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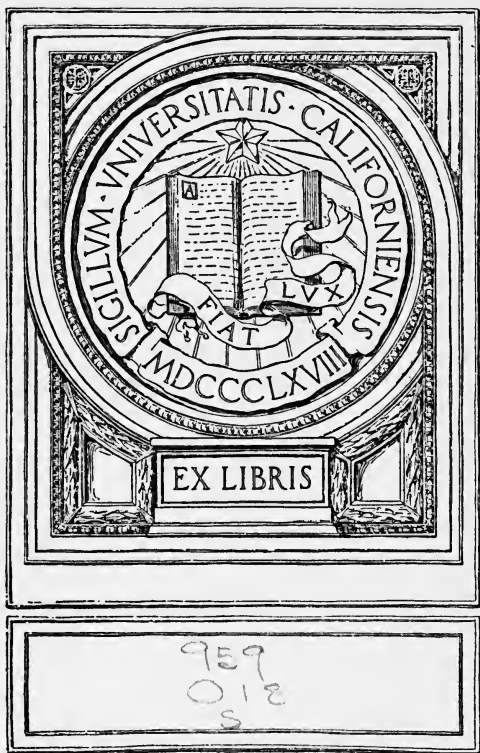


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SONGS OF THE CELTIC PAST

By

NORREYS JEPHSON O'CONOR





SONGS
OF
THE CELTIC PAST

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FAIRY BRIDE

A Play in Three Acts

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POEMS

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JOHN LANE COMPANY
PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK



SAINT PATRICK'S VISION

SONGS OF THE CELTIC PAST

BY

NORREYS JEPHSON O'CONOR

AUTHOR OF "BESIDE THE BLACKWATER," "THE FAIRY BRIDE," ETC.

Ocus mo ét didsiu a mail atomcotasiu

And my desire is for thee, since thou hast possessed me.

The Second Battle of Moytura

FRONTISPIECE

BY

EMILY WOOD COLBY

NEW YORK

JOHN LANE COMPANY

MCMXVIII



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BY NORREYS JEPHSON O'CONOR

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LIBRARY OF THE
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ASTOR LENOX AND TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
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NEW YORK CITY

TO
GRACE
WHO HAS MADE ALL SONGS NEW

These songs of Erin's love, because
You love her too;
And better must I sing her praise
For love of you.

Acknowledgment is made by the Author to the Editors of: *The Art World*, *The American Scandinavian Review*, *The Bellman*, *The Bookman*, *The Churchman*, *The Colonnade*, *The Conning Tower*, *The Cork Holly Bough*, *The Designer*, *The Dublin Review*, *The Living Church*, *The New Republic*, and *The Sonnet*, in reprinting poems which first appeared in their magazines.


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SONGS
OF
THE CELTIC PAST





Songs of the Celtic Past

Songs of the Celtic Past,
Born in an ancient age,
Our hearts will beat more fast
For this, our heritage,

The heritage of song
More powerful than Time,
Which weaves a nation's wrong
With wondrous wreaths of rhyme;

The passion and the pride
Of centuries ago;
The bare, wet mountain-side;
The valleys white in snow;

The stag who trembles, cold
Before the icy wind;
And the wild duck's sorrow, told
As he leaves the marsh behind;

Songs of the Celtic Past

The foxglove, straight and tall;
The blackbirds' carolling;
The mountain, shining, green;
The scent and sound of spring;

The clash of sword on shield,
As arméd men march down,
Driving from field to field
Scared cattle, black and brown;

Harmony of music, sweet
As countless birds in tune,
Or the river, leaping, fleet,
In early days of June;

Music from out a hill,
Where in the sun are seen
Fairy figures, never still,
And fitting garments green;

Last, Love, which fills the world
With its immortal breath,
Here in these songs impearled,
Never to taste of Death.

THE STORY OF AILILL AND
ETAIN

Foreword

WHEN I first read the story of Ailill and Etain in Irish, I was attracted not only by the Fairy glamour and picture of a bygone civilisation brought before me like figures in a crystal, but by the unknown author's attitude towards love. The prominence of the love element in Irish distinguishes it from other early literatures—from the Norse sagas, for instance, or the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*, where the love element, when present at all, is secondary to the joy of fighting and physical prowess. Irish writers, while enjoying battle and manly deeds, understand, with that grasp of spiritual realities significant of their race, the importance of love in the life of man. The tale of Deirdre, and others perhaps better known to the reading public than the one I have used as the basis for my

Foreword

poem, show human passion refined and ennobled by its intensity, and by the frank attitude of the author towards it. Among Irish love stories, that of Etain is the only one I know typifying spiritual love, or perhaps spiritualised would be the better word—for a love which triumphs over the infirmity of nature, even though aided by divine interposition, (and who else is the Fairy Midir but a messenger of a power higher than man?) must have become spiritual. The handling of the triangle situation by a writer centuries ago, and his belief in the sacred obligations of marriage, is significant.

The spiritual element of the story of Ailill and Etain chiefly interested me, and it is this I have endeavoured to bring out in my poem. I believe, however, that I have done no violence to the plot of the story; I have merely added landscape background and striven to deepen contrasts already there. The version of the *Tochmarc Etaine*, "Courtship of Etain" (as the story is known to Celtic scholars), which I have followed, is that printed in Windisch's *Irische*

Foreword

Texte, Vol. I, from the British Museum Manuscript, Egerton, 1782. Because this seems the logical ending, and all that follows detracts from the unity of the central theme, I have carried the story only as far as the end of paragraph fourteen, where occur the words "The stories of Eochaid and Etain are here related." The courtship plays so small a part both in the original Irish and in my adaptation, that I have chosen *The Story of Ailill and Etain* as the most fitting title.

I must acknowledge here my debt to Professor F. N. Robinson, of Harvard University, under whose guidance I read the *Tochmarc Etaine*, and who first interested me in early Irish literature. Those who wish to compare my poem with the original version of the story will find both the Irish text and an English translation in the *Revue Celtique*, Vol. III: pp. 350-60. Herewith is a guide to the pronunciation of names:

Th is pronounced as in *then*

Eochaid—Yök' ith

Eocraid—Yök' rith

Foreword

Ailill—Āl' yil

Etain—Ēdin

Etar—Ēdar

Midir—Mithir

The Message

Green are the summits of the distant hills,
And green the pastures and the nearer fields
Where sleek brown cattle through the springtide
day

Browse in contentment, rest beneath a hedge
Of golden gorse. White are the hawthorn
trees,

Or pink with bloom; now dark, now vivid,
glow

The shades of grass and tree, as the gay Sun
Is hidden by the clouds which throng to pay
Him homage, seeks to show his majesty,
Thrusting apart the courtiers who would dim
His splendour.

Such the sight Eochaid the King
Beholds from the high top of Tara Hill,
Where now he walks beside the royal rath,
Gazing, impatient, toward the distant hills.

The Message

Six months have pass'd, autumn has waned to
winter,
Winter wax'd to spring, since Eochaid, newly
crown'd,
Summon'd the kings of Erin with their wives
To feast at Tara in the High King's hall.
Courteous their answer; but how should they
bring
Their royal consorts to a royal lis
In which there dwelt no queen to welcome them?

The King Eochaid had bowed forthwith to cus-
tom,
And sent his messenger, Ailill, his brother
And the poet of his court, to seek a bride
Fitting the pomp of Erin's highest king.

Six months have pass'd; and all this weary time
Eochaid has grown more lonely in his state.
The winds howled round the hall, and there was
none
To share his loneliness, with her sweet smile
To change his care to pleasure, and the waste

The Message

Of winter to the loveliness of spring.
His poet too was gone upon the quest,
The poet's everlasting quest of Beauty.

Now word has come that Ailill will return
Ere twilight; and the ever-restless King
Has paced for hours around the royal rath,
While toward the highest mountain-top the Sun
Is gone full half his journey, and the shadows
Creep across the fields. Then, as the hundredth
time

The King turns at the corner of the lis,
There is a flutter on the darkening fields,
A moving object, and a man at last.

Tossing his bridle to a waiting kern,
Ailill strides swiftly to the royal presence.

"O King and brother, I have found a bride
Worthy the greatest monarch in this realm;
And I have made an end of my long quest
For Beauty!" cries the poet; and his glance
Kindles the sleeping spirit of the King.

The Message

“Tell me, O brother, that at last I know
The end of loneliness and the bitter pain
Which I have suffered through the winter days.
For me at length there waits the happy end
All men desire,—the poet, kern, and king,—
The love that is a buckler 'gainst the world
For two united hearts, making the home
A sweet wall'd garden, where Eternity
Hath conquer'd Time, and where the Soul, at
rest,
Knows here a portion of the joys to be.
Hasten, O Ailill; ease my aching heart.”

Then, while the sun moves past the dark green
hills,
And twilight deepens, Ailill tells his tale.

“Far have I travell'd in the Irish land,
And seen the courts of many kings who gave
Me royal entertainment, while I sang
In the great hall at supper, 'mid the glare
Of blazing torches, and beneath the gaze
Of hardy warriors, and fair, high-born maids.

The Message

Ever I sang of Beauty and my quest;
But perfect Beauty was forever hid
From me the seeker; and a lovely face
More oft than not conceal'd a canker'd heart.

At last, dejected, I had fled the court
Of many a king in Erin; thence had come
To that great wood near Inbir Cichmuine,
Within a glade from which there well'd a spring,
To sit beneath a yew tree's ancient shade.
A thousand birds fill'd all the wood with song
That reawaken'd joy in my sad heart.

I watch'd the new green leaves blown by the
breath

Of the light April breeze, the sunbeams chase
The shadow through the trees, along the grass.
Glad was I then, while lying at full length
Beneath the branches of the mighty tree.

Sudden I turn'd my eyes toward the glade,
And saw a sight I had not hoped to see
Unless, perchance, I pass'd beyond the world
To that far land which lies across the west,

The Message

Where fairy men and fairy women dwell,
And Time is nothing, Loveliness is all.
A damsel stood beside the spring, who made
The splendour of the sunlight seem as shadow.
In her one person she had caught the grace
And beauty of the land and sea, the foxglove
Blown in early spring upon the mountain slope,
The foam that flies from off the wintry wave
Beating in anger on the Irish shore.

Held by the beauty of so fair a sight,
My senses were adream; I could not speak
Or move; and when the maiden sang, a numb-
ness
Seiz'd my spirit; I knew nor time nor place.
Then, when I woke once more, the maid was
gone.

I rose, caught up my harp, and shouting ran
Down the vast forest echoing emptiness
Through all its dim-lit aisles, which seem'd more
dark
Because so much of loveliness was gone.

The Message

To broad green fields at last, like one distraught,
I came; there met a herdsman of the king.

Soon was I brought before the throne of Etar,
Ruler of green Eocraid, to whom I told
The vision of the wood and whence I came.

I learn'd the damsel I had seen was Etain,
Sole daughter to the King, and dwelt alone
Each spring in depths of woodland solitude,
Belov'd of every forest bird and beast.

Straightway I asked King Etar for a boon,
The hand of Etain as thy fair royal wife.

But Etar answer'd, "We have sworn to give
Our daughter's life to none who shall not woo
And win her love."

Before that day was dead,
The lis of Etar lay full far behind
My eager steed which sped in haste to Tara.

The King then, rising, speaks in joyous tones:
"To-morrow will I ride alone with thee

The Message

To Inbir Cichmuine to woo the maid.
No royal state; for Etain first must love
The lover Eochaid ere she wed the King."

Then turns he toward the royal couch and leaves
His brother Ailill gazing on the hills,
Where now the moon lights the broad, lovely
land,
Changing the fields to a vast lake of silver.

The poet, musing, sounds his harp and sings:

*O Love, that fills all men with sweet desire,
Yet burneth some with Lust's consuming fire,
Lead me at last from conflict with the clay
Into the stillness of Love's true highway,*

*Where in the distance shines the ultimate goal,
Love's healing hands across the troubled Soul,
Assuaging all the sorrow, weakness, pain,
And bringing a new innocence again.*

*Ev'n as the moonlit land before me lies,
Stretches the highway of Love's sacrifice,*

The Message

*Where, one with Beauty, I at last may rest,
Held by Love's arms, my head upon Love's
breast.*

The song is ended, and the azure night
Echoes an instant with the trembling sound.
Then silence; and the royal poet goes
With laggard steps toward the high moonlit hall.

The Wooing

The mist still lies along the dew-drench'd grass
When Ailill the Poet, Eochaid the King, ride
forth

From Tara. The Sun has not yet come in state,
Although his harbingers, the birds, have filled
The dawn with song. Gaily the horses leap
With joy to feel the newly-moisten'd earth
Beneath their feet. Blithe the spirit of the King.
For him each bird has sung his mating-song,
The hawthorn trees have borne their colour'd
bloom,
The brook is rushing to the hidden sea,
The salmon bounding o'er the glistening rocks
To freedom.

Behind the happy King, Ailill,
His bridle loosely held, his thoughts far-spaced
Toward the distant haven of his journey's end.
The King moves in the sunlight, while the
warmth

The Wooing

Mellows his heart with gladness; but the shadow
Falls on the poet Ailill, and he rides
In darkness down the pathways of the world.

Thus travel King and Poet through the day;
But, when the sun is gone behind the hills,
Come to a little hostel to find rest.

The evening star is risen in the height
Of heaven; the trees are motionless; the breeze
Blows with a gentle touch upon the cheek.

Alone behind the hostel Ailill walks,
And in the silence of the gloaming sings:

*Some in the splendour of Love's presence move,
And some beneath the shadow of his wings;
But ev'n the humblest followers in Love's court
Become as kings.*

*Although the shadow falls across my path,
Yet one of Love's most glorious train am I;
And so must shun the baser things of life,
And seek the high.*

The Wooing

Again, before the morning sun has lit
The earth, the twain are sped upon their journey;
Ere evening come to Inbir Cichmuine.

Royal the welcome which King Etar gives
His sovereign. Happy the slumber then of
Eochaid,
Who dreams of Etain and the coming morn.

'Mid the glad melody of an Irish spring,
Come Ailill and King Eochaid to the wood
In which dwells Etain, to the forest glade,
Sunlit and silent, with the fountain clear,
Where Ailill made an ending of his quest.

Hid by the foliage of the very tree
Beneath which Ailill stood, the lover Eochaid;
The poet at a distance stands alone.

Across the flower-strewn carpet of the glade
Comes Etain, while the all-enraptur'd sun
Trembles in the glory of her golden hair,

The Wooing

Plays with the golden threads which are in-
wrought

With her red mantle and her green silk smock.

A silver vessel, with four birds of gold
Athwart the rim, she holds in her white hands,
White as the snowfall in a single night
Upon the plains of Erin.

The wood is hush'd

A moment when she leaves the forest shadow,
Bearing the basin to the fountain's marge.
As some more favour'd mortal follows fast
A fairy damsel into Fairyland,
Flies the glad spirit of the eager King
Upon the steps of Love, across a world
Lit by the glory of a new-found light.

Unnoticed falls the harp from Ailill's hand.

The maiden bathes beside the bubbling spring,
And as she combs her rippling hair she sings:

*O Sunlight, filling the whole world with bloom,
And bringing all things to a wondrous birth,*

The Wooing

*The purple heather and the yellow broom,
The trees, the grass which covers the cold earth;*

*O Fairies, dancing through the moonlit night,
Yet rarely seen of any mortal eye,
Save as a scarf of mist, a cloud of white
Blown past the azure of the evening sky;*

*O Love, that comes into a maiden's heart,
Brighter than sunshine on the sparkling dew;
May I in all this beauty play a part
When thou art come to make my life anew!*

The song is ended; through the distance dies
The maiden's voice; the birds renew their song.
A dizzy moment motionless stands Eochaid,
Forgetful of the steady flight of Time,
Then bursts from out the shadow of the tree
Athwart the sunlit stillness of the glade:

“O fairer than all earthly loveliness,
Whence art thou come, from what desired
world?”

The Wooing

Surely the daughter of a Fairy King,
Since, like all fairies, thou art dress'd in green?"

One who because of mortal birth forgets
Her former life in Fairyland, she answers:
"Daughter to Etar, King of fertile Eocraid,
Am I. How hast thou come to find me here?"

"Far off I dwell, above the plain of Meath,
Leading in loneliness my length of days.
No woman comes with kindly care to greet
My home-returning steps from chase or war;
No woman's lips have eas'd my troubled heart.
From the sad splendour of a desolate hall,
I bade my friends to feast with me, and bring
Their wives to cheer my board; but all refused.
How should a woman gently born be brought
To the rude feasting of a wifeless man?"

I sent a messenger forthwith to find
The loveliest maid of Erin I might win
To share with me the perfect peace which lies
In the true union of two happy hearts.

The Wooing

Long sought the messenger, but found at last
The shining vision of this happy glade.
He brought me word of thee, and straight I rode
To know the happiness for which I longed.
Now am I awed, as one upon whose sight
Flashes a being of no mortal mould;
He loves, yearning to take her in his arms."

So speaks the King. A while the maiden stands
With eyes downcast, then lifts them to her lord.
In their blue depths, as in a fountain clear,
He sees the sweet fulfillment of his dreams.

Soon, safe and happy on his breast, the maid:
"Thus Etain gives her love and life to thee!"

A joyous bird sounds three clear, gladsome notes;
And all the wood is still. The westering sun
Is hidden now behind the sheltering trees.

"Ailill!" at last calls loudly Eochaid. His voice
Reëchoes through the forest and is gone.

The Wooing

Deep in the woodland aisles, Ailill the poet
Wanders disconsolate, wrestles with his grief.
For him the happy issue of his quest,
And, at the moment when he long'd to seize
The dear reward, the high demand of duty,
Duty to his King, and honour, which forbids
Utter abandonment in wild desire.

“Love asked the harder service, and I gave
E'en what he asked, despite the bitter pain.
I too had hoped within these arms to hold
A maid who brought a woman's greatest gifts,
Her life and love.”

Ailill, musing, forgets
The sun has turn'd upon his westward journey;
Then, of a sudden, knows the birds have ceased
Their song, and in the mid-day heat are silent.

Straightway he hastens toward the glade to find
Etain and Eochaid:

“Brother, long since I call'd.
No answer came, and so once more I turn'd
To love. Go, tell King Etar that I bring
His daughter as my bride both woo'd and won.”

The Wooing

Through the cool forest walk the happy pair,
While round them bush and tree are burgeoning;
Heavy the scent of flowers in the air,
And bright the colours in each glade and grove;
The birds all sing in tune; the past and future
Are no more—naught but the everlasting now!

Here pause the twain. He takes her in his arms.

“O Queen, who lov’st me for myself alone,
Soon will I crown thee an High Queen indeed!”

“O King, if ever I may reign the queen
Of thy true heart, in all am I content.”

Thus wandering in a maze of love, come they
To Etar.

Soon is the pomp of Tara brought,
The chariots and the soldiers of the King,
To Inbir Cichmuine. The marriage feast
Makes glad the heart of every man in Erin.
Ailill the poet sings the marriage song.

The Tryst

Two years are past, and May is come again,
Filling with blossom all the Irish land.
Green are the mountains, and the roadside hedge
Shows through its greenness a bright thread of
gold

Where budding gorse has broken into flower.
The birds sing loudly in full praise of Love
From dawn till dark; and Night flees swift away
Before the ardent courtship of the Sun,
Who lends his warmth to every living thing.
Stag fights with antlered stag; the lusty bull
Bellows for joy at conquest of the kine.
Love in the springtime floods the heart of man,
Even as the river floods the teeming fields.

Amid the mellow sunshine of the spring
Queen Etain walks. Far off the happy day
When first the King Eochaid by easy stages
Brought her to Tara, and made every stage

The Tryst

Occasion for a reverent rite of Love.
Bright Angus Og, the god of Youth and Love,
Came from his palace on swift-flowing Boyne,
And hover'd over them. His brilliant birds
Sang for their pleasure, hid in every tree.

Long past this happy time, and now King
Eochaid
Is lost in statecraft, comes no more to walk
With Etain in the sweet delight of love.

Three kings for childish anger gone to war,
The High King, Eochaid, then must lead his host
To quell their brawl; when he again return'd
He must devote his hours to the task
Of building round him an united state.

Ailill in silence watch'd the lonely Queen;
And love grew ever, hidden in his heart,
As grows the wave which rolling to the shore
Must break at last in joyous leaping foam.
Such happy issue was not Ailill's lot;
Upon no rocky shore his love could spend
Itself, but must recoil on its own greatness.

The Tryst

Into a strange sickness Ailill fell at last,
No druid lore could cure: he lies in pain
What time Queen Etain down her garden goes
Amid the scented blossoms of the spring.

Comes Eochaid there to join her.

“Long, O wife,
Have I been given to affairs of state,
Putting aside the myriad joys of home.
My lengthy labour is now well-nigh done;
I ride in royal progress round the land,
To see the kingdoms I have firmly join’d.
When I return I will resign the care
That waits upon a crown, and take the joy.
Love shall possess the absolute sway I hold,
While I content will reign his under-king.”

Folding her in his arms, he kisses her cheek,
All heedless of the frighten’d look which lurks
Deep in her eyes, as when a startled deer
Hears the first echo of the hunting-horn.

“Etain, I ride to-day with heavy heart,
Because my brother Ailill has not found

The Tryst

Relief from pain. I charge thee, therefore,
watch

Beside his sickbed; seek to bring him ease
By whatsoever means thou mayest. Farewell!"

Slowly, to the chamber where sad Ailill lies,
Goes Etain, troubled both in heart and mind.
Long since the reason for the poet's pain
She guess'd; full often watch'd his wistful eyes
Fixed on her face across the festal board:
The night the royal marriage feast was spread
Down the high hall of Tara; yet again
Whenever in the hall the torches lit
The splendour and the glory of a king.
Then, too, he came to where she, lonely, walk'd
Thro' her pied garden; sang to her; told her
tales;
Did all, in sooth, to keep from her the thought
That now her husband Eochaid came no more.

Ailill is heedless of the springtide sun
Aslant the bed, but, with averted face
Hid in his hands, has turn'd him toward the wall.

The Tryst

The room is deck'd with trophies of the chase,
Elk horns and skins; and o'er the sick man's
head

The harp whose strains might set at rest the cares
Of all the world, yet not the harper's own.

He does not hear the step of Etain, light
As the footfall of the wind across the leaves
In the great wood on early autumn days;
But when she sits upon the rough-hewn bench
Below the couch, he turns and sees the Queen.

Even as a river in the strength of spring
Bursts from its banks, Ailill's pent-up passion
Bursts from him with a sudden mighty cry:
"Why hast thou come to look upon my pain,
O Queen? Have I not suffer'd from desire
Of love enough, that thou art here to add
Fresh fuel to a flame which must consume
My life?"

With frighten'd gaze, she looks on
Ailill,
Catching her mantle up as if to flee

The Tryst

From where, half-risen, he stretches out his arms,
Conquer'd by overmastering desire.

He sees the question in her eyes ; a change
Crosses his countenance ; the storm is past,
As when athwart the beauty of a night
In spring, moonlit and cool, a gust of wind
Descends with patter of thick drops of rain,
Then passes, and the moon shines bright once
more.

In tones soft as the gentle breeze that follows
The storm, he speaks again :

“Lady and Queen—
And more than these, my life and love, since I
First saw the vision of the distant wood,
And, spellbound, ran far down the leafy ways,
Because with perfect Beauty I had found
The death of hope,—the canker in my heart
Gnaws ever inward ; soon, perchance, I die ;
Yet I must speak and ease me of my pain.
Long have I loved thee, known thy loneliness.
How could my brother thus neglect the prize

The Tryst

That I had given? My heart as Eochaid's ached
For love. Could I not cherish e'en as well
A woman's life? And then no child has come
To shield the mother's bosom from the world."

Etain makes no answer, but quickly leans
Along the couch to take the poet's hand.
Her eyes are troubled, as the crystal depths
Of a blue pool, where is a quick fish startl'd.

Then Ailill speaks again:

"Love is the lot
Of every man; it gives the strength to dare
Conflict with men and fate; and yet for me
Has been a combat with a shadow, the struggle
Of a drowning man, wherein I strove to keep
My honour safe above the waves which close
At last about me, and I hear no more
The voice of Beauty ringing through the world."

A tremour shakes him and he hides his face,
While Etain answers in a voice which brings
Peace to the poet's hungering heart, a voice

The Tryst

Clear as the tinkle of a fairy bell
Speaking of happiness beyond the world:

“O Ailill, hither have I come to find
A cure for thy grave sickness by command
Of my lord Eochaid, ere he this morning rode
In royal progress round the realm, his last
Before he leaves the petty cares of state,
And sovereign of united Erin reigns.
Then will he come once more to taste the joys
Of home, in my garden be a king indeed.
But happy days have long been dim with dis-
tance;
Long is it now since I was known of Love,
And summon'd to his court to pay my service.”

She muses; gently dies away her voice,
The cry of a wild bird that high in air
Above the waters of a hill-bound lake
Is heard, not seen.

Leaning on elbow, Ailill
Breaks on her musing with swift-spoken words:
“Etain, I can no longer put away

The Tryst

What, being Life, is strong as Life itself;
I must complete the purpose of my days.
Wilt thou not meet me when the cock has crow'd
For sight of the first silver streak of dawn,
Below the Hill of Tara, by the lodge
Of my brother Eochaid at the woodland's edge?"

Ere she replies, the curtain at the door
Is thrust aside, and on the threshold stands
A servant, bearing the leech's draught to Ailill
From Fachtnu, physician to the High King's
court,
Most learned leech in a most learned land.

She glides in silence to the door, and turns:
"To-morrow will I come indeed, O Ailill."

Dim are the happenings of that dreary day,
When Ailill's ears are blurr'd by deep desire,
And dizzy pictures dance before his eyes.
At last, across the meadow of the world
Night sows the seed of sleep. Ailill sleeps not,
But tosses till he sees the risen moon

The Tryst

Shine through the window and across the bed—
Then drifts far off to fight with troublous
dreams.

The cospes of the wood are cool, the dew
Has drench'd the fern, when Etain goes to tryst
With Ailill. The moon in the expectant sky
Has paled, half-hidden by the Hill of Tara.

Led by a lantern whose faint flickering beams
Make the tall, silent trees seem pillar stones—
A stalwart circle round a royal grave—
Etain comes swiftly to the place of tryst.

Far off, the distant watcher for the day
Crows shrilly, while a sudden flush of light
Transforms a mass of blackness into leaves.
Day brightens; down the broad green path which
leads

Out from the forest to King Eochaid's lodge,
Etain espies a man of Ailill's mien,
And yet not Ailill; for how should he come
From the dark woodland, not the royal rath?

The Tryst

A moment looks she toward the Hill of Kings,
But when she turns again the man is gone.
The branches of the tallest trees are fleck'd
With sunlight, while the day waxes apace,
And still no sign of Ailill, and no sound
Save twittering birds, the chatter of the brook.
Then, since the day brings duties, Etain returns
To take her place within the women's hall,
Her absence unremark'd. Full oft her wont
To wander in the woodland with the dawn.

The sun is not yet risen half his height,
Ere Etain comes where Ailill sleeping lies.

Hearing her step, he wakes.

“Now art thou come
To tryst, O Etain”—sudden his voice is gone
At sight of sunlight dancing on the floor.

“Well hast thou mock'd me with thy tryst, O
man,
And paid the service due thy love and Queen!”

The Tryst

Reading the mute amazement in his face,
Straightway she pauses and repents her words.

“My love and sovereign, I have sinn’d indeed.
The moon was high in heaven when I slept,
A prey to troubled dreams. I fought with phan-
toms,—

Strange men who strove to keep me from the
bourne

Of my desire, men clad in fairy green,
With fairy swords; and thou wert in their midst,
As though their sister. One o’er all who seem’d
Thy best protector, overcame my strength,
Smote me to earth, and swiftly bore thee off.
Then, in my vision, tender unseen hands
Took me to some fair palace on a plain,
Lit by a single precious stone. My wounds
Were heal’d; and there I slept a blissful sleep,
Waking to know I had outslept the dawn.
Such is my tale; but, Lady, I believe
My dream and slumber sent from Fairyland
By those who watch the ways of mortal men.”

The Tryst

Him Etain answers not, but dreamy-ey'd
Gazes from out the window on a world
Green-clad and joyous in the yoke of Spring.
Then, of a sudden waking from her dream:
"Hidden the purposes of fairy folk
From mortals. Hither, Ailill, have I come
To bring thee healing, but to none avail."

"Once more, O Etain, wilt thou test my faith,
Meet me to-morrow at our place of tryst?"

She stoops in answer, brushes with her lips
His brow, as one might kiss a pouting child.

The curtain rustles, and the Queen is gone.

A second time the light of early day
Finds Etain waiting by the royal lodge
Alone, and gazing down the woodland path,
Where once again the man of Ailill's mien
Stands motionless.

"Approach," she calls, "and
give

The Tryst

The reason for thy tryst," her voice echoing
Round the green vaulting of the leafy ways.

Proudly the stranger strides to meet the Queen,
The sunlight flashing from the bars of bronze
Cross'd on his helmet, from the brazen shield
Hung on his shoulder, from the sword-hilt set
With priceless stones, from color in his kilt
Of richest texture as befits a king.
Blue are his eyes, like the bright billowy sea
Beyond the western coast of lovely Erin;
Yellow his hair as honey in the sun.

"Who art thou?" murmurs Etain.

He replies:

"Hast thou forgotten race and heritage,
Thy former state, so soon? My name is Midir,
And my folk the Shee. Once wert thou wedded
wife
To me in Fairyland. Behold the past!"

He waves his arm; the forest fades away,
And in its room there comes a mighty plain,

The Tryst

Fill'd with spring flowers, bordering on the sea
Which curls in wavelets round the rocky shore.

A band of maidens, dress'd in filmy green,
Dances in circles 'round a lofty tree
Whose fruit hangs golden in the mellow sun;
And, as they dance, the sound of singing, borne
Faint, passionless, and clear to Etain's ears:

*Dance around the golden tree,
Sisters all,
Singing ever merrily
In the sunshine, glad and free,
One and all.*

*Mortal millions toil in pain;
We are blithe;
Time the Reaper goes again
From the flowers of our plain
With his scythe.*

*Mortals live by war and greed;
We have peace;
Resting on this happy mead,*

The Tryst

*From the woes for which they bleed,
Sure release.*

*Dance around the golden tree,
One and all,
Singing ever merrily
In the sunshine, glad and free,
Sisters all.*

Down toward the dancers comes a merry band
Of youths white, shining, wonderful to see:
Nuada, Kian, Lugh, whom Etain knew
And had forgotten with the former days.

Sudden, the vision of the plain is gone,
And Etain stands with Midir once again
In the cool forest, and the sun is high.

“From me the love which crept round Ailill’s
heart,
A test for him who sang that love should be
A noble passion ever, scorn’d the clay.
Love is the pity which the gods pour out

The Tryst

On man's desire. Much was the poet tried,
But when I saw his fortitude had fail'd,
I sent the sleep upon him which could save
His honour.

Hasten to Tara; for the King
Is come once more within the royal lis,
And Ailill, free of pain, to welcome him."

He ceases, and around him creeps a mist
From out the forest, past the leafy trees.
A strain of music sounds, a single chord,
As though a thousand harps in unison.

Numb grow the senses of the Queen. The mist
Vanishes,—and Midir with the mist is gone.

Slowly moves Etain toward the royal rath,
But swift her footsteps when far off she hears
Music and shouting and the clash of arms
From Tara.

Soon she beholds the royal hill,
With warriors pressing round the haughty King,
Drawn in his chariot by two milk-white steeds.

The Tryst

Now is she first among the clamourous crowd
Standing aside that she may greet her lord.

Behind him Ailill, with proud, buoyant mien,
His sickness vanish'd, as an ugly dream
Forgotten in the golden morning sun.

The Monk Pauses in His Labour

Follow, follow,
O swift-wing'd swallow,
The springtide call to a new delight.

River-rover,
Leap up and over
The rocks, O salmon silver-bright!

In the garden close
Is the new-blown rose,
And the blossom white on the hawthorn tree;

Wild birds are singing;
The breeze is bringing
The keen, clean smell of the wind-swept sea,

Where the roving Dane
Will launch again
His well-mann'd ships for the Irish shore.

The Monk Pauses in His Labour

Yet a Danish sail
Is of no avail
'Gainst the kilted kerns in the battle roar,

When a host of men,
From hill and glen
Sweeps down with the strength of a curling
 wave;

A flash of spears,
And women's tears
Are all that's left for the fallen brave.

But the din of war,
Though loud, is far
From the peaceful toil of a monkish cell,

The open book
In the garden nook
By the great grey house where the brothers dwell.

Swallow, swallow,
Could I but follow
The springtide call to a new delight,

The Monk Pauses in His Labour

Like the river-rover,
I'd up and over,
Across the wall, where the land is bright!

In the Monastery

Is acher in gáith in-nocht
(Cold is the wind to-night)

Old Irish Poem

Cold is the wind to-night, and rough the sea,
Too rough for ev'n the daring Dane to find
A landing-place upon the frozen lea.

Cold is the wind.

The blast sweeps round the chapel from behind,
Making the altar-light flare fitfully,
While I must kneel and pray with troubled
mind.

Patrick and Bridget, I have pray'd to thee!
The night is over, and my task resign'd
To Colum. Though God's own dwelling shel-
ter me,

Cold is the wind.

The Song of Angus and Caer

(In their flight as swans from Loch Bel Draccon)

ANGUS

White as the snow of one night, my love,
Who flies in the form of a swan
Over the green-sided valleys and hills,
Lakes unruffled and leaping rills,
Forever on and on.

CAER

Fairest art thou among swans of the earth,
King of the hidden gods!
As the world in spring, I am born again,
I am born to Love, forgetting Pain,
The stroke of Life's chast'ning rods.

ANGUS

Fly with me to the Brugh of the Boyne,
Hid in the heart of a hill,

The Song of Angus and Caer

Where the hours fade, and the days flow
on,

The sands run ever, and never gone,
As tide to the ocean's will.

CAER

Love is a star in the winter sky,
Caress of the morning dew;
Love is Time, and Time is Love,
Flight of an eagle, wings of a dove,
Light of the lamp of the True.

In May

In May the Irish air is sweet
With odor from the hawthorn spray,
And birds each other blithely greet,
In May.

Night holds but momentary sway,
Then vanishes with flying feet
Before the swift approach of Day.

Stags bellow and the proud ram bleat,
The shining salmon leaps in play,
While happy lovers often meet,
In May.

Blackfoot the Stag

O Stag of Erin, hast thou heard the horn
Of mighty hunters of the Fenian days,
When by the forest pool thou stoodst at gaze
In the crisp stillness of an autumn morn?
Then, swiftly hurrying with feet forlorn
Along Ben Gulban's rough and rocky ways,
Thou camest to behold broad Connaught's bays
Outspread beneath the height where thou wast
born.

How rapid is the passing of the years!
Five hundred summers now have followed spring;
No longer is the flashing of the spears
Bright on the mountain; the bugles' carolling
Borne clearly to thy keen affrighted ears:
Art thou too, Stag, gone with my wondering?

CORMAC'S CHRISTMAS

A Mystery

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TO

F. N. ROBINSON

Professor of English in Harvard University
Friend and Fosterer of Celtic Letters in the
United States

CORMAC'S CHRISTMAS

A Mystery

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

CORMAC, a noble of the first rank
SACHALLUS (formerly Feradach),
a follower of Saint Patrick

CONN, son to Cormac

DEBRANN, a Druid

THREE STRANGERS

BRI, niece to Sachallus

PLACE: Ireland.

TIME: A Christmas Eve during Saint
Patrick's mission, after 429.

SCENE: *The living room of the house of Cormac.
There are benches and chairs about the floor;
a table left center; shields and trophies of*

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

the chase on the walls. There is a fire on the hearth right. Entrances are at right, left, and a door back leading into the open air. Since the hour is late afternoon, candles burn on the table. When the curtain rises Cormac is seated in a large chair left, facing the fire. Sachallus appears at the door back. He raises his hand in benediction.

SACHALLUS

Peace to this house—and to thee, O Cormac!

CORMAC

Victory and blessing of the gods upon thee, O Feradach!

SACHALLUS

Wilt call me by the name I have forgotten long ago?

CORMAC

More shame to thee. Art thou no more Fera-

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

dach mac Lomna, son of the warrior whose name was known throughout Erin, dreaded even in distant Lochlann?

SACHALLUS

In truth I am. Yet have I gained a greater Father, for I am son to the true God.

CORMAC

But I do know thee still as son to Lomna. Hast put aside all pride with thy new God? Dost rejoice no longer in deeds of war, the clash of swords, the red light of the flames of battle?

SACHALLUS

My God can use the sword upon occasion. Yet Him I serve is called the Prince of Peace. I am of the host of His warriors, Sachallus, servant to Christ and follower of holy Patrick.

CORMAC

Dost seek again to turn me from the ancient faith? Thou art more servant than warrior. Should I forego the conflict, the cry of the Mor-

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

rigu, the Battle Crow, above the slaughter, and become as thou? The blood within my veins would turn to fire, and burn the palaces of Erin where men still live.

SACHALLUS

My purpose is to preach the Christ, to show thee a greater vision than the other-world, where dwell the Tuatha De Danaan.

CORMAC

Profane not the Fairy folk. Their green cloaks have often been seen flashing beside me in the fight.

SACHALLUS

I would not speak ill of the Shee; but I would win thee to a land more glorious than the Land of Youth, a land which waits for every Christian—the Paradise of God.

CORMAC

Will there be warlike sport and bowls of mead when I am weary?

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

SACHALLUS

The saints of God singing to the sound of golden harps.

CORMAC

Womanish thou hast become. Thou wert ever a lover of the harp and songs of the far-off world, dreams of the land that lies beyond the west. With thy new faith thou hast forgot men's deeds and dwellest in a world of minstrels' melodies. Well is it Lomna has died and waits with sword in hand the summoning of heroes, upright in his burial mound. He it is slew Tocha of Lochlann and led thee to thy first battle.

SACHALLUS

All this is far away, and I have gained a keener sight. War is but half of life, and, as I deem, the poorer half. The Prince of Peace has shown a newer and a greater beauty. Canst thou not see? Is there no voice that murmurs in thine heart?

CORMAC

Still art thou lost in dreams. For me the sword

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will sing the sweetest song; and in the end I would pass to Tir-n-an-Og, live forever in the Fairy kingdom with my peers, the Fairy men who oft have helped me in the wars.

SACHALLUS

O Cormac, I will bring thee to a fairer world, where thou shalt have a truer life eternal.

CORMAC

No more thy tales. Feradach, friend to my youth, thou art welcome at my board. I have won the name "Hospitable," and I turn thee not away because thou seekest a new God. Thou mayst persuade me not. Dream as thou wilt; but as for me, I keep the faith of men, and I will pray to gods to whom my father prayed, swear by the gods by whom my people swore.

SACHALLUS

I cannot make thee understand; my visits are in vain!

CORMAC

Put away thy folly. Be once more Feradach the

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

warrior, not Sachallus, follower of a Briton from over sea.

SACHALLUS

More warrior am I than e'er before, but soldier in Christ's army.

CORMAC

Truce to thy preaching. I would ask why thou didst come this day, when, speaking both for myself and for the nobles under me, I have sent word to Patrick I would die believing in the ancient faith?

SACHALLUS

Thy resolution for thyself would Patrick suffer, and have trust in prayer; but, since thou ledest others, great is his wrath. He has called to God for punishment on thee, and has been granted it. Victor, God's angel, came in a vision and said, "Thy prayer is heard, O Patrick, and punishment shall be given Cormac soon." In haste I sought thee—for I have loved thee ever—with warning that the wrath of the true God is

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

mighty. Take the faith, O Cormac, and turn aside thy doom.

CORMAC

Thou art in truth a woman. I fear not thy God; I have my sword and strength to wield it. The Dagda and the gods protect me. Come no more with thine eastern tales; Sachallus is no longer welcome, but only Feradach. To Sachallus I bid farewell.

SACHALLUS

Farewell! And may my God have mercy though He punish thee!

(Sachallus goes out at back. Cormac sinks moodily into his chair as Debrann enters right.)

DEBRANN

Once more he sought to wean thee from the gods?

CORMAC

But I was firm. They have ceased their prayers and turned to threats; Sachallus brought word

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

a spirit came to Patrick and promised vengeance
of the Christian God upon me.

DEBRANN

Some demon sent from Balor. May the gods
protect us!

*(He draws a circle with his yew wand,
stands within it, and mutters, "In dia mo
tuatha don ditin.")*

Long shall thy name be known in Erin, defender
of the faith!

CORMAC

The ancient ways are passing—many seek Christ.
I must teach my son to stand firm as his fathers,
be a warrior ever.

DEBRANN

These womanish clerics have forgotten how to
use the sword, and are grown weak from fast-
ing. Naught is there to fear.

CORMAC

The ancient prohibition put upon me?

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

DEBRANN

That Cormac should not receive three strangers in his house upon a night when it both rains and snows?

CORMAC

Now there is rain.

DEBRANN

But there is sign of clearing. Twice in ten years past do I remember snow; snow and rain in one night once in thirty years. Thy life is safe as yet. But I forgot—one waits without to speak with thee,—Ilbrec, thy tenant.

CORMAC

Bid him enter.

*(Debrann goes to door right and beckons.
Ilbrec enters and kneels to Cormac.)*

ILBREC

I ask mercy, O Cormac!

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

(*To Debrann*) Leave us.

(*Debrann goes out at right.*)

What means thy trouble, Ilbrec?

ILBREC

Thou knowest I have held thy farm these three years, and paid thee rent—one cow. Thou demandest this year I give thee three.

CORMAC

I thought thou wert well able. My rents grow slack, and there is unrest in Erin; the state totters with those who seek a strange God. Many give their goods to clerics, but I must still pay my tribute to the King.

ILBREC

I have but six cows in all.

CORMAC

Three are mine, due rental for thy farm.

ILBREC

Thou knowest in the past summer a plague rav-

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

aged my kine; these six alone are left. My wife and children—I cannot pay.

CORMAC

Thy farm, then, is forfeit, and I must seek another tenant.

ILBREC

Mercy, O Cormac! The visitations of the gods—

CORMAC

Thy kine.

ILBREC

Take thou my farm, and I will seek another lord. Thou hast been "Hospitable," but I will call thee "Merciless." May all the curses of the gods be poured upon thee, and through hospitality disaster come!

(He rushes out right, as Conn enters left.)

CONN

O Father, what mean these angry words?

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

Ilbrec's farm is mine again. He seeks another lord, another land, perchance. I care not, save the rent is lost.

CONN

One cow?

CORMAC

Three—thou knowest the times are hard.

CONN

The plague upon his kine: thou shouldst have granted respite.

CORMAC

Thou knowest naught of these things. Ere long will I teach thee, that thou mayest take my place. I am old, and Christians threaten me.

CONN

This may not be, for their gospel is one of peace.

CORMAC

How knowest thou this?

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CONN

Common rumour it is. Their faith is spreading in the land.

CORMAC

But not within my boundaries. Here are still altars of the gods and Druids to serve them. Thou shalt be guardian of the ancient learning.

CONN

Thou speakest of Christian threats. Tell me clearly.

CORMAC

Feradach, my friend, called by Christians Sachalus, came again to win me to his faith. Long is it ere Feradach drew the sword. Such is the end of all who follow too keenly tales and melodies. Thou seekest too often the harp, my son. I were fain didst thou throw the javelin and ply the sling with greater eagerness.

CONN

Yet knowledge of the ancient songs is of a noble's duty. All are not given skill in deeds of

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

war; to some are granted secrets of the harp, as unto others knowledge of the law and judgment.

CORMAC

Harpers' songs will never make thee great among the men of Erin, kings and warriors of Conor's mighty race. I knew the songs once, but have forgotten them. Look upon my lands—are they not wide, and is my sway not revered in Erin?

CONN

Famous bards and learned men will know my name; and mayhap in the years to come my songs will sound through many an hall.

CORMAC

Is that the fame thou seekest—to please the ears of weaklings and of women? For that do I leave thee my well-ordered lands, the power of my name, Conn, son to Cormac?

CONN

Father, all are not as thou. The times change; there is no longer thought alone of war and

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

chase, but many men have other purposes. Thou spakest of Sachallus—to him has come the wide vision of the destiny of man. Not only burning houses and white bodies of fair women doth he see. His vision is of golden sunlight on fertile fields, children playing about their mother, ships laden with rich goods sweeping toward distant lands—such is the army of the Prince of Peace.

CORMAC

Thou hast spoken with Sachallus and art poisoned with his tales and madness. I had hoped thou wouldst serve the altars of the gods, keep the customs of our race. Then were I glad to go within my burial mound knowing one man of strength in Erin. I find thee lured by pretty visions; Fairy folk have piped their magic music in thine ears, and thou art mad. Thou art wandering in another world. Debrann, Debrann,—my son faileth me!

(He goes out right in wild despair.)

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CONN

(Starting after his father.) Thou knowest not,
my Father—

(At this moment a step behind him attracts his attention, and he turns to see Bri on the threshold of the door back.)

BRI

O Conn, I find thee safe?

CONN

What means thy coming?

BRI

Hast thou not heard as yet? Sachallus came—

CONN

I saw him not.

BRI

With message to thy father
From holy Patrick, who has prayed to God
For punishment on Cormac. God has heard.

CONN

Thou art trembling as a leaf upon a bough
In early spring, when winds are still too keen.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

BRI

I thought that I might find thee gone—this house,
Vanished, perchance. My fears are woman's
weakness.

CONN

Belovéd, in my arms thou needst not fear;
I'll keep thee 'gainst the world. Say on at
length.

BRI

God's punishment is mighty; and his angel,
The shining Victor, promised it to Patrick.
I told thee that Sachallus spoke in vain.
Straightway on his return, I threw this cloak
About me, hastened hither, a thousand visions
Flashing before mine eyes: I saw thy dwelling
Struck by a thunderbolt; thee and thy father
White, silent, stark, amid avenging flames;
Or grinning demons bearing him away.

CONN

These are childish fears.

BRI

Born of a too great love.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CONN

Say not too great. How can that be too great
Which, being all we have, is less than God
Who lends His own divinity to Love?

BRI

Thou art a better Christian, Conn, than I.

CONN

Although a later. But a month ago
Sachallus put the Cross upon my brow.

BRI

Hast told thy father?

CONN

I thought this day to speak,
Yet would not; for I found my father troubled.
Ilbrec, his tenant, gave him back his farm;
And thou dost tell me of Sachallus now.
Cormac has longed for me to hold his place,
Wielding a pagan sway, going with fire
And spear and sword to ravage lovely Erin,

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

Crossing with terror to the British land,
Serving the altars of the pagan gods,
Hearkening the Druid tales and prophecies.
He spoke to me of his high hopes, and I
Forbore to bring more woe to-day upon him.

BRI

Love granted thee the gift of gentleness.
Now is my heart at ease, and all the fancies
Of imagination gone, like little clouds
Blown past the glory of a summer moon.
I see the house now as it ever was:
The shields, the table, and the lighted fire,
And thee, O Conn, beside them in the firelight.

CONN

Though I am gentle, I am firm of faith.
I'll keep thee by me, take my father's place,
And lead my people from shadow to the light—
New faith, new life, new hope, for them and me.
Though God's wrath shall be mighty, yet will I
Still be His servant; and I will not fear
The punishment of Cormac.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

BRI

Thou givest me
Courage, for, seeing dimly, thou dost believe.

CONN

Such is the confidence of men who lead.
All others are but petty plodders, ploughmen
Of the world, who lack the skill to sow the seed,
Nor know the wheat from tares. But come, the
rain
Will now have stopped, and there may be the
stars,
As on this night four hundred years ago,
When Christ our Lord in Bethlehem was born.

*(He leads Bri to the door back, and they
stand looking out.)*

BRI

The air is cold, and clouds blow past the heavens.
There are no stars, but presage of more storm.
I must be gone; for now I know thee safe,
And Patrick says a mass for Christmas morn.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CONN

Farewell, and may the angels bring thee joy!

(He kisses her and she goes off, wrapping her mantle about her. He is looking after her when Cormac enters right and comes up behind him. He closes the door.)

CORMAC

I was too hasty in my words. I forgot a father's office. Troublous has been this day. As there are many men, there must be many missions. I think for my place, not for myself. My strength is not what once it was, and I would know thee able to uphold that for which I strove.

(Cormac has now taken his seat in the large chair left, Conn on a bench beside him.)

CONN

O Father, I would not bring thee woe, but thou wert unjust to Ilbrec.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

I could not otherwise; I must support the honour of my house. Men such as he cannot know the need that doth oppress me. I should be a light in battle and in holy duties, else would the country fall to an invader.

CONN

Ilbrec is a man as thou—the same ties, a wife and children.

CORMAC

My sternness was thought for thee; I would deliver thee a sway firmly knit as that my father left me. I would have thee looked to by all Erin as guardian of what comes from days long gone, but by the land's true sons never forgot.

CONN

Thou lookest for the glory and good of thy people? Thou wouldst have Erin keep her place among the nations?

CORMAC

Thou namest the purpose of my life.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CONN

Mayst thou not turn too eagerly toward the past? Wouldst go to battle with a sword of stone, when men wield weapons now of metal? I would seek courage from ancient days, but change with changing customs; bow as the sapling to the wind, which swings back to straightness. Thus would I win my people greater good and glory. Hast not looked upon the fields when the sun was hidden, saying, "How fair! I would not alter this!" But when the sun has shone again, didst thou not see a thousand things but lately hid? In too zealous following of the past there can be lack of wisdom. Erin may not live alone, but for the world; and every lord in Erin must labour for his fellows.

CORMAC

Thou speakest strangely, and I understand thee not.

CONN

A new spirit stirs abroad. Men seek to keep their homes, to till their land, to trade—

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

(Breaking in upon him.) I like not what thou sayest. For me, my weapons shall be buried with me, and I will bequeath thee a warrior's name. I am weary, and vague uneasiness torments me. Mayhap I have listened too oft to Christian tales, and the gods seek vengeance on me. There is a prophecy—

(He looks up and sees Debrann standing in the door right.)

O Debrann, thou knowest the ancient words!

DEBRANN

That thou shouldst dread the visit of three strangers on a night it both rains and snows. Art still fearful of the Christian threat?

CONN

I looked upon the night not long since. The rain had ceased.

DEBRANN

Thy brain is filled with fancies. Thou hast served the gods well and upheld their cause.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

(Rising) 'Tis age, perchance, which creeps upon me. I would speak to thee of Ilbrec. Come.

(Cormac and Debrann go out right.)

CONN

God's ways are strange; my words may not have been in vain.

(He starts to go out right, when there is a knock on the door back. He pauses. The knock is repeated, and he opens the door. Outside are three men richly dressed in foreign-looking garments, and muffled against the cold. One of the men is of dark skin. Behind them it is snowing softly.)

FIRST STRANGER

We ask the hospitality of this house. Far have we travelled, and our journey yet is long.

CONN

In my father's name I bid ye welcome. Enter, and I will bring ye food.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

(The Strangers come into the room.)

FIRST STRANGER

There is no need; our sporans were well filled.
We seek only a place to sleep. In whose house
are we?

CONN

In that of Cormac, son to Aed, first noble of this
kingdom.

*(Cormac and Debrann have appeared at
the door right; they look with astonish-
ment upon the Strangers. The First
Stranger sees Cormac and salutes him.)*

FIRST STRANGER

Hail to thee, O Cormac! In thy name thy son
bade us welcome.

CORMAC

(Still astonished) Ever—was my title—Hospi-
table.—*(Muttering)*—The curse—of Ilbrec.

FIRST STRANGER

Once more hail, O Cormac! Denyest thou the
greeting of thy son?

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

(With effort) All things within this house are yours. Safe are ye to-night, if Cormac's name and arm can make ye so.

DEBRANN

May the almighty gods protect ye—and us!

CORMAC

Amazed was I by your coming. The hour is late; the weather ill. I see snow upon your garments.

FIRST STRANGER

We journey fast and far; nor weather nor hour stays us.

CORMAC

Food——

FIRST STRANGER

Our wants are simple. We ate upon the way. Lodging this night is what we ask.

CORMAC

'Tis yours. Conn, bring mead for the strangers; drink they will not deny.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

(Conn goes out left.)

Lay aside your cloaks.

THE THREE STRANGERS

Thanks, O Cormac! Victory and blessing upon thee!

(The Strangers remove their outer cloaks and stretch them on the floor in front of the fire. Cormac and Debrann exchange understanding looks. Conn reappears from door left, bearing a mead horn which he hands to the First Stranger.)

FIRST STRANGER

(Raising the horn) Health—and strength to thy spirit, O Cormac! And to ye all!

(He drinks, passing the horn to his companions. Cormac, Conn, and Debrann return the Strangers' salute. Conn, after the horn is returned to him, places it upon the table.)

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

DEBRANN

I go to serve the altars of the gods; for there is need.

(He salutes.)

CORMAC

(Returning salute) Farewell!

(Debrann goes out right, and Cormac turns to the Strangers.)

Sit ye by the fire and tell of your coming to Erin.
By your dress I know ye strangers in the land.
Conn, take thy seat beside me.

(Cormac sits in the large chair left, Conn immediately on his right. The Strangers sit to the right of Conn, in the centre of the stage.)

CONN

Methinks ye have journeyed over many seas from vast stretches of eastern plains.

FIRST STRANGER

Thou sayest sooth.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

I like not these eastern lands; strange faiths and customs come thence, which have corrupted our old Irish ways. The Christian's God, the Christ——

CONN

I ask pardon for my father's words.

CORMAC

I did forget. I have had cause to hate the Christ.

FIRST STRANGER

From farther east we come; yet have we been to Bethlehem.

CONN

To Bethlehem!

CORMAC

No more these places of the Christians. I am a follower of my father's gods. What brought ye to Erin?

FIRST STRANGER

We carried gifts to Leary, High King—and others in the land. We are kings in our own

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

right. Much have we studied the ways of Erin,
and now we travel home.

CORMAC

Bring ye no gifts for me?

FIRST STRANGER

Our gifts may not be seen, they are too precious
—yet many have them.

CORMAC

Ye speak in riddles such as Christians call para-
bles.

FIRST STRANGER

Now will I speak what thou canst understand.
There is a prohibition on us which declares that
on this night of all the year we may not rest
where we have been, but must set out toward
Bethlehem.

CORMAC

A prohibition upon thee?

FIRST STRANGER

(With a gesture) On all.

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

The customs of these foreign lands are not so strange. I too have prohibition upon me; but I have broken it.

FIRST STRANGER

What meanest thou?

CONN

My father——

CORMAC

Seek not to dissuade me. There is a prophecy spoken before my birth by Crimthann, High Druid, that I must dread the night three strangers seek my house when it both rains and snows. Ye know what I have done. The laws of hospitality—I could not turn ye from my house. My title is "Hospitable."

FIRST STRANGER

We bring thee no ill; for we are peaceful kings. Oft what seemeth ill is presage of a greater good. Yet, since thou fearest us, we will journey on.

(He rises, and the other Strangers follow suit.)

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

CORMAC

(Rising and standing between them and the door) Shame were it on my house should ye leave it thus. Cormac has strength to meet and bear his fate.

FIRST STRANGER

Thou hast spoken as fits the ancient fame of Erin.

CONN

(Rising) I would show ye where ye may sleep.

CORMAC

O Conn, I stay the night through in this seat; then am I ready for disaster with my sword beside me.

FIRST STRANGER

In proof of faith we will remain to guard thee. No evil spirit here, but one of us shall conquer him. Go thou to rest, O Conn!

CORMAC

My thanks, O Kings!

(To Conn) Come thou at dawn to see that all

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

is well. Goodnight, and blessing of the gods upon thee!

CONN

Blessing and protection be on thee! I'll sleep within the outer chamber, where thou mayst call me.

(Cormac and Conn embrace. Conn goes out left. The Three Strangers draw their swords and sit on the floor in a semi-circle facing Cormac. They have blown out the candles on the table, so that the room is now illumined only by firelight. Cormac leans moodily back in his chair, gazing into the fire. Gradually his head droops, and he falls asleep. The Three Strangers sink to the floor in slumber one by one. There is complete silence. Suddenly a knocking is heard on the outer door. None of the sleepers heeds it, and the knocking is repeated. Cormac stirs uneasily. A voice outside calls, "I am the Good Shepherd, and I seek my sheep."

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

A moment after, the door at the back opens, as if pushed by an unseen hand. Outside, the night is clear, and a bright star shines in the heavens opposite the door. A choir of angels is singing the "Gloria in excelsis."

The Three Strangers rise as though still in a dream. They are now revealed as the Three Wise Men of Bethlehem. They go out in procession by the door back, each bearing before him his appropriate gift—gold, frankincense, myrrh. Behind them walks Cormac, who has risen, also as if in a dream, and goes with his hands outstretched, murmuring, "O Lord, I come! for now I know Thy faith wins everlasting life." All disappear, and the angelic music dies away.

Dawn comes. Conn enters left, and is astonished to find the room empty and the door at the back open. He runs to the door and meets Bri.)

Cormac's Christmas: a Mystery

BRI

A miracle, O Conn! Patrick has seen a miracle!
(Conn does not answer, but looks understandingly at Bri. He puts his arm about her and she clings to him. Voices are heard in the distance singing a Christmas hymn, which grows louder and louder. Conn and Bri fall on their knees as Sachallus, apparently first of a procession, appears at the back bearing the Cross.)

[CURTAIN]

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
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MORE MODERN MELODIES

In Memoriam: Francis Ledwidge

(Killed in action, July 31st, 1917)

Soldier and singer of Erin,
What may I fashion for thee?
What garland of words or of flowers?
Singer of sunlight and showers,
The wind on the lea;

Of clouds, and the houses of Erin,
Wee cabins, white on the plain,
And bright with the colours of even,
Beauty of earth and of heaven
Outspread beyond Slane!

Slane, where the Easter of Patrick
Flamed on the night of the Gael,
Guard both the honour and story
Of him who has died for the glory
That crowns Inisfail.

In Memoriam: Francis Ledwidge

Soldier of right and of freedom,
I offer thee song and not tears.
With Brian, and Red Hugh O'Donnell,
The chiefs of Tyrone and Tyrconnell,
Live on through the years!

The Response of the Shee

In a vision, the night before the outbreak of war, the Poet walked by a fairy rath, and found there the King of the Fairies, or Tuatha De Danaan, as they are called in Irish story, with a number of followers. What he saw he has written; but the vision was fleeting.

I

THE KING

Assemble the host of mighty men,
Gather the strength of the Shee again,
From the Reeks of the south to the hills of the
north,
From Cleena's Wave to the Firth of Forth,
Wherever the mighty heart of the Gael
Has leapt for joy, or at sorrow's wail
Has sadden'd, and patiently borne the years
Of martyr'd men and mothers' tears.
Let the blue-eyed race with wondrous hair,
The godlike race, than men more fair,

The Response of the Shee

Hearken the cry of the Gaelic world,
Lest Freedom die, and Beauty, hurl'd
Beneath a madden'd leader's heel,
Be prey to men of lust and steel.

II

THE RESPONSE

Lo! from the hollows of the changeless hills
Far off, they come.

A wild, sweet strain of Fairy music sounds,
Then all is dumb.

As a grey mist before the sunrise floats
Down a deep glen,

There passes now the wondrous hidden host
Of Fairy men.

Then they are gone, and through the trees the
wind

Sweeps for a moment with a sudden sigh.

Silence comes straightway. Slowly, from behind
The mountain, comes the moon, half veil'd and
shy.

The Response of the Shee

For the scatter'd Gael the host has pass'd:
There's a strength new-found in hearts forlorn,
As across the waste of the world at last,
The first faint call of a fairy horn.

III

A VOICE FROM AFAR, BORNE ON THE WIND

Over the mountain the morning slips.

Away, away!

Hasten and mount, and gallop afar;

The dawn has come and the morning star.

On a Windy Morning

August 16, 1914

The east wind blows and summer's fled away;
Across the sky the cloud-drift goes,
White clouds and gray.

Afar, upon the plain of northern France,
Men meet in mortal enmity
With gun and lance.

O wild east wind, what do ye blow away?
The souls of men are hid within
The clouds to-day.

In Madison Square

Christmas, 1916

I heard a sound of music in the square
Above the bumping of a heavy truck
And hoot of motor-horns,—solemn harmony
Which soon became the carol "Silent Night."
The hubbub of the streets at twilight broke
The music; only now and then I caught
The blare of trumpets. Round a platform stood
A crowd of listeners; high above them gleamed
The mystic Star of Bethlehem. Here and there
Some passerby, to muse the Christmas message,
Paused underneath the gaily lighted tower.

I thought then of the angels' honoured song
Of "Peace on earth, good will to every man,"
Which many in my country fashion thus:
"We have not caught the madness of the nations
Who fight for envy of they know not what.

In Madison Square

We are at peace; come, let us now persuade
them!"

Such men hear not the voices of the soul,
But merely money dropping in the till,
Scent only odours of a well-spread board.

Before my eyes the square was blotted out;
Flash'd in its place the trench-lined fields of
France;

And next, December sunlight on the faces
Of soldiers who had seen a vision glorious,
Who had heard the unheard harmonies, the cry
Of tortured Belgium, and the call to save
All that men cannot touch yet hold most dear.
Then, as I looked, a cloud of smoke broke out
Along the Allied trenches, and I heard
The holier Christmas carol of the guns.

Summer's End

What can I give as the guerdon of friendship?
The words of a song,
That fly like a bird to the nest, where my friend is
When evenings are long,
And the wind which is crying the keen of the
winter
Blows boist'rous and strong.

Winter is dead; but the seed sown in summer
Must blossom in spring,
When the gorse in the land where I left her
grows yellow,
The bird's on the wing;
And the thought that the day when I see her
draws nearer,
New pleasure will bring.

Far away, I will turn where the ocean is breaking
In peace on the shore,

Summer's End

And find me a ship for the land where I linger
In thought evermore:
The County of Cork, the town, and the Castle
I lived in before.

One morning I'll ride from the gate, and will
travel
The road by the hill,
Past a village that lies in the heart of a hollow,
A half-hidden rill—
Till I come to a cottage scarce seen from the
roadside,
White, ancient, and still.

Here at last is an end to my journey, and where
I was longing to be,
While I dwelt in the toil and the noise of a city
Far over the sea.
This song, then, my gift, and a pledge of the
friendship
That binds you to me.

Reveille

Look well and see; for in thy folded hands
There rests my life and all I long to be—
The world lies round us like the desert sands.
 Look well and see.

For this one moment we have met, be free!
And loose thy spirit from convention's bands;
Help me to say what I would say to thee.

Soon must I go to other, distant lands;
May I not take this knowledge then with me,
That there is one who cares and understands?
 Look well and see!

Good-bye

Good-bye to tree and tower,
To meadow, stream, and hill,
Beneath the white clouds marshalled close
At the wind's will.

Good-bye to the gay garden,
With prim geraniums pied,
And spreading yew trees, old, unchanging
Tho' men have died.

Good-bye to the New Castle,
With granite walls and grey,
And rooms where faded greatness still
Lingers to-day.

To every friend in Mallow,
When I am gone afar,
These words of ancient Celtic hope,
"Peace after war."

Good-bye

I would return to Erin
When all these wars are by,
Live long among her hills before
My last good-bye.

In Remembrance of Cork

I'd live again those summer days
I took the train from Mallow town
To crowded Cork—the busy quays,
And Father Mathew looking down
Across the bridge where hurrying cars
Will clatter by, and sway and swerve,
While trams, with noise of jolts and jars,
Come clanging round the sudden curve
To Patrick Street.

I often shopped
Along that broad and pleasant row
Of buildings: here I stopped
To buy a book writ long ago
By some dead bard of Celtic song,
Or scholar from the "Scholars' Isle";
But even now the time is long
When last I walked that happy mile.

In Remembrance of Cork

Yet still there comes before my eyes
The sight of streets I have not seen
Since under brilliant Flemish skies
A thousand Irish swords have been
Unsheathed at sound of Freedom's name,
When, for a tale of Belgium's woe,
The hardy Irish soldiers came
To fight as centuries ago.

And still I hear the city bells
Peal sweetly on the evening air,
And see once more the Irish dells,
Where late lay autumn everywhere—
The autumn of another land
Widespread beyond the western sea—
Then, by the grace of Memory's wand,
I'm safe beside my lovely Lee!

Maid of the West

O grey-eyed maiden of the west,
What is it that you see
Upon the ocean's tranquil breast,
Where soon the sun will be;
Is it a dream of long ago
Stirs in your memory?

An ancient dream of Fairy mounds
And stately Fairy men,
And Fairy minstrelsy that sounds,
Half-heard, throughout the glen,
Where bright the mountain streamlet flows,
And leaping, flows again?

But now the light is fading fast,
White mist the valley fills,
While Night her kerchief grey has cast
Across the purple hills,
And God at evening stills the fret
Of our too childlike wills.

Lullaby for a Wakeful Child

Little Lady, why do you wake?
The moon will shine till Day doth break
Over the top of Galte Mor,
Driving the dreaded Night before
His rosy fingers, his golden glance.
Across the stream he'll gaily dance,
Along the valley and up the hill,
Peep above your window-sill
To see if you are still asleep
When cocks have crowed and young hounds leap.

From a Garden Bench

MORNING

The call of daws in the tower,
The sun through the leaves of the trees,
The bud that bursts into flower—
The morning is bringing me these.

EVENING

The hurry of birds in cloudland,
The breath of wind in the trees,
The call of gulls in ploughed land—
The evening is bringing me these.

To One in Kerry

Hid by the hills, encircled by the sea,
Wait for the happy moment when God wills
That I may come again and set you free,
Hid by the hills.

Here it is evening, and the twilight fills
The little room where, though but distantly,
I hear the murmur of the Kerry rills.

Thus Love hath bridged the sea's immensity,
And with a vision all the clamour stills
Of my sad heart, which for a while must be
Hid by the hills.

At Parknasilla

At Parknasilla blue the river lies
Beneath the bluest of all Irish skies;
Green rise the mountains from the river-breast,
Where wheeling sea-gulls for a moment rest,
And then dart upward with loud, mournful cries.

Over the islands the long twilight dies;
A heron, like a great grey figure, flies
Along the inlet to the star-bright west
At Parknasilla.

O place of beauty, which at least defies
Time's sovranity! When will our happy eyes
Again behold those islands, shamrock-dressed
And garlanded with seaweed; last and best
The moon, like a huge Fairy lantern, rise
At Parknasilla?

The Listeners

(With a copy of Walter de la Mare's Book)

We too have been the listeners; we have heard
The everlasting voices of the sea
Murmur round Erin's shore caressingly,
The gentle wood-note of a hovering bird,
The angry storm-wind in his strength, who
 stirred

The leaves and branches of the trembling tree
With patter of sharp rain unceasingly
Across the landscape by grey dimness blurred.

This echo still sounds faintly in our ears,
As Fairy music which is heard no more;
Pale grows a vision bright in former years—
Brown rocks and seaweed of the Irish shore—
We've naught but memories, and the listener
 hears

No sound from Nature in the city's roar.

The Stowaway

Love came over the mountains laughing in wild
delight

To see the shining level sands, a plain of white.

Love heard the wavelets murmur and felt the
breeze blow free

From the boundless western ocean to hills of
memory—

The ancient hills of Erin, where many men have
died,

Cuchulain's hardy heroes, the brave Fiana's pride.

Love not long would linger by wave-kissed sun-
beat shore,

But stepped with youthful courage on ocean's
sparkling floor.

The Stowaway

The little waves upbore him and broke in curl-
ing foam
At touch of gentle footsteps, and laughed that
Love should roam.

Love sped ever onward, where a ship steamed
from the bay
Bearing Patrick Carroll from the sight of Molly
Shea.

Love sailed with his shipmate to a distant for-
eign land;
And the Irish hills to Patrick seemed always
near at hand.

For the wand of Love is mighty and dispels di-
viding sea;
And the touch of Love's like her touch on hills
of memory.

To One Also Long Absent from
Ireland

Come with me for a moment to the land
We both have loved, and, loving, hence have
sung,

Where, nestled on her bosom, we grow young
Despite her age. Her children understand
The mystery: her mountains and her strand,
The ruins where the hardy weed has sprung,
And, best of all, the mists about her flung
Like a great mantle from God's sheltering hand.

Come with me! for the unwearying teacher,
Time,
Soon turns another page; beauties we have seen
Are dimmer, as the landscape when the rime
Thickens the pane; we forget where we have
been

Because of changing seasons; what late was prime
Is now December—our sight is faint, I ween.

Memories—December, 1916

Green are the meadows, hills, and fields
Of lovely Erin; greener still
The memories of summer days
We passed beneath gnarled ancient trees,
Thick-leaved, through which the sunlight falls
On long and tangled grass where deer
Graze through the days,
And give no heed
To changing fates of men and nations.

The river's eddying pools sweep on,
As if their dark depths held a secret—
A mystery of nature known
To none who wears mortality,
The voiceless message of the dead
Who died for Erin, at home, abroad,
Now one with her forever. The wind
Will whisper of them, and the sun
Reveal a portion of their glory.

Memories—December, 1916

Deep in the vat of war, the world
Is plunged. O may there be new wine
Of life pressed from the ravaged vineyard!

Thus may an ancient land re-born
Gain strength to find a truer faith
In more unselfishness, and those
Who thought not for their country join
With men who loved her, but forgot
Their love because of bitterness
Toward men who knew her not—the jewel
Of the western world. Then we shall find
New-made Erin, glorious and kind.

In the Moonlight

The Fairies dance the livelong night
Across the moonlit hill;
The moonbeams dance along the lake;
The western wind is still.
The waters make a little sound
More sweet than music far—
Oh, let me fly across the world
To where the Fairies are!

If I Had Wings

If I had wings, then would I fly away,
Like a strong-pinioned sea-bird, where distance
brings
The sea and sky together, making me say,
"If I had wings!"

From that island where enraptured Beauty flings
Her coloured cloak of everlasting May
On mountains, meads, and hawthorn-hidden
springs,

I'd gather, as the birds do every day,
A gift of these immortal lovely things,
And, flying homeward to your heart, I'd stay,
If I had wings.

Homeward Bound

To Queenstown harbour come great ocean ships
Decked out with flags which the strong sea-wind
whips

To prim rigidity, while sea-gulls scream
About the vessel's wake, and puffs of steam
Break from the whistle, as the tender draws
away

A throng of passengers: some back to stay
The summer months at home in Kerry, Clare,
Or Cork; others with lordly tourist air
Seek what they've read about—where tourists go:
Killarney; Blarney; Avoca's Vale, Wicklow;
Dublin; Belfast. But they will never see
The vision of great Erin's mystery—
Which even now is hidden in that cloud
Creeping round yonder mountain like a shroud,—
Hear Ireland's wail within the sea-bird's cry.
It is a lovely summer night, and I

Homeward Bound

Stand looking from the carriage window; the
train

Starts slowly; lights twinkle through the air
which rain

Has made the softer, and the hills are changed
To purple, then to black; they seem arranged

By some great child who moulds a map in play.

Darkly the waters glisten; we glide away;

The picture passes, and I settle down.

Two hours more,—and then loved Mallow
town!

A MASQUE OF FLOWERS

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and adaptation*

TO
C. B. E.
in gratitude

A Masque of Flowers

THE following Masque had its inception in the desire of a friend to teach a group of children folk and popular music of a high order; the text, therefore, has been built about the songs, the words and music of which may be found in two books obtainable from the Boston Music Company, 26 West Street, Boston, Massachusetts, both containing songs intended for use in schools. These books are: "Fifty Rote Songs," Collected and Edited by Dr. Archibald T. Davison and Thomas Whitney Surette, for the Boston School Music Series, published by the Boston Music Company; and "Songs of the British Islands," Selected and Edited for the Use of Schools by W. H. Hadow, published by J. Curwen and Sons, Limited, London. The book of rote songs is intended for use in Grades I, II, and III of the Boston Public Schools, the Roman

A Masque of Flowers

number after each title indicating for what grade the song is intended. The songs in the British volume are divided into groups: Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced; for which I have used the abbreviations El., In., and Ad. The songs mentioned in the text are suggested as having been found successful in an actual production, but different or additional songs may be used.

The Masque was first given on the lawn of a country house, the stage being provided with a natural background of pine trees. There was, of course, no curtain. A space at the side of one of the trees gave the actors the advantage of one more entrance than might be feasible in the average outdoor production, but in the following text I have limited my stage directions to entrances at right, left, and back.

Grown people played the parts of the mortals, and the dream figures of the Sun, Moon, Evening Primrose, Pine Tree, Water-Lily, and Fairy. To have adults among the Flowers was thought better, that they might add to the volume of sound during the singing, and guide the

A Masque of Flowers

children in the dances. These dances, like the songs, may be elaborated to suit any particular group of people giving the Masque, and may be accompanied by a violin or piano off stage.

The costumes were of the simplest, made of cheese cloth, muslin, and paper. The Flowers wore either smocks or ordinary dresses, with paper headdresses to indicate the particular flower each represented. The stage properties were a box covered with pine boughs to represent the grassy mound, and a cot covered with green denim, the feet concealed by cut branches, to form the Queen's bower. A flower-bed at hand made the background for the bower and added a touch of colour.

A MASQUE OF FLOWERS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

MORTALS

THE QUEEN

ELEANOR, her handmaiden

THE POET

A Masque of Flowers

DREAM FIGURES

A FAIRY

THE MORNING-GLORY

THE EVENING PRIMROSE

THE WATER-LILY

THE ROSE

THE MOON

THE SUN

OTHER FLOWERS, FAIRIES, *etc.*

SCENE: *The Queen's garden. The Queen's bower, left; a grassy mound in the centre of the stage, back. The Poet enters as Prologue.*

POET

Good friends, it is now no more the fashion to have a prologue, than it was in Shakespeare's time to have the Lady the epilogue. But I bid you put aside the customs of the present and hark back with me when gentry tripped a masque on lawns of Merry England to words of a popular poet, and music by Purcell or Henry Lawes.

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Accept me, then, before the other actors, to tell the story of the masque.

This recounts a dream within a dream. A Queen of romance walks in her garden with Eleanor, her handmaid. Eleanor is trying to persuade her mistress to forget a certain Poet, now abroad on an important mission. The Queen has promised to wed the Poet upon his successful return; but he is five days overdue. Eleanor seizes the opportunity to suggest that the Queen look with favour upon Sir Lionel. The Queen, firm in her faith, dismisses Eleanor, and settles herself with a book in her bower. Soon she falls asleep. A Fairy, sent from whoever may be guardian of true lovers, comes to her bearing a dream—the story of the Morning Glory and the Sun.

The Flowers, asleep in the Queen's garden, wake to find among them a new sister, the Morning Glory. She tells them of a being, shining, golden, who has appeared to her in her sleep. So beautiful has been the vision, that she must seek the world over until she finds the

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dream figure. The Evening Primrose suggests the Morning Glory may have seen the Moon, who is to be found in the ring where Fairies are dancing. With staff and cloak, therefore, the Morning Glory sets out on her search. The Moon proves not to be the person the Morning Glory is looking for, so that she goes next to the Pine Tree, then to the Water Lily, then to the Rose, and finally returns to the garden at evening, unsuccessful in her quest. The Flowers try unavailingly to comfort her. All then join hands and sing their evening hymn before going to sleep. The Moon glides through the garden, raising her hand in benediction over the sleeping Flowers. Soon a bright figure appears in the distance, drawing nearer and nearer, while the Moon slips off behind the trees at the entrance of the Sun. He selects the Morning Glory as his flower, and the twain go off together, the other Flowers singing their praise.

The Queen rouses herself, sure of the changelessness of love. She is none too soon, for the voice of the Poet is heard in the distance, and

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he enters to kneel at her feet. She raises him, while the figures of the dream steal in at the back to share her happiness.

(At the conclusion of this Prologue, the Poet goes out back. The Queen and Eleanor enter right.)

ELEANOR

O put away all thought of him; for he
Is overdue these five days past. Poets
Forget as easily as doth the earth,
Which, harrowed one year, in the next is green
And smooth, as though no ploughman ever
whistled
In the world.

QUEEN

Yet did he promise he would come,
Successful from his mission, and assure
Our wedding, when the sound of voice and viol
Will float from here throughout my happy
kingdom.

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ELEANOR

Madam, forget him. Is not Sir Lionel
More goodly? He hath won each tournament
These twelve months past; he is a man of action.
How many an emprise hath he wrought with
skill,
Going from deed to deed and pausing not!
Each deed is like a catapult drawn back
To hurl the next with greater force more far.
Your poet turns from idle task to task
More idle. He scattereth, as in a wind
The sower, when the seed is blown afield—
A song grows here and there which no man
listeth.

QUEEN

Thou seest as the world, which plucks a rose
Saying, "How fair!" when there may be within
it
A greedy canker gnawing at its life.
With no more sure a gaze the world will look
Upon a man apart from men, and say:
"He fears the arduous task his fellows cope with,

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The struggle and delight of battle"; when he
May bear a weight heavier than armour, fight
Battles bitterer than the wars of men,
Unconquered in the face of conq'ring weakness.

ELEANOR

Madam, I sought only to give thee counsel
That thou mightst win thyself the more renown.

QUEEN

(Going to bower) I'll trust my poet. This day
will he return,
Perchance; there are many hours yet till even.
Give me my book; this is a fairy place
Where I would read awhile—and thou mayst go.

ELEANOR

Once more thou wilt be lost in pretty dreams
Amid bright trees which bear no fruit of action.

(Eleanor, after giving the book to the Queen, goes out back. The Queen reads, smiling at intervals. After a time the heat overcomes her and she falls asleep. A Fairy enters at back, walking about the

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*Queen and waving her wand over her.
As the Fairy speaks the following verses,
the Flowers enter softly at right and cast
themselves upon the ground as though in
slumber.)*

FAIRY

Mortal Lady, lost in love,
I am here thy faith to prove.
Soon a vision thou shalt see,
Sent from God's Divinity
That thy faith may still be sure.
Love for thee shall be the door:
Passing through it thou shalt find
All things lost to finite mind—
How the flowers love as thou,
And for each love is enow;
Yet to each a love apart
Hidden in that flower's heart.
Play thy part now in the play;
Wake to joy at close of day!

EPISODE I: *The Garden.*

(The Fairy waves her wand over the

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Flowers, and they begin to waken. She then sings, "Where the bee sucks." [British Islands, No. 69—Ad. Page 64.] She repeats the chorus, the Flowers joining in. As she finishes the song, she glides out back, leaving the stage to the Flowers and the sleeping Queen.)

EVENING PRIMROSE

O Flowers, see, we have a new sister—the Morning-Glory!

(The Flowers clap their hands in glee.)

Go, each one of you and greet her. First, the Forget-me-not.

(The Evening Primrose names the several Flowers in order, each going up as named and kissing the Morning-Glory, the Evening Primrose going herself last. The Flowers then join hands and dance round the Morning-Glory. At the close of the dance the Morning-Glory speaks as follows.)

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MORNING-GLORY

Brothers and sisters, I have had a dream.
Some one bright and dazzling and all dressed in
gold came and took me in his arms and woke me
with a kiss. Do you know who this could have
been?

*(All the Flowers seem puzzled, and all
but the Evening Primrose shake their
heads.)*

So fair was the vision that I must seek the world
until I find the bright stranger.

EVENING PRIMROSE

You may have seen the Moon; she is in the ring
where the Fairies are dancing.

MORNING-GLORY

Thanks, sister. I shall start at once upon my
journey.

EVENING PRIMROSE

Poppy, bring her a staff and bag.

(The Poppy goes out back and returns

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immediately with a staff, on the end of which is hung a bag.)

Pansy, find her a cloak.

(The Pansy goes out and returns with a cloak, which she puts round the shoulders of the Morning-Glory, kissed her good-bye. The Morning-Glory then kisses all the other Flowers and goes off left, the Flowers crowding to that side of the stage after her, and waving farewell. All the Flowers go off left.)

EPISODE II: *The Fairy Ring.*

(The Morning-Glory enters left, laying her staff down under a tree. She then takes her place at the front of the stage on the left, where she can watch the Fairy revels without interfering with them. The Fairies enter from back singing, "From Oberon in Fairyland." [British Islands, No. 3—El. Page 3.] Behind the Fairies comes the Moon as Queen.

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She stands on the grassy mound at the back, presiding over their revels, while they dance and sing. The French folk-song, "Au clair de la lune," may now be sung and interpreted in action as an interesting interlude. At the conclusion of this, the Fairies romp with one another until the Moon speaks.)

MOON

Stay, let the dance go on!

(The Fairies then sing and dance "The Bridge of Avignon." [Rote Songs, No. 6 —I. Page 4.] As they finish the song the Fairies all go out left, leaving the stage to the Moon and the Morning-Glory. The Morning-Glory then runs up to the Moon, gazes intently at her, and runs back to her place, shaking her head disconsolately. She stands discouraged and in thought as the Moon goes out left, then picks up her staff and goes out after her.)

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EPISODE III: *On the Journey.*

(The Flowers enter left and group themselves by the Queen's bower. The Morning-Glory then enters left and sits down near the grassy mound. The Flowers sing "The Nightingale." [Rote Songs, No. 30—II. Page 22.] While they sing, the Morning-Glory looks about her as if searching for an unseen bird. At the close of the song, she rises and goes out right. The Flowers remain on the stage.)

EPISODE IV: *The Pine Tree.*

(The Pine Tree enters back, bearing before him a large pine bough. He stands at right of stage while the Flowers sing the first verse of "The Pine Tree." [Rote Songs, No. 33—II. Page 23.] During the singing the Morning-Glory enters left, crosses the stage to right front, and takes her position half facing the Pine Tree. She curtsseys to him as she passes. When

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the first verse has been sung, the Morning-Glory speaks.)

MORNING-GLORY

O Pine Tree, I have had a dream. Some one bright and dazzling and all dressed in gold came and took me in his arms and woke me with a kiss. Do you know who this could have been?

(The Flowers sing the second verse of "The Pine Tree" before the Pine Tree answers.)

PINE TREE

It may have been the Mountain. There he stands, strong and glorious.

MORNING-GLORY

(Shaking her head) No.

PINE TREE

The water gleaming in the light may be what you are seeking. Go and ask the Water-Lily.

(The Morning-Glory curtsies to the Pine Tree and goes off as she entered.)

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He goes out back, as the music off stage begins "The Meeting of the Waters." The Flowers stay on the stage.)

EPISODE V: *The Water-Lily.*

(The Water-Lily enters back and sits near the centre of the stage. The Morning-Glory enters and goes through the same stage business as in the previous episode, asking the Water-Lily the question she asked the Pine Tree. In answer, either the Water-Lily or the chorus of Flowers sings, "The Meeting of the Waters." [Rote Songs, No. 44—III. Page 33. British Islands, No. 23—El. Page 23.])

MORNING-GLORY

(Shaking her head) No.

WATER-LILY

Perhaps the sunlight striking the windows of the house is what you are looking for. Go, and ask the Rose!

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(The Water-Lily and Rose go out together, the Flowers still remaining on the stage.)

EPISODE VI: *The Rose.*

(Carrying a wild rose in her hand, the Rose enters and seats herself in the centre of the stage. The Flowers sing "The Wild Rose." [Rote Songs, No. 40—III. Page 30.] As an interlude the song may be interpreted in action as follows, while the Flowers are singing. A boy dressed as a peasant enters right, twirling a staff. Catching sight of the Rose, he drops his staff and walks about her in admiration. He approaches and kneels beside her, leaning forward as if to pluck the flower from her hand. She raises a warning finger and he draws back, only a moment later to pluck the flower. The thorns prick him; he drops the flower and goes off in tears, right. At the conclusion of the interlude, the Morning-Glory enters

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as in the previous episode to ask her question of the Rose.)

ROSE

O Morning-Glory, it is evening now. Go back to your garden and the person you seek will, mayhap, come to you.

(The Morning-Glory and the Rose leave the stage hand in hand, and are followed a moment later by all the Flowers.)

EPISODE VII: *The Home-coming.*

(The Flowers come again to the Queen's garden, entering at right and crossing the stage to look out left, as if waiting for some one. From the left enters the Morning-Glory, discouraged.)

THE FLOWERS

Have you found the person you sought?

(The Morning-Glory shakes her head. The Flowers come up and kiss and try to

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comfort her. The Evening Primrose speaks.)

EVENING PRIMROSE

Let us sing our evening hymn.

(All join hands and sing, "The Little Dustman." [Rote Songs, No. 14—I. Page 9.] As the Flowers sing the last words, they sink to the ground asleep. The Moon glides into the garden, raising her hands in benediction.)

EPISODE VIII: *The Dream Realized.*

(In the distance at right, the Sun approaches slowly and majestically. As he enters, the Moon glides off left. The Flowers stir uneasily and waken. The Sun goes to where the Morning-Glory lies a little apart from the other Flowers, kneels beside her, and kisses her. She awakens, and he leads her down stage centre, as the Flowers sing, "Believe me if all those endearing young charms." [British

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Islands, No. 42—In. Page 46.] *The Sun and the Morning-Glory go off left, the Flowers crowding to the side of the stage and waving after them. A moment after they, too, go off left.*)

(The Queen now wakens)

QUEEN

Ah me, I've had a lovely dream! The Sun
Is stealing off behind the western mountains:
But now, O Sun, at last I know thy secret!

(A man's voice is heard off stage at the back, and the Poet enters saying or singing the following. As he repeats the third stanza, he kneels at the feet of the Queen, who has risen and advanced to the centre of the stage to meet him. For the fourth stanza she raises him, and they stand hand in hand while the figures of the dream enter at the back and pass across the stage, singing softly, "Believe me if all those endearing young charms.")

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POET

Dost thou love me, Lovely Lady,
Fairer than the sea
Beneath the wave-kiss'd rocky headland,
Below the green and windy lea?
Dost thou love me, Lovely Lady,
Tenderer than the dew
On the heavy-hanging flowers—
Yellow primrose and larkspur blue?
Dost thou love me, Lovely Lady?
Wilt thou trust to me,
As the waters trust the shingle,
Or swaying branches trust the tree?
Dost thou love me, Lovely Lady?
Wilt be ever true,
As the birds are to the Summer,
Following her the whole year through?

QUEEN

No need for words; the music in our hearts
Must fill the world, and all men stop to hear it.
*(The actors trip off, and the Masque is
at an end.)*

SONGS OF LOVE AND LIFE

At Eastertide

Love is not old, but lives above;
Triumphing over Death lives Love:
Once Flesh, and seen of mortal eyes
Pointing the way to Paradise,
By Death Eternal Life to prove.

Now pipes the plover, coos the dove,
The snipe is lost in azure skies,
Up from the sea the salmon move:
Love is not old.

Throughout the world Love lives again:
The happy bird, the humming bee;
The ancient changeless mystery,—
Love's gift of Life, Love's yoke of Pain.
O joyous Earth, sing loud the strain
Love is not old!

Hortus Inclusus

Hail sheltered garden!
A treasure fair you hold,
More rare than gold,

A flower folded up,
Even as the cup

Of morning-glories,
Ere the new-risen sun
Opens every one.

A tender minister,
Love will come to her;

She will unfold;
And flowers everywhere
Will be less fair.

Light of My Heart

Light of my heart, all life is calling
To us to rise and play our part:
Why should we tremble in fear of falling,
 Light of my heart?

Sorrow, fled like the wind at even,
Fled afar till another day,
Will come again as the wind from Heaven.

Unafraid, stand we united,
Facing to-morrow, not future years;
Then safe are we, if then benighted.

Light of my heart, when Love is calling,
Why seek to learn what he'll not impart?
Love's hand shall keep our feet from falling,
 Light of my heart.

Oblation

Round the cape of a sudden came the sea,
And the sun look'd over the mountain's rim:
And straight was the path of gold for him,
And the need of a world of men for me.

Robert Browning.

Did you but love me, I could win the world,
And bring new courage to the hearts of men,
And, with the magic of a poet's pen,
Retell the beauty of green hills dew-pearl'd.
Swift through the sunlight, with my wings un-
furl'd,
I'd rise above this mean, low-lying fen
Call'd Earth, and come into the angels' ken,
Who once proud Satan to destruction hurl'd.

All this I'd do, though forc'd to stand aside
From the great race that other men must run,
And walk alone along the harder path.

Oblation

But if, at last, I held you as my bride,
I'd be more joyous than the lusty sun
Who part of God's own wondrous radiance hath.

On the Beach

Keep tryst, as the sun does with the open sea,
The mountain-top with the grey morning mist,
The dew with the flowers on the outspread lea:
Keep tryst.

The moon has met the waters; they have kiss'd,
And will love on for all eternity;
When we are one with dust Love shall persist.

Take thou the love that God has given to thee,
And find therein the spirit we once miss'd,
The shadow of God's love—with Him and me
Keep tryst!

The Wind Is in the Tree-tops

The wind is in the tree-tops,
The sheep are on the lea;
O come and walk the merry world
With me!

The yellow sun is flaming
Above the green-clad hill,
Dancing on the gleaming river
Swift and still.

For freshness of the morning
The birds are in delight;
Long are the daylight hours, and short
The night.

O give me of your lips'
Sweet wine. Turn not away.
So shall we dream in wintertime
Of May.

Service

Songs which I made for you, but may not sing,
Because Life bids me put my harp away,
Weaving my dreams with tasks of every day
Until we come to a sequester'd place,
Where you and I may live alone with Love,
Watch Life and his gay pageant passing by
Like a bright river flowing steadily
Beneath a mountain's solitary height!

I give you all these songs I have not sung,
And ask you 'mid Life's busy turmoil, "Bend
To my singing, dearest, till the journey's end,
When Life and Love shall find the selfsame
grace."

All Saints' Day

For all Thy saints who dwell this day with Thee,
When Nature with a brilliant pencil paints
The world with symbols of Eternity
For all Thy saints,

I make this prayer ; for every one who faints
Beneath the burden of what life should be
And is not, feels the clay's restraints :

O Lord, grant that we walking faithfully
'Mid worldly struggles, free of worldly taints,
May win the joy that waits eternally
For all Thy saints.

To the Mother of My Children

Did you not hear them on this Christmas morn,
Our happy children, laughing on the stair
To see their toys: the soldiers and the horn,
The doll with moving eyes and curly hair?

Since you have heard their voices ringing clear—
Our happy children who now only seem—
Could you turn from me in a future year
To one who might embody what you dream?

Could you thus leave our children fatherless?
I too have borne the sorrow, stress, and strain;
Should I not share the joy which comes to bless
A father, not alone a mother's pain?

God knows our children; and to us hath sent
This lovely vision in His mercy mild:
We now are parents; with our lives is blent
New joy from Him who was Himself a child.

Evensong

O shepherds' Piping, herald of the Night
Who comes with Silence up the coloured vale,
Treading how gently, clad in greyish white,
Poignantly, Piping, sound your reedy wail!
For Day departed moves in funeral train
Tended by Twilight, and, in deepest rose,
The splendid Sunset melts beneath the main
While sweet the Sea-wind with cool softness
blows.

As when a mother gathers to her breast
The child who frets for Day's remembered smart,
Now Light fades quickly in the ashen west,
And Night-peace falls across my troubled heart.
Flutes, for the night through let my mind be still,
And God keep safe with Him my stubborn will!

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