

821

SONGS
AND
TALES
OF
ST COLUMBA
AND HIS AGE

13th CENTENARY
Iona 1897

SECOND EDITION.

Dr. Rev. 635



IONA, 13th CENTENARY
OF ST COLUMBA

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SONGS
AND
TALES
OF
SAINT COLUMBA
AND HIS AGE



PATRICK GEDDES & COLLEAGUES
THE OUTLOOK TOWER, CASTLEHILL, EDINBURGH
1897



With the Publishers' Compliments.

*Read these faint runes of Mystery,
O Celt, at home and o'er the sea;
The bond is loosed—the poor are free—
The world's great future rests with thee!*

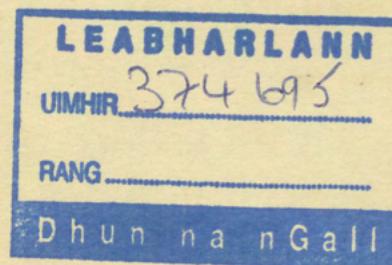
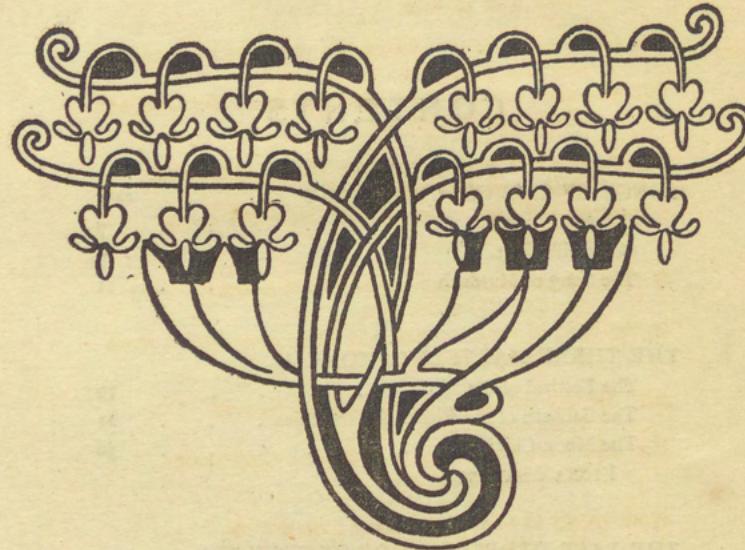
*Till the soil—bid cities rise—
Be strong, O Celt—be rich, be wise—
But still, with those divine grave eyes,
Respect the realm of Mysteries.*

The Book of Orm.

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Columcille cecenit.

O, Son of my God, what a pride, what a pleasure
To plough the blue sea !
The waves of the fountain of deluge to measure
Dear Eiré to thee.

We are rounding Moy-n-Olurg, we sweep by its head, and
We plunge through Loch Foyle,
Whose swans could enchant with their music the dead, and
Make pleasure of toil.

The host of the gulls come with joyous commotion
And screaming and sport,
I welcome my own "Dewy-Red" from the ocean
Arriving in port.*

O Eiré, were wealth my desire, what a wealth were
To gain far from thee,
In the land of the stranger, but there even health were
A sickness to me !

Alas for the voyage O high King of Heaven
Enjoined upon me,
For that I on the red plain of bloody Cooldrevin
Was present to see.

How happy the son is of Dima ; no sorrow
For him is designed,
He is having, this hour, round his own hill in Durrow
The wish of his mind.

The sounds of the winds in the elms, like the strings of
A harp being played,
The note of the blackbird that claps with the wings of
Delight in the glade.

* Dearg-drúchtach—i.e. "Dewy-Red"—was the
name of St Columba's boat.

With him in Ros-Grencha the cattle are lowing
 At earliest dawn,
 On the brink of the summer the pigeons are cooing
 And doves in the lawn,
 Three things am I leaving behind me, the very
 Most dear that I know,
 Tir-Leedach I'm leaving, and Durrow and Derry,
 Alas, I must go!
 Yet my visit and feasting with Comgall have eased me
 At Cainneach's right hand,
 And all but thy government, Eiré, has pleased me,
 Thou waterfall land.

Columcille fecit.

Delightful would it be to me to be in Uchd Ailium
 On the pinnacle of a rock,
 That I might often see
 The face of the ocean;
 That I might see its heaving waves
 Over the wide ocean,
 When they chant music to their Father
 Upon the world's course;
 That I might see its level sparkling strand,
 It would be no cause of sorrow;
 That I might hear the song of the wonderful birds,
 Source of happiness;
 That I might hear the thunder of the crowding waves
 Upon the rocks;
 That I might hear the roar by the side of the church
 Of the surrounding sea;
 That I might see its noble flocks
 Over the watery ocean;
 That I might see the sea-monsters,
 The greatest of all wonders;
 That I might see its ebb and flood
 In their career;
 That my mystical name might be, I say,
 Cul ri Erin;*
 That contrition might come upon my heart
 Upon looking at her;
 That I might bewail my evils all,
 Though it were difficult to compute them;
 That I might bless the Lord
 Who conserves all,
 Heaven with its countless bright orders,
 Land, strand and flood;

* That is, "Back turned to Ireland."

That I might search the books all,
 That would be good for my soul;
 At times kneeling to beloved Heaven;
 At times psalm singing;
 At times contemplating the King of Heaven,
 Holy the chief;
 At times at work without compulsion,
 This would be delightful.
 At times plucking duilisc from the rocks;
 At times at fishing;
 At times giving food to the poor;
 At times in a carcair:*
 The best advice in the presence of God
 To me has been vouchsafed.
 The King whose servant I am will not let
 Anything deceive me.

* Solitary cell.

The Song of Murdoch the Monk.

Murdoch, whet thy knife, that we may shave our
 crowns to the Great King.
 Let us sweetly give our vow, and the hair of both our
 heads to the Trinity.
 I will shave mine to Mary; this is the doing of a true
 heart:
 To Mary shave thou these locks, well-formed, soft-eyed
 man.
 Seldom hast thou had, handsome man, a knife on thy
 hair to shave it;
 Oftener has a sweet, soft queen comb'd her hair beside
 thee.
 Whenever it was that we did bathe, with Brian of the
 well-curled locks,
 And once on a time that I did bathe at the well of the
 fair-haired Boroimhe,
 I strove in swimming with Ua Chais, on the cold
 waters of the Fergus.
 When he came ashore from the stream, Ua Chais and
 I strove in a race:
 These two knives, one to each, were given us by
 Duncan Cairbreach;
 No knives were better: shave gently then, Murdoch.
 Whet your sword, Cathal, which wins the fertile Banva;
 Ne'er was thy wrath heard without fighting, brave, red-
 handed Cathal.
 Preserve our shaved heads from cold and from heat,
 gentle daughter of Iodehim,
 Preserve us in the land of heat, softest branch of Mary.

THE THREE MARVELS OF IONA

THE FESTIVAL OF THE BIRDS

BEFORE dawn, on the morning of the hundredth Sabbath after Colum the White had made glory to God in Hy, that was theretofore called Ioua and thereafter I-shona and is now Iona, the Saint beheld his own Sleep in a vision.

Much fasting and long pondering over the missals, with their golden and azure and sea-green initials and earth-brown branching letters, had made Colum weary. He had brooded much of late upon the mystery of the living world that was not man's world.

On the eve of that hundredth Sabbath, which was to be a holy festival in Iona, he had talked long with an ancient greybeard out of a remote isle in the north, the wild Isle of the Mountains, where Scathach the Queen hanged the men of Lochlin by their yellow hair.

This man's name was Ardan, and he was of the ancient people. He had come to Hy because of two things. Maolmò, the King of the northern Picts, had sent him to learn of Colum what was this god-teaching he had brought out of Eiré: and for himself he had come, with his age upon him, to see what manner of man this Colum was, who had made Ioua, that was "Innis-nan-Dhruidhneach"—the Isle of the Druids—into a place of new worship.

For three hours Ardan and Colum had walked by the sea-shore. Each learned of the other. Ardan bowed his head before the wisdom. Colum knew in his heart that the Druid saw mysteries.

In the first hour they talked of God. Colum spake, and Ardan smiled in his shadowy eyes. "It is for the knowing," he said, when Colum ceased.

"Ay, sure," said the Saint: "and now, O Ardan the wise, is my God thy God?"

But at that Ardan smiled not. He turned the grave, sad eyes of him to the west. With his right hand he pointed to the Sun that was like a great golden flower. "Truly, He

is thy God and my God." Colum was silent. Then he said: "Thee and thine, O Ardan, from Maolmòr the Pictish king to the least of thy slaves, shall have a long weariness in Hell. That fiery globe yonder is but the Lamp of the World: and sad is the case of the man who knows not the torch from the torch-bearer."

And in the second hour they talked of Man. Ardan spake, and Colum smiled in his deep, grey eyes.

"It is for laughter that," he said, when Ardan ceased.

"And why will that be, O Colum of Eiré?" said Ardan. Then the smile went out of Colum's grey eyes, and he turned and looked about him.

He beheld, near, a crow, a horse, and a hound.

"These are thy brethren," he said scornfully.

But Ardan answered quietly, "Even so."

The third hour they talked about the beasts of the earth and the fowls of the air.

At the last Ardan said: "The ancient wisdom hath it that these are the souls of men and women that have been, or are to be."

Whereat Colum answered: "The new wisdom, that is old as eternity, declareth that God created

all things in love. Therefore are we at one, O Ardan, though we sail to the Isle of Truth from the West and the East. Let there be peace between us."

"Peace," said Ardan.

That eve, Ardan of the Picts sat with the monks of Iona. Colum blessed him and said a saying. Oran of the Songs sang a hymn of beauty. Ardan rose, and put the wine of guests to his lips, and chanted this rune:

O Colum and monks of Christ,
It is peace we are having this night:
Sure, peace is a good thing,
And I am glad with the gladness.

We worship one God,
Though ye call him Dè—
And I say not, *O Dia!*
But cry *Bea'uil!*

For it is one faith for man,
And one for the living world,
And no man is wiser than another—
And none knoweth much.

None knoweth a better thing than this:
The Sword, Love, Song, Honour, Sleep.
None knoweth a surer thing than this:
Birth, Sorrow, Pain, Weariness, Death.

Sure, peace is a good thing;
Let us be glad of Peace:
We are not men of the Sword,
But of the Rune and the Wisdom.

I have learned a truth of Colum,
He hath learned of me :
All ye on the morrow shall see
A wonder of the wonders.

The thought is on you, that the Cross.
Is known only of you :
Lo, I tell you the birds know it
That are marked with the Sorrow.

Listen to the Birds of Sorrow,
They shall tell you a great Joy :
It is Peace you will be having,
With the Birds.

No more would Ardan say after that, though
all besought him.

Many pondered long that night. Oran made
a song of mystery. Colum brooded through the
dark ; but before dawn he slept upon the fern
that strewed his cell. At dawn, with waking
eyes, and weary, he saw his Sleep in a vision.

It stood grey and wan beside him.

"What art thou, O Spirit?" he said.

"I am thy Sleep, Colum."

"And is it peace?"

"It is peace."

"What wouldest thou?"

"I have wisdom. Thy heart and thy brain
were closed. I could not give you what I
brought. I brought wisdom."

"Give it."
"Behold!"

And Colum, sitting upon the strewed fern
that was his bed, rubbed his eyes that were
heavy with weariness and fasting and long
prayer. He could not see his Sleep now.
It was gone as smoke that is licked up by
the wind.

But on the ledge of the hole that was in
the eastern wall of his cell he saw a bird.
He leaned his elbow upon the leabhar-
aifrionn that was by his side.* Then he
spoke.

"Is there song upon thee, O Bru-dhearg?"

Then the Red-breast sang, and the singing
was so sweet that tears came into the eyes
of Colum, and he thought the sunlight that
was streaming from the east was melted into
that lilting sweet song. It was a hymn that
the Bru-dhearg sang, and it was this :

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Christ upon the Cross :
My little nest was near,
Hidden in the moss.

* The "leabhar-aifrionn" (pron. lyo-ur eff-runn) is a missal :
literally a mass-book, or chapel-book. Bru-dhearg is literally
red-breast.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Christ was pale and wan:
His eyes beheld me singing
*Bron, Bron, mo Bron!**

Holy, Holy, Holy,
"Come near, O wee brown bird!"
Christ spake: and lo, I lighted
Upon the Living Word.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
I heard the mocking scorn!
But *Holy, Holy, Holy*
I sang against a thorn!

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Ah, his brow was bloody:
Holy, Holy, Holy,
All my breast was ruddy.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Christ's-Bird shalt thou be:
Thus said Mary Virgin
There on Calvary.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
A wee brown bird am I:
But my breast is ruddy
For I saw Christ die.

Holy, Holy, Holy,
By this ruddy feather,
Colum, call thy monks, and
All the birds together.

* "O my Grief, my Grief."

And at that Colum rose. Awe was upon him, and joy.

He went out and told all to the monks. Then he said Mass out on the green sward. The yellow sunshine was warm upon his grey hair. The love of God was warm in his heart.

"Come, all ye birds!" he cried.

And lo, all the birds of the air flew nigh. The golden eagle soared from the Cuchullins in far-off Skye, and the osprey from the wild lochs of Mull; the gannet from above the clouds, and the fulmar and petrel from the green wave: the cormorant and the skua from the weedy rock, and the plover and the kestrel from the machar: the corbie and the raven from the moor, and the snipe and the bittern and the heron: the cuckoo and cushat from the woodland: the crane from the swamp, the lark from the sky, and the mavis and the merle from the green bushes: the yellowite, the shilfa, and the lintie, the gyalvonn and the wren and the redbreast, one and all, every creature of the wings, they came at the bidding.

"Peace!" cried Colum.

"Peace!" cried all the Birds, and even the Eagle, the Kestrel, the Corbie, and the Raven cried *Peace, Peace!*

"I will say the Mass," said Colum the White.

And with that he said the Mass. And he blessed the birds.

When the last chant was sung, only the Bru-dhearg remained.

"Come, O Ruddy-Breast," said Colum, "and sing to us of the Christ."

Through a golden hour thereafter the Red-breast sang. Sweet was the joy of it.

At the end Colum said, "Peace! In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost."

Thereat Ardan the Pict bowed his head, and in a loud voice repeated—

"*Sith* (shee)! *An ainm an Athar, 's an mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh!*"

And to this day the song of the Birds of Colum, as they are called in Hy, is *Sith—Sith—Sith—an—ainm—Chriosd—*

"Peace—Peace—Peace—in the name of Christ!"

II

THE SABBATH OF THE FISHES AND THE FLIES

FOR three days Colum had fasted, save for a mouthful of meal at dawn, a piece of rye-bread at noon, and a mouthful of dulse and spring-water at sundown. On the night of the third day, Oran and Keir came to him in his cell. Colum was on his knees, lost in prayer. There was no sound there, save the faint whispered muttering of his lips, and on the plastered wall the weary buzzing of a fly.

"Master!" said Oran in a low voice, soft with pity and awe, "Master!"

But Colum took no notice. His lips still moved, and the tangled hairs below his nether lip shivered with his failing breath.

"Father!" said Keir, tender as a woman, "Father!"

Colum did not turn his eyes from the wall. The fly droned his drowsy hum upon

the rough plaster. It crawled wearily for a space, then stopped. The slow hot drone filled the cell.

"Master," said Oran, "it is the will of the brethren that you break your fast. You are old, and God has your glory. Give us peace."

"Father," urged Keir, seeing that Colum kneeled unnoticeingly, his lips still moving above his black beard, with the white hair of him falling about his head like a snow-drift slipping from a boulder. "Father, be pitiful! We hunger and thirst for your presence. We can fast no longer, yet have we no heart to break our fast if you are not with us. Come, holy one, and be of our company, and eat of the good broiled fish that awaiteth us. We perish for the benediction of thine eyes."

Then it was that Colum rose, and walked slowly towards the wall.

"Little black beast," he said to the fly that droned its drowsy hum and moved not at all; "little black beast, sure it is well I am knowing what you are. You are thinking you are going to get my blessing, you that have come out of hell for the soul of me!"

At that the fly flew heavily from the wall, and slowly circled round and round the head of Colum the White.

"What think you of that, brother Oran, brother Keir?" he asked in a low voice, hoarse because of his long fast and the weariness that was upon him.

"It is a fiend," said Oran.

"It is an angel," said Keir.

Thereupon the fly settled upon the wall again, and again droned his drowsy hot hum.

"Little black beast," said Colum, with the frown coming down into his eyes, "is it for peace you are here, or for sin? Answer, I conjure you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!"

"An ainm an Athar, 's an mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh," repeated Oran below his breath.

"An ainm an Athar, 's an mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh," repeated Keir below his breath.

Then the fly that was upon the wall flew up to the roof and circled to and fro. And it sang a beautiful song, and its song was this:

I

Praise be to God, and a blessing too at that, and a blessing!
For Colum the White, Colum the Dove, hath worshipped;

Yea, he hath worshipped and made of a desert a garden,
And out of the dung of men's souls hath made a sweet savour
of burning.

II

A savour of burning, most sweet, a fire for the altar,
This he hath made in the desert ; the hell-saved all gladden.
Sure he hath put his benison, too, on milch-cow and bullock,
On the fowls of the air, and the man-eyed seals, and the otter.

III

But where in his Dûn in the great blue mainland of Heaven
God the All-Father broodeth, where the harpers are harping
his glory ;
There where He sitteth, where a river of ale poureth ever,
His great sword broken, His spear in the dust, He broodeth.

IV

And this is the thought that moves in his brain, as a cloud
filled with thunder
Moves through the vast hollow sky filled with the dust of the
stars :
*What boots it the glory of Colum, since he maketh a Sabbath to
bless me,*
*And hath no thought of my sons in the deeps of the air and the
sea ?*

And with that the fly passed from their
vision. In the cell was a most wondrous sweet
song, like the sound of far-off pipes over water.

Oran said in a low voice of awe, "O our
God !"

Keir whispered, white with fear, "O God,
my God !"

But Colum rose, and took a scourge from
where it hung on the wall. "It shall be for
peace, Oran," he said, with a grim smile flitting
like a bird above the nest of his black beard ;
"it shall be for peace, Keir!"

And with that he laid the scourge heavily
upon the bent backs of Keir and Oran, nor
stayed his hand, nor let his three days' fast
weaken the deep piety that was in the might
of his arm, and because of the glory to God.

Then, when he was weary, peace came into
his heart, and he sighed "Amen !"

"Amen !" said Oran the monk.

"Amen !" said Keir the monk.

"And this thing hath been done," said Colum,
"because of the evil wish of you and the
brethren, that I should break my fast, and eat of
fish, till God willeth it. And lo, I have learned
a mystery. Ye shall all witness to it on the
morrow, which is the Sabbath."

That night the monks wondered much. Only
Oran and Keir cursed the fishes in the deeps
of the sea and the flies in the deeps of the
air.

On the morrow, when the sun was yellow on the brown sea-weed, and there was peace on the isle and upon the waters, Colum and the brotherhood went slowly towards the sea.

At the meadows that are close to the sea, the Saint stood still. All bowed their heads.

"O winged things of the air," cried Colum, "draw near!"

With that the air was full of the hum of innumerable flies, midges, bees, wasps, moths, and all winged insects. These settled upon the monks, who moved not, but praised God in silence. "Glory and praise to God," cried Colum, "behold the Sabbath of the children of God that inhabit the deeps of the air! Blessing and peace be upon them."

"Peace! Peace!" cried the monks, with one voice.

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!" cried Colum the White, glad because of the glory to God.

"*An ainm an Athar, 's an mhic, 's an Spioraid Naoimh,*" cried the monks, bowing reverently, and Oran and Keir deepest of all, because they saw the fly that was of Colum's cell leading the whole host, as though it were their

captain, and singing to them a marvellous sweet song.

Oran and Keir testified to this thing, and all were full of awe and wonder, and Colum praised God.

Then the Saints and the brotherhood moved onward and went upon the rocks. When all stood ankle-deep in the sea-weed that was swaying in the tide, Colum cried:

"O finny creatures of the deep, draw near!"

And with that the whole sea shimmered as with silver and gold.

All the fishes of the sea, and the great eels, and the lobsters and the crabs, came in a swift and terrible procession. Great was the glory.

Then Colum cried, "O fishes of the Deep, who is your king?"

Whereupon the herring, the mackerel, and the dog-fish swam forward, and each claimed to be king. But the echo that ran from wave to wave said, *The Herring is King.*

Then Colum said to the mackerel: "Sing the song that is upon you!"

And the mackerel sang the song of the wild rovers of the sea, and the lust of pleasure.

Then Colum said, "But for God's mercy,
I would curse you, O false fish."

Then he spake likewise to the dog-fish:
and the dog-fish sang of slaughter and he
chase, and the joy of blood.

And Colum said: "Hell shall be your
portion."

And there was peace. And the Herring
said:

"In the name of the Father, the Son, and
the Holy Ghost!"

Whereat all that mighty multitude, ere they
sank into the deep, waved their fins and their
claws, each after his kind, and repeated as
with one voice:

*"An ainm an Athar, 's an mhic, 's an Spioraid
Naoimh!"*

And the glory that was upon the Sound of
Iona was as though God trailed a starry net
upon the waters, with a shining star in every
little hollow, and a flowing moon of gold on
every wave.

Then Colum the White put out both his
arms, and blessed the children of God that
are in the deeps of the sea and that are in
the deeps of the air.

That is how Sabbath came upon all living
things upon Hy that is called Iona, and within
the air above Hy, and within the sea that is
around Hy.

And the glory is Colum's.

At the cells he turned, and bade the brethren go in. "Peace be with you," he sighed wearily.

Then he moved downwards towards the sea.

A great tenderness of late was upon Colum the Bishop. Ever since he had blessed the fishes and the flies, the least of the children of God, his soul had glowed in a whiter flame. There were deep seas of compassion in his grey-blue eyes. One night he had waked, because God was there.

"O Christ," he cried, bowing low his old grey head. "Sure, ah sure, the gladness and the joy, because of the hour of the hours."

But God said: "Not so, Colum, who keepest me upon the Cross. It is Murtagh, Murtagh the Druid that was, whose soul I am taking to the glory."

With that Colum rose in awe and great grief. There was no light in his cell. In the deep darkness, his spirit quailed. But lo, the beauty of his heart wrought a soft gleam about him, and in that moonshine of good deeds he rose and made his way to where Murtagh slept.

III

THE MOON-CHILD

A YEAR and a day before God bade Colum arise to the Feast of Eternity, Pòl the Freckled, the youngest of the brethren, came to him, on a night of the nights.

"The moon is among the stars, O Colum. By his own will, and yours, old Murtagh that is this day with God, is to be laid in the deep dry sand at the east end of the isle."

So the holy Saint rose from his bed of weariness, and went and blessed the place that Murtagh lay in, and bade neither the creeping worm nor any other creature to touch the sacred dead. "Let God only," he said, "let God alone strip that which he made to grow."

But on his way back sleep passed from him. The sweet salt smell of the sea was in his nostrils: he heard the running of a wave in all his blood.

The old monk slept indeed. It was a sweet breath he drew—he, young and fair now, and laughing with peace under the apples in Paradise.

"O Murtagh," Colum cried, "and thee I thought the least of the brethren, because that thou wast a Druid, and loved not to see thy pagan kindred put to the sword if they would not repent. But, true, in my years I am becoming as a boy who learns, knowing nothing. God wash the sin of pride out of my life!"

At that a soft white shining, as of one winged and beautiful, stood beside the dead.

"Art thou Murtagh?" whispered Colum, in deep awe.

"No, I am not Murtagh," came as the breath of vanishing song.

"What art thou?"

"I am Peace," said the glory.

Thereupon Colum sank to his knees, sobbing with joy, for the sorrow that had been and was no more.

"Tell me, O White Peace," he murmured, "can Murtagh hearken, there under the apples where God is?"

"God's love is a wind that blows hitherward and hence. Speak, and thou shalt hear."

Colum spake. "O Murtagh my brother, tell me in what way it is that I still keep God crucified upon the Cross."

There was a sound in the cell as of the morning-laughter of children, of the singing of birds, of the sunlight streaming through the blue fields of Heaven.

Then Murtagh's voice came out of Paradise, sweet with the sweetness: honey-sweet it was, and clothed with deep awe because of the glory.

"Colum, servant of Christ, arise!"

Colum rose, and was as a leaf there, a leaf that is in the wind.

"Colum, thine hour is not yet come. I see it, bathing in the white light which is the Pool of Eternal Life, that is in the abyss where deep-rooted are the Gates of Heaven."

"And my sin, O Murtagh, my sin?"

"God is weary because thou hast not repented."

"O my God and my God! Sure, Murtagh, if that is so, it is so, but it is not for knowledge to me. Sure, O God, it is a blessing I have put on man and woman, on beast and bird

and fish, on creeping things and flying things, on the green grass and the brown earth and the flowing wave, on the wind that cometh and goeth, and on the mystery of the flame! Sure, O God, I have sorrowed for all my sins: there is not one I have not fasted and prayed for. Sorrow upon me!—Is it cursed I am, or what is the evil that holdeth me by the hand?"

Then Murtagh, calling through sweet dreams and the rainbow-rain of happy tears that make that place so wondrous and so fair, spake once more:

"O Colum, blind art thou. Hast thou yet repented because after that thou didst capture the great black seal, that is a man under spells, thou, with thy monks, didst crucify him upon the great rock at the place where, long ago, thy coracle came ashore?"

"O Murtagh, favoured of God, will you not be explaining to Him that is King of the Elements, that this was because the seal who was called Black Angus wrought evil upon a mortal woman, and that of the sea-seed was sprung one who had no soul?"

But no answer came to that, and when

Colum looked about him, behold there was no soft shining, but only the body of Murtagh the old monk. With a heavy heart, and his soul like a sinking boat in a sea of pain, he turned and went out into the night.

A fine, wonderful night it was. The moon lay low above the sea, and all the flowing gold and flashing silver of the rippling running water seemed to be a flood going that way and falling into the shining hollow splendour.

Through the sea-weed the old Saint moved, weary and sad. When he came to a sandy place he stopped. There, on a rock, he saw a little child. Naked she was, though clad with soft white moonlight. In her hair were brown weeds of the sea, gleaming golden because of the glow. In her hands was a great shell, and at that shell was her mouth. And she was singing this song; passing sweet to hear it was, with the sea-music that was in it:

A little lonely child am I
That have not any soul:
God made me but a homeless wave,
Without a goal.

A seal my father was, a seal
That once was man:
My mother loved him tho' he was
'Neath mortal ban.

He took a wave and drownèd her,
She took a wave and lifted him:
And I was born where shadows are
I' the sea-depths dim.

All through the sunny blue-sweet hours
I swim and glide in waters green;
Never by day the mournful shores
By me are seen.

But when the gloom is on the wave
A shell unto the shore I bring:
And then upon the rocks I sit
And plaintive sing.

O what is this wild song I sing,
With meanings strange and dim?
No soul am I, a wave am I,
And sing the Moon-Child's hymn.

Softly Colum drew nigh.
"Peace," he said. "Peace, little one. Ah
tender little heart, peace!"
The child looked at him with wide sea-
dusky eyes.
"Is it Colum the Holy you will be?"
"No, my fawn, my white dear babe: it is

not Colum the Holy I am, but Colum the
poor fool that knew not God!"

"Is it you, O Colum, that put the sorrow
on my mother, who is the Sea-woman that
lives in the whirlpool over there?"

"Ay, God forgive me!"

"Is it you, O Colum, that crucified the seal
that was my father: him that was a man once,
and that was called Black Angus?"

"Ay, God forgive me!"

"Is it you, O Colum, that bade the children
of Hy run away from me, because I was a
moon-child, and might win them by the sea-
spell into the green wave?"

"Ay, God forgive me!"

"Sure, dear Colum, it was to the glory of
God, it was?"

"Ay, He knoweth it, and can hear it, too,
from Murtagh, who died this night."

"Look!"

And at that Colum looked, and in a moon-
gold wave he saw Black Angus, the seal-man,
drifting dark, and the eyes in his round head
were the eyes of love. And beside the man-
seal swam a woman fair to see, and she looked
at him with joy, and with joy at the Moon-

Child that was her own, and at Colum with joy.

Thereupon Colum fell upon his knees and cried—

“Give me thy sorrow, wild woman of the sea !”

“Peace to you, Colum,” she answered, and sank into the shadow-thridden wave.

“Give my thy death and crucifixion, O Angus-dhu !” cried the Saint, shaking with the sorrow.

“Peace to you, Colum,” answered the man-seal, and sank into the dusky quietudes of the deep.

“Ah, bitter heart o’ me ! Teach me the way to God, O little child,” cried Colum the old, turning to where the Moon-Child was !

But lo, the glory and the wonder !

It was a little naked child that looked at him with healing eyes, but there were no seaweeds in her hair, and no shell in the little wee hands of her. For now, it was a male Child that was there, shining with a light from within : and in his fair sunny hair was a shadowy crown of thorns, and in his hand was a pearl of great price.

“O Christ, my God,” said Colum, with failing voice.

“It is thine now, O Colum,” said the Moon-Child, holding out to him the shining pearl of great price.

“What is it, O Lord my God ?” whispered the old servant of God that was now glad with the gladness : “what is this, thy boon ?”

“Perfect Peace.”

And that is all.

(To God be the Glory. Amen.)

FIONA MACLEOD.

THE LAST MEDITATION OF COLUMBA

It is known to all that St Columba passed to the Lord in the year of grace 597, on the Sabbath after Whitsuntide, for it was in the season of the Pentecost, when the Holy Dove descended, that he who was named of the dove went to his rest.

On the day before he died, the saint went to bless the two heaps of corn which were still left in the barn, for he was ever the best fore-looker, whether to steer or to store. On his way back to the monastery he rested by the wayside, and was comforted by the old white pack-horse, which came to him and leaned its head upon his breast, for all living creatures were as kin to the saint.

Thereafter St Columba climbed to the hill above the monastery, and, like the Christ on Olivet, he thought of his past life and of what should follow after. This was the last meditation of St Columba; and though it may not be wholly well to break a silence whose light is upon the depths of the un-

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spoken, we would reverently tell of that last meditation, when the past rose up before the saint, and the present became as a moment, and the future began to be unrolled as from an endless scroll. It was not long that he, who was all weary, stood upon the hill, but even to man there are times when one hour is as many years, and a lifetime as one hour. Thrice happy those to whom this time cometh in such an island as that of Hy.

A light wind kissed the waves into smiling, and whispered through the bracken both young and withered; the doves flew from their windows beneath, and sailed to and fro above the saint's head; and his thoughts went back to Erin and to Eithne who had borne him. He was once more the fair child, quivering in keenness, alert to every touch of life, hot as his father's blood, zealous to every God-whisper. He was young again with the spring-tide, which had now set in at Hy.

The wind rose in a sudden gust, like a burst of passion; the great waves sounded dully from the further side of the island; the sea-gulls swept inland with hoarse cries like eagles; and the clouds above seemed as if very God went out to

war. Columba's thoughts went back to the time of his awakening, when the water of life became wine to him at Moville. He lifted his face to the wind, his eyes flashed, his limbs were all tightened, and he was once again the daring sailor, the swift smiter, the cleaving thinker, the pioneer. Once more he wrung out knowledge from the elements of the world and did his miracles ; once more he held men in the grip of his eyes and read their secrets, cursing the ill-doer in words that sounded thunder, yet comforting the weary in a voice that seemed a dove's. He was minded of the oppressor of maidens at Leinster, and biting his lip unto blood he sent him a second time to Hell. He fought again at Cul-Dremhne as in the fierce passion of his youth. Once more, *pro Christo peregrinari volens, enavigavit* ; and lived his manhood's years again, sailing, sowing, singing, smiting, saving. He fought once more at Cul-Rathain and Cul-Fedha ; and sang to the whistling wind, as he had sung before the Picts, the praises of the God of Battles.

The gusts sank into a steady westward wind, towards the setting sun, where the Gates of Paradise seemed to open themselves to the saint. The work of his later years passed before him ; again he was rowing against the stream, again he was

sailing against the wind, again he was preaching and teaching, planting and building, preparing the way of the Lord and binding into one the community of all saints. Once more he was strenuous and untiring, brooking no resistance, impatient of all foolishness, hard on all carelessness, ingenious as a sailor to lose no point, unflinching as a soldier to spare no foe, yet ever, as if glamoured, with the sunshine in his eyes. As the wind sank, he stood with both hands uplifted, and blessed the monastery, saying :—“ *Small and mean though this place is, yet it shall be held in great and universal honour, not only by Scotic kings and people, but also by the rulers of foreign and barbarous nations, and by their subjects ; the saints also of other churches shall regard it with no common reverence.* ”

The wind sank to rest, the sun set, the birds ceased from flying, and all was still, save the lullaby of the now gently lapping waves and the music of the silvery sands of Hy. It was then that there came to St Columba the calm of those who have fought the good fight, or have sailed their craft into a quiet haven. Past, present, and future became as one to him, for he knew no man, but God only.

Returning to the monastery, St Columba busied

himself, as was his untiring wont, with a transcribing of the Psalter, ceasing when he had written the words—"They that seek the Lord shall want no manner of things that is good." He might well have gone on to the next verse, which reads, "Come, ye children, hearken unto me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord," for he himself was feared, even as he was loved.

Soon thereafter he took part in the nightly vigils, and, these ended, spoke his last counsel to the brethren. Shortly after midnight, he rose unsleeping from his stone pillow, and betook himself to the church, and died, as all the world knows, by the altar, in the glimmer of the Heavenly Lights which bespoke for him the dawn of an everlasting morning. Once more, *pro Christo peregrinari volens, enavigavit Columba.*

J. ARTHUR THOMSON.

IV.

THE FLIGHT OF THE CULDEES

ON the wane of noon, on the day following the ruin of Bail-tiorail, sails were descried far east of Skipness.

Olaus called his men together. The boats coming before the wind were doubtless his own galleys which he had lost sight of when the south-gale had blown them against Skye: but no man can know when and how the gods may smile grimly, and let the swords that whirl be broken, or the spears that are flat become a hedge of death.

An hour later, a startled word went from viking to viking. The galleys in the offing were the fleet of Sweno the Hammerer. Why had he come so far southward, and why were oars so swift and with the stained sails distended before the wind?

They were soon to know.
Sweno himself was the first to land. A great

man he was, broad and burly, with a sword-slash across his face that brought his brows together in a frown which made a perpetual dusk above his savage blood-shot eyes.

In a few words he told how he had met a galley, with only half its crew, and of these many who were wounded. It was the last of the fleet of Haco the Laugher. A fleet of fifteen war-birlinns had set out from the Long Island, and had given battle. Haco had gone into the strife, laughing loud as was his wont, and he and all his men had the berserk rage, and fought with joy and foam at the mouth. Never had the Sword sung a sweeter song.

"Well," said Olaus the White, grimly, "well, how did the Raven fly?"

"When Haco laughed for the last time, with waving sword out of the death wherein he sank, there was only one galley left. Of all that company of vikings there were no more than nine to tell the tale. These nine we took out of their boat, which was below waves soon. Haco and his men are all fighting the sea-shadows by now."

A loud snarling went from man to man. This became a wild cry of rage. Then savage

shouts filled the air. Swords were lifted up against the sky, and the fierce glitter of the blue eyes and the bristling of the tawny beards were fair to see, thought the captive women, though their hearts beat against their ribs like eaglets against the bars of a cage.

Sweno the Hammerer frowned a deep frown when he heard that Olaus was there with only the *Svart-Alf* out of the galleys which had gone the southward way.

"If the islanders come upon us now with their birlinns we shall have to make a running fight," he said.

Olaus laughed.

"Ay, but the running shall be after the birlinns, Sweno."

"I hear that there are fifty and nine men of these Culdees yonder under the sword-priest, Maoliosa?"

"It is a true word. But to-night, after the moon is up, there shall be none."

At that, all who heard laughed, and were less heavy in their hearts because of the slaying and drowning of Haco the Laugher and all his crew.

"Where is the woman Brenda that you

took?" Olaus asked, as he stared at Sweno's boat and saw no woman there.

"She is in the sea."

Olaus the White looked. It was his eyes that asked.

"I flung her into the sea because she laughed when she heard of how the birlinns that were under Somhairle the Renegade drove in upon our ships, and how Haco laughed no more, and the sea was red with Lochlin blood."

"She was a woman, Sweno—and none more fair in the isles, after Morna that is mine."

"Woman or no woman, I flung her into the sea. The Gael call us *Gall*: then I will let no Gael laugh at the *Gall*. It is enough. She is drowned. There are always women: one here, one there—it is but a wave blown this way or that."

At this moment a viking came running across the ruined town with tidings. Maoliosa and his Culdees were crowding into a great birlinn. Perhaps they were coming to give battle: mayhap they were for sailing away from that place.

Olaus and Sweno stared across the fjord. At first they knew not what to think. If

Maoliosa thought of battle he would scarce choose that hour and place. Or was it that he knew the Gael were coming in force, and that the vikings were caught in a trap?

At last it was clear. Sweno gave a great laugh.

"By the blood of Odin," he cried, "they come to sue for peace!"

Slowly across the loch the birlinn, filled with white-robed Culdees, drew near. At the prow stood a tall, old man, with streaming hair and beard, white as sea-foam. In his right hand he grasped a great Cross, whereon was Christ crucified.

The vikings drew close one to the other.

"Hail them in their own tongue, Sweno," said Olaus.

The Hammerer moved to the water-edge, as the birlinn stopped, a short arrow-flight away.

"Ho, there, priests of the Christ-faith!"

"What would you, viking?" It was Maoliosa himself that spoke.

"Why do you come here among us, you that are Maoliosa?"

"To win you and yours to God, Pagan."

"Is it madness that is upon you, old man?"

We have swords and spears here, if we lack hymns and prayers."

All this time Olaus kept a wary watch inland and seaward, for he feared that Maoliosa came because of an ambush.

Truly the old monk was mad. He had told his Culdees that God would prevail, and that the Pagans would melt away before the Cross.

The ebb-tide was running swift. Even while Sweno spoke, the birlinn touched a low sea-hidden ledge of rock.

A cry of consternation went up from the white-robés. Loud laughter came from the vikings.

"Arrows!" cried Olaus.

With that three-score men took their bows. There was a hail of death-shafts. Many fell into the water, but some were in the brains and hearts of the Culdees.

Maoliosa, himself, stood in death, transfixed to the mast.

With a wild cry the monks swept their oars backward. Then they leaped to their feet, and changed their place, and rowed for life or death.

The summer-sailors sprang into their galley.

Sweno the Hammerer was at the bow. The foam curled and hissed.

The birlinn grided upon the opposite shore at the self-same moment when Sweno brought down his battle-axe upon the monk who steered. The man was cleft to the shoulder. Sweno swayed with the blow, stumbled, and fell headlong into the sea. A Culdee thrust at him with an oar, and pinned him among the sea-tangle. Thus died Sweno the Hammerer.

Then all the white-robés leaped upon the shore. Yet Olaus was quicker than they. With a score of vikings he raced to the Church of the Cells, and gained the sanctuary. The monks uttered a cry of despair, and, turning, fled across the moor. Olaus counted them. There were now forty in all.

"Let forty men follow," he cried.

Like white birds, the monks fled this way and that. Olaus, and those who watched, laughed at them as they stumbled, because of their robes. One by one fell, sword-cleft or spear-thrust. The moorland was red.

At the last there were less than a score—twelve only—ten!

"Bring them back!" Olaus shouted. When the ten fugitives were captured and brought back, Olaus took the crucifix that Maoliosa had raised, and held it before each in turn.

"Smite," he said to the first monk. But the man would not.

"Smite!" he said to the second; but he would not. And so it was to the tenth.

"Good," said Olaus the White, "they shall witness to their god."

With that he bade his vikings break up the birlinn, and drive the planks into the ground, and shore them up with logs.

When this was done he crucified each Culdee. With nails and with ropes he did unto each what their god had suffered. Then all were left there by the water-side.

That night, when Olaus the White and the laughing Morna left the great bonfire where the vikings sang and drank horn after horn of strong ale, they stood and looked across the loch. In the moonlight, upon the dim verge of the farther shore, they could discern ten crosses. On each was a motionless white splatch.

V.

ENVOY

'In Iona of my heart, Iona of my love,
Instead of the voice of monks shall be lowing of cattle,
But ere the world come to an end
Iona shall be as it was.'



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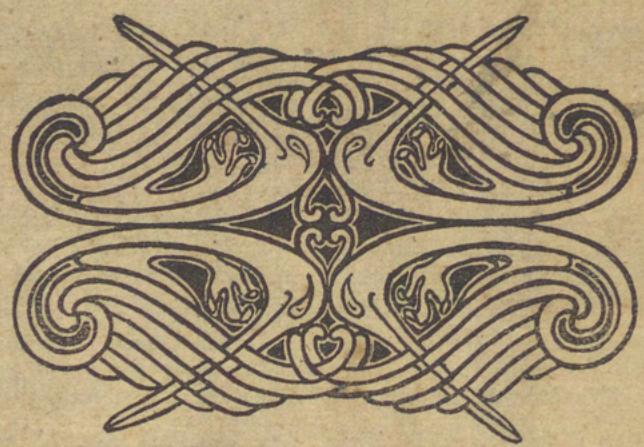
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