-hosts of Mourne. Halt
 Kellach in his chair

Placed on the summit of the slope, sat 'midst his bravest
 there :

And, as a hunter, having his dogs leashed on a rising
 ground,

A tall stag drinking in the vale, slips swift hound after
 hound ;

Or as a man who practises against a mark, hurls forth
 Dart after dart ; or as a youth whose time is little
 worth,

Goat-herd or poet idly bent, from some bald sea-cliff's
crown
Dislodges fragments of the rock, to send them rolling
down,
And claps his hands to see them leap, as, gathering speed,
they go,
With high whirls smoking to the foot; with such fierce
rapture so
Son after son the Halt one sent, and smoking charge
on charge
Hurled down from Augnafoskar's brow against the
glittering marge
Of levelled spear and burnished targe that, 'mid the
throng below,
Marked where Clan-Conail's front advanced o'er Frank-
land's overthrow.
But neither swift Cu-Carmoda, for all his greyhound
spring,
Nor headlong Anlach hurling down with force of javelin-
fling,
Nor Brasil bounding from his bank with crash of whirling
crag
Could bend the steadfast beam of fight stretch'd out
beneath thy flag,
Oh son of Baedan; but, as dogs entangled 'mong the
brakes,
Or mark-short darts that by the butts uplift their quivering
stakes,
Or rolling rocks that at the foot break into pieces
small,
So clung, transfixed; so, sounding, broke against that
brazen wall

Charge after charge. But as a pack of curled waves
clamouring on

Divide and ride to either side, resurging, round a stone
That makes the tide-mark ; or as storms, rebounding
from the breast

Of some impassive mountain huge, go raving forth in
quest

Of things prehensible, broad oaks, or wide-eaved homes
of men,

To wreak their wrath on ; bellowing forth from every
hollow glen

That girds the mighty mountain foot, they on the open
vale

Issue tremendous : groan the woods : the trembling
mothers pale

Beneath their straining rafters crouch, or, driven from
hut and hall,

Hie to the covert of some rock or rock-built castle wall :
So Brasil's battle, burst in twain against the steadfast
face

Of Kinel-Conail, still pursued, oblique, its headlong race
Past the impenetrable ranks ; and, swift as winter wind,
Fell thundering down the lanes of death, on Orgiall's
host behind.

Clan-Colla split before the shock : Clan-Brassilagh
poured in ;

And dire confusion filled the plain, and dreadful grew
the din.

Grief and great heat of anger filled the breast of Congal
Claen

When tidings reached him that the sons of Eochaid Buie
were slain.

Till now, with Conan by his side, the King had, from his
car,
Ordained the onsets of the hosts, and overseen the war.
Now, "Conan, noble friend," he said, "whate'er at
either's hand
The duty of a field-arraying sovereign can demand
We see accomplished; and the time is come when
thou and I
Are free to feed our proper souls with war's satiety;
Thou to achieve increase of fame amid the warlike
throng,
And I to sate enormous hate bred by a life of wrong.
Lo, where the generous Alban chiefs, who, for the love
they bore
Me, hapless wretch, left all they loved on lone Loch
Etive's shore,
Lie wrapped in death or deadlier bonds. There lies
the path for thee
To reinstate our battle's right; and fame and fortune
be
Attendant with thee. Leave to me this Northern robber
horde
Whose march insulting on our left needs some robuster
sword
Than aged Kellach's: he, I judge, will not long sit at
ease,
Unless with some impediment of weightier mould than
these
I bar the access to his chair. Farewell a while; and
now
For vengeance I and destiny; for fame and friendship
thou."

As lightning that divides a bolt forkwise in upper
 air,
 To left and right, from Congal's car, forth sprang the
 glittering pair.
 First on Connacia's shaken ranks impetuous Conan
 flew.
 Four chiefs in turn engaged him there. All these the
 hero slew ;
 And the lopp'd head of each in turn took from the collar'd
 neck ;
 Sweeny, to wit ; Aed Alen, Aed Buie and Eccad Brec ;
 In rough Tir-Eera Sweeny ruled, the son of Carrach he ;
 Aed Alen in Moy-Eola ; in Hy-Mainy, Aed the Buie ;
 In castled Leyny, Eccad Brec. These Conan Rodd
 subdued ;
 And Welshmen, with him, of the rest a mighty multi-
 tude.
 Meanwhile the main Britannic host 'neath Conan Finn
 arrayed,
 Who, midmost, fought the men of Meath, much missed
 true Conan's aid.
 He of the Gates of Heart of Oak had freely, as became
 One who in Congal's choice of Kings the second place
 might claim,
 Followed his glorious judge to war ; and now with loyal
 heart
 Matched against Kellach Mor performed a valiant
 warrior's part.
 Son of Malcova, erewhile King, was Kellach : nephew
 so
 Of Domnal ; and of all who came to Congal's over-
 throw,

Conal Mac-Baedan sole except, in prowess and renown
Foremost ; and destined afterwards, himself, to wear
the crown.

With him contended Conan Finn : but Kellach lopped
his head,

And cast it to his shouting friends ; then mingled rage
and dread

Fell on the thick-Welsh-speaking host ; and forth in
reckless rage

Three cousins of the vanquished chief sprang, eager to
engage

The victor ; Howel, Arthur, Rees ; together forth they
sprung

And with three far-exulting leaps their spears together
flung ;

And with three mutual-echoing shouts their blades toge-
ther drew :

But Kellach from the collared necks of these three sons
of Hû

Took their respective glittering spoils, and, holding up
the same,

Said, " Who will stake another cast upon the noble
game ? "

There marched that day 'mong Congal's host a valiant-
hearted man,

But little-bodied, Fermorc Becc : he, standing in the
van,

Beheld his allies' fate, and heard the conqueror's taunt-
ing call,

And said,

" Although thou be the Great, and though I
be the Small,

Yet have I seen it so befall, oh Kellach, that, at
 play,
 The puniest piece upon the board has borne the prize
 away :
 And for that glorious prize, thy head—and I shall lay it
 low
 Right soon,—I play this cast, and stake my life upon the
 throw.”

He played his spear-cast manfully ; no man of all the
 host
 Could but admire ; but, gamesomely, the prize he played
 for, lost
 Then many hearts beat thick, and tears from some
 stern eyes there broke
 At seeing dauntless Fermorc stand to bide the answer-
 ing stroke.
 But generous Kellach, with a smile, reversed his lifted
 spear,
 And 'mid the laughter of the hosts pushed Fermorc to
 the rere.

The soul of Fermorc swelled with shame ; and but that
 eager bands
 Of friends all round restrained him, he had on himself
 laid hands.

Such feats of arms by Conan Rodd and Kellach Mor
 were done
 To right and centre of the field. Meantime the royal
 son
 Of Scallan Broad-Shield, on the left, in gloomy-vengeful
 wrath,
 At head of Ulster, toward the host of Conal held his
 path.

As when a grampus makes among the ripple-raising
shoals
Of landward-coasting ocean-fry, the parted water
rolls
Before the plunging dolphin, so the hosts on either
side
Fell off from Congal as he came in swiftness and in
pride.
On each hand scattering death he went : with sword-
strokes some he smote
In handed fight : with javelin-casts he others slew
remote ;
Till, 'twixt him and the steadfast front of Conal's host,
the plain
Lay unimpeded to his charge save by the fall'n and
slain.
Clan-Conail, now lock close your shields, make fast
your battle-front ;
The might, the might of Ulster comes, and Congal
gives the brunt.
And proudly kept thy host their place, oh Conal, till the
stroke
Of Congal's own close-wielded mace a bloody passage
broke.
Then, though your battle-border long had baffled all
his best,
Shield-lock'd and shoulder-riveted, with many a valiant
breast
That burned with Northern valour as courageous as his
own,
Yet before the face of Congal ye were crushed and over-
thrown,

Chaff-dispersed and ember-scattered ; till the strong
fraternal arm

Of Kindred-Owen reached between, and stayed your
further harm.

Ill brooked Sil-Setna's generous Chief, young Conal,
to behold

The noblest warriors of his race in confluent tumult
roll'd

Like sheep to shelter of the fold ; and, as fierce Congal
closed

His rallying ranks to charge anew the fresh foes inter-
posed,

Strode forth 'twixt gathering host and host, and said
" Behold, I claim

Safety and single combat, King, and proffer thee the
same."

" Who art thou," Congal said, " who thus would
stay the swelling tide

Of Ulster's might, to aggrandize a single warrior's
pride ? "

" The Son of Baedan I," replied the Chief, " who
from thy race

Wrested Moy Inneray ; and who used, once, make
my dwelling-place

In broad-stoned Aileach ; but who now in Conang's
halls abide,

Since Aileach's gate-posts have of late been stained by
parricide."

" No need for further woman's words," said Congal ;
and his cheek

Grew shameful red : " Accept the fate thy folly dares to
seek."

So closed their parley ; and the hosts kept each its
former place ;

While they, with deadly-lifted spears, moved through
the middle space.

High beat heroic Conal's heart. In every exer-
cise.

Of Erin's athletes hitherto his arm had borne the
prize.

Of all the fearless footsteps, formed 'twixt cliff and
climbing sea,

From dizzy League to Torrey's straits, the fearlesst
had he :

And oft, when on the heaving skiff, mid baffled waves
he hung,

Ere up grey Maulin's eyried lofts of Balor's Stairs he
sprung ;

Oft, when, a-fowling, poised, he swung between the slip-
pery brow

And thundering deep, his soul had longed for danger
such as now,

Guerdoned with glory, called him forth, before a nation's
eyes,

To strive, in Country's righteous cause, for Fame's
eternal prize.

They cast their spears together. Each resounding
weapon stood

To socket in the opposing shield ; and Congal's point
drew blood.

Then forth, to snatch his weapon back, the King of
Ulster sprung ;

But Conal, with a wrestler's leap, his arms around him
flung ;

By flank and shoulder taking hold : nor was King Congal
slow
With ready-darted hands expert to grapple with his
foe,
Shoulder and flank : a moment thus stood either mighty
man ;
Then, in a gathering heave, their game the athlete pair
began,
With lifts and thrusts impetuous ; with swift-reversing
pulls,
And solid stands immovable, as young encountering
bulls ;
And counter-prancing dizzy whirls ; till, in the rapid
round,
The feet of either hero seemed to leave the circling
ground,
Though firm as palace-pillars stood their feet beneath
them still ;
For neither yet felt any lack of athlete force or
skill ;
But each deemed victory his own : for Congal, where
he stood,
Saw the fast-falling drops that soon would sink the
swelling flood
Of Conal's strength ; and Conal, still unconscious of the
waste,
Invoked his glorious sires, and all his loins with rigour
braced ;
Son of the son of Nindid, son of Fergus, as he
was,
Son of great Conal Gulban ;—and he pushed him without
pause ;—

Son of renowned Nine-Hostager ;—and one great heave
 he gave

Of his whole heroic body, as the sea upheaves a
 wave,

A long strong-rising wave of nine, that from the wallowing
 floor

Of ocean, when a storm has ceased, nigh to some beachy
 shore,

Shows with a sudden black-piled bulk, and swallowing
 in its sweep

Accumulated water - heaps from all the hollowed
 deep,

Soars, foams, o'erhangs its glassy gulfs ; then, stooping
 with a roar

Immeasurable of sea-cascades, stuns all the sounding
 shore :

With such a heave great Conal rose, rushed onward,
 overhung

His down-bent foe, and to the earth the King of Ulster
 flung.

As seaweed from the sunken rock the wave's return
 leaves bare,

From Congal's head unhelmeted forth flew the spreading
 hair,

Soiled in the dust. Exulting shouts, and shouts of rage
 and grief

Rose from the breathless hosts around, as Conal, con-
 quering Chief,

Stood ;—so some arch-built buttress stands in bending
 strength inclined ;—

Preparing with his belt of war the captive King to
 bind.

But Conan Rodd, whom conquering rage had sped from
 wing to wing,
 Drawn by the clamour, from afar beheld the prostrate
 King.
 Unconscious of the truce, that yet had not had lawful
 end,
 He ran, he leaped, as shaft from string, he flew, to save
 his friend ;
 And valiant Conal scarce beheld, scarce felt the fatal
 thrust,
 Till his great heart was split in twain, and he too in the
 dust.

Up started Congal ; Conan's arms the reeling warrior
 raised ;
 And Conan's shoulder stayed his steps, as, panting and
 amazed,
 He gained his chariot-seat ; but while with inspirations
 deep
 He breathed his breast, from 'midst of Meath forth
 sprung with clanging leap
 Great Kellach, King Malcova's son : with rage and
 noble scorn
 Dilating, in the midst he stood, and cried—

“ Base Briton, turn.
 From me receive the meed of death that warrior-law
 decrees
 The impious wretch who violates his combat-guaran-
 tees.”

Said Conan, “ Though my love could dare the breach
 of sterner laws
 At friendship's call ; this judgment thou dost give
 without a cause.

For nought, in truth, of any pause or parleying truce
I knew

When, newly on the field arrived, to aid my King I
flew.

If for his life a life be due, take thou a warrior's word,
No freer soul e'er paid a debt more loyally incurred."

He wrung the hand that Congal reached ; their hearts
within them burned

With tenderness they might not speak ; and to the
combat turned

Conan his cast delivered first. The spear, from
Kellach's shield

Glancing oblique, struck socket-deep, innocuous, in the
field.

Then Kellach, with a dreadful smile, in towering strides
drew near ;

And, with the might of both his hands upheaving high
his spear,

Smote Conan's buckler in the midst : the brazen bosses
flew

Disrupted : but, with sudden sleight, the agile warrior
threw

Shield and shield-cumbered spear aside ; and Kellach,
overborne

By his own force, as sinks an elm from yielding roots
uptorn,

Went prone amid the brazen wreck. Three paces
back withdrew

Conan, and bared his blade, and said,

“ Rise, Kellach, and renew
An equal combat, if thou wilt. I shall not fear in thee
Defeat of generous soul, or breach of warrior-warranty.”

“Conan, my life is in thy hands,” said Kellach.

“Take or give.

Thou hast in me a foe to death, whilst thou and I shall live.”

Then, spear and buckler laid aside, his sword he slowly bared ;

Cast on dead Conal's form, a glance ; and stood for fight prepared.

As when two mastiffs chance to meet upon a public way,

And break their leashes, and engage ; their keepers in dismay

Back from the fang-commingling fray on either hand recoil ;

So stood the hosts at gaze, while they resumed their deadly toil.

And well might wearied combatant his own dread work forbear

To view the warlike practice of the sword-accomplished pair ;

So, timing, with instinctive sway, consenting eye and hand,

They wove the dazzling woof of death 'twixt gleaming brand and brand ;

So, mingling their majestic steps in combat's rapid round,

They trod the stately brawls of Mars across the listed ground.

At every strong-delivered stroke Red Conan dealt his foe,

The Welshmen clapped applauding hands ; at every answering blow

Heard with the crush of hauberk burst, or shivering
helm, the voice

Of Erin, Ulster's host except, went up with cheerful
noise.

But, valiant swordsman though he be, the bravest,
soon or late,

Must, in his proper time, expect the even stroke of
fate :

And slower motions, and a mist of darkness round his
brow,

Warned Conan that his stately head to fate should also
bow.

When Kellach felt his force abate, and saw his sight
was gone,

He yielded back ; but darkly still blind Conan battled
on,

Till, not, indeed, like lofty elm in leafy time of
year,

But like a storm-dismantled mast, that, with its tattered
gear,

(The long-tormented keel, at last, heaved by a land-
ward swell

Against the rock), goes overboard, at Kellach's feet he
fell.

But Kellach took no trophy ; for, with dark brows
newly helmed,

Congal approached and said,

“ Although that hand hath overwhelmed
My soul with woe ; and righteous rage would justify
my spear

In piercing, shieldless, as thou art, and combat-wearied
here,

The author of so huge a grief ; yet for the sake of him
Whose clear renown no breath of thine shall e'er have
power to dim,

Go, arm thee, and have needful rest : anon, when apt
to mate

With one fresh-breathed and armed as I, return and
have thy fate."

" Congal, I swear I go not hence without my meed of
fame,"

Cried Kellach, and seized Conan's crest, to drag him.
As the flame

Bursts, at the breath of outer air, through fire-concealing
smoke,

So, forth in fiercer blaze anew the wrath of Congal broke ;
And at the chief he aimed a stroke had stretched upon
the field

War's noblest victim offered yet, but swift, with guardian
shield,

Huge Ultan Long-Hand thrust between ; and others
not a few

From Conal's and Clan-Colla's ranks to aid their cham-
pion flew.

The Ultonian warriors, hitherto regardant, as behoved
Just combatants, and clans of Hû that yet no step had
moved,

Though seeing him they chiefly loved before their faces
slain,

And all the remnant of the Franks at once burst in
amain :

Amid the concourse, Congal Claen rushed to a deadly
close

With Ultan, and o'er all the plain enormous tumult rose.

BOOK V

THE ARGUMENT.

*The Shrew; the Fool; the final overthrow.
What else remains, the verse, itself, will show.*

[Cuanna, the idiot son of Ultan-Long-Hand, armed with a bill-hook, follows in the track of the armies of Moyra. He learns that his father has fallen by the javelin of Congal, and vows revenge. He meets Congal returning from a combat with Caenfalla, and challenges him, but the hero declines the unequal conflict. Cuanna from behind gives him a mortal wound with the bill-hook, which Congal will not revenge. The idiot youth makes his way to King Domnal, and recounts his story. Congal straps his belt over the wound, and though conscious that he is dying, prepares to resist Maldun, who attacks him, strikes off his right hand, yet flees, before him. Kellach, son of Malcova, comes forth refreshed to attack Congal but seeing his disabled condition will not fight; he calls on the hero to yield. Congal swoons from loss of blood. A terrible storm of wind and hail blinds the hosts, who seem to hear in the thunder the flapping cloak of Manannan Mac Lir, and the whistle of the giant Herdsman. When the storm sweeps past Congal has disappeared. His army fly the field and are hotly pursued by the forces of King Domnal. Kellach the Halt alone remains on his seat, and seeks—in vain—to arrest the flight of the fugitives. He hears that his seven sons are slain; the youngest, however, has survived and seeks his father. Brasil comes to carry his parent from the field, but in the act of raising Kellach on his shoulders, is slain by an arrow. Kellach is carried on his chair into the presence of King Domnal and his Bishops. They exhort him to repentance and accuse him of being the author of the war. He dies a pagan; and, like King Laery—buried erect, weapons in hand, in the outer rampart on Tara—is interred, sitting upright on his brazen-chair. Congal, withdrawn, he knows not how, from the battle-field at Moyra, revives from his swoon, and finds himself in his native vale in Antrim, with Ardan by his side. The thought of the ruin he has brought on the friends who fought for him agonizes his heart, and he weeps bitter tears. A veiled nun, in whom he recognises his Lafinda, approaches from a neighbouring convent and kneels to aid him. Her unhappy brother

Sweeny, doomed to perpetual wanderings, appears in the distance ; Lafinda grows red with shame, but is assured by Ardan that he is a victim—demon driven—not a coward. As Sweeny addresses his sister, a splendid vision of Manannan Mac Lir passes before their eyes, disappears, and Sweeny also vanishes. Lafinda addresses herself to Congal : while they converse he dies. She performs for him the last offices of the dead, and re-enters the convent of St. Brigid. Ardan, left alone, prays for one ray of Heavenly light, such as had been vouchsafed to Congal. Four Seniors of the fraternity come from the convent, and raising the dead hero on a bier, bear him in. They invite the Bard to enter, and promise him safety from the vengeance of the approaching hosts. He thanks them, but elects to remain outside. They re-enter ; close the gate, “ while up the hill the hosts of Domnal came.”]

IN Ultan Long-Hand's house, that day, at pleasant
 Dunamain,
 It chanced, his Queen, Finguala, and the women of her
 train
 Were busied heating water for the bath ; and with them
 there
 Went, moping idly, Cuanna, long-handed Ultan's heir ;
 An orphan and an idiot. While as yet a little page
 He had been sent to Tara, to the King, in fosterage ;
 But, ere the second week was passed within the royal
 school,
 King Domnal's tutors finding him, or deeming him,
 a fool,
 Had sent him to Hy-Brazil back : where Cuanna whiled
 away
 His hours amongst the women. Now his stepmother,
 that day,
 Had bade him fetch fresh firewood for the heating of
 the bath ;
 And Cuanna, had idiot-like raked up from pool and path

Green birchen twigs, and oziars dank, and brambles
 clogged with mire,
 And with the smoky fuel green had well nigh quenched
 the fire.

“ Done like thee,” cried the stepmother, with angry
 bitter taunt ;

“ Done like an idiot, as thou art ! Aye, wo is me ;
 we want

Another sort of son this day, than such an one as
 thou,

Thou good-for-nothing imbecile ! Know’st not that
 even now

Thy sire and royal foster-sire on Moyra’s bloody
 plain

Are fighting for their lives, like men, ’gainst cruel Congal
 Claen ;

Are fighting for their lives and crowns, their wives and
 children dear,

Like valiant men, at Moyra, and thou stand’st idling
 here ? ”

“ Show me the way to Moyra,” Cuanna answered, all
 a-flame.

“ Small skill there needs to find it,” replied the bitter
 dame :

“ Get thee down to Neur-Kin-Troya, where the hosts
 have left their track

Plain enough for even an idiot to follow there and
 back.”

“ Bestow me arms and armour,” cried Cuanna.

“ Spear or shield

There is not left within the house since Ultan took
 the field,”

Replied the Queen : but this was false : for much she
stood in dread

Lest Cuanna's scattered sparks of sense should gather
to a head,

And all her hopes to see her own first-born assume the
sway

Be, in the elder son's return to reason, swept away.

Wherefore she sought to urge him forth with words of
taunt and scorn,

Naked, to war, that so perchance the youth might not
return.

“ Arms yet enough are left behind,” said Cuanna ;
and he strode

To where the bill-hook lay wherewith, that morning, he
had mowed

The dank soft twigs as with a scythe ; and scythe-sharp
was the blade,

And spear-keen was the iron spike the skilful smith
had made

Projecting from the burnished hook ; and javelin-long
the shaft

Of tough ash 'twixt its brazen straps.

“ Spear here,” he cried,
and laughed :

And, to the bath-house turning next, with ready art
undid

The bolts that to the cauldron-head secured the brazen
lid.

“ Shield here,” he cried, and laughed again ; and with
a leathern throng

Passed through the handle's inner eyes, in cross-lapped
bandage strong

He braced the great disk to his arm. But when the
 Queen beheld
 Young Cuanna's practice, fear and rage her jealous
 bosom swelled ;
 And, " Fool," she cried, " thou wouldst destroy the
 cauldron that thy Sire
 Bought with three hundred kine : restore the cover,
 I desire,
 Instantly to its former place."

But Cuanna laughed in scorn ;

And when the Queen laid hands on him, and would,
 herself, have torn
 The boss'd brass from his arm, with force so sudden
 Cuanna shook
 Her weak grasp off, and gave withal so terrible a look
 Of bloody meaning, that the Queen and all the maids
 and wives
 About her fled a spear-cast off in terror of their lives,
 Clapping their hands and raising loud their helpless
ulaloos,
 While Cuanna took his downward route straight for
 the Strand-End-Yews.

Arrived at Neur-Kin-Troya, all the Strand-End brown
 and vast
 Was scored with tracks where chariot-wheels and weighted
 steeds had passed,
 The hoof-prints pointing to the North : and northward,
 on the trail
 Of horse and chariot, all alone, went Cuanna up the
 vale.

On came the royal idiot on the strong track of the war,
 Till past the fords of Ornav he descried the fight afar :

And the first man he encountered on the borders of the
strife

Was Fercar Finn, his father's steward : he had escaped
with life,

But deeply wounded ; and he cried, his labouring gasps
between,

“ Good, my dear Cuanna, wherefore thou in such a
bloody scene ? ”

“ I come to slay false Congal,” the generous fool
replied ;

“ And learn to be a warrior by my royal father's
side.”

“ Alas, dear child, since long ere noon thy royal Sire
lies slain,

Pierced by a javelin, through the heart, by cruel Congal
Claen.”

“ Right soon will I revenge his death,” cried Cuanna.

“ Tell me where

“ The traitor fights.”

“ Where thickest ranks thou seest recoiling, there
Be sure, is Congal. But beware : thou canst not bear
the shock

Of battle with thy youthful frame : besides, they all
would mock

Thine arms fantastic : for who yet ere sought a battle-
field

With bill-hook for a spear, and lid of cauldron for a
shield ? ”

“ Let mock who will,” the youth replied ; “ for see ;
the tide of war

Seethes like the rising seas I've seen on Cuan Carlinne's
bar !

And all the hosts are this way driven. Now for the
first essay

In arms of Cuanna, called the Fool no longer from
to-day."

And heading onward through the press, within a little
space,

He found himself with Congal Claen confronted, face
to face.

.

"Take not my words in anger, I beseech thee, brother
mine,"

Said Congal; "well I know that strife is no concern
of thine."

And would have passed him by in scorn: but Cuanna,
as he pass'd,

Pressed hard his foot against the ground, and made a
mighty cast

Of the great bill-hook from behind: just where the
rings were laced

Whereby the brass-seamed coat of mail round Congal's
side was braced

The weapon entered: through the rings of brittle brass,
and through

The deer-skin war-shirt underneath the rugged weapon
flew,

And deep within his flank hung fixed: but, deep as
was the wound,

It did not yet suffice to bring strong Congal to the ground.

He turned, and might have slain the fool; but Congal's
heart disdained

That weapons of a warrior should with idiot blood be
stained.

He laid his glittering weapons on the green grass at
his feet,

And with both hands essayed to drag the weapon from its
seat,

But failed : a second time he tugg'd with painful sick
essay,

And failed : but at the third attempt the javelin came
away.

Then round his lacerated side he drew his glittering
belt,

Resumed his arms, and stood erect, as though he scarce
had felt

The wound that through his vitals was diffusing death
the while ;

And said,

“ It grieves me, Cuanna, that the weak hands
imbecile

Of one devoid of reason, should have dealt the fatal
blow ;

For, that it is a mortal hurt thou'st given me, well I
know :

And well I knew my death to-day at Moyra stood decreed :
Yet thought to find my destiny at other hands indeed.
Had many-battled Kellach dealt the final blow of fate,
I by a King, and like a King, had died with mind elate.
Or Crunvall, to whose royal Sire the stroke of fate I
gave,

To die by him had been to feed the vengeance of the
brave :

But thus at last to perish by thy weak, inglorious spear,
Forgive me, foolish Cuanna ; this is hard indeed to
bear.”

Nought answered Cuanna ; but caught up his weapon
 where it lay,
And towards the royal standard straight proceeded
 through the fray,
Where Domnal stood among his Chiefs and Bishops.
 Hard bested
He was to pass the thronging groups, 'mongst whom
 already spread
The rumour that a stranger youth had slain the dreaded
 King :
But, ever pressing on, at length he stood within the
 ring
Before the Monarch ; and exclaimed, in eager accents
 clear,
Laying his bill at Domnal's feet, " The blood of Congal
 here."

Then, some who saw the feat achieved, avouching it
 for truth,
The King exclaimed, " Oh glorious deed ; and thou,
 oh happy youth,
Say who thou art, and ask such boon as Domnal can
 bestow,
For this, thy realm-enfranchising and mischief-ending
 blow."

Then Cuanna from his brow and face put back the
 matted hair,
And drew his body to its height, and with a graceful
 air,
For tall and comely was the youth, and of a manly
 mould,
His simple story to the King with modest freedom
 told.

“ My name is Cuanna, eldest son of Ultan, who,
sometime,
Was King in Orior. When a child, my wicked Nurse,
whose crime
Goes still unpunished, with a doll, dressed as a goblin,
so
Scared me, that ever since I’ve lost my reason ; but
I know
Enough to know that cunning wretch, ere yet my mother
died,
Inveigled Ultan to her bed ; and now, where once
she plied
Her menial office, sits his Queen. Now, when I grew
of age
For nurture, I to thee, oh King, was sent in pupilage :
But, ere I spent the second week within your Highness’s
school,
Thy tutors, finding, or, at least, supposing, me a fool,
Returned me home ; and as a fool and idiot ever since
I’ve had their usage—used, indeed, not as an idiot prince,
But as a menial slave, by her, who longs to see me
dead,
That her own son, without dispute, might reign in
Ultan’s stead.
Wherefore, to-day, she would have urged me forth to
battle here,
Naked, pretending that the house held neither shield
nor spear,
Although in Ultan’s inner hall a hundred men might
find
Weapons and tackle competent, and still leave store
behind.

And so, with such rude substitutes as these which here
ye see

Perforce I came: and God to these has given the
victory.

And now, oh King, the boon I crave is, to be set at
large

Forthwith from Queen Finguala's thrall; and from
the shameful charge

Of women tutors; and to wear a good sword by my
side,

And have my hound to chase the deer, and have my
horse to ride.

“All that thou wouldst,” replied the King, “dear
Cuanna, shall be done.

And furthermore, I make a vow, thy wicked stepdame's
son

Shall never sit in Ultan's place: and if in Dunamain
Arms but for one be found, she wears, for life, the cap-
tive's chain.”

“'Tis good,” said Cuanna; and sat down; and
from the gravelly soil

Picking the pebbles smooth, began to toss, with patient
toil,

The little stones from hand to hand, alternate back
and palm,

Regardless of the presence round, and lapsed in childish
calm.

But Congal, conscious that his strength by slow degrees
decayed,

Resolved, while yet his arm had nerve to lift the wearying
blade,

To spend his still-remaining power in one supreme
attack,

That Ulster so with victory, though Kingless, might
go back.

Then once again the lines of fight were stretched from
wing to wing

Of Congal's battle ; and the hosts led by the vigorous
King,

For so to all their eyes he seemed, once more in dense
array

Across the corpse-encumbered mead moved to renew
the fray

An onset terrible it was : on all the fight till then
Fell not so many of the flower of Erin's youths and men.

Full on Momonia fell the brunt ; the burst Momonian
host

An arrow-flight on either hand recoiled ; and well nigh lost
For Domnal seemed the day ; when lo, forth came Aed

Bennan's son,

His bedfellow and fosterer in former days, Maldun,
And challenged Congal to the strife : thrice had he
thought before

To raise his courage to the feat ; and thrice his feet
forbore

To bear him past the sheltering ranks : but now, that
Cuanna's blow,

Through Congal's ghastly cheek, proclaimed that life
was ebbing low,

He deemed the hour at length arrived when he might
safely dare

The King's encounter : and he cried, " Turn, Congal,
and prepare

To meet a traitor's recompense. No second rumour vain
Shall now delude us, heralding the King of Ulster slain."

And therewithal he cast his spear. But Congal's
rallying look,
For all the boldness of his speech, his heart within him
shook ;
And feebly, with a wavering flight, the aimless javelin
strayed
Past Congal's shoulder. Then the King swung high
his glittering blade,
And gathering all the force that still lodged in his mighty
frame,
Struck on the helmet of Maldun ; but struck with luck-
less aim,
For, even as crest and crashing helm half yielded to
the stroke,
Short from its rivets, at the hilt, the faithless weapon
broke ;
And, high as from a tree-top, in the pairing time of
spring,
A warbling bird springs up to heaven, its lay of love to
sing,
So high above the warriors' heads leaped Congal's
flickering blade :
But the blind counter-stroke Maldun, with aimless
instinct, made,
As Congal from his crest drew back the remnant of the
brand,
Sheer from the King's extended wrist smote off the
good right hand.

Then maddened Congal would have closed ; but, at
 his aspect dread,
 Maldun, unconscious of his own achievement, turned and
 fled.

“ Aye, go thy ways,” exclaimed the King, in bitter
 scornful ire ;

“ Thou now art treading worthily the footsteps of thy
 sire.

I little thought, though well prepared to meet a warrior’s
 doom,

That ’twas from hands like *his* and thine the stroke of
 fate should come.”

With this, the Meathmen’s parting ranks to Congal’s
 gaze revealed

Kellach, new-armed, and fresh from rest, advancing
 on the field.

So from his cloud the eagle comes ; so from the leafy
 walks

Of brown Gaetulian thicket-sides the lordly lion stalks.
 Darkness came with him : all the heavens with sudden
 gloom were spread,

And gathering mists of faintness closed round Congal’s
 drooping head ;

But still he kept his wavering feet, still waved his flickering
 shield,

And said,

“ Oh Kellach, thou art late My conquest now
 can yield

Small fame ; but if Malcova’s son desire, in future
 days,

With idiot Cuanna and with *him* to share inglorious
 praise

Approach and slaughter Congal Claen, where maimed
and bare he stands,

An easy prey to butcher-swords, left by ignoble
hands ”

“ No, Congal,” generous Kellach said : “ no blood
of thine shall dim

The weapons of Malcova’s son, while armed and whole
of limb

He ; mutilated, swordless thou ; nor shall this spear
deprive

Young Cuanna of his just renown : but yield thyself
alive.”

He sank his spear half-raised to cast, and sprang to
seize the King ;

But, ere he reached him, Congal dropped ; and with
a swooping wing,

Sudden and black, the storm came down : with scourge
of hissing hail

It lashed the blinded, stumbling hosts : a shrill loud-
whistling wail

And thunderous clamors filled the sky, it seemed, with
such a sound

As though to giant herdsman’s call there barked a giant
hound

Within the cloud above their heads ; and loud rebounding
strokes

They also heard, or seemed to hear, the claps of flapping
cloaks

Within the bosom of the cloud : so deemed they ; but
anon

The storm rolled northward ; and the hosts perceived
the King was gone.

Light from the sun, and panic-dread diffusive as the
 light,
 From heaven at once together fell on Congal's line of
 fight ;
 And though they held no counsel, nor did man confer
 with man,
 Yet through the whole invading host, from wing to centre,
 ran
 The desperate simultaneous wish to turn from Domnal's
 face
 Their firm opposing bucklers, and expose him, in their
 place,
 Their shoulders and their hollow spines, exchanging
 strength and fame,
 Safety and pride, for helpless flight, destruction, death
 and shame.

Then dire was their disorder, as the wavering line at
 first
 Swayed to and fro irresolute ; then, all disrupted,
 burst
 Like waters from a broken dam effused upon the
 plain,
 The shelter of Killultagh's woods and winding glens to
 gain.

To expedite their running, in their shameful-vieing
 race,
 Helmet and shield they cast away, long lance and iron
 mace.
 Gold-sparkling swords and shirts of mail in glittering
 heaps were spread,
 Resplendent, gleaming 'mongst the heaps of wounded
 and of dead.

But, though prodigious plunder so encumbered all their
 track,
 For beaten gold nor cloth of gold would Domnal's Chiefs
 hold back
 Their eager hands from vengeance, or their feet from
 warrior-toil ;
 But, leaving slave and horse boy to collect the glittering
 spoil,
 Themseives, with leaps and spurnings amid the entangling
 throes
 Of writhing, prostrate enemies, with close, limb-severing
 blows,
 Urged on the pitiless pursuit ; the helpless flying crowd
 Consumed beneath the wasting sword as melts the
 morning cloud.

Death levels all : and where they ran, hard by the
 brink of death,
 Speed was the last distinction left ; and he whose store
 of breath
 Sufficed to bear him farthest forth, was deemed of all
 the rest,
 Richest : nor ran there there a man who, if he had pos-
 sessed
 The world and all its cattle, would have grudged to
 give the whole
 For one hour's fleetness of a deer to gain the sheltering
 goal,

 There many a haughty noble ran, of stripe and badge
 bereft ;
 Ran many a lithe-ham'd vaulter, without leap or breath-
 ing left ;

And men who, in the morning, would have rather died
than fled,

Now, even as wide-winged running birds, with labour-
ing arms outspread

And shoulders raised alternate, bounded forward like
the wind,

Eager only in their horror to leave friend and foe behind.

Of all the field Halt Kellach on his chair alone sat
still,

Where placed to view the battle on the airy, green-
sloped hill :

And, like a sea-rock that alone of all around stands fast,
Mid scudding clouds, and hurrying waves, and hoarse
tides racing past,

So sat he rooted mid the rout ; so, past his brazen chair
Was poured the heavy-rolling tide of ruin and despair :
And oft he cried to those who fled, with shrill, disdainful
call,

“ Stand fast : fear nothing : turn like men ! ” but none
gave heed at all ;

Till, Druid Drostan hurrying by, like maniac horror-
driven,

He hailed him mid the long-hair'd rout, “ Bald-head, how
fare my Seven ? ”

“ Slain all,” was all the sage replied, as labouring on he
went :

Then Kellach leaned upon his couch, and said, “ I am
content.”

Nor spoke he more till Elar Derg cried, “ Old man of
the chair,

Courage : young Brasil still survives, and seeks thee
everywhere.”

And Brasil's self, emerging from the flying throng,
appeared,

Bloody and faint, but calling out incessant as he neared,
"Ho, father, I am with thee. Courage, father ; I am
here :

Up ; mount upon my shoulders : I have strength to bear
thee clear."

And ran and knelt beside the chair, to heave him on
his back ;

But as he stopped, even through the curls that clustered
on his neck,

An arrow smote him. Kellach said, "Best so. I
thank thee, God,

"That by no son of mine the path of shame will now
be trod."

And leaned again upon his couch ; and set his hoary
head

Awaiting death, with face as fixed as if already dead.

But keen-eyed Domnal, where he stood to view the
rout, ere long

Spying that white unmoving head amid the scattering
throng,

Exclaimed, "Of all their broken host one only man I see
Not flying ; and I therefore judge him impotent to be
Of use of limb. Go : take alive," he cried, "and hither
fetch

The hoary-haired unmoving man : 'tis Kellach, hapless
wretch,

The very author of the war. There lives not on the
face

Of earth a man stands so in need of God's forgiving
grace :

And,—for he was my father's friend, and that white
helpless head

Stirs my compassion,—though my foe, I would not
see him sped

Unshrived to that accounting dread ; if yet your pious
care,

Oh, Pontiffs, may prevail to bend his stubborn heart
to prayer."

Said Bishop Erc,—the kinsman he of Erc of Slane,—
" The ban

Already has gone duly forth against the impious man :
And till the power that laid it on, that sentence shall
reverse,

He who to Kellach proffers grace, is partner in his curse."

Said Senach, " No authentic note to me has yet arrived
Of such a sentence. If he will, the Senior shall be
shrived."

" I know the man," said Ronan Finn. " A Pagan
strong : beware

Lest he repay with blasphemy your proffered call to
prayer."

While thus the Prelates ; from their side, as strong-
cast javelin, sent

From palm of long-armed warrior, a swift battalion went
And, breaking through the hindmost line, where Kellach
sat hard by,

Took him alive ; and chair and man uphoisting shoulder-
high,

They bore him back, his hoary locks and red eyes gleaming
far,

The grimmest standard yet displayed that day o'er all
the war ;

And grimly, where they set him down, he eyed the
 encircling ring
 Of Bishops and of chafing Chiefs who stood about the
 King.

Then, with his crozier's nether end turned towards
 him, Bishop Erc
 Said, "Wretch abhorred, to thee it is we owe this bloody
 work ;
 By whose malignant counsel moved, thy hapless nephew
 first
 Sought impious aid of foreigners ; for which be thou
 accurst."

And turned and left them.

Senach then approaching, mildly said,
 "No curse so strong, but in the blood for man's redemp-
 tion shed,
 May man dissolve ; and also thou, unhappy, if thou
 wilt,
 May'st purchase peace and pardon now, and every
 stain of guilt
 That soils thy soul, may'st wash away ; if but with
 heart sincere
 Thou wilt repent thee, and embrace the heavenly boon
 which here
 I offer."

"Speak him louder, Sir," said harsher Ronan
 Finn.

"Kellach, repent thy sins," he cried ; "and presently
 begin :
 For few the moments left thee now : and, ere the hour
 be past,
 Thy lot may, for eternity, in Heaven or Hell be cast."

“ Repent thy sins,” said Domnal ; “ and implore the
 Church’s grace ;
 So shall thy life be spared thee yet a little breathing-
 space.”

Then Kellach from the Bishops’ gaze withdrew his
 wavering glance,
 And, fixing his fast-glazing eyes on Domnal’s counten-
 ance,

Said, “ I am old, and mainly deaf ; and much of what
 they say

I hear not : but I tell thee this ; we’d not be here
 to-day

But for this trick of cursing ; wherein much more expert
 Are these front-shaven Druids than in any manly art.”

“ Injurious Kellach,” said the King, “ beware the
 chastening rod

The Church of Christ reserves for those who mock
 the priests of God.”

“ Of no good God are these the priests,” said Kellach ;
 “ and, for me,

I ne’er sought evil Spirit’s aid ’gainst any enemy :

But what I’ve learned in better times among my noble
 peers,

That I have practised and upheld for well-nigh four-
 score years ;

And never asked from clerk or witch, by sacrifice or
 charm,

To buy a demon’s venal help to aid my own right arm ;
 But in my house, good Poets, men expert in song and
 lay,

I’ve kept, in bounteous sort, to teach my sons the pros-
 perous way

Of open truth and manliness : for, ever since the time
When Cathbad smothered Usnach's sons in that foul
sea of slime

Raised by abominable spells at Creeveroe's bloody
gate,

Do ruin and dishonour still on priest-led Kings await.
Wherefore, by Fergus, son of Roy, ere that year pass'd
away,

Emania was left bare and black ; and so lies at this
day :

And thou in desert Tara darest not, thyself, to dwell,
Since that other bald magician, of Lorrhah, from his
bell

Shook out his maledictions on the unoffending hill."

Said Domnal, " By my valour, old man, thou doest
ill,

Comparing blessed Saints of Christ with Pagan priests
of Crom."

" Crom, or whomever else they serve," said Kellach ;
" them that come

Cursing, I curse."

Then Ronan Finn, upheaving high his bell,
Rang it, and gave the banning word ; and Kellach
therewith fell

Off his *tolg* side upon the ground, stone dead. The
Poets there,

Next night, in secret, buried him upon his brazen
chair.

Brass-armed complete for standing fight, in Cahir-
Laery's wall.

Sun-smitten Laery, rampart-tomb'd, awaits the judgment-
call,

Facing the Leinstermen ; years roll ; and Leinster is
no more

The dragon-den of hostile men it was in days of yore ;
Still, constant till the day of doom, while the great stone-
work lasts,

Laery stands listening for the trump, at whose wall-
bursting blasts

He leaps again to fire thy plain, oh Liffey, with the
glare

Of that dread golden-bordered shield : thus ever, on
his chair,

Kellach awaits from age to age, the coming of the time
Will bring the cursers and the curs'd before the Judge
sublime.

But, rapt in darkness and in swoon of anguish and
despair,

As in a whirlwind, Congal Claen seemed borne thro'
upper air ;

And, conscious only of the grief surviving at his heart,
Now deemed himself already dead, and that his death-
less part

Journeyed to judgment ; but before what God's or
demon's seat

Dared not conjecture ; though, at times, from tramp
of giant feet

And heavy flappings heard in air, around and under-
neath,

He darkly surmised who might be the messenger of
death

Who bore him doomward : but anon, laid softly on the
ground,

His mortal body with him still, and still alive he found.

Loathing the light of day he lay ; nor knew nor reck'd
he where ;
For present anguish left his mind no room for other
care ;
All his great heart to bursting filled with rage, remorse
and shame,
To think what labour come to nought, what hopes of
power and fame
Turned in a moment to contempt ; what hatred and
disgrace
Fixed thenceforth irremovably on all his name and
race ;—
Till Ardan's voice beside him rose, " Lo, Congal, we
are here,
Not, I attest all Earth and Heaven, through willing
flight or fear :
But, when from Kellach's last assault I caught thee to my
car
Fainting, a frenzy seized the steeds, and swept us from
the war ;
And all night long, with furious hoofs, and necks that
scorned control,
They've borne us northward, and have here attained
their fated goal."

Then Congal raised his drooping head, and saw with
bloodshot eyes
His native vale before him spread ; saw grassy Collin
rise
High o'er the homely Antrim hills. He groaned with
rage and shame.
" And have I fled the field," he cried ; " and shall my
hapless name

Become this byword of reproach? Rise; bear me
back again,

And lay me where I yet may lie among the valiant slain."

"The steeds," said Ardan, "'neath the yoke, behold,
lie stiff in death.

Here fate has fixed that thou and I shall draw our last
of breath;

For I am worn with weight of years, and feebly now
inhale

The vital air: and newer life from mountain and from
vale

Rises and pushes me aside. A voice that seems to
cry,

'Make way; make straight another way,' is filling earth
and sky."

A thought came into Congal's mind,—how sent let
faith divine,—

He said, "No man had ever shame or grief compared
to mine.

A fugitive against my will: in sacrilegious feud,
A proud invader, shamefully by idiot hands subdued.
But more than for myself I mourn my generous friends
deceived,

And all their wives and little ones of lord and sire
bereaved."

Tears sent from whence the thought had come,—let
faith divine their source,—

Rose at the thought to Congal's eyes, and pressed with
tender force

Unwonted passage; and he wept, with many bitter
sighs,

In sudden vision of his life and all its vanities.

As when a tempest—which, all day, with whirlwind,
 fire and hail,
 Vexing mid-air, has hid the sight of sunshine from the
 vale,—
 Towards sunset rolls its thunders up : fast as it mounts
 on high,
 A flood of placid light re-fills the lately troubled sky ;
 Shine all the full down-sliding streams, wet blades and
 quivering sprays,
 And all the grassy-sided vales with emerald lustre blaze ;
 So, in the shower of Congal's tears, his storms of passion
 pass'd ;
 So, o'er his long distempered soul came tranquil light
 at last.

Ere wonder in his calming mind had found reflection's
 aid,
 There came across the daisied lawn a veiled religious
 maid
 From wicket of a neighbouring close ; and, as she nearer
 drew,
 The peerless gesture and the grace indelible he knew.
 She, when she saw the wounded man was Congal,
 stood and prayed
 A little space, and trembled much : then came, and
 meekly said,
 “ Sir, thou art wounded ; and I come from Brigid's cell
 hard by
 To tend thy wants, if thou wilt brook a sister's charity.”
 “ And is my aspect also, then, so altered,” Congal
 cried,
 “ That thou, Lafinda, knowest me not, that shouldst
 have been my bride ? ”

“Bride now of Christ,” she answered low ; “I know thee but as one
For whom my heavenly Spouse has died.”

“And other nuptials none
Desire I for thee now,” he said ; “for nothing now
is mine,
Save the fast-fleeting breath of life I hasten to resign.”

She knelt to aid him. As she knelt, light-wafted o’er
the green,
In shadow of a passing cloud, was flying Sweeny seen.
Whom, when, at first, Lafinda knew, her cheek, so pale
but now,
And all the veil allowed to view of neck and marble brow,
Grew red with shame. But Congal said,

“Although the assembled host
Have seen him fly, yet scorn him not, nor deem thy
brother lost,
More than his Chief, who also fled.”

“The red blood on thy cheek,”
Said Ardan, “maid, mis-seems thee not. Though
vowed submiss and meek,
Thou art a royal daughter still. But deem not that
he flies,
Impelled by dread of mortal foe. The demons of the
skies,
Wielding the unseen whips of God, are they who drive
them on,
Mad, but in no disgraceful flight unworthy Colman’s
son.”

“Sister,” said Sweeny ; and he came, with light foot,
gliding nigh ;
“I come not hither as *he* comes, in sight of home to die.

My day, indeed, is distant yet : and many a wandering
 race
 Must I with wind and shower maintain ; and many
 a rainbow chase
 Across the wet-bright meads, ere I, like him, obtain
 release
 From furious fancy's urgent stings, and lay my limbs
 in peace.
 Lo, all is changed. In Brigid's cell thou, now, a close-
 shut nun,
 That wert the assemblies pride before. I with the
 clouds and sun,
 And bellowing creatures of the glade, for comrades of
 my way,
 Roam homeless ; I, that was a king of thousands yes-
 day."

"Grieve not for me," Lafinda said. "In Brigid's
 cell I find
 The calm enforcing discipline and humbleness of
 mind
 My nature needed, and yet needs. And thou, my
 brother wild,
 Take ghostly counsel ; and thou, too, may'st yet be
 reconciled
 To God and reason."

Sweeny said : "Some holy man, perchance
 May aid me ; but unless he dwell where morning
 sunbeams dance
 In spray of upland waterfalls, or tell his beads
 below
 Where, deep in murky mountain-clefts the moon-white
 waters flow,

Small chance is his and mine to meet : for there my
path must lie ;

And thither rise my feet to run o'er crags and hill-tops
high.

But not alone I course the wild. Although apart from
men,

Shapes of the air attend my steps, and have me in their
ken."

Even as he spoke, soft-rustling sounds to all their
ears were borne,

Such as warm winds at eve excite 'mongst brown-ripe
rolling corn.

All, but Lafinda, looked : but she, behind a steadfast
lid,

Kept her calm eyes from that she deemed a sight unholy,
hid.

And Congal reck'd not if the Shape that passed before
his eyes

Lived only on the inward film, or outward 'neath the
skies.

No longer soiled with stain of earth, what seemed
his mantle shone

Rich with innumerable hues refulgent, such as
one

Beholds, and thankful-hearted he, who casts abroad
his gaze

O'er some rich tillage-country-side, when mellow Autumn
days

Gild all the sheafy foodful stooks ; and broad before
him spread,—

He looking landward from the brow of some great sea-
cape's head,

Bray or Ben-Edar—sees beneath, in silent pageant
grand,
Slow fields of sunshine spread o'er fields of rich, corn-
bearing land ;
Red glebe and meadow-margin green commingling to
the view
With yellow stubble, browning woods, and upland tracts
of blue ;—
Then, sated with the pomp of fields, turns, seaward,
to the verge
Where, mingling with the murmuring wash made by
the far-down surge,
Comes up the clangorous song of birds unseen, that,
low beneath,
Poised off the rock, ply underfoot ; and, 'mid the blos-
soming heath,
And mint-sweet herb that loves the ledge rare-air'd, at
ease reclined,
Surveys the wide pale-heaving floor crisped by a curling
wind ;
With all its shifting, shadowy belts, and chasing scopes
of green,
Sun-strown, foam-freckled, sail-embossed, and blacken-
ing squalls between,
And slant, cerulean-skirted showers that with a drowsy
sound,
Heard inward, of ebullient waves, stalk all the horizon
round ;
And haply, being a citizen just 'scaped from some
disease
That long has held him sick indoors, now, in the brine-
fresh breeze,

Health-salted, bathes ; and says, the while he breathes
reviving bliss,

“ I am not good enough, oh God, nor pure enough for
this ! ”—

Such seemed its hues. His feet were set in fields of
waving grain ;

His head, above, obscured the sun : all round the leafy
plain

Blackbird and thrush piped loud acclaims : in middle
air, breast-high,

The lark shrill carolled : overhead, and halfway up
the sky,

Sailed the far eagle : from his knees, down dale and
grassy steep,

Thronged the dun, mighty upland droves, and mountain-
mottling sheep,

And by the river-margins green, and o'er the thymy meads
Before his feet, careered, at large, the slim-knee'd,
slender steeds,

It passed. Light Sweeny, as it passed, went also
from their view :

And conscious only of her task, Lafinda bent anew
At Congal's side. She bound his wounds, and asked
him, “ Has thy heart

At all repented of its sins, unhappy that thou art ? ”

“ My sins,” said Congal, “ and my deeds of strife
and bloodshed seem

No longer mine, but as the shapes and shadows of a
dream :

And I myself, as one oppressed with sleep's deceptive
shows,

Awaking only now to life, when life is at its close.”

“ Oh, grant,” she cried with tender joy, “ Thou, who
 alone canst save,
 That this awaking be to light and life beyond the grave ! ”
 ’Twas then the long-corroded links of life’s mysterious
 chain
 Snapped softly ; and his mortal change passed upon
 Congal Claen.

As sank the limbs relaxed in death, from Brigid’s
 neighbouring cell,
 With clang importunate began the Sisters’ morning bell.
 She closed the eyes ; the straightened limbs in comely
 posture laid ;
 And, going with submissive steps, the call to prayer
 obeyed.

Then Ardan spread his hands to heaven, and said,
 “ I stand alone,
 Last wreck remaining of a Power and Order over-thrown,
 Much needing solace : and, ah me, not in the empty
 lore
 Of Bard or Druid does my soul find peace or comfort
 more ;
 Nor in the bells or crooked staves or sacrificial shows
 Find I the help my soul desires, or in the chaunts of
 those
 Who claim our Druids’ vacant place. Alone and faint,
 I crave,
 Oh God, one ray of Heavenly light to help me to the
 grave,
 Such even as thou, dead Congal, hadst ; that so, these
 eyes of mine
 May look their last on earth and heaven with calmness
 such as thine.”

The wicket opened once again, and forth came Seniors
four,
Who, raising Congal on a bier, the royal body bore
Into the consecrated close. While yet half open lay
The wicket-gate, the distant sounds of tumult and
affray
Came on the breeze.

“Old man,” said one; “approaching foes begin
To fill the vale with death. If thou wouldst save thy
life, come in.”

“Servants of Brigid,” Ardan said. “To God be
thankful praise,
Who turns the hearts of men like you towards me in
tender ways :
Yet, since my King has found the peace I seek to share,
outside
Your Saint’s enclosure, here will I the will of Heaven
abide.”

“On his own head, Lord, not on ours,” they said,
“let lie the blame.”
And closed the gate; while up the hill the hosts of
Domnal came

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 A large oil painting by Miss Purser, 1886. The property of the Royal
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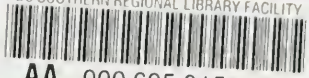
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