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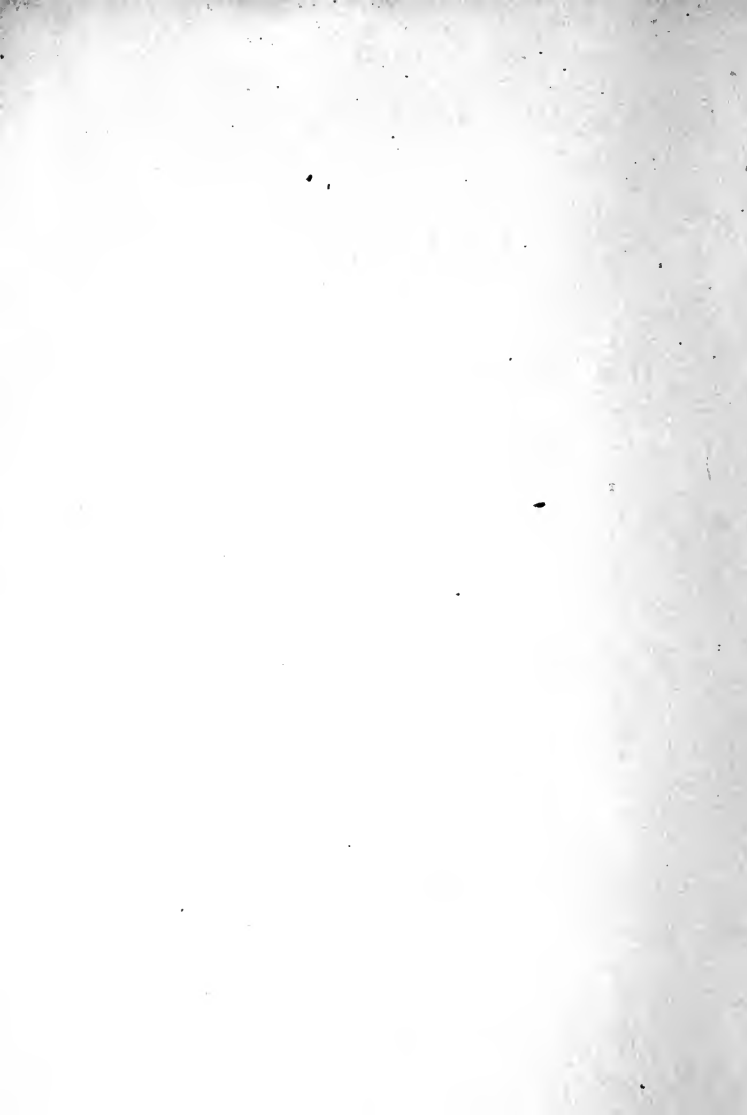
COLLECTION
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TAUCHNITZ EDITION

VOL. 4384

A SELECTION FROM THE POETRY
OF
W. B. YEATS

IN ONE VOLUME

*W. B. Yeats
Poetry*



A
SELECTION FROM THE POETRY
OF
W. B. YEATS

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LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1913



PREFACE.

THE plays in this volume of selections that I have made for Baron Tauchnitz, are part of the repertory of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the exception of "The Countess Cathleen" are printed as they are played. I have left an end to "The Countess Cathleen" that is not played, because the new end, as given in the notes, was not made for dramatic or poetic reasons, but to suit audiences that, even in Dublin, know little of Irish mythology. The rest of the play, which differs from any published version, is as it has been shaped after many rehearsals and performances. I have spent so much of my time in the theatre, that what gives me displeasure there, gives me displeasure when in print, seeming as though it were something unshapely in a woman's body. It seems to me that what plays best before a worthy

audience, will read best, and with this conviction, which may be but a false light of the theatre, I have left out passages that used to please me.

If I had but music enough to make settings that had but enough music to adorn the words yet leave them natural and audible, I should have written lyrics to be sung, for it is speaking or singing before an audience that makes us tell our stories well, and put our thoughts into some lasting order and set our emotions clambering to some arduous climax, but as it is, lacking music but that of words I have chosen the lyrics not out of singers' mouths but from little books published at Stratford-on-Avon, or in London, or by my sisters at the hand-press worked by the village of Dundrum, in Ireland.

W. B. YEATS.

OCTOBER, 1912.

CONTENTS.

EARLY POEMS (1885-1892).	Page
To Ireland in the Coming Times	13
The Lake Isle of Innisfree	15
The Meditation of the Old Fisherman	16
Down by the Salley Gardens	17
To an Isle in the Water	17
The Fiddler of Dooney	18
The Song of the Old Mother	19
The Man who dreamed of Faeryland	20
The Rose of the World	22
The Rose of Peace	23
The Rose of Battle	24
The Two Trees	25
The White Birds	27
THE WANDERINGS OF USHEEN (1889).	
Book III.	29

	Page
THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN (1892-1912)	47
LYRICS (1892-1899).	
The Hosting of the Sidhe	111
The Everlasting Voices	112
The Moods	112
The Lover tells of the Rose in His Heart	113
Into the Twilight	114
The Song of Wandering Aengus	115
The Heart of the Woman	116
He mourns for the Change that has come upon him and his Beloved and longs for the End of the World	116
He bids his Beloved be at Peace	117
He reproves the Curlew	118
He remembers forgotten Beauty	118
He gives his Beloved certain Rhymes	119
To my Heart, bidding it have no Fear	120
The Cap and Bells	120
The Valley of the Black Pig	122
The Lover asks Forgiveness because of his many Moods	122
He tells of the Perfect Beauty	123
He hears the Cry of the Sedge	124
The Travail of Passion	124
The Lover pleads with his Friend for Old Friends	125
He wishes his Beloved were dead	125
He wishes for the Cloths of Heaven	126

	Page
THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE	127
BAILE AND AILLINN (1902)	135
LYRICS (1899-1904).	
The Folly of being comforted	147
Old Memory	147
Never give all the Heart	148
The Withering of the Boughs	149
The Ragged Wood	150
Under the Moon	151
Adam's Curse	152
Red Hanrahan's Song about Ireland	154
The Old Men admiring themselves in the Water	155
The Happy Townland	155
ON BAILE'S STRAND (1904)	159
DEIRDRE (1906)	201
LYRICS (1904-1912).	
His Dream	245
A Woman Homer sung	246
That the Night come	247
Friends	247
No Second Troy	248
Reconciliation	249
King and no King	249
Against Unworthy Praise	250

	Page
The Cold Heaven	251
Fallen Majesty	251
To a Child dancing in the Wind	252
These are the Clouds	252
At Galway Races	253
The Mountain Tomb	254
NOTES	255

EARLY POEMS.

(1885-1892)



TO IRELAND IN THE COMING TIMES.

*KNOW, that I would accounted be
True brother of that company,
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,
Ballad and story, rann and song;
Nor be I any less of them,
Because the red-rose-bordered hem
Of her, whose history began
Before God made the angelic clan,
Trails all about the written page;
For in the world's first blossoming age
The light fall of her flying feet
Made Ireland's heart begin to beat;
And still the starry candles flare
To help her light foot here and there;
And still the thoughts of Ireland brood
Upon her holy quietude.
Nor may I less be counted one
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,
Because to him, who ponders well,
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell
Of the dim wisdoms old and deep,
That God gives unto man in sleep.*

*For the elemental beings go
About my table to and fro.
In flood and fire and clay and wind,
They huddle from man's pondering mind;
Yet he who treads in austere ways
May surely meet their ancient gaze.
Man ever journeys on with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.
Ah, faeries, dancing under the moon,
A Druid land, a Druid tune!*

*While still I may, I write for you
The love I lived, the dream I knew.
From our birthday, until we die,
Is but the winking of an eye;
And we, our singing and our love,
The mariners of night above,
And all the wizard things that go
About my table to and fro,
Are passing on to where may be,
In truth's consuming ecstasy
No place for love and dream at all;
For God goes by with white foot-fall.
I cast my heart into my rhymes,
That you, in the dim coming times,
May know how my heart went with them
After the red-rose-bordered hem.*

THE LAKE ISLE OF INNISFREE.

I WILL arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey
bee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes
dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the
cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

THE MEDITATION OF THE OLD FISHERMAN.

You waves, though you dance by my feet like children
at play,
Though you glow and you glance, though you purr and
you dart;
In the Junes that were warmer than these are, the waves
were more gay,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

The herring are not in the tides as they were of old;
My sorrow! for many a creak gave the creel in the cart
That carried the take to Sligo town to be sold,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

And ah, you proud maiden, you are not so fair when
his oar
Is heard on the water, as they were, the proud and
apart,
Who paced in the eve by the nets on the pebbly shore,
When I was a boy with never a crack in my heart.

DOWN BY THE SALLEY GARDENS.

Down by the salley gardens my love and I did meet;
She passed the salley gardens with little snow-white feet.
She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the
tree;

But I, being young and foolish, with her would not
agree.

In a field by the river my love and I did stand,
And on my leaning shoulder she laid her snow-white
hand.

She bid me take life easy, as the grass grows on the
weirs;

But I was young and foolish, and now am full of tears.

TO AN ISLE IN THE WATER.

SHY one, shy one,
Shy one of my heart,
She moves in the firelight
Pensively apart.

She carries in the dishes,
And lays them in a row.
To an isle in the water
With her would I go.

She carries in the candles,
And lights the curtained room,
Shy in the doorway
And shy in the gloom;

And shy as a rabbit,
Helpful and shy.
To an isle in the water
With her would I fly.

THE FIDDLER OF DOONEY.

WHEN I play on my fiddle in Dooney,
Folk dance like a wave of the sea;
My cousin is priest in Kilvarnet,
My brother in Moharabuiee.

I passed my brother and cousin:
They read in their books of prayer;
I read in my book of songs
I bought at the Sligo fair.

When we come at the end of time,
To Peter sitting in state,
He will smile on the three old spirits,
But call me first through the gate;

For the good are always the merry,
Save by an evil chance,
And the merry love the fiddle
And the merry love to dance:

And when the folk there spy me,
They will all come up to me,
With "Here is the fiddler of Dooney!"
And dance like a wave of the sea.

THE SONG OF THE OLD MOTHER.

I RISE in the dawn, and I kneel and blow
Till the seed of the fire flicker and glow;
And then I must scrub and bake and sweep
Till stars are beginning to blink and peep;
And the young lie long and dream in their bed
Of the matching of ribbons for bosom and head,
And their day goes over in idleness,
And they sigh if the wind but lift a tress:
While I must work because I am old,
And the seed of the fire gets feeble and cold.

THE MAN WHO DREAMED OF FAERYLAND.

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

He wandered by the sands of Lisadill;
His mind ran all on money cares and fears,
And he had known at last some prudent years
Before they heaped his grave under the hill;
But while he passed before a plashy place,
A lug-worm with its grey and muddy mouth
Sang how somewhere to north or west or south
There dwelt a gay, exulting, gentle race;

And how beneath those three times blessed skies
A Danaan fruitage makes a shower of moons,
And as it falls awakens leafy tunes:
And at that singing he was no more wise.

He mused beside the well of Scanavin,
He mused upon his mockers: without fail
His sudden vengeance were a country tale,
Now that deep earth has drunk his body in;
But one small knot-grass growing by the pool
Told where, ah, little, all-unneeded voice!
Old Silence bids a lonely folk rejoice,
And chaplet their calm brows with leafage cool,
And how, when fades the sea-strewn rose of day,
A gentle feeling wraps them like a fleece,
And all their trouble dies into its peace:
The tale drove his fine angry mood away.

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

THE ROSE OF THE WORLD.

WHO dreamed that beauty passes like a dream?
For these red lips, with all their mournful pride,
Mournful that no new wonder may betide,
Troy passed away in one high funeral gleam,
And Usna's children died.

We and the labouring world are passing by:
Amid men's souls, that waver and give place,
Like the pale waters in their wintry race,
Under the passing stars, foam of the sky,
Lives on this lonely face.

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

THE ROSE OF PEACE.

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

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

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

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

THE ROSE OF BATTLE.

ROSE of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
The tall thought-woven sails, that flap unfurled
Above the tide of hours, trouble the air,
And God's bell buoyed to be the water's care;
While hushed from fear, or loud with hope, a band
With blown, spray-dabbled hair gather at hand.
Turn if you may from battles never done,
I call, as they go by me one by one,
Danger no refuge holds, and war no peace,
For him who hears love sing and never cease,
Beside her clean-swept hearth, her quiet shade:
But gather all for whom no love hath made
A woven silence, or but came to cast
A song into the air, and singing past
To smile on the pale dawn; and gather you
Who have sought more than is in rain or dew
Or in the sun and moon, or on the earth,
Or sighs amid the wandering, starry mirth,
Or comes in laughter from the sea's sad lips;
And wage God's battles in the long grey ships.
The sad, the lonely, the insatiable,
To these Old Night shall all her mystery tell;

*God's bell has claimed them by the little cry
Of their sad hearts, that may not live nor die.*

Rose of all Roses, Rose of all the World!
You, too, have come where the dim tides are hurled
Upon the wharves of sorrow, and heard ring
The bell that calls us on; the sweet far thing.
Beauty grown sad with its eternity
Made you of us, and of the dim grey sea.
Our long ships loose thought-woven sails and wait,
For God has bid them share an equal fate;
And when at last defeated in His wars,
They have gone down under the same white stars,
We shall no longer hear the little cry
Of our sad hearts, that may not live nor die.

THE TWO TREES.

BELOVED, gaze in thine own heart,
The holy tree is growing there;
From joy the holy branches start,
And all the trembling flowers they bear.
The changing colours of its fruit
Have dowered the stars with merry light;
The surety of its hidden root
Has planted quiet in the night;
The shaking of its leafy head
Has given the waves their melody,
And made my lips and music wed,
Murmuring a wizard song for thee.

There, through bewildered branches, go
Winged Loves borne on in gentle strife,
Tossing and tossing to and fro
The flaming circle of our life.
When looking on their shaken hair,
And dreaming how they dance and dart,
Thine eyes grow full of tender care:
Beloved, gaze in thine own heart.

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

THE WHITE BIRDS.

I WOULD that we were, my beloved, white birds on the
foam of the sea!
We tire of the flame of the meteor, before it can fade
and flee;
And the flame of the blue star of twilight, hung low on
the rim of the sky,
Has awaked in our hearts, my beloved, a sadness that
may not die.

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

I am haunted by numberless islands, and many a Danaan
shore,
Where Time would surely forget us, and Sorrow come
near us no more;

Soon far from the rose and the lily, and fret of the
flames would we be,
Were we only white birds, my beloved, buoyed out on
the foam of the sea!

THE WANDERINGS OF USHEEN.

BOOK III.

(1889)



BOOK III.

FLED foam underneath us, and around us, a wandering
and milky smoke,
High as the saddle girth, covering away from our glances
the tide;
And those that fled, and that followed, from the foam-
pale distance broke;
The immortal desire of immortals we saw in their faces,
and sighed.

I mused on the chase with the Fenians, and Bran,
Sgeolan, Lomair,
And never a song sang Niam, and over my finger-tips
Came now the sliding of tears and sweeping of mist
cold hair,
And now the warmth of sighs, and after the quiver
of lips.

Were we days long or hours long in riding, when rolled
in a grisly peace,
An isle lay level before us, with dripping hazel and
oak?
And we stood on a sea's edge we saw not; for whiter
than new-washed fleece
Fled foam underneath us, and round us, a wandering
and milky smoke.

And we rode on the plains of the sea's edge; the sea's
edge barren and grey,
Grey sand on the green of the grasses and over the
dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would
hasten away
Like an army of old men longing for rest from the
moan of the seas.

But the trees grew taller and closer, immense in their
wrinkling bark;
Dropping; a murmurous dropping; old silence and that
one sound;
For no live creatures lived there, no weasels moved in
the dark:
Long sighs arose in our spirits, beneath us bubbled
the ground.

And the ears of the horse went sinking away in the
hollow night,
For, as drift from a sailor slow drowning the gleams of
the world and the sun,
Ceased on our hands and our faces, on hazel and oak
leaf, the light,
And the stars were blotted above us, and the whole of
the world was one.

Till the horse gave a whinny; for, cumbrous with stems
of the hazel and oak,
A valley flowed down from his hoofs, and there in the
long grass lay,

Under the starlight and shadow, a monstrous slumbering folk,
Their naked and gleaming bodies poured out and heaped
in the way.

And by them were arrow and war-axe, arrow and shield
and blade;
And dew-blanch'd horns, in whose hollow a child of
three years old
Could sleep on a couch of rushes, and all inwrought
and inlaid,
And more comely than man can make them with bronze
and silver and gold.

And each of the huge white creatures was huger than
fourscore men;
The tops of their ears were feathered, their hands were
the claws of birds,
And, shaking the plumes of the grasses and the leaves
of the mural glen,
The breathing came from those bodies, long-warless,
grown whiter than curds.

The wood was so spacious above them, that He who
had stars for His flocks
Could fondle the leaves with His fingers, nor go from
His dew-cumbered skies;
So long were they sleeping, the owls had builded their
nests in their locks,
Filling the fibrous dimness with long generations of eyes.

And over the limbs and the valley the slow owls wandered
and came,

Now in a place of star-fire, and now in a shadow
place wide;
And the chief of the huge white creatures, his knees in
the soft star-flame,
Lay loose in a place of shadow: we drew the reins by
his side.

Golden the nails of his bird-claws, flung loosely along
the dim ground;
In one was a branch soft-shining, with bells more many
than sighs
In midst of an old man's bosom; owls ruffling and pac-
ing around,
Sidled their bodies against him, filling the shade with
their eyes.

And my gaze was thronged with the sleepers; no, not
since the world began,
In realms where the handsome are many, nor in
glamours by demons flung,
Have faces alive with such beauty been known to the
salt eye of man,
Yet weary with passions that faded when the seven-fold
seas were young.

And I gazed on the bell-branch, sleep's forebear, far
sung by the Sennachies.
I saw how those slumberers, grown weary, there camp-
ing in grasses deep,
Of wars with the wide world and pacing the shores of
the wandering seas,

Laid hands on the bell-branch and swayed it, and fed
of unhuman sleep.

Snatching the horn of Niam, I blew a lingering note;
Came sound from those monstrous sleepers, a sound
like the stirring of flies.

He, shaking the fold of his lips, and heaving the pillar
of his throat,
Watched me with mournful wonder out of the wells of
his eyes.

I cried, "Come out of the shadow, king of the nails of
gold!

"And tell of your goodly household and the goodly
works of your hands,

"That we may muse in the starlight and talk of the
battles of old;

"Your questioner, Usheen, is worthy, he comes from the
Fenian lands."

Half open his eyes were, and held me, dull with the
smoke of their dreams;

His lips moved slowly in answer, no answer out of them
came;

Then he swayed in his fingers the bell-branch, slow
dropping a sound in faint streams

Softer than snow-flakes in April and piercing the marrow
like flame.

Wrapt in the wave of that music, with weariness more
than of earth,

The moil of my centuries filled me; and gone like a
sea-covered stone

Were the memories of the whole of my sorrow and the
memories of the whole of my mirth,
And a softness came from the starlight and filled me
full to the bone.

In the roots of the grasses, the sorrels, I laid my body
as low;
And the pearl-pale Niam lay by me, her brow on the
midst of my breast;
And the horse was gone in the distance, and years after
years 'gan flow;
Square leaves of the ivy moved over us, binding us
down to our rest.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I
forgot;
How the fetlocks drip blood in the battle, when the
fallen on fallen lie rolled;
How the falconer follows the falcon in the weeds of the
heron's plot,
And the names of the demons whose hammers made
armour for Conhor of old.

And, man of the many white croziers, a century there I
forgot;
That the spear-shaft is made out of ashwood, the shield
out of ozier and hide;
How the hammers spring on the anvil, on the spear-
head's burning spot;
How the slow, blue-eyed oxen of Finn low sadly at
evening tide.

But in dreams, mild man of the croziers, driving the
dust with their throngs,
Moved round me, of seamen or landsmen, all who are
winter tales;
Came by me the kings of the Red Branch, with roaring
of laughter and songs,
Or moved as they moved once, love-making or piercing
the tempest with sails.

Came Blanid, Mac Nessa, tall Fergus who feastward of
old time slunk,
Cook Barach, the traitor; and warward, the spittle on
his beard never dry,
Dark Balor, as old as a forest, car borne, his mighty
head sunk
Helpless, men lifting the lids of his weary and death-
making eye.

And by me, in soft red raiment, the Fenians moved in
loud streams,
And Grania, walking and smiling, sewed with her needle
of bone,
So lived I and lived not, so wrought I and wrought not,
with creatures of dreams,
In a long iron sleep, as a fish in the water goes dumb
as a stone.

At times our slumber was lightened. When the sun
was on silver or gold;
When brushed with the wings of the owls, in the dim-
ness they love going by;

When a glow-worm was green on a grass leaf, lured
from his lair in the mould;
Half wakening, we lifted our eyelids, and gazed on the
grass with a sigh.

So watched I when, man of the croziers, at the heel of
a century fell,
Weak, in the midst of the meadow, from his miles in
the midst of the air,
A starling like them that forgathered 'neath a moon
waking white as a shell,
When the Fenians made foray at morning with Bran,
Sgeolan, Lomair.

I awoke: the strange horse without summons out of the
distance ran,
Thrusting his nose to my shoulder; he knew in his
bosom deep
That once more moved in my bosom the ancient sad-
ness of man,
And that I would leave the immortals, their dimness,
their dews dropping sleep.

O, had you seen beautiful Niam grow white as the
waters are white,
Lord of the croziers, you even had lifted your hands
and wept:
But, the bird in my fingers, I mounted, remembering
alone that delight
Of twilight and slumber were gone, and that hoofs
impatiently stopt.

I cried, "O Niam! O white one! if only a twelve-
hour day,

"I must gaze on the beard of Finn, and move where
the old men and young

"In the Fenians' dwellings of wattle lean on the
chessboards and play,

"Ah, sweet to me now were even bald Conan's
slanderous tongue!

"Like me were some galley forsaken far off in Meridian
isle.

"Remembering its long-oared companions, sails turning
to thread-bare rags;

"No more to crawl on the seas with long oars mile
after mile,

"But to be amid shooting of flies and flowering of
rushes and flags."

Their motionless eyeballs of spirits grown mild with
mysterious thought

Watched her those seamless faces from the valley's
glimmering girth;

As she murmured, "O wandering Usheen, the strength
of the bell-branch is naught,

"For there moves alive in your fingers the fluttering
sadness of earth.

"Then go through the lands in the saddle and see
what the mortals do,

"And softly come to your Niam over the tops of the
tide;

“But weep for your Niam, O Usheen, weep; for if only
your shoe

“Brush lightly as haymouse earth’s pebbles, you will
come no more to my side.

“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to
your rest?”

I saw from a distant saddle; from the earth she made
her moan;

“I would die like a small withered leaf in the autumn,
for breast unto breast

“We shall mingle no more, nor our gazes empty their
sweetness lone

“In the isles of the farthest seas where only the spirits
come.

“Were the winds less soft than the breath of a pigeon
who sleeps on her nest,

“Nor lost in the star-fires and odours the sound of the
sea’s vague drum?

“O flaming lion of the world, O when will you turn to
your rest?”

The wailing grew distant; I rode by the woods of the
wrinkling bark,

Where ever is murmurous dropping, old silence and
that one sound;

For no live creatures live there, no weasels move in the
dark;

In a reverie forgetful of all things, over the bubbling
ground.

And I rode by the plains of the sea's edge, where all
is barren and grey,
Grey sands on the green of the grasses and over the
dripping trees,
Dripping and doubling landward, as though they would
hasten away,
Like an army of old men lounging for rest from the
moan of the seas.

And the winds made the sands on the sea's edge
turning and turning go,
As my mind made the names of the Fenians. Far
from the hazel and oak,
I rode away on the surges, where, high as the saddle
bow,
Fled foam underneath me, and round me, a wandering
and milky smoke.

Long fled the foam-flakes around me, the winds fled
out of the vast,
Snatching the bird in secret; nor knew I, embosomed
apart,
When they froze the cloth on my body like armour
riveted fast,
For Remembrance, lifting her leanness, keened in the
gates of my heart.

Till fattening the winds of the morning, an odour of
new-mown hay
Came, and my forehead fell low, and my tears like
berries fell down;

Later a sound came, half lost in the sound of a shore
far away,
From the great grass-barnacle calling, and later the
shore-weeds brown.

If I were as I once was, the strong hoofs crushing the
sand and the shells,
Coming out of the sea as the dawn comes, a chaunt of
love on my lips,
Not coughing, my head on my knees, and praying, and
wroth with the bells,
I would leave no saint's head on his body from Rachlin
to Bera of ships.

Making way from the kindling surges, I rode on a
bridle-path
Much wondering to see upon all hands, of wattles and
woodwork made,
Your bell-mounted churches, and guardless the sacred
cairn and the rath,
And a small and a feeble populace stooping with
mattock and spade.

Or weeding or ploughing with faces a-shining with
much-toil wet;
While in this place and that place, with bodies un-
glorious, their chieftains stood,
Awaiting in patience the straw-death, croziered one,
caught in your net:
Went the laughter of scorn from my mouth like the
roaring of wind in a wood.

And because I went by them so huge and so speedy
with eyes so bright,

Came after the hard gaze of youth, or an old man
lifted his head:

And I rode and I rode, and I cried out, "The Fenians
hunt wolves in the night,

"So sleep thee by daytime." A voice cried, "The
Fenians a long time are dead."

A whitebeard stood hushed on the pathway, the flesh
of his face as dried grass,

And in folds round his eyes and his mouth, he sad as
a child without milk;

And the dreams of the islands were gone, and I knew
how men sorrow and pass,

And their hound, and their horse, and their love, and
their eyes that glimmer like silk.

And wrapping my face in my hair, I murmured, "In old
age they ceased";

And my tears were larger than berries, and I murmured,
"Where white clouds lie spread

"On Crevroe or broad Knockfein, with many of old
they feast

"On the floors of the gods." He cried, "No, the gods
a long time are dead."

And lonely and longing for Niam, I shivered and turned
me about,

The heart in me longing to leap like a grasshopper
into her heart;

I turned and rode to the westward, and followed the
sea's old shout
Till I saw where Maeve lies sleeping till starlight and
midnight part.

And there at the foot of the mountain, two carried a
sack full of sand,
They bore it with staggering and sweating, but fell with
their burden at length:
Leaning down from the gem-studded saddle, I flung it
five yards with my hand,
With a sob for men waxing so weakly, a sob for the
Fenian's old strength.

The rest you have heard of, O crozied one; how, when
divided the girth,
I fell on the path, and the horse went away like a
summer fly;
And my years three hundred fell on me, and I rose, and
walked on the earth,
A creeping old man, full of sleep, with the spittle on
his beard never dry.

How the men of the sand-sack showed me a church
with its belfry in air;
Sorry place, where for swing of the war-axe in my dim
eyes the crozier gleams;
What place have Caolte and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan,
Lomair?
Speak, you too are old with your memories, an old man
surrounded with dreams.

S. PATRIC.

Where the flesh of the footsole clingeth on the burning
stones is their place;
Where the demons whip them with wires on the burning
stones of wide hell,
Watching the blessed ones move far off, and the smile
on God's face,
Between them a gateway of brass, and the howl of the
angels who fell.

USHEEN.

Put the staff in my hands; for I go to the Fenians, O
cleric, to chaunt
The war-songs that roused them of old; they will rise,
making clouds with their breath
Innumerable, singing, exultant; the clay underneath
them shall pant,
And demons be broken in pieces, and trampled beneath
them in death.
And demons afraid in their darkness; deep horror of
eyes and of wings,
Afraid their ears on the earth laid, shall listen and rise
up and weep;
Hearing the shaking of shields and the quiver of
stretched bowstrings,
Hearing hell loud with a murmur, as shouting and
mocking we sweep.
We will tear out the flaming stones, and batter the
gateway of brass
And enter, and none sayeth "No" when there enters
the strongly armed guest;

Make clean as a broom cleans, and march on as oxen
move over young grass;
Then feast, making converse of wars, and of old wounds,
and turn to our rest.

S. PATRIC.

On the flaming stones, without refuge, the limbs of the
Fenians are tost;
None war on the masters of Hell, who could break up
the world in their rage;
But kneel and wear out the flags and pray for your
soul that is lost
Through the demon love of its youth and its godless
and passionate age.

USHEEN.

Ah, me! to be shaken with coughing and broken with
old age and pain,
Without laughter, a show unto children, alone with
remembrance and fear;
All emptied of purple hours as a beggar's cloak in the
rain,
As a hay-cock out on the flood, or a wolf sucked under
a weir.

It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man I
loved of old there;
I throw down the chain of small stones! when life in
my body has ceased,
I will go to Caoite, and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan,
Lomair,
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in
flames or at feast.

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN.

(1892-1912)

“The sorrowful are dumb for thee”

Lament of Morion Shehane for Miss Mary Bourke.

TO
MAUD GONNE.

SHEMUS RUA, *a Peasant.*

MARY, *his Wife.*

TEIG, *his Son.*

ALEEL, *a Poet.*

THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN.

OONA, *her Foster Mother.*

Two Demons disguised as Merchants, Peasants, Servants, Angelical
Beings, Spirits.

The Scene is laid in Ireland and in old times.

SCENE I.

SCENE.—*A room with lighted fire, and a door into the open air at one side, and there may be a window at back through which one sees, the trees of a wood, and these trees should be painted in flat colour upon a gold or diapered sky. The walls are of one colour. The scene should have the effect of missal painting.*
MARY, *a woman of forty years or so, is grinding a quern.*

MARY.

What can have made the grey hen flutter so?

TEIG, *a boy of fourteen, is coming in with turf, which he lays beside the hearth.*

TEIG.

They say that now the land is famine struck
The graves are walking.

MARY.

There is something that the hen hears.

TEIG.

And that is not the worst; at Tubber-vanach
A woman met a man with ears spread out,
And they moved up and down like a bat's wing.

MARY.

What can have kept your father all this while?

TEIG.

Two nights ago, at Carrick-orus churchyard,
A herdsman met a man who had no mouth,
Nor eyes, nor ears; his face a wall of flesh;
He saw him plainly by the light of the moon.

MARY.

Look out, and tell me if your father's coming.

TEIG goes to door.

TEIG.

Mother!

MARY.

What is it?

TEIG.

In the bush beyond,
There are two birds—if you can call them birds—
I could not see them rightly for the leaves.
But they've the shape and colour of horned owls
And I'm half certain they've a human face.

MARY.

Mother of God, defend us!

TEIG.

They're looking at me.
What is the good of praying? father says.
God and the Mother of God have dropped asleep.
What do they care, he says, though the whole land
Squeal like a rabbit under a weasel's tooth?

MARY.

You'll bring misfortune with your blasphemies
Upon your father, or yourself, or me.

I would to God he were home—ah, there he is.

[SHEMUS *comes in.*

What was it kept you in the wood? You know

I cannot get all sorts of accidents

Out of my mind till you are home again.

SHEMUS.

I'm in no mood to listen to your clatter.

Although I tramped the woods for half a day,

I've taken nothing, for the very rats,

Badgers, and hedgehogs seem to have died of drought,

And there was scarce a wind in the parched leaves.

TEIG.

Then you have brought no dinner.

SHEMUS.

After that

I sat among the beggars at the cross-roads,

And held a hollow hand among the others.

MARY.

What, did you beg?

SHEMUS.

I had no chance to beg,

For when the beggars saw me they cried out

They would not have another share their alms,

And hunted me away with sticks and stones.

TEIG.

You said that you would bring us food or money.

SHEMUS.

What's in the house?

TEIG.

A bit of mouldy bread.

MARY.

There's flour enough to make another loaf.

TEIG.

And when that's gone?

MARY.

There is the hen in the coop.

SHEMUS.

My curse upon the beggars, my curse upon them!

TEIG.

And the last penny gone.

SHEMUS.

When the hen's gone,
What can we do but live on sorrel and dock,
And dandelion, till our mouths are green?

MARY.

God, that to this hour's found bit and sup,
Will cater for us still.

SHEMUS.

His kitchen's bare.
There were five doors that I looked through this day
And saw the dead and not a soul to wake them.

MARY.

Maybe He'd have us die because He knows,
When the ear is stopped and when the eye is stopped,
That every wicked sight is hid from the eye,
And all fool talk from the ear.

SHEMUS.

Who's passing there?
And mocking us with music?

A stringed instrument without.

TEIG.

A young man plays it,
There's an old woman and a lady with him.

SHEMUS.

What is the trouble of the poor to her?
Nothing at all or a harsh radishy sauce
For the day's meat.

MARY.

God's pity on the rich.
Had we been through as many doors, and seen
The dishes standing on the polished wood
In the wax candle light, we'd be as hard,
And there's the needle's eye at the end of all.

SHEMUS.

My curse upon the rich.

TEIG.

They're coming here.

SHEMUS.

Then down upon that stool, down quick, I say,
And call up a whey face and a whining voice,
And let your head be bowed upon your knees.

MARY.

Had I but time to put the place to rights.

CATHLEEN, OONA, and ALEEL *enter.*

CATHLEEN.

God save all here. There is a certain house,
An old grey castle with a kitchen-garden,
A cider orchard and a plot for flowers,
Somewhere among these woods.

MARY.

We know it, lady.
A place that's set among impassable walls
As though world's trouble could not find it out.

CATHLEEN.

It may be that we are that trouble, for we—
Although we've wandered in the wood this hour—
Have lost it too, yet I should know my way,
For I lived all my childhood in that house.

MARY.

Then you are Countess Cathleen?

CATHLEEN.

And this woman,
Oona, my nurse, should have remembered it,
For we were happy for a long time there.

OONA.

The paths are overgrown with thickets now,
Or else some change has come upon my sight.

CATHLEEN.

And this young man, that should have known the
woods—
Because we met him on their border but now,
Wandering and singing like a wave of the sea—
Is so wrapped up in dreams of terrors to come
That he can give no help.

MARY.

You have still some way,
But I can put you on the trodden path
Your servants take when they are marketing.
But first sit down and rest yourself awhile,

For my old fathers served your fathers, lady,
 Longer than books can tell—and it were strange
 If you and yours should not be welcome here.

CATHLEEN.

And it were stranger still were I ungrateful
 For such kind welcome—but I must be gone,
 For the night's gathering in.

SHEMUS.

It is a long while
 Since I've set eyes on bread or on what buys it.

CATHLEEN.

So you are starving even in this wood,
 Where I had thought I would find nothing changed.
 But that's a dream, for the old worm o' the world
 Can eat its way into what place it pleases.

She gives money.

TEIG.

Beautiful lady, give me something too;
 I fell but now, being weak with hunger and thirst,
 And lay upon the threshold like a log.

CATHLEEN.

I gave for all and that was all I had.
 Look, my purse is empty. I have passed
 By starving men and women all this day,
 And they have had the rest; but take the purse,
 The silver clasps on't may be worth a trifle.
 But if you'll come to-morrow to my house
 You shall have twice the sum. [ALEEL begins to play.

SHEMUS (*muttering*).

What, music, music!

CATHLEEN.

Ah, do not blame the finger on the string;
The doctors bid me fly the unlucky times
And find distraction for my thoughts, or else
Pine to my grave.

SHEMUS.

I have said nothing, lady.
Why should the like of us complain?

OONA.

Have done.

Sorrows that she's but read of in a book
Weigh on her mind as if they had been her own.

OONA, MARY, and CATHLEEN go out. ALEEL looks
defiantly at SHEMUS.

ALEEL (*singing*).

Were I but crazy for love's sake
I know who'd measure out his length,
I know the head that I should break
For crazy men have double strength.
There! all's out now to leave or take,
And who mocks music mocks at love.
And when I am crazy for love's sake
I'll not go far to choose.

[*Snapping his fingers in SHEMUS' face.*

Enough!

I know the head that I shall break.

[*He takes a step towards the door and then turns again.*

Shut to the door before the night has fallen,
For who can say what walks, or in what shape
Some devilish creature flies in the air; but now
Two grey-horned owls hooted above our heads.

He goes out, his singing dies away. MARY comes in. SHEMUS has been counting the money.

SHEMUS.

So that fool's gone.

TEIG.

He's seen the horned owls too
There's no good luck in owls, but it may be
That the ill luck's to fall upon his head.

MARY.

You never thanked her ladyship.

SHEMUS.

Thank her,
For seven halfpence and a silver bit?

TEIG.

But for this empty purse?

SHEMUS.

What's that for thanks,
Or what's the double of it that she promised?
With bread and flesh and every sort of food
Up to a price no man has heard the like of
And rising every day.

MARY.

We have all she had;
She emptied out the purse before our eyes.

SHEMUS (*to MARY, who has gone to close the door*).
Leave that door open.

MARY.

When those that have read books,
And seen the seven wonders of the world,

Fear what's above or what's below the ground,
It's time that poverty should bolt the door.

SHEMUS.

I'll have no bolts, for there is not a thing
That walks above the ground or under it
I had not rather welcome to this house
Than any more of mankind, rich or poor.

TEIG.

So that they brought us money.

SHEMUS.

I've heard say
There's something that appears like a white bird,
A pigeon or a seagull or the like,
But if you hit it with a stone or a stick
It clangs as though it had been made of brass;
And that if you dig down where it was scratching
You'll find a crock of gold.

TEIG.

But dream of gold
For three nights running, and there's always gold.

SHEMUS.

You might be starved before you've dug it out.

TEIG.

But maybe if you called, something would come,
They have been seen of late.

MARY.

Is it call devils?
Call devils from the wood, call them in here?

SHEMUS.

So you'd stand up against me, and you'd say

Who or what I am to welcome here. [*He hits her.*
That is to show who's master.

TEIG.

Call them in.

MARY.

God help us all!

SHEMUS.

Pray, if you have a mind to.
It's little that the sleepy ears above
Care for your words; but I'll call what I please.

TEIG.

There is many a one, they say, had money from them.

SHEMUS (*at door*).

Whatever you are that walk the woods at night,
So be it that you have not shouldered up
Out of a grave—for I'll have nothing human—
And have free hands, a friendly trick of speech,
I welcome you. Come, sit beside the fire.
What matter if your head's below your arms
Or you've a horse's tail to whip your flank,
Feathers instead of hair, that's but a straw,
Come, share what bread and meat is in the house,
And stretch your heels and warm them in the ashes.
And after that, let's share and share alike
And curse all men and women. Come in, come in.
What, is there no one there? [*Turning from door.*

And yet they say

They are as common as the grass, and ride
Even upon the book in the priest's hand.

TEIG *lifts one arm slowly and points toward the*

door and begins moving backward. SHEMUS turns, he also sees something and begins moving backward. MARY does the same. A man dressed as an Eastern merchant comes in carrying a small carpet. He unrolls it and sits cross-legged at one end of it. Another man dressed in the same way follows, and sits at the other end. This is done slowly and deliberately. When they are seated they take money out of embroidered purses at their girdles and begin arranging it on the carpet.

TEIG.

You speak to them.

SHEMUS.

No, you.

TEIG.

'Twas you that called them.

SHEMUS (*coming nearer.*)

I'd make so bold, if you would pardon it,
To ask if there's a thing you'd have of us.
Although we are but poor people, if there is,
Why, if there is——

FIRST MERCHANT.

We've travelled a long road,
For we are merchants that must tramp the world,
And now we look for supper and a fire
And a safe corner to count money in.

SHEMUS.

I thought you were . . . but that's no matter now—
There had been words between my wife and me

Because I said I would be master here,
 And ask in what I pleased or who I pleased
 And so . . . but that is nothing to the point,
 Because it's certain that you are but merchants.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We travel for the Master of all merchants.
 Yet if you were that I had thought but now
 I'd welcome you no less. Be what you please
 And you'll have supper at the market rate,
 That means that what was sold for but a penny
 Is now worth fifty.

MERCHANTS *begin putting money on carpet.*

FIRST MERCHANT.

Our Master bids us pay
 So good a price, that all who deal with us
 Shall eat, drink, and be merry.

SHEMUS (*to MARY.*)

Bestir yourself,
 Go kill and draw the fowl, while Teig and I
 Lay out the plates and make a better fire.

MARY.

I will not cook for you.

SHEMUS.

Not cook! not cook!
 Do not be angry. She wants to pay me back
 Because I struck her in that argument.
 But she'll get sense again. Since the dearth came
 We rattle one on another as though we were
 Knives thrown into a basket to be cleaned.

MARY.

I will not cook for you, because I know
In what unlucky shape you sat but now
Outside this door.

TEIG.

It's this, your honours:
Because of some wild words my father said
She thinks you are not of those who cast a shadow.

SHEMUS.

I said I'd make the devils of the wood
Welcome, if they'd a mind to eat and drink;
But it is certain that you are men like us.

FIRST MERCHANT.

It's strange that she should think we cast no shadow,
For there is nothing on the ridge of the world
That's more substantial than the merchants are
That buy and sell you.

MARY.

If you are not demons,
And seeing what great wealth is spread out there,
Give food or money to the starving poor.

FIRST MERCHANT.

If we knew how to find deserving poor
We'd do our share.

MARY.

But seek them patiently.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We know the evils of mere charity.

MARY.

Those scruples may befit a common time.

I had thought there was a pushing to and fro,
At times like this, that overset the scale
And trampled measure down.

FIRST MERCHANT.

But if already
We'd thought of a more prudent way than that?

SECOND MERCHANT.

If each one brings a bit of merchandise,
We'll give him such a price he never dreamt of.

MARY.

Where shall the starving come at merchandise?

FIRST MERCHANT.

We will ask nothing but what all men have.

MARY.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

They have not sold all yet.
For there's a vaporous thing—that may be nothing,
But that's the buyer's risk—a second self,
They call immortal for a story's sake.

SHEMUS.

They come to buy our souls.

TEIG.

I'll barter mine.
Why should we starve for what may be but nothing?

MARY.

Teig and Shemus——

SHEMUS.

What can it be but nothing?
What has God poured out of His bag but famine?
Satan gives money.

TEIG.

Yet no thunder stirs.

FIRST MERCHANT.

There is a heap for each.

[SHEMUS goes to take money.

But no, not yet,

For there's a work I have to set you to.

SHEMUS.

So then you're as deceitful as the rest,
And all that talk of buying what's but a vapour
Is fancy bread. I might have known as much,
Because that's how the trick-o'-the-loop man talks.

FIRST MERCHANT.

That's for the work, each has its separate price;
But neither price is paid till the work's done.

TEIG.

The same for me.

MARY.

Oh, God, why are you still?

FIRST MERCHANT.

You've but to cry aloud at every cross-road,
At every house door, that we buy men's souls,
And give so good a price that all may live
In mirth and comfort till the famine's done,
Because we are Christian men.

SHEMUS.

Come, let's away.

TEIG.

I shall keep running till I've earned the price.

SECOND MERCHANT (*who has risen and gone towards fire*).

Stop. What could you do without a proof?

Here is your entertainment on the road.

Live as you please; our Master's generous.

*He throws a bag of money on the ground.*TEIG and SHEMUS *have stopped*. TEIG *takes the money*. *They go out*.

MARY.

Destroyers of souls, God will destroy you quickly.

You shall at last dry like dry leaves and hang

Nailed like dead vermin to the doors of God.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Curse to your fill, for saints will have their dreams.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Though we're but vermin that our Master sent

To overrun the world, he at the end

Shall pull apart the pale ribs of the moon

And quench the stars in the ancestral night.

MARY.

God is all powerful.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Pray, for you shall need Him.

You shall eat dock and grass, and dandelion,

Till that low threshold there becomes a wall,

And when your hands can scarcely drag your body
We shall be near you. [MARY faints.

The FIRST MERCHANT takes up the carpet, spreads it before the fire and stands in front of it warming his hands.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Our faces go unscratched,
Wring the neck o' that fowl, scatter the flour
And look if there is bread upon the shelves.
We'll turn the fowl upon the spit and roast it,
And eat the supper we were bidden to,
Now that the house is quiet, praise our master,
And stretch and warm our heels among the ashes.

SCENE II.

FRONT SCENE.—*A wood with perhaps distant view of turreted house at one side, but all in flat colour, without light and shade and against a diapered or gold background.*

COUNTESS CATHLEEN comes in leaning upon ALEEL'S arm.
OONA follows them.

CATHLEEN (*stopping*).

Surely this leafy corner, where one smells
The wild bee's honey, has a story too?

OONA.

There is the house at last.

ALEEL.

A man, they say,
 Loved Maeve the Queen of all the invisible host,
 And died of his love nine centuries ago.
 And now, when the moon's riding at the full,
 She leaves her dancers lonely and lies there
 Upon that level place, and for three days
 Stretches and sighs and wets her long pale cheeks.

CATHLEEN.

So she loves truly.

ALEEL.

No, but wets her cheeks,
 Lady, because she has forgot his name.

CATHLEEN.

She'd sleep that trouble away—though it must be
 A heavy trouble to forget his name—
 If she had better sense.

OONA.

Your own house, lady.

ALEEL.

She sleeps high up on wintry Knock-na-rea
 In an old cairn of stones; while her poor women
 Must lie and jog in the wave if they would sleep—
 Being water born—yet if she cry their names
 They run up on the land and dance in the moon
 Till they are giddy and would love as men do,
 And be as patient and as pitiful.
 But there is nothing that will stop in their heads,
 They've such poor memories, though they weep for it.
 Oh, yes, they weep; that's when the moon is full.

CATHLEEN.

Is it because they have short memories
They live so long?

ALEEL.

What's memory but the ash
That chokes our fires that have begun to sink?
And they've a dizzy, everlasting fire.

OONA.

There is your own house, lady.

CATHLEEN.

Why, that's true,
And we'd have passed it without noticing.

ALEEL.

A curse upon it for a meddlesome house!
Had it but stayed away I would have known
What Queen Maeve thinks on when the moon is
 pinched;
And whether now—as in the old days—the dancers
Set their brief love on men.

OONA.

Rest on my arm.
These are no thoughts for any Christian ear.

ALEEL.

I am younger, she would be too heavy for you.

He begins taking his lute out of the bag, CATHLEEN, who has turned towards OONA, turns back to him.

This hollow box remembers every foot
That danced upon the level grass of the world,
And will tell secrets if I whisper to it.

(Sings.)

“Lift up the white knee;”
Hear what they sing,
Those young dancers
That in a ring
Raved but now
Of the hearts that brake
Long, long ago
For their sake.

OONA.

New friends are sweet.

ALEEL.

But the dance changes.
“Lift up the gown,
All that sorrow
Is trodden down.”

OONA.

The empty rattle-pate! Lean on this arm,
That I can tell you is a christened arm,
And not like some, if we are to judge by speech.
But as you please. It is time I was forgot.
Maybe it is not on this arm you slumbered
When you were as helpless as a worm.

ALEEL.

Stay with me till we come to your own house.

CATHLEEN (*sitting down*).

When I am rested I will need no help.

ALEEL.

I thought to have kept her from remembering

The evil of the times for full ten minutes;
But now when seven are out you come between.

OONA.

Talk on; what does it matter what you say,
For you have not been christened?

ALEEL.

Old woman, old woman,
You robbed her of three minutes peace of mind,
And though you live unto a hundred years,
And wash the feet of beggars and give alms,
And climb Croaghpatrick, you shall not be pardoned.

OONA.

How does a man who never was baptised
Know what Heaven pardons?

ALEEL.

You are a sinful woman.

OONA.

I care no more than if a pig had grunted.

(Enter CATHLEEN'S Steward.)

STEWARD.

I am not to blame, for I had locked the gate,
The forester's to blame. The men climbed in
At the east corner where the elm-tree is.

CATHLEEN.

I do not understand you, who has climbed?

STEWARD.

Then God be thanked, I am the first to tell you.
I was afraid some other of the servants—
Though I've been on the watch—had been the first
And mixed up truth and lies, your ladyship.

CATHLEEN (*rising*).

Has some misfortune happened?

STEWARD.

Yes, indeed.

The forester that let the branches lie
Against the wall's to blame for everything,
For that is how the rogues got into the garden.

CATHLEEN.

I thought to have escaped misfortune here.
Has anyone been killed?

STEWARD.

Oh, no, not killed.

They have stolen half a cart-load of green cabbage.

CATHLEEN.

But maybe they were starving.

STEWARD.

That is certain.

To rob or starve, that was the choice they had.

CATHLEEN.

A learned theologian has laid down
That starving men may take what's necessary,
And yet be sinless.

OONA.

Sinless and a thief!

There should be broken bottles on the wall.

CATHLEEN.

And if it be a sin, while faith's unbroken
God cannot help but pardon. There is no soul
But it's unlike all others in the world,
Nor one but lifts a strangeness to God's love

Till that's grown infinite, and therefore none
Whose loss were less than irremediable
Although it were the wickedest in the world.

(Enter TEIG and SHEMUS.)

STEWARD.

What are you running for? Pull off your cap,
Do you not see who's there?

SHEMUS.

I cannot wait.

I am running to the world with the best news
That has been brought it for a thousand years.

STEWARD.

Then get your breath and speak.

SHEMUS.

If you'd my news
You'd run as fast and be as out of breath.

TEIG.

Such news, we shall be carried on men's shoulders.

SHEMUS.

There's something every man has carried with him
And thought no more about than if it were
A mouthful of the wind; and now it's grown
A marketable thing!

TEIG.

And yet it seemed
As useless as the paring of one's nails.

SHEMUS.

What sets me laughing when I think of it,
Is that a rogue who's lain in lousy straw,
If he but sell it, may set up his coach.

TEIG (*laughing*).

There are two gentlemen who buy men's souls.

CATHLEEN.

O God!

TEIG.

And maybe there's no soul at all.

STEWARD.

They're drunk or mad.

TEIG.

Look at the price they give.

Showing money.

SHEMUS (*tossing up money*).

"Go cry it all about the world," they said.

"Money for souls, good money for a soul."

CATHLEEN.

Give twice and thrice and twenty times their money,
And get your souls again. I will pay all.

SHEMUS.

Not we! not we! For souls—if there are souls—

But keep the flesh out of its merriment.

I shall be drunk and merry.

TEIG.

Come, let's away.

He goes.

CATHLEEN.

But there's a world to come.

SHEMUS.

And if there is,

I'd rather trust myself into the hands

That can pay money down than to the hands

That have but shaken famine from the bag.

He goes out.

(Lilting.)

“There’s money for a soul, sweet yellow money.
There’s money for men’s souls, good money, money.”

CATHLEEN *(to ALEEL)*.

Go call them here again, bring them by force,
Beseech them, bribe, do anything you like;

[ALEEL goes.

And you too follow, add your prayers to his.

[OONA, who has been praying, goes out.

Steward, you know the secrets of my house.

How much have I?

STEWARD.

A hundred kegs of gold.

CATHLEEN.

How much have I in castles?

STEWARD.

As much more.

CATHLEEN.

How much have I in pasture?

STEWARD.

As much more.

CATHLEEN.

How much have I in forests?

STEWARD.

As much more.

CATHLEEN.

Keeping this house alone, sell all I have,

Go barter where you please, but come again
With herds of cattle and with ships of meal.

STEWARD.

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

CATHLEEN.

Make no delay.

He goes L.

(ALEEL and OONA return.)

CATHLEEN.

They have not come; speak quickly.

ALEEL.

One drew his knife
And said that he would kill the man or woman
That stopped his way; and when I would have stopped
him
He made this stroke at me; but it is nothing.

CATHLEEN.

You shall be tended. From this day for ever
I'll have no joy or sorrow of my own.

OONA.

Their eyes shone like the eyes of birds of prey.

CATHLEEN.

Come, follow me, for the earth burns my feet
Till I have changed my house to such a refuge
That the old and ailing, and all weak of heart,
May escape from beak and claw; all, all, shall come
Till the walls burst and the roof fall on us.
From this day out I have nothing of my own.

She goes.

OONA (*taking ALEEL by the arm and as she speaks bandaging his wound*).

She has found something now to put her hand to,
And you and I are of no more account
Than flies upon a window-pane in the winter.

They go out.

SCENE III.

SCENE.—*Hall in the house of COUNTESS CATHLEEN. At the Left an oratory with steps leading up to it. At the Right a tapestried wall, more or less repeating the form of the oratory. In the Centre are two or more arches through which one can see dimly the trees of the garden. CATHLEEN is kneeling in front of the altar in the oratory; there is a hanging lighted lamp over the altar. ALEEL enters.*

ALEEL.

I have come to bid you leave this castle and fly
Out of these woods.

CATHLEEN.

What evil is there here?
That is not everywhere from this to the sea?

ALEEL.

They who have sent me walk invisible.

CATHLEEN.

So it is true what I have heard men say,
That you have seen and heard what others cannot.

ALEEL.

I was asleep in my bed, and while I slept
 My dream became a fire; and in the fire
 One walked and he had birds about his head.

CATHLEEN.

I have heard that one of the old gods walked so.

ALEEL.

It may be that he is angelical;
 And, lady, he bids me call you from these woods.
 And you must bring but your old foster-mother,
 And some few serving men, and live in the hills,
 Among the sounds of music and the light
 Of waters, till the evil days are done.
 For here some terrible death is waiting you,
 Some unimagined evil, some great darkness
 That fable has not dreamt of, nor sun nor moon
 Scattered.

CATHLEEN.

No, not angelical.

ALEEL.

This house

You are to leave with some old trusty man,
 And bid him shelter all that starve or wander
 While there is food and house room.

CATHLEEN.

He bids me go

Where none of mortal creatures but the swan
 Dabbles, and there you would pluck the harp, when the
 trees
 Had made a heavy shadow about our door,

And talk among the rustling of the reeds,
 When night hunted the foolish sun away
 With stillness and pale tapers. No—no—no!
 I cannot. Although I weep, I do not weep
 Because that life would be most happy, and here
 I find no way, no end. Nor do I weep
 Because I had longed to look upon your face,
 But that a night of prayer has made me weary.

ALEEL (*prostrating himself before her*).

Let Him that made mankind, the angels and devils
 And death and plenty, mend what He has made,
 For when we labour in vain and eye still sees
 Heart breaks in vain.

CATHLEEN.

How would that quiet end?

ALEEL.

How but in healing?

CATHLEEN.

You have seen my tears
 And I can see your hand shake on the floor.

ALEEL (*faltering*).

I thought but of healing. He was angelical.

CATHLEEN (*turning away from him*).

No, not angelical, but of the old gods,
 Who wander about the world to waken the heart—
 The passionate, proud heart—that all the angels,
 Leaving nine heavens empty, would rock to sleep.

*She goes to chapel door; ALEEL holds his clasped
 hands towards her for a moment hesitatingly,
 and then lets them fall beside him.*

CATHLEEN.

Do not hold out to me beseeching hands.
 This heart shall never waken on earth. I have sworn,
 By her whose heart the seven sorrows have pierced,
 To pray before this altar until my heart
 Has grown to Heaven like a tree, and there
 Rustled its leaves, till Heaven has saved my people.

ALEEL (*who has risen*).

When one so great has spoken of love to one
 So little as I, though to deny him love,
 What can he but hold out beseeching hands,
 Then let them fall beside him, knowing how greatly
 They have overdared?

He goes towards the door of the hall. The COUNTESS CATHLEEN takes a few steps towards him.

CATHLEEN.

If the old tales are true,
 Queens have wed shepherds and kings beggar-maids;
 God's procreant waters flowing about your mind
 Have made you more than kings or queens; and not you
 But I am the empty pitcher.

ALEEL.

Being silent,
 I have said all, yet let me stay beside you.

CATHLEEN.

No, no, not while my heart is shaken. No,
 But you shall hear wind cry and water cry,
 And curlew cry, and have the peace I longed for.

ALEEL.

Give me your hand to kiss.

CATHLEEN.

I kiss your forehead.

And yet I send you from me. Do not speak;
 There have been women that bid men to rob
 Crowns from the Country-under-Wave or apples
 Upon a dragon-guarded hill, and all
 That they might sift men's hearts and wills,
 And trembled as they bid it, as I tremble
 That lay a hard task on you, that you go,
 And silently, and do not turn your head;
 Good-bye; but do not turn your head and look;
 Above all else, I would not have you look. [ALEEL goes.
 I never spoke to him of his wounded hand,
 And now he is gone. (*She looks out.*)
 I cannot see him, for all is dark outside.
 Would my imagination and my heart
 Were as little shaken as this holy flame!

She goes slowly into the chapel.

*The distant sound of an alarm bell. The two
 MERCHANTS enter hurriedly.*

SECOND MERCHANT.

They are ringing the alarm and in a moment
 They'll be upon us.

FIRST MERCHANT (*going to a door at the side*).

Here is the treasury,
 You'd my commands to put them all to sleep.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Some angel or else her prayers protected them.

*Goes into the treasury and returns with bags of
 treasure. FIRST MERCHANT has been listening at
 the oratory door.*

FIRST MERCHANT.

She has fallen asleep.

SECOND MERCHANT *goes out through one of the arches at the back and stands listening. The bags are at his feet.*

SECOND MERCHANT.

We've all the treasure now.

So let's away before they've tracked us out.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I have a plan to win her.

SECOND MERCHANT.

You have time enough,

If you would kill her and bear off her soul,
Before they are upon us with their preyers;
They search the western tower.

FIRST MERCHANT.

That may not be.

We cannot face the heavenly host in arms.
Her soul must come to us of its own will,
But being of the ninth and mightiest hell
Where all are kings, I have a plan to win it.
Lady, we've news that's crying out for speech.

CATHLEEN *wakes and comes to door of the chapel.*

CATHLEEN.

Who calls?

FIRST MERCHANT.

We have brought news.

CATHLEEN.

What are you?

FIRST MERCHANT.

We are merchants, and we know the book of the world
Because we have walked upon its leaves; and there
Have read of late matters that much concern you;
And noticing the castle door stand open,
Came in to find an ear.

CATHLEEN.

The door stands open,
That no one who is famished or afraid,
Despair of help or of a welcome with it.
But you have news, you say.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

CATHLEEN.

My thanks to God, to Mary and the angels,
That I have money in my treasury,
And can buy grain from those who have stored it up
To prosper on the hunger of the poor.
But you've been far and know the signs of things,
When will the famine end?

FIRST MERCHANT.

Day copies day,
And there's no sign of change nor can it change
With the wheat withered and the cattle dead.

CATHLEEN.

And heard you of the demons who buy souls?

FIRST MERCHANT.

There are some men who hold they have wolves' heads,
And say their limbs—dried by the infinite flame—
Have all the speed of storms; others, again,
Say they are gross and little; while a few
Will have it they seem much as mortals are,
But tall and brown and travelled—like us—lady,
Yet all agree a power is in their looks
That makes men bow, and flings a casting-net
About their souls, and that all men would go
And barter those poor vapours, were it not
You bribe them with the safety of your gold.

CATHLEEN.

Praise be to God, to Mary, and the angels
That I am wealthy! Wherefore do they sell?

FIRST MERCHANT.

As we came in at the great door we saw
Your porter sleeping in his niche—a soul
Too little to be worth a hundred pence,
And yet they buy it for a hundred crowns.
But for a soul like yours, I heard them say,
They'd give five hundred thousand crowns and more.

CATHLEEN.

How can a heap of crowns pay for a soul?
Is the green grave so terrible a thing?

FIRST MERCHANT.

Some sell because the money gleams, and some
Because they are in terror of the grave,

And some because their neighbours sold before,
 And some because there is a kind of joy
 In casting hope away, in losing joy,
 In ceasing all resistance, in at last
 Opening one's arms to the eternal flames,
 In casting all sails out upon the wind;
 To this—full of the gaiety of the lost—
 Would all folk hurry if your gold were gone.

CATHLEEN.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

I laugh
 To think that all these people should be swung
 As on a lady's shoe-string,—under them
 The glowing leagues of never-ending flame.

CATHLEEN.

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

*The SECOND MERCHANT, who has been listening
 beyond the arches, comes forward, and as he comes
 a sound of voices and feet is heard.*

SECOND MERCHANT.

Away now—they are in the garden—hurry,
 For they will know us, and freeze up our hearts

With Ave Marys, and burn all our skin
With holy water.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

They go out by a door at one side. A number of

PEASANTS *enter.*

FIRST PEASANT.

Forgive us, lady, but we heard a noise.

SECOND PEASANT.

We sat by the fireside telling vanities.

FIRST PEASANT.

We heard a noise, but though we have searched the
house

We have found nobody.

CATHLEEN.

You are too timid.

For now you are safe from all the evil times.
There is no evil that can find you here.

OONA (*entering hurriedly*).

Ochone! Ochone! The treasure room is broken in,
The door stands open, and the gold is gone.

(PEASANTS *raise a lamentable cry.*)

CATHLEEN.

Be silent. (*The cry ceases.*) Have you seen nobody?

OONA.

Ochone!

That my good mistress should lose all this money.

CATHLEEN.

Let those among you—not too old to ride—
Get horses and search all the country round,
I'll give a farm to him who finds the thieves.

A man with keys at his girdle has come in while she speaks. There is a general murmur of "The porter! the porter!"

PORTER.

Demons were here. I sat beside the door
In my stone niche, and two owls passed me by,
Whispering with human voices.

OLD PEASANT.

God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN.

Old man, old man, He never closed a door
Unless one opened. I am desolate,
Because of a strange thought that's in my heart:
But I have still my faith; therefore be silent;
For surely He does not forsake the world,
But stands before it modelling in the clay
And moulding there His image. Age by age
The clay wars with His fingers and pleads hard
For its old, heavy, dull and shapeless ease;
But sometimes—though His hand is on it still—
It moves awry and demon hordes are born.

[PEASANTS cross themselves.

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

[She comes from the oratory door.

Yet stay an instant. When we meet again
I may have grown forgetful. Oona, take

These two—the larder and the dairy keys.

To the PORTER.

But take you this. It opens the small room
Of herbs for medicine, of hellebore,
Of vervain, monkshood, plantain, and self-heal.
The book of cures is on the upper shelf.

PORTER.

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

CATHLEEN.

Ah, no, not that.

But I have come to a strange thought. I have heard
A sound of wailing in unnumbered hovels,
And I must go down, down—I know not where—
Pray for all men and women mad from famine;
Pray, you good neighbours.

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

Mary, Queen of angels,

And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

SCENE IV.

SCENE.—*A wood near the Castle, as in Scene II. A group
of PEASANTS pass.*

FIRST PEASANT.

I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT.

It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT.

It's beautiful.

The most beautiful thing under the sun,
That's what I've heard.

THIRD PEASANT.

I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT.

I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT.

But doesn't a gold piece glitter like the sun?
That's what my father, who'd seen better days,
Told me when I was but a little boy
And but so tall it's shining like the sun,
Round and shining, that is what he said.

SECOND PEASANT.

There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT.

They've bags and bags of it.

They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow silently.

Then ALEEL passes over the stage singing.

Impetuous heart, be still, be still,
Your sorrowful love can never be told,
Cover it up with a lonely tune.
He who could bend all things to His will
Has covered the door of the infinite fold
With the pale stars and the wandering moon.

SCENE V.

SCENE.—*The house of SHEMUS RUA. There is an alcove at the back with curtains; in it a bed, and on the bed is the body of MARY with candles round it. The two MERCHANTS while they speak put a large book upon a table, arrange money, and so on.*

FIRST MERCHANT.

Thanks to that lie I told about her ships
And that about the herdsman lying sick,
We shall be too much thronged with souls to-morrow.

SECOND MERCHANT.

What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT.

When the night fell and I had shaped myself
Into the image of the man-headed owl,
I hurried to the cliffs of Donegal,
And saw with all their canvas full of wind
And rushing through the parti-coloured sea
Those ships that bring the woman grain and meal.
They're but three days from us.

SECOND MERCHANT.

When the dew rose

I hurried in like feathers to the east,
And saw nine hundred oxen driven through Meath
With goads of iron. They're but three days from us.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Three days for traffic.

PEASANTS crowd in with TEIG and SHEMUS.

SHEMUS.

Come in, come in, you are welcome.
That is my wife. She mocked at my great masters,
And would not deal with them. Now there she is;
She does not even know she was a fool,
So great a fool she was.

TEIG.

She would not eat
One crumb of bread bought with our master's money,
But lived on nettles, dock, and dandelion.

SHEMUS.

There's nobody could put into her head
That Death is the worst thing can happen us,
Though that sounds simple, for her tongue grew rank
With all the lies that she had heard in chapel.
Draw to the curtain. (TEIG *draws it.*) You'll not play
the fool
While these good gentlemen are there to save you.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Since the drought came they drift about in a throng,
Like autumn leaves blown by the dreary winds.
Come, deal—come, deal.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS.

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

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

I come to deal—if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in a book*).

“John Maher, a man of substance, with dull mind,
And quiet senses and unventurous heart.
The angels think him safe.” Two hundred crowns,
All for a soul, a little breath of wind.

THE MAN.

I ask three hundred crowns. You have read there
That no mere lapse of days can make me yours.

FIRST MERCHANT.

There is something more writ here— “often at night
He is wakeful from a dread of growing poor,
And thereon wonders if there’s any man
That he could rob in safety.”

A PEASANT.

Who’d have thought it?
And I was once alone with him at midnight.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT.

There is this crack in you—two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT.

That’s plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

I’d give him nothing.

SHEMUS.

You’ll get no more—so take what’s offered you.

*A general murmur, during which the MIDDLE-AGED
MAN takes money, and slips into background,
where he sinks onto a seat.*

FIRST MERCHANT.

Has no one got a better soul than that?
If only for the credit of your parishes,
Traffic with us.

A WOMAN.

What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in book*).

"Soft, handsome, and still young"—not much, I think.
"It's certain that the man she's married to
Knows nothing of what's hidden in the jar
Between the hour-glass and the pepper-pot."

THE WOMAN.

The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT.

"Nor how when he's away
At the horse fair the hand that wrote what's hid
Will tap three times upon the window-pane."

THE WOMAN.

And if there is a letter, that is no reason
Why I should have less money than the others.

FIRST MERCHANT.

You're almost safe, I give you fifty crowns

[*She turns to go.*]

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS.

Woman, have sense—come, come.
Is this a time to haggle at the price?
There, take it up. There, there. That's right.

She takes them and goes into the crowd.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Come, deal, deal, deal. It is but for charity
 We buy such souls at all; a thousand sins
 Made them our Master's long before we came.

(ALEEL enters.)

ALEEL.

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

SHEMUS.

Not ask a price?
 How can you sell your soul without a price?
 I would not listen to his broken wits;
 His love for Countess Cathleen has so crazed him
 He hardly understands what he is saying.

ALEEL.

The trouble that has come on Countess Cathleen,
 The sorrow that is in her wasted face,
 The burden in her eyes, have broke my wits,
 And yet I know I'd have you take my soul.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL.

No, but you must. Seeing it cannot help her
 I have grown tired of it.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Begone from me,
 I may not touch it.

ALEEL.

Is your power so small?

And must I bear it with me all my days?
May you be scorned and mocked!

FIRST MERCHANT.

Drag him away.

He troubles me.

TEIG and SHEMUS lead ALEEL into the crowd.

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Lean forward

And kiss the circlet where my Master's lips
Were pressed upon it when he sent us hither;
You shall have peace once more.

SECOND MERCHANT *kisses the gold circlet that is
about the head of the* FIRST MERCHANT.

I, too, grow weary,

But there is something moving in my heart
Whereby I know that what we seek the most
Is drawing near—our labour will soon end.
Come, deal, deal, deal, deal, deal; are you all dumb?
What, will you keep me from our ancient home,
And from the eternal revelry?

SECOND MERCHANT.

Deal, deal.

SHEMUS.

They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I offer this great price: a thousand crowns
For an old woman who was always ugly.

An old PEASANT WOMAN comes forward, and he takes up a book and reads:

There is but little set down here against her.

“She has stolen eggs and fowl when times were bad,
But when the times grew better has confessed it;
She never missed her chapel of a Sunday
And when she could, paid dues.” Take up your money.

OLD WOMAN.

God bless you, sir. (*She screams.*) Oh, sir, a pain went through me!

FIRST MERCHANT.

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

Murmur among the PEASANTS, who shrink back from her as she goes out.

A PEASANT.

How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT.

And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT.

I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Can such a trifle turn you from your profit?
Come, deal; come, deal.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT.

I bought your soul, and there's no sense in fear
Now the soul's gone.

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

Give me my soul again.

WOMAN (*going on her knees and clinging to MERCHANT*).
And take this money too, and give me mine.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Bear bastards, drink or follow some wild fancy;
For sighs and cries are the soul's work,
And you have none.

Throws the woman off.

PEASANT.

Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Come quickly; if that woman had not screamed
I would have lost my soul.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Come, come away.

They turn to door, but are stopped by shouts of
"Countess Cathleen! Countess Cathleen!"

CATHLEEN (*entering*).

And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT.

In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN.

I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT.

What matter, if the soul be worth the price?

CATHLEEN.

The people starve, therefore the people go

Thronging to you. I hear a cry come from them
 And it is in my ears by night and day,
 And I would have five hundred thousand crowns
 That I may feed them till the dearth go by.

FIRST MERCHANT.

It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN.

There is more:
 The souls that you have bought must be set free.

FIRST MERCHANT.

We know of but one soul that's worth the price.

CATHLEEN.

Being my own it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT.

You offer us——

CATHLEEN.

I offer my own soul.

A PEASANT.

Do not, do not, for souls the like of ours
 Are not precious to God as your soul is.
 O! what would Heaven do without you, lady?

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Look how their claws clutch in their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Five hundred thousand crowns; we give the price.
 The gold is here; the souls even while you speak
 Have slipped out of our bond, because your face
 Has shed a light on them and filled their hearts.
 But you must sign, for we omit no form
 In buying a soul like yours.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Sign with this quill.

It was a feather growing on the cock
That crowed when Peter dared deny his Master,
And all who use it have great honour in Hell.

CATHLEEN leans forward to sign.

*ALEEL (rushing forward and snatching the pen
from her).*

Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN.

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

ALEEL (casting the pen on the ground).

I have seen a vision under a green hedge,
A hedge of hips and haws—men yet shall hear
The Archangels rolling Satan's empty skull
Over the mountain-tops.

FIRST MERCHANT.

Take him away.

*TEIG and SHEMUS drag him roughly away so that
he falls upon the floor among the PEASANTS.*

*CATHLEEN picks up the pen and signs, then turns
towards the PEASANTS.*

CATHLEEN.

Take up the money, and now come with me;
When we are far from this polluted place
I will give everybody money enough.

*She goes out, the PEASANTS crowding round her and
kissing her dress. ALEEL and the two MERCHANTS
are left alone.*

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

We need but hover over her head in the air,
 For she has only minutes. When she signed
 Her heart began to break. Hush, hush, I hear
 The brazen door of Hell move on its hinges,
 And the eternal revelry float hither
 To hearten us.

SECOND MERCHANT.

Leap feathered on the air
 And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.
*They rush out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of
 the room. The twilight has fallen and gra-
 dually darkens as the scene goes on. There is a
 distant muttering of thunder and a sound of
 rising storm.*

ALEEL.

The brazen door stands wide, and Balor comes
 Borne in his heavy car, and demons have lifted
 The age-weary eyelids from the eyes that of old
 Turned gods to stone; Barach, the traitor, comes;
 And the lascivious race, Cailitin,
 That cast a druid weakness and decay
 Over Sualtem's and old Dectera's child;
 And that great king Hell first took hold upon
 When he killed Naisi and broke Deirdre's heart,
 And all their heads are twisted to one side,

For when they lived they warred on beauty and peace
With obstinate, crafty, sidelong bitterness.

*He crouches down as though spirits were whirling
in the air above him. OONA enters.*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA.

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand it trembled,
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL.

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA.

God guard her soul.

ALEEL.

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

[He points downward.]

First, Orchill, her pale, beautiful head alive,
Her body shadowy as vapour drifting
Under the dawn, for she who awoke desire
Has but a heart of blood when others die;
About her is a vapoury multitude
Of women alluring devils with soft laughter;
Behind her a host heat of the blood made sin,
But all the little pink-white nails have grown
To be great talons.

He seizes OONA and drags her into the middle of the room and points downward with vehement gestures. The wind roars.

They begin a song

And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA (*casting herself face downwards on the floor.*)

O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons,

And if a soul must needs be lost, take mine.

ALEEL kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words. The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.

OONA.

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay

Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT.

We were under the tree where the path turns,

When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

And while we bore her hither cloudy gusts

Blackened the world and shook us on our feet;

Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld

So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

One who is near the door draws the bolt.

CATHLEEN.

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm

Is dragging me away.

OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.

PEASANT.

Hush!

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*).

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
To every man and woman: judge, and give
According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN.

And will she give
Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN.

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
Let us and ours be lost so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN.

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
Upon the nest under the eave, before
She wander the loud waters Do not weep
Too great awhile, for there is many a candle
On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
That know not the hard burden of the world,
Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
And farewell, Oona, you who played with me,

And bore me in your arms about the house
 When I was but a child and therefore happy,
 Therefore happy, even like those that dance.
 The storm is in my hair and I must go.

She dies.

OONA.

Bring me the looking-glass.

*A WOMAN brings it to her out of the inner room.
 OONA holds it over the lips of CATHLEEN. All
 is silent for a moment. And then she speaks in
 a half scream:*

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT.

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT.

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN.

The little plant I love is broken in two.

*ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings
 it upon the floor so that it is broken in many
 pieces.*

ALEEL.

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
 That brimmed you up with beauty is no more:
 And die, dull heart, for she whose mournful words
 Made you a living spirit has passed away
 And left you but a ball of passionate dust.
 And you, proud earth and plummy sea, fade out!
 For you may hear no more her faltering feet,

But are left lonely amid the clamorous war
Of angels upon devils.

*He stands up; almost everyone is kneeling, but
it has grown so dark that only confused forms
can be seen.*

And I who weep
Call curses on you, Time and Fate and Change,
And have no excellent hope but the great hour
When you shall plunge headlong through bottomless space.

*A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.*

A PEASANT WOMAN.

Pull him upon his knees before his curses
Have plucked thunder and lightning on our heads.

ALEEL.

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.

*A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.*

Yonder a bright spear, cast out of a sling,
Has torn through Balor's eye, and the dark clans
Fly screaming as they fled Moytura of old.

Everything is lost in darkness.

AN OLD MAN.

The Almighty wrath at our great weakness and sin
Has blotted out the world and we must die.

*The darkness is broken by a visionary light. The
PEASANTS seem to be kneeling upon the rocky
slope of a mountain, and vapour full of storm*

and ever-changing light is sweeping above them and behind them. Half in the light, half in the shadow, stand armed angels. Their armour is old and worn, and their drawn swords dim and dinted. They stand as if upon the air in formation of battle and look downward with stern faces. The PEASANTS cast themselves on the ground.

ALEEL.

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me, whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things,
And tell of her who lies there.

He seizes one of the angels.

Till you speak

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL.

The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide.
And she is passing to the floor of peace,
And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
Has fallen on her face; The Light of Lights
Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.

OONA.

Tell them who walk upon the floor of peace
That I would die and go to her I love;
The years like great black oxen tread the world,

And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
And I am broken by their passing feet.

*A sound of far-off horns seems to come from the
heart of the Light. The vision melts away,
and the forms of the kneeling PEASANTS appear
faintly in the darkness.*

LYRICS.

(1892-1899)



THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE.

THE host is riding from Knocknarea
And over the grave of Clooth-na-bare;
Caolte tossing his burning hair
And Niamh calling *Away, come away:*
Empty your heart of its mortal dream.
The winds awaken, the leaves whirl round,
Our cheeks are pale, our hair is unbound,
Our breasts are heaving, our eyes are a-gleam,
Our arms are waving, our lips are apart;
And if any gaze on our rushing band,
We come between him and the deed of his hand,
We come between him and the hope of his heart.
The host is rushing 'twixt night and day,
And where is there hope or deed as fair?
Caolte tossing his burning hair,
And Niamh calling *Away, come away,*

THE EVERLASTING VOICES.

O SWEET everlasting Voices, be still;
Go to the guards of the heavenly fold
And bid them wander obeying your will
Flame under flame, till Time be no more;
Have you not heard that our hearts are old,
That you call in birds, in wind on the hill,
In shaken boughs, in tide on the shore?
O sweet everlasting Voices, be still.

THE MOODS.

TIME drops in decay,
Like a candle burnt out,
And the mountains and woods
Have their day, have their day;
What one in the rout
Of the fire-born moods
Has fallen away?

THE LOVER TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS
HEART.

ALL things uncomely and broken, all things worn out
and old,
The cry of a child by the roadway, the creak of a
lumbering cart,
The heavy steps of the ploughman, splashing the
wintry mould,
Are wronging your image that blossoms a rose in the
deeps of my heart.

The wrong of unshapely things is a wrong too great
to be told;
I hunger to build them anew and sit on a green knoll
apart,
With the earth and the sky and the water, remade,
like a casket of gold
For my dreams of your image that blossoms a rose in
the deeps of my heart.

INTO THE TWILIGHT.

OUT-WORN heart, in a time out-worn,
Come clear of the nets of wrong and right;
Laugh, heart, again in the grey twilight,
Sigh, heart, again in the dew of the morn.

Your mother Eire is always young,
Dew ever shining and twilight grey;
Though hope fall from you and love decay,
Burning in fires of a slanderous tongue.

Come, heart, where hill is heaped upon hill:
For there the mystical brotherhood
Of sun and moon and hollow and wood
And river and stream work out their will;

And God stands winding His lonely horn,
And time and the world are ever in flight;
And love is less kind than the grey twilight,
And hope is less dear than the dew of the morn.

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS.

I WENT out to the hazel wood,
Because a fire was in my head,
And cut and peeled a hazel wand,
And hooked a berry to a thread;
And when white moths were on the wing,
And moth-like stars were flickering out,
I dropped the berry in a stream
And caught a little silver trout.

When I had laid it on the floor
I went to blow the fire a-flame,
But something rustled on the floor,
And someone called me by my name:
It had become a glimmering girl
With apple blossom in her hair
Who called me by my name and ran
And faded through the brightening air.

Though I am old with wandering
Through hollow lands and hilly lands,
I will find out where she has gone,
And kiss her lips and take her hands;
And walk among long dappled grass,
And pluck till time and times are done
The silver apples of the moon,
The golden apples of the sun.

THE HEART OF THE WOMAN.

O WHAT to me the little room
That was brimmed up with prayer and rest;
He bade me out into the gloom,
And my breast lies upon his breast.

O what to me my mother's care,
The house where I was safe and warm;
The shadowy blossom of my hair
Shall hide us from the bitter storm.

O hiding hair and dewy eyes,
I am no more with life and death,
My heart upon his warm heart lies,
My breath is mixed into his breath.

HE MOURNS FOR THE CHANGE THAT HAS
COME UPON HIM AND HIS BELOVED AND
LONGS FOR THE END OF THE WORLD.

Do you not hear me calling, white deer with no horns!
I have been changed to a hound with one red ear;
I have been in the Path of Stones and the Wood of
Thorns,
For somebody hid hatred and hope and desire and fear

Under my feet that they follow you night and day.
A man with a hazel wand came without sound;
He changed me suddenly; I was looking another way;
And now my calling is but the calling of a hound;
And Time and Birth and Change are hurrying by.
I would that the Boar without bristles had come from
the West
And had rooted the sun and moon and stars out of
the sky
And lay in the darkness, grunting, and turning to his
rest.

HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE.

I HEAR the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering
white;
The North unfolds above them clinging, creeping night,
The East her hidden joy before the morning break,
The West weeps in pale dew and sighs passing away,
The South is pouring down roses of crimson fire:
O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay:
Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous
feet.

HE REPROVES THE CURLEW.

O, CURLEW, cry no more in the air,
Or only to the waters in the West;
Because your crying brings to my mind
Passion-dimmed eyes and long heavy hair
That was shaken out over my breast:
There is enough evil in the crying of wind.

HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY.

WHEN my arms wrap you round I press
My heart upon the loveliness
That has long faded from the world;
The jewelled crowns that kings have hurled
In shadowy pools, when armies fled;
The love-tales wrought with silken thread
By dreaming ladies upon cloth
That has made fat the murderous moth;
The roses that of old time were
Woven by ladies in their hair,
The dew-cold lilies ladies bore
Through many a sacred corridor

Where such grey clouds of incense rose
That only the gods' eyes did not close:
For that pale breast and lingering hand
Come from a more dream-heavy land,
A more dream-heavy hour than this;
And when you sigh from kiss to kiss
I hear white Beauty sighing, too,
For hours when all must fade like dew,
All but the flames, and deep on deep,
Throne over throne where in half sleep,
Their swords upon their iron knees,
Brood her high lonely mysteries.

HE GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES.

FASTEN your hair with a golden pin,
And bind up every wandering tress;
I bade my heart build these poor rhymes:
It worked at them, day out, day in,
Building a sorrowful loveliness
Out of the battles of old times.

You need but lift a pearl-pale hand,
And bind up your long hair and sigh;
And all men's hearts must burn and beat;
And candle-like foam on the dim sand,
And stars climbing the dew-dropping sky,
Live but to light your passing feet.

TO MY HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO FEAR.

BE you still, be you still, trembling heart;
Remember the wisdom out of the old days:
*Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds that blow through the starry ways,
Let the starry winds and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the proud, majestic multitude.*

THE CAP AND BELLS.

THE jester walked in the garden:
The garden had fallen still;
He bade his soul rise upward
And stand on her window-sill.

It rose in a straight blue garment,
When owls began to call:
It had grown wise-tongued by thinking
Of a quiet and light footfall;

But the young queen would not listen;
She rose in her pale night gown;
She drew in the heavy casement
And pushed the latches down.

He bade his heart go to her,
When the owls called out no more;
In a red and quivering garment
It sang to her through the door.

It had grown sweet-tongued by dreaming,
Of a flutter of flower-like hair;
But she took up her fan from the table
And waved it off on the air.

"I have cap and bells," he pondered,
"I will send them to her and die;"
And when the morning whitened
He left them where she went by.

She laid them upon her bosom,
Under a cloud of her hair,
And her red lips sang them a love-song:
Till stars grew out of the air.

She opened her door and her window,
And the heart and the soul came through,
To her right hand came the red one,
To her left hand came the blue.

They set up a noise like crickets,
A chattering wise and sweet,
And her hair was a folded flower
And the quiet of love in her feet.

THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK FIG.

THE dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown
spears

Suddenly hurtle before my dream-awakened eyes,
And then the clash of fallen horsemen and the cries
Of unknown perishing armies beat about my ears.
We who still labour by the cromlec on the shore,
The grey cairn on the hill, when day sinks drowned in
dew,

Being weary of the world's empires, bow down to you,
Master of the still stars and of the flaming door.

THE LOVER ASKS FORGIVENESS BECAUSE OF
HIS MANY MOODS.

IF this importunate heart trouble your peace
With words lighter than air,
Or hopes that in mere hoping flicker and cease;
Crumple the rose in your hair;
And cover your lips with odorous twilight and say,
"O Hearts of wind-blown flame!
O Winds, elder than changing of night and day,
That murmuring and longing came,

From marble cities loud with tabors of old
In dove-grey faery lands;
From battle banners, fold upon purple fold;
Queens wrought with glimmering hands;
That saw young Niam hover with love-lorn face
Above the wandering tide;
And lingered in the hidden desolate place,
Where the last Phoenix died
And wrapped the flames above his holy head;
And still murmur and long:
O Piteous Hearts, changing till change be dead
In a tumultuous song":
And cover the pale blossoms of your breast
With your dim heavy hair,
And trouble with a sigh for all things longing for rest
The odorous twilight there.

HE TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY.

O CLOUD-PALE eyelids, dread-dimmed eyes,
The poets labouring all their days
To build a perfect beauty in rhyme
Are overthrown by a woman's gaze
And by the unlabouring brood of the skies:
And therefore my heart will bow, when dew
Is dropping sleep, until God burn time,
Before the unlabouring stars and you.

HE HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE.

I WANDER by the edge
 Of this desolate lake
 Where wind cries in the sedge
Until the axle break,
That keeps the stars in their round,
And hands hurl in the deep
The banners of East and West,
And the girdle of light is unbound,
Your breast will not lie by the breast
Of your beloved in sleep.

THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION.

WHEN the flaming lute-thronged angelic door is wide;
 When an immortal passion breathes in mortal clay;
 Our hearts endure the scourge, the plaited thorns, the
 way
 Crowded with bitter faces, the wounds in palm and side,
 The hyssop-heavy sponge, the flowers by Kidron stream;
 We will bend down and loosen our hair over you,
 That it may drop faint perfume, and be heavy with dew,
 Lilies of death-pale hope, roses of passionate dream,

THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR
OLD FRIENDS.

THOUGH you are in your shining days,
Voices among the crowd
And new friends busy with your praise,
Be not unkind or proud,
But think about old friends the most:
Time's bitter flood will rise,
Your beauty perish and be lost
For all eyes but these eyes.

HE WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD.

WERE you but lying cold and dead,
And lights were paling out of the West,
You would come hither, and bend your head,
And I would lay my head on your breast;
And you would murmur tender words,
Forgiving me, because you were dead:
Nor would you rise and hasten away,
Though you have the will of the wild birds,

But know your hair was bound and wound
About the stars and moon and sun:
O would, beloved, that you lay
Under the dock-leaves in the ground,
While lights were paling one by one.

HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN.

HAD I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
Enwrought with golden and silver light,
The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
Of night and light and the half light.
I would spread the cloths under your feet:
But I, being poor, have only my dreams;
I have spread my dreams under your feet;
Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE.



MAEVE the great queen was pacing to and fro,
Between the walls covered with beaten bronze,
In her high house at Cruachan; the long hearth,
Flickering with ash and hazel, but half showed
Where the tired horse-boys lay upon the rushes,
Or on the benches underneath the walls,
In comfortable sleep; all living slept
But that great queen, who more than half the night
Had paced from door to fire and fire to door.
Though now in her old age, in her young age
She had been beautiful in that old way
That's all but gone; for the proud heart is gone,
And the fool heart of the counting-house fears all
But soft beauty and indolent desire.
She could have called over the rim of the world
Whatever woman's lover had hit her fancy,
And yet had been great bodied and great limbed,
Fashioned to be the mother of strong children;
And she'd had lucky eyes and a high heart,
And wisdom that caught fire like the dried flax,
At need, and made her beautiful and fierce,
Sudden and laughing.

O unquiet heart,
Why do you praise another, praising her,
As if there were no tale but your own tale

Worth knitting to a measure of sweet sound?
Have I not bid you tell of that great queen
Who has been buried some two thousand years?

When night was at its deepest, a wild goose
Cried from the porter's lodge, and with long clamour
Shook the ale horns and shields upon their hooks;
But the horse-boys slept on, as though some power
Had filled the house with Druid heaviness;
And wondering who of the many-changing Sidhe
Had come as in the old times to counsel her,
Maeve walked, yet with slow footfall, being old,
To that small chamber by the outer gate.
The porter slept, although he sat upright
With still and stony limbs and open eyes.
Maeve waited, and when that ear-piercing noise
Broke from his parted lips and broke again,
She laid a hand on either of his shoulders,
And shook him wide awake, and bid him say
Who of the wandering many-changing ones
Had troubled his sleep. But all he had to say
Was that, the air being heavy and the dogs
More still than they had been for a good month,
He had fallen asleep, and, though he had dreamed
nothing,
He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

She turned away; he turned again to sleep
That no god troubled now, and, wondering
What matters were afoot among the Sidhe,

Maeve walked through that great hall, and with a sigh
Lifted the curtain of her sleeping-room,
Remembering that she too had seemed divine
To many thousand eyes, and to her own
One that the generations had long waited
That work too difficult for mortal hands
Might be accomplished. Bunching the curtain up
She saw her husband Ailell sleeping there,
And thought of days when he'd had a straight body,
And of that famous Fergus, Nessa's husband,
Who had been the lover of her middle life.

Suddenly Ailell spoke out of his sleep,
And not with his own voice or a man's voice,
But with the burning, live, unshaken voice,
Of those that it may be can never age.
He said, "Queen of unsheltered Cruachan,
A king of the Great Plain would speak with you."
And with glad voice Maeve answered "many a time
Kings of the Great Plain have come and gone
About my door to counsel and to help."
The parted lips replied, "I seek your help,
For I am Aengus, and I am crossed in love."
"How may a mortal whose life gutters out
Help them that pace, hand in unwithering hand,
For all their beauty's like a hollow dream,
Mirrored in waters that nor hail nor rain
Nor the cold North has troubled?"

He replied:
"I am from those rivers and would have you call
The children of the Maines out of sleep,
And set them digging in the west of the hill.

We shadows, while they uproot the earthy house
Of one who is no friend to me or to mine,
Will overthrow his shadows and carry off
Caer, his blue-eyed daughter that I love.
I helped your fathers when they built these walls,
And I would have your help in my great need,
Queen of high Cruachan."

"I obey your will
With speedy feet and a most thankful heart:
For you have been, O Aengus of the birds,
Our giver of good counsel and good luck."
And with a groan, as if the mortal breath
Could but awaken sadly upon lips
That happier breath had moved, her husband turned
Face downward, tossing in a troubled sleep;
But Maeve, and not with a slow feeble foot,
Came to the threshold of the painted house,
Where her grandchildren slept, and cried aloud,
Until the pillared dark began to stir
With shouting and the clang of unhooked arms.
She told them of the many-changing ones;
And all that night, and all through the next day
To middle night, they dug into the hill.
At middle night great cats with silver claws,
Bodies of shadow and blind eyes like pearls,
Came up out of the hole, and red-eared hounds
With long white bodies came out of the air
Suddenly, and ran at them and harried them.

The Maines' children dropped their spades, and stood
With quaking joints and terror-stricken faces,
Till Maeve called out: "These are but common men.

The Maines' children have not dropped their spades,
Because Earth, crazy for its broken power,
Casts up a show and the winds answer it
With holy shadows." Her high heart was glad,
And when the uproar ran along the grass
She followed with light footfall in the midst,
Till it died out where an old thorn tree stood.

Friend of these many years, you too had stood
With equal courage in that whirling rout;
For you, although you've not her wandering heart,
Have all that greatness, and not hers alone.
For there is no high story about queens
In any ancient book but tells of you;
And when I've heard how they grew old and died,
Or fell into unhappiness, I have said:
"She will grow old and die, and she has wept!"
And when I'd write it out anew, the words,
Half crazy with the thought, She too has wept!
Outrun the measure.

I'd tell of that great queen
Who stood amid a silence by the thorn
Until two lovers came out of the air
With bodies made out of soft fire. The one,
About whose face birds wagged their fiery wings,
Said: "Aengus and his sweetheart give their thanks
To Maeve and to Maeve's household, owing all
In owing them the bride-bed that gives peace."
Then Maeve: "O Aengus, Master of all lovers,
A thousand years ago you held high talk
With the first kings of many-pillared Cruachan.

O when will you grow weary?"

They had vanished;
But out of the dark air over her head there came
A murmur of soft words and meeting lips.

BAILE AND AILLINN.

(1902)



Argument. Baile and Aillinn were lovers, but Aengus, the Master of Love, wishing them to be happy in his own land among the dead, told to each a story of the other's death, so that their hearts were broken and they died.

*I hardly hear the curlew cry,
Nor the grey rush when the wind is high,
Before my thoughts begin to run
On the heir of Ulad, Buan's son,
Baile, who had the honey mouth;
And that mild woman of the south,
Aillinn, who was King Lugaid's heir.
Their love was never drowned in care
Of this or that thing, nor grew cold
Because their bodies had grown old.
Being forbid to marry on earth,
They blossomed to immortal mirth.*

About the time when Christ was born,
When the long wars for the White Horn
And the Brown Bull had not yet come,
Young Baile Honey-Mouth, whom some
Called rather Baile Little-Land,
Rode out of Emain with a band

Of harpers and young men; and they
 Imagined, as they struck the way
 To many-pastured Muirthemne,
 That all things fell out happily,
 And there, for all that fools had said,
 Baile and Aillinn would be wed.

They found an old man running there:
 He had ragged long grass-coloured hair;
 He had knees that stuck out of his hose;
 He had puddle water in his shoes;
 He had half a cloak to keep him dry,
 Although he had a squirrel's eye.

*O wandering birds and rushy beds,
 You put such folly in our heads
 With all this crying in the wind;
 No common love is to our mind,
 And our poor Kate or Nan is less
 Than any whose unhappiness
 Awoke the harp-strings long ago.
 Yet they that know all things but know
 That all life had to give us is
 A child's laughter, a woman's kiss.
 Who was it put so great a scorn
 In the grey reeds that night and morn
 Are trodden and broken by the herds,
 And in the light bodies of birds
 That north wind tumbles to and fro
 And pinches among hail and snow?*

That runner said: "I am from the south;
I run to Baile Honey-Mouth,
To tell him how the girl Aillinn
Rode from the country of her kin,
And old and young men rode with her:
For all that country had been astir
If anybody half as fair
Had chosen a husband anywhere
But where it could see her every day.
When they had ridden a little way
An old man caught the horse's head
With: 'You must home again, and wed
With somebody in your own land.'
A young man cried and kissed her hand,
'O lady, wed with one of us';
And when no face grew piteous
For any gentle thing she spake,
She fell and died of the heart-break."

Because a lover's heart's worn out,
Being tumbled and blown about
By its own blind imagining,
And will believe that anything
That is bad enough to be true, is true,
Baile's heart was broken in two;
And he being laid upon green boughs,
Was carried to the goodly house
Where the Hound of Ulad sat before
The brazen pillars of his door,
His face bowed low to weep the end
Of the harper's daughter and her friend.

For although years had passed away
 He always wept them on that day,
 For on that day they had been betrayed;
 And now that Honey-Mouth is laid
 Under a cairn of sleepy stone
 Before his eyes, he has tears for none,
 Although he is carrying stone, but two
 For whom the cairn's but heaped anew.

*We hold because our memory is
 So full of that thing and of this
 That out of sight is out of mind.
 But the grey rush under the wind
 And the grey bird with crooked bill
 Have such long memories, that they still
 Remember Deirdre and her man;
 And when we walk with Kate or Nan
 About the windy water side,
 Our heart can hear the voices chide.
 How could we be so soon content,
 Who know the way that Naoise went?
 And they have news of Deirdre's eyes,
 Who being lovely was so wise—
 Ah! wise, my heart knows well how wise.*

Now had that old gaunt crafty one,
 Gathering his cloak about him, run
 Where Aillinn rode with waiting maids,
 Who amid leafy lights and shades
 Dreamed of the hands that would unlace
 Their bodices in some dim place

When they had come to the marriage bed;
And harpers, pondering with bowed head
A music that had thought enough
Of the ebb of all things to make love
Grow gentle without sorrowings;
And leather-coated men with slings
Who peered about on every side;
And amid leafy light he cried:
"He is well out of wind and wave;
They have heaped the stones above his grave
In Muirthemne, and over it
In changeless Ogham letters writ—
Baile, that was of Rury's seed.

"But the gods long ago decreed
No waiting maid should ever spread
Baile and Aillinn's marriage bed,
For they should clip and clip again
Where wild bees hive on the Great Plain.
Therefore it is but little news
That put this hurry in my shoes."

And hurrying to the south, he came
To that high hill the herdsmen name
The Hill Seat of Leighin, because
Some god or king had made the laws
That held the land together there,
In old times among the clouds of the air.

That old man climbed; the day grew dim;
Two swans came flying up to him,

Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.
They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp-strings
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

What shall I call them? fish that swim,
Scale rubbing scale where light is dim
By a broad water-lily leaf;
Or mice in the one wheaten sheaf
Forgotten at the threshing place;
Or birds lost in the one clear space
Of morning light in a dim sky;
Or, it may be, the eyelids of one eye,
Or the door pillars of one house,
Or two sweet blossoming apple-boughs
That have one shadow on the ground;
Or the two strings that made one sound
Where that wise harper's finger ran.
For this young girl and this young man
Have happiness without an end,
Because they have made so good a friend.

They know all wonders, for they pass
The towery gates of Gorias,
And Findrias and Falias,
And long-forgotten Murias,
Among the giant kings whose hoard,
Cauldron and spear and stone and sword,

Was robbed before earth gave the wheat;
Wandering from broken street to street
They come where some huge watcher is,
And tremble with their love and kiss.

They know undying things, for they
Wander where earth withers away,
Though nothing troubles the great streams
But light from the pale stars, and gleams
From the holy orchards, where there is none
But fruit that is of precious stone,
Or apples of the sun and moon.

What were our praise to them? they eat
Quiet's wild heart, like daily meat;
Who when night thickens are afloat
On dappled skins in a glass boat,
Far out under a windless sky;
While over them birds of Aengus fly,
And over the tiller and the prow,
And waving white wings to and fro
Awaken wanderings of light air
To stir their coverlet and their hair.

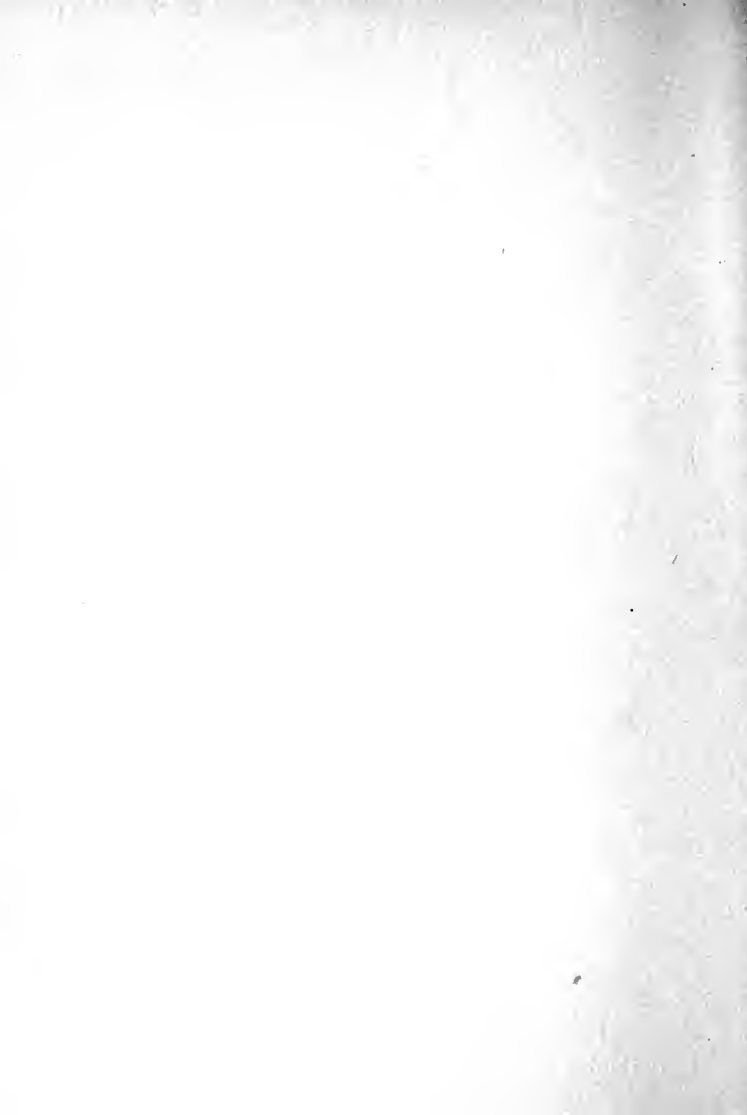
And poets found, old writers say,
A yew-tree where his body lay;
But a wild apple hid the grass
With its sweet blossom where hers was;
And being in good heart, because
A better time had come again
After the deaths of many men,

And that long fighting at the ford,
They wrote on tablets of thin board,
Made of the apple and the yew,
All the love stories that they knew.

*Let rush and bird cry out their fill
Of the harper's daughter if they will,
Beloved, I am not afraid of her.
She is not wiser nor lovelier,
And you are more high of heart than she,
For all her wanderings over-sea;
But I'd have bird and rush forget
Those other two; for never yet
Has lover lived, but longed to wive
Like them that are no more alive.*

LYRICS.

(1899-1904)



THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED.

ONE that is ever kind said yesterday:
"Your well-beloved's hair has threads of grey,
And little shadows come about her eyes;
Time can but make it easier to be wise,
Though now it's hard, till trouble is at an end;
And so be patient, be wise and patient, friend."
But, heart, there is no comfort, not a grain;
Time can but make her beauty over again;
Because of that great nobleness of hers
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs
Burns but more clearly. O she had not these ways,
When all the wild summer was in her gaze.
O heart! O heart! if she'd but turn her head,
You'd know the folly of being comforted.

OLD MEMORY.

O THOUGHT, fly to her when the end of day
Awakens an old memory, and say,
"Your strength, that is so lofty and fierce and kind,
It might call up a new age, calling to mind

The queens that were imagined long ago,
Is but half yours: he kneaded in the dough
Through the long years of youth, and who would have
thought

It all, more than it all, would come to naught,
And that dear words meant nothing?" But enough,
For when we have blamed the wind we can blame
love;

Or, if there needs be more, be nothing said
That would be harsh for children that have strayed.

NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART.

NEVER give all the heart, for love
Will hardly seem worth thinking of
To passionate women if it seem
Certain, and they never dream
That it fades out from kiss to kiss;
For everything that's lovely is
But a brief, dreamy, kind delight.
O never give the heart outright,
For they, for all smooth lips can say,
Have given their hearts up to the play.
And who could play it well enough
If deaf and dumb and blind with love?
He that made this knows all the cost,
For he gave all his heart and lost.

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS.

I CRIED when the moon was murmuring to the birds,
"Let peewit call and curlew cry where they will,
I long for your merry and tender and pitiful words,
For the roads are unending, and there is no place to
my mind."

The honey-pale moon lay low on the sleepy hill,
And I fell asleep upon lonely Ectge of streams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them
my dreams.

I know of the leafy paths that the witches take,
Who come with their crowns of pearl and their spindles
of wool,
And their secret smile, out of the depths of the lake;
I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan
kind
Wind and unwind their dances when the light grows
cool
On the island lawns, their feet where the pale foam
gleams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;

The boughs have withered because I have told them
my dreams.

I know of the sleepy country, where swans fly round
Coupled with golden chains, and sing as they fly.
A king and a queen are wandering there, and the sound
Has made them so happy and hopeless, so deaf and
so blind
With wisdom, they wander till all the years have
gone by;
I know, and the curlew and peewit on Eichtge of streams.
No boughs have withered because of the wintry wind;
The boughs have withered because I have told them
my dreams.

THE RAGGED WOOD.

O HURRY where by water among trees,
The delicate stepping stag and his lady sigh
When they have but looked upon their images,
O that none ever loved but you and I!

Or have you heard that sliding silver-shoed,
Pale, silver-proud queen-woman of the sky,
When the sun looked out of his golden hood,
O that none ever loved but you and I!

O hurry to the ragged wood, for there
I'll hollo all those lovers out and cry—
O my share of the world, O yellow hair,
No one has ever loved but you and I!

UNDER THE MOON.

I HAVE no happiness in dreaming of Brycelinde,
Nor Avalon the grass-green hollow, nor Joyous Isle,
Where one found Lancelot crazed and hid him for awhile;
Nor Ulad, when Naoise had thrown a sail upon the
wind,
Nor lands that seem too dim to be burdens on the
heart;
Land-under-Wave, where out of the moon's light and
the sun's
Seven old sisters wind the threads of the long-lived
ones;
Land-of-the-Tower, where Aengus has thrown the gates
apart,
And Wood-of-Wonders, where one kills an ox at dawn,
To find it when night falls laid on a golden bier:
Therein are many queens like Branwen and Guinivere;
And Niam and Laban and Fand, who could change to
an otter or fawn,
And the wood-woman, whose lover was changed to a
blue-eyed hawk;
And whether I go in my dreams by woodland, or dun,
or shore,
Or on the unpeopled waves with kings to pull at the oar,

I hear the harp-string praise them, or hear their mournful talk.

Because of a story I heard under the thin horn
Of the third moon, that hung between the night and
the day,

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dismay,

Even in an old story, is a burden not to be borne.

ADAM'S CURSE.

WE sat together at one summer's end,
That beautiful mild woman, your close friend,
And you and I, and talked of poetry.

I said: "A line will take us hours maybe;
Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.
Better go down upon your marrow bones
And scrub a kitchen pavement, or break stones
Like an old pauper, in all kinds of weather;
For to articulate sweet sounds together
Is to work harder than all these, and yet
Be thought an idler by the noisy set
Of bankers, schoolmasters, and clergymen
The martyrs call the world."

That woman then
Murmured with her young voice, for whose mild sake
There's many a one shall find out all heartache

In finding that it's young and mild and low:
"There is one thing that all we women know,
Although we never heard of it at school—
That we must labour to be beautiful."

I said: "It's certain there is no fine thing
Since Adam's fall but needs much labouring.
There have been lovers who thought love should be
So much compounded of high courtesy
That they would sigh and quote with learned looks
Precedents out of beautiful old books;
Yet now it seems an idle trade enough."

We sat grown quiet at the name of love;
We saw the last embers of daylight die,
And in the trembling blue-green of the sky
A moon, worn as if it had been a shell
Washed by time's waters as they rose and fell
About the stars and broke in days and years.

I had a thought for no one's but your ears;
That you were beautiful, and that I strove
To love you in the old high way of love;
That it had all seemed happy, and yet we'd grown
As weary hearted as that hollow moon.

RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND.

THE old brown thorn trees break in two high over
 Cummen Strand,
Under a bitter black wind that blows from the left hand;
Our courage breaks like an old tree in a black wind
 and dies,
But we have hidden in our hearts the flame out of the
 eyes
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Kneck-
 narea,
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that
 Maeve can say.
Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts
 abeat;
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet
 feet
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

The yellow pool has overflowed high up on Clooth-na-
 Bare,
For the wet winds are blowing out of the clinging air;
Like heavy flooded waters our bodies and our blood;
But purer than a tall candle before the Holy Rood
Is Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES
IN THE WATER.

I HEARD the old, old men say,
 "Everything alters,
 And one by one we drop away."
 They had hands like claws, and their knees
 Were twisted like the old thorn trees
 By the waters.
 I heard the old, old men say,
 "All that's beautiful drifts away
 Like the waters."

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND.

THERE'S many a strong farmer
 Whose heart would break in two,
 If he could see the townland
 That we are riding to;
 Boughs have their fruit and blossom
 At all times of the year;
 Rivers are running over
 With red beer and brown beer.

An old man plays the bagpipes
In a golden and silver wood;
Queens, their eyes blue like the ice,
Are dancing in a crowd.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

When their hearts are so high
That they would come to blows,
They unhook their heavy swords
From golden and silver boughs;
But all that are killed in battle
Awaken to life again:
It is lucky that their story
Is not known among men.
For O, the strong farmers
That would let the spade lie,
Their hearts would be like a cup
That somebody had drunk dry.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;

But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

Michael will unhook his trumpet
From a bough overhead,
And blow a little noise
When the supper has been spread.
Gabriel will come from the water
With a fish tail, and talk
Of wonders that have happened
On wet roads where men walk,
And lift up an old horn
Of hammered silver, and drink
Till he has fallen asleep
Upon the starry brink.

The little fox he murmured,
"O what of the world's bane?"
The sun was laughing sweetly,
The moon plucked at my rein;
But the little red fox murmured,
"O do not pluck at his rein,
He is riding to the townland
That is the world's bane."

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

(1904)



CUCHULAIN, *the King of Muirthemne.*

CONCHUBAR (*pronounced Conochar*), *the High King of Uladh.*

DAIRE, *a King.*

FINTAIN, *a blind man.*

BARACH, *a fool.*

A Young Man.

Young Kings and old Kings.

SCENE. *A great hall at Dundéalgan; not "Cuchulain's great ancient house," but an assembly house nearer to the sea. A big door at the back, and through the door misty light as of sea mist. There are many chairs on either side raised one above another, tier above tier. One of these chairs, which is turned towards the front of the stage, is bigger than the others. An elaborate cloak lies on a chair at the other side. Somewhere at the back there is a table with flagons of ale upon it and drinking horns. There is a small door at one side of the hall. A FOOL and BLIND MAN come in through the door at the back. They wear patched and ragged clothes.*

FOOL.

What a clever man you are, though you are blind! There's nobody with two eyes in his head that is as clever as you are. Who but you could have thought that

the henwife sleeps every day a little at noon! I would never be able to steal anything if you didn't tell me where to look for it. And what a good cook you are! You take the fowl out of my hands after I have stolen it, and you pluck it, and put it into the big pot at the fire there, and I can go out and run races with the witches at the edge of the waves and get an appetite; and when I've got it, there's the hen waiting inside for me done to the turn!

BLIND MAN. (*Who is feeling about with his hands.*)
Done to the turn.

FOOL. (*Putting his arm round BLIND MAN'S neck.*)

Come now, I'll have a leg and you'll have a leg, and we'll draw lots for the wish-bone. I'll be praising you—I'll be praising you while we're eating it—for your good plans and for your good cooking. There's nobody in the world like you, Blind Man. Come, come—wait a minute—I shouldn't have closed the door. There are some that look for me, and I wouldn't let them find me. Don't tell it to anybody, Blind Man. There are some that follow me: Boann herself out of the river, and Fand out of the deep sea—witches they are, and they come by in the wind and they cry, "Give a kiss, Fool, give a kiss!" That's what they cry. That's wide enough; all the witches can come in now. I wouldn't have them beat at the door and say, "Where is the Fool? Why has he put a lock on the door?" Maybe they'll hear the bubbling of a pot and come in and sit on the ground—but we won't give them any of the fowl—let them go back to the sea, let them go back to the sea.

BLIND MAN. (*Feeling legs of chair with his hands.*)

Ah! (*Then in a louder voice as he feels the back of it.*) Ah—ah!

FOOL.

Why do you say "ah—ah"?

BLIND MAN.

I know the big chair. It is to-day the High King Conchubar is coming. They have brought out his chair. He is going to be Cuchulain's master in earnest from this day out. It is that he's coming for.

FOOL.

He must be a great man to be Cuchulain's master.

BLIND MAN.

So he is. He is a great man. He is over all the rest of the kings of Ireland.

FOOL.

Cuchulain's master! I thought Cuchulain could do anything he liked.

BLIND MAN.

So he did, so he did; but he ran too wild, and Conchubar is coming to-day to put an oath upon him that will stop his rambling and make him as biddable as a house-dog and keep him always at his hand. He will sit in this chair and put the oath upon him. [*He sits in chair.*]

FOOL.

How will he do that?

BLIND MAN.

You have no wits to understand such things. He will sit up in this chair, and he'll say, "Take the oath,

Cuchulain; I bid you take the oath. Do as I tell you. What are your wits compared with mine? And what are your riches compared with mine? And what sons have you to pay your debts and to put a stone over you when you die? Take the oath, I tell you; take a strong oath."

FOOL. (*Crumpling himself up and whining.*)
I will not—I'll take no oath—I want my dinner.

BLIND MAN.
Hush! hush! It is not done yet.

FOOL.
You said it was done to a turn.

BLIND MAN.
Did I, now! Well, it might be done and not done. The wings might be white, but the legs might be red; the flesh might stick hard to the bones and not come away in the teeth . . . but believe me, Fool, it will be well done before you put your teeth in it.

FOOL.
My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

BLIND MAN.
I'll tell you a story. The kings have story-tellers while they are waiting for their dinner. I will tell you a story with a fight in it, a story with a champion in it, and a ship and a queen's son that has his mind set on killing somebody that you and I know.

FOOL.
Who is that? Who is he coming to kill?

BLIND MAN.

Wait, now, till you hear. When you were stealing the fowl I was lying in a hole in the sand, and I heard three men coming with a shuffling sort of noise. They were wounded and groaning.

FOOL.

Go on, tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN.

There had been a fight, a great fight, a tremendous great fight. A young man had landed on the shore, the guardians of the shore had asked his name and he had refused to tell it, and he had killed one and others had run away.

FOOL.

That's enough. Come on, now, to the fowl. I wish it was bigger. I wish it was as big as a goose.

BLIND MAN.

Hush! I haven't told you all. I know who that young man is. I heard the men who were running away say he had red hair, that he came from Aoife's country, that he was coming to kill Cuchulain.

FOOL.

Nobody could do that.

(Singing.)

Cuchulain has killed kings,
Kings and sons of kings,
Dragons out of the water,
And witches out of the air,

Bocanachs and Bananachs and people of the woods.

BLIND MAN.

Hush! hush!

FOOL (*still singing.*)

Witches that steal the milk,
Fomor that steal the children,
Hags that have heads like hares,
Hares that have claws like witches,
All riding a cock-horse.

(*Spoken.*)

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black North.

BLIND MAN.

Hush, I say!

FOOL.

Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

BLIND MAN.

How would he know that with his head in the clouds? He doesn't care for common fighting. Why would he put himself out, and nobody in it but that young man? Now, if it were a white fawn that might turn into a queen before morning—

FOOL.

Come to the fowl. I wish it was as big as a pig. A fowl with goose-grease and pig's crackling.

BLIND MAN.

No hurry, no hurry. I know whose son it is. I wouldn't tell anybody else, but I will tell you. A secret is better to you than your dinner. You like being told secrets.

FOOL.

Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN.

That young man is Aoife's son. . . . I am sure it is Aoife's son; it is borne in upon me that it is Aoife's son. You have often heard me talking of Aoife, the great woman fighter Cuchulain got the mastery over in the North?

FOOL.

I know, I know. She is one of those cross queens that live in hungry Scotland.

BLIND MAN.

I am sure it is her son. I was in Aoife's country for a long time.

FOOL.

That was before you were blinded for putting a curse upon the wind.

BLIND MAN.

There was a boy in her house that had her own red colour on him, and everybody said he was to be brought up to kill Cuchulain, that she hated Cuchulain. She used to put a helmet on a pillar stone and call it Cuchulain and set him casting at it. . . . There is a step outside—Cuchulain's step.

CUCHULAIN passes by in the mist outside the big door.

FOOL.

Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN.

He is going to meet Conchubar, that has bidden him to take the oath.

FOOL.

Ah! an oath, Blind Man. . . . How can I remember so many things at once? Who is going to take an oath?

BLIND MAN.

Cuchulain is going to take an oath to Conchubar, who is High King.

FOOL.

What a mix-up you make of everything, Blind Man! You were telling me one story, and now you are telling me another story. How can I understand things, when they begin to happen, if you mix up everything at the beginning?—Wait till I settle it out. (*Takes off shoes.*) There now, there's Cuchulain, and there is the young man that is coming to kill him, and Cuchulain doesn't know. But where's Conchubar? (*Takes bag from side.*) That's Conchubar with all his riches.—Cuchulain—Conchubar—the Young Man.—And where's Aoife? (*Throws up cap.*) There is Aoife, high up on the mountains in high hungry Scotland. (*Begins putting on shoes.*) Maybe it's not true after all. Maybe it was your own making up. It's many a time you cheated me before with your lies. Come to the cooking-pot, my stomach is pinched and rusty. Would you have it be creaking like a gate?

BLIND MAN.

I tell you it's true. And more than that is true. If you listen to what I say you'll forget your stomach.

FOOL.

I won't!

BLIND MAN.

Listen. I know who the young man's father is, but I won't say; I would be afraid to say. . . . Ah, Fool, you would forget everything if you could know who the young man's father is!

FOOL.

Who is it? Tell me now, quick, or I'll shake you. Come, out with it, or I'll shake you!

A murmur of voices in the distance.

BLIND MAN.

Wait, wait, there's somebody coming. . . . It is Cuchulain is coming. He's coming back with the High King. Go and ask Cuchulain. He'll tell you. It's little you'll care about the cooking-pot when you have asked Cuchulain that.

BLIND MAN *goes out by side-door.*

FOOL.

I'll ask him. Cuchulain will know. He was in Aoife's country. (*Going towards door at back.*) I'll ask him. (*Turns and goes to door at side.*) But no, I won't ask him. I would be afraid. (*Going up towards door and back again.*) Yes, I will ask him.—What harm in asking?—The blind man said I was to ask him.—(*Going to door at side again.*) No, no; I'll not ask him.—He might kill me.—I have but killed hens and geese and pigs. He has killed kings. (*Goes up again almost to door at back.*) Who says I'm afraid? I'm not afraid; I'm no coward. I'll ask him.—No, no, Cuchulain, I'm not going to ask you. (*Running to door at side.*)

He has killed kings,
 Kings and the sons of kings,
 Dragons out of the water,
 And witches out of the air,
 Bocanachs and Bananachs and people of the wood.

He runs out, the last words being heard outside.

CUCHULAIN and CONCHUBAR enter through the big door at the back. While they are still outside CUCHULAIN'S voice is heard raised in anger. He is a dark man, something over forty years of age. CONCHUBAR is much older, though not feeble-looking.

CUCHULAIN.

Because I have killed men without your bidding,
 And have rewarded others at my own pleasure,
 Because of half a score of trifling things,
 You lay this oath upon me; and now—and now
 You add another pebble to the heap,
 And I must be your man, wellnigh your bondsman,
 Because a youngster out of Aoife's country
 Has found the shore ill guarded.

CONCHUBAR.

He came to land
 While you were somewhere out of sight and hearing;
 Hunting or dancing with your wild companions.

CUCHULAIN.

He can be driven out. I'll not be bound.
 I'll dance or hunt, or quarrel or make love,
 Wherever or whenever I've a mind to.
 If time had not put water in your blood
 You never would have thought it.

CONCHUBAR.

I would leave
A strong and settled country to my children.

CUCHULAIN.

And I must be obedient in all things;
Give up my will to yours, go where you please,
Come where you will, sit at the council-board
Among the unshapely bodies of old men!
I, whose mere name has kept this country safe,
I, that in early days have driven out
Maeve of Cruachan and the northern pirates,
The hundred kings of Sorcha and the kings
Out of the Garden in the East of the World!
Must I that held you on the throne, when all
Had pulled you from it, swear obedience
As if I were some cattle-raising king?
Are my shins speckled with the heat of the fire,
Or have my hands no skill but to make figures
Upon the ashes with a stick? Am I
So slack and idle that I need a whip
Before I serve you?

CONCHUBAR.

No, no whip, Cuchulain.
But every day my children come and say:
"This man is growing harder to endure.
How can we be at safety with this man,
That nobody can buy or bid or bind?
We shall be at his mercy when you are gone.
He burns the earth as if it were a fire,
And time can never touch him."

CUCHULAIN.

And so the tale
Grows finer yet, and I am to obey
Whatever child you set upon the throne
As if it were yourself!

CONCHUBAR.

Most certainly.
I am High King, my son shall be High King;
And you, for all the wildness of your blood,
And though your father came out of the sun,
Are but a little king, and weigh but light
In anything that touches government,
If put into the balance with my children.

CUCHULAIN.

It's well that we should speak our minds out plainly,
For when we die we shall be spoken of
In many countries. We in our young days
Have seen the heavens like a burning cloud
Brooding upon the world, and being more
Than men can be, now that cloud's lifted up,
We should be the more truthful, Conchubar.
I do not like your children. They have no pith,
No marrow in their bones, and will lie soft
Where you and I lie hard.

CONCHUBAR.

You rail at them
Because you have no children of your own.

CUCHULAIN.

I think myself most lucky that I leave
No pallid ghost or mockery of a man

To drift and mutter in the corridors
Where I have laughed and sung.

CONCHUBAR.

That is not true,
For all your boasting of the truth between us,
For there is none that having house and lands,
That have been in the one family,
And called by the one name for centuries,
But is made miserable if he know
They are to pass into a stranger's keeping,
As yours will pass.

CUCHULAIN.

The most of men feel that;
But you and I leave names upon the harp.

CONCHUBAR.

You play with arguments as lawyers do,
And put no heart in them. I know your thoughts,
For we have slept under the one cloak and drunk
From the one wine-cup. I know you to the bone.
I have heard you cry—aye, in your very sleep—
“I have no son!” and with such bitterness
That I have gone upon my knees and prayed
That it might be amended.

CUCHULAIN.

For you thought
That I should be as biddable as others
Had I their reason for it; but that's not true,
For I would need a weightier argument
Than one that marred me in the copying,
As I have that clean hawk out of the air,

That as men say begot this body of mine
Upon a mortal woman.

CONCHUBAR.

Now as ever
You mock at every measurable hope,
And would have nothing or impossible things.
What eye has ever looked upon the child
Would satisfy a mind like that?

CUCHULAIN.

I would leave
My house and name to none that would not face
Even myself in battle.

CONCHUBAR.

Being swift of foot,
And making light of every common chance,
You should have overtaken on the hills
Some daughter of the air, or on the shore
A daughter of the Country-under-Wave.

CUCHULAIN.

I am not blasphemous.

CONCHUBAR.

Yet you despise
Our queens, and would not call a child your own
If one of them had borne him.

CUCHULAIN.

I have not said it.

CONCHUBAR.

Ah, I remember I have heard you boast,
When the ale was in your blood, that there was one

In Scotland, where you had learned the trade of war,
 That had a stone-pale cheek and red-brown hair,
 And that although you had loved other women,
 You'd sooner that fierce woman of the camp
 Bore you a son than any queen among them.

CUCHULAIN.

You call her a fierce woman of the camp;
 But having lived among the spinning-wheels,
 You'd have no woman near that would not say,
 "Ah, how wise!" "What will you have for supper?"
 "What shall I wear that I may please you, sir?"
 And keep that humming through the day and night
 Forever. A fierce woman of the camp!—
 But I am getting angry about nothing.
 You have never seen her. Ah, Conchubar, had you
 seen her,
 With that high, laughing, turbulent head of hers
 Thrown backward, and the bow-string at her ear,
 Or sitting at the fire with those grave eyes
 Full of good counsel as it were with wine,
 Or when love ran through all the lineaments
 Of her wild body—although she had no child,
 None other had all beauty, queen or lover,
 Or was so fitted to give birth to kings.

CONCHUBAR.

There's nothing I can say but drifts you farther
 From the one weighty matter. That very woman—
 For I know well that you are praising Aoife—
 Now hates you, and will leave no subtilty
 Unknotted that might run into a noose

About your throat, no army in idleness
That might bring ruin on this land you serve.

CUCHULAIN.

No wonder in that—no wonder at all in that.
I never have known love but as a kiss
In the mid-battle, and a difficult truce
Of oil and water, candles and dark night,
Hillside and hollow, the hot-footed sun,
And the cold sliding, slippery-footed moon—
A brief forgiveness between opposites
That have been hatreds for three times the age
Of this long-'stablished ground.

CONCHUBAR.

Listen to me:

Aoife makes war on us, and every day
Our enemies grow greater and beat the walls
More bitterly, and you within the walls
Are every day more turbulent; and yet
When I would speak about these things, your mind
Runs as it were a swallow on the wind.
Look at the door, and what men gather there—
Old counsellors that steer the land with me
And younger kings, the dancers and harp-players
That follow in your tumults, and all these
Are held there by the one anxiety.
Will you be bound into obedience,
And so make this land safe for them and theirs?
You are but half a king, and I but half.
I need your might of hand and burning heart,
And you my wisdom.

Outside the door in the blue light of the sea mist

are many old and young kings; amongst them are three women, two of whom carry a bowl full of fire. The third woman puts from time to time fragrant herbs into the fire so that it flickers up into brighter flame.

CUCHULAIN (*going near to the door*).

Nestlings of a high nest,
Hawks that have followed me into the air
And looked upon the sun, we'll out of this
And sail upon the wind once more. This king
Would have me take an oath to do his will,
And having listened to his tune from morning,
I will no more of it. Run to the stable
And set the horses to the chariot-pole,
And send a messenger to the harp-players.
We'll find a level place among the woods
And dance awhile.

A YOUNG KING.

Cuchulain, take the oath.
There is none here that would not have you take it.

CUCHULAIN.

You'd have me take it? Are you of one mind?

THE KINGS.

All, all, all, all!

A KING.

Do what the High King bids you.

CONCHUBAR.

There is not one but dreads this turbulence,
Now that they are settled men.

CUCHULAIN.

Are you so changed,
 Or have I grown more dangerous of late?
 But that's not it. I understand it all.
 It's you that have changed. You've wives and children
 now,
 And for that reason cannot follow one
 That lives like a bird's flight from tree to tree—
 It's time the years put water in my blood
 And drowned the wildness of it, for all's changed,
 But that unchanged.—I'll take what oath you will:
 The moon, the sun, the water, light, or air,
 I do not care how binding.

CONCHUBAR (*who has seated himself in his great
 chair*).

On this fire
 That has been lighted from your hearth and mine,
 The older men shall be my witnesses,
 The younger yours. The holders of the fire
 Shall purify the thresholds of the house
 With waving fire, and shut the outer door,
 According to old custom, and sing rhyme
 That has come down from the old law-makers
 To blow the witches out. Considering
 That the wild will of man could be oath-bound,
 But that a woman's could not, they bid us sing
 Against the will of woman at its wildest
 In the shape-changers that run upon the wind.

(*The song of the WOMEN.*)

May this fire have driven out
 The shape-changers that can put

Ruin on a great king's house
Until all be ruinous.
Names whereby a man has known
The threshold and the hearthstone,
Gather on the wind and drive
Women none can kiss and thrive,
For they are but whirling wind,
Out of memory and mind.
They would make a prince decay
With light images of clay
Planted in the running wave;
Or, for many shapes they have,
They would change them into hounds
Until he had died of his wounds,
Though the change were but a whim;
Or they'd hurl a spell at him,
That he follow with desire
Bodies that can never tire
Or grow kind, for they anoint
All their bodies joint by joint
With a miracle-working juice
That is made out of the grease
Of the ungoverned unicorn;
But the man is thrice forlorn,
Emptied, ruined, wracked, and lost,
That they follow, for at most
They will give him kiss for kiss
While they murmur "After this
Hatred may be sweet to the taste;"
Those wild hands that have embraced
All his body can but shove
At the burning wheel of love

Till the side of hate comes up.
 Therefore, in this ancient cup
 May the sword-blades drink their fill
 Of the home-brew there, until
 They will have for master none
 But the threshold and hearthstone.

After "Memory and mind" their words die away to a murmur, but are loud again at "Therefore in." The others do not speak when these words are loud.

CUCHULAIN. (*Speaking while they are singing.*)
 I'll take and keep this oath, and from this day
 I shall be what you please, my nestlings.
 Yet I had thought you were of those that praised
 Whatever life could make the pulse run quickly,
 Even though it were brief, and that you held
 That a free gift was better than a forced;
 But that's all over.—I will keep it, too.
 I never gave a gift and took it again.
 If the wild horse should break the chariot-pole
 It would be punished. Should that be in the oath?—

Two of the women, still singing, crouch in front of him holding the bowl over their heads. He spreads his hands over the flame.

I swear to be obedient in all things
 To Conchubar, and to uphold his children.

CONCHUBAR.

We are one being, as these flames are one.
 I give my wisdom, and I take your strength.
 Now thrust the swords in the flame, and pray

That they may serve the threshold and the hearth-
stone

With faithful service.

The Kings kneel in a semicircle before the two women and CUCHULAIN, who thrusts his sword in the flame. They all put the points of their swords in the flame. The third woman is at the back near the big door.

CUCHULAIN.

O pure glittering ones,
That should be more than wife or friend or mistress,
Give us the enduring will, the unquenchable hope,
The friendliness of the sword!—

The song grows louder, and the last words ring out clearly. There is a loud knocking at the door, and a cry of "Open! open!"

CONCHUBAR.

Some king that has been loitering on the way.
Open the door, for I would have all know
That the oath's finished, and Cuchulain bound
And that the swords are drinking up the flame.

The door is opened by the third woman, and a Young Man with a drawn sword enters.

YOUNG MAN.

I am of Aoife's army.

The Kings rush towards him. CUCHULAIN throws himself between.

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your swords.
He is but one. Aoife is far away.

YOUNG MAN.

I have come alone into the midst of you
To weigh this sword against Cuchulain's sword.

CONCHUBAR.

And are you noble? for if of common seed
You cannot weigh your sword against his sword
But in mixed battle.

YOUNG MAN.

I am under bonds
To tell my name to no man; but it's noble.

CONCHUBAR.

But I would know your name, and not your bonds.
You cannot speak in the Assembly House
If you are not noble.

FIRST KING.

Answer the High King!

YOUNG MAN.

I will give no other proof than the hawk gives—
That it's no sparrow!

[He is silent for a moment, then speaks to all.]

Yet look upon me, kings.

I too am of that ancient seed, and carry
The signs about this body and in these bones.

CUCHULAIN.

To have shown the hawk's grey feather is enough,
And you speak highly, too. Give me that helmet!
I'd thought they had grown weary sending champions.
That sword and belt will do. This fighting's welcome.
The High King there has promised me his wisdom;
But the hawk's sleepy till its well-beloved

Cries out amid the acorns, or it has seen
 Its enemy like a speck upon the sun.
 What's wisdom to the hawk, when that clear eye
 Is burning nearer up in the high air!

*Looks hard at YOUNG MAN; then comes down steps
 and grasps the YOUNG MAN by his shoulder.*

Hither into the light! [To CONCHUBAR.

The very tint

Of her that I was speaking of but now.

Not a pin's difference. [To YOUNG MAN.

You are from the North,

Where there are many that have that tint of hair—

Red-brown, the light red-brown. Come nearer, boy,

For I would have another look at you.

There's more likeness—a pale, a stone-pale cheek.

What brought you, boy? Have you no fear of death!

YOUNG MAN.

Whether I live or die is in the Gods' hands.

CUCHULAIN.

That is all words, all words; a young man's talk.

I am their plough, their harrow, their very strength;

For he that's in the sun begot this body

Upon a mortal woman, and I have heard tell

It seemed as if he had outrun the moon,

That he must follow always through waste heaven,

He loved so happily. He'll be but slow

To break a tree that was so sweetly planted.

Let's see that arm! I'll see it if I like.

That arm had a good father and a good mother,

But it is not like this.

YOUNG MAN.

You are mocking me!
 You think I am not worthy to be fought.
 But I'll not wrangle but with this talkative knife.

CUCHULAIN.

Put up your sword; I am not mocking you.
 I'd have you for my friend; but if it's not
 Because you have a hot heart and a cold eye,
 I cannot tell the reason. (*To CONCHUBAR.*) He has got
 her fierceness,
 And nobody is as fierce as those pale women.
 And I will keep him with me, Conchubar,
 That he may set my memory upon it
 When the day's fading.

You will stop with us,
 And we shall hunt the deer and the wild bulls;
 And, when we have grown weary, light our fires
 Between the wood and water, or on some mountain
 Where the shape-changers of the morning come.
 The High King there would make a mock of me
 Because I did not take a wife among them.
 Why do you hang your head? It's a good life.
 The head grows prouder in the light of the dawn,
 And friendship thickens in the murmuring dark,
 Where the spare hazels meet the wool-white foam.
 But I can see there's no more need for words,
 And that you'll be my friend from this day out.

CONCHUBAR.

He has come hither, not in his own name,
 But in Queen Aoife's name; and has challenged us
 In challenging the foremost man of us all,

CUCHULAIN.

Well, well, what matter!

CONCHUBAR.

You think it does not matter,
 And that a fancy lighter than the air,
 A whim of the moment has more matter in it,
 For having none that shall reign after you,
 You cannot think, as I do, who would leave
 A throne too high for insult.

CUCHULAIN.

Let your children
 Re-mortar their inheritance as we have,
 And put more muscle on. I'll give you gifts,
 But I'd have something too—that arm-ring, boy.
 We'll have this quarrel out when you are older.

YOUNG MAN.

There is no man I'd sooner have my friend
 Than you, whose name has gone about the world
 As if it had been the wind; but Aoife'd say
 I had turned coward.

CUCHULAIN.

I will give you gifts,
 That Aoife'll know, and all her people know,
 To have come from me. (*Showing cloak which is on a
 chair.*) My father gave me this.
 He came to try me, rising up at dawn
 Out of the cold dark of the rich sea.
 He challenged me to battle, but before
 My sword had touched his sword, told me his name,
 Gave me this cloak, and vanished. It was woven

By women of the Country-under-Wave
 Out of the fleeces of the sea. O! tell her
 I was afraid, or tell her what you will.
 No; tell her that I heard a raven croak
 On the north side of the house, and was afraid.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch of the air has troubled Cuchulain's mind.

CUCHULAIN.

No witchcraft. His head is like a woman's head
 I had a fancy for.

CONCHUBAR.

A witch of the air
 Can make a leaf confound us with memories.
 They ride upon the wind and hurl the spells
 That make us nothing, out of the invisible wind.
 They have gone to school to learn the trick of it.

CUCHULAIN.

No, no, there's nothing out of common here;
 The winds are innocent. That arm-ring, boy!

A KING.

If I've your leave, I'll take this challenge up.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me, High King, for that wild Aoife
 Has carried off my slaves.

ANOTHER KING.

No, give it me,
 For she has harried me in house and herd.

ANOTHER KING.

I claim this fight.

OTHER KINGS *together*).
And I! and I! and I!

CUCHULAIN.

Back! back! Put up your swords! put up your swords!
There's none alive that shall accept a challenge
I have refused. Laegaire put up your sword!

YOUNG MAN.

No, let them come! If they've a mind for it,
I'll try it out with any two together.

CUCHULAIN.

That's spoken as I'd have spoken at your age.
But you are in my house. Whatever man
Would fight with you shall fight it out with me.
They're dumb, they're dumb? How many of you would
meet [*Draws sword.*]
This mutterer, this old whistler, this sand-piper,
This edge that's greyer than the tide, this mouse
That's gnawing at the timbers of the world,
This, this—? Boy, I would meet them all in arms
If I'd a son like you. He would avenge me
When I have withstood for the last time the men
Whose fathers, brothers, sons, and friends I have killed
Upholding Conchubar, when the four provinces
Have gathered with the ravens over them.
But I'd need no avenger. You and I
Would scatter them like water from a dish.

YOUNG MAN.

We'll stand by one another from this out.
Here is the ring.

CUCHULAIN.

No, turn and turn about.
But my turn's first, because I am the older.

[*Spreading out cloak.*]

Nine queens out of the Country-under-Wave
Have woven it with the fleeces of the sea,
And they were long embroidering at it. Boy,
If I had fought my father, he'd have killed me
As certainly as if I had a son,
And fought with him, I should be deadly to him,
For the old fiery fountains are far off,
And every day there is less heat o' the blood.

CONCHUBAR (*in a loud voice*).

No more of that; I will not have this friendship.
Cuchulain is my man, and I forbid it.
He shall not go unfought, for I myself——

CUCHULAIN.

I will not have it.

CONCHUBAR.

You lay commands on me?

CUCHULAIN (*seizing CONCHUBAR*).

You shall not stir, High King; I'll hold you there.

CONCHUBAR.

Witchcraft has maddened you.

THE KINGS (*shouting*).

Yes, witchcraft! witchcraft!

FIRST KING.

Some witch has worked upon your mind, Cuchulain.
The head of that young man seemed like a woman's

You had a fancy for. Then of a sudden
 You laid your hands on the High King himself.

He has taken his hands from the HIGH KING. He stands as if he were dazed.

CUCHULAIN.

And laid my hands on the High King himself.

CONCHUBAR.

Some witch is floating in the air above us.

CUCHULAIN.

Yes, witchcraft, witchcraft. Witches of the air.

[To YOUNG MAN.

Why did you? Who was it set you to this work?

Out! out, I say! for now it's sword on sword!

YOUNG MAN.

But . . . but I did not.

CUCHULAIN.

Out, I say! out! out!

YOUNG MAN goes out followed by CUCHULAIN. The KINGS follow them out with confused cries, and words one can hardly hear because of the noise. Some cry, "Quicker, quicker!" "Why are you so long at the door?" "We'll be too late!" "Have they begun to fight?" and so on; and one, it may be, "I saw him fight with Ferdia!" Their voices drown each other. The three women are left alone.

FIRST WOMAN.

I have seen, I have seen.

SECOND WOMAN.

What do you cry aloud?

FIRST WOMAN.

The ever-living have shown me what's to come.

THIRD WOMAN.

How? Where?

FIRST WOMAN.

In the ashes of the bowl.

SECOND WOMAN.

While you were holding it between your hands?

THIRD WOMAN.

Speak quickly!

FIRST WOMAN.

I saw Cuchulain's roof-tree
Leap into fire, and the walls split and blacken.

SECOND WOMAN.

Cuchulain has gone out to die.

THIRD WOMAN.

O! O!

SECOND WOMAN.

Who could have thought that one so great as he
Should meet his end at this unnoted sword!

FIRST WOMAN.

Life drifts between a Fool and a Blind Man
To the end, and nobody can know his end.

SECOND WOMAN.

Come, look upon the quenching of this greatness.

*The other two go to the door, but they stop for a
moment upon the threshold and wail.*

FIRST WOMAN.

No crying out, for there'll be need of cries
And knocking at the breast when it's all finished.

*The women go out. There is a sound of clashing
swords from time to time during what follows.*

Enter the FOOL dragging the BLIND MAN.

FOOL.

You have eaten it, you have eaten it!
You have left me nothing but the bones!

He throws BLIND MAN down by big chair.

BLIND MAN.

O, that I should have to endure such a plague! O,
I ache all over! O, I am pulled to pieces! This is the
way you pay me all the good I have done you!

FOOL.

You have eaten it! You have told me lies. I might
have known you had eaten it when I saw your slow,
sleepy walk. Lie there till the kings come. O, I will
tell Conchubar and Cuchulain and all the kings about
you!

BLIND MAN.

What would have happened to you but for me, and
you without your wits? If I did not take care of you,
what would you do for food and warmth?

FOOL.

You take care of me! You stay safe, and send me
into every kind of danger. You sent me down the cliff
for gulls' eggs while you warmed your blind eyes in the
sun; and then you ate all that were good for food. You
left me the eggs that were neither egg nor bird. (BLIND

MAN *tries to rise*; FOOL *makes him lie down again*). Keep quiet now, till I shut the door. There is some noise outside—a high vexing noise, so that I can't be listening to myself. (*Shuts the big door.*) Why can't they be quiet! why can't they be quiet! (BLIND MAN *tries to get away*). Ah! you would get away, would you! (*Follows BLIND MAN and brings him back*). Lie there! lie there! No, you won't get away! Lie there till the kings come. I'll tell them all about you. I will tell it all. How you sit warming yourself, when you have made me light a fire of sticks, while I sit blowing it with my mouth. Do you not always make me take the windy side of the bush when it blows, and the rainy side when it rains?

BLIND MAN.

O, good Fool! listen to me. Think of the care I have taken of you. I have brought you to many a warm hearth, where there was a good welcome for you, but you would not stay there; you were always wandering about.

FOOL.

The last time you brought me in it was not I who wandered away, but you that got put out because you took the crubeen out of the pot when nobody was looking. Keep quiet, now!

CUCHULAIN (*rushing in*).

Witchcraft! There is no witchcraft on the earth, or among the witches of the air, that these hands cannot break.

FOOL.

Listen to me, Cuchulain. I left him turning the

fowl at the fire. He ate it all, though I had stolen it. He left me nothing but the feathers.

CUCHULAIN.

Fill me a horn of ale!

BLIND MAN.

I gave him what he likes best. You do not know how vain this Fool is. He likes nothing so well as a feather.

FOOL.

He left me nothing but the bones and feathers. Nothing but the feathers, though I had stolen it.

CUCHULAIN.

Give me that horn! Quarrels here, too! (*Drinks*). What is there between you two that is worth a quarrel? Out with it!

BLIND MAN.

Where would he be but for me? I must be always thinking—thinking to get food for the two of us, and when we've got it, if the moon is at the full or the tide on the turn, he'll leave the rabbit in the snare till it is full of maggots, or let the trout slip back through his hands into the stream.

The FOOL has begun singing while the BLIND MAN is speaking.

(*Sings.*)

When you were an acorn on the tree-top,
Then was I an eagle cock;
Now that you are a withered old block,
Still am I an eagle cock.

BLIND MAN.

Listen to him now. That's the sort of talk I have to put up with day out, day in.

The FOOL is putting the feathers into his hair.

CUCHULAIN takes a handful of feathers out of a heap the FOOL has on the bench beside him, and out of the FOOL'S hair, and begins to wipe the blood from his sword with them.

FOOL.

He has taken my feathers to wipe his sword. It is blood that he is wiping from his sword.

CUCHULAIN. (Goes up to door at back and throws away feathers.)

They are standing about his body. They will not awaken him for all his witchcraft.

BLIND MAN.

It is that young champion that he has killed. He that came out of Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN.

He thought to have saved himself with witchcraft.

FOOL.

That blind man there said he would kill you. He came from Aoife's country to kill you. That blind man said they had taught him every kind of weapon that he might do it. But I always knew that you would kill him.

CUCHULAIN (to the BLIND MAN).

You knew him, then?

BLIND MAN.

I saw him, when I had my eyes, in Aoife's country.

CUCHULAIN.

You were in Aoife's country?

BLIND MAN.

I knew him and his mother there.

CUCHULAIN.

He was about to speak of her when he died.

BLIND MAN.

He was a queen's son.

CUCHULAIN.

What queen? what queen? (*Seizes BLIND MAN, who is now sitting upon the bench.*) Was it Scathach? There were many queens. All the rulers there were queens.

BLIND MAN.

No, not Scathach.

CUCHULAIN.

It was Uathach, then? Speak! speak!

BLIND MAN.

I cannot speak; you are clutching me too tightly. (*CUCHULAIN lets him go.*) I cannot remember who it was. I am not certain. It was some queen.

FOOL.

He said awhile ago that the young man was Aoife's son.

CUCHULAIN.

She? No, no! She had no son when I was there.

FOOL.

That blind man there said that she owned him for her son.

CUCHULAIN.

I had rather he had been some other woman's son. What father had he? A soldier out of Alba? She was an amorous woman—a proud, pale, amorous woman.

BLIND MAN.

None knew whose son he was.

CUCHULAIN.

None knew! Did you know, old listener at doors?

BLIND MAN.

No, no; I knew nothing.

FOOL.

He said awhile ago that he heard Aoife boast that she'd never but the one lover, and he the only man that had overcome her in battle. *[Pause.*

BLIND MAN.

Somebody is trembling, Fool! The bench is shaking. Why are you trembling? Is Cuchulain going to hurt us? It was not I who told you, Cuchulain.

FOOL.

It is Cuchulain who is trembling. It is Cuchulain who is shaking the bench.

BLIND MAN.

It is his own son he has slain.

CUCHULAIN.

'Twas they that did it, the pale windy people.

Where? where? where? My sword against the thunder!
 But no, for they have always been my friends;
 And though they love to blow a smoking coal
 Till it's all flame, the wars they blow aflame
 Are full of glory, and heart-uplifting pride,
 And not like this. The wars they love awaken
 Old fingers and the sleepy strings of harps.
 Who did it, then? Are you afraid? speak out?
 For I have put you under my protection,
 And will reward you well. Dubthach the Chafer?
 He'd an old grudge. No, for he is with Maeve.
 'Twas Laegaire did it! Why do you not speak?
 What is this house? (*Pause.*) Now I remember all.

*Comes before CONCHUBAR'S chair, and strikes out
 with his sword, as if CONCHUBAR was sitting
 upon it.*

'Twas you who did it—you who sat up there
 With your old rod of kingship, like a magpie
 Nursing a stolen spoon. No, not a magpie,
 A maggot that is eating up the earth!
 Yes, but a magpie, for he's flown away.
 Where did he fly to?

BLIND MAN.

He is outside the door.

CUCHULAIN.

Outside the door?

BLIND MAN.

Between the door and the sea.

CUCHULAIN.

Conchubar, Conchubar! the sword into your heart!

He rushes out. Pause. FOOL creeps up to the big door and looks after him.

FOOL.

He is going up to King Conchubar. They are all about the young man. No, no, he is standing still. There is a great wave going to break, and he is looking at it. Ah! now he is running down to the sea, but he is holding up his sword as if he were going into a fight. (*Pause.*) Well struck! well struck!

BLIND MAN.

What is he doing now!

FOOL.

O! he is fighting the waves.

BLIND MAN.

He sees King Conchubar's crown on every one of them.

FOOL.

There, he has struck at a big one! He has struck the crown off it; he has made the foam fly. There again, another big one!

BLIND MAN.

Where are the kings! What are the kings doing?

FOOL.

They are shouting and running down to the shore, and the people are running out of the houses. They are all running,

BLIND MAN.

You say they are running out of the houses? There will be nobody left in the houses. Listen, Fool!

FOOL.

There, he is down! He is up again. He is going into the deep water. There is a big wave. It has gone over him. I cannot see him now. He has killed kings and giants, but the waves have mastered him, the waves have mastered him!

BLIND MAN.

Come here, Fool!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here!

FOOL.

The waves have mastered him.

BLIND MAN.

Come here, I say!

FOOL. (*Coming towards him, but looking backward towards the door.*)

What is it?

BLIND MAN.

There will be nobody in the houses. Come this way; come quickly! The ovens will be full. We will put our hands into the ovens. [*They go out.*]

DEIRDRE.

(1906)

MUSICIANS.

FERGUS, *an old man.*

NAISI, *a young king.*

DEIRDRE, *his queen.*

CONCHUBAR (*pronounced Conochar*), *the old King of Uladh, who is still strong and vigorous.*

Men with dark faces.

SCENE: *A Guest-house in a wood. It is a rough house of timber; through the doors and some of the windows one can see the great spaces of the wood, the sky dimming, night closing in. But a window to the left shows the thick leaves of a coppice; the landscape suggests silence and loneliness. There is a door to right and left, and through the side windows one can see anybody who approaches either door, a moment before he enters. In the centre, a part of the house is curtained off; the curtains are drawn. There are unlighted torches in brackets on the walls. There is, at one side, a small table with a chessboard and chessmen upon it. At the other side of the room there is a brazier with a fire; two women, with musical instruments beside them, crouch about the brazier: they are comely women of about forty. Another woman, who carries a stringed instrument,*

enters hurriedly; she speaks, at first standing in the doorway.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have a story right, my wanderers,
That has so mixed with fable in our songs,
That all seemed fabulous. We are come, by chance,
Into King Conchubar's country, and this house
Is an old guest-house built for travellers
From the seashore to Conchubar's royal house,
And there are certain hills among these woods,
And there Queen Deirdre grew.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

That famous queen
Who has been wandering with her lover Naisi,
And none to friend but lovers and wild hearts?

FIRST MUSICIAN (*going nearer to the brazier*).

Some dozen years ago, King Conchubar found
A house upon a hillside in this wood,
And there a comely child with an old witch
To nurse her, and there's nobody can say
If she were human, or of those begot
By an invisible king of the air in a storm
On a king's daughter, or anything at all
Of who she was or why she was hidden there
But that she'd too much beauty for good luck.
He went up thither daily, till at last
She put on womanhood, and he lost peace,
And Deirdre's tale began. The King was old.
A month or so before the marriage day,
A young man, in the laughing scorn of his youth,

Naisi, the son of Usna, climbed up there,
 And having wooed, or, as some say, been wooed,
 Carried her off.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

The tale were well enough
 Had it a finish.

FIRST MUSICIANS.

Hush! I have more to tell;
 But gather close that I may whisper it:
 I speak of terrible, mysterious ends—
 The secrets of a king.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

There's none to hear!

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have been to Conchubar's house and followed up
 A crowd of servants going out and in
 With loads upon their heads: embroideries
 To hang upon the walls, or new-mown rushes
 To strew upon the floors, and came at length
 To a great room.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Be silent; there are steps!

*Enter FERGUS, an old man, who moves about from
 door to window excitedly through what follows.*

FERGUS.

I thought to find a message from the king.
 You are musicians by these instruments,
 And if as seems—for you are comely women—
 You can praise love, you'll have the best of luck,
 For there'll be two, before the night is in,

That bargained for their love, and paid for it
All that men value. You have but the time
To weigh a happy music with a sad;
To find what is most pleasing to a lover,
Before the son of Usna and his queen
Have passed this threshold.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Deirdre and her man!

FERGUS.

I was to have found a message in this house,
And ran to meet it. Is there no messenger
From Conchubar to Fergus, son of Rogh?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Are Deirdre and her lover tired of life?

FERGUS.

You are not of this country, or you'd know
That they are in my charge and all forgiven.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

We have no country but the roads of the world.

FERGUS.

Then you should know that all things change in the
world,
And hatred turns to love and love to hate,
And even kings forgive.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

An old man's love
Who casts no second line, is hard to cure;
His jealousy is like his love.

FERGUS.

And that's but true.

You have learned something in your wanderings.
 He was so hard to cure, that the whole court,
 But I alone, thought it impossible;
 Yet after I had urged it at all seasons,
 I had my way, and all's forgiven now;
 And you shall speak the welcome and the joy
 That I lack tongue for.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS (*going to door*).

I am Conchubar's near friend, and that weighed
 somewhat,
 And it was policy to pardon them.
 The need of some young, famous, popular man
 To lead the troops, the murmur of the crowd,
 And his own natural impulse, urged him to it.
 They have been wandering half-a-dozen years.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

And yet old men are jealous.

FERGUS (*coming from door*).

Sing the more sweetly

Because, though age is arid as a bone,
 This man has flowered. I've need of music, too;
 If this grey head would suffer no reproach,
 I'd dance and sing—

Dark-faced MEN with strange, barbaric dress and

*arms begin to pass by the doors and windows.
They pass one by one and in silence.*

and dance till the hour ran out,
Because I have accomplished this good deed.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Look there—there at the window, those dark men,
With murderous and outlandish-looking arms—
They've been about the house all day.

FERGUS (*looking after them*).

What are you?
Where do you come from, who is it sent you here?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They will not answer you.

FERGUS.

They do not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Forgive my open speech, but to these eyes
That have seen many lands, they are such men
As kings will gather for a murderous task,
That neither bribes, commands, nor promises
Can bring their people to.

FERGUS.

And that is why
You harped upon an old man's jealousy.
A trifle sets you quaking. Conchubar's fame
Brings merchandise on every wind that blows.
They may have brought him Libyan dragon-skin,
Or the ivory of the fierce unicorn.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If these be merchants, I have seen the goods

They have brought to Conchubar, and understood
His murderous purpose

FERGUS.

Murderous, you say?

Why, what new gossip of the roads is this?
But I'll not hear.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

It may be life or death.

There is a room in Conchubar's house, and there——

FERGUS.

Be silent, or I'll drive you from the door.
There's many a one that would do more than that,
And make it prison, or death, or banishment
To slander the high King.

[Suddenly restraining himself and speaking gently.]

He is my friend;

I have his oath, and I am well content.
I have known his mind as if it were my own
These many years, and there is none alive
Shall buzz against him, and I there to stop it.
I know myself, and him, and your wild thought
Fed on extravagant poetry, and lit
By such a dazzle of old fabulous tales
That common things are lost, and all that's strange
Is true because 'twere pity if it were not.

[Going to the door again.]

Quick! quick! your instruments! they are coming now.
I hear the hoofs a-clatter. Begin that song;
But what is it to be? I'd have them hear
A music foaming up out of the house
Like wine out of a cup. Come now, a verse

Of some old time not worth remembering,
 And all the lovelier because a bubble.
 Begin, begin, of some old king and queen,
 Of Ludgaidh Redstripe or another; no, not him,
 He and his lady perished wretchedly.

FIRST MUSICIAN (*singing*).

"Why is it," Queen Edain said,
 "If I do but climb the stair

FERGUS.

Ah! that is better. . . . They are alighted now.
 Shake all your cockscombs, children; these are lovers.

FERGUS *goes out*.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

"Why is it," Queen Edain said,
 "If I do but climb the stair
 To the tower overhead,
 When the winds are calling there,
 Or the gannets calling out,
 In waste places of the sky,
 There's so much to think about,
 That I cry, that I cry?"

SECOND MUSICIAN.

But her goodman answered her:
 "Love would be a thing of naught
 Had not all his limbs a stir
 Born out of immoderate thought;
 Were he anything by half,
 Were his measure running dry.
 Lovers, if they may not laugh,
 Have to cry, have to cry."

DEIRDRE, NAISI, *and* FERGUS *have been seen for a moment through the windows, but now they have entered.*

THE THREE MUSICIANS (*together*).

But is Edain worth a song
 Now the hunt begins anew?
 Praise the beautiful and strong;
 Praise the redness of the yew;
 Praise the blossoming apple-stem.
 But our silence had been wise.
 What is all our praise to them,
 That have one another's eyes?

DEIRDRE.

Silence your music, though I thank you for it;
 But the wind's blown upon my hair, and I
 Must set the jewels on my neck and head
 For one that's coming.

NAISI.

Your colour has all gone
 As 'twere with fear, and there's no cause for that.

DEIRDRE.

These women have the raddle that they use
 To make them brave and confident, although
 Dread, toil, or cold may chill the blood o' their cheeks.
 You'll help me, women. It is my husband's will
 I show my trust in one, that may be here
 Before the mind can call the colour up.
 My husband took these rubies from a king
 Of Surracha that was so murderous
 He seemed all glittering dragon. Now wearing them

Myself wars on myself, for I myself—
That do my husband's will, yet fear to do it—
Grow dragonish to myself.

The Women have gathered about her. NAISI has stood looking at her, but FERGUS brings him to the chess-table.

FERGUS.

We'll play at chess
Till the king comes. It is but natural
That she should fear him, for her house has been
The hole of the badger and the den of the fox.

NAISI.

If I were childish and had faith in omens,
I'd rather not have lit on that old chess-board
At my home-coming.

FERGUS.

There's a tale about it—
It has been lying there these many years—
Some wild old sorrowful tale.

NAISI.

It is the board
Where Ludgaidh Redstripe and that wife of his,
Who had a seamew's body half the year,
Played at the chess upon the night they died.

FERGUS.

I can remember now, a tale of treachery,
A broken promise and a journey's end—
But it were best forgot.

DEIRDRE has been standing with the Women about her. They have been helping her to put on her

jewels and to put the pigment on her cheeks and arrange her hair. She has gradually grown attentive to what FERGUS is saying.

NAISI.

If the tale's true,
When it was plain that they had been betrayed,
They moved the men and waited for the end
As it were bedtime, and had so quiet minds
They hardly winked their eyes when the sword flashed.

FERGUS.

She never could have played so, being a woman,
If she had not the cold sea's blood in her.

DEIRDRE.

I have heard the ever-living warn mankind
By changing clouds and casual accidents,
Or what seem so.

NAISI.

It would but ill become us,
Now that King Conchubar has pledged his word,
Should we be startled by a cloud or a shadow.

DEIRDRE.

There's none to welcome us.

NAISI.

Being his guest,
Words that would wrong him can but wrong ourselves.

DEIRDRE.

An empty house upon the journey's end!
Is that the way a king that means no mischief
Honours a guest?

FERGUS.

He is but making ready
 A welcome in his house, arranging where
 The moorhen and the mallard go, and where
 The speckled heathcock on a golden dish.

DEIRDRE.

Had he no messenger?

NAISI.

Such words and fears
 Wrong this old man who's pledged his word to us.
 You speak as women do that sit alone
 Marking among the ashes with a stick
 Till they are terrified.—You are a queen:
 You should have too calm thought to start at shadows.
 (To FERGUS.) Come, let us look if there's a messenger
 From Conchubar. We cannot see from this
 Because we are blinded by the leaves and twigs,
 But it may be the wood will thin again.
 It is but kind that when the lips we love
 Speak words that are unfitting for kings' ears
 Our ears be deaf.

FERGUS.

But now I had to threaten
 These wanderers because they would have weighed
 Some crazy phantasy of their own brain
 Or gossip of the road with Conchubar's word.
 If I had thought so little of mankind
 I never could have moved him to this pardon.
 I have believed the best of every man,
 And find that to believe it is enough

To make a bad man show him at his best,
Or even a good man swing his lantern higher.

NAISI and FERGUS go out. *The last words are spoken as they go through the door. One can see them through part of what follows, either through door or window. They move about, talking or looking along the road towards CONCHUBAR'S house.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If anything lies heavy on your heart,
Speak freely of it, knowing it is certain
That you will never see my face again.

DEIRDRE.

You've been in love?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

If you would speak of love,
Speak freely. There is nothing in the world
That has been friendly to us but the kisses
That were upon our lips, and when we are old
Their memory will be all the life we have.

DEIRDRE.

There was a man that loved me. He was old;
I could not love him. Now I can but fear.
He has made promises, and brought me home;
But though I turn it over in my thoughts,
I cannot tell if they are sound and wholesome,
Or hackles on the hook.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have heard he loved you,
As some old miser loves the dragon-stone
He hides among the cobwebs near the roof.

DEIRDRE.

You mean that when a man who has loved like that
Is after crossed, love drowns in its own flood,
And that love drowned and floating is but hate;
And that a king who hates, sleeps ill at night,
Till he has killed; and that, though the day laughs,
We shall be dead at cock-crow.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

You have not my thought.

When I lost one I loved distractedly,
I blamed my crafty rival and not him,
And fancied till my passion had run out,
That could I carry him away with me,
And tell him all my love, I'd keep him yet.

DEIRDRE.

Ah! now I catch your meaning, that this king
Will murder Naisi, and keep me alive.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

'Tis you that put that meaning upon words
Spoken at random.

DEIRDRE.

Wanderers like you,
Who have their wit alone to keep their lives,
Speak nothing that is bitter to the ear
At random; if they hint at it at all
Their eyes and ears have gathered it so lately
That it is crying out in them for speech.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

We have little that is certain,

DEIRDRE.

Certain or not,

Speak it out quickly, I beseech you to it;
 I never have met any of your kind,
 But that I gave them money, food and fire.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

There are strange, miracle-working, wicked stones,
 Men tear out of the heart and the hot brain
 Of Libyan dragons.

DEIRDRE.

The hot Istein stone,
 And the cold stone of Fanes, that have power
 To stir even those at enmity to love.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They have so great an influence, if but sewn
 In the embroideries that curtain in
 The bridal bed.

DEIRDRE.

O Mover of the stars
 That made this delicate house of ivory,
 And made my soul its mistress, keep it safe!

FIRST MUSICIAN.

I have seen a bridal bed, so curtained in,
 So decked for miracle in Conchubar's house,
 And learned that a bride's coming.

DEIRDRE.

And I the bride?

Here is worse treachery than the seamew suffered,
 For she but died and mixed into the dust

Of her dear comrade, but I am to live
 And lie in the one bed with him I hate.
 Where is Naisi? I was not alone like this
 When Conchubar first chose me for his wife,
 I cried in sleeping or waking and he came,
 But now there is worse need.

NAISI (*entering with* FERGUS.)

Why have you called?

I was but standing there, without the door.

DEIRDRE.

I have heard terrible mysterious things,
 Magical horrors and the spells of wizards.

FERGUS.

Why, that's no wonder. You have been listening
 To singers of the roads that gather up
 The stories of the world.

DEIRDRE.

But I have one
 To make the stories of the world but nothing.

NAISI.

Be silent if it is against the king
 Whose guest you are.

FERGUS.

No, let her speak it out,
 I know the High King's heart as it were my own,
 And can refute a slander, but already
 I have warned these women that it may be death.

NAISI.

I will not weigh the gossip of the roads

With the king's word. I ask you pardon for her:
 She has the heart of the wild birds that fear
 The net of the fowler or the wicker cage.

DEIRDRE.

Am I to see the fowler and the cage
 And speak no word at all?

NAISI.

You would have known,
 Had they not bred you in that mountainous place,
 That when we give a word and take a word
 Sorrow is put away, past wrong forgotten.

DEIRDRE.

Though death may come of it?

NAISI.

Though death may come.

FERGUS.

To those that slander kings.

DEIRDRE.

Then I will say
 What it were best to carry to the grave.
 Look at my face where the leaf raddled it
 And at these rubies on my hair and breast.
 It was for him, to stir him to desire,
 I put on beauty; yes, for Conchubar.

NAISI.

What frenzy put these words into your mouth?

DEIRDRE.

No frenzy, for what need is there for frenzy
 To change what shifts with every change of the wind,

Or else there is no truth in men's old sayings?
Was I not born a woman?

NAISI.

You're mocking me.

DEIRDRE.

And is there mockery in this face and eyes,
Or in this body, in these limbs that brought
So many mischiefs? Look at me and say
If that that shakes my limbs be mockery.

NAISI.

What woman is there that a man can trust
But at the moment when he kisses her
At the first midnight?

DEIRDRE.

Were it not most strange
That women should put evil in men's hearts
And lack it in themselves?

NAISI.

Come, I command it:
We'll to the horses and take ship again.

FERGUS.

Fool, she but seeks to rouse your jealousy
With crafty words.

DEIRDRE.

Were we not born to wander?
These jewels have been reaped by the innocent sword
Upon a mountain, and a mountain bred me;
But who can tell what change can come to love
Among the valleys? I speak no falsehood now.

Away to windy summits, and there mock
The night-jar and the valley-keeping bird!

FERGUS.

Men blamed you that you stirred a quarrel up
That has brought death to many. I have poured
Water upon the fire, but if you fly
A second time, the house is in a blaze,
And all the screaming household will but blame
The savage heart of beauty for it all;
And Naisi, that has helped to tar the whisp,
Shall be a hunted outlaw all his days.

DEIRDRE.

I will be blamed no more. There's but one way:
I'll spoil this beauty that brought misery
And houseless wandering on the man I loved.
These wanderers will show me how to do it;
To clip this hair to baldness, blacken my skin
With walnut juice, and tear my face with briars.
Oh, that the creatures of the woods had torn
My body with their claws!

FERGUS.

What, wilder yet!

DEIRDRE (*to NAISI*).

Whatever were to happen to my face
I'd be myself, and there's not any way
But this to bring all trouble to an end.

NAISI.

What have you told to put such frenzy in her?

FERGUS.

Yes, speak it out.

NAISI.

I give you my protection,
Are you afraid to speak? Does the king love her?
Will no one answer?

DEIRDRE.

Tell out all the plot,
The plan, the network, all the treachery;
Tell of the bridal chamber and the bed,
The magical stones, the wizard's handiwork.

NAISI.

Ah! now I understand why it is you fear
To waken death with words. Take care of Deirdre:
She must not fall alive into his hands,
Whatever the cost.

DEIRDRE.

Where would you go to, Naisi?

NAISI.

I go to drag the truth from Conchubar,
Before his people, in the face of his army,
And if it be as black as you have made it,
To kill him there.

DEIRDRE.

You never would return;
I'll never look upon your face again.
Oh, keep him, Fergus; do not let him go,
But hold him from it. You are both wise and kind.

NAISI.

When you were all but Conchubar's wife, I took you;
He tried to kill me, and he would have done it
If I had been so near as I am now.

And now that you are mine, he has planned to take you.
Should I be less than Conchubar, being a man?

*Dark-faced MESSENGER comes into the house, un-
noticed.*

MESSENGER.

Supper is on the table, Conchubar
Is waiting for his guests.

FERGUS.

All's well, again!

All's well! all's well! You cried your doubts so loud
That I had almost doubted.

NAISI.

I would have killed him,
And he the while but busy in his house
For the more welcome.

DEIRDRE.

The message is not finished.

FERGUS.

Come quickly. Conchubar will laugh, that I—
Although I held out boldly in my speech—
That I, even I——

DEIRDRE.

Wait, wait! He is not done.

MESSENGER.

Deirdre and Fergus, son of Rogh, are summoned;
But not the traitor that bore off the queen.
It is enough that the king pardon her,
And call her to his table and his bed,

NAISI.

So then, it's treachery.

FERGUS.

I'll not believe it.

NAISI.

Tell Conchubar to meet me in some place
Where none can come between us but our swords,
For I have found no truth on any tongue
That's not of iron.

MESSENGER.

I am Conchubar's man;
I take no message but he bids me do it. [*He goes.*]

NAISI.

I bid you. I will have you swear to take it.
He follows MESSENGER out.

FERGUS.

Some enemy has paid him well for this.
I know King Conchubar's mind as it were my own;
I'll learn the truth from him.

He is about to follow NAISI, but DEIRDRE stops him.

DEIRDRE.

No, no, old man,
You thought the best, and the worst came of it;
We listened to the counsel of the wise,
And so turned fools. But ride and bring your friends.
Go, and go quickly. Conchubar has not seen me;
It may be that his passion is asleep,
And that we may escape.

FERGUS.

But I'll go first,
 And follow up that Libyan heel, and send
 Such words to Conchubar, that he may know
 At how great peril he lays hands upon you.

(NAISI enters.)

NAISI.

The Libyan, knowing that a servant's life
 Is safe from hands like mine, but turned and mocked.

FERGUS.

I'll call my friends, and call the reaping-hooks,
 And carry you in safety to the ships.
 My name has still some power. I will protect,
 Or, if that is impossible, revenge.

Goes out by other door.

NAISI (*who is calm, like a man who has passed
 beyond life*).

The crib has fallen and the birds are in it;
 There is not one of the great oaks about us
 But shades a hundred men.

DEIRDRE.

Let's out and die,
 Or break away, if the chance favour us.

NAISI.

They would but drag you from me, stained with blood.
 Their barbarous weapons would but mar that beauty,
 And I would have you die as a queen should—
 In a death chamber. You are in my charge.
 We will wait here, and when they come upon us,

I'll hold them from the doors, and when that's over,
Give you a cleanly death with this grey edge.

DEIRDRE.

I will stay here; but you go out and fight.
Our way of life has brought no friends to us,
And if we do not buy them leaving it,
We shall be ever friendless.

NAISI.

What do they say?
That Ludgaidh Redstripe and that wife of his
Sat at this chess-board, waiting for their end.
They knew that there was nothing that could save them,
And so played chess as they had any night
For years, and waited for the stroke of sword.
I never heard a death so out of reach
Of common hearts, a high and comely end.
What need have I, that gave up all for love,
To die like an old king out of a fable,
Fighting and passionate? What need is there
For all that ostentation at my setting?
I have loved truly and betrayed no man.
I need no lightning at the end, no beating
In a vain fury at the cage's door.
(To MUSICIANS.) Had you been here when that man and
his queen
Played at so high a game, could you have found
An ancient poem for the praise of it?
It should have set out plainly that those two,
Because no man and woman have loved better,
Might sit on there contentedly, and weigh
The joy comes after. I have heard the seamew

Sat there, with all the colour in her cheeks,
As though she'd say: "There's nothing happening
But that a king and queen are playing chess."

DEIRDRE.

He's in the right, though I have not been born
Of the cold, haughty waves, my veins being hot.
And though I have loved better than that queen,
I'll have as quiet fingers on the board.
Oh, singing women, set it down in a book
That love is all we need, even though it is
But the last drops we gather up like this;
And though the drops are all we have known of life,
For we have been most friendless—praise us for it
And praise the double sunset, for naught's lacking,
But a good end to the long, cloudy day.

NAISI.

Light torches there and drive the shadows out.
For day's grey end comes up.

A MUSICIAN lights a torch in the fire and then crosses before the chess-players, and slowly lights the torches in the sconces. The light is almost gone from the wood, but there is a clear evening light in the sky, increasing the sense of solitude and loneliness.

DEIRDRE.

Make no sad music.
What is it but a king and queen at chess?
They need a music that can mix itself
Into imagination, but not break
The steady thinking that the hard game needs.

(During the chess, the MUSICIANS sing this song.)

Love is an immoderate thing
 And can never be content,
 Till it dip an ageing wing,
 Where some laughing element
 Leaps and Time's old lanthorn dims.
 What's the merit in love-play,
 In the tumult of the limbs
 That dies out before 'tis day,
 Heart on heart, or mouth on mouth,
 All that mingling of our breath,
 When love longing is but drouth
 For the things come after death?

*During the last verses DEIRDRE rises from the board
 and kneels at NAISI'S feet.*

DEIRDRE.

I cannot go on playing like that woman
 That had but the cold blood of the sea in her veins.

NAISI.

It is your move. Take up your man again.

DEIRDRE.

Do you remember that first night in the woods
 We lay all night on leaves, and looking up,
 When the first grey of the dawn awoke the birds,
 Saw leaves above us? You thought that I still slept,
 And bending down to kiss me on the eyes,
 Found they were open. Bend and kiss me now,
 For it may be the last before our death.
 And when that's over, we'll be different;
 Imperishable things, a cloud or a fire.

And I know nothing but this body, nothing
But that old vehement, bewildering kiss.

CONCHUBAR *comes to the door.*

MUSICIAN.

Children, beware!

NAISI (*laughing*).

He has taken up my challenge;
Whether I am a ghost or living man
When day has broken, I'll forget the rest,
And say that there is kingly stuff in him.

Turns to fetch spear and shield, and then sees that

CONCHUBAR *has gone.*

FIRST MUSICIAN.

He came to spy upon you, not to fight.

NAISI.

A prudent hunter, therefore, but no king.
He'd find if what has fallen in the pit
Were worth the hunting, but has come too near,
And I turn hunter. You're not man, but beast.
Go scurry in the bushes, now, beast, beast,
For now it's topsy-turvey. I upon you.

He rushes out after CONCHUBAR.

DEIRDRE.

You have a knife there, thrust into your girdle.
I'd have you give it me.

MUSICIAN.

No, but I dare not,

DEIRDRE,

No, but you must,

MUSICIAN.

If harm should come to you,
They'd know I gave it.

DEIRDRE (*snatching knife*).

There is no mark on this
To make it different from any other
Out of a common forge.

Goes to the door and looks out.

MUSICIAN.

You have taken it,
I did not give it you; but there are times
When such a thing is all the friend one has.

DEIRDRE.

The leaves hide all, and there's no way to find
What path to follow. Why is there no sound?

She goes from door to window.

MUSICIAN.

Where would you go?

DEIRDRE.

To strike a blow for Naisi,
If Conchubar call the Libyans to his aid.
But why is there no clash? They have met by this!

MUSICIAN.

Listen. I am called wise. If Conchubar win,
You have a woman's wile that can do much,
Even with men in pride of victory.
He is in love and old. What were one knife
Among a hundred?

DEIRDRE (*going towards them*).

Women, if I die,

If Naisi die this night, how will you praise?
 What words seek out? for that will stand to you;
 For being but dead we shall have many friends.
 All through your wanderings, the doors of kings
 Shall be thrown wider open, the poor man's hearth
 Heaped with new turf, because you are wearing this
 Gives MUSICIAN a bracelet.
 To show that you have Deirdre's story right.

MUSICIAN.

Have you not been paid servants in love's house
 To sweep the ashes out and keep the doors?
 And though you have suffered all for mere love's sake
 You'd live your lives again.

DEIRDRE.

Even this last hour.

CONCHUBAR *enters with dark-faced Men.*

CONCHUBAR.

One woman and two men; that is a quarrel
 That knows no mending. Bring in the man she chose
 Because of his beauty and the strength of his youth.

*The dark-faced Men drag in NAISI entangled in a
 net.*

NAISI.

I have been taken like a bird or a fish.

CONCHUBAR.

He cried "Beast, beast!" and in a blind-beast rage
 He ran at me and fell into the nets,
 But we were careful for your sake, and took him

With all the comeliness that woke desire
Unbroken in him. I being old and lenient—
I would not hurt a hair upon his head.

DEIRDRE.

What do you say? Have you forgiven him?

NAISI.

He is but mocking us. What's left to say
Now that the seven years' hunt is at an end?

DEIRDRE.

He never doubted you until I made him,
And therefore all the blame for what he says
Should fall on me.

CONCHUBAR.

But his young blood is hot,
And if we're of one mind, he shall go free,
And I ask nothing for it, or, if something,
Nothing I could not take. There is no king
In the wide world that, being so greatly wronged,
Could copy me, and give all vengeance up.
Although her marriage-day had all but come,
You carried her away; but I'll show mercy.
Because you had the insolent strength of youth
You carried her away; but I've had time
To think it out through all these seven years.
I will show mercy.

NAISI.

You have many words.

CONCHUBAR.

I will not make a bargain; I but ask
What is already mine.

[DEIRDRE *moves slowly towards CONCHUBAR while he is speaking, her eyes fixed upon him.*]

You may go free

If Deirdre will but walk into my house
 Before the people's eyes, that they may know
 When I have put the crown upon her head
 I have not taken her by force and guile.
 The doors are open, and the floors are strewed,
 And in the bridal chamber curtains sewn
 With all enchantments that give happiness,
 By races that are germane to the sun,
 And nearest him, and have no blood in their veins—
 For when they're wounded the wound drips with wine—
 Nor speech but singing. At the bridal door
 Two fair king's daughters carry in their hands
 The crown and robe.

DEIRDRE.

Oh, no! Not that, not that.

Ask any other thing but that one thing.
 Leave me with Naisi. We will go away
 Into some country at the ends of the earth.
 We'll trouble you no more; and there is no one
 That will not praise you if you pardon us.
 "He is good, he is good," they'll say to one another;
 "There's nobody like him, for he forgave
 Deirdre and Naisi."

CONCHUBAR.

Do you think that I
 Shall let you go again, after seven years
 Of longing and of planning here and there,
 And trafficking with merchants for the stones

That make all sure, and watching my own face
That none might read it?

DEIRDRE (*to NAISI*).

It's better to go with him.

Why should you die when one can bear it all?

My life is over; it's better to obey.

Why should you die? I will not live long, Naisi.

I'd not have you believe I'd long stay living;

Oh no, no, no! You will go far away.

You will forget me. Speak, speak, Naisi, speak,

And say that it is better that I go.

I will not ask it, Do not speak a word,

For I will take it all upon myself.

Conchubar, I will go.

NAISI.

And do you think

That, were I given life at such a price,

I would not cast it from me? O, my eagle!

Why do you beat vain wings upon the rock

When hollow night's above?

DEIRDRE.

It's better, Naisi.

It may be hard for you, but you'll forget.

For what am I, to be remembered always?

And there are other women. There was one,

The daughter of the King of Leodas;

I could not sleep because of her. Speak to him;

Tell it out plain, and make him understand.

And if it be he thinks I shall stay living,

Say that I will not.

NAISI.

Would I had lost life

Among those Scottish kings that sought it of me,
 Because you were my wife, or that the worst
 Had taken you before this bargaining!
 O eagle! If you were to do this thing,
 And buy my life of Conchubar with your body,
 Love's law being broken, I would stand alone
 Upon the eternal summits, and call out,
 And you could never come there, being banished.

DEIRDRE (*kneeling to CONCHUBAR*).

I would obey, but cannot. Pardon us.
 I know that you are good. I have heard you praised
 For giving gifts; and you will pardon us,
 Although I cannot go into your house.
 It was my fault. I only should be punished.

[*Unseen by DEIRDRE, NAISI is gagged.*

The very moment these eyes fell on him,
 I told him; I held out my hands to him;
 How could he refuse? At first he would not—
 I am not lying—he remembered you.
 What do I say? My hands?—No, no, my lips—
 For I had pressed my lips upon his lips—
 I swear it is not false—my breast to his;

CONCHUBAR *motions*; NAISI *unseen by DEIRDRE, is
 taken behind the curtain.*

Until I woke the passion that's in all,
 And how could he resist? I had my beauty.
 You may have need of him, a brave, strong man,
 Who is not foolish at the council board,
 Nor does he quarrel by the candle-light

And give hard blows to dogs. A cup of wine
 Moves him to mirth, not madness. [*She stands up.*

What am I saying?

You may have need of him, for you have none
 Who is so good a sword, or so well loved
 Among the common people. You may need him,
 And what king knows when the hour of need may come?
 You dream that you have men enough. You laugh.
 Yes; you are laughing to yourself. You say,
 "I am Conchubar—I have no need of him."
 You will cry out for him some day and say,
 "If Naisi were but living"——(*She misses NAISI.*) Where
 is he?

Where have you sent him? Where is the son of Usna?
 Where is he, O, where is he?

She staggers over to the MUSICIANS. The EXECUTIONER has come out with sword on which there is blood; CONCHUBAR points to it. The MUSICIANS give a wail.

CONCHUBAR.

The traitor who has carried off my wife
 No longer lives. Come to my house now, Deirdre,
 For he that called himself your husband's dead.

DEIRDRE.

O, do not touch me. Let me go to him. [*Pause.*
 King Conchubar is right. My husband's dead.
 A single woman is of no account,
 Lacking array of servants, linen cupboards,
 The bacon hanging—and King Conchubar's house
 All ready, too—I'll to King Conchubar's house,

It is but wisdom to do willingly
What has to be.

CONCHUBAR.

But why are you so calm?
I thought that you would curse me and cry out,
And fall upon the ground and tear your hair.

DEIRDRE (*laughing*).

You know too much of women to think so;
Though, if I were less worthy of desire,
I would pretend as much; but, being myself,
It is enough that you were master here.
Although we are so delicately made,
There's something brutal in us, and we are won
By those who can shed blood. It was some woman
That taught you how to woo: but do not touch me:
I shall do all you bid me, but not yet
Because I have to do what's customary.
We lay the dead out, folding up the hands,
Closing the eyes, and stretching out the feet,
And push a pillow underneath the head,
Till all's in order; and all this I'll do
For Naisi, son of Usna.

CONCHUBAR.

It is not fitting.
You are not now a wanderer, but a queen,
And there are plenty that can do these things.

DEIRDRE (*motioning CONCHUBAR away*).

No, no. Not yet. I cannot be your queen,
Till the past's finished, and its debts are paid.
When a man dies, and there are debts unpaid,

He wanders by the debtor's bed and cries,
 "There's so much owing."

CONCHUBAR.

You are deceiving me.
 You long to look upon his face again.
 Why should I give you now to a dead man
 That took you from a living?

He makes a step towards her.

DEIRDRE.

In good time.
 You'll stir me to more passion than he could,
 And yet, if you are wise, you'll grant me this:
 That I go look upon him that was once
 So strong and comely and held his head so high
 That women envied me. For I will see him
 All blood-bedabbled and his beauty gone.
 It's better, when you're beside me in your strength,
 That the mind's eye should call up the soiled body,
 And not the shape I loved. Look at him, women.
 He heard me pleading to be given up,
 Although my lover was still living, and yet
 He doubts my purpose. I will have you tell him
 How changeable all women are. How soon
 Even the best of lovers is forgot,
 When his day's finished.

CONCHUBAR.

No; but I will trust
 The strength that you have praised, and not your purpose.

DEIRDRE (*almost with a caress*).
 It is so small a gift and you will grant it

Because it is the first that I have asked.
 He has refused. There is no sap in him;
 Nothing but empty veins. I thought as much.
 He has refused me the first thing I have asked—
 Me, me, his wife. I understand him now;
 I know the sort of life I'll have with him;
 But he must drag me to his house by force.
 If he refuse (*she laughs*), he shall be mocked of all.
 They'll say to one another, "Look at him
 That is so jealous that he lured a man
 From over sea, and murdered him, and yet
 He trembled at the thought of a dead face!"

She has her hand upon curtain.

CONCHUBAR.

How do I know that you have not some knife,
 And go to die upon his body?

DEIRDRE.

Have me searched,
 If you would make so little of your queen.
 It may be that I have a knife hid here
 Under my dress. Bid one of these dark slaves
 To search me for it. [*Pause.*

CONCHUBAR.

Go to your farewells, queen.

DEIRDRE.

Now strike the wire, and sing to it awhile,
 Knowing that all is happy, and that you know
 Within what bride-bed I shall lie this night,
 And by what man, and lie close up to him,

For the bed's narrow, and there outsleep the cock-
crow. [*She goes behind the curtain.*]

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They are gone, they are gone. The proud may lie by
the proud.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Though we were bidden to sing, cry nothing loud.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

They are gone, they are gone.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

Whispering were enough.

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Into the secret wilderness of their love.

SECOND MUSICIAN.

A high, grey cairn. What more is to be said?

FIRST MUSICIAN.

Eagles have gone into their cloudy bed.

Shouting outside. FERGUS *enters.* *Many men with
scythes and sickles and torches gather about the
doors. The house is lit with the glare of their
torches.*

FERGUS.

Where's Naisi, son of Usna, and his queen?
I and a thousand reaping-hooks and scythes
Demand him of you.

CONCHUBAR.

You have come too late.
I have accomplished all. Deirdre is mine;

She is my queen, and no man now can rob me.
 I had to climb the topmost bough, and pull
 This apple among the winds. Open the curtain,
 That Fergus learn my triumph from her lips.

*The curtain is drawn back. The MUSICIANS begin
 to keen with low voices.*

No, no; I'll not believe it. She is not dead—
 She cannot have escaped a second time!

FERGUS.

King, she is dead; but lay no hand upon her.
 What's this but empty cage and tangled wire,
 Now the bird's gone? but I'll not have you touch it.

CONCHUBAR.

You are all traitors, all against me—all.
 And she has deceived me for a second time.
 And every common man can keep his wife,
 But not the King.

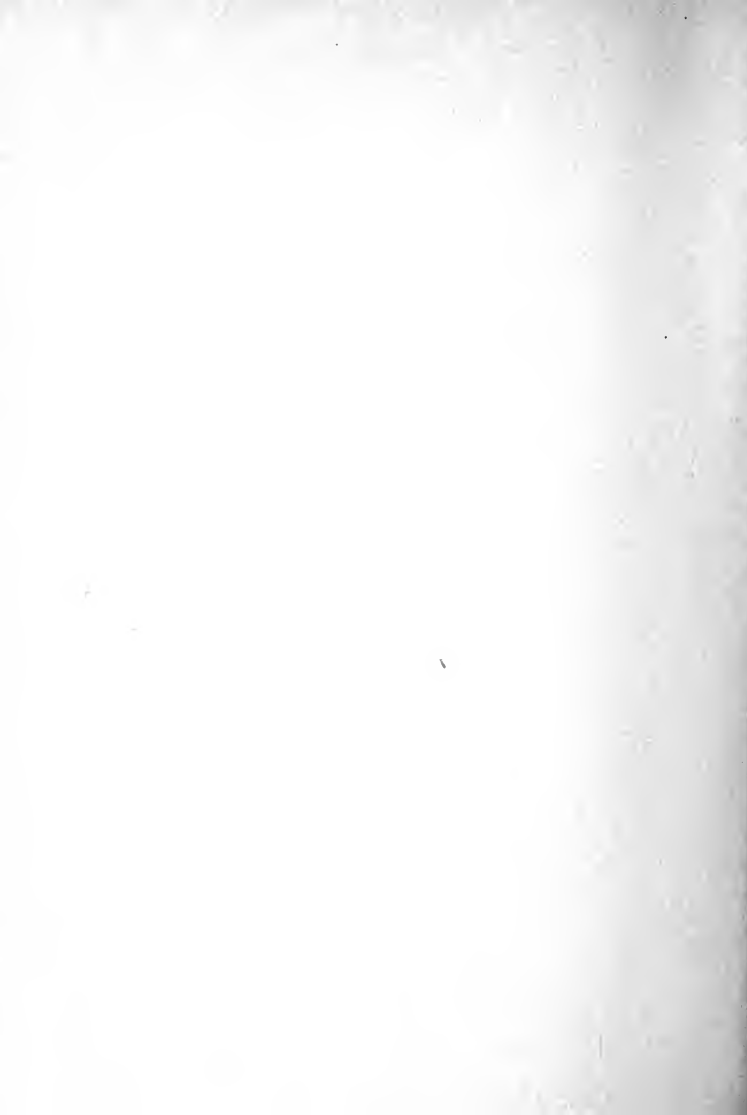
*Loud shouting outside: "Death to Conchubar!"
 "Where is Naisi?" etc. The dark-skinned men
 gather round CONCHUBAR and draw their swords;
 but he motions them away.*

I have no need of weapons.
 There's not a traitor that dare stop my way.
 Howl, if you will; but I, being king, did right
 In choosing her most fitting to be queen,
 And letting no boy lover take the sway.



LYRICS.

(1904-1912)



HIS DREAM.

I SWAYED upon the gaudy stern
The butt end of a steering oar,
And everywhere that I could turn
Men ran upon the shore.

And though I would have hushed the crowd
There was no mother's son but said,
"What is the figure in a shroud
Upon a gaudy bed?"

And fishes bubbling to the brim
Cried out upon that thing beneath,
It had such dignity of limb,
By the sweet name of Death.

Though I'd my finger on my lip,
What could I but take up the song?
And fish and crowd and gaudy ship
Cried out the whole night long—

Crying amid the glittering sea,
Naming it with ecstatic breath,
Because it had such dignity,
By the sweet name of Death,

A WOMAN HOMER SUNG.

If any man drew near
When I was young,
I thought, "He holds her dear,"
And shook with hate and fear.
But oh, 't was bitter wrong
If he could pass her by
With an indifferent eye.

Whereon I wrote and wrought,
And now, being grey,
I dream that I have brought
To such a pitch my thought
That coming time can say,
"He shadowed in a glass
What thing her body was."

For she had fiery blood
When I was young,
And trod so sweetly proud
As 't were upon a cloud,
A woman Homer sung,
That life and letters seem
But an heroic dream.

THAT THE NIGHT COME.

SHE lived in storm and strife.
Her soul had such desire
For what proud death may bring
That it could not endure
The common good of life,
But lived as 't were a king
That packed his marriage day
With banneret and pennon
Trumpet and kettledrum,
And the outrageous cannon,
To bundle Time away
That the night come.

FRIENDS.

Now must I these three praise—
Three women that have wrought
What joy is in my days;
One that no passing thought,
Nor those unpassing cares,
No, not in these fifteen
Many times troubled years,

Could ever come between
Heart and delighted heart;
And one because her hand
Had strength that could unbind
What none can understand,
What none can have and thrive,
Youth's dreamy load, till she
So changed me that I live
Labouring in ecstasy.
And what of her that took
All till my youth was gone
With scarce a pitying look?
How should I praise that one?
When day begins to break
I count my good and bad,
Being wakeful for her sake,
Remembering what she had,
What eagle look still shows,
While up from my heart's root
So great a sweetness flows
I shake from head to foot.

NO SECOND TROY.

WHY should I blame her that she filled my days
With misery, or that she would of late
Have taught to ignorant men most violent ways,
Or hurled the little streets upon the great,
Had they but courage equal to desire?
What could have made her peaceful with a mind
That nobleness made simple as a fire,
With beauty like a tightened bow, a kind

That is not natural in an age like this,
 Being high and solitary and most stern?
 Why, what could she have done being what she is?
 Was there another Troy for her to burn?

RECONCILIATION.

SOME may have blamed you that you took away
 The verses that could move them on the day
 When, the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes
 blind

With lightning you went from me, and I could find
 Nothing to make a song about but kings,
 Helmets, and swords, and half-forgotten things
 That were like memories of you—but now
 We'll out, for the world lives as long ago;
 And while we're in our laughing, weeping fit,
 Hurl helmets, crowns, and swords into the pit.
 But, dear, cling close to me; since you were gone,
 My barren thoughts have chilled me to the bone.

KING AND NO KING.

“WOULD it were anything but merely voice!”
 The No King cried who after that was King,
 Because he had not heard of anything
 That balanced with a word is more than noise;
 Yet Old Romance being kind, let him prevail
 Somewhere or somehow that I have forgot,
 Though he'd but cannon—Whereas we that had thought
 To have lit upon as clean and sweet a tale

Have been defeated by that pledge you gave
In momentary anger long ago;
And I that have not your faith, how shall I know
That in the blinding light beyond the grave
We'll find so good a thing as that we have lost?
The hourly kindness, the day's common speech,
The habitual content of each with each
When neither soul nor body has been crossed.

AGAINST UNWORTHY PRAISE.

O HEART, be at peace, because
Nor knave nor dolt can break
What's not for their applause,
Being for a woman's sake.
Enough if the work has seemed,
So did she your strength renew,
A dream that a lion had dreamed
Till the wilderness cried aloud,
A secret between you two,
Between the proud and the proud.

What, still you would have their praise!
But here's a haughtier text,
The labyrinth of her days
That her own strangeness perplexed.
And how what her dreaming gave
Earned slander, ingratitude,
From self-same dolt and knave;

Aye, and worse wrong than these.
Yet she, singing upon her road,
Half lion, half child, is at peace.

THE COLD HEAVEN.

SUDDENLY I saw the cold and rook-delighting Heaven
That seemed as though ice burned and was but the
 more ice,
And thereupon imagination and heart were driven
So wild, that every casual thought of that and this
Vanished, and left but memories, that should be out of
 season
With the hot blood of youth, of love crossed long
 ago;
And I took all the blame out of all sense and reason,
Until I cried and trembled and rocked to and fro,
Riddled with light. Ah! when the ghost begins to
 quicken,
Confusion of the death-bed over, is it sent
Out naked on the roads, as the books say, and
 stricken
By the injustice of the skies for punishment?

FALLEN MAJESTY.

ALTHOUGH crowds gathered once if she but showed her
 face,
And even old men's eyes grew dim, this hand alone,
Like some last courtier at a gypsy camping place,
Babbling of fallen Majesty, records what's gone.

The lineaments, a heart that laughter has made sweet,
These, these remain, but I record what's gone. A crowd
Will gather, and not know it walks the very street
Whereon a thing once walked that seemed a burning
cloud.

TO A CHILD DANCING IN THE WIND.

DANCE there upon the shore;
What need have you to care
For wind or waters roar?
And tumble out your hair
That the salt drops have wet;
Being young you have not known
The fool's triumph, nor yet
Love lost as soon as won,
Nor the best labourer dead
And all the sheaves to bind.
What need have you to dread
The monstrous crying of wind?

THESE ARE THE CLOUDS.

THESE are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye;
The weak lay hand on what the strong has done,
Till that be tumbled that was lifted high
And discord follow upon unison,
And all things at one common level lie.
And therefore, friend, if your great race were run

And these things came, so much the more thereby
Have you made greatness your companion,
Although it be for children that you sigh:
These are the clouds about the fallen sun,
The majesty that shuts his burning eye.

AT GALWAY RACES.

THERE where the course is,
Delight makes all of the one mind,
The riders and the galloping horses,
The field that closes in behind:
We, too, had good attendance once,
Hearers and hearteners of the work;
Aye, horsemen for companions,
Before the merchant and the clerk
Breathed on the world with timid breath.
Sing on: sometime, and at some new moon,
We'll learn that sleeping is not death,
Hearing the whole earth change its tune,
Its flesh being wild, and it again
Crying aloud as the race-course is,
And we find hearteners among men
That ride upon horses.

THE MOUNTAIN TOMB.

POUR wine and dance if Manhood still have pride,
Bring roses if the rose be yet in bloom;
The cataract smokes on the mountain side,
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

Pull down the blinds, bring fiddle and clarionet
That there be no foot silent in the room
Nor mouth from kissing, nor from wine unwet;
Our Father Rosicross is in his tomb.

In vain, in vain: the cataract still cries
The everlasting taper lights the gloom;
All wisdom shut into his onyx eyes
Our Father Rosicross sleeps in his tomb.

NOTES.

NOTES.

The Pronunciation of the Irish Words.—When I wrote the greater number of these poems I had hardly considered the question seriously. I copied at times somebody's perhaps fanciful phonetic spelling, and at times the ancient spelling as I found it in some literal translation, pronouncing the words always as they were spelt. I do not suppose I would have defended this system at any time, but I do not yet know what system to adopt. The modern pronunciation, which is usually followed by those who spell the words phonetically, is certainly unlike the pronunciation of the time when classical Irish literature was written, and, so far as I know, no Irish scholar who writes in English or French has made that minute examination of the way the names come into the rhythms and measures of the old poems which can alone discover the old pronunciation. A French Celtic scholar gave me the pronunciation of a few names, and I understand that Mr. Whitley Stokes had written something about the subject in German. If I ever learn the old pronunciation, I may revise these poems, but at present I can only affirm that I have not treated my Irish names as badly as the mediæval writers of the stories of King Arthur treated their Welsh names.

The Meditation of the Old Fisherman (p. 16).—This poem is founded upon some things a fisherman said to me when out fishing in Sligo Bay.

Down by the Salley Gardens (p. 17).—An extension of three lines sung to me by an old woman at Ballisodare.

The Wanderings of Usheen (p. 29).—The poem is founded upon the middle Irish dialogues of S. Patric and Usheen and a certain Gaelic poem of the last century. Usheen, son of Finn, is led away into the Happy Islands by a faery woman. The extract in this book describes his visit to the last of these islands and his return home and his meeting with S. Patric. The Gaelic poems do not make Usheen go to more than one island, but a story in *Silva Gadelica* describes "four paradises," an island to the north, an island to the west, an island to the south, and Adam's paradise in the east. For further detail see note on pages 266 and 267.

The Countess Cathleen (p. 47) was acted in Dublin in 1899, with Mr. Marcus St. John and Mr. Trevor Lowe as the First and Second Demon, Mr. Valentine Grace as Shemus Rua, Master Charles Sefton as Teig, Madame San Carola as Mary, Miss Florence Farr as Aleel, Miss Anna Mather as Oona, Mr. Charles Holmes as the Herdsman, Mr. Jack Wilcox as the Gardener, Mr. Walford as a Peasant, Miss Dorothy Paget as a Spirit, Miss M. Kelly as a Peasant Woman, Mr. T. E. Wilkinson as a Servant, and Miss May Whitty as The Countess Cathleen. They had to face a very vehement opposition stirred up by a politician and a newspaper, the one accusing me in a pamphlet, the other in long articles day after day, of blasphemy because of the language of the demons or of Shemus Rua, and because I made a woman sell her soul and yet escape damnation, and of a lack of patriotism because I made Irish men and women, who, it seems, never did such a thing, sell theirs. The politician or the newspaper persuaded some forty Catholic students to sign a protest against the play, and a Cardinal, who avowed that he had not read it, to make another, and both politician and newspaper made such obvious appeals to the audience to break the peace, that a score or so of police were sent to the theatre to see that they did not. I had, however, no reason to regret the result, for the stalls, containing almost all that was distinguished in Dublin, and a gallery of artisans alike insisted on the freedom of literature.

After the performance in 1899 I added the love-scene between Aleel and the Countess, and in this new form the play was revived in New York by Miss Wycherley as well as being played a good deal in England and America by amateurs. Now at last I have made a complete revision to make it suitable for performance at

the Abbey Theatre. The first two scenes are almost wholly new, and throughout the play I have added or left out such passages as a stage experience of some years showed me encumbered the action; the play in its first form having been written before I knew anything of the theatre. I have left the old end, however, in the version printed in the body of this book, because the change for dramatic purposes has been made for no better reason than that audiences—even at the Abbey Theatre—are almost ignorant of Irish mythology, or because a shallow stage made the elaborate vision of armed angels upon a mountain-side impossible. The new end is particularly suited to the Abbey stage, where the stage platform can be brought out in front of the proscenium and have a flight of steps at one side up which the Angel comes, crossing towards the back of the stage at the opposite side. The principal lighting is from two arc lights in the balcony which light up the faces of the players, making footlights unnecessary. The room at Shemua Rua's house is suggested by a great grey curtain—a colour which becomes full of rich tints under the stream of light from the arcs. The short front scene before the last is just long enough when played with incidental music to allow the scene set behind it to be changed. The play when played without interval in this way lasts about an hour.

The play was performed at the Abbey Theatre for the first time on December 14, 1911, Miss Maire O'Neill taking the part of the Countess, and the last scene from the going out of the Merchants was as follows:—

MERCHANTS *rush out.* ALEEL *crawls into the middle of the room; the twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on.*

ALEEL.

They're rising up—they're rising through the earth,
 Fat Asmodel and giddy Belial,
 And all the fiends. Now they leap in the air.
 But why does Hell's gate creak so? Round and round,
 Hither and hither, to and fro they're running.

He moves about as though the air was full of spirits.

OONA *enters.*

Crouch down, old heron, out of the blind storm.

OONA.

Where is the Countess Cathleen? All this day
Her eyes were full of tears, and when for a moment
Her hand was laid upon my hand, it trembled;
And now I do not know where she is gone.

ALEEL.

Cathleen has chosen other friends than us,
And they are rising through the hollow world.
Demons are out, old heron.

OONA.

God guard her soul.

ALEEL.

She's bartered it away this very hour,
As though we two were never in the world.

*He kneels beside her, but does not seem to hear her words.
The PEASANTS return. They carry the COUNTESS
CATHLEEN and lay her upon the ground before OONA
and ALEEL. She lies there as if dead.*

OONA.

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT.

We were under the tree where the path turns
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.

CATHLEEN.

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

OONA takes her in her arms. A WOMAN begins to wail.

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*).

Lay all the bags of money in a heap,
 And when I am gone, old Oona, share them out
 To every man and woman: judge, and give
 According to their needs.

A PEASANT WOMAN.

And will she give
 Enough to keep my children through the dearth?

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN.

O, Queen of Heaven, and all you blessed saints,
 Let us and ours be lost, so she be shriven.

CATHLEEN.

Bend down your faces, Oona and Aleel;
 I gaze upon them as the swallow gazes
 Upon the nest under the eave, before
 She wander the loud waters. Do not weep
 Too great awhile, for there is many a candle
 On the High Altar though one fall. Aleel,
 Who sang about the dancers of the woods,
 That know not the hard burden of the world,
 Having but breath in their kind bodies, farewell!
 And farewell, Oona, you who played with me
 And bore me in your arms about the house
 When I was but a child—and therefore happy,
 Therefore happy even like those that dance.
 The storm is in my hair and I must go.

[*She dies.*]

OONA.

Bring me the looking-glass.

A WOMAN *brings it to her out of inner room.* OONA

holds glass over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a moment, then she speaks in a half-scream.

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT.

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT.

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN.

The little plant I loved is broken in two.

ALEEL takes looking-glass from OONA and flings it upon floor, so that it is broken in many pieces.

ALEEL.

I shatter you in fragments, for the face
That brimmed you up with beauty is no more;
And die, dull heart, for you that were a mirror
Are but a ball of passionate dust again!
And level earth and plummy sea, rise up!
And haughty sky, fall down!

A PEASANT WOMAN.

Pull him upon his knees,
His curses will pluck lightning on our heads.

ALEEL.

Angels and devils clash in the middle air,
And brazen swords clang upon brazen helms.
Look, look, a spear has gone through Belial's eye!

A winged ANGEL, carrying a torch and a sword, enters from the R. with eyes fixed upon some distant thing. The ANGEL is about to pass out to the L. when ALEEL speaks. The ANGEL stops a moment and turns.

Look no more on the half-closed gates of Hell,
But speak to me whose mind is smitten of God,
That it may be no more with mortal things:
And tell of her who lies there.

The ANGEL turns again and is about to go, but is seized by ALEEL.

Till you speak
You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL.

The light beats down; the gates of pearl are wide.
 And she is passing to the floor of peace,
 And Mary of the seven times wounded heart
 Has kissed her lips, and the long blessed hair
 Has fallen on her face; the Light of Lights
 Looks always on the motive, not the deed,
 The Shadow of Shadows on the deed alone.

ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.

OONA.

Tell them to walk upon the floor of peace,
 That I would die and go to her I love,
 The years like great black oxen tread the world,
 And God the herdsman goads them on behind,
 And I am broken by their passing feet.

The Hosting of the Sidhe (p. 111).—The gods of ancient Ireland, the Tuatha De Danaan, or the Tribes of the goddess Danu, or the Sidhe, from Aes Sidhe, or Sluagh Sidhe, the people of the Faery Hills, as these words are usually explained, still ride the country as of old. Sidhe is also Gaelic for wind, and certainly the Sidhe have much to do with the wind. They journey in whirling winds, the winds that were called the dance of the daughters of Herodias in the Middle Ages, Herodias doubtless taking the place of some old goddess. When the country people see the leaves whirling on the road they bless themselves, because they believe the Sidhe to be passing by. They are almost always said to wear no covering upon their heads, and to let their hair stream out; and the great among them, for they have great and simple, go much upon horseback. If anyone becomes too much interested in them, and sees them overmuch, he loses all interest in ordinary things.

A woman near Gort, in Galway, says: "There is a boy, now, of the Clorans; but I wouldn't for the world let them think I spoke of him; it's two years since he came from America, and since that time he never went to Mass, or to church, or to fairs, or to market, or to stand on the cross roads, or to hurling, or to nothing. And if anyone comes into the house, it's into the room he'll slip, not to see them; and as to work, he has the garden dug to bits, and the

whole place smeared with cow dung; and such a crop as was never seen; and the alders all plaited till they look grand. One day he went as far as the chapel; but as soon as he got to the door he turned straight round again, as if he hadn't power to pass it. I wonder he wouldn't get the priest to read a Mass for him, or something; but the crop he has is grand, and you may know well he has some to help him." One hears many stories of the kind; and a man whose son is believed to go out riding among them at night tells me that he is careless about everything, and lies in bed until it is late in the day. A doctor believes this boy to be mad. Those that are at times "away," as it is called, know all things, but are afraid to speak. A countryman at Kiltartan says, "There was one of the Lydons—John—was away for seven years, lying in his bed, but brought away at nights, and he knew everything; and one, Kearney, up in the mountains, a cousin of his own, lost two hoggets, and came and told him, and he knew the very spot where they were, and told him, and he got them back again. But *they* were vexed at that, and took away the power, so that he never knew anything again, no more than another."

Knocknarea is in Sligo, and the country people say that Maeve, still a great queen of the western Sidhe, is buried in the cairn of stones upon it. I have written of Clooth-na-Bare in "The Celtic Twilight." She "went all over the world, seeking a lake deep enough to drown her faery life, of which she had grown weary, leaping from hill to hill, and setting up a cairn of stones wherever her feet lighted, until, at last, she found the deepest water in the world in little Lough Ia, on the top of the bird mountain, in Sligo." I forget, now, where I heard this story, but it may have been from a priest at Collooney. Clooth-na-Bare would mean the old woman of Bare, but is evidently a corruption of Cailleac Bare, the old woman Bare, who, under the names Bare, and Berah, and Beri, and Verah, and Dera, and Dhira, appears in the legends of many places. Mr. O'Grady found her haunting Lough Liath high up on the top of a mountain of the Fewes, the Slieve Fuadh, or Slieve G-Cullain of old times, under the name of the Cailleac Buillia. He describes Lough Liath as a desolate moon-shaped lake, with made wells and sunken passages upon its borders, and beset by marsh and heather and grey boulders, and closes his "Flight of the Eagle" with a long rhapsody upon mountain and lake, because of the heroic tales and beautiful old myths that have hung about them always.

He identifies the Cailleac Buillia with that Meluchra who persuaded Fionn to go to her amid the waters of Lough Liath, and so changed him with her enchantments, that, though she had to free him because of the threats of the Fiana, his hair was ever afterwards as white as snow. To this day the Tuatha De Danaan that are in the waters beckon to men, and drown them in the waters; and Bare, or Dhira, or Meluchra, or whatever name one likes the best, is, doubtless, the name of a mistress among them. Meluchra was daughter of Cullain; and Cullain Mr. O'Grady calls, upon I know not what authority, a form of Lir, the master of waters. The people of the waters have been in all ages beautiful and changeable and lascivious, or beautiful and wise and lonely, for water is everywhere the signature of the fruitfulness of the body and of the fruitfulness of dreams. The white hair of Fionn may be but another of the troubles of those that come to unearthly wisdom and earthly trouble, and the threats and violence of the Fiana against her, a different form of the threats and violence the country people use, to make the Aes Sidhe give up those that are "away." Bare is now often called an ugly old woman, but in the "Song of Bare," which Lady Gregory has given in her "Saints and Wonders," she laments her lost beauty after the withering of seven hundred years; and Dr. Joyce says that one of her old names was Aebhin, which means beautiful. Aebhin was the goddess of the tribes of northern Leinster; and the lover she had made immortal, and who loved her perfectly, left her, and put on mortality, to fight among them against the stranger, and died on the strand of Clontarf.

The Song of Wandering Aengus (p. 115).—The Tuatha De Danaan can take all shapes, and those that are in the waters take often the shape of fish. A woman of Burren, in Galway, says, "There are more of them in the sea than on the land, and they sometimes try to come over the side of the boat in the form of fishes, for they can take their choice shape." At other times they are beautiful women; and another Galway woman says, "Surely those things are in the sea as well as on land. My father was out fishing one night off Tyrone. And something came beside the boat that had eyes shining like candles. And then a wave came in, and a storm rose all in a minute, and whatever was in the wave, the weight of it had like to sink the boat. And then they saw that it was a woman in the sea that had the shining eyes. So my father

went to the priest, and he bid him always to take a drop of holy water and a pinch of salt out in the boat with him, and nothing could harm him."

The poem was suggested to me by a Greek folk song; but the folk belief of Greece is very like that of Ireland, and I certainly thought, when I wrote it, of Ireland, and of the spirits that are in Ireland. An old man who was cutting a quickset hedge near Gort, in Galway, said, only the other day, "One time I was cutting timber over in Inchy, and about eight o'clock one morning, when I got there, I saw a girl picking nuts, with her hair hanging down over her shoulders; brown hair; and she had a good, clean face, and she was tall, and nothing on her head, and her dress no way gaudy, but simple. And when she felt me coming she gathered herself up, and was gone, as if the earth had swallowed her up. And I followed her, and looked for her, but I never could see her again from that day to this, never again."

The county Galway people use the word "clean" in its old sense of fresh and comely.

He Mourns for the Change that has Come upon Him and His Beloved, and Longs for the End of the World (p. 116).—My deer and hound are properly related to the deer and hound that flicker in and out of the various tellings of the Arthurian legends, leading different knights upon adventures, and to the hounds and to the hornless deer at the beginning of, I think, all tellings of Usheen's journey to the country of the young. The hound is certainly related to the Hounds of Annwryn or of Hades, who are white, and have red ears, and were heard, and are, perhaps, still heard by Welsh peasants, following some flying thing in the night winds; and he is probably related to the hounds that Irish country people believe will awake and seize the souls of the dead if you lament them too loudly or too soon. An old woman told a friend and myself that she saw what she thought were white birds, flying over an enchanted place, but found, when she got near, that they had dogs' heads; and I do not doubt that my hound and these dog-headed birds are of the same family. I got my hound and deer out of a last century Gaelic poem about Usheen's journey to the country of the young. After the hunting of the hornless deer, that leads him to the seashore, and while he is riding over the sea with Niam, he sees amid the waters—I have not the Gaelic poem by

me, and describe it from memory—a young man following a girl who has a golden apple, and afterwards a hound with one red ear following a deer with no horns. This hound and this deer seem plain images of the desire of man “which is for the woman,” and “the desire of the woman which is for the desire of the man,” and of all desires that are as these. I have read them in this way in “The Wanderings of Usheen” or Oisín, and have made my lover sigh because he has seen in their faces “the immortal desire of immortals.”

The man in my poem who has a hazel wand may have been Aengus, Master of Love; and I have made the boar without bristles come out of the West, because the place of sunset was in Ireland, as in other countries, a place of symbolic darkness and death.

The Cap and Bells (p. 120).—I dreamed this story exactly as I have written it, and dreamed another long dream after it, trying to make out its meaning, and whether I was to write it in prose or verse. The first dream was more a vision than a dream, for it was beautiful and coherent, and gave me the sense of illumination and exaltation that one gets from visions, while the second dream was confused and meaningless. The poem has always meant a great deal to me, though, as is the way with symbolic poems, it has not always meant quite the same thing. Blake would have said, “the authors are in eternity,” and I am quite sure they can only be questioned in dreams.

The Valley of the Black Pig (p. 122).—All over Ireland there are prophecies of the coming rout of the enemies of Ireland, in a certain Valley of the Black Pig and these prophecies are, no doubt, now, as they were in the Fenian days, a political force. I have heard of one man who would not give any money to the Land League, because the Battle could not be until the close of the century; but, as a rule, periods of trouble bring prophecies of its near coming. A few years before my time, an old man who lived at Lisadill, in Sligo, used to fall down in a fit and rave out descriptions of the Battle; and a man in Sligo has told me that it will be so great a battle that the horses shall go up to their fetlocks in blood, and that their girths, when it is over, will rot from their bellies for lack of a hand, to unbuckle them. If one reads Pro-

fessor Rhys' "Celtic Heathendom" by the light of Professor Frazer's "Golden Bough," and puts together what one finds there about the boar that killed Diarmuid, and other old Celtic boars and sows, one sees that the battle is mythological, and that the Pig it is named from must be a type of cold and winter doing battle with the summer, or of death battling with life. For the purposes of poetry, at any rate, I think it a symbol of the darkness that will destroy the world. The country people say there is no shape for a spirit to take so dangerous as the shape of a pig; and a Galway blacksmith—and blacksmiths are thought to be specially protected—says he would be afraid to meet a pig on the road at night; and another Galway man tells this story: "There was a man coming the road from Gort to Garryland one night, and he had a drop taken; and before him, on the road, he saw a pig walking; and having a drop in, he gave a shout, and made a kick at it, and bid it get out of that. And by the time he got home, his arm was swelled from the shoulder to be as big as a bag, and he couldn't use his hand with the pain of it. And his wife brought him, after a few days, to a woman that used to do cures at Rahasane. And on the road all she could do would hardly keep him from lying down to sleep on the grass. And when they got to the woman she knew all that happened; 'and,' says she, 'it's well for you that your wife didn't let you fall asleep on the grass, for if you had done that but even for one instant, you'd be a lost man.'"

Professor Rhys, who considers the bristleless boar a symbol of darkness and cold, rather than of winter and cold, thinks it was without bristles because the darkness is shorn away by the sun.

The Battle should, I believe, be compared with three other battles; a battle the Sidhe are said to fight when a person is being taken away by them; a battle they are said to fight in November for the harvest; the great battle the Tuatha De Danaan fought, according to the Gaelic chroniclers, with the Fomor at Moy Tura, or the Towery Plain.

I have heard of the battle over the dying both in County Galway and in the Isles of Aran, an old Aran fisherman having told me that it was fought over two of his children, and that he found blood in a box he had for keeping fish, when it was over; and I have written about it, and given examples elsewhere. A faery doctor, on the borders of Galway and Clare, explained it as a battle

between the friends and enemies of the dying, the one party trying to take them, the other trying to save them from being taken. It may once, when the land of the Sidhe was the only other world, and when every man who died was carried thither, have always accompanied death. I suggest that the battle between the Tuatha De Danaan, the powers of light, and warmth, and fruitfulness, and goodness, and the Fomor, the powers of darkness, and cold, and barrenness, and badness upon the Towery Plain, was the establishment of the habitable world, the rout of the ancestral darkness; that the battle among the Sidhe for the harvest is the annual battle of summer and winter; that the battle among the Sidhe at a man's death is the battle of life and death; and that the battle of the Black Pig is the battle between the manifest world and the ancestral darkness at the end of all things; and that all these battles are one, the battle of all things with shadowy decay. Once a symbolism has possessed the imagination of large numbers of men, it becomes, as I believe, an embodiment of disembodied powers, and repeats itself in dreams and visions, age after age.

On Baile's Strand (p. 159) was first played, in a version considerably different from the present, on December 27th, 1904, at the opening of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the following cast:—

CUCHULAIN	<i>F. J. Fay.</i>
CONCHUBAR	<i>George Roberts.</i>
DAIRE (<i>an old king not now in the play</i>)	<i>G. MacDonald.</i>
THE BLIND MAN	<i>Seumas O'Sullivan.</i>
THE FOOL	<i>William Fay.</i>
THE YOUNG MAN	<i>P. MacShiubhlaigh.</i>

The old and young kings were played by the following:—R. Nash, A. Power, U. Wright, E. Keegan, Emma Vernon, Miss Garvey, Dora Gunning, Sarah Allgood. It was necessary to put women into men's parts owing to the smallness of our company at that time. It were indefensible could we have helped it.

The play was revived by the National Theatre Society, Ltd., in a somewhat altered version at Oxford, Cambridge, and London a few months later. I then entirely rewrote it up to the entrance of the Young Man, and changed it a good deal from that on to the end, and this new version was played at the Abbey Theatre for the first time in April, 1906.

Deirdre (p. 201) was first played at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on November 24th, 1906, with the following cast:—

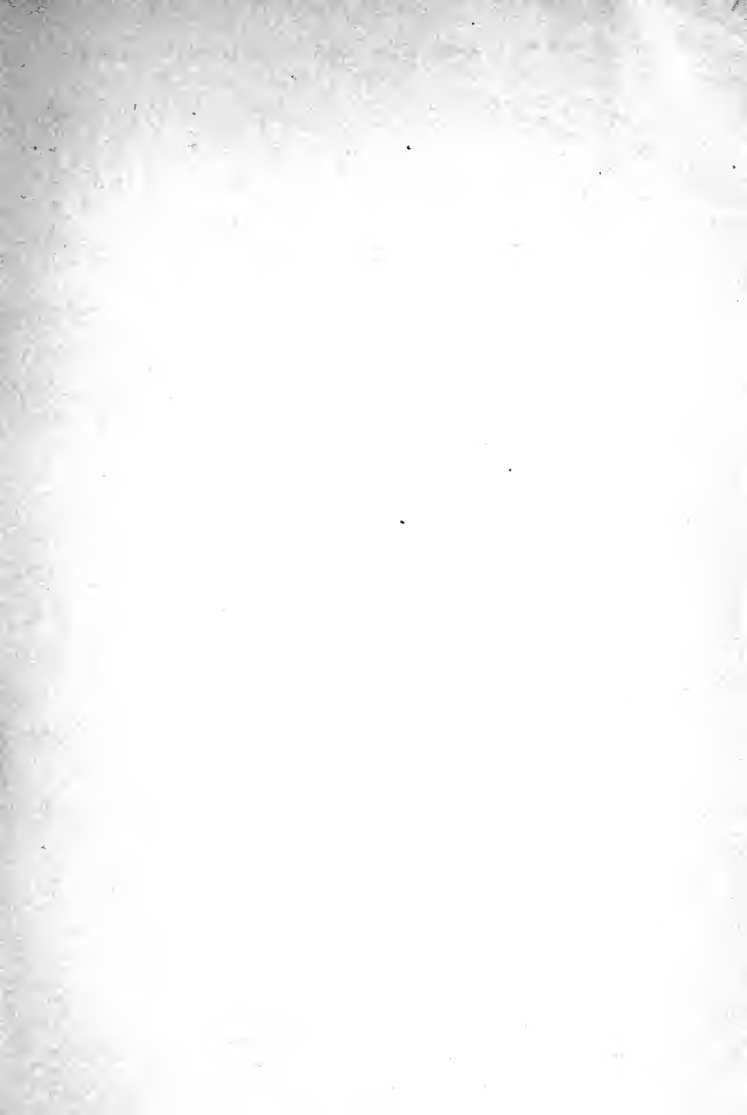
MUSICIANS	{ <i>Miss Sara Allgood.</i> <i>Miss Maire O'Neill.</i> <i>Miss Brigit O'Dempsey.</i>
FERGUS, <i>an old man</i>	<i>Arthur Sinclair.</i>
NAISI, <i>a young king</i>	<i>F. J. Fay.</i>
DEIRDRE, <i>his queen</i>	<i>Miss Darragh.</i>
A DARK-FACED MESSENGER	<i>U. Wright.</i>
CONCHUBAR	<i>J. M. Kerrigan.</i>
DARK-FACED EXECUTIONER	<i>A. Power.</i>

Since then the principal part has been taken by Miss Mona Limerick, Miss Sara Allgood and Maire O'Neill; and by Mrs. Patrick Campbell who played it in Dublin and London with the Abbey Company in 1907 and 1908 as well as playing it with a company of her own in London in the Autumn of 1907.

THE END.

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