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THE ISLE OF DREAMS

THE ISLE OF DREAMS

BY

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Mdccccv

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TO

YIOLIN ORAIN

THIS BOOK OF DREAMS AND MEMORIES

F. M.

THE ISLE OF DREAMS

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A FEW places in the world are to be held holy, because of the love which consecrates them and the faith which enshrines them. Their names are themselves talismans of spiritual beauty. Of these is Iona.

But to write of Iona, there are many ways of approach. No place that has a spiritual history can, to those who know nothing of it, be revealed by facts and descriptions. The approach may be through the obscure glens of another's mind and so out by the moonlit way, as well as by the track that thousands travel. I have nothing to say here of Iona's acreage, or fisheries, or pastures: nothing of how the islanders live. These things are the accidental. There is small difference in simple life anywhere. Moreover, there are many to tell all that need be known.

There is one Iona, a little island of the west. It is but a small isle, fashioned of a little sand, a few grasses salt with the spray of an ever-restless wave, a few rocks that wade in heather and upon whose brows the sea-wind weaves the yellow lichen. But in this little island a lamp was lit whose flame

lighted pagan Europe, from the Saxon in his fens to the swarthy folk who came by Greek waters to trade the Orient. Here Learning and Faith had their tranquil home, when the shadow of the sword lay upon all lands, from Syracuse by the Tyrrhene Sea to the rainy isles of Orcc. From age to age, lowly hearts have never ceased to ease their burthen here. To tell the story of Iona would be to go back to God, and to end in God. There is another Iona, of which I would speak. I do not say that it lies open to all. It is as we come that we find. If we come, bringing nothing with us, we go away ill-content, having seen and heard nothing of what we had vaguely expected to see or hear. It is another Iona than the Iona of sacred memories and prophecies: Iona the metropolis of dreams. None can understand it who does not see it through its pagan light, its Christian light, its singular blending of paganism and romance and spiritual beauty. There is, too, an Iona that is more than Gaelic, that is more than a place rainbow-lit with the seven desires of the world, the Iona that, if we will it so, is a mirror of your heart and of mine.

And that is why I would speak here of Iona as befalls my pen, rather than as perhaps my pen should go: and choose legend and remembrance, and my own and other

memories and associations, and knowledge of my own and others, and hidden meanings, and beauty and strangeness surviving in dreams and imaginations, rather than facts and figures, that others could adduce more deftly and with more will.

I

When I was a child I used to throw offerings — small coins, flowers, shells, even a newly caught trout, once a treasured flint arrow-head — into the sea-loch by which we lived. My Hebridean nurse had often told me of Shony, a mysterious sea-god, and I know I spent much time in wasted adoration: a fearful worship, not unmixed with disappointment and some anger. Not once did I see him. I was frighted time after time, but the sudden cry of a heron, or the snort of a pollack chasing the mackerel, or the abrupt uplifting of a seal's head, became over-familiar, and I desired terror, and could not find it by the shore. Inland, after dusk, there was always the mysterious multitude of shadow. There, too, I could hear the wind leaping and growling. But by the shore I never knew any dread, even in the darkest night. The sound and company of the sea washed away all fears.

I was amused not long ago to hear a little girl singing, as she ran wading through the foam of a troubled sunlit sea, as it broke on those wonderful white sands of Iona —

> " Shanny, Shanny, Shanny,
> Catch my feet and tickle my toes !
> And if you can, Shanny, Shanny, Shanny,
> I'll go with you where no one knows ! "

I have no doubt this daintier Shanny was my old friend Shony, whose more terrifying way was to clutch boats by the keel and drown the sailors, and make a death-necklace of their teeth. An evil Shony; for once he netted a young girl who was swimming in a loch, and when she would not give him her love he tied her to a rock, and to this day her long brown hair may be seen floating in the shallow green wave at the ebb of the tide. One need not name the place !

The Shanny song recalls to me an old Gaelic-alphabet rhyme, wherein a *Maighdeann-Mhara*, or Mermaid, stood for M, and a *Suire* (also a mermaid) stood for S; and my long perplexities as to whether I would know a shuera from a midianmara when I saw either. It also recalls to me that it was from a young schoolmaster priest, who had come back from Ireland to die at home, that I first heard of the Beth-Luis-Nuin, the old Gaelic equivalent of " the A B C." Every letter in

the Gaelic alphabet is represented by a tree, and Beithe and Luis and Nuin are the Birch, the Rowan, and the Ash. The reason why the alphabet is called the Beth-Luis-Nuin is that B, L, N, and not A, B, C, are its first three letters. It consists of eighteen letters — and in ancient Gaelic seventeen, for H (the Huath, or Whitethorn) does not exist there, I believe: and these run, B, L, N, F, S (H), D, T, C, M, G, P, R, A, O, U, E, I — each letter represented by the name of a tree, "Birch, Rowan, Ash," etc. Properly, there is no C in Gaelic, for though as a signature the letter C is common, it has always the sound of K.

Since this page first appeared I have had so many letters about the Gaelic alphabet of to-day that I take the opportunity to add a few lines. To-day as of old all the letters of the Gaelic alphabet are called after trees, from the oak to the shrub-like elder, with the exception of G, T, and U, which stand for the Ivy, Furze, and Heather. It no longer runs B, L, N, etc., but in sequence follows the familiar and among western peoples universal A, B, C, etc. It is, however, short of our Roman alphabet by eight letters, J, K, Q, V, W, X, Y, and Z. On the other hand each of these is represented, either by some other letter having a like value or by a combination: thus, K is identical with C,

which does not exist in Gaelic as a soft sound any more than it does in Greek, but only as the C in English words such as *cat* or *cart*, or in combination with *h* as a gutteral, as in *loch* — while V, as common a sound in Gaelic as the hiss of S in English, exists in almost every second or third word as *bh* or *mh*. The Gaelic A B C of to-day, then, runs as follows: Ailm, Beite, Coll, Dur, Eagh, Fearn, Gath, Huath, Iogh, Luis, Muin, Nuin, Oir, Peith, Ruis, Suil, Teine, Ur —— which, again, is equivalent to saying Elm, Birch, Hazel, Oak, Aspen, Alder, Ivy, Whitethorn, Yew, Rowan or Quicken, Vine, Ash, Spindle-tree, Pine, Elder, Willow, Furze, Heath.

The little girl who knew so much about Shanny knew nothing but of her own A B C. But I owe her a debt, since through her I came upon my good friend "Gunainm." From her I heard first, there on Iona, on a chance visit of a few summer days, of two of the most beautiful of the ancient Gaelic hymns, the Fiacc Hymn and the Hymn of Broccán. My friend had delineated them as missals, with a strangely beautiful design to each. How often I have thought of one, illustrative of a line in the Fiacc Hymn: "There was pagan darkness in Eiré in those days: the people adored Faerie." In the

Broccán Hymn (composed by one Broccán in the time of Lugaid, son of Loegaire, A. D. 500) is one particularly lovely line: "Victorious Bride (Bridget) loved not this vain world: here, ever, she sat the seat of a bird on a cliff."

In a dream I dream frequently, that of being the wind, and drifting over fragrant hedgerows and pastures, I have often, through unconscious remembrance of that image of St. Bride sitting the seat of a bird on the edge of the cliff that is this world, felt myself, when not lifted on sudden warm fans of dusk, propelled as on a swift wing from the edge of a precipice.

I would that we had these winds of dream to command. I would, now that I am far from it, that this night at least I might pass over Iona, and hear the sea-doves by the ruins making their sweet mournful croon of peace, and lift, as a shadow gathering phantom flowers, the pale orchis by the lapwing's nest.

II

As a child I had some wise as well as foolish instruction concerning the nations of Faerie. If, in common with nearly all happy children, I was brought up in intimate, even in circumstantial, knowledge of "the fairies"

— being charitably taught, for one thing, so that I have often left a little bowl of milk, a saucerful of oatcake and honey, and the like, under a wooden seat, where they would be sure to see it — I was told also of the Sìdhe, often so rashly and ignorantly alluded to as the fairies in the sense of a pretty, diminutive, harmless, natural folk; and by my nurse Barabal instructed in some of the ways, spells, influences, and even appearances of these powerful and mysterious clans.

I do not think, unless as a very young child, I ever confused them. I recollect well my pleasure at a sign of gratitude. I was fond of making little reed or bulrush or ash flutes, but once I was in a place where these were difficult to get, and I lost the only one I had. That night I put aside a small portion of my supper of bread and milk and honey, and remember also the sacrifice of a gooseberry of noble proportions, relinquished, not without a sigh, in favour of any wandering fairy lad.

Next morning when I ran out — three of us then had a wild morning performance we called some fantastic, forgotten name, and ourselves the Sun-dancers — I saw by the emptied saucer my little reed-flute! Here was proof positive! I was so grateful for that fairy's gratitude, that when dusk came

again I not only left a larger supper-dole than usual, but, decked with white foxglove bells (in which I had unbounded faith), sat drenched in the dew and played my little reed. Any moment (I was sure) a small green fellow would appear, and with wild indignation I found myself snatched from the grass, and my ears dinned now with reproaches about the dew, now with remonstrances against "that frightfu' reed-screeching that scared awa' the varry hens."

Ah, there are souls that know nothing of fairies, or music!

III

But the Sìdhe are a very different people from the small clans of the earth's delight.

However (though I could write of both a great volume), I have little to say of either just now, except in one connection.

It is commonly said that the People of the Sìdhe dwell within the hills, or in the underworld. In some of the isles their home, now, is spoken of as Tir-na-thonn, the Land of the Wave, or Tir-fo-Tuinn, the Land under the Sea.

But from a friend, an islander of Iona, I have learned many things, and among them, that the Shee no longer dwell within the inland hills, and that though many of them

inhabit the lonelier isles of the west, and in particular The Seven Hunters, their Kingdom is in the North.

Some say it is among the pathless mountains of Iceland. But my friend spoke to an Iceland man, and he said he had never seen them. There were Secret People there, but not the Gaelic Sìdhe.

Their Kingdom is in the North, under the *Fir-Chlisneach*, the Dancing Men, as the Hebrideans call the polar aurora. They are always young there. Their bodies are white as the wild swan, their hair yellow as honey, their eyes blue as ice. Their feet leave no mark on the snow. The women are white as milk, with eyes like sloes, and lips like red rowans. They fight with shadows, and are glad; but the shadows are not shadows to them. The Shee slay great numbers at the full moon, but never hunt on moonless nights, or at the rising of the moon, or when the dew is falling. Their lances are made of reeds that glitter like shafts of ice, and it is ill for a mortal to find one of these lances, for it is tipped with the salt of a wave that no living thing has touched, neither the wailing mew nor the finned sgádan nor his tribe, nor the narwhal. There are no men of the human clans there, and no shores, and the tides are forbidden.

Long ago one of the monks of Columba sailed thither. He sailed for thrice seven days till he lost the rocks of the north; and for thrice thirty days, till Iceland in the south was like a small bluebell in a great grey plain; and for thrice three years among bergs. For the first three years the finned things of the sea brought him food; for the second three years he knew the kindness of the creatures of the air; in the last three years angels fed him. He lived among the Sìdhe for three hundred years. When he came back to Iona, he was asked where he had been all that long night since evensong to matins. The monks had sought him everywhere, and at dawn had found him lying in the hollow of the long wave that washes Iona on the north. He laughed at that, and said he had been on the tops of the billows for nine years and three months and twenty-one days, and for three hundred years had lived among a deathless people. He had drunk sweet ale every day, and every day had known love among flowers and green bushes, and at dusk had sung old beautiful forgotten songs, and with star-flame had lit strange fires, and at the full of the moon had gone forth laughing to slay. It was heaven, there, under the Lights of the North. When he was asked how that people might be

known, he said that away from there they had a cold, cold hand, a cold, still voice, and cold ice-blue eyes. They had four cities at the four ends of the green diamond that is the world. That in the north was made of earth; that in the east, of air; that in the south, of fire; that in the west, of water. In the middle of the green diamond that is the world is the Glen of Precious Stones. It is in the shape of a heart, and glows like a ruby, though all stones and gems are there. It is there the Sìdhe go to refresh their deathless life.

The holy monks said that this kingdom was certainly Ifurin, the Gaelic Hell. So they put their comrade alive in a grave in the sand, and stamped the sand down upon his head, and sang hymns so that mayhap even yet his soul might be saved, or, at least, that when he went back to that place he might remember other songs than those sung by the milk-white women with eyes like sloes and lips red as rowans. "Tell that honey-mouthed cruel people they are in Hell," said the abbot, "and give them my ban and my curse unless they will cease laughing and loving sinfully and slaying with bright lances, and will come out of their secret places and be baptized."

They have not yet come.

This adventurer of the dreaming mind is another Oran, that fabulous Oran of whom the later Columban legends tell. I think that other Orans go out, even yet, to the Country of the Sìdhe. But few come again. It must be hard to find that glen at the heart of the green diamond that is the world; but, when found, harder to return by the way one came.

IV

In the *Félire na Naomh Nerennach* is a strangely beautiful if fantastic legend of one Mochaoi, Abbot of n'-Aondruim in Uladh. With some companions he was at the edge of a wood, and while busy in cutting wattles wherewith to build a church, "he heard a bright bird singing on the blackthorn near him. It was more beautiful than the birds of the world." Mochaoi listened entranced. There was more in that voice than in the throat of any bird he had ever heard, so he stopped his wattle-cutting, and, looking at the bird, courteously asked who was thus delighting him. The bird at once answered, "A man of the people of my Lord" (that is, an angel). "Hail," said Mochaoi, "and for why that, O bird that is an angel?" "I am come here by command to encourage you in your good work, but also, because of the love in your heart, to

amuse you for a time with my sweet singing." "I am glad of that," said the saint. Thereupon the bird sang a single surpassing sweet air, and then fixed his beak in the feathers of his wing, and slept. But Mochaoi heard the beauty and sweetness and infinite range of that song for three hundred years. Three hundred years were in that angelic song, but to Mochaoi it was less than a hour. For three hundred years he remained listening, in the spell of beauty: nor in that enchanted hour did any age come upon him, or any withering upon the wattles he had gathered; nor in the wood itself did a single leaf turn to a red or yellow flame before his eyes. Where the spider spun her web, she spun no more: where the dove leaned her grey breast from the fir, she leaned still.

Then suddenly the bird took its beak from its wing-feathers, and said farewell. When it was gone, Mochaoi lifted his wattles, and went homeward as one in a dream. He stared, when he looked for the little wattled cells of the Sons of Patrick. A great church built of stone stood before his wondering eyes. A man passed him, and told the stranger that it was the church of St. Mochaoi. When he spoke to the assembled brothers, none knew him: some thought he had been taken away by the people of the

Shee, and come back at fairy-nightfall, which is the last hour of the last day of three hundred years. "Tell us your name and lineage," they cried. "I am Mochaoi, Abbot of n'-Aondruim," he said, and then he told his tale, and they knew him, and made him abbot again. In the enchanted wood a shrine was built, and about it a church grew, "and surpassingly white angels often alighted there, or sang hymns to it from the branches of the forest trees, or leaned with their foot on tiptoe, their eyes on the horizon, their ear on the ground, their wings flapping, their bodies trembling, waiting to send tidings of prayer and repentance with a beat of their wings to the King of the Everlasting."

There were many who thought that Mochaoi was dead, when he was seen no more of his fellow-monks at the forest-monastery of n'-Aondruim in Uladh. But his chronicler knew: "a sleep without decay of the body Mochaoi of Antrim slept."

I am reminded of the story of Mochaoi when I think of Iona. I think she too, beautiful isle, while gathering the kelp of human longings and tears and hopes, strewn upon her beaches by wild waves of the world, stood, enchanted, to listen to a Song of Beauty. "That is a new voice I hear in the wave," we can dream of her saying, and of

the answer: "we are the angelical flocks of the Shepherd: we are the Voices of the Eternal: listen a while!"

It has been a long sleep, that enchanted swoon. But Mochaoi awoke, after three hundred years, and there was neither time upon his head, nor age in his body, nor a single withered leaf of the forest at his feet. And shall not that be possible for the Isle of Dreams, whose sands are the dust of martyrs and noble and beautiful lives, which was granted to one man by "one of the people of my lord?"

V

When I think of Iona I think often, too, of a prophecy once connected with Iona; though perhaps current no more in a day when prophetical hopes are fallen dumb and blind.

It is commonly said that, if he would be heard, none should write in advance of his times. That I do not believe. Only, it does not matter how few listen. I believe that we are close upon a great and deep spiritual change. I believe a new redemption is even now conceived of the Divine Spirit in the human heart, that is itself as a woman, broken in dreams and yet sustained in faith, patient, long-suffering, looking towards home.

I believe that though the Reign of Peace may be yet a long way off, it is drawing near: and that Who shall save us anew shall come divinely as a Woman, to save as Christ saved, but not, as He did, to bring with Her a sword. But whether this Divine Woman, this Mary of so many passionate hopes and dreams, is to come through mortal birth, or as an immortal Breathing upon our souls, none can yet know.

Sometimes I dream of the old prophecy that Christ shall come again upon Iona, and of that later and obscure prophecy which foretells, now as the Bride of Christ, now as the Daughter of God, now as the Divine Spirit embodied through mortal birth in a Woman, as once through mortal birth in a Man, the coming of a new Presence and Power: and dream that this may be upon Iona, so that the little Gaelic island may become as the little Syrian Bethlehem. But more wise it is to dream, not of hallowed ground, but of the hallowed gardens of the soul wherein She shall appear white and radiant. Or, that upon the hills, where we are wandered, the Shepherdess shall call us home.

From one man only, on Iona itself, I have heard any allusion to the prophecy as to the Saviour who shall yet come: and he in part

was obscure, and confused the advent of Mary into the spiritual world with the possible coming again to earth of Mary, as another Redeemer, or with a descending of the Divine Womanhood upon the human heart as an universal spirit descending upon awaiting souls. But in intimate remembrance I recall the words and faith of one or two whom I loved well. Nor must I forget that my old nurse, Barabal, used to sing a strange "oran," to the effect that when St. Bride came again to Iona it would be to bind the hair and wash the feet of the Bride of Christ.

One of those to whom I allude was a young Hebridean priest, who died in Venice, after troubled years, whose bitterest vicissitude was the clouding of his soul's hope by the wings of a strange multitude of dreams — one of whom and whose end I have elsewhere written: and he told me once how, "as our forefathers and elders believed and still believe, that Holy Spirit shall come again which once was mortally born among us as the Son of God, but, then, shall be the Daughter of God. The Divine Spirit shall come again as a Woman. Then for the first time the world will know peace." And when I asked him if it were not prophesied that the Woman is to be born in Iona, he said that if this prophecy had been made it was

doubtless of an Iona that was symbolic, but that this was a matter of no moment, for She would rise suddenly in many hearts, and have her habitation among dreams and hopes. The other who spoke to me of this Woman who is to save was an old fisherman of a remote island of the Hebrides, and one to whom I owe more than to any other spiritual influence in my childhood, for it was he who opened to me the three gates of Beauty. Once this old man, Seumas Macleod, took me with him to a lonely haven in the rocks, and held me on his knee as we sat watching the sun sink and the moon climb out of the eastern wave. I saw no one, but abruptly he rose and put me from him, and bowed his grey head as he knelt before one who suddenly was standing in that place. I asked eagerly who it was. He told me that it was an Angel. Later, I learned (I remember my disappointment that the beautiful vision was not winged with great white wings) that the Angel was one soft flame of pure white, and that below the soles of his feet were curling scarlet flames. He had come in answer to the old man's prayer. He had come to say that we could not see the Divine One whom we awaited. "But you will yet see that Holy Beauty," said the Angel, and Seumas believed, and I too believed, and believe.

He took my hand, and I knelt beside him, and he bade me repeat the words he said. And that was how I first prayed to Her who shall yet be the Balm of the World.

And since then I have learned, and do see, that not only prophecies and hopes, and desires unclothed yet in word or thought, foretell Her coming, but already a multitude of spirits are in the gardens of the soul, and are sowing seed and calling upon the wind of the south; and that everywhere are watching eyes and uplifted hands, and signs which cannot be mistaken, in many lands, in many peoples, in many minds; and, in the heaven itself that the soul sees, the surpassing signature.

VI

I recall one whom I knew, a fisherman of the little green island: and I tell this story of Coll here, for it is to me more than the story of a dreaming islander. One night, lying upon the hillock that is called Cnoc-nan-Aingeal, because it is here that St. Colum was wont to hold converse with an angel out of heaven, he watched the moonlight move like a slow fin through the sea: and in his heart were desires as infinite as the waves of the sea, the moving homes of the dead.

And while he lay and dreamed, his thoughts idly adrift as a net in deep waters, he closed his eyes, muttering the Gaelic words of an old line

In the Isle of Dreams God shall yet fulfil
Himself anew.

Hearing a footfall, he stirred. A man stood beside him. He did not know the man, who was young, and had eyes dark as hill-tarns, with hair light and soft as thistledown; and moved light as a shadow, delicately treading the grass as the wind treads it. In his hair he had twined the fantastic leaf of the horn-poppy.

The islander did not move or speak: it was as though a spell were upon him.

"God be with you," he said at last, uttering the common salutation.

"And with you, Coll mac Coll," answered the stranger. Coll looked at him. Who was this man, with the sea-poppy in his hair, who, unknown, knew him by name? He had heard of one whom he did not wish to meet, the Green Harper: also of a grey man of the sea whom islesmen seldom alluded to by name: again, there was the Amadan Dhu . . . but at that name Coll made the sign of the cross, and remembering what Father Allan had told him in South Uist, muttered a holy exorcism of the Trinity.

The man smiled.

"You need have no fear, Coll mac Coll," he said quietly.

"You that know my name so well are welcome, but if you in turn would tell me your name I should be glad."

"I have no name that I can tell you," answered the stranger gravely; "but I am not of those who are unfriendly. And because you can see me and speak to me, I will help you to whatsoever you may wish."

Coll laughed.

"Neither you nor any man can do that. For now that I have neither father nor mother, nor brother nor sister, and my lass too is dead, I wish neither for sheep nor cattle, nor for new nets and a fine boat, nor a big house, nor as much money as MacCailein Mòr has in the bank at Inveraora."

"What then do you wish for, Coll mac Coll?"

"I do not wish for what cannot be, or I would wish to see again the dear face of Morag, my lass. But I wish for all the glory and wonder and power there is in the world, and to have it all at my feet, and to know everything that the Holy Father himself knows, and have kings coming to me as the crofters come to MacCailein Mòr's factor."

"You can have that, Coll mac Coll," said

the Green Harper, and he waved a withe of hazel he had in his hand.

"What is that for?" said Coll.

"It is to open a door that is in the air. And now, Coll, if that is your wish of all wishes, and you will give up all other wishes for that wish, you can have the sovereignty of the world. Ay, and more than that: you shall have the sun like a golden jewel in the hollow of your right hand, and all the stars as pearls in your left, and have the moon as a white shining opal above your brows, with all knowledge behind the sun, within the moon, and beyond the stars."

Coll's face shone. He stood, waiting. Just then he heard a familiar sound in the dusk. The tears came into his eyes.

"Give me instead," he cried, "give me a warm breast-feather from that grey dove of the woods that is winging home to her young." He looked as one moon-dazed. None stood beside him. He was alone. Was it a dream, he wondered? But a weight was lifted from his heart. Peace fell upon him as dew upon grey pastures. Slowly he walked homeward. Once, glancing back, he saw a white figure upon the knoll, with a face noble and beautiful. Was it Colum himself come again? he mused: or that white angel with whom the Saint was wont

to discourse, and who brought him intimacies of God? or was it but the wave-fire of his dreaming mind, as lonely and cold and unreal as that which the wind of the south makes upon the wandering hearths of the sea?

I tell this story of Coll here, for, as I have said, it is to me more than the story of a dreaming islander. He stands for the soul of a race. It is because, to me, he stands for the sorrowful genius of our race, that I have spoken of him here. Below all the strife of lesser desires, below all that he has in common with other men, he has the live-long unquenchable thirst for the things of the spirit. This is the thirst that makes him turn so often from the near securities and prosperities, and indeed all beside, setting his heart aflame with vain, because illimitable, desires. For him, the wisdom before which knowledge is a frosty breath: the beauty that is beyond what is beautiful. For, like Coll, the world itself has not enough to give him. And at the last, and above all, he is like Coll in this, that the sun and moon and stars themselves may become as trampled dust, for only a breast-feather of that Dove of the Eternal, which may have its birth in mortal love, but has its evening home where are the dews of immortality.

VII

"The Dove of the Eternal." It was from the lips of an old priest of the Hebrides that I first heard these words. I was a child, and asked him if it was a white dove, such as I had seen fanning the sunglow in Icolmkill.

"Yes," he told me, "the Dove is white, and it was beloved of Colum, and is of you, little one, and of me."

"Then it is not dead?"

"It is not dead."

I was in a more wild and rocky isle than Iona then, and when I went into a solitary place close by my home it was to a stony wilderness so desolate that in many moods I could not bear it. But that day, though there were no sheep lying beside boulders as grey and still, nor whinnying goats (creatures that have always seemed to me strangely homeless, so that, as a child, it was often my noon-fancy on hot days to play to them on a little reed-flute I was skilled in making, thwarting the hill-wind at the small holes to the fashioning of a rude furtive music, which I believed comforted the goats, though why I did not know, and probably did not try to know): and though I could hear nothing but the soft, swift, slipping feet of the wind among rocks and grass and a noise of the

tide crawling up from a shore hidden behind crags (beloved of swallows for the small honey-flies which fed upon the thyme): still, on that day, I was not ill at ease, nor in any way disquieted. But before me I saw a white rock-dove, and followed it gladly. It flew circling among the crags, and once I thought it had passed seaward; but it came again, and alit on a boulder.

I went upon my knees, and prayed to it, and, as nearly as I can remember, in these words:—

'O Dove of the Eternal, I want to love you, and you to love me: and if you live on Iona, I want you to show me, when I go there again, the place where Colum the Holy talked with an angel. And I want to live as long as you, Dove" (I remember thinking this might seem disrespectful, and that I added hurriedly and apologetically), "Dove of the Eternal."

That evening I told Father Ivor what I had done. He did not laugh at me. He took me on his knee, and stroked my hair, and for a long time was so silent that I thought he was dreaming. He put me gently from him, and kneeled at the chair, and made this simple prayer which I have never forgotten: "O Dove of the Eternal, grant the little one's prayer."

That is a long while ago now, and I have sojourned since in Iona, and there and elsewhere known the wild doves of thought and dream. But I have not, though I have longed, seen again the White Dove that Colum so loved. For long I thought it must have left Iona and Barra too, when Father Ivor died.

Yet I have not forgotten that it is not dead. "I want to live as long as you," was my child's plea: and the words of the old priest, knowing and believing were, "O Dove of the Eternal, grant the little one's prayer."

VIII

It was not in Barra, but in Iona, that, while yet a child, I set out one evening to find the Divine Forges. A Gaelic sermon, preached on the shoreside by an earnest man, who, going poor and homeless through the west, had tramped the long roads of Mull overagainst us, and there fed to flame a smouldering fire, had been my ministrant in these words. The "revivalist" had spoken of God as one who would hammer the evil out of the soul and weld it to good, as a blacksmith at his anvil: and suddenly, with a dramatic gesture, he cried: "This little island of Iona is this anvil; God is your

blacksmith: but oh, poor people, who among you knows the narrow way to the Divine Forges?"

There is a spot on Iona that has always had a strange enchantment for me. Behind the ruined walls of the Columban church, the slopes rise, and the one isolated hill of Iona is, there, a steep and sudden wilderness. It is commonly called Dûn-I (*Doon-ee*), for at the summit in old days was an island fortress; but the Gaelic name of the whole of this uplifted shoulder of the isle is Slibh Meanach. Hidden under a wave of heath and boulder, near the broken rocks, is a little pool. From generation to generation this has been known, and frequented, as the Fountain of Youth.

There, through boggy pastures, where the huge-horned shaggy cattle stared at me, and up through the ling and roitch, I climbed: for, if anywhere, I thought that from there I might see the Divine Forges, or at least might discover a hidden way, because of the power of that water, touched on the eyelids at sunlift, at sunset, or at the rising of the moon.

From where I stood I could see the people still gathered upon the dunes by the shore, and the tall, ungainly figure of the preacher. In the narrow strait were two boats, one

being rowed across to Fionnaphort, and the other, with a dun sail burning flame-brown, hanging like a bird's wing against Glas Eilean, on the tideway to the promontory of Earraid. Was the preacher still talking of the Divine Forges? I wondered; or were the men and women in the ferry hurrying across to the Ross of Mull to look for them among the inland hills? And the Earraid men in the fishing-smack: were they sailing to see if they lay hidden in the wilderness of rocks, where the muffled barking of the seals made the loneliness more wild and remote?

I wetted my eyelids, as I had so often done before (and not always vainly, though whether vision came from the water, or from a more quenchless spring within, I know not), and looked into the little pool. Alas! I could see nothing but the reflection of a star, too obscured by light as yet for me to see in the sky, and, for a moment, the shadow of a gull's wing as the bird flew by far overhead. I was too young then to be content with the symbols of coincidence, or I might have thought that the shadow of a wing from Heaven, and the light of a star out of the East, were enough indication. But, as it was, I turned, and walked idly northward, down the rough side of Dun Bhuirg (at Cul Bhuirg, a furlong westward, I had once seen

a phantom, which I believed to be that of the Culdee, Oran, and so never went that way again after sundown) to a thyme-covered mound that had for me a most singular fascination.

It is a place to this day called Dûn Mananain. Here, a friend who told me many things, a Gaelic farmer named Macarthur, had related once a fantastic legend about a god of the sea. Manaun was his name, and he lived in the times when Iona was part of the kingdom of the Suderöer. Whenever he willed he was like the sea, and that is not wonderful, for he was born of the sea. Thus his body was made of a green wave. His hair was of wrack and tangle, glistening with spray; his robe was of windy foam; his feet, of white sand. That is, when he was with his own, or when he willed; otherwise, he was as men are. He loved a woman of the south so beautiful that she was named Dèar-sadh-na-Ghréine (Sunshine). He captured her and brought her to Iona in September, when it is the month of peace. For one month she was happy: when the wet gales from the west set in, she pined for her own land: yet in the dream-days of November, she smiled so often that Manaun hoped; but when Winter was come, her lover saw that she could not live. So he changed her into

a seal. "You shall be a sleeping woman by day," he said, "and sleep in my dûn here on Iona: and by night, when the dews fall, you shall be a seal, and shall hear me calling to you from a wave, and shall come out and meet me."

They have mortal offspring also, it is said.

There is a story of a man who went to the mainland, but could not see to plough, because the brown fallows became waves that splashed noisily about him. The same man went to Canada, and got work in a great warehouse; but among the bales of merchandise he heard the singular note of the sandpiper, and every hour the sea-fowl confused him with their crying.

Probably some thought was in my mind that there, by Dûn Mananain, I might find a hidden way. That summer I had been thrilled to the inmost life by coming suddenly, by moonlight, on a seal moving across the last sand-dune between this place and the bay called Port Ban. A strange voice, too, I heard upon the sea. True, I saw no white arms upthrown, as the seal plunged into the long wave that swept the shore; and it was a grey skua that wailed above me, winging inland; yet had I not had a vision of the miracle?

But alas! that evening there was not even

a barking seal. Some sheep fed upon the green slope of Manaun's mound.

IX

So, still seeking a way to the Divine Forges, I skirted the shore and crossed the sandy plain of the Machar, and mounted the upland district known as Sliav Starr (the Hill of Noises), and walked to a place, to me sacred. This was a deserted green airidh between great rocks. From here I could look across the extreme western part of Iona, to where it shelved precipitously around the little Port-a-churaich, the Haven of the Coracle, the spot where St. Columba landed when he came to the island.

I knew every foot of ground here, as every cave along the wave-worn shore. How often I had wandered in these solitudes, to see the great spout of water rise through the grass from the caverns beneath, forced upward when tide and wind harried the sea-flocks from the north; or to look across the ocean to the cliffs of Antrim, from the Carn cul Ri Eirinn, the Cairn of the Hermit King of Ireland, about whom I had woven many a romance.

I was tired, and fell asleep. Perhaps the Druid of a neighbouring mound, or the lonely Irish King, or Colum himself (whose own Mound of the Outlook was near), or one of

his angels who ministered to him, watched, and shepherded my dreams to the desired fold. At least I dreamed, and thus: —

The skies to the west beyond the seas were not built of flushed clouds, but of transparent flame. These flames rose in solemn stillness above a vast forge, whose anvil was the shining breast of the sea. Three great Spirits stood by it, and one lifted a soul out of the deep shadow that was below; and one with his hands forged the soul of its dross and welded it anew; and the third breathed upon it, so that it was winged and beautiful. Suddenly the glory-cloud waned, and I saw the multitude of the stars. Each star was the gate of a long, shining road. Many — a countless number — travelled these roads. Far off I saw white walls, built of the pale gold and ivory of sunrise. There again I saw the three Spirits, standing and waiting. So these, I thought, were not the walls of Heaven, but the Divine Forges.

That was my dream. When I awaked, the curlews were crying under the stars.

When I reached the shadowy glebe, behind the manse by the sea, I saw the preacher walking there by himself, and doubtless praying. I told him I had seen the Divine Forges, and twice; and in crude, childish words told how I had seen them.

"It is not a dream," he said.

I know now what he meant.

X

In my childhood I well recall meeting in Iona an old man who had come from the glens of Antrim, to me memorable because he was the last Gaelic minstrel of the old kind I have seen. "It was a poor land, Antrim," he said, "with no Gaelic, a bitter lot o' protestantry, and little music."

I remember, too, his adding in effect:

"It is in the west you should be if you want music, and men and women without coldness or the hard mouth. In Donegal and Mayo and all down Connemara-way to the cliffs of Moher you'll hear the wind an' the voices o' the Shee with never a man to curse the one or the other." I asked him why he had come to Iona. It was to see the isle of Colum, he said, "St. Bridget's brother, God bless the pair av' thim." He was on his way to Oban, thence to go to a far place in the Athole country, where his daughter had married a factor who had returned to his own land from the Irish west, and was the more dear to the old man because his only living blood-kin, and because she had called her little girl by the name of

the old harper's long-lost love, "my love and my wife."

The last harper, though he had not his harp with him. He had come from Drogheda in a cattle-boat to Islay (whence he had sailed in a fishing-smack to Iona), and his friend the mate had promised to leave the harp and his other belongings at Oban in safe keeping. He had with him, however, a small instrument that he called his little clar. It was something between a guitar and a cithern, suggestive of a primitive violin, and he played on it sometimes with his fingers, sometimes with a short bit of wood like a child's tipcat; and, he said, could make good music with a hazel-wand or "the dry straight rod of a quicken when that's to be had." He said this quaint instrument had come down to him through fifty-one generations: literally, "eleven and twice twenty *sheanairean* (grandfathers, or elders or forebears)," of whom he could at any moment give the pedigree of *ceithir deug air 'fhichead*, "four and ten upon twenty"—that is, to translate the Gaelic method of enumeration, "thirty-four."

This was at the house of a minister then lodging in the island, and it was he who hosted the old harper. He told me, later, that he had no doubt this was the old-world

cruit, the Welsh *crwth* of to-day, and the once colloquial Lowland "crowther," akin to the Roman *canora cythara*, the "forebear" of the modern Spanish guitar. To this day, I may add, Highlanders (at least in the west) call the guitar the *Cruit-Spànteach*. There seems to have been four kinds of "harp" in the old days: the clar or clarsach, the kairneen (ceirnine), the kreemtheencrooth (cream-thine-cruit), and the cionar cruit. The clarsach was the harp proper; that is, the small Celtic harp. The ceirnine was the smaller hand-harp. The "creamthine cruit" had six strings, and was probably used chiefly at festivals, possibly for a strong sonance to accentuate chants; while the cionar cruit had ten strings, and was played either by a bow or with a wooden or other instrument. It must have been a cionar-cruit, ancient or a rude later-day imitation, that the old harper had.

Poor old man, I fear he never played on his harp again; for I learned later that he had found his Athole haven broken up, and his daughter and her husband about to emigrate to Canada, so that he went with them, and died on the way — perhaps as much from the mountain-longing and home-sickness as from any more tangible ill.

I have a double memento of him that I

value. In Islay he had bought or been given a little book of Gaelic songs (the Scoto-Gaelic must have puzzled him sorely, poor old *eirionnach*), and this he left behind him, and my minister friend gave it to me, with much of the above noted down on its end-pages. The little book had been printed early in the century, and was called *Ceilleirean Binn nan Creagan Aosda*, literally "Melodious Little Warblings from the Aged Rocks;" and it has always been dear to me because of one lovely phrase in it about birds, where the unknown Gaelic singer calls them "clann bheag' nam preas," the small clan of the bushes, equivalent in English to "the children of the bushes." This occurs in a lovely verse —

> "Mu'n cuairt do bhruachaibh ard mo glinn,
> Biodh luba gheuga 's orra blath,
> 's clann bheag' nam preas a' tabhairst seinn
> Do chreagaibh aosd oran graidh."

("Along the lofty sides of my glen let there be bending boughs clad in blossom, and the children of the bushes making the aged rocks re-echo their songs of love") — truly a characteristic Gaelic wish, characteristically expressed.

And though this that I am about to say did not happen on Iona, I may tell it here, for it was there and from an islander I heard

it, an old man herding among the troubled rocky pastures of Sguir Mòr and Cnoc na Fhiona, in the south of that western part called Sliav Starr — one translation of which might be Wuthering Heights, for the word can be rendered wind-blustery or wind-noisy; though I fancy that *starr* is, on Iona, commonly taken to mean a strong coarse grass. (Fhiona here I take to be not the genitive of a name, nor that of "wine," but a misspelling of *fionna*, grain.)

When he was a boy he was in the island of Barra, he said, and he had a foster-brother called Iain Macneil. Iain was born with music in his mind, for though he was ever a poor creature as a man, having as a child eaten of the bird's heart, he could hear a power o' wonder in the wind.[1] He had never come to any good in a worldly sense, my old herdsman Micheil said; but it was not from want of cleverness only, but because "he had enough with his music." "Poor man, he failed in everything he did but that — and, sure, that was not against him, for *is ann air an tràghadh a rugadh e* — wasn't he born when the tide was ebbing?" Besides,

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1 An allusion to the Hebridean proverb, *Ma dh' itheas tu cridh an eòin, bidh do chridhe air chrith ri d' bheò* ("If you eat the bird's heart, your heart will palpitate for ever.")

there was a mystery. Iain's father was said to be an Iona man, but that was only a politeness and a play upon words ("*The holy isle of the western sea*" could mean either Iona or the mystic Hy-Bràsil, or Tir-na-thonn of the underworld); for he had no mortal father, but a man of the Smiling Distant People was his father. Iain's mother had loved her Leannan-shee, her fairy sweetheart, but that love is too strong for a woman to bear, and she died. Before Iain was born she lay under a bush of whitethorn, and her Leannan appeared to her. "I can't give you life," he said, "unless you 'll come away with me." But she would not; for she wished the child to have Christian baptism. "Well, good-bye," he said, "but you are a weak love. A woman should care more for her lover than her child. But I 'll do this: I 'll give the child the dew, an' he won't die, an' we 'll take him away when we want him. An' for a gift to him, you can have either beauty or music." "I don't want the dew," she said, "for I 'd rather he lay below the grass beside me when his time comes: an' as for beauty, it 's been my sorrow. But because I love the songs you have sung to me an' wooed me with, an' made me forget to hide my soul from you — an' it fallen as helpless as a broken wave on damp sand — let the child

have the *binn-beul* and the *làmh clarsaireachd* (the melodious mouth and the harping hand)."

And truly enough Iain Macneil "went away." He went back to his own people. It must have been a grief to him not to lie under the grass beside his mother, but it was not for his helping. For days before he mysteriously disappeared he went about making a *ciucharan* like a November wind, a singular plaintive moaning. When asked by his foster-brother Micheil why he was not content, he answered only "*Far am bi mo ghaol, bidh mo thathaich*" (Where my Love is, there must my returning be). He had for days, said Micheil, the mournful crying in the ear that is so often a presage of death or sorrow; and himself had said once "Tha 'n éabh a' m' chenais" — the cry is in my ear. When he went away, that going was the way of the snow.

XI

It is no wonder that legends of Finn and Oisein, of Oscur and Gaul and Diarmuid, of Cuchullin, and many of the old stories of the Gaelic chivalry survive in the isles. There, more than in Ireland, Gaelic has survived as the living speech, and though now in the

Inner Hebrides it is dying before "an a' Beurla," the English tongue, and still more before the degraded "Bheurla leathan" or Glasgow-English of the lowland west, the old vernacular still holds an ancient treasure.

The last time I sailed to Staffa from Ulva, a dead calm set in, and we took a man from Gometra to help with an oar—his recommendation being that he was "cho làidir ri Cuchullin," as strong as Coohoolin. But neither in Iona nor in the northward isles nor in Skye itself, have I found or heard of much concerning the great Gaelic hero. Fionn and Oisìn and Diarmid are the names oftenest heard, both in legend and proverbial allusion. An habitual mistake is made by writers who speak of the famous Cuchullin or Cuthullin mountains in Skye as having been named after Cuchullin; and though sometimes the local guides to summer tourists may speak of the Gaelic hero in connection with the mountains north of Coruisk, that is only because of hearsay. The Gaelic name should never be rendered as the Cuthullin or Cohoolin mountains, but as the Coolins. A possible meaning of the name *Cuilfhion* (Kyoolyun or Coolun), is "the fine corner," but, as has been suggested, the hills may have got their name because of the "cuillionn mara" or sea-holly, which is pronounced

Ku' l'-unn or *coolin*. This is most probably the origin of the name.

In fine weather one may see from Iona the Coolins standing out in lovely blue against the northern sky-line, their contours the most beautiful feature in a view of surpassing beauty. How often have I watched them, how often dreamed of what they have seen, since Oisìn passed that way with Malvina: since Cuchullin learned the feats of war at Dûn Sgàiah, from that great queen whose name, it is said, the island bears in remembrance of her; since Connlaoch, his son, set sail to meet so tragic a death in Ireland. There are two women of Gaelic antiquity who above all others have always held my imagination as with a spell: Scathach or Sgathàith (*sky-ah*), the sombre Amazonian queen of the mountain-island (then perhaps, as now, known also as the Isle of Mist), and Meave, the great queen of Connaught, whose name has its mountain bases in gigantic wars, and its summits among the wild poetry and romance of the Shee.

My earliest knowledge of the heroic cycle of Celtic mythology and history came to me, as a child, when I spent my first summer in Iona. How well I remember a fantastic legend I was told: how that these far blue mountains, so freaked into a savage beauty,

were due to the sword-play of Cuchullin. And this happened because the Queen o' Skye had put a spear through the two breasts of his love, so that he went in among her warrior women and slew every one, and severed the head of Sgàiah herself, and threw it into Coruisk, where to this day it floats as Eilean Dubh, the dark isle. Thereafter, Cuchullin hewed the mountain-tops into great clefts, and trampled the hills into a craggy wilderness, and then rushed into the waves and fought with the sea-hordes till far away the bewildered and terrified stallions of the ocean dashed upon the rocks of Man and uttermost shores of Erin.

This magnificent mountain range can be seen better still from Lunga near Iona, whence it is a short sail with a southerly wind. In Lunga there is a hill called Cnoc Cruit or Dun Cruit, and thence one may see, as in a vast illuminated missal whose pages are of deep blue with bindings of azure and pale gold, innumerable green isles and peaks and hills of the hue of the wild plum. When last I was there it was a day of cloudless June. There was not a sound but the hum of the wild bee foraging in the long garths of white clover, and the continual sighing of a wave. Listening, I thought I heard a harper playing in the hollow of the hill. It may

have been the bees heavy with the wine of honey, but I was content with my fancy and fell asleep, and dreamed that a harper came out of the hill, at first so small that he seemed like the green stalk of a lily and had hands like daisies, and then so great that I saw his breath darkening the waves far out on the Hebrid sea. He played, till I saw the stars fall in a ceaseless, dazzling rain upon Iona. A wind blew that rain away, and out of the wave that had been Iona I saw thousands upon thousands of white doves rise from the foam and fly down the four great highways of the wind. When I woke, there was no one near. Iona lay like an emerald under the wild-plum bloom of the Mull mountains. The bees stumbled through the clover; a heron stood silver-grey upon a grey-blue stone; the continual wave was, as before, as one wave, and with the same hushed sighing.

XII

Two or three years ago I heard a boatman use a singular phrase, to the effect that a certain deed was as kindly a thought as that of the piper who played to St. Micheil in his grave. I had never heard of this before, or anything like it, nor have I since, on lip or in book. He told me that he spoke of a wandering piper known as Piobaire Raonull

Dall, Blind Piper Ronald, who fifty years or so ago used to wander through the isles and West Highlands; and how he never failed to play a spring on his pipes, either to please or to console, or maybe to air a lament for what's lost now and can't come again, when on any holy day he stood before a figure of the Virgin (as he might well do in Barra or South Uist), or by old tombs or habitations of saints. My friend's father or one of his people, once, in the Kyles of Bute, when sailing past the little ruinous graveyard of Kilmichael on the Bute shore, had come upon Raonull-Dall, pacing slowly before the broken stones and the little cell which legend says is both the hermitage and the grave of St. Micheil. When asked what he was playing and what for, in that lonely spot, he said it was an old ancient pibroch, the Gathering of the Clerics, which he was playing just to cheer the heart of the good man down below. When told that St. Micheil would be having his fill of good music where he was, the old man came away in the boat, and for long sat silent and strangely disheartened. I have more than once since then sailed to that little lonely ancient grave of Kilmichael in the Kyles of Bute, from Tignabruaich or further Cantyre, and have wished that I too could play a spring upon

the pipes, for if so I would play to the kind heart of "Piobaire Raonull Dall."

Of all the saints of the west, from St. Molios or Molossius (Maol-Iosa? the servant of Jesus?) who has left his name in the chief township in Arran, to St. Barr, who has given his to the largest of the Bishop's Isles, as the great Barra island-chain in the South Hebrides used to be called, there is none so commonly remembered and so frequently invoked as St. Micheil. There used to be no festival in the Western Isles so popular as that held on 29th September, "La' Fheill Mhicheil," the Day of the Festival of Michael; and the Eve of Michael's Day is still in a few places one of the gayest nights in the year, though no longer is every barn turned into a dancing place or a place of merry-making or, at least, a place for lovers to meet and give betrothal gifts. The day itself, in the Catholic Isles, was begun with a special Mass, and from hour to hour was filled with traditional duties and pleasures.

The whole of the St. Micheil ceremonies were of a remote origin, and some, as the ancient and almost inexplicable dances, and their archaic accompaniment of word and gesture, far older than the sacrificial slaying of the Michaelmas Lamb. It is, however, not improbable that this latter rite was a

survival of a pagan custom long anterior to the substitution of the Christian for the Druidic faith.

The "Iollach Mhicheil"—the triumphal song of Michael—is quite as much pagan as Christian. We have here, indeed, one of the most interesting and convincing instances of the transmutation of a personal symbol. St. Michael is on the surface a saint of extraordinary powers and the patron of the shores and the shore-folk: deeper, he is an angel, who is upon the sea what the angelican saint, St. George, is upon the land: deeper, he is, a blending of the Roman Neptune and the Greek Poseidon: deeper, he is himself an ancient Celtic god: deeper, he is no other than Manannan, the god of ocean and all waters, in the Gaelic Pantheon: as, once more, Manannan himself is dimly revealed to us as still more ancient, more primitive, and even as supreme in remote godhead, the Father of an immortal Clan.

To this day Micheil is sometimes alluded to as the god Micheil, and I have seen some very strange Gaelic lines which run in effect:

"It was well thou hadst the horse of the god Micheil
Who goes without a bit in his mouth,
So that thou couldst ride him through the fields of the
air,
And with him leap over the knowledge of Nature"—

presumably not very ancient as they stand,

because of the use of "steud" for horse, and "naduir" for nature, obvious adaptations from English and Latin. Certainly St. Micheil has left his name in many places, from the shores of the Hebrides to the famous Mont St. Michel of Brittany, and I doubt not that everywhere an earlier folk, at the same places, called him Manannan. In a most unlikely place to find a record of old hymns and folk-songs, one of the volumes of Reports of the Highlands and Islands Commission, Mr. Carmichael many years ago contributed some of his unequalled store of Hebridean reminiscence and knowledge. Among these old things saved, there is none that is better worth saving than the beautiful Catholic hymn or invocation sung at the time of the midsummer migration to the hill-pastures. In this shealing-hymn the three powers who are invoked are St. Micheil (for he is a patron saint of horses and travel, as well as of the sea and seafarers), St. Columba, guardian of cattle, and the Virgin Mary, "Mathair Uain ghil," "Mother of the White Lamb," as the tender Gaelic has it, who is so beautifully called the golden-haired Virgin Shepherdess.

This is a far cry from Iona! And I had meant to write only of how I heard so recently as three or four summers ago a

verse of the Uist Herding Chant. It was recited to me, overagainst Dûn-I, by a friend who is a crofter in that part of Iona. It was not quite as Mr. Carmichael translates it, but near enough. The Rann Buachhail-leag is, I should add, addressed to the cattle.

"The protection of God and Columba
Encompass your going and coming,
And about you be the milkmaid of the smooth
white palms,
Bridget of the clustering hair, golden brown."

On Iona, however, there is, so far as I remember, no special spot sacred to St. Micheil: but there is a legend that on the night Columba died Micheil came over the waves on a rippling flood of light, which was a cloud of angelic wings, and that he sang a hymn to the soul of the saint before it took flight for its heavenly fatherland. No one heard that hymn save Colum, but I think that he who first spoke of it remembered a more ancient legend of how Manannan came to Cuchullin when he was in the country of the Shee, when Liban laughed.

XIII

I spoke of Port-a-Churaich, the Haven of the Coracle, a little ago. How strange a history is that of Iona since the coming of the Irish priest, Crimthan, or Crimmon as

we call the name, surnamed Colum Cille, the Dove of the Church. Perhaps its unwritten history is not less strange. God was revered on Iona by priests of a forgotten faith before the Cross was raised. The sun-priest and the moon-worshipper had their revelation here. I do not think their offerings were despised. Colum, who loved the Trinity so well that on one occasion he subsisted for three days on the mystery of the mere word, did not forego the luxury of human sacrifice, though he abhorred the blood stained altar. For, to him, an obstinate pagan slain was to the glory of God. The moon-worshipper did no worse when he led the chosen victim to the dolmen. But the moon-worshipper was a Pict without the marvel of the written word; so he remained a heathen, and the Christian named himself saint or martyr.

None knows with surety who dwelled on this mysterious island before the famous son of Feilim of Clan Domnhuil, great-grandson of Neil of the Nine Hostages, came with his fellow-monks and raised the Cross among the wondering Picts. But the furthest record tells of worship. Legend itself is more ancient here than elsewhere. Once a woman was worshipped. Some say she was the moon, but this was before the dim day of the moon-worshippers. (In Gaelic too, as

with all the Celtic peoples, it is not the moon but the sun that is feminine.) She may have been an ancestral Brighde, or that mysterious Anait whose Scythian name survives elsewhere in the Gaelic west, and nothing else of all her ancient glory but that shadowy word. Perhaps, here, the Celts remembered one whom they had heard of in Asian valleys or by the waters of Nilus, and called upon Isis under a new name.

The Haven of the Coracle! It was not Colum and his white-robe company who first made the isle sacred. I have heard that when Mary Macleod (our best-loved Hebridean poet) was asked what she thought of Iona, she replied that she thought it was the one bit of Eden that had not been destroyed, and that it was none other than the central isle in the Garden untouched of Eve or Adam, where the angels waited.

Many others have dreamed by that lonely cairn of the Irish king, before Colum, and, doubtless, many since the child who sought the Divine Forges.

XIV

Years afterwards I wrote, in the same place, after an absence wherein Iona had become as a dream to me, the story of St. Bridget, in the Hebrides called Bride, under

the love-name commonly given her, Muime Chriosd — Christ's Foster-Mother. May I quote again, here, as so apposite to what I have written, to what indirectly I am trying to convey of the spiritual history of Iona, some portion of it?

In my legendary story I tell of how one called Dùghall, of a kingly line, sailing from Ireland, came to be cast upon the ocean-shore of Iona, then called Innis-nan-Dhruidhneach, the Isle of the Druids — for this was before the cry of the Sacred Wolf was heard, as an old-time island poet has it, playing upon Colum's house-name, Crimthan, signifying a wolf. The frail coracle in which he and others had crossed the Moyle had been driven before a tempest, and cast at sunrise like a spent fish upon the rocks of the little haven that is now called Port-a-Churaich. All had found death in the wave except himself and the little girl-child he had brought with him from Ireland, the child of so much magic mystery.

When, warmed by the sun, they rose, they found themselves in a waste place. Dùghall was ill in his mind because of the portents, and now to his fear and amaze the child Bridget knelt on the stones, and, with claspt hands, frail and pink as the sea-shells round about her, sang a song of words which were

unknown to him. This was the more marvellous, as she was yet but an infant, and could say few words even of Erse, the only tongue she had heard.

At this portent, he knew that Aodh the Ard-Druid had spoken seeingly. Truly this child was not of human parentage. So he, too, kneeled; and, bowing before her, asked if she were of the race of the Tuatha de Danann, or of the older gods, and what her will was, that he might be her servant. Then it was that the kneeling child looked at him, and sang in a low sweet voice in Erse:

"I am but a little child,
Dùghall, son of Hugh, son of Art,
But my garment shall be laid
On the lord of the world,
Yea, surely it shall be that He,
The King of Elements Himself
Shall lean against my bosom,
And I will give him peace,
And peace will I give to all who ask
Because of this mighty Prince,
And because of his Mother that is the
Daughter of Peace."

And while Dùghall Donn was still marvelling at this thing, the Arch-Druid of Iona approached, with his white-robed priests. A grave welcome was given to the stranger. While the youngest of the servants of God was entrusted with the child, the Arch-Druid

took Dùghall aside and questioned him. It was not till the third day that the old man gave his decision. Dùghall Donn was to abide on Iona if he so willed; but the child was to stay. His life would be spared, nor would he be a bondager of any kind, and a little land to till would be given him, and all that he might need. But of his past he was to say no word. His name was to become as nought, and he was to be known simply as Dùvach. The child, too, was to be named Bride, for that was the way the name Bridget is called in the Erse of the Isles.

To the question of Dùghall, that was thenceforth Dùvach, as to why he laid so great stress on the child, who was a girl, and the reputed offspring of shame at that, Cathal the Arch-Druid replied thus: "My kinsman Aodh of the golden hair, who sent you here, was wiser than Hugh the king, and all the Druids of Aoimag. Truly, this child is an Immortal. There is an ancient prophecy concerning her: surely of her who is now here, and no other. There shall be, it says, a spotless maid born of a virgin of the ancient divine race in Innisfail. And when for the seventh time the sacred year has come, she will hold Eternity in her lap as a white flower. Her maiden breasts shall swell with milk for the Prince of the World.

She shall give suck to the King of the Elements. So I say unto you, Dùvach, go in peace. Take unto yourself a wife, and live upon the place I will allot on the east side of Ioua. Treat Bride as though she were your soul, and leave her much alone, and let her learn of the sun and the wind. In the fulness of time the prophecy shall be fulfilled."

So was it, from that day of the days. Dùvach took a wife unto himself, who weaned the little Bride, who grew in beauty and grace, so that all men marvelled. Year by year for seven years the wife of Dùvach bore him a son, and these grew apace in strength, so that by the beginning of the third year of the seventh circle of Bride's life there were three stalwart youths to brother her, and three comely and strong lads, and one young boy fair to see. Nor did any one, not even Bride herself, saving Cathal the Arch-Druid, know that Dùvach the herdsman was Dùghall Donn, of a princely race in Innisfail.

In the end, too, Dùvach came to think that he had dreamed, or at the least that Cathal had not interpreted the prophecy aright. For though Bride was of exceeding beauty, and of a holiness that made the young druids bow before her as though she

were a bàndia, yet the world went on as before, and the days brought no change. Often, while she was still a child, he had questioned her about the words she had said as a babe, but she had no memory of them. Once, in her ninth year, he came upon her on the hillside of Dûn-I singing these self-same words. Her eyes dreamed far away. He bowed his head, and, praying to the Giver of Light, hurried to Cathal. The old man bade him speak no more to the child concerning the mysteries.

Bride lived the hours of her days upon the slopes of Dûn-I, herding the sheep, or in following the kye upon the green hillocks and grassy dunes of what then, as now, was called the Machar. The beauty of the world was her daily food. The spirit within her was like sunlight behind a white flower. The birdeens in the green bushes sang for joy when they saw her blue eyes. The tender prayers that were in her heart were often seen flying above her head in the form of white doves of sunshine.

But when the middle of the year came that was (though Dùvach had forgotten it) the year of the prophecy, his eldest son, Conn, who was now a man, murmured against the virginity of Bride, because of her beauty and because a chieftain of the mainland was

eager to wed her. "I shall wed Bride or raid Ioua," was the message he had sent.

So one day, before the Great Fire of the summer festival, Conn and his brothers reproached Bride.

"Idle are these pure eyes, O Bride, not to be as lamps at thy marriage-bed."

"Truly, it is not by the eyes that we live," replied the maiden gently, while to their fear and amazement she passed her hand before her face and let them see that the sockets were empty.

Trembling with awe at this portent, Dùvach intervened:

"By the sun I swear it, O Bride, that thou shalt marry whomsoever thou wilt and none other, and when thou wilt, or not at all, if such be thy will."

And when he had spoken, Bride smiled, and passed her hand before her face again, and all there were abashed because of the blue light as of morning that was in her shining eyes.

It was while the dew was yet wet on the grass that on the morrow Bride came out of her father's house, and went up the steep slope of Dûn-I. The crying of the ewes and lambs at the pastures came plaintively against the dawn. The lowing of the kye arose from the sandy hollows by the shore, or from the meadows on the lower slopes.

Through the whole island went a rapid, trickling sound, most sweet to hear: the myriad voices of twittering birds, from the dotterel in the seaweed, to the larks climbing the blue slopes of heaven.

This was the festival of her birth, and she was clad in white. About her waist was a girdle of the sacred rowan, the feathery green leaves flickering dusky shadows upon her robe as she moved. The light upon her yellow hair was as when morning wakes, laughing in wind amid the tall corn. As she went she sang to herself, softly as the crooning of a dove. If any had been there to hear he would have been abashed, for the words were not in Erse, and the eyes of the beautiful girl were as those of one in a vision.

When, at last, a brief while before sunrise, she reached the summit of the Scuir, that is so small a hill and yet seems so big in Iona, where it is the sole peak, she found three young druids there, ready to tend the sacred fire the moment the sunrays should kindle it. Each was clad in a white robe, with fillets of oak leaves; and each had a golden armlet. They made a quiet obeisance as she approached. One stepped forward, with a flush in his face because of her beauty, that was as a sea-wave for grace and a flower

for purity, as sunlight for joy and moonlight for peace.

"Thou mayst draw near if thou wilt, Bride, daughter of Dùvach," he said, with something of reverence as well as of grave courtesy in his voice; "for the holy Cathal hath said that the breath of the Source of All is upon thee. It is not lawful for women to be here at this moment, but thou hast the law shining upon thy face and in thine eyes. Hast thou come to pray?"

But at that moment a cry came from one of his companions. He turned, and rejoined his fellows. Then all three sank upon their knees, and with outstretched arms hailed the rising of God.

As the sun rose, a solemn chant swelled from their lips, ascending as incense through the silent air. The glory of the new day came soundlessly. Peace was in the blue heaven, on the blue-green sea, and on the green land. There was no wind, even where the currents of the deep moved in shadowy purple. The sea itself was silent, making no more than a sighing slumber-breath round the white sands of the isle, or a dull whisper where the tide lifted the long weed that clung to the rocks.

In what strange, mysterious way, Bride did not see; but as the three druids held their

hands before the sacred fire there was a faint crackling, then three thin spirals of blue smoke rose, and soon dusky red and wan yellow tongues of flame moved to and fro. The sacrifice of God was made. Out of the immeasurable heaven He had come, in his golden chariot. Now, in the wonder and mystery of His love, He was re-born upon the world, re-born a little fugitive flame upon a low hill in a remote isle. Great must be His love that he could die thus daily in a thousand places: so great His love that he could give up His own body to daily death, and suffer the holy flame that was in the embers He illumined to be lighted and revered and then scattered to the four quarters of the world.

Bride could bear no longer the mystery of this great love. It moved her to an ecstasy. What tenderness of divine love that could thus redeem the world daily: what long-suffering for all the evil and cruelty done hourly upon the weeping earth: what patience with the bitterness of the blind fates! The beauty of the worship of Be'al was upon her as a golden glory. Her heart leaped to a song that could not be sung.

Bowing her head, so that the tears fell upon her hands, she rose and moved away.

XV

Elsewhere I have told how a good man of Iona sailed along the coast one Sabbath afternoon with the Holy Book, and put the Word upon the seals of Soa: and, in another tale, how a lonely man fought with a sea-woman, that was a seal; as, again, how two fishermen strove with the sea-witch of Earraid: and, in "The Dan-nan-Ron," of a man who went mad with the sea-madness, because of the seal-blood that was in his veins, he being a MacOdrum of Uist, and one of the Sliochd nan Ron, the Tribe of the Seal. And those who have read the tale, twice printed, once as "The Annir Choille," and again as "Cathal of the Woods," will remember how, at the end, the good hermit Molios, when near death in his sea-cave of Arran, called the seals to come out of the wave and listen to him, so that he might tell them the white story of Christ; and how in the moonshine, with the flowing tide stealing from his feet to his knees, the old saint preached the gospel of love, while the seals crouched upon the rocks, with their brown eyes filled with glad tears: and how, before his death at dawn, he was comforted by hearing them splashing to and fro in the moon-dazzle, and calling one to the other, "We, too, are of the sons of God."

What has so often been written about is a reflection of what is in the mind: and though stories of the seals may be heard from the Rhinns of Islay to the Seven Hunters (and I first heard that of the MacOdrums, the seal-folk, from a Uist man), I think that it was because of what I heard of the sea-people on Iona, when I was a child, that they have been so much with me in remembrance.

In the short tale of the Moon-child, I told how two seals that had been wronged by a curse which had been put upon them by Columba, forgave the saint, and gave him a sore-won peace. I recall another (unpublished) tale, where a seal called Domnhuil Dhu — a name of evil omen — was heard laughing one Hallowe'en on the rocks below the ruined abbey, and calling to the creatures of the sea that God was dead: and how the man who heard him laughed, and was therewith stricken with paralysis, and so fell sidelong from the rocks into the deep wave, and was afterwards found beaten as with hammers and shredded as with sharp fangs.

But, as most characteristic, I would rather tell here the story of Black Angus, though the longer tale of which it forms a part has been printed before.

One night, a dark rainy night it was, with

an uplift wind battering as with the palms of savage hands the heavy clouds that hid the moon, I went to the cottage near Spanish Port, where my friend Ivor Maclean lived with his old deaf mother. He had reluctantly promised to tell me the legend of Black Angus, a request he had ignored in a sullen silence when he and Padruic Macrae and I were on the Sound that day. No tales of the kind should be told upon the water.

When I entered, he was sitting before the flaming coal-fire; for on Iona now, by decree of MacCailein Mòr, there is no more peat burned.

"You will tell me now, Ivor?" was all I said.

"Yes; I will be telling you now. And the reason why I did not tell you before was because it is not a wise or a good thing to tell ancient stories about the sea while still on the running wave. Macrae should not have done that thing. It may be we shall suffer for it when next we go out with the nets. We were to go to-night; but no, not I, no, no, for sure, not for all the herring in the Sound."

"Is it an ancient *sgeul*, Ivor?"

"Ay. I am not for knowing the age of these things. It may be as old as the days of the Féinn, for all I know. It has come

down to us. Alasdair MacAlasdair of Tiree, him that used to boast of having all the stories of Colum and Brigdhe, it was he told it to the mother of my mother, and she to me."

"What is it called?"

"Well, this and that; but there is no harm in saying it is called the Dark Nameless One."

"The Dark Nameless One!"

"It is this way. But will you ever have heard of the MacOdrums of Uist?"

"Ay; the Sliochd-nan-ròn."

"That is so. God knows. The Sliochd-nan-ròn . . . the progeny of the Seal. . . . Well, well, no man knows what moves in the shadow of life. And now I will be telling you that old ancient tale, as it was given to me by the mother of my mother."

XVI

. . . . . On a day of the days, Colum was walking alone by the sea-shore. The monks were at the hoe or the spade, and some milking the kye, and some at the fishing. They say it was on the first day of the *Faoilleach Geamhraidh*, the day that is called *Am Fhéill Brighde*, and that they call Candlemas over yonder.

The holy man had wandered on to where the rocks are, opposite to Soa. He was praying and praying; and it is said that whenever he prayed aloud, the barren egg in the nest would quicken, and the blighted bud unfold, and the butterfly break its shroud.

Of a sudden he came upon a great black seal, lying silent on the rocks, with wicked eyes.

"My blessing upon you, O Ròn," he said, with the good kind courteousness that was his. "*Droch spadadh ort*," answered the seal, "A bad end to you, Colum of the Gown."

"Sure now," said Colum angrily, "I am knowing by that curse that you are no friend of Christ, but of the evil pagan faith out of the north. For here I am known ever as Colum the White, or as Colum the Saint; and it is only the Picts and the wanton Normen who deride me because of the holy white robe I wear."

"Well, well," replied the seal, speaking the good Gaelic as though it were the tongue of the deep sea, as God knows it may be for all you, I, or the blind wind can say; "well, well, let that thing be: it's a wave-way here or a wave-way there. But now, if it is a druid you are, whether of fire or of Christ, be telling me where my woman is, and where my little daughter."

At this, Colum looked at him for a long while. Then he knew.

"It is a man you were once, O Ròn?"

"Maybe ay and maybe no."

"And with that thick Gaelic that you have, it will be out of the north isles you come?"

"That is a true thing."

"Now I am for knowing at last who and what you are. You are one of the race of Odrum the Pagan?"

"Well, I am not denying it, Colum. And what is more, I am Angus MacOdrum, Aonghas mac Torcall mhic Odrum, and the name I am known by is Black Angus."

"A fitting name too," said Colum the Holy, "because of the black sin in your heart, and the black end God has in store for you."

At that Black Angus laughed.

"Why is laughter upon you, Man-Seal?"

"Well, it is because of the good company I'll be having. But, now, give me the word: Are you for having seen or heard of a woman called Kirsteen Mc.Vurich?"

"Kirsteen — Kirsteen — that is the good name of a nun it is, and no sea-wanton!"

"Oh, a name here or a name there is soft sand. And so you cannot be for telling me where my woman is?"

"No."

"Then a stake for your belly, and nails through your hands, thirst on your tongue, and the corbies at your eyne!"

And, with that, Black Angus louped into the green water, and the hoarse wild laugh of him sprang into the air and fell dead upon the shore like a wind-spent mew.

Colum went slowly back to the brethren, brooding deep. "God is good," he said in a low voice, again and again; and each time that he spoke there came a daisy into the grass, or a bird rose, with song to it for the first time, wonderful and sweet to hear.

As he drew near to the House of God he met Murtagh, an old monk of the ancient race of the isles.

"Who is Kirsteen Mc.Vurich, Murtagh?" he asked.

"She was a good servant of Christ, she was, in the south isles, O Colum, till Black Angus won her to the sea."

"And when was that?"

"Nigh upon a thousand years ago."

"But can mortal sin live as long as that?"

"Ay, it endureth. Long, long ago, before Oisìn sang, before Fionn, before Cuchullin was a glorious great prince, and in the days when the Tuatha-de-Danann were sole lords in all green Banba, Black Angus made the woman Kirsteen Mc.Vurich leave the place

of prayer and go down to the sea-shore, and there he leaped upon her and made her his prey, and she followed him into the sea."

"And is death above her now?"

"No. She is the woman that weaves the sea-spells at the wild place out yonder that is known as Earraid: she that is called the sea-witch."

"Then why was Black Angus for the seeking her here and the seeking her there?"

"It is the Doom. It is Adam's first wife she is, that sea-witch over there, where the foam is ever in the sharp fangs of the rocks."

"And who will he be?"

"His body is the body of Angus, the son of Torcall of the race of Odrum, for all that a seal he is to the seeming; but the soul of him is Judas."

"Black Judas, Murtagh?"

"Ay, Black Judas, Colum."

But with that, Ivor Macrae rose abruptly from before the fire, saying that he would speak no more that night. And truly enough there was a wild, lone, desolate cry in the wind, and a slapping of the waves one upon the other with an eerie laughing sound, and the screaming of a seamew that was like a human thing.

So I touched the shawl of his mother, who looked up with startled eyes and said, "God be with us;" and then I opened the door, and the salt smell of the wrack was in my nostrils, and the great drowning blackness of the night.

XVII

One day in an early year, that was certainly not later than my ninth, I had on Iona a singular instance of what is called second-sight, though indirectly, for only the narration of it came to me, and that some time after the occurrences related. On a late autumn afternoon the Oban steamer coming from Tiree put in at the haven, but only one passenger alighted in the ferry-boat. MacDonald, the then ferryman, noticed that the stranger was a poor man and that the little luggage he had was done up in a red bandana handkerchief. He tried the man in the Gaelic, but got no answer, and that surprised him, for he was certain he had heard the mate of the steamer, or if not the mate some other, speak to the man in Gaelic just before he came over the side of the vessel, and that he had answered in the old speech. Then MacDonald spoke in English, and asked him if he had been on the island before.

"No," he said, "and I hope never to see it or Scotland again. I am from New Zealand," he added, "and in a week from now I 'll be on the ship that will be taking me there."

When the ferry-boat came to the little stone pier the stranger asked the way to the house where Mary Macallum lived.[1]

"What Mary Macallum?" asked MacDonald.

"This Mary Macallum," said the stranger, showing a tinted photograph on a porcelain medallion. MacDonald recognised the face at once, and directed the man to the farm-house where a single-woman of that name lived since her father and mother had left her their all. When the man stood in the doorway, the woman, who was peeling potatoes, gave a cry, and went yellow-white as clotted foam.

"Is Seumas (James) dead?" she cried in Gaelic.

"That is so," said the man in Gaelic too, "and by the same token I've brought you this. And before he died James Macarthur said to me, take this to Mary Macallum on Iona, and say to her that if I thought she 'd

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1 The name is at random. I do not recollect the actual name. And so again with Neil Stewart.

have you instead then it 's dying happy I should be."

The woman looked at him, like as though dazed.

"What is it," he said, "what is the matter with you, woman?"

Then the dream went out of her eyes, and her white face grew like a rock for hardness, but a rock on fire.

"And what will *your* name be?" she asked.

"Neil Stewart," he said: "Neil Stewart, out of Appin in Argyll."

"And do you know what I see behind you, Neil Stewart?"

The man gave a start, and looked behind him.

"And what will that be?" he asked uneasily.

"It 's a dream I 've had three times, an' I see it all over again as I look at you, Neil Stewart. I see a field of the dead and wounded, with a few men on horses, riding away, and others, further off, looking about them. And broken guns. And among the dead and wounded in the sand, for it is all sand there, I see dark-skinned men too, but they are all dead. And at that fall of sand yonder, a few yards from the upside-down gun sticking in the sand I see Seumas Macarthur

lying faint to death, but struggling hard to get the water-bottle from out below his broken arm. And what do I see next, Neil Stewart . . . ah, you needn't be so white and scared, I 'm only a woman ye ken, Neil Stewart out of Appin in Argyll! . . . what do I see next? I see a man that looks singular like Neil Stewart out of Appin in Argyll crawling towards my man, an' snatchin' the water-bottle from him an' drinkin' every drop left in it, an' then striking my man on the head with it, an' then feeling in his pockets, and taking out of the one the little silver there is an' some strange coins, and from the other a letter, an' this portrait here tied by a red string through the top buttonhole of his flannel shirt. And now, Neil Stewart out of Appin in Argyll, I. . . . .

But at that the man gave a skreich like a herring-gull, and his face grew dark and foam blew from his mouth and he fell forward in a swoon of death. And true enough he died of an apoplexy there and then. And it was all true, every word of it. For when less than a month later James Macarthur came back to Iona to seek out Mary Macallum, for all he had but one arm now after that fierce fight at dawn in the sands of Egypt, he bore out every word that Mary had uttered, she with her dreams behind her and her

vision before her, when the man Stewart stood before her like a dread phantom of sleep.

XVIII

For one thing of great Gaelic import, Columba has been given a singular preeminence — not for his love of country, pride of race, passionate loyalty to his clan, to every blood-claim and foster-claim, and friendship-claim, though in all this he was the very archetype of the clannish Gael — but because (so it is averred) he was the first of our race of whom is recorded the systematic use of this strange gift of spiritual foresight, "second-sight." It has been stated authoritatively that he is the first of whom there is record as having possessed this faculty; but that could only be averred by one ignorant of ancient Gaelic literature. Even in Adamnan's chronicle, written some seventy years after the death of Columba, there is record of others having this faculty, apart from the perhaps more purely spiritual vision of his mother Aithnê, when an angel raimented her with the beauty of her unborn son, or of his foster-father, the priest Cruithnechan, who saw the singular light of the soul about his sleeping pupil, or of the abbot Brendan who redeemed the saint from excommunication

and perhaps death by his vision of him advancing with a pillar of fire before him and an angel on either side. (When, long years afterwards, Brendan died in Ireland, Colum in Iona startled his monks by calling for an immediate celebration of the Eucharist, because it had been revealed to him that St. Brendan had gone to the heavenly fatherland yesternight: "Angels came to meet his soul: I saw the whole earth illumined with their glory.") Among others there is the story of Abbot Kenneth, who, sitting at supper, rose so suddenly as to leave without his sandals, and at the altar of his church prayed for Colum, at that moment in dire peril upon the sea: the story of Ernan, who, fishing in the river Fenda, saw the death of Colum in a symbol of flame: the story of Lugh mac Tailchan, who, at Cloinfinchoil, beheld Iona (which he had never visited), and above it a blaze of angels' wings, and Colum's soul. In the most ancient tales there is frequent allusion to what we call second-sight. The writer alluded to could not have heard of the warning of the dread Mor-Rigân to Cuchulain before the fatal strife of the Táin-Bó-Cuailgne; or Cuchulain's own pre-vision (among a score as striking) of the hostings and gatherings on the fatal plain of Muirthemne; or the Amazonian queen, Scathach's, fore-

knowledge of the career and early death of the champion of the Gaels:

"(At the last) great peril awaits thee . . .
Alone against a vast herd:
Thirty years I reckon the length of thy years
(literally, the strength of thy valour);
Further than this I do not add;"

or of Deirdrê's second-sight, when by the white cairn on Sliav Fuad she saw the sons of Usna headless, and Illann the Fair headless too, but Buimne the Ruthless Red with his head upon his shoulders, smiling a grim smile — when she saw over Naois, her beloved, a cloud of blood — or that, alas, too bitter-true a foreseeing, when in the Craebh Derg, the House of the Red Branch, she cried to her lover and his two brothers that death was at the door and "grievous to me is the deed, O darling friends — and till the world's end Emain will not be better for a single night than it is to-night." Or, again, of that pathetic, simultaneous death-vision of Bailê the Sweet-Spoken and Aillinn, he in the north, she in the south, so that each out of a grief unbearable straightway died, as told in one of the oldest as well as loveliest of ancient Gaelic tales, the *Scél Baili Binnbérlaig*.

There is something strangely beautiful in

most of these "second-sight" stories of Columba. The faculty itself is so apt to the spiritual law that one wonders why it is so set apart in doubt. It would, I think, be far stranger if there were no such faculty.

That I believe, it were needless to say, were it not that these words may be read by many to whom this quickened inward vision is a superstition, or a fantastic glorification of insight. I believe; not only because there is nothing too strange for the soul, whose vision surely I will not deny, while I accept what is lesser, the mind's prescience, and, what is least, the testimony of the eyes. That I have cause to believe is perhaps too personal a statement, and is of little account; but in that interior wisdom, which is no longer the flicker of one little green leaf but the light and sound of a forest, of which the leaf is a part, I know that to be true, which I should as soon doubt as that the tide returns or that the sap rises or that dawn is a ceaseless flashing light beneath the circuit of the stars. Spiritual logic demands it.

It would ill become me to do otherwise. I would as little, however, deny that this inward vision is sometimes imperfect and untrustworthy, as I would assert that it is infallible. There is no common face of good or evil; and in like fashion the aspect of

this so-called mystery is variable as the lives of those in whom it dwells. With some it is a prescience, more akin to instinct than to reason, and obtains only among the lesser possibilities, as when one beholds another where in the body none is; or a scene not possible, there, in that place; or a face, a meeting of shadows, a disclosure of hazard or accident, a coming into view of happenings not yet fulfilled. With some it is simply a larger sight, more wide, more deep; not habitual, because there is none of us who is not subject to the law of the body; and sudden, because all tense vision is a passion of the moment. It is as the lightning, whose sustenance is sure for all that it has a second's life. With a few it is a more constant companion, a dweller by the morning thought, by the noon reverie, by the evening dream. It lies upon the pillow for some; to some it is as though the wind disclosed pathways of the air; a swaying branch, a dazzle on the wave, the quick recognition in unfamiliar eyes, is, for others, sufficient signal. Not that these accidents of the manner need concern us much. We have the faculty, or we do not have it. Nor must we forget that it can be the portion of the ignoble as well as of those whose souls are clear. When it is in truth a spiritual vision, then we are in

company of what is the essential life, that which we call divine.

XIX

It was this that Columba had, this serene perspicuity. That it was a conscious possession we know from his own words, for he gave this answer to one who marvelled: "Heaven has granted to some to see on occasion in their mind, clearly and surely, the whole of earth and sea and sky."

It is not unlikely that in the seventy years which elapsed between Colum's death and the writing of that lovely classic of the Church, Adamnan's *Vita St. Columbae*, some stories grew around the saint's memory which were rather the tribute of childlike reverence and love than the actual experiences of the holy man himself. What then? A field in May is not the less a daughter of Spring, because the cowslip-wreaths found there may have been brought from little wayward garths by children who wove them lovingly as they came.

Many of these strange records are mere coincidences; others reveal so happy a surety in the simple faith of the teller that we need only smile, and with no more resentment than at a child who runs to say he has found stars in a wayside pool. Others are rather

the keen insight of a ceaseless observation than the seeing of an inward sense. But, and perhaps oftener, they are not inherently incredible. I do not think our forebears did ill to give haven to these little ones of faith, rather than to despise, or to drive them away.

I have already spoken of Columba as another St. Francis, because of his tenderness for creatures. I recall now the lovely legend (for I do not think Colum himself attributed "second-sight" to an animal) which tells how the old white pony which daily brought the milk from the cow-shed to the monastery came and put its head in the lap of the aged and feeble abbot, thus mutely to bid farewell. Let Adamnan tell it: "This creature then coming up to the saint, and knowing that his master would soon depart from him, and that he would see his face no more, began to utter plaintive moans, and, as if a man, to shed tears in abundance into the saint's lap, and so to weep, frothing greatly. Which when the attendant saw, he began to drive away that weeping mourner. But the saint forbade him, saying, 'Let him alone! As he loves me so, let him alone, that into this my bosom he may pour out the tears of his most bitter lamentation. Behold, thou, a man, that hast a soul, yet in no way hast knowledge of my end save what

I have myself shown thee; but to this brute animal the Master Himself hath revealed that his master is about to go away from him.' And so saying, he blessed his sorrowing servant the horse."

If there be any to whom the aged Colum comforting the grief of his old white pony is a matter of disdain or derision, I would not have his soul in exchange for the dumb sorrow of that creature. One would fare further with that sorrow, though soulless, than with the soul that could not understand that sorrow.

If one were to quote from Adamnan's three Books of the Prophecies, Miracles, and Visions of Columba, there would be another book. Amid much that is childlike, and a little that is childish, what store of spiritual beauty and living symbol in these three books — the Book of Prophetic Revelations, the Book of Miracles of Power, the Book of Angelic Visitations. But there, as elsewhere, one must bear in remembrance that, in spiritual sight, there is symbolic vision as well as actual vision. When Colum saw his friend Columbanus (who, unknown to any on Iona, had set out in his frail coracle from the Isle of Rathlin) tossed in the surges of Corryvrechan; or when, nigh Glen Urquhart, he hurried forward to minister to an old dying

Pict "who had lived well by the light of nature," and whose house, condition, and end had been suddenly revealed to him: then we have actual vision. When Aithnê, his mother, dreamed that an angel showed her a garment of so surpassing a loveliness that it was as though woven of flowers and rainbows, and then threw it on high, till its folds expanded and covered every mountain-top from the brows of Connaught to the feet of the Danish sea, and so revealed to her what manner of son she bore within her womb; or when, in the hour of Colum's death, the aged son of Tailchan beheld the whole expanse of air flooded with the blaze of angels' wings, which trembled with their songs: then we have symbolic vision. And sometimes we have that which partakes of each, as when (as Adamnan tells us in his third book) Colum saw angels standing upon the rocks on the opposite side of the Sound which divides Iona from the Ross of Mull, calling to his soul to cross to them, yet, as they assembled and beckoned, mysteriously and suddenly restrained, for his hour was not come.

And in all actual vision there is gradation; from what is so common, premonition, to what is not common, prescience, and to what is rare, revelation. Thus when the labourers

on Iona looked up from the fields and saw the aged abbot whom they so loved, borne in a cart to give them benediction at seed-sowing, many among them knew that they would not see Colum again, and Colum knew it, and so shared that premonition. And when, many years before, he and the abbot Comgell, returning from a futile conference of the kings Aedh and Aidan, rested by a spring, concerning which Colum said that the day would come when it would be filled with human blood, "because my people, the Hy-Neill, and the Pictish folk, thy relations according to the flesh, will wage war by this fortress of Cethirn close by," Comgell learned, through Colum's foreknowledge, of what did in truth come to pass. Again, when Colum bade a brother go three days thence to the sea-shore on the west side of Iona, and lie in readiness to help "a certain guest, a crane to wit, beaten by the winds during long and circuitous and aerial flights, which will arrive after the ninth hour of the day, very weary and sore distressed," and bade him to lift it and tend it lovingly for three days and three nights till it should have strength to return to "its former sweet home," and to do this out of love and courtesy because "it comes from our fatherland" — and when all happens and

is done as the saint foretold and commanded, then we have revelation, the vision that is absolute, the knowledge that is the atmosphere of the inevitable. It would take a book indeed to tell all the stories of Columba's visionary and prophetic powers. That I write at this length concerning him, indeed, is because he is himself Iona. Columba is Christian Iona, as much as Iona is Icolmkill. I have often wondered (because of a passage in Adamnan) if the island be not indeed named after him, the Dove: for as Adamnan says incidentally, the name Columba is identical with the Hebrew name Jonah, also signifying a Dove, and by theHebrews pronounced Iona.

It is enough now to recall that this man, so often erring but so human always, in whose life we see the soul of Iona as in a glass, is become the archetype of his race, as Iona is the microcosm of the Gaelic world. That he came into this life heralded by dreams and visions, that from his youth onward to old age he knew every mystery of dream and vision, and that before and after his death his soul was revealed to others through dreams and visions, is but an added hieratic grace: yet we do well to recall often how these dreams before and these visions after were angelical, and nobly beautiful:

how there was left of him, and to his little company, and to us for remembrance, that last signal vision of a blaze of angelic wings, more intolerable than the sun at noon, the tempestuous multitude trembling with the storm of song.

XX

One day, walking by a reedy lochan on the Ross of Mull, not far inland from Fionnaphort, where is the ferry for Baile Mòr of Iona, I met an old man who seemed in sorrow. When he spoke I was puzzled by some words which were not native there, and then I learned that he had long lived in Edinburgh and later in Dunfermline, and in his work had associated with Hollanders and others of the east seas.

He had come back, in his old age, to "see the place of his two loves" — the hamlet in Earraid, where his old mother had blessed him "forty year back," and the little farm where Jean Cameron had kissed him and promised to be true. He had gone away as a soldier, and news reached them of his death; and when he came out of the Indies, and went up Leith Walk to the great post-house in Edinburgh, it was to learn that the Earraid cottage was empty, and that Jean was no longer Jean Cameron.

There was not a touch of bitterness in the old man's words. "It was my name, for one thing," he said simply: "you see, there 's many a 'J. Macdonald' in the Highland regiments; and the mistake got about that way. No, no — the dear lass wasna to blame. And I never lost her love. When I found out where she was I went to see her once more, and to tell her I understood, and loved her all the same. It was hard, in a way, when I found she had made a loveless marriage, but human nature 's human nature, and I could not but be proud and glad that she had nane but puir Jamie Macdonald in her heart. I told her I would be true to her, and since she was poor, would help her, an' wi' God's kindness true I was, an' helped her too. For her man did an awfu' business one day, and was sentenced for life. She had three bairns. Well, I keepit her an' them — though I ne'er saw them but once in the year, for she had come back to the west, her heart brast with the towns. First one bairn died, then another. Then Jean died."

The old man resumed suddenly: "I had put all my savings into the Grand North Bank. When that failed I had nothing, for with the little that was got back I bought a good 'prenticeship for Jean's eldest. Since then I 've lived by odd jobs. But I 'm old

now, and broke. Every day an' every night I think o' them two, my mother an' Jean."

"She must have been a leal fine woman," I said, but in Gaelic. With a flash he looked at me, and then said slowly, as if remembering, "*Eudail de mhnathan an domhain*," "Treasure of all the women in the world."

I have often thought of old "Jamie Macdonald" since. How wonderful is deep love! This man was loyal to his love in long absence, and was not less loyal when he found that she was the wife of another; and gave up thought of home and comfort and companionship, so that he might make life more easy for her and the children that were not his. He had no outer reward for this, nor looked for any.

He had become a "Methody," and preached; so I was told of him contemptuously, afterward. I would have liked to hear James Macdonald preach. The words might have been uncouth, but not the spirit.

We crossed to Balliemore together, and when I came upon him next day by the Reilig Odhran, I asked him what he thought of Iona.

He looked at the grey worn stones, "the stairway of the Kings," the tombs, the carved crosses, the grey ruin of the wind-harried cathedral, and with a wave of his hand, said

simply, "*Comunn mo ghaoil*," "'Tis a companionship after my heart."

I do not doubt that the old man went on his way comforted by the grey silence and grey beauty of this ancient place, and that he found in Iona what would be near him for the rest of his days.

XXI

Once when I was sailing to Tiree, I stopped at Iona, and went to see an old woman named Giorsal. She was of my own people, and, not being Iona-born, the islanders called her the foreigner. She had a daughter named Elasaidh, or Elsie as it is generally given in English, and I wanted to see her even more than the old woman.

"Where is Elsie?" I asked, after our greetings were done.

Giorsal looked at me sidelong, and then shifted the kettle, and busied herself with the teapot.

I repeated the question.

"She is gone," the old woman said, without looking at me.

"Gone? Where has she gone to?"

"I might as well ask you to tell me that."

"Is she married . . . had she a lover . . . or . . . or . . . do you mean that she . . that you . . have lost her?"

"She 's gone. That 's all I know. But she isn't married, so far as I know: and I never knew any man she fancied: and neither I nor any other on Iona has seen her dead body; and by St. Martin's Cross, neither I nor any other saw her leave the island. And that was more than a year ago."

"But, Giorsal, she must have left Iona and gone to Mull, or maybe gone away in a steamer, or ——"

"It was in midwinter, and when a heavy gale was tearing through the Sound. There was no steamer and no boat that day. There isn't a boat of Iona that could have taken the sea that day. And no — Elsie wasna drowned. I see that 's what 's in your mind. She just went out o' the house again cryin'. I asked her what was wrong wi' her. She turned an' smiled, an' because o' that witherin' smile I couldna say a word. She went up behind the Ruins, and no one saw her after that but Ian Donn. He saw her among the bulrushes in the swamp over by Staonaig. She was laughing an' talking to the reeds, or to the wind in the reeds. So Ian Donn says."

"And what do *you* say, Giorsal?"

The old woman went to the door, looked out, and closed it. When she returned, she put another bit on the fire, and kept her gaze on the red glow.

"Do you know much about them old Iona monks?" she asked abruptly.

"What old monks?"

"Them as they call the Culdees. You used to be askin' lots o' questions about them. Ay? well . . . they aye hated folk from the North, an' women-folk above all."

I waited, silent.

"And Elsie, poor lass, she hated them in turn. She was all for the wild clansmen out o' Skye and the Long Island. She said she wished the Siól Leoid had come to Iona before Colum built the big church. And for why? Well, there's this, for one thing: For months a monk had come to her o' nights in her sleep, and said he would kill her, because she was a heathen. She went to the minister at last, and said her say. He told her she was a foolish wench, and was sore angry with her. So then she went to old Mary Gillespie, out by the lochan beyond Fionnaphort on the Ross yonder — her that has the sight an' a power o' the old wisdom. After that she took to meeting friends in the moonshine."

"Friends?"

"Ay. There's no call to name names. One day she told me that she had been bidden to go over to them. If she didn't, the monks would kill her, they said. The

monks are still the strongest here, they told her, or she me, I forget which. That is, except over by Staonaig. Up between Sgéur Iolaire and Cnoc Druidean there's a path that no monk can go. There, in the old days, they burned a woman. She was not a woman, but they thought she was. She was one o' the Sorrows of the Shee, that they put out to suffer for them, an' get the mortal ill. That's the plague to *them*. It's ill to any that brings harm on *them*. That's why the monks arena strong over by Staonaig way. But I told my girl not to mind. She was safe wi' me, I said. She said that was true. For weeks I heard no more o' that monk. One night Elsie came in smiling an' pluckin' wild roses. '*Breisleach!*' I cried, 'what's the meanin' o' roses in January?' She looked at me, frighted, an' said nothin', but threw the things on the fire. It was next day she went away."

"And ——"

"An' that's all. Here's the tea. Ay, an' for sure here's my good man. *Whist*, now! Rob, do you see who's here?"

XXII

Nothing is more strange than the confused survival of legends and pagan faiths and early Christian beliefs, such as may be found

still in some of the isles. A Tiree man, whom I met some time ago on the boat that was taking us both to the west, told me there 's a story that Mary Magdalene lies in a cave in Iona. She roamed the world with a blind man who loved her, but they had no sin. One day they came to Knoidart in Argyll. Mary Magdalene's first husband had tracked her there, and she knew that he would kill the blind man. So she bade him lie down among some swine, and she herself herded them. But her husband came and laughed at her. "That is a fine boar you have there," he said. Then he put a spear through the blind man. "Now I will take your beautiful hair," he said. He did this, and went away. She wept till she died. One of Colum's monks found her, and took her to Iona, and she was buried in a cave. No one but Colum knew who she was. Colum sent away the man, because he was always mooning and lamenting. She had a great wonderful beauty to her.

It is characteristic enough, even to the quaint confusion that could make Mary Magdalene and St. Columba contemporary. But as for the story, what is it but the universal Gaelic legend of Diarmid and Grania? They too wandered far to escape the avenger. It does not matter that their "beds" are

shown in rock and moor, from Glenmoriston to Loch Awe, from Lora Water to West Loch Tarbert, with an authenticity as absolute as that which discovers them almost anywhere between Donegal and Clare; nor that the death-place has many sites betwixt Argyll and Connemara. In Gaelic Scotland every one knows that Diarmid was wounded to the death on the rocky ground between Tarbert of Loch Fyne and the West Loch. Every one knows the part the boar played, and the part Finn played.

Doubtless the story came by way of the Shannon to the Loch of Shadows, or from Cuculain's land to Dûn Sobhairce on the Antrim coast, and thence to the Scottish mainland. In wandering to the isles, it lost something both of Eiré and Alba. The Campbells, too, claimed Diarmid; and so the Hebrideans would as soon forget him. So there, by one byplay of the mind or another, it survived in changing raiment. Perhaps an islesman had heard a strange legend about Mary Magdalene, and so named Grania anew. Perhaps a story-teller consciously wove it the new way. Perhaps an Iona man, hearing the tale in distant Barra or Uist, in Coll or Tiree, "buried" Mary in a cave of Icolmkill.

The notable thing is, not that a primitive

legend should love fantastic raiment, but that it should be so much alike, where the Syrian wanders from waste to waste, by the camp-fires of the Basque muleteers, and in the rainy lands of the Gael.

In Mingulay, one of the south isles of the Hebrides, in South Uist, and in Iona, I have heard a fundamentally identical tale told with striking variations. It is a tale so widespread that it has given rise to a pathetic proverb, "Is mairg a loisgeadh a chlarsach dut," "Pity on him who would burn the harp for you."

In Mingulay, the "harper" who broke his "harp" for a woman's love was a young man, a fiddler. For three years he wandered out of the west into the east, and when he had made enough money to buy a good share in a fishing-boat, he came back to Mingulay. When he reached his Mary's cottage, at dusk, he played her favourite air, an "oran leannanachd:" but when she came out it was with a silver ring on her left hand and a baby in her arms. Thus poor Padruig Macneill knew Mary had broken her troth and married another man, and so he went down to the shore and played the lament for the dead that is called a "marbh-rann," and then broke his fiddle on the rocks; and when they came upon him in the morning

he had the strings of it round his neck. In Uist, the instrument is more vaguely called a "tiompan," and here, on a bitter cold night in a famine time, the musician breaks it so as to feed the fire to warm his wife — a sacrifice ill repaid by the elopement of the hard woman that night. In Iona, the tale is of an Irish piper who came over to Icolmkill on a pilgrimage, and to lay his "peeb-h'yanna" [1] on "the holy stones;" but, when there, he got word that his young wife was ill, so he "made a loan of his clar," and with the money returned to Derry, only to find that his dear had gone away with a soldier to the Americas.

The legendary history of Iona would be as much Pagan as Christian. To-day, at many a *ceilidh* by the warm hearths in winter, one may hear allusions to the Scandinavian pirates, or to their more ancient and obscure kin, the Fomór. The Fomór or Fomórians were a people that lived before the Gael, and had their habitations in the isles: fierce prowlers of the sea, who loved darkness and cold and storm, and drove herds of wolves across the deeps. In other words, they were elemental forces. But the name

1 The Irish pipes are called "Piob-theannaich" to distinguish them from the "Piob" or "Piob-Mhòr" of the Highlands.

is sometimes used for the Norse pirates who ravaged the west, from the Lews to the Town of the Hurdle-Ford, as Dublin is called in Gaelic.

In poetic narration "the men of Lochlin" occurs oftener: sometimes the "Summer-sailors," as the Vikings called themselves; sometimes, perhaps oftenest, the "Danes." The Vikings have left numerous personal names among the islanders, notably the general term "summer-sailors," *somerlédi*, which survives as Somerled. Many Macleods and Macdonalds are called Somerled, Torquil (also Torcall, Thorkill), and Mànus (Magnus), and in the Hebrides surnames such as Odrum betray a Norse origin. A glance at any good map will reveal how largely the capes and promontories and headlands, and small bays and havens of the west, remember the lords of the Suderoer.

The fascination of this legendary history is in its contrast of the barbaric and the spiritual. Since I was a child I have been held spell-bound by this singular union. To see the Virgin Mary in the sombre and terrible figure of the Washer of the Ford, or spiritual destiny in that of the Woman with the Net, was natural: as to believe that the same Columba could be as tender as St. Bride or gentle as St. Francis, and yet could

thrust the living Oran back into his grave, or prophecy, as though himself a believer in the druidic wisdom, by the barking of a favourite hound that had a white spot on his forehead — *Donnalaich chon chinain.*

XXIII

Once more, for an instance of the grafting of Christian thought and imagery on pagan thought and imagery, I take a few pages of the introductory part to the story of "The Woman with the Net," in a later volume.[1] They tell of a young monk who, inspired by Colum's holy example, went out of Iona as a missionary to the Pictish heathen of the north.

When Artân had kissed the brow of every white-robed brother on Iona, and had been thrice kissed by the aged Colum, his heart was filled with gladness.

It was late summer, and in the afternoon-light peace lay on the green waters of the Sound, on the green grass of the dunes, on the domed wicker-woven cells of the culdees over whom the holy Colum ruled, and on the little rock-strewn hill which rose above where stood Colum's wattled church of sun-baked mud. The abbot walked slowly

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[1] The Dominion of Dreams.

by the side of the young man. Colum was tall, with hair long and heavy but white as the canna, and with a beard that hung low on his breast, grey as the moss on old firs. His blue eyes were tender. The youth — for though he was a grown man he seemed a youth beside Colum — had beauty. He was tall and comely, with yellow curling hair, and dark-blue eyes, and a skin so white that it troubled some of the monks who dreamed old dreams and washed them away in tears and scourgings.

"You have the bitter fever of youth upon you, Artân," said Colum, as they crossed the dunes beyond Dûn-I; "but you have no fear, and you will be a flame among these Pictish idolaters, and you will be a lamp to show them the way."

"And when I come again, there will be clappings of hands, and hymns, and many rejoicings?"

"I do not think you will come again," said Colum. "The wild people of these north-lands will burn you, or crucify you, or put you upon the crahslat, or give you thirst and hunger till you die. It will be a great joy for you to die like that, Artân, my son?"

"Ay, a great joy," answered the young monk, but with his eyes dreaming away from his words.

Silence was between them as they neared the cove where a large coracle lay, with three men in it.

"Will God be coming over the water to Iona when I am away?" asked Artân.

Colum stared at him.

"Is it likely that God would come here in a coracle?" he asked, with scornful eyes.

The young man looked abashed. For sure, God would not come in a coracle, just as he himself might come. He knew by that how Colum had reproved him. He would come in a cloud of fire, and would be seen from far and near. Artân wondered if the place he was going to was too far north for him to see that greatness; but he feared to ask.

"Give me a new name," he asked; "give me a new name, my father."

"What name will you have?"

"Servant of Mary."

"So be it, Artân Gille-Mhoire."

With that Colum kissed him and bade farewell, and Artân sat down in the coracle, and covered his head with his mantle, and wept and prayed.

The last word he heard was, *Peace!*

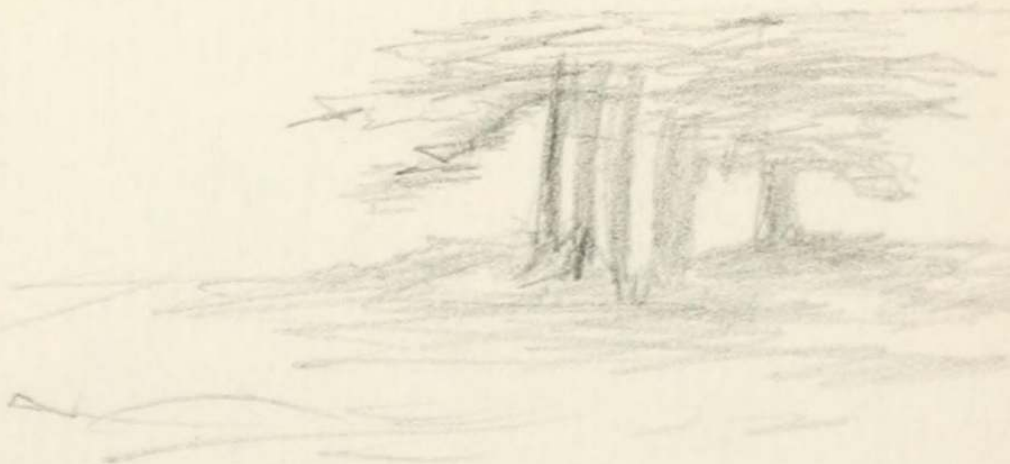
"That is a good word, and a good thing," he said to himself; "and because I am the Servant of Mary, and the Brother of Jesu

the Son, I will take peace to the *Cruitnè*, who know nothing of that blessing of the blessings."

When he unfolded his mantle, he saw that the coracle was already far from Iona. The south wind blew, and the tides swept northward, and the boat moved swiftly across the water. The sea was ashine with froth and small waves leaping like lambs.

In the boat were Thorkeld, a helot of Iona, and two dark wild-eyed men of the north. They were Picts, but could speak the tongue of the Gael. Myrdu, the Pictish king of Skye, had sent them to Iona, to bring back from Colum a culdee who could show wonders. "And tell the chief Druid of the God-men," Myrdu had said, "that if his culdee does not show me good wonders, and so make me believe in his two gods and the woman, I will put an ash-shaft through his body from the hips and out at his mouth, and send him back on the north tide to the Isle of the White-Robes."

The sun was already among the outer isles when the coracle passed near the Isle of Columns. A great noise was in the air: the noise of the waves in the caverns, and the noise of the tide, like sea-wolves growling, and like bulls bellowing in a narrow pass of the hills.



A sudden current caught the boat, and it began to drift towards great reefs white with ceaseless torn streams.

Thorkeld leaned from the helm, and shouted to the two Picts. They did not stir, but sat staring, idle with fear.

Artân knew now that it was as Colum had said. God would give him glory soon.

So he took the little clarsach he had for hymns, for he was the best harper on Iona, and struck the strings, and sang. But the Latin words tangled in his throat, and he knew too that the men in the boat would not understand what he sang; also that the older gods still came far south, and in the caves of the Isle of Columns were demons. There was only one tongue common to all; and since God had wisdom beyond that of Colum himself, He would know the song in Gaelic as well as though sung in Latin.

So Artân let the wind take his broken hymn, and he made a song of his own, and sang:

O Heavenly Mary, Queen of the Elements,
And you, Brigit the fair with the little harp,
And all the saints, and all the old gods
(And it is not one of them I 'd be disowning),
Speak to the Father, that he may save us from drowning.

Then seeing that the boat drifted closer, he sang again:

Save us from the rocks and the sea, Queen of Heaven!
And remember that I am a Culdee of Iona,
And that Colum has sent me to the *Cruitnè*
To sing them the song of peace lest they be damned for ever!

Thorkeld laughed at that.

"Can the woman put swimming upon you?" he said roughly. "I would rather have the good fin of a great fish now than any woman in the skies."

"You will burn in hell for that," said Artân, the holy zeal warm at his heart.

But Thorkeld answered nothing. His hand was on the helm, his eyes on the foaming rocks. Besides, what had he to do with the culdee's hell or heaven? When he died, he, who was a man of Lochlann, would go to his own place.

One of the dark men stood, holding the mast. His eyes shone. Thick words swung from his lips, like seaweed thrown out of a hollow by an ebbing wave.

The coracle swerved, and the four men were wet with the heavy spray.

Thorkeld put his oar in the water, and the swaying craft righted.

"Glory to God," said Artân.

"There is no glory to your god in this," said Thorkeld scornfully. "Did you not hear what Necta sang? He sang to the woman in there that drags men into the

caves, and throws their bones on the next tide. He put an incantation upon her, and she shrank, and the boat slid away from the rocks."

"That is a true thing," thought Artân. He wondered if it was because he had not sung his hymn in the holy Latin.

When the last flame died out of the west, and the stars came like sheep gathering at the call of the shepherd, Artân remembered that he had not said his prayers nor sung the vesper hymn.

He lay back and listened. There were no bells calling across the water. He looked into the depths. It was Manann's kingdom, and he had never heard that God was there. He looked long. Then he stared into the dark-blue star-strewn sky.

Suddenly he touched Thorkeld.

"Tell me," he said, "how far north has the Cross of Christ come?"

"By the sea-way it has not come here yet. Murdoch the Freckled came with it this way, but he was pulled into the sea, and he died."

"Who pulled him into the sea?"

Thorkeld stared into the running wave. He had no words.

Artân lay still for a long while.

"It will go ill with me," he thought, "if Mary cannot see me so far away from Iona,

and if God will not listen to me. Colum should have known that, and given me a holy leaf with the fair branching letters on it, and the Latin words that are the words of God."

Then he spoke to the man who had sung.

"Do you know of Mary, and God, and the Son, and the Spirit?"

"You have too many Gods, Culdee," answered the Pict sullenly: "for of these one is your god's son, and the other is the woman his mother, and the third is the ghost of an ancestor."

Artân frowned.

"The curse of the God of Peace upon you for that," he said angrily; "do you know that you have hell for your dwelling-place if you speak evil of God the Father, and the Son, and the Mother of God?"

"How long have they been in Iona, White-Robe?"

The man spoke scornfully. Artân knew they had not been there many years. He had no words.

"My fathers worshipped the Sun on the Holy Isle before ever your great Druid that is called Colum crossed the Moyle. Were your three gods in the coracle with Colum? They were not on the Holy Isle when he came."

"They were coming there," answered Artân confusedly. "It is a long, long way from — from — from the place they were sailing from."

Necta listened sullenly.

"Let them stay on Iona," he said: "gods though they be, it would fare ill with them if they came upon the Woman with the Net." Then he turned on his side, and lay by the man Darach, who was staring at the moon and muttering words that neither Artân nor Thorkeld knew.

A white calm fell. The boat lay like a leaf on a silent pool. There was nothing between that dim wilderness and the vast sweeping blackness filled with quivering stars, but the coracle, that a wave could crush.

XXIV

One day, on Iona, I met an old woman who had been gathering driftwood in the haven called Port-na-Churaich — the haven of the coracle, for it was there St. Colum landed on the day Christ's hand steered the helm to the Holy Isle. She was weary with her burthen, and had rested on a ledge of granite, and there had fallen asleep. I stood a long time looking at her. I had not seen her for some years, not since the death of

her daughter in the Sleat of Skye: but it was not at the wayworn sadness of the old figure I was looking, though that was in my thoughts. I was thinking of what I had heard of her. Long ago a poet of the isles had put song upon song on her, as the saying is: and one known to all of us had made an *oran-ghaoil* about her which is still sung from the Rhinns of Islay to The Seven Hunters. When I was a child I had heard often of the beauty of Mary Macarthur. But sorrow, which had long lain as upon a rock on the hills, looking at her, had come suddenly in the twilight, when all was well, and took her heart in fierce swift hands, and wrung it, till it was as tide-wrack left by the ebb on dry sand. She was old, and her beauty was gone away from her like a rainbow lifted from a wilderness, long before the last of her partings came to her in Sleat of Skye.

She too had been known for her songs. They were pastoral and sweet, or of the sea and wild and lamenting. One, telling of the small, shaggy, long-horned kye coming with a young herd-girl over the braes in mist and crowding upon a loosened cliff, and so falling into the surge of the tides a thousand feet below, is well known among the few who remember such things in the old tongue

that is being so swiftly forgotten: another, of the sea-bulls, is a favourite *iorram* of the boatmen of the middle isles: and Eachan MacDougall, the blind poet of Skye, used to sing to women in the twilight, over the kindly tea or sup of milk and porridge, her seven strange sad songs that are called "A Day in My Heart." It was these only I recalled now. They tell the lives of many women. There is the dawn-song of wonder and joy, the morning-song of the proud heart, the noon-song of the sleeping passions and sleeping thoughts, the afternoon song of longing and blind anger and pain, the gloaming song of regret and tears and silence, the nightfall song of revolt and the heart aflame, and the midnight song that is not sung, but is smothered in ashes, or drowned in deep water, or burned in the fierceness of fire. In Eachan-Dall's poem, he says her beauty is the beauty of the morning star in June, when it is a white fire in a rose of flame. He says her grace is the grace of the larch in an April wind, of a reed in shaken waters, of a wave tost like a white flower in the blue hair of the sea, of a fawn moving through bracken in the green dusk of old trees. He says men will remember her beauty till they are old; and their sons shall remember it; and their son's sons. He says, "Surely in this fair

woman's heart is great joy and pride, for she will be beautiful and glad all the days of her life." And I recall the last of her songs, "Flame on the Wind." I cannot give it aright in English, for its long mournful cadences, lifted on tides of passionate vain regret and old grief, need the language of the old world that has in it so much of the sound of wind in trees and the lamentation of wind and the sighing of waters. I thought of it as I looked at old Mary Macarthur, and of the ending of one verse:

O burning soul,
Can hills of ice assuage this burning fire?

And then I remembered one of her love-songs, she who had known so much love, and had thrown treasures down barren rocks into the cold seas, and had made a flaming universe and eternity out of the pale hour of a wintry noon.

It is dark here, my Love, my Pulse, my Heart, my Flame:
Dark the night, dark with wind and cloud, the wind without aim
Baffled and blind, the cloud low, broken, dragging, lame,
And a stir in the darkness at the end of the room sighing my name, whispering my name!

Is that the sea calling, or the hounds of the sea, or the wind's hounds?

* * * * *

Great is that dark noise under the black north wind
Out on the sea to-night: but still it is — still as the frosts that bind
The stark inland waters in green depths where icebergs grind —
In this noise of shaking storm in my heart and this blast sweeping my mind!

And now nothing of all this left, nothing but a tired old woman, sad-eyed and furrowed, poorly clad, a gatherer of driftwood. Hills of ice had in truth assuaged this burning fire. The noise of shaking storm had ebbed from the troubled heart; no blast now swept the mind, but only the chill airs of winter froze dreams and all old sweet thoughts, perhaps memories even. Poor old woman, how white and old and withered she looked, so forlorn in her poor frayed clothes, in the sleep of weariness, among the yellowing bracken by the granite rock. Was it all gone, I wondered: all the dream, the wonder, the flame? Were they all gone, noons of passionate life, twilights of peace and recaptured hopes, nights uplifted in dreams or shaken with tears and longings?

While I was dreaming and wondering, wondering and dreaming, old Mary stirred, and opened her eyes. At first sleep was heavy on her, and I saw she was not yet rightly awake.

"Do not stir," I said, "and I will sit down

here beside you, *Mairi nic Ruaridh Donn*." At that, and the familiar name, she knew me, and was glad to tears, and welcomed me over and over, as though I had come in some impossible way out of the irrecoverable past.

"Yes, I had the tiredness indeed," she added after a little, "but what of that? For I had the good sleep, and a thousand things of goodness more, for I had a dream of dreams. Do I remember it? Yes, for sure, I have it as clear as a cradle. I was lying here, just as I will be now, with this faggot here too, when a woman of beauty came up the path and took the faggot and flung all the sticks an' ends into the sea. 'What will you be doing, lady?' I said, but not in anger, only in the great wonder. ''Tis your sorrows I'm throwing away,' she said, with a voice as sweet as to send the birds to the branches —*chuireadh e na h'eòin 'an crannaibh*. 'It is glad of that I am,' I said, 'for it is many of them I have.' Then she said, 'You 'll have peace, Mary, and great joy, and your songs and your beauty will never die.' So the tears were at me at that, an' I cried, 'It is only an *aisling* you are . . . a dream and a vision!' 'No,' she said, 'an' by the same token, Mary, I 'll tell you the song that you were singing below your breath down there on the shore:

" A Dhe na mara
Cuir todhar 's an tarruinn
Chon tachair an talaimh
Chon bailcidh dhuinn biaidh." '

And sure, an' in truth, these were the very words I was singing to myself down there on the shore . . . 'O God of the Sea, fill the sea-wave with store of the good weed, to feed the soil that will give us food.' And at that my heart sank with fear and rose with gladness, for who could this be but . . . an' sure before I could put word to it, she said *I am Brighid.* I went on the knees, and cried *gach la' agus oidhche thoir duinn do sheimh* — 'each day and night give us thy peace.' And I was putting another word to it, for her, fair Foster-Mother of Christ, when she looked at me and said, 'I am older than Brighid of the Mantle, Mary, and it is you that should know that. I put songs and music on the wind before ever the bells of the chapels were rung in the West or heard in the East. I am Brighid-nam-Bratta, but I am also Brighid-Muirghin-na-tuinne, and Brighid-sluagh, Brighid-nan-sitheach seang, Brighid-Binne-Bheul-lhuchd-nan-trusganan-uaine, and I am older than Aona and am as old as Luan. And in Tir na h'oige my name is Suibhal-bheann; in Tir-fo-thuinn it is Cù-gorm; and in Tir na h'oise it is Sireadh-thall. And I

have been a breath in your heart. And the day has its feet to it that will see me coming into the hearts of men and women like a flame upon dry grass, like a flame of wind in a great wood. For the time of change is at hand, Mairi nic Ruaridh Donn — though not for you, old withered leaf on the dry branch, though for you, too, when you come to us and see all things in the pools of life yonder.'

"And at that I closed my eyes, and said the line of the old poem that you will be knowing well, the Laoidh Fhraoch — *Bu bhinne na farch-chiuil do ghuth* — sweeter thy voice than the sweetest lute.

"And when I opened them she was not there, but I was an old woman on the brae above Port-na-Churaich, and when I looked again it was you I saw and no other."[1]

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1 St. Brighid (in Gaelic pronounced sometimes *Bride*, sometimes *Breed*), St. Bride of the Isles as she is lovingly called in the Hebrides, has no name so dear to the Gael as "Muime-Chriosd," Christ's Foster-Mother, a name bestowed on her by one of the most beautiful of Celtic legends. In the isles of Gaelic Scotland her most familiar name is *Brighid nam Bratta* — St. Bridget or St. Bride of the Mantle — from her having wrapt the new-born Babe in her mantle in Mary's hour of weakness. She did not come into the Gaelic heart with the Cross and Mary, but was there long before as Bride, Brighid or Brithid of the Dedannans, those not immortal but for long ages deathless folk who to the Gael were as the Olympians to the Greeks. That

I have thought often of old Mary Macarthur, and of her dream of holy St. Bride, and of that older Brighid of the West, Mother of Songs and Music — she who breathes in the

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earlier Brighid was goddess of poetry and music, one of the three great divinities of love, goddess of women, the keeper of prophecies and dreams, the watcher of the greater destinies, the guardian of the future. I think she was no other than a Celtic Demeter — that Demeter-Desphœna born of the embrace of Poseidon, who in turn is no other than Lîr, the Oceanus of the Gael: and instead of Demeter seeking and lamenting Persephone in the underworld, it is Demeter-Brighid seeking her brother (or, it may be, her son) Manan (Manannan), God of the Sea, son of Oceanus, Lîr — and finding him at last in Iceland, etc. — as I write here a little further on. Persephone and Manan are symbols of the same Return of Life.

The other names are old Gaelic names: *Brighid-Muirghin-na-tuinne*, Brighid-Conception-of-the-Waves; *Brighid-Sluagh* (or Sloigh), Brighid of the Immortal Host; *Brighid-nan-Sitheach-seang*, Bridget of the Slim Fairy Folk; *Brighid-Binne-Bheul-thuchd-nan-trusganan-uaine*, Song-sweet (lit. melodious mouth'd) Brighid of the Tribe of the Green Mantles. She is also called Brighid of the Harp, Brighid of the Sorrowful, Brighid of Prophecy, Brighid of Pure Love, St. Bride of the Isles, Bride of Joy, and other names. *Aona* is an occasional and ancient form of *Di-Aoìn*, Friday; and *Luan*, of *Diluain*, Monday.

Tir-na-h'Oige (commonly anglicised as Tirnanogue) is the Land of (Eternal) Youth; *Tir-fo-thuinn* is the Country of the Waves; and *Tir-na-h'oise* is the Country of Ancient Years. The fairy names *Siubhal-bheann*, *Cù-gorm*, and *Siread-thall* respectively mean Mountain-traveller, Grey Hound, and Seek-Beyond.

reed, on the wind, in the hearts of women and in the minds of poets. For I too have my dream, my memory of one whom as a child I called Star-Eyes, and whom, later, I called "Banmorair-na-mara," the Lady of the Sea, and whom at last I knew to be no other than the woman that is in the heart of women. I was not more than seven when one day, by a well, near a sea-loch in Argyll, just as I was stooping to drink, my glancing eyes lit on a tall woman standing among a mist of wild-hyacinths under three great sycamores. I stood, looking, as a fawn looks, wide-eyed, unafraid. She did not speak, but she smiled, and because of the love and beauty in her eyes I ran to her. She stooped and lifted blueness out of the flowers as one might lift foam out of a pool, and I thought she threw it over me. When I was found, lying among the hyacinths, dazed, and, as was thought, ill, I asked eagerly after the lady in white and with hair "all shiny-gold like buttercups," but when I found I was laughed at, or at last, when I passionately persisted, was told I was sun-dazed and had been dreaming, I said no more. But I did not forget. And for many days, for weeks indeed, I stole away to seek or be found by my white love, though she had gone away or did not come again. It

was years afterward that I heard a story of a woman of the divine folk, who was called the Lady of the Sea, and was a daughter of Lîr, and went lamenting upon the earth because she had lost her brother Manan the Beautiful, but came upon him at last among the hills of Iceland and wooed him with songs and flowers and brought him back again, so that all the world of men rejoiced, and ships sailed the seas in safety and nets were filled with the fruit of the wave. And it was years after that before I knew the deeper wisdom, and wrote of the Shepherdess the words that I now say again — "I believe that we are close upon a great and deep spiritual change; I believe a new redemption is even now conceived of the Divine Spirit in the human heart, that is itself as a woman, broken in dreams and yet sustained in faith, patient, long-suffering, looking towards home. I believe that though the Reign of Peace may be yet a long way off, it is drawing near; and that Who shall save us anew shall come divinely as a Woman — but whether through mortal birth, or as an immortal breathing upon our souls, none can yet know. Sometimes I dream of the old prophecy that Christ shall come again upon Iona; and of that later prophecy which foretells, now as the Bride

of Christ, now as the Daughter of God, now as the Divine Spirit embodied through mortal birth — the coming of a new Presence and Power; and dream that this may be upon Iona, so that the little Gaelic island may become as the little Syrian Bethlehem. But more wise it is to dream, not of hallowed ground, but of the hallowed gardens of the soul, wherein She shall appear white and radiant. Or that, upon the hills, where we are wandered, the Shepherdess shall call us home."

Yes, I have thought often of Mary Macarthur, that solitary old woman, poor and desolate, once so beautiful: yet loved by Brighid, the genius of our people. Was it not our sorrowful Gaelic world I saw, when I came upon the poor old woman — that passing world of songs and beauty, of poets' dreams and of broken hearts, that even now in forlorn old age is loved again by Brighid the White — Brighid the White, who even yet may use the fading voice to lead the wild trumpets of revelation?

XXVI

We have in Ross and the Outer Isles a singular legend, which has a beauty within

and without. A young crofter was unhappy in love and not fortunate in the hard way of the hill-life. When bad seasons come on the back of the black wind, the croft-smoke turns from blue to brown, as the saying is: and bad seasons in succession had come to the Strath, and every one of the scattered clansfolk there had suffered, but none so much as Fergus Dhu, who had lost sheep, and crops, and the youth out of his heart.

One day he went idly across the boggy moor under Cnoc Glas, mooning among the loneroid and black heather where the white tufts of canna were like blown foam of the sea. A single tree grew on that waste, a thorn that on a forgotten Beltane had been withered into a grey Woman, the Fairy Thorn or The Singing Tree or Tree of Bad Music. At many a winter *ceilidh* by the peat-glow tales were passed of what had been seen or heard there: but they were all at one in this, that only the happy and fortunate were in peril there, that only the unhappy and unfortunate might go that way, and, indifferent, see the tall swift woman in grey, or hear the thin music.

Likely that was why Fergus — Fergus Dhu as he was called, because of his black hair, and black eyes, and the dark hours into which he so often fell — wandered that day along

the sodden bracken-covered sheep-ways. When he came to the Thorn he saw no grey woman, perhaps because there was no room in his dreaming mind for any but one woman who now would never warm to him but be a kindly stranger always; and heard no thin air, gay or wild, perhaps because the sad lift and fall in his heart was a daylong sound that dulled his ears. But while he was staring idly into the withered thorn he saw a short stem break into little green leaves. He could not believe what his eyes showed him, but when he saw also pink and white blossoms run in and out among the leaves and break into a fall of snow, and felt the sudden sweetness in the air about him, he believed. He went closer, and his wonder grew when he saw that the stem had seven holes in it. He put his hand on the stem, and it came away. There was a hole at each end, and the thorn-reed was like any *feadan*. So he put it to his mouth, and ran his familiar fingers up and down the holes, for Fergus Dhu was the cunningest player in the Strath. He played till the whole Thorn went into a wave of green. He played till a snow of blossom came all over that greenness. Although it was November, and wet, and the hill-wind moaned searching the corries, by the thorn it was like a May noon. Fergus

looked at the sky, and saw that it was blue: at the long moor, and saw that it was covered with April yellow and with a shimmer of the wings of little birds. He looked at the grey hills to the east, and they were rose-red and a star was above them: he looked at the grey hills to the west, and they were blue as peat-smoke and a rainbow leaned against them. Then his heart filled with joy, and he said to himself, "I have found my desire." So he played his joy. As he played, the rainbow leaned away from the grey hills of the west, and took their sadness, and was no more: the star sank behind the grey mountains of the east: the long moor faded into the old silence: the white foam and the green wave ebbed from the thorn.

Fergus looked at the thorn-pipe, and it was only a black cloud-wet feadan with seven mossy holes in it.

He "went away" in that hour. No one saw him that night, or the next day, or the next: and months and years passed, and no one saw him, and his body was never seen, though his bonnet was found near the withered thorn.

In the seventh year after that a strange thing happened. A new life quickened the thorn. A thousand small green buds shook out little fluttering green leaves, and, from

these, white moths of blossom continually rose. Linnets sang on the branches.

One day Fergus Dhu came strolling that way. He had no memory of the years that had gone, or with whom he had been, and the sweet fatal accent was out of his ears. But when he saw the thorn he remembered his *feadan*, and took it from his coat-fold, and played because of his gladness. The tears fell from his eyes when he saw the grey rain come down and blot out the new life from the thorn, so that it was old and withered again: and at the wet hill-wind calling again its old mournful cry, wheeling like a tired hawk above the far lamentation of the sheep. "Why is this?" he said. "When I saw this lonely place in its sorrow I played it into joy. And now when I come upon it in its beauty, I have played it back into the old sorrow. Grief to my heart that it is so."

One man of the Strath saw Fergus Dhu that day, and he spoke of Fergus as a thin worn leaf that one sees through when it hangs in the wind. Certainly no other saw him, nor has seen him since.

XXVII

This tale of Fergus, who was fey, and went down the west with strangers, is it not

also a symbol, even as Mary Macarthur, old and poor but treasured and loved and cared for by the Genius of our race . . . is it not also a symbol of the Gaelic heart, of the Gaelic muse let me say? For the Gaelic muse seems to me the beautiful and sad and waywardly joyous spirit of whom poor Fergus was but the troubled image. Does she, too, not go to and fro in a land where rainbows bloom and fade above desolate places and where a star hangs above the holy hills of the east, seeking her desire: going in sorrow, but, suddenly beholding the world radiant, breaking into songs of joy and laughter: coming again, after an evil time, and finding the grey thorn of the world full of the green leaf, blossom, and undying youth, and, so finding, turning suddenly to tears, and to the old sorrow, and to the longing whose thirst is not to be quenched, to the cry of the curlew for the waste, of the heart going a long way from shadow to shadow?

One must with this lanthorn of the spirit look into the dark troubled water of the Gaelic heart, too, I think, if one would understand. How else can one understand the joy that is so near to sorrow, the sorrow that like a wave of the sea can break in a moment into light and beauty? I have

heard often in effect, "This is no deep heart that in one hour weeps, and in the next laughs." But I know a deeper heart that in one hour weeps and the next laughs, so deep that light dies away within it, and silence and the beginning and the end are one: the heart of the sea. And there is another heart that is deep, and weeps one hour and in the next laughs: the heart of Night . . . where Oblivion smiles, and it is day; sighs, and the darkness is come. And there is another heart that is deep, and weeps in one hour and in the next laughs: the soul of man: where tears and laughter are the fans that blow the rose-white flame of life. And I am well content that the Gaelic heart, that in one hour weeps and in the next laughs, though it be so sad and worn among smiling nations, is in accord with the great spirits of the world and with immortal things.

As I write, here on the hill-slope of Dûn-I, the sound of the furtive wave is as the sighing in a shell. I am alone between sea and sky, for there is no other on this bouldered height, nothing visible but a single blue shadow that slowly sails the hillside. The bleating of lambs and ewes, the lowing of kine, these come up from the Machar that lies between the west slopes and the shore-

less sea to the west; these ascend as the very smoke of sound. All round the island there is a continuous breathing; deeper and more prolonged on the west, where the open sea is; but audible everywhere. The seals on Soa are even now putting their breasts against the running tide; for I see a flashing of fins here and there in patches at the north end of the Sound, and already from the ruddy granite shores of the Ross there is a congregation of seafowl — gannets and guillemots, skuas and herring-gulls, the long-necked northern diver, the tern, the cormorant. In the sunblaze, the waters of the Sound dance their blue bodies and swirl their flashing white hair o' foam; and, as I look, they seem to me like children of the wind and the sunshine, leaping and running in these flowing pastures, with a laughter as sweet against the ears as the voices of children at play.

The joy of life vibrates everywhere. Yet the Weaver does not sleep, but only dreams. He loves the sun-drowned shadows. They are invisible thus, but they are there, in the sunlight itself. Sure, they may be heard: as, an hour ago, when on my way hither by the Stairway of the Kings — for so sometimes they call here the ancient stones of the mouldered princes of long ago — I heard a

mother moaning because of the son that had had to go over-sea and leave her in her old age; and heard also a child sobbing, because of the sorrow of childhood — that sorrow so unfathomable, so incommunicable. And yet not a stone's-throw from where I lie, half hidden beneath an overhanging rock, is the Pool of Healing. To this small, black-brown tarn, pilgrims of every generation, for hundreds of years, have come. Solitary, these; not only because the pilgrim to the Fount of Eternal Youth must fare hither alone, and at dawn, so as to touch the healing water the moment the first sunray quickens it — but solitary, also, because those who go in quest of this Fount of Youth are the dreamers and the Children of Dream, and these are not many, and few come now to this lonely place. Yet, an Isle of Dream Iona is, indeed. Here the last sun-worshippers bowed before the Rising of God: here Columba and his hymning priests laboured and brooded; and here Oran or his kin dreamed beneath the monkish cowl that pagan dream of his. Here, too, the eyes of Fionn and Oisìn, and of many another of the heroic men and women of the Fiànna, may have lingered; here the Pict and the Celt bowed beneath the yoke of the Norse pirate, who, too, left his dreams, or rather his strangely beautiful soul-rainbows,

as a heritage to the stricken; here, for century after century, the Gael has lived, suffered, joyed, dreamed his impossible, beautiful dream; as here, now, he still lives, still suffers patiently, still dreams, and, through all and over all, broods upon the incalculable mysteries. He is an elemental, among the elemental forces. He knows the voices of wind and sea: and it is because the Fount of Youth upon Dûn-I of Iona is not the only wellspring of peace, that the Gael can front destiny as he does, and can endure. Who knows where its tributaries are? They may be in your heart, or in mine, and in a myriad others.

I would that the birds of Angus Ogue might, for once, be changed, not, as fabled, into the kisses of love, but into doves of peace, that they might fly into the green world, and nest there in many hearts, in many minds, crooning their incommunicable song of joy and hope.

XXVIII

A doomed and passing race. I have been taken to task for these words. But they are true, in the deep reality where they obtain. Yes, but true only in one sense, however vital that is. The Breton's eyes are slowly turning from the enchanted West, and slowly his ears

are forgetting the whisper of the wind around menhir and dolmen. The Manxman has ever been the mere yeoman of the Celtic chivalry; but even his rude dialect perishes year by year. In Wales, a great tradition survives; in Ireland, a supreme tradition fades through sunset-hued horizons; in Celtic Scotland, a passionate regret, a despairing love and longing, narrows yearly before a dull and incredibly selfish alienism. The Celt has at last reached his horizon. There is no shore beyond. He knows it. This has been the burden of his song since Malvina led the blind Oisìn to his grave by the sea: "Even the Children of Light must go down into darkness." But this apparition of a passing race is no more than the fulfilment of a glorious resurrection before our very eyes. For the genius of the Celtic race stands out now with averted torch, and the light of it is a glory before the eyes, and the flame of it is blown into the hearts of the stronger people. The Celt fades, but his spirit rises in the heart and the mind of the Anglo-Celtic peoples, with whom are the destinies of generations to come.

I stop, and look seaward from this hill-slope of Dûn-I. Yes, even in this Isle of Joy, as it seems in this dazzle of golden light and splashing wave, there is the like mortal

gloom and immortal mystery which moved the minds of the old seers and bards. Yonder, where that thin spray quivers against the thyme-set cliff, is the Spouting Cave, where to this day the Mar-Tarbh, dread creature of the sea, swims at the full of the tide. Beyond, out of sight behind these craggy steeps, is Port-na-Churaich, where, a thousand years ago, Columba landed in his coracle. Here, eastward, is the landing-place, for the dead of old, brought hence out of Christendom for sacred burial in the Isle of the Saints. All the story of the Gael is here. Iona is the microcosm of the Gaelic world.

Last night, about the hour of the sun's going, I lay upon the heights near the Cave, overlooking the Machar — the sandy, rock-frontiered plain of duneland on the west side of Iona, exposed to the Atlantic. There was neither bird nor beast, no living thing to see, save one solitary human creature. The man toiled at kelp-burning. I watched the smoke till it merged into the sea-mist that came creeping swiftly out of the north, and down from Dûn-I eastward. At last nothing was visible. The mist shrouded everything. I could hear the dull, rhythmic beat of the waves. That was all. No sound, nothing visible.

It was, or seemed, a long while before a rapid thud-thud trampled the heavy air. Then I heard the rush, the stamping and neighing, of some young mares, pasturing there, as they raced to and fro, bewildered or perchance in play. A glimpse I caught of three, with flying manes and tails; the others were blurred shadows only. A swirl, and the mist disclosed them; a swirl, and the mist enfolded them again. Then, silence once more.

Abruptly, though not for a long time thereafter, the mist rose and drifted seaward.

All was as before. The kelp-burner still stood, straking the smouldering seaweed. Above him a column ascended, bluely spiral, dusked with shadow.

XXIX

The kelp-burner: who was he but the Gael of the Isles? Who but the Gael in his old-world sorrow? The mist falls and the mist rises. He is there all the same, behind it, part of it; and the column of smoke is the incense out of his longing heart that desires Heaven and Earth, and is dowered only with poverty and pain, hunger and weariness, a little isle of the seas, a great hope, and the love of love.

XXX

But . . . to the island-story once more!

Some day, surely, the historian of Iona will appear. I have before me a little book about Iona, written by the one man who better than any other might be expected to tell us not about Iona, which many could do, but of Iona, which few can do. But MacCailein Mòr has not given us what we would so gladly have had from him. I do not say this in reproach, for a book is to be judged by its fulfilment of aim and not by what it foregoes. As a little volume to tell the visitor about Iona, the Duke's book is excellent. It is a matter of regret only that he, in whose overlordship the island is, did not care also to write *of* Iona.

How many "history-books" there are like that! Dead leaves. The simile is a travesty. There is no little russet leaf of the forest that could not carry more real, more intimate knowledge. There is no leaf that could not reveal mystery of form, mystery of colour, wonder of structure, secret of growth, the law of harmony; that could not testify to birth, and change, and decay, and death; and what history tells us more? — that could not, to the inward ear, bring the sound of the south wind making a greenness in the woods of

Spring, the west wind calling his brown and red flocks to the fold.

But why do I speak of the Duke of Argyll's "Iona"? Only because so splendid an opportunity was lost. He of all men should not have fallen short of it, and perhaps he or one of his people will yet give us what we await.

I do not overlook the admirable works written on the Columban Church, on the Culdees of Iona, on its archæological remains, on every period of its ecclesiastical history: from Dr. Skene's to that of the latest historian of the Celtic Church. But these are all chapters often invaluable and all profoundly interesting for the one historian to take up, and put down to relate in a new way, that shall be the one way.

What a book it will be! It will reveal to us the secret of what Oisìn sang, what Merlin knew, what Columba dreamed, what Adamnan hoped: what this little "lamp of Christ" was to pagan Europe; what incense of testimony it flung upon the winds; what saints and heroes went out of it; how the dust of kings and princes was brought there to mingle with its sands; how the noble and the ignoble came to it across long seas and perilous countries. It will tell, too, how the Danes ravaged the isles of the west, and

left not only their seed for the strengthening of an older race, but imageries and words, words and imageries so alive to-day that the listener in the mind may hear the cries of the viking above the voice of the Gael and the more ancient tongue of the Pict. It will tell, too, how the nettle came to shed her snow above kings' heads, and the thistle to wave where bishops' mitres stood; how a simple people out of the hills and moors, remembering ancient wisdom or blindly cherishing forgotten symbols, sought here the fount of youth; and how, slowly, a long sleep fell upon the island, and only the grasses shaken in the wind, and the wind itself, and the broken shadows of dreams in the minds of the old, held the secret of Iona. And, at the last — with what lift, with what joy — it will tell how once more the doves of hope and peace have passed over its white sands, this little holy land! This little holy land! Ah, white doves, come again! A thousand thousand wait.

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