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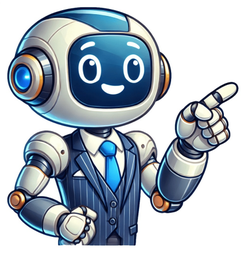

Ask the publishers to restore access to 500,000+ books. Gaelic poems are a captivating and poignant expression of the rich cultural heritage found in both Ireland and Scotland. Dating back several centuries, these poems have carried the stories, traditions, and emotions of the Gaelic people through generations. With their melodic rhythms, evocative imagery, and deep-rooted themes of love, nature, and mythology, Gaelic poems continue to enrapture both native speakers and poetry enthusiasts around the world. In this article, we will delve into the captivating world of Gaelic poetry, exploring its origins, features, and showcasing several examples that will transport you to the enchanting realms of Celtic imagination.Índice Gaelic poetry has a long and storied history, rooted in the ancient language and culture of the Gaelic people. The Gaelic language, sometimes referred to as Irish in Ireland (Gaeilge) and as Scots Gaelic (Gàidhlig) in Scotland, has been a vehicle for oral tradition, storytelling, and poetic expression throughout the centuries.Early Gaelic poetry dates back to the Middle Ages, where it was preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to the next. Bards, known as filí in Irish and bàrd in Scottish Gaelic, played a central role in Gaelic society, composing and reciting poetry that celebrated heroic deeds, expressed love and longing, and served as a medium for political and social commentary.The Features of Gaelic PoemsOne remarkable characteristic of Gaelic poems is their adherence to complex metrical structures, often featuring intricate rhymes and alliteration. These structures, known as forms, vary from one poetic style to another, highlighting the technical virtuosity of the poets.Beyond the technical aspects, Gaelic poetry is known for its profound connection to nature. The landscapes of Ireland and Scotland are imbued with symbolism and mythological references, infusing the verses with awe-inspiring imagery. The sea, mountains, rivers, and forests serve as metaphors for human experiences, emotions, and spirituality.Love and longing are recurring themes in Gaelic poetry. Whether celebrating the beauty of a beloved person or lamenting lost love, these poems touch upon the depths of human emotions, evoking both joy and melancholy in equal measure.Examples of Gaelic PoemsExample 1: 'An t-Eilean' by Sorley MacLeanBeyond the sea, beyond the village,In whispering voices of brooks and trees,There lies the shadowy island,An t-ionad draoidheil[1].Rich in myth and legend,Its people sing the enchantment of tale,A tapestry woven with ancient threads,A place beyond the gauzy veil.Example 2: 'Tartan and Saltire' by Iain Crichton SmithFrom the Hebrides to the Highlands,Tartan dances with the wind,Saltire waves upon the hills,Scotland's ancient spirit, thinned.Clans gather and memories stir,Connecting past and present anew,Gaelic whispers in the misty glens,History's embers, forever true.Example 3: 'Caoineadh Airt Uí Laoghaire' (The Lament for Art O'Leary)O curse on you, cruel Saxon! Why didn't you let me dieOn the field of glory, with the old pride of my race?Your harsh law crushed us, but oh, not till you saw me broken,Not till you broke the burning spirit shining in my face!These poems, just a glimpse of the profound beauty found in Gaelic verses, capture the essence of the language, culture, and intricate emotions interwoven within Gaelic poetry.Preserving the Gaelic Poetic TraditionPreserving the legacy of Gaelic poetry has become increasingly important in the face of modernization and globalization. Organizations and festivals dedicated to the promotion of the Gaelic language and arts continue to celebrate and cultivate the poetic tradition.In Ireland, An Cumann le Béaloideas Éireann (The Folklore of Ireland Society) and Oireachtas na Gaeilge (The Gaelic League) play key roles in nurturing and promoting Gaelic poetry. In Scotland, the Scottish Poetry Library and the Celtic arts organization, An Comunn Gàidhealach, actively engage in preserving and showcasing Gaelic poetry's enduring significance.As these organizations work diligently to ensure the continuation of the Gaelic poetic tradition, it is our responsibility to appreciate, celebrate, and learn from the profound beauty found within these verses.Gaelic poems are a testament to the resilience, creativity, and vivid cultural heritage of the Gaelic people. Through their timeless verses, these poems have carried the stories and emotions of generations, immersing us in the landscapes, myths, and longing that define Gaelic culture.Although Gaelic poetry faces challenges in an increasingly interconnected world, its enchanting allure continues to captivate and inspire audiences around the globe. So, immerse yourself in the rich tapestry of Gaelic poems, and let the mellifluous melodies and evocative imagery transport you to the heart of Celtic imagination. Title: Index of Poems and Translations Author: Maureen Filk Full Text & Source: The Internet, Online, 31/10/2014 Sample Text: Praise poems: Mo-chean do theacht, a sgadáin/My love for coming, herring! — Praise poem for a herring, during Lent Love poems: Mairg darab galar an grá/Love is a sad sickness — A woman's love poem I mbrat an bhrollaigh ghil-se/In [her] cloak, the bright breast — Love and a cloak brooch Stories: A Mhuireadhach, meil do sgín/Muireadhach, it's a waste of knife — A king and a poet become monks Dubhach sin, a dhúin na ríogh/That gloominess, oh fort of the kings Folamh anocht Dú Chearmna/The Fort of Cearmna is empty tonight — Two lament/warnings from a widowed queen Tabhás do Lugh, leannán Teamhra/It was revealed to Lugh, Temuir's lover — Retelling Irish mythology Humor: Mo-chean do theacht, a sgadáin/My love for coming, herring! — Funny praise poem for a herring in Lent Miscellaneous: Ionmhuin sgríbhionn sgaoiltear sunn/Dear little piece of loose-tongued writing here — Letter to a boy in exile who will be clan head O áite doimhne bhéic mé/From the deep place, I shout — Resinging Psalm 130 Moladh daoine is dó is moladh/Praise of people, and you, is praising the Spirit — Poetry is the foundation of Irish society From University Library of Cambridge MS 3082: (translation by James Carney, introduction to _Poems of the O'Reillys_) And let everyone who shall read these poems that I have written here and on the paper, give a blessing upon the souls of the people for whom they were made. And let him not forget to pray for the writer. That is enough. Medieval Irish Poetry Links Medieval Irish and Scottish Literature Actual Literature Online The Cattle-Raid of Cooley (Táin Bó Cúalnge), including an Old Irish pronunciation guide and pictures of the manuscript; and The Story of Mac Dathó's Pig, both prepared by Steven Taylor. What a webmaster! Chronicle of the Picts and Scots Lebor Gabala Erren (The Book of Leinster) and the Milesian Legends The Annals of Ulster Banseanchus by Giolla Mochuda Mor Ó Caiside CELT: Irish Language Texts The Annals of the Four Masters — Currently CELT has the following volumes online: 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6. The Annals of Tigernach The Annals of Connacht The Egerton Annals: Mionnannala Cathréim Cellacháin Caisil (The Battles of Cellachan of Cashel) Aimirgin Glúngel tuir tend by Gilla in Chomded Ua Cormaic Tuan mac Cairill ro clos "The circuit of Ireland by Muirchertach mac Néill", Author unknown, c. 1156-1166. Tréide cétna labratar iarna genemain LL and YBL. In tan no théigmis don dáil The Colloquy Between Fintan and the Hawk of Achill Manuscripts and Images Online Images from the Book of Kells Information and Adaptations The Ulster Cycle Patrick Brown's nice compilation. The Cattle Raid of Cooley Online Comic by Patrick Brown. What a cool concept! I always thought The Hound of Culann's transformation sequence was anime-worthy, myself. Patrick Bladey's collection of tales. Papers The Morrigan and her Germano-Celtic counterparts, a dissertation. Literary History The Cassidy Poets, including part of the Banseanchus by Giolla Mochuda Mor Ó Caiside Links Page The Digital Medievalist: Medieval Irish Language and Literature Excellent links and information site for medieval studies. 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Bookmark the permalink. The Project Gutenberg EBook of Ancient Irish Poetry, by Various This eBook is for the use of anyone anywhere at no cost and with almost no restrictions whatsoever. You may copy it, give it away or re-use it under the terms of the Project Gutenberg License included with this eBook or online at www.gutenberg.org Title: Ancient Irish Poetry Author: Various Translator: Kuno Meyer Release Date: April 17, 2010 [EBook #32030] Language: English Character set encoding: ISO-8859-1 *** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ANCIENT IRISH POETRY *** Produced by Bethanne M. Simms, Christine D. and the Online Distributed Proofreading Team at [Pg i] [Pg ii] [Pg iii] LONDON CONSTABLE & COMPANY Ltd 10 ORANGE STREET LEICESTER SQUARE W.C. 1911 [Pg iv] [Pg v] TO EDMUND KNOWLES MUSPRATT THE ENLIGHTENED AND GENEROUS PATRON OF CELTIC STUDIES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL A SMALL TOKEN OF AFFECTIONATE REGARD AND GRATITUDE [Pg vi] [Pg vii] INTRODUCTION In offering this collection of translations from early Irish poetry to a wider public I feel that I am expected to give a brief account of the literature from which they are taken—a literature so little known that its very existence has been doubted or denied by some, while others, who had the misfortune to make its acquaintance in ill-chosen or inadequate renderings, have refused to recognise any merit in it. The bias and ignorance of English historians and of many professed students of Irish history, who continue to write without a first-hand knowledge of its sources, have also reacted unfavourably upon the study of Irish literature. Slowly, however, the fact is becoming recognised in ever wider circles that the vernacular literature of ancient Ireland is the most primitive and original among the literatures of Western Europe, and that in its origins and development it affords a most fascinating study. Whatever may be its intrinsic merit, its importance as the earliest voice from the dawn of West European civilisation cannot be denied. Time and again in the course of their history the nations of Western and Northern Europe have had to struggle hard for the preservation of their national life against a powerful denationalising influence proceeding from Rome. Those among them who underwent the Roman conquest lost early, together with their liberty, their most precious national possession, their native language and with it their vernacular literature. Less than a [Pg viii]century after the slaughter of Vercingetorix Romanised Gauls were carrying off the palm of Roman eloquence. By the fifth century the Gaulish language was everywhere extinct, without having left behind a single record of its literature. The same fate was shared by all Celtic nationalities of the Continent, and by those numerous Germanic tribes that were conquered by Rome, or came within the sphere of the later Roman civilisation. In Britain, where the Roman occupation was only temporary, its denationalising effect may be gauged by the numerous Latin loan-words preserved to the present day in the Welsh language, by the partial Romanisation of British personal proper names, by the early inscribed stones, which, unlike those of Ireland, are all in Latin, and by the late and slow beginnings of a literature in the vernacular. It was only on the outskirts of the Continental world, and beyond the sway and influence of the Roman Empire, that some vigorous nations preserved their national institutions intact, and among them there are only three whom letters reached early enough to leave behind some record of their pagan civilisation in a vernacular literature. These were the Irish, the Anglo-Saxons, and, comparative latecomers, the Icelanders. Again, when Christianity came with the authority of Rome and in the Latin language, now imbued with an additional sanctity, there ensued in all nations a struggle between the vernacular and the foreign tongue for obtaining the rank of a literary language—a struggle from which the languages of the Continental nations, as well as of Britain, emerged only [Pg ix]slowly and late. It is not till the end of the eleventh century that we find the beginnings of a national literature in France and Germany. In Ireland, on the other hand, which had received her Christianity not direct from Rome but from Britain and Gaul, and where the Church, far removed from the centre of Roman influence and cut off from the rest of Christendom, was developing on national lines, vernacular literature received a fresh impulse from the new faith. A flourishing primitive Christian literature arose. The national language was employed not only for the purposes of instruction and devotion, in tombstone or other inscriptions, but also in religious prose and poetry, and, still more remarkable, in learned writings. There can, I think, be little doubt that we should hardly have any early records of Anglo-Saxon literature if the English had not in the first instance received Christianity from the Irish. It had been the influence and example of those Irish missionaries who converted Northumberland that taught the Anglian monk to preserve and cultivate his national literature. Ireland had become the heiress of the classical and theological learning of the Western Empire of the third and fourth centuries, and a period of humanism was thus ushered in which reached its culmination during the sixth and following centuries, the Golden Age of Irish civilisation. The charge that is so often levelled against Irish history, that it has been, as it were, in a backwater, where only the fainter wash of the larger currents reaches, cannot apply to this period. For once, at any rate, Ireland drew upon herself the eyes[Pg x] of the whole world, not, as so often in later times, by her unparalleled sufferings, but as the one haven of rest in a turbulent world overrun by hordes of barbarians, as the great seminary of Christian and classical learning, 'the quiet habitation of sanctity and literature,' as Doctor Johnson called her in a memorable letter written to Charles O'Connor. Her sons, carrying Christianity and a new humanism over Great Britain and the Continent, became the teachers of whole nations, the counsellors of kings and emperors. For once, if but for a century or two, the Celtic spirit dominated a large part of the Western world, and Celtic ideals imparted a new life to a decadent civilisation until they succumbed, not altogether to the benefit of mankind, before a mightier system—that of Rome. It was during this period that the oral literature, handed down by many generations of bards and story-tellers, was first written down in the monasteries. Unfortunately, not a single tale, only two or three poems, have come down to us from these early centuries in contemporary manuscripts. In Ireland nearly all old MSS. were destroyed during the Viking terror which burst upon the island at the end of the eighth century.[1] But, from the eleventh century onward, we have an almost unbroken series of hundreds of MSS. in which all that had escaped destruction was collected and arranged. Many of the tales and poems thus preserved were undoubtedly originally composed in the eighth century; some few perhaps in the seventh; and as Irish scholarship advances, it is not unlikely that fragments of poetry will be found which, from linguistic or internal evidence, may be claimed for the sixth century.[Pg xi] The Celtic nations stand almost alone in this, that they did not employ poetry for epical narrative. There are no ancient Irish epics or ballads. So much was prose the natural vehicle of expression for Gaelic narrative, that when in later centuries the Arthurian epics were done into Gaelic, they were all turned from poetry into prose. At the same time, most Irish tales and stories are interspersed with lyrics put into the mouth of the principal heroes, after the manner of the cante fable, most familiar to modern readers from the French story of Aucassin et Nicolete. My collection begins with a few specimens of such poems. The purely lyrical poetry of ancient Ireland may be roughly divided into two sections—that of the professional bard attached to the court and person of a chief; and that of the unattached poet, whether monk or itinerant bard. From the earliest times we know the names of many famous bards of ancient Ireland and Scotland. Their songs are interwoven with the history of the dynasties and the great houses of the country whose retainers they were, and whose joys and sorrows they shared and expressed. Thus they became the chroniclers of many historical events. Of the oldest bardic poetry very little has as yet been published, and less translated. But many fine examples of a later age will be found in Standish Hayes O'Grady's Catalogue of Irish Manuscripts in the British Museum, a book which[Pg xii] makes one realise more clearly than any other that the true history of Ireland has never yet been written. My own specimens from the earlier centuries include several laments and a sword-song, a species of bardic composition which the Gaels share with the Norse. Religious poetry ranges from single quatrains to lengthy compositions dealing with all the varied aspects of religious life. Many of them give us a fascinating insight into the peculiar character of the early Irish Church, which differed in so many ways from the rest of the Christian world. We see the hermit in his lonely cell, the monk at his devotions or at his work of copying in the scriptorium or under the open sky; or we hear the ascetic who, alone or with twelve chosen companions, has left one of the great monasteries in order to live in greater solitude among the woods or mountains, or on a lonely island. The fact that so many of these poems are fathered upon well-known saints emphasises the friendly attitude of the native clergy towards vernacular poetry. In Nature poetry the Gaelic muse may vie with that of any other nation. Indeed, these poems occupy a unique position in the literature of the world. To seek out and watch and love Nature, in its tiniest phenomena as in its grandest, was given to no people so early and so fully as to the Celt. Many hundreds of Gaelic and Welsh poems testify to this fact.[2] It is a characteristic of these poems that in none of them do we get an elaborate or sustained description of any scene or scenery, but rather a succession of pictures and images which the poet, like an impressionist, calls up before us by light and skilful touches. Like the Japanese, the Celts were always quick to take an artistic hint; they avoid the obvious and the commonplace; the half-said thing to them is dearest.[Pg xiii] Of ancient love-songs comparatively little has come down to us. What we have are mostly laments for departed lovers. He who would have further examples of Gaelic love-poetry must turn to modern collections, among which the Love-Songs of Connaught, collected and translated by Douglas Hyde, occupy the foremost place. A word on the metrical system of Irish poetry may conclude this rapid sketch. The original type from which the great variety of Irish metres has sprung is the catalectic trochaic tetrameter of Latin poetry, as in the well-known popular song of Cæsar's soldiers: — 'Caesar Gallias subegit, Nicomedes Caesarem, Ecce Caesar nunc triumphat qui subegit Gallias'; or in St. Hilary's Hymnus in laudem Christi, beginning:— 'Ymnum dicat turba fratrum, ymnum cantus personet, Christo regi concinentes laudem demus debitam.' The commonest stanza is a quatrain consisting of four heptasyllabic lines with the rhyme at the end of the couplet. In my renderings I have made no attempt at either rhythm or rhyme; but I[Pg xiv] have printed the stanzas so as to show the structure of the poem. For merely practical reasons I have, in some cases, printed them in the form of couplets, in others in that of verse-lines. I must not conclude without recording here also, as I have done elsewhere, my gratitude for the constant help and advice given to me in these translations by my old friend and colleague, Professor J.M. Mackay. K.M. [Pg xv] CONTENTS PAGE MYTH AND SAGA— THE ISLES OF THE HAPPY3 THE SEA-GOD'S ADDRESS TO BRAN7 THE TRYST AFTER DEATH9 DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO SCOTLAND15 DEIRDRE'S LAMENT17 THE HOSTS OF FAERY19 FROM THE VISION OF MAC CONGLINNE20 RELIGIOUS POETRY— THE DEER'S CRY25 AN EVEN-SONG28 PATRICK'S BLESSING ON MUNSTER29 THE HERMIT'S SONG30 A PRAYER TO THE VIRGIN32 EVE'S LAMENT34 ON THE FLIGHTINESS OF THOUGHT35 TO CRINOG37 THE DEVIL'S TRIBUTE TO MOLING39 MAELISU'S HYMN TO THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL41 THE MOTHERS' LAMENT AT THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS42 SONGS OF NATURE— KING AND HERMIT47 SONG OF THE SEA51 SUMMER HAS COME53 SONG OF SUMMER54 SUMMER IS GONE56 A SONG OF WINTER57 ARRAN59 [Pg xvi] LOVE POETRY— THE SONG OF CREDE, DAUGHTER OF GUARE63 LIADIN AND CURITHIR65 BARDIC POETRY— A DIRGE FOR KING NIALL OF THE NINE HOSTAGES69 THE SONG OF CARROLL'S SWORD72 EOCHAID'S LAMENT75 LAMENT ON KING MALACHY II.77 MISCELLANEOUS— THE MONK AND HIS PET CAT81 COLUM CILLE'S GREETING TO IRELAND83 ON ANGUS THE CULDEE86 COLUM CILLE THE SCRIBE87 THE LAMENT OF THE OLD WOMAN OF BEARE88 THE DESERTED HOME92 CORMAC MAC CULENNAIN SANG THIS94 ALEXANDER THE GREAT95 QUATRAINS— THE SCRIBE99 ON A DEAD SCHOLAR99 THE CRUCIFIXION99 THE PILGRIM AT ROME100 HOSPITALITY100 THE BLACKBIRD100 MOLING SANG THIS100 THE CHURCH BELL IN THE NIGHT101 THE VIKING TERROR101 FROM THE TRIADS OF IRELAND102 FROM THE INSTRUCTIONS OF KING CORMAC105 NOTES111 [Pg 1] MYTH AND SAGA [Pg 2] [Pg 3] THE ISLES OF THE HAPPY Once when Bran, son of Feval, was with his warriors in his royal fort, they suddenly saw a woman in strange raiment upon the floor of the house. No one knew whence she had come or how she had entered, for the ramparts were closed. Then she sang these quatrains to Bran while all the host were listening. I bring a branch of Evin's[3] apple-tree, In shape alike to those you know: Twigs of white silver are upon it, Buds of crystal with blossoms. There is a distant isle, Around which sea-horses glisten: A fair course against the white-swelling surge— Four pedestals uphold it. A delight of the eyes, a glorious range Is the plain on which the hosts hold games: Coracle contends against chariot In Silver-white Plain[3] to the south. Pedestals of white bronze underneath Glittering through ages of beauty: Fairest land throughout the world, On which the many blossoms drop. An ancient tree there is in bloom, On which birds call to the Hours: In harmony of song they all are wont To chant together every Hour. Colours of every shade glisten Throughout the gentle-voiced plains: Joy is known, ranked around music, In Silver-cloud Plain[3] to the south. [Pg 4] Unknown is wailing or treachery In the homely cultivated land: There is nothing rough or harsh, But sweet music striking on the ear. Without grief, without gloom, without death, Without any sickness or debility— That is the sign of Evin: Uncommon is the like of such a marvel. A beauty of a wondrous land, Whose aspects are lovely, Whose view is wondrous fair, Incomparable is its haze.[4] Then if Silverland[5] is seen, On which dragon-stones and crystals drop— The sea washes the wave against the land, A crystal spray drops from its mane. Wealth, treasures of every hue Are in the Land of Peace[5]—a beauty of freshness: There is listening to sweet music, Drinking of the choicest wine. Golden chariots on the plain of the sea Heaving with the tide to the sun: Chariots of silver on the Plain of Sports,[5] And of bronze that has no blemish. Steeds of yellow gold are on the sward there, Other steeds with crimson colour, Others again with a coat upon their backs Of the hue of all-blue heaven. [Pg 5] At sunrise there comes A fair man illumining level lands: He rides upon the white sea-washed plain, He stirs the ocean till it is blood. A host comes across the clear sea, They exhibit their rowing to the land: Then they row to the shining stone From which arises music a hundredfold. It sings a strain unto the host Through ages long, it is never weary: Its music swells with choruses of hundreds— They expect neither decay nor death. Many-shaped Evna by the sea, Whether it be near, whether it be far— In which are thousands of many-hued women, Which the clear sea encircles. If one has heard the voice of the music, The chorus of little birds from the Land of Peace, A band of women comes from a height To the plain of sport in which he is. There comes happiness with health To the land against which laughter peals: Into the Land of Peace at every season Comes everlasting joy. Through the ever-fair weather Silver is showered on the lands, A pure-white cliff over the range of the sea Receives from the sun its heat. There are thrice fifty distant isles In the ocean to the west of us: Larger than Erin twice Is each of them, or thrice. [Pg 6] A wonderful child will be born after ages, Who will not be in lofty places, The son of a woman whose mate is unknown, He will seize the rule of the many thousands. A rule without beginning, without end. He has created the world so that it is perfect: Earth and sea are His— Woe to him that shall be under His unwill! 'Tis He that made the heavens, Happy he that has a white heart! He will purify multitudes with pure water, 'Tis He that will heal your sicknesses. Not to all of you is my speech, Though its great marvel has been revealed: Let Bran listen from the crowd of the world To the wisdom told to him. Do not sink upon a bed of sloth! Let not intoxication overcome thee! Begin a voyage across the clear sea, If perchance thou mayst reach the Land of Women. [Pg 7] THE SEA-GOD'S ADDRESS TO BRAN Then on the morrow Bran went upon the sea. When he had been at sea two days and two nights, he saw a man in a chariot coming towards him over the sea. It was Manannan, the son of Ler, who sang these quatrains to him. To Bran in his coracle it seems A marvellous beauty across the clear sea: To me in my chariot from afar It is a flowery plain on which he rides. What is a clear sea For the prowed skiff in which Bran is, That to me in my chariot of two wheels Is a delightful plain with a wealth of flowers. Bran sees A mass of waves beating across the clear sea: I see myself in the Plain of Sports Red-headed flowers that have no fault. Sea-horses glisten in summer As far as Bran can stretch his glance: Rivers pour forth a stream of honey In the land of Manannan, son of Ler. The sheen of the main on which thou art, The dazzling white of the sea on which thou rowest about— Yellow and azure are spread out, It is a light and airy land. Speckled salmon leap from the womb Out of the white sea on which thou lookest: They are calves, they are lambs of fair hue, With truce, without mutual slaughter. [Pg 8] Though thou seest but one chariot-rider In the Pleasant Plain of many flowers, There are many steeds on its surface, Though them thou seest not. Large is the plain, numerous is the host, Colours shine with pure glory, A white stream of silver, stairs of gold Afford a welcome with all abundance. An enchanting game, most delicious, They play over the luscious wine, Men and gentle women under a bush, Without sin, without transgression. Along the top of a wood Thy coracle has swum across ridges, There is a wood laden with beautiful fruit Under the prow of thy little skiff. A wood with blossom and with fruit On which is the vine's veritable fragrance, A wood without decay, without defect, On which is a foliage of a golden hue. We are from the beginning of creation Without old age, without consummation of clay, Hence we expect not there might be frailty— Transgression has not come to us. Steadily then let Bran row! It is not far to the Land of Women: Evna with manifold bounteousness He will reach before the sun is set. [Pg 9] THE TRYST AFTER DEATH Fothad Canann, the leader of a Connaught warrior-band, had carried off the wife of Alill of Munster with her consent. The outraged husband pursued them and a fierce battle was fought, in which Fothad and Alill fell by each other's hand. The lovers had engaged to meet in the evening after the battle. Faithful to his word, the spirit of the slain warrior kept the tryst and thus addressed his paramour: Hush, woman, do not speak to me! My thoughts are not with thee. My thoughts are still in the encounter at Feic. My bloody corpse lies by the side of the Slope of two Brinks; My head all unwashed is among warrior-bands in fierce slaughter. It is blindness for any one making a tryst to set aside the tryst with Death: The tryst that we made at Claragh has been kept by me in pale death. It was destined for me,—unhappy journey! at Feic my grave had been marked out; It was ordained for me—O sorrowful fight! to fall by warriors of another land. 'Tis not I alone who in the fulness of desires has gone astray to meet a woman— No reproach to thee, though it was for thy sake—wretched is our last meeting! Had we known it would be thus, it had not been hard to desist. [Pg 10] The noble-faced, grey-horsed warrior-band has not betrayed me. Alas! for the wonderful yew-forest,[6] that they should have gone into the abode of clay! Had they been alive, they would have revenged their lords; Had mighty death not intervened, this warrior-band had not been unavenged by me. To their very end they were brave; they ever strove for victory over their foes; They would still sing a stave—a deep-toned shout,—they sprang from the race of a noble lord. That was a joyous, lithe-limbed band to the very hour when they were slain: The green-leaved forest has received them—it was an all-fierce slaughter. Well-armed Domnall, he of the red draught, he was the Lugh[7] of the well-accoutred hosts: By him in the ford—it was doom of death—Congal the Slender fell. The three Eoghans, the three Flanns, they were renowned outlaws; Four men fell by each of them, it was not a coward's portion. Swiftly Cu-Domna reached us, making for his namesake: On the hill of the encounter the body of Flann the Little will be found. [Pg 11] With him where his bloody bed is thou wilt find eight men: Though we thought them feeble, the leavings of the weapon of Mughirne's son. Not feebly fights Falvey the Red; the play of his spear-strings withers the host; Ferchorb of radiant body leapt upon the field and dealt seven murderous blows. Front to front twelve warriors stood against me in mutual fight: Not one of them all remains that I did not leave in slaughter. Then we two exchanged spears, I and Alill, Eoghan's son: We both perished—O the fierceness of those stout thrusts! We fell by each other though it was senseless: it was the encounter of two heroes. Do not await the terror of night on the battle-field among the slain warriors: One should not hold converse with ghosts! betake thee home, carry my spoils with thee! Every one will tell thee that mine was not the raiment of a churl: A crimson cloak and a white tunic, a belt of silver, no paltry work! My five-edged spear, a murderous lance, whose slaughters have been many; A shield with five circles and a boss of bronze, by which they used to swear binding oaths. [Pg 12] The white cup of my cup-bearer, a shining gem, will glitter before thee; My golden finger-ring, my bracelets, treasures without a flaw, King Nia Nar had brought them over the sea. Cailte's brooch, a pin with luck, it was one of his marvellous treasures: Two heads of silver round a head of gold, a goodly piece, though small. My draught-board—no mean treasure!—is thine; take it with thee. Noble blood drips on its rim, it lies not far hence. Many a body of the spear-armed host lies here and there around its crimson woof; A dense bush of the ruddy oak-wood conceals it by the side of the grave. As thou carefully searchest for it thou shouldst not speak much: Earth never covered anything so marvellous. One half of its pieces are yellow gold, the other are white bronze; Its woof is of pearls; it is the wonder of smiths how it was wrought. The bag for its pieces,—'tis a marvel of a story—its rim is embroidered with gold; The master-smith has left a lock upon it which no ignorant person can open. A four-cornered casket,—it is but tiny—made of coils of red gold; One hundred ounces of white bronze have been put into it firmly. [Pg 13] For it is of a coil of firm red gold, Dinoll the goldsmith brought it over the sea; Even one of its clasps only has been priced at seven slave-women.[8] Memories describe it as one of Turvey's master-works: In the time of Art—he was a luxurious king—'tis then Turvey, lord of many herds, made it. Smiths never made any work comparable with it; Earth never hid a king's jewel so marvellous. If thou be cunning as to its price, I know thy children will never be in want; If thou hoard it, a close treasure, none of thy offspring will ever be destitute. There are around us here and there many spoils of famous luck: Horrible are the huge entrails which the Morrigan[9] washes. She came to us from the edge of a spear, 'tis she that egged us on. Many are the spoils she washes, terrible the hateful laugh she laughs. She has flung her mane over her back—it is a stout heart that will not quail at her: Though she is so near to us, do not let fear overcome thee! [Pg 14] In the morning I shall part from all that is human, I shall follow the warrior-band; Go to thy house, stay not here, the end of the night is at hand. Some one will at all times remember this song of Fothad Canann; My discourse with thee shall not be unrenowned, if thou remember my bequest. Since my grave will be frequented, let a conspicuous tomb be raised; Thy trouble for thy love is no loss of labour. My riddled body must now part from thee awhile, my soul to be tortured by the black demon. Save for the worship of Heaven's King, love of this world is folly. I hear the dusky ousel that sends a joyous greeting to all the faithful: My speech, my shape are spectral—hush, woman, do not speak to me! [Pg 15] DEIRDRE'S FAREWELL TO SCOTLAND A beloved land is yon land in the east, Alba[10] with its marvels. I would not have come hither[11] out of it, Had I not come with Noisi. Beloved are Dun Fidga and Dun Finn, Beloved is the fortress above them, Beloved is the Isle of the Thorn-bush, And beloved is Dun Sweeny. Caill Cuan! Unto which Ainnle would go, alas! Short we thought the time there, Noisi and I in the land of Alba. Glen Lay! There I used to sleep under a shapely rock. Fish and venison and badger's fat, That was my portion in Glen Lay. Glen Massan! Tall is its wild garlic, white are its stalks: We used to have a broken sleep On the grassy river-mouth of Massan. Glen Etive! There I raised my first house. Delightful its house! when we rose in the morning A sunny cattle-fold was Glen Etive. Glen Urchain! That was the straight, fair-ridged glen! Never was man of his age prouder Than Noisi in Glen Urchain. [Pg 16] Glen Da Ruadh! Hail to him who hath it as an heritage! Sweet is the cuckoo's voice on bending branch On the peak above Glen Da Ruadh. Beloved is Draighen over a firm beach! Beloved its water in pure sand! I would never have left it, from the east, Had I not come with my beloved. [Pg 17] DEIRDRE'S LAMENT And Deirdre dishevelled her hair and began kissing Noisi and drinking his blood, and the colour of embers came into her cheeks, and she uttered this lay. Long is the day without Usnagh's Children; It was never mournful to be in their company. A king's sons, by whom exiles were rewarded, Three lions from the Hill of the Cave. Three dragons of Dun Monidh, The three champions from the Red Branch: After them I shall not live— Three that used to break every onrush. Three darlings of the women of Britain, Three hawks of Slieve Gullion, Sons of a king whom valour served, To whom soldiers would pay homage. Three heroes who were not good at homage, Their fall is cause of sorrow— Three sons of Cathba's daughter, Three props of the battle-host of Coolney. Three vigorous bears, Three lions out of Liss Una, Three lions who loved their praise, Three pet sons of Ulster. That I should remain after Noisi Let no one in the world suppose! After Ardan and Ainnle My time would not be long. Ulster's high-king, my first husband, I forsook for Noisi's love: Short my life after them, I will perform their funeral game. [Pg 18] After them I will not be alive— Three that would go into every conflict, Three who liked to endure hardships, Three heroes who never refused combat. O man that diggest the tomb, And that puttest my darling from me, Make not the grave too narrow, I shall be beside the noble ones. [Pg 19] THE HOSTS OF FAERY White shields they carry in their hands, With emblems of pale silver; With glittering blue swords, With mighty stout horns. In well-devised battle array, Ahead of their fair chieftain They march amid blue spears, Pale-visaged, curly-headed bands. They scatter the battalions of the foe, They ravage every land they attack, Splendidly they march to combat, A swift, distinguished, avenging host! No wonder though their strength be great: Sons of queens and kings are one and all; On their heads are Beautiful golden-yellow manes. With smooth comely bodies, With bright blue-starred eyes, With pure crystal teeth, With thin red lips. Good they are at man-slaying, Melodious in the ale-house, Masterly at making songs, Skilled at playing fidchell.[12] [Pg 20] FROM THE VISION OF MAC CONGLINNE A vision that appeared to me, An apparition wonderful I tell to all: There was a coracle all of lard Within a port of New-milk Lake Upon the world's smooth sea. We went into that man-of-war, 'Twas warrior-like to take the road O'er ocean's heaving waves. Our oar-strokes then we pulled Across the level of the main, Throwing the sea's harvest up Like honey, the sea-soil. The fort we reached was beautiful, With works of custards thick, Beyond the lake. Fresh butter was the bridge in front, The rubble dyke was fair white wheat, Bacon the palisade. Stately, pleasantly it sat, A compact house and strong. Then I went in: The door of it was hung beef, The threshold was dry bread, Cheese-curds the walls. Smooth pillars of old cheese And sappy bacon props Alternate ranged; Stately beams of mellow cream, White posts of real curds Kept up the house. [Pg 21] Behind it was a well of wine, Beer and bragget in streams, Each full pool to the taste. Malt in smooth wavy sea Over a lard-spring's brink Flowed through the floor. A lake of juicy pottage Under a cream of oozy lard Lay 'twixt it and the sea. Hedges of butter fenced it round, Under a crest of white-mantled lard Around the wall outside. A row of fragrant apple-trees, An orchard in its pink-tipped bloom, Between it and the hill. A forest tall of real leeks, Of onions and of carrots, stood Behind the house. Within, a household generous, A welcome of red, firm-fed men, Around the fire: Seven bead-strings and necklets seven Of cheeses and of bits of tripe Round each man's neck. The Chief in cloak of beefy fat Beside his noble wife and fair I then beheld. Below the lofty caldron's spit Then the Dispenser I beheld, His fleshfork on his back. [Pg 22] Wheatlet son of Milklet, Son of juicy Bacon, Is mine own name. Honeyed Butter-roll Is the man's name That bears my bag. Haunch of Mutton Is my dog's name, Of lovely leaps. Lard, my wife, Sweetly smiles Across the brose. Cheese-curds, my daughter, Goes round the spit, Fair is her fame. Corned Beef is my son, Who beams over a cloak, Enormous, of fat. Savour of Savours Is the name of my wife's maid: Morning-early Across New-milk Lake she went. Beef-lard, my steed, An excellent stallion That increases studs; A guard against toil Is the saddle of cheese Upon his back. A large necklace of delicious cheese-curds Around his back; His halter and his traces all Of fresh butter. [Pg 23] RELIGIOUS POETRY [Pg 24] [Pg 25] THE DEER'S CRY Patrick sang this hymn when the ambuscades were laid against him by King Loeguire (Leary) that he might not go to Tara to sow the faith. Then it seemed to those lying in ambush that he and his monks were wild deer with a fawn, even Benen, following them. And its name is 'Deer's Cry.' I arise to-day Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, Through belief in the threeness, Through confession of the oneness Of the Creator of Creation. I arise to-day Through the strength of Christ's birth with His baptism, Through the strength of His crucifixion with His burial, Through the strength of His resurrection with His ascension, Through the strength of His descent for the judgment of Doom. I arise to-day Through the strength of the love of Cherubim, In obedience of angels, In the service of archangels, In hope of resurrection to meet with reward, In prayers of patriarchs, In predictions of prophets, In preachings of apostles, In faiths of confessors, In innocence of holy virgins, In deeds of righteous men. [Pg 26] I arise to-day Through the strength of heaven: Light of sun, Radiance of moon, Splendour of fire, Speed of lightning, Swiftness of wind, Depth of sea, Stability of earth, Firmness of rock. I arise to day Through God's strength to pilot me: God's might to uphold me, God's wisdom to guide me, God's eye to look before me, God's ear to hear me, God's word to speak for me, God's hand to guard me, God's way to lie before me, God's shield to protect me, God's host to save me From snares of devils, From temptations of vices, From every one who shall wish me ill, Afar and anear, Alone and in a multitude. I summon to-day all these powers between me and those evils, Against every cruel merciless power that may oppose my body and soul, Against incantations of false prophets, Against black laws of pagandom, Against false laws of heretics, Against craft of idolatry, Against spells of women and smiths and wizards, Against every knowledge that corrupts man's body and soul. [Pg 27] Christ to shield me to-day Against poison, against burning, Against drowning, against wounding, So that there may come to me abundance of reward. Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me, Christ on my right, Christ on my left, Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise, Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me, Christ in the mouth of every one who speaks of me, Christ in every eye that sees me, Christ in every ear that hears me. I arise to-day Through a mighty strength, the invocation of the Trinity, Through belief in the threeness, Through confession of the oneness Of the Creator of Creation. [Pg 28] AN EVEN-SONG PATRICK SANG THIS May Thy holy angels, O Christ, son of living God, Guard our sleep, our rest, our shining bed. Let them reveal true visions to us in our sleep, O high-prince of the universe, O great king of the mysteries! May no demons, no ill, no calamity or terrifying dreams Disturb our rest, our willing, prompt repose. May our watch be holy, our work, our task, Our sleep, our rest without let, without break. [Pg 29] PATRICK'S BLESSING ON MUNSTER God's blessing upon Munster, Men, women, children! A blessing on the land Which gives them fruit! A blessing on every wealth Which is brought forth on their marches! No one to be in want of help: God's blessing upon Munster! A blessing on their peaks, On their bare flagstones, A blessing on their glens, A blessing on their ridges! Like sand of sea under ships Be the number of their hearths: On slopes, on plains, On mountain-sides, on peaks. [Pg 30] THE HERMIT'S SONG I wish, O Son of the living God, O ancient, eternal King, For a hidden little hut in the wilderness that it may be my dwelling. An all-grey lithe little lark to be by its side, A clear pool to wash away sins through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Quite near, a beautiful wood around it on every side, To nurse many-voiced birds, hiding it with its shelter. A southern aspect for warmth, a little brook across its floor, A choice land with many gracious gifts such as be good for every plant. A few men of sense—we will tell their number— Humble and obedient, to pray to the King:— Four times three, three times four, fit for every need, Twice six in the church, both north and south:— Six pairs besides myself, Praying for ever the King who makes the sun shine. A pleasant church and with the linen altar-cloth, a dwelling for God from Heaven; Then, shining candles above the pure white Scriptures. One house for all to go to for the care of the body, Without ribaldry, without boasting, without thought of evil. [Pg 31] This is the husbandry I would take, I would choose, and will not hide it: Fragrant leek, hens, salmon, trout, bees. Raiment and food enough for me from the King of fair fame, And I to be sitting for a while praying God in every place. [Pg 32] A PRAYER TO THE VIRGIN Gentle Mary, noble maiden, give us help! Shrine of our Lord's body, casket of the mysteries! Queen of queens, pure holy maiden, Pray for us that our wretched transgression be forgiven for Thy sake. Merciful one, forgiving one, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, Pray with us the true-judging King of the goodly ambrosial clan. Branch of Jesse's tree in the beauteous hazel-wood, Pray for me until I obtain forgiveness of my foul sins. Mary, splendid diadem, Thou that hast saved our race, Glorious noble torch, orchard of Kings! Brilliant one, transplendent one, with the deed of pure chastity, Fair golden illumined ark, holy daughter from Heaven! Mother of righteousness, Thou that excellest all else, Pray with me Thy first-born to save me on the day of Doom. Noble rare star, tree under blossom, Powerful choice lamp, sun that warmeth every one. Ladder of the great track by which every saint ascends, Mayst Thou be our safeguard towards the glorious Kingdom. [Pg 33] Fair fragrant seat chosen by the King, The noble guest who was in Thy womb three times three months. Glorious royal porch through which He was incarnated, The splendid chosen sun, Jesus, Son of the living God. For the sake of the fair babe that was conceived in Thy womb, For the sake of the holy child that is High-King in every place, For the sake of His cross that is higher than any cross, For the sake of His burial when He was buried in a stone-tomb, For the sake of His resurrection when He arose before every one, For the sake of the holy household from every place to Doom, Be Thou our safeguard in the Kingdom of the good Lord, That we may meet with dear Jesus—that is our prayer—hail! [Pg 34] EVE'S LAMENT I am Eve, great Adam's wife, 'Tis I that outraged Jesus of old; 'Tis I that robbed my children of Heaven, By rights 'tis I that should have gone upon the cross. I had a kingly house to please me, Grievous the evil choice that disgraced me, Grievous the wicked advice that withered me! Alas! my hand is not pure. 'Tis I that plucked the apple, Which went across my gullet: So long as they endure in the light of day, So long women will not cease from folly. There would be no ice in any place, There would be no glistening windy winter, There would be no hell, there would be no sorrow, There would be no fear, if it were not for me. [Pg 35] ON THE FLIGHTINESS OF THOUGHT Shame to my thoughts, how they stray from me! I fear great danger from it on the day of eternal Doom. During the psalms they wander on a path that is not right: They fash, they fret, they misbehave before the eyes of great God. Through eager crowds, through companies of wanton women, Through woods, through cities—swifter they are than the wind. Now through paths of loveliness, anon of riotous shame! Without a ferry or ever missing a step they go across every sea: Swiftly they leap in one bound from earth to heaven. They run a race of folly anear and afar: After a course of giddiness they return to their home. Though one should try to bind them or put shackles on their feet, They are neither constant nor mindful to take a spell of rest. Neither sword-edge nor crack of whip will keep them down strongly: As slippery as an eel's tail they glide out of my grasp. [Pg 36] Neither lock nor firm-vaulted dungeon nor any fetter on earth, Stronghold nor sea nor bleak fastness restrains them from their course. O beloved truly chaste Christ to whom every eye is clear, May the grace of the seven-fold Spirit come to keep them, to check them! Rule this heart of mine, O dread God of the elements, That Thou mayst be my love, that I may do Thy will. That I may reach Christ with His chosen companions, that we may be together! They are neither fickle nor inconstant—not as I am. [Pg 37] TO CRINOG Crinog, melodious is your song. Though young no more you are still bashful. We two grew up together in Niall's northern land, When we used to sleep together in tranquil slumber. That was my age when you slept with me, O peerless lady of pleasant wisdom: A pure-hearted youth, lovely without a flaw, A gentle boy of seven sweet years. We lived in the great world of Banva[13] Without sullying soul or body, My flashing eye full of love for you, Like a poor innocent untempted by evil. Your just counsel is ever ready, Wherever we are we seek it: To love your penetrating wisdom is better Than glib discourse with a king. Since then you have slept with four men after me, Without folly or falling away: I know, I hear it on all sides, You are pure, without sin from man. At last, after weary wanderings, You have come to me again, Darkness of age has settled on your face: Sinless your life draws near its end. You are still dear to me, faultless one, You shall have welcome from me without stint; You will not let us be drowned in torment: We will earnestly practise devotion with you. [Pg 38] The lasting world is full of your fame, Far and wide you have wandered on every track: If every day we followed your ways, We should come safe into the presence of dread God. You leave an example and a bequest To every one in this world, You have taught us by your life: Earnest prayer to God is no fallacy. Then may God grant us peace and happiness! May the countenance of the King Shine brightly upon us When we leave behind us our withered bodies. [Pg 39] THE DEVIL'S TRIBUTE TO MOLING Once as Moling was praying in his church he saw a man coming in to him. Purple raiment he wore and a distinguished form had he. 'Well met, cleric!' says he. 'Amen!' says Moling. 'Why dost thou not salute me?' says the man. 'Who art thou?' says Moling. 'I am Christ, the Son of God,' he answers. 'I do not know that,' says Moling. 'When Christ used to come to converse with God's servants, 'twas not in purple or with royal pomp he would come, but in the shape of a leper.' 'Then dost thou not believe in me?' says the man. 'Whom dost thou suppose to be here?' 'I suppose,' says Moling, 'that it is the Devil for my hurt.' 'Thy unbelief will be ill for thee,' says the man. 'Well,' says Moling, raising the Gospel, 'here is thy successor, the Gospel of Christ.' 'Raise it not, cleric!' says the Devil; 'it is as thou thinkest: I am the man of tribulations.' 'Wherefore hast thou come?' says Moling. 'That thou mayst bestow a blessing upon me.' 'I will not bestow it,' says Moling, 'for thou dost not deserve it. Besides, what good could it do thee?' 'If,' says the Devil, 'thou shouldst go into a tub of honey and bathe therein with thy raiment on, its odour would remain upon thee unless the raiment were washed.' 'How would that affect thee?' asks Moling. 'Because, though thy blessing do nought else to me, its good luck and its virtue and its blossom will be on me externally.' 'Thou shalt not have it,' says Moling, 'for thou deservest it not.' 'Well,' said the Devil, 'then bestow the full of a curse on me.' 'What good were that to thee?' asks Moling. 'The venom and the hurt of the curse will be on the lips from which it will come.' 'Go,' says Moling; 'thou hast no right to a blessing.' 'Better were it for me that I had. How shall I earn it?' 'By service to God,' says Moling. 'Woe is me!' says the Devil, 'I cannot bring it.' 'Even a trifle of study.' 'Thine own study is not greater, and yet it helps me not.' 'Fasting, then,' says Moling. 'I have been fasting since the beginning of the world, and not the better thereof am I.' 'Making genuflexions,' says Moling. 'I cannot bend forward,' says the Devil, 'for backwards are my knees.' 'Go forth,' says Moling; 'I cannot teach thee nor help thee.' Then the Devil said: He is pure gold, he is the sky around the sun, He is a vessel of silver with wine, He is an angel, he is holy wisdom, Whoso doth the will of the King. [Pg 40] He is a bird round which a trap closes, He is a leaky ship in perilous danger, He is an empty vessel, a withered tree, Who doth not the will of the King above. He is a fragrant branch with its blossom, He is a vessel full of honey, He is a precious stone with its virtue, Whoso doth the will of God's Son from Heaven. He is a blind nut in which there is no good, He is a stinking rottenness, a withered tree, He is a branch of a blossomless crab-apple, Whoso doth not the will of the King. Whoso doth the will of God's Son from Heaven Is a brilliant summer-sun, Is a daïs of God of Heaven, Is a pure crystalline vessel. He is a victorious racehorse over a smooth plain, The man that striveth after the Kingdom of great God; He is a chariot that is seen Under a triumphant king. He is a sun that warms holy Heaven, A man with whom the Great King is pleased, He is a temple blessed, noble, He is a holy shrine bedecked with gold. He is an altar on which wine is dealt, Round which a multitude of melodies is sung, He is a cleansed chalice with liquor, He is fair white bronze, he is gold. [Pg 41] MAELISU'S HYMN TO THE ARCHANGEL MICHAEL O angel! Bear, O Michael of great miracles, To the Lord my plaint. Hearest thou? Ask of forgiving God Forgiveness of all my vast evil. Delay not! Carry my fervent prayer To the King, to the great King! To my soul Bring help, bring comfort At the hour of its leaving earth. Stoutly To meet my expectant soul Come with many thousand angels! O soldier! Against the crooked, wicked, militant world Come to my help in earnest! Do not Disdain what I say! As long as I live do not desert me! Thee I choose, That thou mayst save my soul, My mind, my sense, my body. O thou of goodly counsels, Victorious, triumphant one, Angelic slayer of Antichrist! [Pg 42] THE MOTHERS' LAMENT AT THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS Then, as the executioner plucked her son from her breast, one of the women said: Why do you tear from me my darling son, The fruit of my womb? It was I who bore him, My breast he drank. My womb carried him about, My vitals he sucked, My heart he filled. He was my life, 'Tis death to have him taken from me. My strength has ebbed, My speech is silenced, My eyes are blinded. Then another woman said: It is my son you take from me. I did not do the evil, But kill me—me! Kill not my son! My breasts are sapless, My eyes are wet, My hands shake, My poor body totters. My husband has no son, And I no strength. My life is like death. O my own son, O God! My youth without reward, My birthless sicknesses Without requital until Doom. My breasts are silent, My heart is wrung. [Pg 43] Then said another woman: Ye are seeking to kill one, Ye are killing many. Infants ye slay, The fathers ye wound, The mothers ye kill. Hell with your deed is full, Heaven is shut, Ye have spilt the blood of guiltless innocents. And yet another woman said: O Christ, come to me! With my son take my soul quickly! O great Mary, Mother of God's Son, What shall I do without my son? For Thy Son my spirit and sense are killed. I am become a crazy woman for my son. After the piteous slaughter My heart is a clot of blood From this day till Doom. [Pg 44] [Pg 45] SONGS OF NATURE [Pg 46] [Pg 47] KING AND HERMIT Marvan, brother of King Guare of Connaught in the seventh century, had renounced the life of a warrior-prince for that of a hermit. The king endeavoured to persuade his brother to return to his court, when the following colloquy took place between them. Guare Why, hermit Marvan, sleepest thou not Upon a

feather quilt? Why rather sleepest thou abroad Upon a pitchpine floor? Marvan I have a shieling in the wood, None knows it save my God: An ash-tree on the hither side, a hazel-bush beyond, A huge old tree encompasses it. Two heath-clad doorposts for support, And a lintel of honeysuckle: The forest around its narrowness sheds Its mast upon fat swine. The size of my shieling tiny, not too tiny, Many are its familiar paths: From its gable a sweet strain sings A she-bird in her cloak of the ousel's hue. The stags of Oakridge leap Into the river of clear banks: Thence red Roiny can be seen, Glorious Muckraw and Moinmoy.[14] A hiding mane of green-barked yew Supports the sky: Beautiful spot! the large green of an oak Fronting the storm. [Pg 48] A tree of apples—great its bounty! Like a hostel, vast! A pretty bush, thick as a fist, of tiny hazel-nuts, A green mass of branches. A choice pure spring and princely water To drink: There spring watercresses, yew-berries, Ivy-bushes thick as a man. Around it tame swine lie down. Goats, pigs, Wild swine, grazing deer, A badger's brood. A peaceful troop, a heavy host of denizens of the soil, A-trysting at my house: To meet them foxes come, How delightful! Fairest princes come to my house, A ready gathering: Pure water, perennial bushes, Salmon, trout. A bush of rowan, black sloes, Dusky blackthorns, Plenty of food, acorns, pure berries, Bare flags. A clutch of eggs, honey, delicious mast, God has sent it: Sweet apples, red whortleberries, And blaeberries. [Pg 49] Ale with herbs, a dish of strawberries Of good taste and colour, Haws, berries of the juniper, Sloes, nuts. A cup with mead of hazel-nut, blue-bells, Quick-growing rushes, Dun oaklets, manes of briar, Goodly sweet tangle. When brilliant summer-time spreads its coloured mantle, Sweet-tasting fragrance! Pignuts, wild marjoram, green leeks, Verdant pureness! The music of the bright red-breasted men, A lovely movement! The strain of the thrush, familiar cuckoos Above my house. Swarms of bees and chafers, the little musicians of the world, A gentle chorus: Wild geese and ducks, shortly before summer's end, The music of the dark torrent. An active songster, a lively wren From the hazel-bough, Beautiful hooded birds, woodpeckers, A vast multitude! Fair white birds come, herons, seagulls, The cuckoo sings between— No mournful music! dun heathpoults Out of the russet heather. [Pg 50] The lowing of heifers in summer, Brightest of seasons! Not bitter, toilsome over the fertile plain, Delightful, smooth! The voice of the wind against the branchy wood Upon the deep-blue sky: Falls of the river, the note of the swan, Delicious music! The bravest band make cheer to me, Who have not been hired: In the eyes of Christ the ever-young I am no worse off Than thou art. Though thou rejoicest in thy own pleasures, Greater than any wealth; I am grateful for what is given me From my good Christ. Without an hour of fighting, without the din of strife In my house, Grateful to the Prince who giveth every good To me in my shieling. Guare I would give my glorious kingship With the share of my father's heritage— To the hour of my death I would forfeit it To be in thy company, my Marvan. [Pg 51] SONG OF THE SEA A great tempest rages on the Plain of Ler, bold across its high borders Wind has arisen, fierce winter has slain us; it has come across the sea, It has pierced us like a spear. When the wind sets from the east, the spirit of the wave is roused, It desires to rush past us westward to the land where sets the sun, To the wild and broad green sea. When the wind sets from the north, it urges the dark fierce waves Towards the southern world, surging in strife against the wide sky, Listening to the witching song. When the wind sets from the west across the salt sea of swift currents, It desires to go past us eastward towards the Sun-Tree, Into the broad long-distant sea. When the wind sets from the south across the land of Saxons of mighty shields, The wave strikes the Isle of Scit, it surges up to the summit of Caladnet, And pounds the grey-green mouth of the Shannon. The ocean is in flood, the sea is full, delightful is the home of ships, The wind whirls the sand around the estuary, Swiftly the rudder cleaves the broad sea. [Pg 52] With mighty force the wave has tumbled across each broad river-mouth, Wind has come, white winter has slain us, around Cantire, around the land of Alba, Slieve-Dremon pours forth a full stream. Son of the God the Father, with mighty hosts, save me from the horror of fierce tempests! Righteous Lord of the Feast, only save me from the horrid blast, From Hell with furious tempest! [Pg 53] SUMMER HAS COME Summer has come, healthy and free, Whence the brown wood is aslope; The slender nimble deer leap, And the path of seals is smooth. The cuckoo sings sweet music, Whence there is smooth restful sleep; Gentle birds leap upon the hill, And swift grey stags. Heat has laid hold of the rest of the deer— The lovely cry of curly packs! The white extent of the strand smiles, There the swift sea is. A sound of playful breezes in the tops Of a black oakwood is Drum Daill, The noble hornless herd runs, To whom Cuan-wood is a shelter. Green bursts out on every herb, The top of the green oakwood is bushy, Summer has come, winter has gone, Twisted hollies wound the hound. The blackbird sings a loud strain, To him the live wood is a heritage, The sad angry sea is fallen asleep, The speckled salmon leaps. The sun smiles over every land,— A parting for me from the brood of cares: Hounds bark, stags tryst, Ravens flourish, summer has come! [Pg 54] SONG OF SUMMER Summer-time, season supreme! Splendid is colour then. Blackbirds sing a full lay If there be a slender shaft of day. The dust-coloured cuckoo calls aloud: Welcome, splendid summer! The bitterness of bad weather is past, The boughs of the wood are a thicket. Panic startles the heart of the deer, The smooth sea runs apace— Season when ocean sinks asleep, Blossom covers the world. Bees with puny strength carry A goodly burden, the harvest of blossoms; Up the mountain-side kine take with them mud, The ant makes a rich meal. The harp of the forest sounds music, The sail gathers—perfect peace; Colour has settled on every height, Haze on the lake of full waters. The corncrake, a strenuous bard, discourses, The lofty cold waterfall sings A welcome to the warm pool— The talk of the rushes has come. Light swallows dart aloft, Loud melody encircles the hill, The soft rich mast buds, The stuttering quagmire prattles. [Pg 55] The peat-bog is as the raven's coat, The loud cuckoo bids welcome, The speckled fish leaps— Strong is the bound of the swift warrior. Man flourishes, the maiden buds In her fair strong pride. Perfect each forest from top to ground, Perfect each great stately plain. Delightful is the season's splendour, Rough winter has gone: Every fruitful wood shines white, A joyous peace is summer. A flock of birds settles In the midst of meadows, The green field rustles, Wherein is a brawling white stream. A wild longing is on you to race horses, The ranked host is ranged around: A bright shaft has been shot into the land, So that the water-flag is gold beneath it. A timorous, tiny, persistent little fellow Sings at the top of his voice, The lark sings clear tidings: Surpassing summer-time of delicate hues! [Pg 56] SUMMER IS GONE My tidings for you: the stag bells, Winter snows, summer is gone. Wind high and cold, low the sun, Short his course, sea running high. Deep-red the bracken, its shape all gone— The wild-goose has raised his wonted cry. Cold has caught the wings of birds; Season of ice— these are my tidings. [Pg 57] A SONG OF WINTER Cold, cold! Cold to-night is broad Moylurg, Higher the snow than the mountain-range, The deer cannot get at their food. Cold till Doom! The storm has spread over all: A river is each furrow upon the slope, Each ford a full pool. A great tidal sea is each loch, A full loch is each pool: Horses cannot get over the ford of Ross, No more can two feet get there. The fish of Ireland are a-roaming, There is no strand which the wave does not pound, Not a town there is in the land, Not a bell is heard, no crane talks. The wolves of Cuan-wood get Neither rest nor sleep in their lair, The little wren cannot find Shelter in her nest on the slope of Lon. Keen wind and cold ice Has burst upon the little company of birds, The blackbird cannot get a lee to her liking, Shelter for its side in Cuan-wood. Cosy our pot on its hook, Crazy the hut on the slope of Lon: The snow has crushed the wood here, Toilsome to climb up Ben-bo. [Pg 58] Glenn Rye's ancient bird From the bitter wind gets grief; Great her misery and her pain, The ice will get into her mouth. From flock and from down to rise— Take it to heart!—were folly for thee: Ice in heaps on every ford— That is why I say 'cold'! [Pg 59] ARRAN Arran of the many stags, The sea strikes against its shoulder, Isle in which companies are fed, Ridge on which blue spears are reddened. Skittish deer are on her peaks, Delicious berries on her manes, Cool water in her rivers, Mast upon her dun oaks. Greyhounds are in it and beagles, Blackberries and sloes of the dark blackthorn, Her dwellings close against the woods, Deer scattered about her oak-woods. Gleaning of purple upon her rocks, Faultless grass upon her slopes, Over her fair shapely crags Noise of dappled fawns a-skipping. Smooth is her level land, fat are her swine, Bright are her fields, Her nuts upon the tops of her hazel-wood, Long galleys sailing past her. Delightful it is when the fair season comes, Trout under the brinks of her rivers, Seagulls answer each other round her white cliff, Delightful at all times is Arran! [Pg 60] [Pg 61] LOVE POETRY [Pg 62] [Pg 63] THE SONG OF CREDE, DAUGHTER OF GUARE In the battle of Aidne, Crede, the daughter of King Guare of Aidne, beheld Dinertach of the Hy Fidgenti, who had come to the help of Guare, with seventeen wounds upon his breast. Then she fell in love with him. He died, and was buried in the cemetery of Colman's Church. These are arrows that murder sleep At every hour in the bitter-cold night: Pangs of love throughout the day For the company of the man from Roiny. Great love of a man from another land Has come to me beyond all else: It has taken my bloom, no colour is left, It does not let me rest. Sweeter than songs was his speech, Save holy adoration of Heaven's King; He was a glorious flame, no boastful word fell from his lips, A slender mate for a maid's side. When I was a child I was bashful, I was not given to going to trysts: Since I have come to a wayward age, My wantonness has beguiled me. I have every good with Guare, The King of cold Aidne: But my mind has fallen away from my people To the meadow at Irluachair. There is chanting in the meadow of glorious Aidne Around the sides of Colman's Church: Glorious flame, now sunk into the grave— Dinertach was his name. [Pg 64] It wrings my pitiable heart, O chaste Christ, What has fallen to my lot: These are arrows that murder sleep At every hour in the bitter-cold night. [Pg 65] LIADIN AND CURITHIR Liadin of Corkaguiney, a poetess, went visiting into the country of Connaught. There Curithir, himself a poet, made an ale-feast for her. 'Why should not we two unite, Liadin?' saith Curithir. 'A son of us two would be famous.' 'Do not let us do so now,' saith she, 'lest my round of visiting be ruined for me. If you will come for me again at my home, I shall go with you.' That fell so. Southward he went, and a single gillie behind him with his poet's dress in a bag upon his back, while Curithir himself was in a poor garb. There were spear-heads in the bag also. He went till he was at the well beside Liadin's court. There he took his crimson dress about him, and the heads were put upon their shafts, and he stood brandishing them. Meanwhile Liadin had made a vow of chastity; but faithful to her word she went with him. They proceed to the monastery of Clonfert, where they put themselves under the spiritual direction of Cummin, son of Fiachna. He first imposes a slight probation upon them, allowing them to converse without seeing each other. Then, challenged by Liadin, he permits them a perilous freedom. In the result he banishes Curithir, who thenceforward renounces love and becomes a pilgrim. When Liadin still seeks him he crosses the sea. She returns to the scene of their penance, and shortly dies. When all is over, Cummin lovingly lays the stone where she had mourned her love, and upon which she died, over the grave of the unhappy maiden. Curithir Of late Since I parted from Liadin, Long as a month is every day, Long as a year each month. Liadin Joyless The bargain I have made! The heart of him I loved I wrung. [Pg 66] 'Twas madness Not to do his pleasure, Were there not the fear of Heaven's King. 'Twas a trifle That wrung Curithir's heart against me: To him great was my gentleness. A short while I was In the company of Curithir: Sweet was my intimacy with him. The music of the forest Would sing to me when with Curithir, Together with the voice of the purple sea. Would that Nothing of all I have done Should have wrung his heart against me! Conceal it not! He was my heart's love, Whatever else I might love. A roaring flame Has dissolved this heart of mine— Without him for certain it cannot live. [Pg 67] BARDIC POETRY [Pg 68] [Pg 69] A DIRGE FOR KING NIALL OF THE NINE HOSTAGES (+ a.d. 405) Tuirn son of Torna When we used to go to the gathering with Echu's[15] son, Yellow as a bright primrose was the hair upon the head of Cairenn's[16] son. Torna Well hast thou spoken, dear son. A bondmaid should be given thee For the sake of the hair which thou hast likened to the colour of the crown of the primrose. Eyelashes black, delicate, equal in beauty, and dark eyebrows— The crown of the woad, a bright hyacinth, that was the colour of his pupils. Tuirn son of Torna The colour of his cheeks at all seasons, even and symmetrical: The fox-glove, the blood of a calf—a feast without a flaw! the crown of the forest in May. Torna His white teeth, his red lips that never reproved in anger— His shape like a fiery blaze overtopping the warriors of Erin. [Pg 70] Like the moon, like the sun, like a fiery beacon was the splendour of Niall: Like a dragon-ship from the wave without a flaw was Niall, Echu's son. Tuirn son of Torna This is a yearnful music, the wail of every mouth in Kerry— It increases my grief in my house for the death of Muredach's[17] grandson. Saxons will ravage here in the east, noble men of Erin and Alba, After the death of Niall, Echu's noble son—it is a bitter cause of reproach. Torna Saxons with overwhelming cries of war, hosts of Lombards from the continent, From the hour in which the king fell Gael and Pict are in a sore straight. Tuirn son of Torna Upon Tara's rampart his fair hair shone against his ruddy face: Like unto the colour of his hair is red gold or the yellow iris. Torna 'Twas great delight, 'twas great peace to be in the company of my dear foster-son,[18] When with Echu's son—it was no small thing—we used to go to the gathering. [Pg 71] Tuirn son of Torna Darling hero of the white shoulder! whose tribes are vast, a beloved host: Every man was under protection when we used to go to forgather with him. [Pg 72] THE SONG OF CARROLL'S SWORD (a.d. 909) Hail, sword of Carroll! Oft hast thou been in the great woof of war, Oft giving battle, beheading high princes. Oft hast thou gone a-raiding in the hands of kings of great judgments, Oft hast thou divided the spoil with a good king worthy of thee. Oft where men of Leinster were hast thou been in a white hand, Oft hast thou been among kings, oft among great bands. Many were the kings that wielded thee in fight, Many a shield hast thou cleft in battle, many a head and chest, many a fair skin. Forty years without sorrow Enna of the noble hosts had thee, Never wast thou in a strait, but in the hands of a very fierce king. Enna gave thee —'twas no niggardly gift—to his own son, to Dunling, For thirty years in his possession, at last thou broughtest ruin to him. Many a king upon a noble steed possessed thee unto Dermot the kingly, the fierce: Sixteen years was the time Dermot had thee. At the feast of Allen Dermot the hardy-born bestowed thee, Dermot, the noble king, gave thee to the man of Mairg, to Murigan. [Pg 73] Forty years stoutly thou wast in the hand of Allen's high-king, With Murigan of mighty deeds thou never wast a year without battle. In Wexford Murigan, the King of Vikings, gave thee to Carroll: While he was upon the yellow earth Carroll gave thee to none. Thy bright point was a crimson point in the battle of Odba of the Foreigners, When thou leftest Aed Finnliath on his back in the battle of Odba of the noble routs. Crimson was thy edge, it was seen; at Belach Moon thou wast proved, In the valorous battle of Alvy's Plain throughout which the fighting raged. Before thee the goodly host broke on a Thursday at Dun Ochtair, When Aed the fierce and brilliant fell upon the hillside above Leafin. Before thee the host broke on the day when Kelly was slain, Flannagan's son, with numbers of troops, in high lofty great Tara. Before thee they ebbed southwards in the battle of the Boyne of the rough feats, When Cnogva fell, the lance of valour, at seeing thee, for dread of thee. Thou wast furious, thou wast not weak, heroic was thy swift force, When Ailill Frosach of Fál[19] fell in the front of the onset. [Pg 74] Thou never hadst a day of defeat with Carroll of the beautiful garths. He swore no lying oath, he went not against his word. Thou never hadst a day of sorrow, many a night thou hadst abroad; Thou hadst awaiting thee many a king with many a battle. O sword of the kings of mighty fires, do not fear to be astray! Thou shalt find thy man of craft, a lord worthy of thee. Who shall henceforth possess thee, or to whom wilt thou deal ruin? From the day that Carroll departed, with whom wilt thou be bedded? Thou shalt not be neglected until thou come to the house of glorious Naas: Where Finn of the feasts is they will hail thee with 'welcome.' [Pg 75] EOCHAID ON THE DEATH OF KING AED MAC DOMNAILL UA NEILL[20] Aed of Ailech, beloved he was to me, Woe, O God, that he should have died! Seven years with Aed of Ath Í— One month with Mael na mBó[21] would be longer! Seven years I had with the King of Ross, Delightful was my time with the lord of Slemish, Though I were but one month with the king in the south, I know that it would weary me. Many honours the king gave to me, To pleasure me he brought down stags: A herd of horses he gave to me in my day, The great son of the woman from Magh Ai. Alas, O Comgall, master of harmonies, That the son of Domnaill should be food for worms! Alas that his face should be on the ground! Alas for noble Ailech without Aed! From the day that great Aed was slain Few men on earth but are in want: Since he has died that was another Lugh,[22] It were right to shed tears of blood. Tara is deprived of her benefactor, A blight is upon his kindred, Torture is put upon the rays of the sun, Glorious Erin is without Aed. [Pg 76] Fair weather shines not on the mountain-side, Fine-clustering fruit is not enjoyed, The gloom of every night is dark Since earth was put over Aed. Ye folk of great Armagh, With whom the son of the chief lies on his back, Cause of reproach will come of it That your grave is open before Aed. In the battle of Craeb Tholcha in the north I left my fair companions behind! Alas for the fruit of the heavy bloodshed Which severed Eochaid and Aed! [Pg 77] ERARD MAC COISSE ON THE DEATH OF KING MALACHY II.[23] Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath![24] Alas that thy lord is not alive! The high-king of Meath of the polished walls, His death has thrown us off our course. Thou without games, without drinking of ale, Thou shining abode of the twisted horns! After Malachy of noble shape Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! I upon the green of thy smooth knolls Like Ronan's son after the Fiana, Or like a hind after her fawn, Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! I got three hundred speckled cups, Three hundred steeds and bridles In this famous fort of noble shape— Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! After Malachy and sweet Brian,[25] And Murchad[26] that was never weak in hurdled battle, My heart has been left without a leap of vigour, Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! Ochone! I am the wretched phantom, Small are my wages since the three are gone. Greater than my own ruin is my cause of lament, Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! [Pg 78] Och! 'tis I that am the body without head, I, Mac Coisse, chief of all poets— Now that my skill and my vigour are gone, Alas for thy state, O Dun na Sciath! [Pg 79] MISCELLANEOUS [Pg 80] [Pg 81] THE MONK AND HIS PET CAT I and my white Pangur Have each his special art: His mind is set on hunting mice, Mine is upon my special craft. I love to rest—better than any fame!— With close study at my little book: White Pangur does not envy me: He loves his childish play. When in our house we two are all alone— A tale without tedium! We have—sport never-ending! Something to exercise our wit. At times by feats of derring-do A mouse sticks in his net, While into my net there drops A difficult problem of hard meaning. He points his full shining eye Against the fence of the wall: I point my clear though feeble eye Against the keenness of science. He rejoices with quick leaps When in his sharp claw sticks a mouse: I too rejoice when I have grasped A problem difficult and dearly loved. Though we are thus at all times, Neither hinders the other, Each of us pleased with his own art Amuses himself alone. [Pg 82] He is a master of the work Which every day he does: While I am at my own work To bring difficulty to clearness. [Pg 83] COLUM CILLE'S GREETING TO IRELAND Delightful to be on the Hill of Howth Before going over the white-haired sea: The dashing of the wave against its face, The bareness of its shores and of its border. Delightful to be on the Hill of Howth After coming over the white-bosomed sea; To be rowing one's little coracle, Ochone! on the wild-waved shore. Great is the speed of my coracle, And its stern turned upon Derry: Grievous is my errand over the main, Travelling to Alba of the beetling brows. My foot in my tuneful coracle, My sad heart tearful: A man without guidance is weak, Blind are all the ignorant. There is a grey eye That will look back upon Erin: It shall never see again The men of Erin nor her women. I stretch my glance across the brine From the firm oaken planks: Many are the tears of my bright soft grey eye As I look back upon Erin. My mind is upon Erin, Upon Loch Lene, upon Linny, Upon the land where Ulstermen are, Upon gentle Munster and upon Meath. [Pg 84] Many in the East are lanky chiels, Many diseases there and distempers, Many they with scanty dress, Many the hard and jealous hearts. Plentiful in the West the fruit of the apple-tree, Many kings and princes; Plentiful are luxurious sloes, Plentiful oak-woods of noble mast. Melodious her clerics, melodious her birds, Gentle her youths, wise her elders, Illustrious her men, famous to behold, Illustrious her women for fond espousal. It is in the West sweet Brendan is, And Colum son of Criffan, And in the West fair Baithin shall be, And in the West shall be Adamnan. Carry my greeting after that To Comgall of eternal life: Carry my greeting after that To the stately king of fair Navan. Carry with thee, thou fair youth, My blessing and my benediction, One half upon Erin, sevenfold, And half upon Alba at the same time. Carry my blessing with thee to the West, My heart is broken in my breast: Should sudden death overtake me, It is for my great love of the Gael. Gael! Gael! beloved name! It gladdens the heart to invoke it: Beloved is Cummin of the beauteous hair, Beloved are Cainnech and Comgall. [Pg 85] Were all Alba mine From its centre to its border, I would rather have the site of a house In the middle of fair Derry. It is for this I love Derry, For its smoothness, for its purity, And for its crowd of white angels From one end to another. It is for this I love Derry, For its smoothness, for its purity; All full of angels Is every leaf on the oaks of Derry. My Derry, my little oak-grove, My dwelling and my little cell, O living God that art in Heaven above, Woe to him who violates it! Beloved are Durrow and Derry, Beloved is Raphoe with purity, Beloved Drumhome with its sweet acorns, Beloved are Swords and Kells! Beloved also to my heart in the West Drumcliff on Culcinne's strand: To gaze upon fair Loch Foyle— The shape of its shores is delightful. Delightful it is, The deep-red ocean where the sea-gulls cry, As I come from Derry afar, It is peaceful and it is delightful. [Pg 86] ON ANGUS THE CULDEE (+ ca. 830) Delightful to sit here thus By the side of the cold pure Nore: Though it was frequented, it was never a path o raids In glorious Disert Bethech.[27] Disert Bethech, where dwelt the man Whom hosts of angels were wont to visit; A pious cloister behind a circle of crosses, Where Angus son of Oivlen used to be. Angus from the assembly of Heaven, Here are his tomb and his grave: 'Tis hence he went to death, On a Friday, to holy Heaven. 'Tis in Clonenagh he was reared, In Clonenagh he was buried: In Clonenagh of many crosses He first read his psalms. [Pg 87] COLUM CILLE THE SCRIBE My hand is weary with writing, My sharp quill is not steady, My slender-beaked pen juts forth A black draught of shining dark-blue ink. A stream of the wisdom of blessed God Springs from my fair-brown shapely hand: On the page it squirts its draught Of ink of the green-skinned holly. My little dripping pen travels Across the plain of shining books, Without ceasing for the wealth of the great— Whence my hand is weary with writing. [Pg 88] THE LAMENT OF THE OLD WOMAN OF BEARE The reason why she was called the Old Woman of Beare was that she had fifty foster-children in Beare. She had seven periods of youth one after another, so that every man who had lived with her came to die of old age, and her grandsons and great-grandsons were tribes and races. For a hundred years she wore the veil which Cummin had blessed upon her head. Thereupon old age and infirmity came to her. 'Tis then she said: Ebb-tide to me as of the sea! Old age causes me reproach. Though I may grieve thereat— Happiness comes out of fat. I am the Old Woman of Beare, An ever-new smock I used to wear: To-day—such is my mean estate— I wear not even a cast-off smock. It is riches Ye love, it is not men: In the time when we lived It was men we loved. Swift chariots, And steeds that carried off the prize,— Their day of plenty has been, A blessing on the King who lent them! My body with bitterness has dropt Towards the abode we know: When the Son of God deems it time Let Him come to deliver His behest. My arms when they are seen Are bony and thin: Once they would fondle, They would be round glorious kings. [Pg 89] When my arms are seen, And they bony and thin, They are not fit, I declare, To be uplifted over comely youths. The maidens rejoice When May-day comes to them: For me sorrow is meeter, For I am wretched, I am an old hag. I hold no sweet converse, No wethers are killed for my wedding-feast, My hair is all but grey, The mean veil over it is no pity. I do not deem it ill That a white veil should be on my head: Time was when many cloths of every hue Bedecked my head as we drank the good ale. The Stone of the Kings on Femen, The Chair of Ronan in Bregon, 'Tis long since storms have reached them. The slabs of their tombs are old and decayed. The wave of the great sea talks aloud, Winter has arisen: Fermuid the son of Mugh to-day I do not expect on a visit. I know what they are doing: They row and row across The reeds of the Ford of Alma— Cold is the dwelling where they sleep. [Pg 90] 'Tis 'O my God!' To me to-day, whatever will come of it. I must take my garment even in the sun:[28] The time is at hand that shall renew me. Youth's summer in which we were I have spent with its autumn: Winter-age which overwhelms all men, To me has come its beginning. Amen! Woe is me! Every acorn has to drop. After feasting by shining candles To be in the gloom of a prayer-house! I had my day with kings Drinking mead and wine: To-day I drink whey-water Among shrivelled old hags. I see upon my cloak the hair of old age, My reason has beguiled me: Grey is the hair that grows through my skin— 'Tis thus I am an old hag. The flood-wave And the second ebb-tide— They have all reached me, So that I know them well. The flood-wave Will not reach the silence of my kitchen: Though many are my company in darkness, A hand has been laid upon them all. O happy the isle of the great sea Which the flood reaches after the ebb! As for me, I do not expect Flood after ebb to come to me. [Pg 91] There is scarce a little place to-day That I can recognise: What was on flood Is all on ebb. [Pg 92] THE DESERTED HOME Sadly talks the blackbird here. Well I know the woe he found: No matter who cut down his nest, For its young it was destroyed. I myself not long ago Found the woe he now has found. Well I read thy song, O bird, For the ruin of thy home. Thy heart, O blackbird, burnt within At the deed of reckless man: Thy nest bereft of young and egg The cowherd deems a trifling tale. At thy clear notes they used to come, Thy new-fledged children, from afar; No bird now comes from out thy house, Across its edge the nettle grows. They murdered them, the cowherd lads, All thy children in one day: One the fate to me and thee, My own children live no more. There was feeding by thy side Thy mate, a bird from o'er the sea: Then the snare entangled her, At the cowherds' hands she died. O Thou, the Shaper of the world! Uneven hands Thou layst on us: Our fellows at our side are spared, Their wives and children are alive. [Pg 93] A fairy host came as a blast To bring destruction to our house: Though bloodless was their taking off, Yet dire as slaughter by the sword. Woe for our wife, woe for our young! The sadness of our grief is great: No trace of them within, without— And therefore is my heart so sad. [Pg 94] CORMAC MAC CULENNAIN SANG THIS Shall I launch my dusky little coracle On the broad-bosomed glorious ocean? Shall I go, O King of bright Heaven, Of my own will upon the brine? Whether it be roomy or narrow, Whether it be served by crowds of hosts— O God, wilt Thou stand by me When it comes upon the angry sea? [Pg 95] ALEXANDER THE GREAT Four men stood by the grave of a man, The grave of Alexander the Proud; They sang words without falsehood Over the prince from fair Greece. Said the first man of them: 'Yesterday there were around the king The men of the world—a sad gathering! Though to-day he is alone.' 'Yesterday the king of the brown world Rode upon the heavy earth: Though to-day it is the earth That rides upon his neck.' 'Yesterday,' said the third wise author, 'Philip's son owned the whole world: To-day he has nought Save seven feet of earth.' 'Alexander the liberal and great Was wont to bestow silver and gold: To-day,' said the fourth man, 'The gold is here, and it is nought.' Thus truly spoke the wise men Around the grave of the high-king: It was not foolish women's talk What those four sang. [Pg 96] [Pg 97] QUATRAINS [Pg 98] [Pg 99] THE SCRIBE A hedge of trees surrounds me, A blackbird's lay sings to me; Above my lined booklet The trilling birds chant to me. In a grey mantle from the top of bushes The cuckoo sings: Verily— may the Lord shield me!— Well do I write under the greenwood. ON A DEAD SCHOLAR Dead is Lon Of Kilgarrow, O great hurt! To Ireland and beyond her border It is ruin of study and of schools. THE CRUCIFIXION At the cry of the first bird They began to crucify Thee, O cheek like a swan! It were not right ever to cease lamenting— It was like the parting of day from night. Ah! though sore the suffering Put upon the body of Mary's Son— Sorer to Him was the grief That was upon her for His sake. [Pg 100] THE PILGRIM AT ROME To go to Rome Is much of trouble, little of profit: The King whom thou seekest here, Unless thou bring Him with thee, thou wilt not find. HOSPITALITY O King of stars! Whether my house be dark or bright, Never shall it be closed against any one, Lest Christ close His house against me. If there be a guest in your house And you conceal aught from him, 'Tis not the guest that will be without it, But Jesus, Mary's Son. THE BLACKBIRD Ah, blackbird, thou art satisfied Where thy nest is in the bush: Hermit that clinkest no bell, Sweet, soft, peaceful is thy note. MOLING SANG THIS When I am among my elders I am proof that sport is forbidden: When I am among the mad young folk They think that I am their junior. [Pg 101] THE CHURCH BELL IN THE NIGHT Sweet little bell That is struck[29] in the windy night, I liefer go to a tryst with thee Than to a tryst with a foolish woman. THE VIKING TERROR Bitter is the wind to-night, It tosses the ocean's white hair: To-night I fear not the fierce warriors of Norway Coursing on the Irish Sea. [Pg 102] FROM THE TRIADS OF IRELAND Three slender things that best support the world: the slender stream of milk from the cow's dug into the pail; the slender blade of green corn upon the ground; the slender thread over the hand of a skilled woman. The three worst welcomes: a handicraft in the same house with the inmates; scalding water upon your feet; salt food without a drink. Three rejoicings followed by sorrow: a wooer's, a thief's, a tale-bearer's. Three rude ones of the world: a youngster mocking an old man; a robust person mocking an invalid; a wise man mocking a fool. Three fair things that hide ugliness: good manners in the ill-favoured; skill in a serf; wisdom in the misshapen. Three sparks that kindle love: a face, demeanour, speech. Three glories of a gathering: a beautiful wife, a good horse, a swift hound. Three fewnesses that are better than plenty: a fewness of fine words; a fewness of cows in grass; a fewness of friends around good ale. Three ruins of a tribe: a lying chief, a false judge, a lustful priest. Three laughing-stocks of the world: an angry man, a jealous man, a niggard. Three signs of ill-breeding: a long visit, staring, constant questioning. Three signs of a fop: the track of his comb in his hair; the track of his teeth in his food; the track of his stick behind him. Three idiots of a bad guest-house: an old hag with a chronic cough; a brainless tartar of a girl; a hobgoblin of a gillie. [Pg 103] Three things that constitute a physician: a complete cure; leaving no blemish behind; a painless examination. Three things betokening trouble: holding plough-land in common; performing feats together; alliance in marriage. Three nurses of theft: a wood, a cloak, night. Three false sisters: 'perhaps,' 'may be,' 'I dare say.' Three timid brothers: 'hush!' 'stop!' 'listen!' Three sounds of increase: the lowing of a cow in milk; the din of a smithy; the swish of a plough. Three steadinesses of good womanhood: keeping a steady tongue; a steady chastity; a steady housewifery. Three excellences of dress: elegance, comfort, lastingness. Three candles that illume every darkness: truth, nature, knowledge. Three keys that unlock thoughts: drunkenness, trustfulness, love. Three youthful sisters: desire, beauty, generosity. Three aged sisters: groaning, chastity, ugliness. Three nurses of high spirits: pride, wooing, drunkenness. Three coffers whose depth is not known: the coffers of a chieftain, of the Church, of a privileged poet. Three things that ruin wisdom: ignorance, inaccurate knowledge, forgetfulness. Three things that are best for a chief: justice, peace, an army. Three things that are worst for a chief: sloth, treachery, evil counsel. Three services, the worst that a man can serve: serving a bad woman, a bad lord, and bad land. [Pg 104] Three lawful handbreadths: a handbreadth between shoes and hose, between ear and hair, and between the fringe of the tunic and the knee. Three angry sisters: blasphemy, strife, foul-mouthedness. Three disrespectful sisters: importunity, frivolity, flightiness. Three signs of a bad man: bitterness, hatred, cowardice. [Pg 105] FROM THE INSTRUCTIONS OF KING CORMAC 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what are the dues of a chief and of an ale-house?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Good behaviour around a good chief, Lights to lamps, Exerting oneself for the company, A proper settlement of seats, Liberality of dispensers, A nimble hand at distributing, Attentive service, Music in moderation, Short story-telling, A joyous countenance, Welcome to guests, Silence during recitals, Harmonious choruses.' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what were your habits when you were a lad?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'I was a listener in woods, I was a gazer at stars, I was blind where secrets were concerned, I was silent in a wilderness, I was talkative among many, I was mild in the mead-hall, I was stern in battle, I was gentle towards allies, I was a physician of the sick, I was weak towards the feeble, I was strong towards the powerful, I was not close lest I should be burdensome, I was not arrogant though I was wise, I was not given to promising though I was strong, I was not venturesome though I was swift, I did not deride the old though I was young, I was not boastful though I was a good fighter, I would not speak about any one in his absence, I would not reproach, but I would praise, I would not ask, but I would give,— [Pg 106] for it is through these habits that the young become old and kingly warriors.' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what is the worst thing you have seen?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Faces of foes in the rout of battle.' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what is the sweetest thing you have heard?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'The shout of triumph after victory, Praise after wages, A lady's invitation to her pillow.' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'how do you distinguish women?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'I distinguish them, but I make no difference among them. [Pg 107] 'They are crabbed as constant companions, haughty when visited, lewd when neglected, silly counsellors, greedy of increase; they have tell-tale faces, they are quarrelsome in company, steadfast in hate, forgetful of love, anxious for alliance, accustomed to slander, stubborn in a quarrel, not to be trusted with a secret, ever intent on pilfering, boisterous in their jealousy, ever ready for an excuse, on the pursuit of folly, slanderers of worth, scamping their work, stiff when paying a visit, disdainful of good men, gloomy and stubborn, viragoes in strife, sorrowful in an ale-house, tearful during music, lustful in bed, arrogant and disingenuous, abettors of strife, niggardly with food, rejecting wisdom, eager to make appointments, sulky on a journey, troublesome bedfellows, deaf to instruction, blind to good advice, fatuous in society, craving for delicacies, chary in their presents, languid when solicited, exceeding all bounds in keeping others waiting, tedious talkers, close practitioners, dumb on useful matters, eloquent on trifles. Happy he who does not yield to them! They should be dreaded like fire, they should be feared like wild beasts. Woe to him who humours them! Better to beware of them than to trust them, better to trample upon them than to fondle them, better to crush them than to cherish them. They are waves that drown you, they are fire that burns you, they are two-edged weapons that cut you, they are moths for tenacity, they are serpents for cunning, they are darkness in light, they are bad among the good, they are worse among the bad.' [Pg 108] 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what is the worst for the body of man?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Sitting too long, lying too long, long standing, lifting heavy things, exerting oneself beyond one's strength, running too much, leaping too much, frequent falls, sleeping with one's leg over the bed-rail, gazing at glowing embers, wax, biestings, new ale, bull-flesh, curdles, dry food, bog-water, rising too early, cold, sun, hunger, drinking too much, eating too much, sleeping too much, sinning too much, grief, running up a height, shouting against the wind, drying oneself by a fire, summer-dew, winter-dew, beating ashes, swimming on a full stomach, sleeping on one's back, foolish romping.' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'what is the worst pleading and arguing?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Contending against knowledge, contending without proofs, taking refuge in bad language, a stiff delivery, a muttering speech, hair-splitting, uncertain proofs, despising books, turning against custom, shifting one's pleading, inciting the mob, blowing one's own trumpet, shouting at the top of one's voice.' [Pg 109] 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'who are the worst for whom you have a comparison?' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'A man with the impudence of a satirist, with the pugnacity of a slave-woman, with the carelessness of a dog, with the conscience of a hound, with a robber's hand, with a bull's strength, with the dignity of a judge, with keen ingenious wisdom, with the speech of a stately man, with the memory of an historian, with the behaviour of an abbot, with the swearing of a horse-thief, and he wise, lying, grey-haired, violent, swearing, garrulous, when he says "the matter is settled, I swear, you shall swear."' 'O Cormac, grandson of Conn,' said Carbery, 'I desire to know how I shall behave among the wise and the foolish, among friends and strangers, among the old and the young, among the innocent and the wicked.' 'Not hard to tell,' said Cormac. 'Be not too wise, nor too foolish, be not too conceited, nor too diffident, be not too haughty, nor too humble, be not too talkative, nor too silent, be not too hard, nor too feeble. [Pg 110] If you be too wise, one will expect too much of you; if you be too foolish, you will be deceived; if you be too conceited, you will be thought vexatious; if you be too humble, you will be without honour; if you be too talkative, you will not be heeded; if you be too silent, you will not be regarded; if you be too hard, you will be broken; if you be too feeble, you will be crushed.' [Pg 111] NOTES 'The Isles of the Happy' and 'The Sea-god's Address to Bran' are poems interspersed in the prose tale called 'The Voyage of Bran son of Febal to the Land of the Living.' For text and translation see my edition (London: D. Nutt, 1895), pp. 4 and 16. The tale was probably first written down early in the eighth, perhaps late in the seventh century. 'The Tryst after Death' (Reicne Fothaid Canainne) belongs to the ninth century. For the original text and translation see my 'Fianaigecht, a collection of hitherto inedited Irish poems and tales relating to Finn and his Fiana' (Dublin: Hodges, Figgis and Co., 1910), p. 10 ff. 'Deirdre's Farewell to Scotland' and 'Deirdre's Lament' are taken from the well-known tale called 'The Death of the Children of Usnech.' The text which is here rendered is that of the Middle-Irish version edited and translated by Whitley Stokes (Irische Texte, ii., Leipzig, 1884), pp. 127 and 145. My rendering follows in the main that of Stokes. 'The Hosts of Faery.'—From the tale called 'Laegaire mac Crimthainn's Visit to the Fairy Realm of Mag Mell,' the oldest copy of which is found in the Book of Leinster, a MS. of the twelfth century, p. 275 b. See S.H. O'Grady's Silva Gadelica (Williams and Norgate, 1892), vol. i. p. 256; vol. ii. p. 290, where, however, the verse is not translated. The two poems from the 'Vision of MacConglinne' are taken from my translation of the twelfth-century burlesque so called (D. Nutt, 1892), pp. 34 and 78. 'A Dirge for King Niall of the Nine Hostages.'—Text and translation in Festschrift für Whitley Stokes (Harrassowitz, Leipzig, 1900), p. 1 ff., and in the Gaelic Journal, x.p. 578 ff. Late eighth or early ninth century. 'The Song of Carroll's Sword.'—Edited and translated in Revue Celtique, xx. p. 7 ff., and again in the Gaelic Journal, x.p. 613. Dallán mac Móre, to whom the poem is ascribed, was chief bard to King Carroll (Cerball) mac Muiregan of Leinster, who reigned from about a.d. 885 to 909. 'Eochaid's Lament.'—Text published in Archiv für celtische Lexikographie (Niemeyer, Halle a. S., 1907), vol. iii. p. 304. [Pg 112] 'Lament on King Malachy II.'—Ibid., p. 305. 'King and Hermit.'—First published and translated by me under that title with Messrs. D. Nutt, 1901. The language is that of the tenth century. 'Song of the Sea.'—Text and translation in Otia Merseiana (the publication of the Arts Faculty, University College, Liverpool), vol. ii. p. 76 ff. Though the poem is ascribed to the celebrated poet Rumann, who died in 748, its language points to the eleventh century. 'Summer has come.'—Text and translation in my Four Songs of Summer and Winter (D. Nutt, 1903), p. 20 ff. The piece probably dates from the tenth century. 'Song of Summer.'—Ibid., p. 8 ff., and Ériu, the Journal of the School of Irish Learning, i. p. 186. The date is the ninth century, I think. 'Summer is gone.'—Ibid., p. 14. Ninth century. 'A Song of Winter.'—From the story called 'The Hiding of the Hill of Howth,' first printed and translated by me in Revue Celtique, xi. p. 125 ff. Probably tenth century. 'Arran.'—Taken from the thirteenth-century prose tale called Agallamh na Senórach, edited and translated by S.H. O'Grady in Silva Gadelica. The poem refers to the island in the Firth of Clyde. 'The Song of Crede, daughter of Guare.'—See text and translation in Ériu, ii. p. 15 ff. Probably tenth century. 'Liadin and Curithir.'—First published and translated by me under that title with Messrs. D. Nutt, 1902. It belongs to the ninth century. 'The Deer's Cry.'—For the text and translation see Stokes and Strachan, Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus (University Press, Cambridge), vol. ii. p. 354. I have adopted the translation there given except in some details. The hymn in the form in which it has come down to us cannot be earlier than the eighth century. 'An Evening Song.'—Printed in my Selections from Old-Irish Poetry, p. 1. Though ascribed to Patrick, the piece cannot be older than the tenth century. 'Patrick's Blessing on Munster.'—Taken from the Tripartite Life of Patrick, edited by Whitley Stokes (Rolls Series, London, 1887), p. 216. Not earlier than the ninth century. [Pg 113] 'The Hermit's Song.'—See Ériu, vol. i. p. 39, where the Irish text will be found. The poem dates from the ninth century. 'A Prayer to the Virgin.'—See Strachan's edition of the original in Ériu, i. p. 122. There is another copy in the Bodleian MS. Laud 615, p. 91, from which I have taken some better readings. The poem is hardly earlier than the tenth century. 'Eve's Lament.'—See Ériu, iii. p. 148. The date is probably the late tenth or early eleventh century. 'On the Flightiness of Thought.'—See Ériu, iii. p. 13. Tenth century. 'To Crinog.'—The Irish text was published by me in the Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie, vol. vi. p. 257. The date of the poem is the tenth century. Crinog was evidently what is known in the literature of early Christianity as ιαγαπητη, virgo subintroducta (συνεισακτοσ) or conhospita, i.e. a nun who lived with a priest, monk, or hermit like a sister or 'spiritual wife' (uxor spiritualis). This practice, which was early suppressed and abandoned everywhere else, seems to have survived in the Irish Church till the tenth century. See on the whole subject H. Achelis, Virgines Subintroductae, ein Beitrag zu i., Kor. vii. (Leipzig, 1902). 'The Devil's Tribute to Moling.'—For text and translation see Whitley Stokes's Goidelica, 2nd ed., p. 180, and his edition of Félire Oingusso, p. 154 ff. I have in the main followed Stokes's rendering. 'Maelisu's Hymn to the Archangel Michael.'—Text and translation in the Gaelic Journal, vol. iv. p. 56. Maelisu ua Brolcháin was a writer of religious poetry both in Irish and Latin, who died in 1056. 'The Mothers' Lament at the Slaughter of the Innocents.'—See text and translation in the Gaelic Journal, iv. p. 89. The piece probably belongs to the eleventh century. 'Colum Cille's Greeting to Ireland.'—From Reeves' edition of Adamnan's Life of St. Columba, p. 285. The poem, like most of those ascribed to this saint, is late, belonging probably to the twelfth century. 'The Lament of the Old Woman of Beare.'—Text and translation in Otia Merseiana, i. p. 119 ff. The language of the poem points to the late tenth century. [Pg 114] 'The Deserted Home.'—See Gaelic Journal, iv. p. 42. Probably eleventh century. 'Colum Cille the Scribe.'—See Gaelic Journal, viii. p. 49. Probably eleventh century. 'The Monk and his Pet Cat.'—Text and translation in Thesaurus Palaeohibernicus, ii. p. 293. I have made my own translation. The language is that of the late eighth or early ninth century. 'The Crucifixion.'—From Leabhar Breac, p. 262 marg. sup. and p. 168 marg. inf. 'Pilgrimage to Rome.'—See Thes. Pal., ii. p. 296. 'On a Dead Scholar.'—From the notes to the Félire Oingusso, ed. Wh. Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Society, vol. xxix.), p. 198. 'Hospitality.'—From the Brussels MS., 5100-4, p. 5, and Leabhar Breac, p. 93, marg. sup. 'The Scribe.'—See Thes. Pal., ii. p. 290. 'Moling sang this.'—From the notes to the Félire Oingusso, ed. Wh. Stokes, p. 150. 'The Church Bell.'—See Irische Texte, iii. p. 155. 'The Blackbird.'—From Leabhar Breac, p. 36, marg. sup. The 'Triads of Ireland.' Edited and translated by me in the Todd Lecture Series of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xiii. (Hodges, Figgis and Co., Dublin, 1906). The collection was made towards the end of the ninth century. The 'Instructions of King Cormac.' Edited and translated by me in the Todd Lecture Series, vol. xv. (Dublin, 1909). Early ninth century. Printed by T. and A. 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