

CATHLEEN.

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

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

PORTER.

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

OLD PEASANT.

God forsakes us.

CATHLEEN.

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

[PEASANTS cross themselves.]

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

[She comes from the oratory door.]

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

These two—the larder and the dairy keys.

To the PORTER.

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

PORTER.

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

CATHLEEN.

Ah, no, not that.

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

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

Mary, Queen of angels,
And all you clouds on clouds of saints, farewell!

SCENE IV.

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

FIRST PEASANT.

I have seen silver and copper, but not gold.

SECOND PEASANT.

It's yellow and it shines.

FIRST PEASANT.

It's beautiful.

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

THIRD PEASANT.

I have seen gold enough.

FOURTH PEASANT.

I would not say that it's so beautiful.

FIRST PEASANT.

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

SECOND PEASANT.

There's nothing in the world it cannot buy.

FIRST PEASANT.

They've bags and bags of it.

They go out. The two MERCHANTS follow silently.

Then ALEEL passes over the stage singing.

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

SCENE V.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

What has she in her coffers now but mice?

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Three days for traffic.

PEASANTS *crowd in with TEIG and SHEMUS.*

SHEMUS.

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

TEIG.

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

SHEMUS.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Who will come deal with us?

SHEMUS.

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

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

I come to deal—if you give honest price.

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in a book*).

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

THE MAN.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

A PEASANT.

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

ANOTHER PEASANT.

I will not trust my mother after this.

FIRST MERCHANT.

There is this crack in you—two hundred crowns.

A PEASANT.

That’s plenty for a rogue.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

I’d give him nothing.

SHEMUS.

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

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

A WOMAN.

What will you give for mine?

FIRST MERCHANT (*reading in book*).

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

THE WOMAN.

The scandalous book.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

THE WOMAN.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

You’re almost safe, I give you fifty crowns

[*She turns to go.*]

A hundred, then.

SHEMUS.

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

She takes them and goes into the crowd.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

(ALEEL enters.)

ALEEL.

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

SHEMUS.

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

ALEEL.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

We cannot take your soul, for it is hers.

ALEEL.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Begone from me,
I may not touch it.

ALEEL.

Is your power so small?

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Drag him away.

He troubles me.

TEIG *and* SHEMUS *lead* ALEEL *into the crowd.*

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Lean forward

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

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

I, too, grow weary,

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

Deal, deal.

SHEMUS.

They say you beat the woman down too low.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

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

There is but little set down here against her.

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

OLD WOMAN.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

That name is like a fire to all damned souls.

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

A PEASANT.

How she screamed out!

SECOND PEASANT.

And maybe we shall scream so.

THIRD PEASANT.

I tell you there is no such place as hell.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

Master, I am afraid.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

MIDDLE-AGED MAN.

Give me my soul again.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

Throws the woman off.

PEASANT.

Come, let's away.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Yes, yes.

ANOTHER PEASANT.

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

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Come, come away.

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

CATHLEEN (*entering*).

And so you trade once more?

FIRST MERCHANT.

In spite of you.

What brings you here, saint with the sapphire eyes?

CATHLEEN.

I come to barter a soul for a great price.

SECOND MERCHANT.

What matter, if the soul be worth the price?

CATHLEEN.

The people starve, therefore the people go

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

It may be the soul's worth it.

CATHLEEN.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

CATHLEEN.

Being my own it seems a priceless thing.

SECOND MERCHANT.

You offer us——

CATHLEEN.

I offer my own soul.

A PEASANT.

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

ANOTHER PEASANT.

Look how their claws clutch in their leathern gloves.

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

Sign with this quill.

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

CATHLEEN *leans forward to sign.*

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

Leave all things to the builder of the heavens.

CATHLEEN.

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

ALEEL (*casting the pen on the ground*).

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

Take him away.

TEIG and SHEMUS *drag him roughly away so that
he falls upon the floor among the PEASANTS.*
CATHLEEN *picks up the pen and signs, then turns
towards the PEASANTS.*

CATHLEEN.

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

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

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

FIRST MERCHANT.

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

SECOND MERCHANT.

Leap feathered on the air
And meet them with her soul caught in your claws.

They rush out. ALEEL crawls into the middle of the room. The twilight has fallen and gradually darkens as the scene goes on. There is a distant muttering of thunder and a sound of rising storm.

ALEEL.

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

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

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

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

OONA.

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

ALEEL.

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

OONA.

God guard her soul.

ALEEL.

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

[He points downward.]

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

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

They begin a song
And there is still some music on their tongues.

OONA (*casting herself face downwards on the floor.*)
O, Maker of all, protect her from the demons,
And if a soul must needs be lost, take mine.

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

OONA.

O, that so many pitchers of rough clay
Should prosper and the porcelain break in two!

She kisses the hands of CATHLEEN.

A PEASANT.

We were under the tree where the path turns,
When she grew pale as death and fainted away.
And while we bore her hither cloudy gusts
Blackened the world and shook us on our feet;
Draw the great bolt, for no man has beheld
So black, bitter, blinding, and sudden a storm.

One who is near the door draws the bolt.

CATHLEEN.

O, hold me, and hold me tightly, for the storm
Is dragging me away.

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

PEASANT.

Hush!

PEASANTS.

Hush!

PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

OTHER PEASANT WOMEN.

Hush!

CATHLEEN (*half rising*).

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

A PEASANT WOMAN.

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

ANOTHER PEASANT WOMAN.

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

CATHLEEN.

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

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

She dies.

OONA.

Bring me the looking-glass.

A WOMAN brings it to her out of the inner room.

OONA holds it over the lips of CATHLEEN. All is silent for a moment. And then she speaks in a half scream:

O, she is dead!

A PEASANT.

She was the great white lily of the world.

A PEASANT.

She was more beautiful than the pale stars.

AN OLD PEASANT WOMAN.

The little plant I love is broken in two.

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

ALEEL.

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

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

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

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

*A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.*

A PEASANT WOMAN.

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

ALEEL.

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

*A flash of lightning followed immediately by
thunder.*

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

Everything is lost in darkness.

AN OLD MAN.

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

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

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

ALEEL.

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

He seizes one of the angels.

Till you speak

You shall not drift into eternity.

THE ANGEL.

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

ALEEL releases the ANGEL and kneels.

OONA.

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

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

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

LYRICS.

(1892-1899)

LYRICS

(1801-1802)

THE HOSTING OF THE SIDHE.

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

THE EVERLASTING VOICES.

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

THE MOODS.

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

THE LOVER TELLS OF THE ROSE IN HIS
HEART.

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

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

INTO THE TWILIGHT.

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

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

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

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

THE SONG OF WANDERING AENGUS.

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

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

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

THE HEART OF THE WOMAN.

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

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

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

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

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

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

HE BIDS HIS BELOVED BE AT PEACE.

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

HE REPROVES THE CURLEW.

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

HE REMEMBERS FORGOTTEN BEAUTY.

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

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

HE GIVES HIS BELOVED CERTAIN RHYMES.

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

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

TO MY HEART, BIDDING IT HAVE NO FEAR.

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

THE CAP AND BELLS.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE VALLEY OF THE BLACK FIG.

THE dews drop slowly and dreams gather: unknown
spears

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

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

THE LOVER ASKS FORGIVENESS BECAUSE OF
HIS MANY MOODS.

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

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

HE TELLS OF THE PERFECT BEAUTY.

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

HE HEARS THE CRY OF THE SEDGE.

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

THE TRAVAIL OF PASSION.

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

THE LOVER PLEADS WITH HIS FRIEND FOR
OLD FRIENDS.

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

HE WISHES HIS BELOVED WERE DEAD.

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

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

HE WISHES FOR THE CLOTHS OF HEAVEN.

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

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MAEVE.

THE OLD AGE OF QUEEN MARY.

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

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

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

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

He could remember when he had had fine dreams.
It was before the time of the great war
Over the White-Horned Bull, and the Brown Bull.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

O when will you grow weary?"

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

BAILE AND AILLINN.

(1902)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Linked by a gold chain each to each,
And with low murmuring laughing speech
Alighted on the windy grass.

They knew him: his changed body was
Tall, proud and ruddy, and light wings
Were hovering over the harp-strings
That Etain, Midhir's wife, had wove
In the hid place, being crazed by love.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

LYRICS.

(1899-1904)

1871

(1871)

THE FOLLY OF BEING COMFORTED.

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

OLD MEMORY.

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

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

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

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

NEVER GIVE ALL THE HEART.

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

THE WITHERING OF THE BOUGHS.

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

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

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

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

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

THE RAGGED WOOD.

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

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

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

UNDER THE MOON.

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

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

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

To dream of women whose beauty was folded in dis-
may,

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

ADAM'S CURSE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

RED HANRAHAN'S SONG ABOUT IRELAND.

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

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

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

THE OLD MEN ADMIRING THEMSELVES
IN THE WATER.

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

THE HAPPY TOWNLAND.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ON BAILE'S STRAND.

(1904)

ON BAKER'S STRAND.

(1904)

CUCHULAIN, *the King of Muirthemne.*

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

DAIRE, *a King.*

FINTAIN, *a blind man.*

BARACH, *a fool.*

A Young Man.

Young Kings and old Kings.

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

FOOL.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FOOL.

Why do you say "ah—ah"?

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

How will he do that?

BLIND MAN.

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

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

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

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

FOOL.
You said it was done to a turn.

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

FOOL.
My teeth are growing long with the hunger.

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

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

Go on, tell me about the fight.

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

Nobody could do that.

(Singing.)

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

BLIND MAN.

Hush! hush!

FOOL (*still singing.*)

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

(*Spoken.*)

Out of the very bottom of the bitter black North.

BLIND MAN.

Hush, I say!

FOOL.

Does Cuchulain know that he is coming to kill him?

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

Tell me the secret.

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

CUCHULAIN passes by in the mist outside the big door.

FOOL.

Where is Cuchulain going?

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

I won't!

BLIND MAN.

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

FOOL.

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

A murmur of voices in the distance.

BLIND MAN.

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

BLIND MAN *goes out by side-door.*

FOOL.

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

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

He runs out, the last words being heard outside.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

I am not blasphemous.

CONCHUBAR.

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

CUCHULAIN.

I have not said it.

CONCHUBAR.

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

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

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

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

CONCHUBAR.

Listen to me:

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

Outside the door in the blue light of the sea mist

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

CUCHULAIN (*going near to the door*).

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

A YOUNG KING.

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

CUCHULAIN.

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

THE KINGS.

All, all, all, all!

A KING.

Do what the High King bids you.

CONCHUBAR.

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