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Columba  
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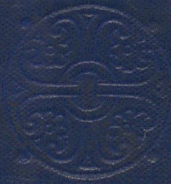
J. H. SKRINE



822.  
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*W. Blackwood & Sons,  
Edin. & London.*

Columba



*JOHN HUNTLEY SKRINE*

LEABHARLANN DHÚN NA NGALL



DL0371984

E. P.

inimici militis

populari, commilitoni,

in memoriam

patris, Columbae filii germani,

d. d.

auctor

C O L U M B A

C O L U M B A

A DRAMA

BY

JOHN HUNTLEY SKRINE

WARDEN OF GLENALMOND

AUTHOR OF 'A MEMORY OF EDWARD THRING'

WILLIAM BLACKWOOD AND SONS  
EDINBURGH AND LONDON  
MDCCCXCIII

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*'Columba, insularis miles.'*  
ADAMNAN.

*DEAR listener of the tale half-told,  
Whose singer's breath was breath from thee ;  
If to the spirits' guarded fold  
A voice of kin find pathway free,  
If memories of a music old  
Live on with her who bade it be,—  
O then, beyond this beat of time,  
Love yet is listener of the rhyme.*

COLUMBA, who was also called Columcille—that is, Dove of the Cell—came on both sides of the blood-royal of Ireland: for his father, Fedhlimidh, was of the northern Hy Neill, and his mother, Eithné, had for ancestor Cathair Mor, the first king of Leinster, afterwards king of Ireland. In youth he became a monk, and presently a founder of churches and monasteries, whereof the first was Derry and the greatest Durrow. Yet, when he was now forty years old, having a quarrel with Diarmid, king of all Ireland, concerning the slaying, when in sanctuary, of Curnan, son of the king of Connaught, Columba roused to war his own clansmen and set them against Diarmid, whom they overthrew with great slaughter of his Meathmen. In sorrow for this bloodshed, and at the bidding of Molasius, abbot of Inishmurry, Columba set out for Scotland, to convert the Picts to Christ, and so atone for his wrong-doing. He sailed at Whitsuntide in the year of Christ 563, and the forty-second of his own age, with twelve companions, and settled on the island of Hy, that is now called Iona. There they built a monastery, and from it they went out to preach in all Pictland. Afterwards there arose a dispute between Aedh, king of Ireland, and Aidan, king of Dalriada in Scotland. Now Aidan had been consecrated king by Columba, and was his friend. So Columba went with Aidan to Ireland to meet Aedh and the Irish chiefs at the Synod called of Drumceit. There did the abbot cause Aedh both to free the Dalriad people from subjection, and also to recall a decree by which he would have driven the bards from his kingdom. From Ireland came Columba back to Hy, and after many good works there died, nigh seven-and-seventy years old, in the year of Christ 597, and was buried by his own monks alone. For a great wind arose straightway upon his passing, and blew for three days and nights, so that no boat could cross the sound to reach the island; but when the burial was fully ended, forthwith the wind fell and the seas grew calm.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

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COLUMBA, Abbot of Iona.

BAITHEN,

ERNAN,

FECHNO,

MOCHONNA,

} Monks.

DIORMIT, a young Monk, Attendant on Columba.

RONAN, a Bard.

FERGUS, an Irish Chief, Kinsman of Columba.

MOLASIUS, a Hermit, Soul's-friend (Confessor) to Columba.

A Retainer of Fergus.

A Dalriad.





C O L U M B A.

—◆—  
ACT FIRST.

SCENE I.

*The Monastery at Derry. A.D. 561. BAITHEN and  
ERNAN seated.*

BAITHEN.

How heavy, Ernan, is this waiting time!  
Ere now there should be news. A week ago  
The clans were up.

ERNAN.

Yes, and our Abbot there.  
Men loiter not where he is.

BAITHEN.

I should know it,  
Who followed with him when he roused the chiefs.

A

They are hot enough, when fight is forward, they ;  
 But he was fire, at council or in field  
 A hovering flame still at their backs to scorch  
 Doubter or lingerer. O to see him stand  
 That eve among the clansmen when the chiefs  
 Besought his blessing! On a little mound  
 He rose; the mustered spears before his breast  
 Bristled; I watched him o'er them. Head uncowled  
 For heat, and liker knight unhelmeted  
 Than churchman, tall he towered, his lifted hand  
 Beckoning kinglike: then the voice rolled out:  
 —Ah! but we know the voice of him, so large  
 It fills the wide air as the thunder fills,  
 Yet the clear syllables in a stealing rain  
 Chime on the senses pure and musical:  
 So deep, it girds you like a grappling wave,  
 And sways the stoutest-footed down the tide.  
 O when he spoke of vengeance, Curnan dragged  
 From sanctuary of the great Abbot's arms,  
 The fair boy's blood dashed on the sacred skirts,  
 A shiver ran across the glancing field  
 Of spear-heads, and there heaved a passionate sob  
 Of wrath that would have roared in storm, but he,  
 Spreading his palms, as who would still the seas  
 By miracle, overawed them to a hush;

So blessed their arms and them, and let them go.  
 Was ever holy man so royal as he?

ERNAN.

Less royal were more holy. Ay; 'uncowled.'  
 Somewhat too loose our Abbot wears the cowl  
 To my poor thinking, dare I speak my thought.  
 These knightly warrings and these kingly ways,  
 I cannot like them. We are men of peace.  
 Who takes the sword shall perish by the sword.

BAITHEN.

He takes no sword. You wrong him. He but guides,  
 In this high quarrel of avenging God,  
 The earthlier arm that takes it.

ERNAN.

Yes, I know.

Yet I do fear his saintliness may draw  
 A soil from this hot traffic with the world.  
 For who can pray aright whose veins are swelled  
 With anger, or with fierce expectancy  
 Of bloody news, or, haply, sights of blood?  
 These trampling musters and harsh horns of war  
 Will put him from his prayers.

BAITHEN.

That will they not.

Brother, you never were Columba's man ;  
 You know him not. But I remember how  
 That self-same night, late in the second watch,  
 I rose, for sleep I could not, and would pace  
 The moonlight glades awhile ; but there I heard  
 A rustle in the brake, and came on him  
 Risen to his feet, but praying still, as one  
 Drawn from the earth by energy of the prayer.  
 Uppillared in the lonely beam he stood :  
 And by wrung lip and ghost-white cheek I read  
 Sign of a fading agony in the face.  
 I heard him murmur Curnan's name, and knew  
 He pleaded for his peace, with such a tone,  
 So yearningly beseeching and so rapt  
 With holy passion, that all shamed I hid  
 And stole away over the silent moss,  
 Unnoted. But that white face follows me.  
 O he is saint for all his kingliness !

ERNAN.

And well and warmly have you pleaded it,  
 Good brother : saintly is he : I were churl  
 To question it ; and yet—and yet, my fears

Root deep (God grant them vain !) that he will rue  
 His commerce with the men of feud and fray.

[RONAN *the bard is heard singing outside.*

*O the Dove of the Cell hath the Eagle for kin.  
 When the banner is blown, when the bugles begin . . .*

BAITHEN.

The voice of Ronan, as I live ! He brings  
 The news of battle.

(To RONAN *entering.*) Speak ! is it well, is it well ?

RONAN.

Should I come singing, if my news were ill ?  
 The men of Meath are flying on all the hills.  
 Columba is avenged.

BAITHEN.

Now praised be God !

RONAN.

There lie three thousand stark among the brakes  
 Of Meathmen, and stout fellows of our own  
 A scant five hundred, but too many so.

ERNAN.

Three thousand lives for one ! a goodly toll.

And half a thousand more in taking it.  
Will God make reckoning for transgression thus?

BAITHEN.

More, more, good Ronan. Tell us all, and how  
Columba did, and where ye fought.

RONAN.

We fought

Hard by Drumcliff. The Brethren of that House  
Were on the hills to watch us,—would have fought,  
A score of them: Columba drove them back.  
'What should they do with fighting? Let them pray.'  
Yet monks there fought too in our battle ranks,  
Some three or four. Our scouts had found the king  
Couched in our path among the matted hills  
That hide Culdrevny, scarce a league away,  
And we should rush upon him with the morn.  
Then under the last stars Columba came  
Along the ranks to bless them: tall he stood  
Between the torches: pale of cheer was he  
With vigil on the ghostly moor, but pale  
As with the white fires of a stormy dawn.  
Some said that, as he blessed us, very fire  
Was sprayed from waving sleeve and moving hand,  
Most wonderful, and like the fluttering heat  
That fumes from summer meads. I know not this.

But silent-footed as a troop of elves  
The army moved. Dun hollow and dun height  
Grew greyer, and not yet the mist had risen,  
When far to right a watcher cried, and far  
To left the alarum bickered down their line,  
And all the hill was live with starting foes,  
And roaring open war we bounded on them.  
I had lost the Master in the march, but came  
Upon him in the fight. Beside an oak  
He leaned, his left hand stayed upon a bough,  
The other clenched as if a hilt were in it.  
The trenchant eyes under a knotted brow  
Seemed to see all things in the swarming field,  
But saw not me. 'Father,' I cried, 'you press  
Too near the vanguard's skirt.' He answered not,  
Nor cast a look upon me. To and fro,  
With rush and flight and rally and staggering shock,  
Across blind copses of the bellowing dells  
Tumbled the unsteady battle, till I cried,  
Quailing, 'Good Master, shall we win it?' He  
Answered me not. A random spear-point fell  
Glancing the oak-trunk. 'Master, shelter you,'  
I groaned in agony. But he answered not,  
Nor looked, nor stirred. Only the even breath  
Through the stretched nostril labouringly toiled.  
But on a sudden he put hand to ear

And hearkened, flushing; and I too could hear,  
 Through the thick uproar, hoarse a slughorn blare  
 A point of onset. 'Twixt the teeth he muttered,  
 'He is o'er the moss, he has turned their right, good Fergus;  
 We have them—as I told him.' Then he fell  
 To the old mute stare again. My throbbing heart  
 Had told three hundred, when he cried aloud,  
 'That stir on the far hillock yonder—see,  
 Canst thou not see it, bard?' I saw it not.  
 But on the instant rose the angry wail  
 Of men borne hopeless back, and in the air  
 Hung, till our peal of victory swallowed it,  
 And all one way the heavy battle swung.  
 Then under it the torn brake bent again,  
 And snapped with rushing footsteps; up the slope  
 Billowed the chase of war, and on the brow,  
 A moment poising, stretched a vulture wing,  
 Flecking the sky with banner and stormy spear,  
 Then stooped upon the fliers that fight no more.

Thereon the mighty Abbot turned his eyes,  
 And with their large smile all enfolding me,  
 Said, 'Here is goodly news, my bard, for Derry.  
 And men will hear to-morrow (will they not?)  
 A battle psalm of our sweet singer tell  
 How fought the stars against Columba's wrong.'

Yea, will ye hear it?

BAITHEN.

Blithely, Ronan.

ERNAN.

Bard,

Knew you those three or four who fought, you said,  
 Against Columba's bidding?

RONAN.

Nay, I know not.

Or—how should I forget him?—one I knew  
 Through all his war-gear: and he whispered me  
 Be silent. But his name—how call you him?  
 The comely boy with the black eyes and hot,  
 Free spirit, him who took his vows with us  
 Seven months ago.

ERNAN.

Mochonna?

RONAN.

Yea, the same.

The Abbot's godson, or I err.

B

ERNAN.

Mochonna!

I would you had said some other.

RONAN.

Nay, 'twas he.

But friends, my harp's afret to tell the tale

Her fashion. Listen.

*(Sings.)*

Faint of tread as mists on moorland trooping,

Linking wavering hand in hand, and looping

Fold on cloudy fold,—

Faint of tread our hunters o'er the wold

Come with holden breath and helmet stooping,

Lest the night reveal

Tramplings of the Neil,

Lest the trembling heath

Warn the men of Meath

Connaught's sword upon their sleep is swooping.

Hark!

What was it there?

Foeman's signal, or owl's

Hoot in the brake?

Mark!

Comrade, the hazels shake.

Was it a hare

Starting, a fox that prowls?

No, in a trice

Ere an eyelid's fall or a heart's beat twice,

To left and to right

With a cry running ever before it in widening peal,

As a wind on the wheat, as a fire on the fern, the quick  
furrow of fight

Sunders the ridges of steel.

Shock of the mighty, reel

Of the helmet under the sword,

Wrestle of spear and spear,

Rattle of mail on the sward.

Fire of the battle, and fear:

Fear that to fire will spring

At the stormy veer of the soul,

And ride o'er the war's uproll

On the glory of danger's wing.

Who is this arisen to rule us, loftier than our lords of fray?

Who is this all still in tumult, all aflame in our dismay?

Hood for helm: for mail a girdle. Shines not in his hand  
the sword.With the light of eyes he smiteth, and he routeth with the  
word.

Whom we knew not, lo! we know him, now in danger's  
 burning hour,  
 Him who walks the fire and burns not, armoured with  
 the nameless power ;  
 Him whose ears have heard the High One's counsel ; who  
 the warcraft knows  
 Of the secret lightnings raining viewless ruin o'er the  
 foes.  
 Lo! the Dove, that of the dove name bears the pureness,  
 not the fear :  
 Lo! the Dove, that hath the eagle for his kinsman and  
 his peer :  
 Blenched not he, nor plume he ruffled when the battle-  
 horns began,  
 On our standard-beam alit and steadfast in the reeling van.  
 Who shall fright him, who shall front him, who shall  
 countercharm the spell  
 Of the Dove from out the eyrie, of the soldier from the  
 cell ?

Harp of glory,  
 Raise the wail :

Teach, O harp, thy strings to tell of woe !  
 Tell of those who chant not with our chanting,  
 Brother hearts, that bled to make our vaunting ;  
 And they linger where they drave the foe.

Sing we sorrow o'er the proud, fair faces,  
 Starward staring ;  
 O'er the strong limbs couched in heathy places  
 Frorely faring.  
 Cold they lie, whose souls a moment burning  
 Flamed away :  
 Cold they lie, and wait an unreturning  
 Beam of day.  
 Who are these, like mists in moonlight trooping,  
 Fold on fold and hand in hand enlooping,  
 Light as breath, and white as death, on moorland  
 hoar ?  
 These the shades are of our brothers parted,  
 Empty shadows of our mighty-hearted :  
 They will meet us, but they greet us nevermore.  
*[Seeing them gone.]*
 What! gone ? and let me sing to the bare walls,  
 Ay, and bare table (hunger pinch them for't !),  
 Nor offered the poor harper bite or sup.  
 Oh these lean men of God, the way of them !  
 'Tis better when the Master's here, he knows  
 A man who fasts may pray, but sing he cannot.  
 But what ? We are soldiers ; I'll go forage for it.  
*[Exit.]*

## SCENE II.

*A moor near the monastery of Derry. At night.*

COLUMBA *alone.*

COLUMBA.

By my much weariness the night is old.  
Yet the dark lightens not. Would it were day!  
And yet not so: I would not day should rise  
Upon a night outwatched so barrenly.  
I have watched, but not to prayer. Prayer from my soul  
Withers away, as sleep from aching brows  
The more we woo it. Tender dews of heaven  
Rain over the dark sod I kneeled on, rain  
Large over all things else but only me,  
Dry in the drenched field as a Gideon's fleece.  
Pray can I not; and something ails my soul.

Nay, 'tis but Nature's use, a faintness bred  
By strain of the tasked spirit; nothing more.  
Have I not known it? after stormy day  
Of fire and of anointing, when a truth  
Burned in my heart and flamed on lip and caught  
From edge to edge the pale, lit multitude,  
How on the rapt hour fell a morrow blank

As grey March heavens where the east wind creeps,  
So lightless, stark, and cold. 'Tis ever so.  
The hand of Spirit's jealous sister, Flesh,  
Prisons the dove-wings of her heavenly twin  
Caught from their moment's flight. And in this cause  
Body and Soul as honest yoke-fellows  
Have toiled and tired:—that rousing of the clans;  
Vigil and march and vigil; an army's fate  
Laid all on me; and that soul-shaking fight,  
And what befell me after with the dead!  
Yea, 'tis but spendthrift Nature's hour of ebb.  
A night of slumber brings again the flow.

Will it? I know not. Something deeper ails  
Than sleep can physic.

Ha! What stirred? Who cries?

Folly! The night-jar's ruckle as he shifts  
From brake to brake. I start at nothings now.  
It made me think upon the cries I heard  
Through the drear darkness where our lanterns crept  
Among the dying: fluttering cries of pain  
That rose and drifted, rose and drifted thick  
As multitudinous bleat of the shorn flock  
At night in chill June meadows. There was one  
Lifted a warped face to the gleam, and cursed  
Me and my quarrel. Ah! the stricken one,



He was past knowing me: but yet it hurts,  
That dead man's curse. 'My quarrel.' Was it mine:  
Not God's in His wronged justice? Yet he cursed.  
And I must still remember that he cursed.

Just Heaven, I warred for Justice. Is the blame  
Mine, if she bared so blind a sword, and mowed  
A swathe of many to reach the guilty One?  
For land, for pelf, for pride my tribesmen flock  
Gaily to battle; nay, for battle's sake:  
No better. I have taught them war for right.  
The blood be on the wrongers, not on me.  
Let Diarmid see to that. My hands are clean.

Yet the man cursed: and I must still remember.

A shiver pricks my flesh. It is the dawn.  
Her cold forefinger touched me through the dark.  
Yet night is solid everywhere. My flesh?  
Nay, was it cold that pricked, or flesh that shrank?

My hands are clean; my hands——

Out, out, and out upon it! 'Tis not so.  
I lie to my own soul. I am not clean.  
It is my sin, O soul, it is my sin

Winged that sore arrow of his curse: my sin  
Venomed its point with rancours. Clean I am not:  
Their blood is thick upon me, and I knew,  
Dissembler! and I laboured not to know it.  
But that lodged arrow galling all my side  
Devours me: and I dared not, miserable!  
Set hand and pluck the iron out, and brave  
Agony of unsealed wound and spouting vein.  
Dared not? What is there else I dared not, I  
Who on the roaring strand of battle felt  
The sharp spray on my lips unshrinking? Dare not?  
'Twere ill then with Columba. O my soul,  
We have braved all else, shall we not brave my guilt?  
Stand forth, my sin, and let me look on thee:  
Forth from thy lair, full-statured as thou art,  
Featured and limbed as the Ill Sire begot:  
Stand armed, a traitor challenged; let me know thee  
As warrior knows his foeman, point to point.

O Thou just God, thus have I done and thus.  
There was a man of Thine, if Thine he was  
For his much labour's sake, a youth who vowed  
To teach the fiery hearts of our wild Erin  
Burn for the Christ alone: a prince who cast  
Hopes from him of a crown, red gold of earth,  
So might he reach the starrier coronal

That brows a Prince with God. For this he dwelt  
 Apart with visions, till the visions broke  
 In blossom and o'er-ran the jarring land  
 With shrines of peace and prayerful brotherhoods.

God! what is this has cut my path across?  
 What pit of horror opens at my feet,  
 Yawning, with blood of men that blackens in it  
 And fumes that mount and madden? Is it I  
 Have done this deed,—I, that came preaching peace,  
 Have wrought confusion, brother's hand on brother,  
 And this red chrism of blood in hatred shed?  
 I, is it I have done it, I that dreamed  
 So purely—I, and not some other man?  
 I cannot think it mine: but that abhorred  
 Red gleam of blood once looked on fills my eyes,  
 And falls in blots before them where they fall,  
 And writes my guilt on air and field and sky,  
 'Shedder of blood, shedder of blood.' O Christ,  
 Is all then fallen to this: the dream that blessed  
 My cradle, angels of the infancy,  
 And prophesyings that sealed me saint: to this  
 The fast, the prayer, the vigil, and the brows  
 That felt thy finger through the trembling dark  
 Descend in consecration,—fallen to this?  
 I hear the fierce kings mutter, 'Even as we  
 Is he, Columba: hates and wars and kills

After man's kind, no other; he that bade  
 Forbear, forgive. Ha! ha! he is wiser now:  
 Wise as his flock that live the olden way.'  
 O to have lived for sainthood, then to slay  
 The saint within me! Never more to me,  
 Pale with his violence when the flame-fit dies  
 Shall turn the vengeful clansman, 'Cleanse me, father,  
 For thou art pure.' Nor, lit with ghostly hopes,  
 The young boy lift his eyes and murmur, 'Master,  
 Thou hast the words of life: I serve with thee.  
 I shall not cleanse nor rule; the power is lost  
 I cleansed with, fallen my sceptre over men.  
 Men! is't with men I reckon? Holy God,  
 Thee, against Thee my sin is, Thine the face  
 That will not look on me, so cold a cloud,  
 Crimson with mists of blood that welter in it,  
 Curtains me out: and through the cloud I feel,  
 Unseen, Thy brows of judgment wintrily  
 Beat on my soul and bear it down to earth.  
 And dead as earth of earth my soul, but quick  
 With icy pangs of horror, and nameless pain  
 Of glory beheld and lost, and bliss not mine,  
 Cut off from the face of God, from the face of God.

## SCENE III.

*The isle of Inishmurry. The monastery of Molasius  
in the background. COLUMBA landing.*

COLUMBA.

Lo! Christ's last watch-tower in the West, the isle  
Of wise Molasius and his anchorites.

The wave that splits upon this rock has heard  
The talk of winds at the earth's margin, fresh  
From the evening star; or in dumb bosom bears  
From ocean gardens, where no shipman comes,  
Charm-murmurs of the dread Hesperian witch,  
And foams their echo first on shores of Christ.

There peep the red domes of the hermit folk  
Above the rampart, where they hive like bees,  
But work not bee-like. Would I hive with these,  
If he should bid? God knows.

(*To ATTENDANT.*) Go thou and say  
Columba waits on wise Molasius,  
To speak with him when leisure serves from prayer.

To hive with these—a hermit? I could not, I,  
To crawl from cell to shrine, from shrine to cell,  
To crouch and muse in the close vault, to moan  
Sad litanies to the unresponding wave;

Or when the demons wake the seas, and all  
The deep isle labours in the surge, to feel  
The unused, unwasted might within me pent  
Rage at its chain to spend itself in storm;  
Until the grey years dateless, deedless, dumb,  
Chronicled only by the whitening beard,  
Crumble to ash my manhood. God! I will not.  
Free air, free field, free service give me, room,—  
Though but to bleed in or to die in, room.

[MOLASIUS enters.]

MOLASIUS.

God and all holy angels, son, be with thee.  
Thou wouldst have speech with me. I ask not why.  
Our chapel—shall it serve us?

COLUMBA.

Rather here,  
Under these heavens, at the headland's edge.  
I can speak better so. The shower that dashed  
My rowers' backs is overblown; the next  
Pearls but the blue sky's edge with cloudy plumes.  
An hour before its wing flap over us.

MOLASIUS.

So be it, son.

[*They sit.*]

COLUMBA.

Father, thou wouldst not ask  
What brought me here ; haply because thou knowest.

MOLASIUS.

We dwell afar, yet something reaches us.  
Your wrath with Diarmid, and the woful field  
Culdrevny, and that session of the Church  
Which but for Brendan would have banned thee, this  
Mochonna told us : he had fought himself,  
Vowed monk although he be, for love of thee.  
Alas ! the wild blood in our churchman hearts  
That preach peace, not ensue it. Here he bides,  
Sorrowing for that soul's peace his violence slew.

COLUMBA.

Mochonna ! Deep you pierce. Mochonna, he  
On whose babe-brow I traced the saving sign,  
He, too, undone through me ! The boy I taught  
His first Christ-lore, and saw his musing eyes  
Deepen with young resolve, and loved him, he  
Among the murdered souls whose blood I bear !  
The slain men are at ease, their spirits rest  
In pardon ; Abban told me when he came  
From prayer and from that angel whom he meets.

But, for the living souls whose peace I slew  
That should have taught them peace, what penance,  
what——

Father, it was for this I sought thee out.  
I have bent my knees in every holy shrine  
Of Erin, questioned all our wisest, prayed  
Nightlong by hallowed wells or under shade  
Of secret oaks, where the white angels dwell ;  
But voice of man nor angel eased my pain.  
Last, ' I will seek Molasius,' I cried,  
' The soul's-friend of my boyhood, first and best.  
Far from our jars among pure seas he dwells,  
He prays in the great silences, he hears  
God's voice across the storms, 'tis he shall name  
The penance-doom that makes Columba clean.'  
Speak. By thy sentence I have vowed to stand.  
Father, upon my knees I wait it : speak.

MOLASIUS.

I cannot speak the penance that makes clean ;  
For, son, I know not any.

COLUMBA.

Thou, not thou ?

MOLASIUS.

Not I, nor any. Thou hast asked amiss.  
 What penance did the Christ who cleansed us all?  
 Death? But He died I think as warriors die,  
 Who choose the pain for mastery's sake, the death  
 Because the victory comes no otherwise.  
 But pain, by use unblessed, how should it heal?

COLUMBA.

Strange words from such as thou, whose very life  
 Seems pain, in prison on this mournful isle.

MOLASIUS.

In prison! I was never free but here.  
 Bound; but the great God's visions are not bound;  
 Bound, north and south and east, but upwards free  
 From lone rock up to highest heaven of heavens.  
 My doom be mine who know it. Other thine.  
 See here the sinewed hand that lies in mine,  
 The keen eyes under the great brow, the frame  
 And stature, auguries of toil and rule.  
 The toil, the rule must be thy penance, son.  
 Go work for Christ, go work.

COLUMBA.

Ha! sayest thou so?

MOLASIUS.

Go work, His shepherd on the hillside, keep  
 Thy vigils by the fold, and let the frost  
 Of night, the noonday's drought consume thee; bring  
 Through gusts upon the giddy mountain stair  
 The strayed lamb home; and, for thy penance, bleed  
 Grappling the fanged wolf in his ravin heat,  
 Thy blood for theirs. For every soul thy wrath  
 Sent to God's judgment-seat unshriven, bring  
 A hundred to His fold. Lo! I Molasius  
 Pronounce the sentence. Yet not I but Christ.

COLUMBA (*starting to his feet*).

O earth and heaven, heaven and wide earth! Is this  
 Thy sentence, this? Father, my dear heart's wish  
 Had chosen as thou bidst. To toil, to dare,  
 War with the wolf, to range the stirring field  
 Shepherd and fighter—O my very dream!  
 What, can man's wishing be God's willing, joy  
 Be penance, and the chastening cup of gall  
 Run in my veins a cordial? Can it be?

D

Sweet justicer, art wise as thou art sweet?  
Can that please heaven which pleases flesh so well?

MOLASIUS.

Fair son, and hath not God, then, made the flesh?  
And sown the strength in't, and delight of strength,  
And longing for the battle? He who taught  
The erne his sunward circlings, gave withal  
The thrills and rapture of the unpractised wing  
That prick his strong youth skyward. Doubt me not.  
Man's nature is God's oracle, and grace  
Is to know nature as God made her first.  
But, O young brother mine, mistrust not yet  
Thy doom for over-sweetness! Hear the rest.  
But stoop and let me speak it in thy ear.  
I have no heart except to whisper it.

*[He whispers.]*

COLUMBA.

'No more to Erin, never again to Erin!'  
Unsay it, father.

MOLASIUS.

Nay, for I have said.  
Thou must go labour for the heathen Pict,  
And never come to Erin any more.

Such doom pronounce I, not the Lord but I:  
But deem I have God's spirit uttering it.

COLUMBA.

Never to Erin again, never to Erin!

MOLASIUS.

Never again. The crimson rain, that drenched  
Culdrevny's sod, hath watered weeds too many.  
In that red glebe shalt thou no harvest plant,  
Gather no sheaves into thy bosom. Tare  
And spurge and poison-plant and mandrake choke  
A ground for thy sake barren, and unblest  
Harsh fallows, furrowed once by ploughs of war.  
Ye cannot sow the strife and reap the peace.  
Ah! no. Away, away: the ghosts would start  
Thick from those trampled fields to shake thy prayer  
With horror or heat: amid thy listening flock  
Would faction's hell-hounds bay thy preaching dumb;  
Or the pale blood-feud's Fury, mocking, point  
A gaunt forefinger at thy sullied robe  
And shame the pleading saint. It may not be.  
Go. Alba waits across the eastern sea,  
White Alba, virgin of thy violences;  
Yea, white for harvest are the fields thereof.

COLUMBA.

But never more to come to Erin! Father,  
 Cloistered a life long on this naked rock,  
 With naked skies for all thy country, thou  
 Hast half forgot thy Erin. Seed of hers  
 Am I, and wither in an alien soil.  
 O great are birth and use! I am one half I,  
 Half her that nursed me, and my powers would faint  
 Unbuoyed on that strong river of her love,  
 Unwaffed by her glory as a wind.  
 How should I teach the Christ to outland men,  
 Unknowing and unknown, dumb to the deaf,  
 Their spirits locked from mine? But Erin's heart  
 Was to my voice as is a minstrel's harp,  
 Familiar to his touch; for when he plays  
 Hand wakens harp, and harp awakens hand,  
 Live string, live finger wedded, and there grows  
 Music, of neither made, of twain begot.  
 He cannot harp aright on stranger chords,  
 Nor I make music sundered from my kin.

MOLASIUS.

Yea, great are birth and use and land and kin.  
 But when the Lord in Jewry walked, He owned  
 No kin but whoso wrought the Father's will,

Nor land so much as rests a weary head.  
 But God will give thee homes a hundredfold,  
 And God is able of rude Alba's stones  
 To raise up kin for thee. Thy fears are blind,  
 The trick of use and wont. What is, thou seest;  
 What shall be, canst not see. Be strong and go.

COLUMBA.

My heart is broken in my breast. I go,  
 Honouring thy word and my own vow. I take  
 Thy counsel not thy comfort. But I go.  
 And bless me thou who nevermore shalt bless.

[*Kneels.*]MOLASIUS (*laying his hands on him*).

The blessing of the God of Abraham,  
 Who calls His saints from country and from kin  
 Unto the land which He will show them, go  
 Before thee, and His promise comfort thee,  
 And make thy seed in number as the sand,  
 And thy soul's-children as the stars of heaven.

## ACT SECOND.

## SCENE I.

*On the shore of Lough Foyle near the Monastery of  
Derry. A.D. 563.*

FECHNO.

Baithen, the Abbot tarries long.

BAITHEN.

Let be.

He bides in yonder dingle, where the brook  
Girdles a lawn about the Angel Oak,  
Taking last leave of home: and partings seem  
Ever too soon. Are all the brethren here?

FECHNO.

All, and not all. All, but who has not come  
Nor will come.

BAITHEN.

Who is he?

FECHNO.

What, know you not  
That Dallan goes not with us to the work,  
But treads even now the road to Durrow?

BAITHEN.

How!

And has Columba suffered it?

FECHNO.

Ay, has he.

Truth, when the craven spoke, his brow grew big  
With storm, but sudden all the gathered face  
Fell back in utter sadness, and he sighed;  
'Ay, so: go back. Better be Mark to-day  
Than Judas on the morrow. Go in peace!'  
And Dallan went, but not in peace. Ashamed  
He stumbled some ten paces, turned, beheld,  
Stern-sorrowful as the angel Adam saw  
Posted by Eden Gate, Columba stand  
Watching him. Half I thought he would have run



And caught his knees, prayed pardon and return ;  
But eyes he dropped, shivered, and went his way.

BAITHEN.

And breaks our goodly Order of the Twelve,  
And daunts our voyage with the omen. Well,  
Twelve were they once in Galilee, and one—  
But we that are true men, aboard ! and part  
The oars between us : slack yon hawser's knot,  
And half-mast high hoist up the sail, to lose  
No minute when the Abbot crosses plank.  
Fair sets the tide seaward, if fair can be  
That bears us out from Erin. Friends, aboard !

SCENE II.

*The oak-grove at Derry.* COLUMBA *alone.*

COLUMBA.

How otherwise, than as I feared, the end  
Has fallen at last. I thought to break away  
With such a horror of life-sundering pain  
As rends the live-root mandrake. 'Tis not so.  
The bitterness of death is past : the life  
Born in the pang. A promise vast and veiled,

A pillared flame uplift beyond the seas,  
Beckons, and strains my heart until I go.  
As one who treads some dreadful brink will leap  
In fear's impatience to the death he fears,  
So from this brink of home, this tottering verge  
Of things which were my being, into the void,  
Into the void, not to the death, I spring  
Safe to the outspread eagle-wings of God.  
They will uphold ; I shall not die but live.  
Not die. But O fair mother, all-beloved  
Erin, my nature's nurse, 'tis death to part !  
Christ's soldier am I, but thy child : and all  
The child within the man cries out for thee,  
And catches clinging to thy skirts, and quails  
To be torn away. Yet will Columba go,  
Though death it be. O tender lap of earth,  
And dewy meadows under glooming oaks,  
And secret thickets of the chiding merle,  
And ever-talking waters,—evermore  
Farewell, and from a bleeding heart, farewell !  
Farewell ! Columba looks his last on Erin.

[*Turns and sees* MOCHONNA.

Mochonna ! in God's name what do you here ?

MOCHONNA.

What should I do but seek my father ?

COLUMBA.

Nay,  
Too well of old you sought him. But the Isle,  
How came you from it? Did Molasius bid?

MOCHONNA.

Nor bade, nor suffered, though I prayed him long.  
I have broken pale.

COLUMBA.

Alas, a second time!

MOCHONNA.

Father, there came a fisher to the isle  
One even, brought us news Columba's bark  
Should sail for Alba ere this moon were full.  
Mad was I that Molasius hindered me.  
At night I rose, crept to the fisher's boat,  
And hid me in the gear, until with dawn  
He woke, the breeze being landward, and would go.  
Him I persuaded, and the bird was flown,  
No cageling gladlier. Then by path or wild,  
With sunrise and with moonrise, grudging sleep  
Its hour of darkness, on I toiled to thee,  
And find thee. Father, make me of the Band.

COLUMBA.

Too hotly done, as ever. Was it well  
To o'erleap the bound, against Molasius' word  
Thy wise soul's friend and true?

MOCHONNA.

Soul's friend have I

None other than Columba.

COLUMBA.

Nay, but hearken.

I loved thee, son, and loved thee to thy harm.  
My path of blood dipped-in Mochonna, soiled  
His virgin soul of peace, made riot there  
Red dreams of wrath and horror, ghosts of guilt  
That never will be wholly laid again,  
Howe'er thy penance cleanse. This did my love.  
Seek me not, boy, but fly: thy bane am I.

MOCHONNA.

Hearken me too, my father. Thou art bound  
Hence to the Christless folk, to make them Christ's.  
Yea, but a folk ungentle, men that slay  
The stranger as we slay the beast; untaught,  
Untamed,—and thou wilt tame them. Ay, but how?

Father, among the reddened heathen spears  
 I see thee quit thy trespass, blood with blood,  
 And purge thy violence in their violences.  
 And therefore, even therefore must I go.  
 With thee I sinned, let me be sained with thee,  
 Partake thy penance. Did thy path of blood  
 Dip-in Mochonna? Let Mochonna wash  
 In the same purging stream. Hast made me sinner?  
 Then let me drink thy cup, endure thy chrisim,  
 In the red martyrdom made saint with thee.

## COLUMBA.

Boy, boy, thy passion tears me at the heart.  
 Yet must I teach it, make thy passion wise.  
 Bethink thee, thou art young, thy life unmaimed;  
 Wearing a scar, but whole. My life is broken,  
 A tree stem-severed, not to blossom more  
 Here in the soil of home, though God elsewhere  
 May graft it and give fruit. But thine is Erin  
 To grow in and abound and quite forget  
 This blight of fury on thy spring. Abide,  
 Live thy own life, nor lean on mine; be free;  
 Gather thy companies of holy men;  
 Bear rule, for thou art royal, be great for Christ.  
 Thou wilt not, no? Thou wilt not? Then for *me*  
 Abide. Behold me, how I need an heir.

I leave my plough in furrow, guide it thou;  
 My work is fallen, save thou rear it up;  
 My flock will faint, except thou shepherd it.  
 Then work my work, see what I saw not, be  
 Columba's soul in Erin. I shall walk  
 In thee the dear lost fields, look with thine eyes  
 On Erin's goodly men and gracious women.  
 Oh! yield me this: this my one joy fulfil.  
 I am not banished wholly, so I leave  
 My purpose planted in such breast as thine.

## MOCHONNA.

How should I answer this? So dear a plea  
 Thrusts at me hard and through the harness-joints.  
 Yet no, and no, and no. 'Make passion wise?'  
 Passion is wise already, being passion:  
 She can because she would. 'Be free,' thou sayest.  
 Strongest is freest: strong am I, with thee.  
 'Live my own life?' Yea, will I. But that life  
 (Father, the Lord hath shown it me) is thine.  
 Ah! must I tell my story? Once a child  
 Was playing nigh a dim mid-forest cell.  
 There came a saint to pray. The child drew near  
 And watched him, awed. The up-flung head, the cowl  
 Stirred with the heart-throb, or a something (was it?)  
 Winnowing unviewed the air between them, held

His soul in a sweet terror, till the saint,  
 Arising, with his tranced eyes yet in heaven,  
 Fronted the boy, tarrying, too scared to flee.  
 Then the great light of those grey eyes came down  
 One moment, fell like an anointing flame,  
 So burningly, so tender; and one word  
 Fell with the light on the boy's heart, 'My son.'  
 The rest thou know'st. I never told thee this.  
 Nor had I told at all, but now I see  
 That was God's moment when He sealed my soul;  
 God's moment, mighty as a thousand years.  
 All years of mine were in it, as the tree  
 Closed in the seed. There did I choose, not here.  
 Nay, there was chosen. All the after-hours  
 Danced to the rhythm of one enchanted name.  
 'Columba': all the wild wood throbbled with it.  
 'Columba': in the throngs of men I heard it.  
 If there were praising of high deeds, 'Columba'  
 I whispered to my heart. All names were nought:  
 All pomps, all passions, all ambitions else  
 Were vacant shows, dumb echoes, meagre ghosts  
 Of one live worth that breathed and burned in thee.  
 I cannot image me the mortal doom  
 That holds not thee. Therefore most sure am I  
 God wills it, for He set the yearning here:  
 God wills it,—for thou dar'st not question it.

See! I have moved thee, I have moved thee: yield.  
 Love is life's pilot ever; let him rule:  
 Love, wise as Fate, Fate's kinder angel form;  
 Heaven's cloudy pillar where it breaks a-flame;  
 God's banner. Let us follow it to the death.

## COLUMBA.

Yea, to the red death or white age together,  
 Son, will we follow. I clasp thee to my breast  
 Till the white age or the red death us part:  
 And with this kiss I seal thee Christ's and mine.  
 Oh! we the lonely virgin lives that miss  
 Earth's bridals and the father's fleshlier bond,  
 A hundredfold, yea in the life that is,  
 Receive we more. God guard it ours. Enough.  
 I cannot trust my words. God keep it holy  
 In silence, this great bond that makes us one,  
 Till Christ declare it in His heaven of heavens.

Thou art the twelfth. March with me to the war.

## SCENE III.

*On the Coracle. FECHNO and ERNAN seated in the prow.*

FECHNO.

Didst mark that heron, Ernan, by the brink  
At yonder point? We sent our ruffled wake  
Up the tall shank to splash his skirts, and he  
Stood with his musing chin pulled in, nor budged  
An inch, nor stirred a feather.

ERNAN.

Yes, I saw.

Old solitary of the river wilds,  
And day-long dreamer, half he seems to me  
Monk of some sylvan Rule. Why should he fear  
His human brethren of the cowl?

FECHNO.

Good wit.

But more I think, he knows the fowler's bonnet  
And cowl apart.

ERNAN.

Wise bird. But I will hold  
He is wiser yet. He knows that out of Erin

Goes Erin's best: he comes to view the last  
Of his great brother, and the kindest heart  
That ever loved the woods and woodland folk.

FECHNO.

Yes, loves the woodland well; and, were he not  
Churchman, had loved it in another sort.  
He has the forest eye, a hunter born  
If ever any, as old Hubert vows.

ERNAN.

He has the woodcraft in a gentler kind:  
He draws, not drives the creatures. Baithen tells  
How at his orisons the startled hare  
Will turn and thread the thicket back, to peer  
From the hazel root about his knees, as bold  
As the quick bush-tailed climber in the bough.  
'Tis Eden there for the wild folk and him.

COLUMBA (*in the stern*).

Come, brother Baithen, leave the oar awhile  
And sit by me. They need thee not: we make  
Good speed, we exiles, all too good. And thou  
Dear son Mochonna, on the further side.

And give me each a hand, as marchers use  
 Who stem a stream together, when the glen  
 Is loud with wroth storm-water. Yea, for we  
 Have such a stream to cross, a river of death.

BAITHEN.

When our great Abbot needs to cross that stream,  
 There is no man of his would loose a hand.

COLUMBA.

Nay, simple-valorous one, I meant not so:  
 Though, truth, we soldiers make our count with death.  
 But, Baithen, there are other ways to die.  
 Death is that angel that unclothes the soul.  
 One while with sword or plague or age he rends  
 The garment of the flesh, to clothe anew  
 Or with pure, rosy vesture of the saint,  
 Or (God have mercy!) fire robe of the lost.  
 But with another hand, and yet austere,  
 He plucks the breathing man, spirit and frame  
 Together, from the warm enfolding life  
 Whereto he clung, one with it: plucks him forth  
 From home and friend and folk and land and kin,  
 From uses, helps, and proven instruments,  
 All purposes, all loves grown ripe with years,  
 And memory, nurse of hopes, and hopes that crown

Memory with starrier beauty—forth from these,  
 And casts him stark and sole, a naked mind,  
 Into the abyss to root him as he may.  
 Such image of a death 'tis ours to die.

MOCHONNA.

It is an image then, not death itself.  
 See our linked hands! we carry Erin with us  
 Fast in our mutual bosoms.

COLUMBA.

Ah! fair son,  
 Ever soft youth will lightlier part with life  
 Than our firm-rooted manhood. Thou perchance——  
 Nay, but I thank thee for thy loyal word.  
 Nor speak I now of death as one who fears,  
 Or murmurs, any more. The pang is past.  
 Rather I taste a mystic joy to lie  
 One hour unclathed of temporal circumstance,  
 A naked soul by the All-Soul uplift,  
 Hid in the hollow of the Eternal's palm,  
 Mid-air between the worlds. Lo! now, our bark,  
 As if it bore a freight of spirits freed,  
 Leaving the long, long arms of the dear earth  
 Sternward, and winging for the twilight void,  
 Is climbing up and up the scaling seas,

Wave after wave, stair over stair, to win  
 Yon glimmering gate where ends the deep in heaven.  
 Ah! such a death the just made perfect die,  
 When all their works do follow them: not mine,  
 Not mine such death: my deeds are all to do,  
 My justness—God forgive me! But O friends,  
 Look back and tell me: is the headland hid?

BAITHEN.

Not hid, but faint already as a cloud  
 And blent with sky and water.

MOCHONNA.

See you there  
 That spark upon its edge! And look, it grows  
 Into a shoot of flame. What is it, Baithen?  
 Signal of war? How say you?

BAITHEN.

Ay, of war,  
 War surely: for to war we voyage. Nay;  
 A signal word of peace that spells, 'Farewell.'  
 'Tis Ronan and his fellows. With the dawn  
 (I knew of it) they went. They fire their pile  
 Still to be with us on the exile's foam  
 And linger out our Erin's last embrace.

COLUMBA.

What do they? Cruel love is here, to wake  
 An exile's pang. I thought we had passed in peace  
 Like spirits of the blest; and now the earth  
 Checks, at the chain's length, backward her estray,  
 Nor hers again nor free. 'Twas ill bethought.  
 How couldst thou suffer it, Baithen?

BAITHEN.

Pardon me.  
 I had not thought——. They had a hunger for it,  
 To be the very last to speed the Abbot.  
 They warm their own chill bosoms at that blaze,  
 True hearts, not knowing.

COLUMBA.

Pardon *me*, my Baithen.  
 I am to blame that ever I blamed love,  
 Though the thorn pricked beneath the flower. O friends  
 Who yet may stand on the dear soil, and wave  
 Your last of farewells, from the bitter sea  
 An exile's last of blessings light on you  
 With balm of all the sweetness he foregoes.

. . . . .

MOCHONNA (*after a pause*).

But Ronan, sire, thy Ronan—surely he  
Should share our flight. Was there no place for him?

COLUMBA.

My Ronan, say you? Mine, and 'mine too much,'  
They murmured. Nay, no place for him with us.

MOCHONNA.

But wherefore? It was spite and narrow heart  
Girded at merry Ronan. Care we for them?

COLUMBA.

No, not for them, son: not a jot for them.  
For mine own sake I left him, and the work's.

MOCHONNA.

He would have cheered the work. Stout heart was his  
Under the lightsome mood and wandering eyes  
And the frail limbs of him. What song was that  
Beside the camp-fire (but you heard it not)  
That drooping night ere Connaught ranged with us?

Few, few, few!  
From the brown moor's desolate ends,  
From the cloud where the welkin blends,  
Plaineth the lone curlew.  
Few, few, few  
Feet to the gathering true,  
Feet on the heather of friends.

Near, near, near,  
With the grim day's labouring flight,  
Cometh onward the southland might,  
Gathers the storm and the fear.  
Near, nearer, and near  
Dumb on the heather I hear  
Feet of the foes of the right.

And there he bent and listened long. A tear  
Rose, shining in the firelight: but it broke  
Down-shaken, as the song-wind smote him again.

Few our muster, and dark  
The camp of the hope forlorn.  
Few—but amidst us are borne  
Prophet and hallowing ark.  
Few—but an answer, Hark!  
Faint through the severing dark:  
'Few shall be many at morn.'



And with the dawn a shout ran in among us  
 From southward, and to arms we leapt, and met——  
 No foe, but Connaught's banners dancing in,  
 Ten thousand spears. Nay, you remember that.

## COLUMBA.

While I remember——. But forbear. Your Ronan  
 Would harp me back whither I would not. Peace.  
 And look again, friends, if the land be hid.

## MOCHONNA.

Not yet, nor will be. Mark you how the wind,  
 That followed full, puffs on the leftward cheek.  
 Aedh changes course, steers for the northern star,  
 But eastward, wary of old Breacan's pool,  
 And keeps the land in touch.

## COLUMBA.

And all night long  
 Erin will overhang us, all night long  
 Reach yearning arms of dusky promontories  
 After her children. We must yet endure,  
 Brothers, the long home-hunger. But the wind  
 Of our great purpose, rising in its hour,  
 And bringing gales of strength, and blowing full  
 Our spirit's sail that flags in this sad air,

Will lift us onward. O o'ershadowing God,  
 Who willest, ere we die, some deed be done,  
 Some deed by us unworthy, unto Thy  
 More glory and our less unworthiness,  
 Spread Thou Thy wing wide as the night is wide,  
 And in the utmost of the homeless sea  
 Let Thy hand find and lead: that neither blast,  
 Nor shoal, nor goring spear of secret rock,  
 Nor toppling wave, nor downward-eddy gulf,  
 Nor buffet of the fell sea-dragon's fin,  
 O'erwhelm us! Some fair angel, on our prow  
 Alighting, with pure eyes o'erawe the deep  
 All night, until the whitening East unveil  
 The land Thou knowest whereon Thy name shall be.

## ACT THIRD.

## SCENE I.

*Duni, the hill of Iona. COLUMBA and MOCHONNA seated.*

MOCHONNA.

May I speak, father?

COLUMBA.

Surely.

MOCHONNA.

You have sat

A long hour silent, silent, gazing out  
Southward, as if you saw Her.

COLUMBA.

Ay, too clear.

MOCHONNA.

And then you turned; 'twas when beyond the sound  
One hailed our ferry: though you looked not thither,  
But swept the little plain, rock, heather, tilth,  
And pasture, with a lone and weary glance,  
As when one seeks and misses.

COLUMBA.

Like enow.

Something I missed.

MOCHONNA.

Your thought is lightly read,  
Father: the day comes round, as by the year.  
I said, 'The old wound galls him with the day.'

COLUMBA.

No, the old wound galls not.

MOCHONNA.

Why then, what new?

COLUMBA.

Nay, nor a new.

MOCHONNA.

Yet you are sad, more sad  
Than e'er I knew you in this manner. I fear  
To ask your trouble, father: but I ask.

COLUMBA.

I thought on grey Molasius, and the Isle. . . .

[Pauses.]

MOCHONNA.

Good cause have you to think of him. I too.

COLUMBA.

The grey, lone saint. The little sea-bound isle. . . .

MOCHONNA.

You are not sad for him. He loves it well.

COLUMBA (*impetuously*).

But I, I cannot love it. O my son,  
Chilling it came upon me—'here is mine;  
My isle, the prison of my penance; here  
Shall I waste out my summers.'

MOCHONNA.

Waste them? How?

What likeness holds? We came to war, not dream.  
Not island hermit, island soldier thou.

COLUMBA.

And there are soldiers die without the deed.

MOCHONNA.

Not thou.

COLUMBA.

And why not I?

MOCHONNA.

Nay, wherefore fear it?

Our deed has opened fairly: we have sped.  
There lies our camp of wattles, in the fence  
Of girdling sea. To-morrow o'er the sound  
(Serve wind) we row the timbers home, and build  
Our shrine, the fortress whence Columba moves  
To conquer Alba.

COLUMBA.

If it be to conquer.

MOCHONNA.

You doubt it? you?

COLUMBA.

No sin to doubt, if faith  
 Outran her warrant. Son, my cloud has fallen.  
 We trusted—did we well to trust? The deed,  
 So goodly, seemed the warrant for itself.  
 There went a fire to lead me: eagle wings  
 Upbare me coming: they have left me thus,  
 Lightless, and wingless, and the pathway lost.  
 Nay, sadden not, Mochonna, till you hear.  
 I trust the good hand of my God; I trust.  
 But some there are He bears to golden dooms,  
 Full-measured with the signs that led them. Some  
 He lifts awhile, glorying, on eagle wings,  
 To drop on deserts, on an aching doom  
 Of silence, deedless ends, a nameless grave.  
 My heart misgives me, such an end is mine.  
 I hear the men who speak, remembering me,  
 'His star rode high, Columba: but he went  
 Somewhere to the wild folk, and there an end.'  
 God's will! But hard, Mochonna, hard to bear.

MOCHONNA.

*Thy* cloud, not ours, has fallen. Us who sit  
 But in the skirts, it blinds not, though it chill.  
 Thy brethren see not with thy sight, those eyes

That see the stars where we but sunlight. No.  
 Nor with thy darkness are we dark. The sun  
 Yet rides the sky for us, when veiled for thee.  
 Use our sight then, till the seer's own return.

COLUMBA.

Why, be it so. Thy vision then, my son.

MOCHONNA.

I see—but how to tell thee?—yet—why there  
 (Look, father, look) the word is spoken for me.  
 I see grim Alba's mountains, fold on fold;  
 Storm in their glens. But toward them from the isle,  
 Sails such a sunbeam o'er the sound, and breaks  
 Wavelike upon the kindled coast, and scales  
 To fire the cloud-bow on their fuming tops.  
 My word is spoken there. For O what cloud,  
 Blacker than storm, over those sullen hills,  
 What darkness of what cruel homes of men,  
 Waits for our Island's Light! And must it wait,  
 Columba on the threshold? This to do:  
 And thou to do it: and the thing undone!  
 Or will the Almighty hide the polished shaft  
 Long in His hollow palm, to break it then,  
 Then, when the battle joins? If this can be  
 What worth is faith?

Ah! I am rash, as ever:  
For so your eyes reprove me.

COLUMBA.

Nay, not rash.  
'Tis a boy's faith, but blessed, and strong to win.  
Hold it. But know, there is a riper faith  
And sadder, humbling all the soul in dust,  
That whispers, 'Does God need Columba so?  
Has not the potter power upon the clay  
To make, or break, to cast upon the heap  
The vessel freshest from the wheel and best?'  
Ah! yes: and half the mighty world is dark;  
Yet how God waits to say, 'Let there be light.'  
Hold, boy, thy faith. It cannot answer mine.

MOCHONNA.

You are hard to answer, father. Yet the mood  
Will change. But let me leave you for a while,  
To learn what means yon stir about our boat  
New touched, a stranger on her, and return.

COLUMBA (*alone*).

'The little plain,' he said, 'the little plain.'  
How little all things look this barren morn!  
All shrinks with the shrunk spirit. But afar

What world of iron hills and heathen glens,  
Vastness that breaks the hope, a wilderness  
To swallow up men's lives, and nothing done.  
What! is my heart turned coward now, and faints  
At the edge of war? I am not used to faint  
At battle. Nay, not fear is this: the truth  
Strikes home, it is the penance of my sin.  
'The toil, son, be thy penance,' said the seer.  
Not so. I came to suffer and to work:  
I bide to suffer and waste—the hermit's end  
Not soldier's mine, nor shepherd's. God's high will.  
God's? Is it His? Not as He willed it, then,  
But as I warped it sinning. There's the sting  
That makes obedience bitter, woe's my heart!  
I dreamed I paid the utmost toll of sin  
Dying the death of exile. Dreamed. For here  
The imperious shadow fronts me in the path,  
Reaching a hand to take the new life too.  
It met me that first hour I crossed the isle.  
For, resting in a seaward grassy lawn  
Hung with low cliffs, I looked, and on the walls  
What hand had writ my shame? From cleft and scar,  
Dyeing with flecks the grey cliff face, methought,  
Sweated red oozings as of blood. I quailed  
At the omen. Then I mocked it. 'Nature's freak;  
Time's rust upon them.' Yet my guilty veins

Curdled, as if the wounds of all my slain  
 Welled up to witness that the slayer was nigh.  
 Horrible! and I held me purged! Alas!  
 To purge the soul makes not to free the life.  
 This mortal bears its trespass yet. My years,  
 Drawn by their secret chain for ever down,  
 Will fail their golden mark, and, crownless, end  
 In some bleak grave beside the stranger sea.

[Enter MOCHONNA, with a DALRIAD of the mainland.

MOCHONNA.

Sire, here is one will speak but with yourself.

COLUMBA.

What would you, friend?

DALRIAD.

A shelter, holy sire,  
 To save a hunted life new plucked from death.

COLUMBA.

What death? what hunters?

DALRIAD.

Heathen of the north.  
 A Dalriad, sire, am I, of Erin's kin  
 In Britain. Five nights since, the raiding Pict

Broke on and fired our steading, haled us thence,  
 Brother with me, and sister: him my eyes  
 (And that accurst fire burns yet in my blood)  
 Saw on their demon-altar bound and burned.  
 God heat sevenfold the furnace of their hell,  
 So grant He first my will upon them. Her——  
 Father, I know not if she died, or lives  
 A death more miserable, the heathen's thrall.  
 For me—by chance unhop'd, that drunken night  
 Which revelled out the horror, I slipped my cord,  
 'Scaped, the chase hot upon my heels, and turned  
 Because I would not draw the Pictish sword  
 Down on my tribesmen, shoreward: there, good hap,  
 Found friends and boat and quiet seas, and came,  
 Great father, to entreat for sanctuary.

[A pause.

Shall I not have it?—of thy faith, thy blood.

[A pause.

(To MOCH.) Young sir, he speaks not. Do I plead in vain?

MOCHONNA.

Fear not: some thought o'ercomes him. 'Tis his mood.

COLUMBA (to himself).

Upon the demon-altar! Christ! And Thou  
 Wast offered once.

DALRIAD.

Yea, on their altar, sire—  
My brother. Christ's curse burn them, flesh and soul!

COLUMBA (*looking up*).

Man! What hath Christ with curses?

DALRIAD.

O the fire,  
And the eyes that stared from out it! I but live  
To whet the sword that slakes it in their blood.

COLUMBA (*to himself*).

How long, how long?

DALRIAD.

Ay, every hour is long  
That lets me. But I wait, wait, wait. It comes.  
Till then but give me shelter.

COLUMBA.

Yes, it comes.  
Else wherefore was I born? It comes indeed.

DALRIAD.

Yea, father: so we wait.

COLUMBA.

Wait? Not an hour.  
Wait? God in heaven! and such deeds done on earth!  
Wait? I go forth to-morrow.

DALRIAD.

Ah! no, no.  
To-morrow cannot be. You know them not,  
How many, and what fighters, of what wile.  
And fast they hold together, Pict by Pict,  
To where Brude sits far on the eastern sea.  
No. Bide awhile, till they forget us. Then  
We creep one moonless midnight round their huts,  
Seven spears at every door; and shout and stroke  
Shall be as thunder and bolt when both are one,  
And not a life break through our hedge of thorns  
To tell whose hand fell on them.

MOCHONNA.

He hears you not:  
He would not brook your counsel, if he heard.

DALRIAD.

Nay, then, what better? Men must bide the hour.

COLUMBA (*looking up*).

The hour, the hour! It is thy trumpet, God.  
I am ready, I am ready.

DALRIAD.

Sire, be ruled.

COLUMBA.

Ah! friend, I had forgotten you. Forgive—  
And yet—what chieftain, said you, in the east?

DALRIAD.

Brude. He that holds Craig Phadrick: but his word  
Sways every chief of Picts between the seas.

COLUMBA.

Then we go thither.

DALRIAD.

God forbid it thee.

Madness. You go but to their demon-fires.

COLUMBA (*rising*).

Man, there is fire within me that will blanch  
Whiter than any ash their fires of bale.  
We shall avenge him well—your brother—well;  
Yea, on the demons. God, the trumpet is it.

And I to doubt if there were deeds for me!  
O light of all the dark of all the world,  
O holy flame of the blest sacrifice,  
O fire of Love, dying that these might live,  
Shine in me living, dying: shine through me  
On these red slayers, brothers of my guilt,  
Guiltless, who know not what they do. Awake,  
Arm of the Lord; I follow: the deed shall be.  
(*To the DALRIAD.*) But come, sir, I have much to learn  
of you.

DALRIAD.

(*To MOCH.*) What like of man is this? He mazes me.

[*Goes.*

MOCHONNA (*alone*).

He mazes *me*. Heaven! how the great grey eyes  
Widened, as if the Light he called upon  
Sphered itself there! I saw it once, but once,  
This glory. 'Twas that hour I passed unknown  
Hard by him into battle. I peered and saw.  
Wonderful! all the tumult of my flesh  
And terror died in a great quiet, as if  
God's finger touched the flesh and freed the soul.  
I could fear nothing after. And this look  
Was like, yet other. What a man is here!



## SCENE II.

*The tent of the missionaries near Craig Phadrick, the  
fortress of Brude, King of the Picts.*

BAITHEN *enters.*

BAITHEN.

How do you now, Mochonna?

MOCHONNA.

Well at ease.

The fever shakes me not: my mind is grown  
So clear and lightsome, that it augurs me  
Some issue great and glad is hard at hand.

BAITHEN.

'Tis like, Mochonna. Can you see yon hill,  
Not far, but dim in starlight, level-ridged?

MOCHONNA.

Surely. What of it?

BAITHEN.

'Tis the seat of Brude.

MOCHONNA.

That is the gate, then, where we knock to-morrow.

BAITHEN.

To-morrow. *There* is issue great enough.

MOCHONNA.

And glad, my brother, glad,—howe'er it fall.

BAITHEN.

Yea. But the waiting. With what iron tread  
March on the ponderous hours, with what bleak light  
The steel-hard stars look down. 'Tis thus, methinks,  
A soldier feels before the fighting morn.

MOCHONNA.

You to have said it, Baithen! So he feels.  
I know it, though it is my shame to know.  
Ah! yes: the watchful stars that note and hide  
The couching soldier's secret: the live hush  
Of beating hearts: and yon dim lift of hill  
That we must carry with the dawn—how like  
That other night (good omen!) ere we won;  
As we shall win to-morrow. We? Alas!

I that fought with him the unhallowed fight,  
Fight not the holy; this marsh fever's clutch  
So lets me from the ranks.

BAITHEN.

Nay, brother, cheer.  
When we have won, there will be work enough  
To share: or, if——

MOCHONNA.

Why fear to end it? 'If  
We fail, then death to share.' Ah! Baithen, death  
Is hard, for all the glory, save with him.  
Love casteth fear out; and I too could die  
Under his eyes. Without him . . .

BAITHEN.

Hist! Mochonna.  
One passes yonder by the trees. Aedh is it  
Upon his watch?

MOCHONNA.

No watcher's footstep that.  
And see, between the trunks he pauses, clear  
On open sky, turned to the Pictish hill.  
Ah! now you know him.

BAITHEN.

Yes. The lifted hands.  
He sends his prayer before him up the hill.  
Courage! That prayer will leap the rampart, steal  
Through those strong guards, and, at the prince's side,  
Murmuring in pagan ears they know not whence  
A word they hearken not yet heed, unstring  
The arm of hasty violence, ere it lift  
Hand on the Lord's Anointed. Brother, cheer;  
Good cheer: we are not set for death to-morrow

SCENE III.

*The tent.*

MOCHONNA (*alone*).

Steps on the turf! It is the news. O Christ!

[BAITHEN *enters*.

Speak it not. Let me read it . . . Ah! 'tis well.  
Yet you look awed too. Speak: I bear it now.

BAITHEN.

O brother, be there wonders yet on earth?  
We went, the Abbot, Ernan, and myself,

And the boy thrall who taught their speech, and Ronan,  
 Ay, Ronan, with that harp which grows to him  
 Like a fifth limb (the elf), to where the hill  
 Grows bare below the fortress. There he stayed,  
 And casting a high look and tender, 'Friends,  
 Tarry,' he said, 'I go the rest alone.'  
 How we cried out against it, image you.  
 'Nay, lest we quench,' he said, 'the lamps of all  
 Together': then to me, 'Good Baithen, stay:  
 For who shall guide the brethren, if I fall?'  
 So went he forth alone. But Ronan, he,  
 (What dares not Ronan?) dancing after him,  
 Looked quaintly up, and whispered him. The face  
 Frowned; but a smile broke through. 'Ay, Ronan, ay.  
 We ever fight together.' So they came  
 Gateward. We heard the challenge, 'Open, ho!  
 An envoy waits.' A dozen wolfish heads  
 Stared o'er the rampart, silent: then a laugh  
 Bellowed, of barbarous throats. Half-oped the door.  
 One parleyed through it, and Columba cried,  
 'Tell him, the envoy of my king and his.'  
 Bellowed a noisier laughter; clashed the door.  
 Then,—blame my eyes for folly—but I saw  
 A hand that waved, signing the cross, and wide,  
 As if God's breath had blown it from its bar,  
 Swung the great door inward. I saw no more:

But, torn between obedience and my love,  
 Broke loose, and bounded after up the slope;  
 There found a tumult dying, grounded spears,  
 Low murmurs, wondering eyes, but nowhere him.  
 Then through the throng slipt Ronan, pale, uplit  
 With such a pure and steady light as never  
 Shone, brother, in those dancing eyes, and said  
 'Baithen, we win, we win. Go tell the rest,  
 (He bade me say it) Christ hath kept His own.'  
 I know not why I did not question more.  
 I was amazed, abashed: I turned, I came,  
 And told—this broken story.

MOCHONNA.

'Tis enough.

Christ keeps His own: he lives. O glad am I,  
 How glad, you stayed no moment more. He lives.  
 Dear Baithen, when you went, I lay and stared  
 Before me, mindless, strengthless, could not make  
 One little prayer to follow you: my life  
 Was gone the while with him, my clay was here.  
 Then came, I think, the fever-folly, I saw  
 Columba by me, in his hand a palm.  
 He spoke not, but with eyes I could not read  
 Searched mine. I reached to touch him: 'twas a babe  
 Grasping at stars, he was so far away.

I murmured, 'Saint of the red martyrdom  
In glory:' but it wrung me like a pang,  
And woke me weeping, weeping. Then your step,  
Your eyes; and I thanked heaven my dream was vain.

BAITHEN.

My thanks with yours. I shame to grudge the palm:  
But ere we feast with saints, I pray to drink  
This earthlier-holy wine of brotherhood  
Full measure in his love and yours, Mochonna.  
But tell me of yourself. Your eyes are bright  
And not with fever; and there's blood again  
Filling your lips.

MOCHONNA.

Your news is cordial.  
Some Pict shall be my convert yet. But, hark  
'Tis Ronan, or I know not Ronan's tread.

RONAN (*entering*).

I kiss your hand, loved sir: grow well and live,  
For there are flocks in Britain for your hand.

MOCHONNA.

Kind Ronan, I believe it. But thy lord—

RONAN.

Has conquered. Surely Baithen told you all.

BAITHEN.

I told but what I heard, that all was well:  
And what I saw, the wonder at the gates.

RONAN.

The wonder at the gates?

BAITHEN.

Yea, when he signed  
The cross, and they flew wide before him.

RONAN.

Ay?

And did he so? Marry, he set his hand—  
God wot, he has the thews of Finn—I know  
The gates flew wide enough, and we were in;  
And from the dust the tumbled doorkeeper  
Stared up, too mazed to hinder. But there rose  
A scurry and a shout: a score of spears  
Hung at our eyes. Silent he looked them o'er,  
And seemed to grow and grow. For me, I felt  
Nor fear nor daring; in a stupid muse

I watched my fate as 'twere some other man's.  
 And yet those murdering hands fell not: I think  
 His eyes unsinewed them: across my brain  
 Half a prayer flickered; then a great voice rang  
 'Let be:' and in his doors a warrior rose  
 Red-bearded, huge, unarmed, with eyes of scorn.  
 Then all gave back, and those two goodly men  
 (I know not which was mightier, monk or king)  
 Looked each in other's eyes, and no man spake.  
 Sudden Columba stirred: as prince to prince  
 He stept with offered hand: the other hung  
 A moment with pressed lip and rolling eyes;  
 Then heaved the russet beard, the deep eye flashed  
 From menace into welcome, King's hand met  
 Abbot's, and all my stayed veins leapt again:  
 For now is Britain ours.

BAITHEN.

So fast, my Ronan?

RONAN.

Where jumps the big bell-wether jump the flock.  
 No chief of them dares touch the guest of Brude.

BAITHEN.

Well, well: you have more to tell us.

RONAN.

Nay, not I.

When I came back from you, the doors were shut  
 On king and abbot. Down I sat to wait.  
 The big guards came and stared at me, like dogs  
 That watch some little, unknown, woodland thing  
 And fear to try it. Long they stared: at last  
 Into my finger-tips the frolic ran,  
 Round came my harp, I taught them how we won  
 Culdrevny fight. O to have laughed my laugh  
 (I dared not) when those beamy shanks began  
 To feel the lusty rhythm and swing the knee.  
 A minute more, I had had my troop of bears  
 A-dancing: but hark! hush! the music broke;  
 A door creaked; 'twas Columba facing me,  
 Shaking his brows, but O I caught the smile  
 Flashed in an eyelid's flicker. 'Bard,' he said,  
 'Go take your music homewards: tell them I  
 Am with them ere an hour.' So home I came.  
 The tale is his.

BAITHEN.

Till then, Mochonna, rest.

Come, bard, without, for you must tease your strings  
 To yield us the new war-song. Rest you well.

K

MOCHONNA (*alone*).

Peace, peace, and peace! O ease of aching nerve  
 After the daring and the dread. I think  
 To die can be no other, when the soul,  
 A passage-bird that beats a fainting wing  
 Over cold seas, and holds the air with pain,  
 Sudden will breast the upbearing wind of heaven,  
 And stir no plume, but float and float and fall  
 Into the Eternal's bosom.

[*Sleeps.*]

## SCENE IV.

*The same. COLUMBA enters.*MOCHONNA (*waking*).

Thou? or thy shade again?

COLUMBA.

Nay, by this hand  
 Laid on thy brows, no shadow. Live thou too,  
 For He has willed His glory by our life.

MOCHONNA.

Yea, thou. This time I touch thee. O beloved  
 A hundredfold from the awful pass of death.  
 I have no care to question. Thou art here,  
 Thy hand on me, thine eyes. I would no more.

COLUMBA.

No care to question? Nay, nor I to tell,  
 For gladness at thy health. Son, from this bed  
 Such trouble went with us, our peril seemed  
 Phantom-like by the fears we left. And now  
 The great joy tastes not for my joy in thee.

MOCHONNA.

The joys are one. We live to work the work.

COLUMBA.

As God has willed us work it. How my veins  
 Beat with the wonder, as that warrior's mind  
 Lay grasped in mine, to handle how I would,  
 As when a man's hand folds about a child's:  
 Greatest in Britain, in God's kingdom least.  
 Greatest? He is that no longer: One there is  
 Greater than Brude in Britain, One there is  
 Will rule the ruler. . . Out on't! O son, son!

Thy asking look. My angel's chiding eyes  
Had never pierced me deeper.

MOCHONNA.

What is this?

I read you not.

COLUMBA.

No, but your innocent eyes,  
That cannot read me, make me read myself:  
So clear a soul looks through them: I the while  
Hide such a coiling secret in my own.

MOCHONNA.

Forbear. You shame me.

COLUMBA.

And 'tis you, my son,  
Must charm that serpent forth.

MOCHONNA.

Ah! could I that!  
Sire, what is this new trouble?

COLUMBA.

Alas! not new.  
The fiend that lost me Erin, haunts me here.

MOCHONNA.

The fiend of violence, mean you? Dead he lies,  
Dead with the thrice-dead past.

COLUMBA.

Yea, lies he so?

Who ever buried yet his past? But this  
Is deadlier than that brawling fiend of feud,  
Being his subtler master. 'Tis the pride  
Of the heart that cannot rest unless it rule.

MOCHONNA.

God made the strong for rule. What sin is here?

COLUMBA.

O virgin spirit, and stainless but for me,  
Didst ever thou (but no, I think it not)  
Pursue some holy vision of a deed,  
Grasp it: and lo! its fashion changed, and there. . . .  
What in your arms lay but your olden sin,  
Smiling its cursèd smile, victor again?  
Son, when I climbed yon hill, my heart was peace,  
Pure, all-subduing, all-upholding peace.  
So simple was it: I should die, or live.  
And God, not I, must choose it now: my will

Moved on in His, nor knew itself apart  
 More than the lifted billow knows itself  
 From the deep tide that swings it toward the shore.  
 So. But I did not die. We sat, we talked,  
 The chief of Britain and the chief of Hy,  
 He of the little isle the greater. Then  
 Even as I preached the Christ, the selfless king,  
 Began a Christless king, the kingly self  
 That broke my peace and broke my Erin's peace,  
 To stir and swell and glory in my veins.  
 'Move this, move Britain,' came the thought: again  
 'What, have I lost the sway to find the sway?'  
 And still the proud dream shaped itself, and still  
 I preached the Christ: but with the tale of grace  
 The graceless burden of a heathen hope  
 Blent in my ears who told it, as the harp  
 Of Ronan unawares at distance blends  
 Wild music with our psalm. I sinned the sin  
 (Nor knew it) that hath lost Columba once,  
 And yet may lose him. But I know it now,  
 Since thy pure eyes fell on it. Son, my son,  
 I was thy soul's-friend ever, be thou mine,  
 Who have no elder: be thou mine, and hold  
 Thy selfless nature's faithful crystal up  
 To glass and give to view the spirit of ill  
 That whispers at thy father's ear.

Alas!

What do I, thus to strain thy weakness? Rest;  
 Forget it. Nay, or I will sit with thee,  
 Holding thy hand in mine a little while,  
 And tell the long day's wonders, point by point,  
 Gently and low, till the sleep falls again.



## ACT FOURTH.

## SCENE I.

*The landing-place at Derry. A.D. 575. Before the Synod of Drumceit. ERNAN and a RETAINER of FERGUS.*

RETAINER.

Ernan! Our twelve-year parted Ernan back!  
Why, then I'll yet believe it.

ERNAN.

What is this,  
Old friend, I am such warrant for?

RETAINER.

They say,  
Columba comes to Erin again, Columba!

ERNAN.

Yea, to Drumceit, to parley with the kings.

RETAINER.

Yea, but the vow! I marvelled at the news.  
How said yon hermit of the western rock?  
'Never again to Erin, never again.'

ERNAN.

Why then you know not how Molasius sent  
(Last breath the grey seer cast on mortal air),  
'Go tell Columba, "not the Lord but I."  
Thou hast the spirit of Christ. I pass. Be thou  
Thy doomster for the rest.'

RETAINER.

The doom is good  
That speeds him home to Erin. Will he now  
Teach our hot Aedh to loose the Dalriad's fee  
And homage of our Erin over-seas?

ERNAN.

Sooth, the task craves a master. O but he,  
Mighty for wars, is mightier yet for peace.  
I had not dreamed it of him; no, not I.

RETAINER.

He stilled old riotous Breacan, so they tell,  
That roared to gulf him. May he swim as sure

The land swirl of our Council! But our Aedh,  
Who loves his glorious clansman of the cowl,  
Less loves the clansman's heart should spend itself  
On Aidan's fledgeling greatness.

ERNAN.

'Tis to fear.

But I do think more nigh the Abbot's heart  
Lies the Bards' danger. Ill the quarry fares  
When folk and king are hounds and huntsman.

RETAINER.

Ay,

The Bards, our song-birds which we petted till  
They peck the petting hand in wantonness,  
And filch the dainties from the board. And yet  
Pity to drive or dumb our songsters. Well,  
'Tis your Lord's proper quarrel: Prince of Bards  
Should be Bards' Champion. Turn it how it may,  
He is full welcome home, and welcomer  
The more he make it home.

ERNAN.

How mean you, friend?

RETAINER.

O there be those will tell him that. Our House

Miss him too long; and, since the vow is out,  
Perchance his isle will spare him.

ERNAN.

Sir, my task

(Forgive me) somewhat calls on haste. I think  
I may not parley longer. With your leave  
I take my farewell of you.

[Goes.]

RETAINER.

Whew! my friend

Flushed angerly. Ill promise, if like man  
Like master. He was ever cloister-bird,  
Ernan, and grudged Columba to his kin.

## SCENE II.

*Drumceit.* FERGUS and COLUMBA.

FERGUS.

And must you part to-morrow?

COLUMBA.

Yes, to-morrow,

While the seas sleep.

FERGUS.

Then will you part too soon.

COLUMBA.

Why should I tarry, friend? Our work is done.  
At home they need me.

FERGUS.

Ay, they need you sore  
. . . At home. And therefore would I bid you stay.

COLUMBA.

A riddle, Fergus.

FERGUS.

One that you can read.

COLUMBA.

And lightly: those truth-speaking eyes of yours  
Have read it for me. Friend, it cannot be.

FERGUS.

Why 'cannot'? O great cousin, hear me once.  
I have watched you at the Council, seen you sway  
Our headlong lords, as they were brawling boys

Awed by a man. I said, 'My cousin's fire  
Burns steadier, but it burns as strong, as when  
We broke stout Diarmid,' you and I together,  
My sword, your counsel. Ha! have you forgot?

COLUMBA.

No; else would Fergus plead with better hope.

FERGUS.

O but remember, cousin; when the rest  
Had so much warcraft as a bull, to set  
Head down and counter them, brute horn to horn,  
Ha! ha! 'twas you and I, old comrade, met  
Beside the oak in the low moon, and traced  
Our battle in the dust, and how my men  
Should creep and creep round Diarmid's sleepy flank  
To weave the raft of shields, and flat-long thread  
His fencing quagmire, light as river-rats  
Buoyed on a float of lily leaves. I caught  
Your hand, and called you 'brother-soldier'; you  
—You started like a dreamer, were not pleased.  
O but that cowl of yours hid thrice the wit  
For battle of our helmets.

COLUMBA.

Fergus, cease.

You know not how you plead against your plea.  
I will not sin it twice.

FERGUS.

Nor I will tempt.  
Your pardon for remembering. But, Columba,  
It is not now as then. That too I saw  
In council, when your Aidan's patience broke  
In taunts: Aedh started, flaming, and went dumb;  
And all we hushed, waiting the bolt: but you  
(What is that mastery that abashes us,  
Strange kinsman, in your voice?) you only said  
—But 'twas as if one spoke it from the air—  
'Brothers, we are one Erin, there as here.  
Peace.' And a peace there was. O stay with us.  
You came in Britain's aid, abide in ours,  
The healer of our feuds.

COLUMBA.

The healer? I?  
Fate turns her wheel apace then. Nay, my friend.  
This might have been. I am all Britain's now.

FERGUS.

All Britain's? All the blood of all your veins  
Cries out on you for treason. Erin's once

Is Erin's ever. But I know for all  
The twelve sad exile summers, hers are you.  
For this is home, Columba: never Gael  
Forgot the nursing-mother. Said I 'mother' ?  
Why she, the very mother of your blood,  
Eithnè, who saw your glories in the dream,  
Pleads with me from the silent land of souls.  
Her people are thy people, and they crave,  
Because the times go ill, a leader. Who  
Should stead the men of Leinster as thyself,  
Leinster's great son? You shake the head. You think  
I talk of hostings, plottings. Cousin, no.  
In this loud world of arms there moves a power  
(We swordsmen know it) that can clear a path  
More surely than the sword-sway, takes the heart  
Captive behind the levelled steel, and wins  
Unwounding and not wounded. God who makes  
Knows of what stuff 'tis made: I know it thine.  
Lo! you would rob the household of your gift,  
To squander it on strangers, cast your pearls—  
Nay, then, I'll speak no scorn of your wild men:  
They love you: sooth! the fault were else their own—  
But, kinsman, kinsman, blood is blood. You slight  
(I brave you saying it), but indeed, you slight  
High nature's holy bond that makes men one,  
Her sacrament of kinship. And for what?

For Alba of the Ravens, homeless Alba,  
 Rocks of the sea-mew, moors of kite and crow,  
 For heathendom's raw hearth and witless heart!  
 O but it grieves my soul our man of men,  
 Our own heaven-dowered Columba, Erin's star,  
 Whose beam God kindled for her storied field,  
 Should fail his mark, misprize his birthright, waste  
 A royal spirit's wealth unthanked, and starve  
 A golden doom on naked isles of storm.

COLUMBA.

Moved are you, Fergus. You were little used  
 To flow in words. These would have moved myself  
 If I might hearken words of men. But cease.  
 I may not yield; and it is pain to hear.

FERGUS.

But would my counsel pain you, were it nought?  
 Farewell—until to-morrow.

[*Exit.*

COLUMBA.

'Till to-morrow.'

Will it be then 'farewell'? His words are wind  
 That blows a rolling sea, swayed from beneath  
 Already: they but break it into voice.  
 Come back to Erin, at the council board

It sounded: 'back to Erin,' in the choirs  
 Of chanting Derry. Ancient longings, thinned  
 By distance, like the sorcerer's viewless line  
 Which haies his captive, clench upon me here  
 Cords as of steel. Why came I back, to set  
 Foot in an open snare? Nay, 'twas not I  
 Came, but God brought me. Other was there none  
 Could loose these knots save with the sword. I came  
 By the priest's bond, peacemaker. Is it God  
 Tempts my obedience but to temper it?  
 Why, let Him take this sword of His, my soul,  
 And in the fieriest furnace of desire  
 Torture white-hot, to plunge the shuddering grain  
 In the stark ice-bath of what loneliest doom  
 He chooses for me. I would joy in it:  
 If I but knew, if I but knew. For oh!  
 What if He tempts me not, but rather calls  
 His servant to new venture? That might be.  
 How said the island saint of silence? 'Trust  
 Man's nature, 'tis God's oracle.' He said it.  
 Shall I not trust this prophet in my breast,  
 This craving heart which craves because it can,  
 And bid it set my task? What work is here  
 For me! My very work; my fingers fret  
 To have the handling of it. Here to reign  
 Their unnamed, viewless, spiritual king,

Centring in one deft hand a hundred clues,  
 Seeing a goal they see not, steering to it  
 These blind and restive champions, unaware.  
 O I could salve these rancours, awe to peace  
 Neil of the North, Neil of the South, could stay  
 The blood-rain of our fields, let princes die  
 On the down pillow, shriven. Ha! why, so.  
 Thus I unsin my sin, pay back to Erin  
 For each life slain a thousand! Can there be  
 A fate so apt, and God not mean it?

Ah!

Too confident Columba, is the fate  
 So apt then, or so sure? Is't you would rule  
 The princes, or the princes you? I fear  
 Earth's children on the vantage-field of earth  
 Are stronger than the saints. The wings that range  
 High heaven, but stoop to rescue, dare not perch,  
 Lest they be limed. Why, my own Fergus, best  
 And sanest of the stormy brotherhood,  
 Seeks to the monk but for a holier charm  
 To smooth the worldly way. A peril here  
 To count with! On my narrow sea-lapped rock,  
 That least of kingdoms, where my hold of earth  
 Is dwindled to a pin-point, earth I touch  
 Light as a footless ghost nor mingle with it.  
 But on the broad and unfenced, equal plain,

In the hot breath and jostle of the herd,  
 Will the soul guard her clearness? Peril here.

Well, there is peril then. God made the saints  
 For peril. Would He leave His world of men  
 Unpiloted, for fear the pilot drown,  
 Sunk with the ship? And I was framed for men,  
 To mingle with, subdue them. Not for me  
 The mute home of unneighbour'd solitude  
 Our Cormac hungers for and hunts in vain  
 All the seas over. And I think that God  
 Hath for such rare ordeal annealed me well  
 By trespass and the fruit of trespass, then  
 By pilgrim sojourn and the severing years  
 Through which I died to passion. Danger, yes.  
 Danger there is. And I am armoured for it.

But then my Britain. They will cry on me,  
 'We are thy children, thou hast travailed with us  
 Till we should live in Christ. Leave us not thou;  
 We claim a parent's pledge. Who made the life  
 Must rear it.' Children, I shall answer you,  
 'Ye are strong sons in faith, no babes, to need  
 Babes' milk and eyes of watching. Kenneth bides  
 And Cormac, men that have one tongue with you,  
 And my strong Baithen in his prime of years,

Steward of all our memories, all our hopes,  
 And stronger if I leave his side unfenced;  
 And with them—but I know not—nay, not he. . . .  
 What would ye, sons? I am God's shepherd, I;  
 Shepherd not master of the sheep, to lead  
 What flock He bids me in what fields He wills,  
 So I be sure He wills it.'

Ah! 'be sure.'

But there's the pain: for who can surely know?  
 How easy now to end it thus, 'O soul,  
 Choose safely; take the hard, forsake the sweet.  
 Is Erin dear? Then cast this love away,  
 A costly-fragrant balm of sacrifice  
 Outpoured for Who is dearer.' Yes, 'tis easy.  
 Is it so safe? Or can one safely choose  
 Who only chooses safety? God Who bids  
 We add to virtue, knowledge, bids me here  
 With all the pith and sinew of my mind  
 Discern the truth and follow it, dread or dear.  
 But ah! till I discern, the travail of it!

Father, who watchest in Thy silent heaven,  
 Knowing the right, bidding me know it, yet  
 Unconquerably silent, till I choose,  
 Oh! in the dizzying, weary to and fro,  
 And counter-winds of question, in the blank

And shoreless void of doubt, where steers a soul,  
 Let me not err, Father of souls, not err.  
 Thou wilt not speak. Yea, Lord, but let the hand  
 Bar the false path in silence. [*A pause.*]

Doubters once,  
 When thought's slow balance dallied long, would weight  
 The tedious scale with any grain of sand,  
 Cry of an owl, a crow's flight, idle sounds  
 Caught from the babbling market. Were they fools  
 To judge the gods were kind and would not leave  
 Man's path without a signal?

Music there!

A random chord, a bard that passes.

[*RONAN enters.*]

You!

I scarce have seen you since the council made  
 The peace between your Order and the folk.

RONAN.

Pardon it, master. Ah! how worn a look!  
 And that is strange in you. Our champion  
 Has spent some strength to save us.

COLUMBA.

Nay, not so.

Am I so worn? Not in your quarrel then,

Dear minstrel. But the medicine is yours.  
Come, I have saved your harps, and earned the song.

RONAN.

And have it, master, all your own: the woods  
Alone have heard it yet. But what a song!  
A brief bird-flight, two beats of music's wing;  
No more. Yet flights of birds, you told me once,  
Were signs of things to be for ancient men.

*(Sings.)*

Waters of doom that drowned an earth,  
A sea with never a shore.  
And what is it wings to the wandering hearth  
That travels the void sea-floor?  
Lost in the surf and the heave,  
Seen on the rose-red of eve,  
Clear in the skies ere it stoop to the haven,—  
Ah! 'tis no wing of our rover the Raven;  
Soft to her harbour of love  
Steadies and settles the dove.

A land of brothers, a land of war:  
A flock that the grim wolf grips.  
And who is the white-clad helper afar,  
Lo! and with peace in the lips?

Lost for a day and a day,  
Saved to fair Erin for aye,  
Hither from Alba, grey roost of the raven,  
Homeward there steers o'er the desert foam-paven,  
Ah! unforgettingly well  
Homeward, our Dove of the Cell.

I have not pleased you. Is my song too bold?  
Sire, I am but a mocking-bird who hears  
What all men say, and sings it to your face.

COLUMBA.

I was misdoubting, Ronan, of your lore.  
The parable runs lame. Your homeward dove  
Went outward yet again, and came no more.

RONAN.

Then hear another parable of the birds:  
Yea, of an island-sojourner, who winged  
Again to Erin and back no more to Hy.  
*(Sings.)*  
'Stranger Grey-wing, whence and whither  
From the sea-cloud drift you hither  
Sorely spent;



Glazing eye and pinion dragging,  
Like a shipman's sail down-sagging  
    Tempest-rent?

    Know, you come to Alba's coast,  
    Heron, and a tender host.'

'Spent am I and nigh to perish.  
Take me, tender host, and cherish  
    Safe; and then  
Let me rise and back to yonder  
Happy West, that bare me, wander  
    Home again.

    Take me, kindred hands of Hy:  
    Ye are Erin's, Erin's I.'

'Would that I too, I might borrow  
Wings that waft you hence to-morrow,  
    Kinsman fair.

Would that I might rise and follow  
Over Ocean, under hollow  
    Arch of air;

    Flee away and be at rest,  
    Heron, in thy happy West.'

COLUMBA.

Go, Ronan, go: my heartstrings are the chords  
You play on.

RONAN.

    Master, when the bard is gone,  
Thy heartstrings will make music of themselves.  
Then listen thou. [Exit.

COLUMBA.

    Gone. But it echoes on,  
That music, thrilled against my heart. Perhaps,  
Father, thy sign, the omen for my doubt.  
Ay, how my soul went with him, as he climbed  
Labouringly up the spiring stair of heaven,  
Then from that watch-tower summit, saw and shot  
Due for his home and mine. O Home and Kin,  
Ye first of voices in the dooms of men,  
Shall ye not be the last, and I obey?

MOCHONNA *enters.*

MOCHONNA.

All things are ordered for the voyage, sire.  
To-morrow ho! for Alba and the Isle.

COLUMBA.

What! *you* so glad, Mochonna!

MOCHONNA.

Why not I?

N

COLUMBA.

Well, well. Your time went blithely. Hands of kin,  
 Found on your twelve-year parting's hither side,  
 Have pressed a welcome; kindly eyes have smiled  
 On your unfolded manhood. Sit awhile,  
 Son mine, I have a thought to break to you.

MOCHONNA.

Your son to hear it ever.

COLUMBA.

This it is.

I scarce would have you go with me to Hy.

MOCHONNA.

Father!

COLUMBA.

For I would have your manhood spent  
 For the loved West and in it.

MOCHONNA.

Not with you?

COLUMBA.

Why, since I must to Alba, not with me.

MOCHONNA.

I am all astonished at your words and lost.  
 What should I do in Erin?

COLUMBA.

Be as I

Was once in Erin; rule my Houses here,  
 Derry and all her sisters; guard the life  
 Christ gave us; water where I planted erst;  
 Keep whole the pure tradition, dower it more.  
 I charge you not by your obedience now;  
 But by our fellowship I plead with you  
 To put the young hand to the plough I left.

MOCHONNA.

But I have put hand to a plough already.  
 Dare I look back?

COLUMBA.

No looking back is this,  
 To drive God's plough across a wealthier field.

MOCHONNA.

Wealthier? My father, can you mean the word?  
 I know it is a thorny glebe we ear

In Britain, but the soil is virgin. O  
 The joy of the new seedland; hearts untamed,  
 Our capture; souls that open to our word  
 Fresh as the mountain flower to suns of May.  
 But you that loved the Pict and saved him, prize  
 That harvest well.

COLUMBA.

That harvest can be reaped  
 By ruder husbandmen. There's more to say.  
 I have marked your way with the fierce chieftains here,  
 And theirs with you. I think it shame to blunt  
 The fine tool's temper on the coarser need.  
 Nay, wave it not away. God's gift is God's,  
 To fear and to revere, but use withal.  
 And by that birthright charm of nobleness,  
 And by the sudden fire which kindles on you  
 Among your peers, I know you framed to sway  
 Princes, not peasants.

MOCHONNA.

O you little know!  
 You would not be your own son's tempter else.  
 There is a wild pulse, that has beat before,  
 Stirred at your speech. For once my kin and twice  
 Have whispered me of power. They set the lure

Too broadly, they, for then I thought of one  
 True youth who lost a crown to gain the Christ.  
 I too would choose as purely, if I may.

COLUMBA.

Ah yes, do I not know it? This way lies  
 Temptation. Yet for holy cause a man  
 Must dare be tempted. Son, remember it,  
 We are debtors to the Gael and to the Briton,  
 But to our household first. The cause of brothers  
 Is holy cause, Mochonna.

MOCHONNA.

Holy cause,  
 Thrice holy. But my brothers—who are they?  
 There's a tall fisher-lad in far-off Hy  
 Came to the beach at parting, wrung my hand,  
 Then kissed it sobbing 'Friend, come quickly home.  
 The firefit else will take me, and you not here.'  
 My brothers! All the brother in my heart  
 Is given to this my brother and to those  
 My hundred of rude Alba. Part me not,  
 Chief shepherd, from the flock you gave.

COLUMBA.

Again,  
 Do not I know? Left I no flock of mine

In Erin? But if God who asked thy self  
For the flock's sake, shall now require the flock,  
Only that once more He may ask the self,  
Harder to give, so given—how answer you?

MOCHONNA.

Why, if God ask——. But no, it is not so.  
I know it, but I cannot reason it.  
There's a blind something in my being's core  
That sees more clear than eyesight, plainlier speaks  
Than utterance, 'Break not heaven's unsevered clue:  
Keep whole life's sacred line, or forfeit weal:  
Fate spins not twice, nor Heaven, the threads of men.'  
And my thread is enwoven, sire, with thine,  
As thine with Alba's. I will keep it whole:  
Go where Columba goes, where bides, abide:  
Till he bid sunder. And he has not bidden.

COLUMBA.

Nor will he bid it. Son, we two go on,  
We two. Would God I knew but whither! Enough.  
Go sit and muse your sweet farewells of Erin,  
While I——. I have spoken half my thought, but half:  
The rest, when God has given it. Go, my son.

[MOCHONNA goes.

'Fate spins not twice, nor Heaven, the threads of men.'

How strong and true and single runs the thread  
Of life for him, and shining as it runs,  
Not to be missed. He steers no doubting way.  
How otherwise Columba. O to choose!  
My heart and reins are wearying with the toil:  
While he but thought upon his fisher-lad  
And all was clear. Sooth, they have cause to love him.  
Some day when he is laid away to sleep  
On the salt marge with Oran, he will be  
Saint of the fishers' love, his glory hymned  
In the low chant as laden gunwales bring  
The netted spoil at morning; his the name  
Cried from the perilled coracle-side to ban  
The sea-beast's monster gambol; his be cried  
When races up the sound the swallowing fog  
And blots red Malea and blanched sands of Hy.

[A pause.

But I, this weary while, have yet to choose.

Ah!

Why lo! 'tis chosen; and I knew it not.  
Nor know I how. My battling thought had sunk  
Like a spent swimmer gulfed in the dark sea.  
And then—why, sudden, I was all one light,  
And no part dark: from all my being a fire  
(As if a sign were scrolled along the sky)

Ran blazoning out on my soul's vision a name,  
 'Alba.' The witchery of that counter-scene,  
 Cloud-glories risen in the alluring West  
 To daze the o'er-tempted spirit, the pomp, the glow,  
 The weight and imminence of that pageant high  
 Drift like a wrecked storm leeward. And a peace,  
 Such peace has fallen as where God showers a dew  
 Of benediction on the fold of Heaven.

## ACT FIFTH.

## SCENE I.

*The seashore of Iona. Circiter A.D. 590. COLUMBA  
 alone.*

COLUMBA.

Nay, 'tis this memoried night of Whitsuntide  
 Has vexed me with the dream. Even yet my heart  
 Aches with it in this sunshine. There's a voice  
 Away from me this while, could charm it hence.

Erin! To dream again of Erin, and wake,  
 Tears in my eyes, crying 'I will not go':  
 And as it were a hand upon my breast  
 Pushing me forth from what I clung to. Ay,  
 A dream: a shadow. But a shadow of what?  
 The thing that nears us casts a shadow too.  
 Would thou wert home, Mochonna.

Dream? I think,

It is my fate comes up to wrestle me,  
Casting the shadow, as yon sea-bird's wing  
Comes westward over the grass before him——

Ha!

[*Seeing* MOCHONNA.

Why, how! What blessed south-wind of the June  
Has blown you hither a week before your hour?

[*Embraces him.*

I think my wish must be the wonder-worker.

Son, I was breathing it e'en now.

MOCHONNA.

Your wish

Has always worked a wonder, father mine,  
Yet, scarce so quickly: 'tis a morn and night  
Since *my* wish urged a coracle's head to sea.  
I had sped. How could I tarry? And the boy  
That six long weeks should play Mochonna here,  
I fear he played it ill then.

COLUMBA.

Nay, indeed.

Apt scholar is your Diormit; was yourself  
For tender service at the old man's need.

I missed you not, or only——. Heaven forgive  
That I should talk of this, and have not asked  
How fared Mochonna's work in Derry.

MOCHONNA.

Well.

Too well. I was an idle envoy. Peace  
Outran me, and no part was mine to do  
But chant *Quam bonum, fratres!* over hands  
That clasped again without me.

COLUMBA.

Ay and ay.

Were they so speedy, son? But I have heard  
The wrinkled ice-brook snap his chain an hour  
Ere the kind South came talking in the glen;  
And yet the South wind was the Spring. What else?  
Saw you good Fergus, and what said he?

MOCHONNA.

Truth,

He shook a silvered forelock, and he growled,  
As some old war-dog grinding a worn fang,  
'Grey am I, but no wiser now than then.  
I told him truth. He should have stayed.' But there  
He gripped me strongly, 'Tell your prince of priests,

Since he'll not fight for me, why let him pray  
For his poor fighting Fergus. Yea, and tell him,  
I love him now as then,—so turned and went.  
There passed no more between us.

COLUMBA.

And your kin—  
Still would they have Mochonna home?

MOCHONNA.

O sire,  
Wrong not your son! Forget them.

COLUMBA.

Ay, forget.  
How easily! So far away and dead  
That old fear of a severing doom, until  
This grey age whiten to an end. O son,  
How gladsome is this morn of Pentecost  
That blows you home long sighed for! Warmer for it  
The sunshine wraps my aging limbs, the blooms  
Of our spare coverts open, as we talk,  
Wider and whiter, and their scanty choir  
Pipe boldlier than I knew them.

MOCHONNA.

'Tis the Spring,  
Father, in your own veins. May age to me

Come as to you, who know of winter's frost  
Nought but the rime amidst your hair.

COLUMBA.

To you?

Age come to you, Mochonna? Never will it.  
Yours is a youth that keeps my age from me,  
And old I cannot image you.

Alack!

[Seeing a Pictish messenger approach.

Here's one to part us, or I read amiss  
The signs of envoy. Be not far away  
The while I hear him.

[Goes apart with the messenger.

MOCHONNA ( *pacing alone* ).

'Part us?' Part.—Is that  
A cloud that crossed the sunlight? Nay, the sky  
Is stainless. 'Twas a numbness of the long,  
Chill seas that left me with a shiver. How glad  
Shone the grey eyes on me, so deep, so pure,  
As our pure deeps that breathe the sunlight down,  
Alive and lucent to their agate floor!  
And they could think that I would leave him! Well,  
At last 'tis over: they'll not tempt me more.  
We twain go on together, till the end.

And then—and then——. What will Mochonna then?

[*Pauses at the edge of a hollow.*]

Ha! Why, 'tis good the hermit is from home:  
He had heard me. I have stumbled on the cell  
Of Ernan, where he plays the anchorite,  
This hollow, rounded as a mavis' nest,  
A whimsy of the winds that whirl or heap  
Our shifting sands to shape and shape again  
The island meadow. Here he sits and sees  
The round bowl under, the round heaven above,  
Lifted as in a cup to starland. Ah!  
For him 'tis well. Yet I——. 'Twas earnest there  
With yon wild stranger. He has sped. They part.

[*Rejoins COLUMBA.*]

His errand is soon ended, sire.

COLUMBA.

He brought

A message from the East. His tribesmen crave  
A preacher from the island.

MOCHONNA.

And the hive

Can spare them him. We are full forced. I know  
Ten that would answer at your lifted hand.

COLUMBA.

I do believe it. But this folk is bold:  
'Send us your best,' they ask me, 'send your best.'  
Well, I will send—whom I will send. Enough.  
Back to our talk. You have not told a word  
Of the leal House of Durrow.

MOCHONNA (*abstractedly*).

All was well,

Far as I heard.

COLUMBA.

And they have filled their ranks  
After the sickness?

MOCHONNA.

As I think.

COLUMBA.

The King

Holds by his promise?

MOCHONNA.

Yea, he holds, they said.



COLUMBA.

(*Aside.*) What ails him then? (*Aloud.*) Saw you not  
Ernan there?

MOCHONNA.

Ernan!

COLUMBA.

He surely sent his word to me.

MOCHONNA.

Was he not here in Britain?

COLUMBA.

Dreaming! son.

We speak of Irish Ernan,—but your thoughts  
Wander—the tongue-bound, blighted child whom I  
(The simpler take it half for miracle)  
Loosed from his dismal chain. And strange it was  
How the smit branch outblossomed.

MOCHONNA.

Yes, I saw—

My thoughts had strayed—I know not what—forgive.  
Full sure I saw your Ernan, if the straight  
And gainly youth I saw be surely he.

Free speech is his, free wits. They whisper him  
The preacher of some decade hence; so well  
You wrought with him. O he forgets it not!  
For talking of you at the board I felt  
A gaze that burned on me, and, glancing, caught  
His eyes aflame consuming me. They dipped  
Lids on a reddening cheek. And when I pressed  
To bear his message home, the graceful speech,  
Tongue-fast as with the old infirmity,  
Could only falter, 'Tell him that I pray  
Never to shame him.' Yet 'twill please you, so.

COLUMBA.

Dear child! and said he so? Heaven's dew be on him!  
Ah! son, the bud which had not opened, save  
For our poor tendance, is the flower we love.  
There's one life more on barren earth for us.

MOCHONNA (*abruptly*).

Father, if you should live three lives of man  
There still would be a youth, when I am gone,  
To love, as I have loved you.

COLUMBA.

Son, what words!

When you are gone! So you would from me.

MOCHONNA.

Would!

Ay, when Mochonna's loves are turned to hates,  
And all the holy past a thing unclean,  
Then would I, then; no sooner. Sire, what words!

COLUMBA.

There is no wrong in them. An hour of God  
Calls whom it will, not when they will, nor whither.  
I meant no more, true son. Away with this.  
Come now your counsel in this question risen,  
Whom I should send to the eastward folk, a flock  
That asks a wise hand and a fearless too;  
Fierce and with neighbours fiercer. Fruit the more  
For who can shepherd them. Shall Ernan go?

MOCHONNA.

None braver. Yet those hermit winters cramp  
Somewhat the free mind's sinew. He that goes  
Lither must be, and apt for change and chance.  
Say rather Fechno.

COLUMBA.

Yet I doubt him here.  
This shepherd must be ruler too, and he—

Heaven pardon if my thoughts are earthly—yet  
The princely blood for ruling.

MOCHONNA.

Is the work

(I fear almost to ask), but is it worth  
Our Baithen's venture?

COLUMBA.

Worth! what is it not?

The stark East's capture; Britain, sea to sea,  
One fold of Christ's. What were too costly? Yet  
Too well he rules in Ethica. Withal  
Baithen's strong years are done. It is not he.  
Strength must be his and time to work his will  
Who ventures thither.

MOCHONNA.

Youth is plenty with us;

Lugneius, Mocumin, and Fintan.

COLUMBA.

Boys.

I may not squander their unhardened prime  
In wars beyond them. Nay, but name no more.  
This choice will tax us: let it rest. I think

God will provide Himself—a priest, my son.

But go you now within and greet the House,  
For fear they grudge me; then re-weave our talk  
With bosoms freer of this care. Farewell.

MOCHONNA.

Farewell? Why even but now it was Good-morrow.

COLUMBA.

And yet farewell; and take the father's kiss  
Going. I fear to lose you one short hour  
Now, who have lost you late so many and long.  
Farewell. The peace of Heaven be with thee, son.

MOCHONNA.

And with thy spirit, father.

[Goes.

COLUMBA.

Peace with me!—

Did he discern?—A cloud there fell on him:  
Strayed thoughts: a stumbling speech. And how we  
swerved

Suddenly from the touch, as fishing barks  
Drift in the blind haze on a consort's beam,  
Then glimpse and shudder asunder ere they jar!  
'Send us your best.' And wherefore? Bold are they.

Yet 'tis a great door that is opened, great.  
I dare not say them nay. But then 'my best.'  
Why, that is he, none other. Him I cannot:  
Son of my spirit, grown my brother. No.  
There is some other, best for this; not he:  
Some other, though 'twere Baithen's self. Alas!  
God is not mocked, and He will have the best.  
And like a river His Will enfolding mine  
Sweeps it along, still clutching this and that,  
Still borne unstayed beyond them, and the fall  
Booms in my ears. Kind God, be pitiful.  
Since what Thou askest I must give it, Thou  
Ask me not this, ask not my half of life;  
My faith's true Angel; saint whose lamp, unblown  
By any gust of earth, uplighted mine  
At the awful crossways. Lighted—ah! for what?  
I rendered power for love, must love for love  
Be rendered last? Son, art thou grown to be  
Dread Angel of the Passion, ministering  
A cup we drink together, lip with lip?  
Yea, stern the Christ is and will have no less;  
But sends this lonely, lonelier age to pace  
The last, sad miles friendless, a single soul,  
When need of friend is sorest. Christ, I bow;  
I draw this wine of wormwood to my lips,  
If he—we drink not or we drink together—

If he—for must I bid him? O my soul,  
 What if Mochonna wills not? Wise is he:  
 Sudden, but wise in suddenness; the Spirit  
 Deals with him by the lightning. Lo, I'll trust  
 His heart's word, as an angel's cry from heaven  
 Staying the doom before it fall. O yet  
 God will provide Himself an offering, son!

[Goes.

RONAN *enters and crosses, singing.*

O a bark and forth to the silent North,  
 Never a mate with me,  
 To steer her fair for isles of prayer  
 In a land where no men be,  
 For the rocks that meet the angel feet  
 Flown over the sail-less sea.

Though, sooth, I know not if they find the Christ  
 Nearer, who go so far to seek Him. Well:  
 Harp, lie you safe the while I fetch the gear.

[Lays his harp in a coracle, and goes.

MOCHONNA *enters.*

MOCHONNA.

Gone. Well, I sought him not. I meant to 'scape  
 The household bounds, and breathe the air. A mood  
 Of restlessness is on me; and 'tis strange,

Seeing I longed but now for rest and home.  
 Kind too they were in welcome. But the Pict,  
 How his eyes followed me! They drove me out,  
 They or a something in his tale. He moved  
 To stay me passing, but I would not see.  
 I am half sorry that I would not. Well,  
 This choice will tax the House.

What's here? The harp

Of Ronan in a tethered coracle's prow.  
 He will be faring o'er the sound anon.  
 I'll wait him here.

'Baithen's strong years are done.'

Else he had spared him for't; and that is much,  
 He needing helpers in this ebb of life.  
 Had this but fallen sooner, had it fallen  
 Some later day——. Yet Diormit loves him well,  
 And haply—fie upon my thoughts. Their need  
 Is great, his own is greater.

Ronan tarries;

And fast the tide flows out from Hy. The bark  
 Totters half beached, half in the jostling wave.  
 I'll push it seaward. So. What trick is this  
 The quick mind played? I thought of Galilee,  
 And a forth-faring bark and one who cried  
 'Lord, let me first go lay in earth my sire.'  
 Stayed he or followed? For they told us not.

I am grown strangely sad. Come quicklier you,  
Kind minstrel. Yet there's somewhat at my heart  
Would bid me be alone. Why, let me muse,  
While Ronan stays, my counsel in this strait;  
It will be asked ere sunset. Nay, 'tis spent.  
New way there is not, and new name is none.  
And yet what fitter chance for who were fit;  
When will the slow moons bring another as fair?  
Myself, if this were mine——. But peace, my soul,  
Thine is it not.

Yet home is hard to leave.  
Poor Drostan of our Convent of the Tears,—  
The years have dried that storm upon his cheek  
Long since, but how he wept the while, and how  
Clung to Columba's hand, sobbing his prayer  
Not to be sundered from him, not to bide  
Sole in the friendless wild. We wept with him,  
And named it from our tears. Poor Drostan! I,  
Should I be hardier-hearted? Peace, my soul;  
It calls not thee——

RONAN (*entering at the other side of the boat*).

Sir, would you o'er the sound?

MOCHONNA.

Ha, Ronan! Stolen on me from behind!

And I so looking for you. Yes, the sound.  
Let us go o'er. And, Ronan, sing the while.  
Your sail will speed us east without the oar.

[*They enter the boat.*]

RONAN.

Old songs or new, which will you?

MOCHONNA.

Nay, the old:

The oldest, one you made beneath the oak  
Of Derry, till you spied me watching you,  
And broke your strain. I never heard the end.

RONAN.

I care not for it. Choose some other one.

MOCHONNA.

But I care, Ronan: and I choose none else.

RONAN.

Why, then——. (*Aside*). I would he had not asked me this.

(*Sings.*)

What was that ye saw, my son, and started,  
Changing cheer?

What is this ye strain so long with parted  
Lips to hear?

'Tis the war-horn on the wind, my father, calling :  
'Tis the war-horn on the wind.'

Let it blow, my son, so strong and many  
Troops the glen :  
Leave not you the old man's side for any  
Call of men.

'Who should lead them but the chief's son, O my  
father :  
Who should lead them for the chief ?'

Nay, but keep thee in the fence beside me,  
Soldier son :  
Keep thee fast, for, if the death betide thee,  
Chief is none.

'Sire, the chieftain for the vanward not the shelter,  
When the war-horn's on the wind.'

You pierce me with those eyes ! What ails you, sir ?  
Forbear. I cannot end it.

MOCHONNA.

Ended is it.

Ronan shall sing Mochonna song no more.  
I heard the voices of all sires of mine  
Sound on thy strings : and all their hands are laid

To draw me where I would not and I would.  
Set me on shore, dear minstrel, for I go.

RONAN.

O sir, and whither ?

MOCHONNA.

To the battle front.  
Old warrior comrade, you have sung me thither.  
Go tell Columba I have broken pale  
Third time and last ; for, if his best were I,  
Then is the best gone eastward. Say to him  
He wills it, though he knows it not ; and I  
Not will, but know it : and I come no more,  
Except he bids me,—and he will not bid.

[Goes. RONAN gazes after him, then seizes  
his harp and sings.

Why is this ye come from warward trooping,  
Soldiers true ?

Who is this lies under banners drooping,  
Borne of you ?

'He who fell at battle's edge, and o'er him fallen  
Swept his clansmen as the storm.'

## SCENE II.

*Iona. The Abbot's hut. A.D. 597.*

DIORMIT (*without, at the door*).

My father, shall I enter?

COLUMBA.

Yea, my son.

What hinders my Mochonna?

DIORMIT.

Father!

COLUMBA.

Ah!

Forgive me, dear son Diormit, the old brain  
Was dreaming still. What would you with me, son?

DIORMIT.

Baithen is come. You called upon him twice,  
When the trance lifted yester-eve. But then  
Again it fell. You heard not when at night  
Softly we called your name. We dared no more,  
Because of the strange light which hardly yet

Had faded from the crannies. But he waits,  
Baithen—if you will speak with him.

COLUMBA.

Yea, yea.

Too late he comes, yet send him.

[DIORMIT *goes*.

Christ, my hope,

I thought Thy day had dawned on me, but lo!  
The grey, grey lift o'er Malea. Watches yet  
For Thy worn sentinel, who can but watch,  
Lamed with his seventy years and seven of march.  
But the end nears me.

[BAITHEN *enters*.

Baithen, come at last!

Ah! but too late.

BAITHEN.

Late? As I might, I came:  
No later. The great wind has held me bound.  
What need of me the while: what chance has fallen?

COLUMBA.

Things beyond words, and thoughts above my thought,  
Thou couldst have heard. Why wert thou from my side?

BAITHEN.

How! Heard you not nor felt with what a wind  
Earth groaned and ocean laboured these three days?

COLUMBA.

Wind? Yea, my son, a rushing mighty wind  
I heard: but ocean heard it not nor earth.  
A rushing mighty wind, and in the wind  
A voice that spake with me such things as thou——.  
Why wast thou from me, Baithen?

BAITHEN.

Blame me not.

To Egga's shore, my errand done, I came,  
Drawn by I knew not what that yearned within,  
To ship for Hy and thee. But 'twixt us stood  
An ever-toppling, ever-mounting wall  
Prisoning our craft upon the beach. A day  
I watched the waves: but then the yearning grew  
Past bearing, till I pushed my men aboard,  
Because a moment's quiet eased the deep,  
But had not cleared the harbour horn, when down  
Swooped the quick tempest's wing, and caught the bark,  
Half from the giddy wave-top lifted her,  
And tossed her back like a leaf to the shrieking shore.

COLUMBA.

I wronged thee. Pardon it. But sore it was,  
When the sweet vision's chain had loosed awhile  
This three-days' prisoner of the Lord, to miss  
My Baithen. Thou art nearest me: thy faith  
A wave that ever surely climbed with mine,  
Slowlier, and sank not with it, but remained  
To mark where both had mounted. 'Twas for thee,  
Hadst thou been here to hearken. In thine ear  
A word had been a thousand.

BAITHEN.

I am here

At last, my father: shall I hear it?

COLUMBA.

Nay.

When first I looked abroad, a rainbow lit  
His beacon over Malea's brow: the sun  
Dipped: 'twas a blind wrack on a dead sea-crag.  
God's spirit was the sun, my soul the cloud:  
I burned and I am dark.

BAITHEN.

No memory, none?



Tarrying before your door our Diormit heard  
 A voice (and hardly knew it yours) that rose  
 Chanting; and words he caught, but mystic all  
 And past his wit, he said, to render them.  
 Has the song died and left no echo?

COLUMBA.

None

That I can voice to others, even to thee.  
 For, if I sang, 'twas in some bound of heaven,  
 Where blew the wind of heaven and swept a strain  
 From mortal harp-strings. And it blows not here.

BAITHEN.

Strange! For what profit in a vision given  
 And gone,—a moment's shadow on a stream  
 That glances and forgets it? Barren grace  
 Were this, my master.

COLUMBA.

Nay, for I have seen.  
 I looked on heights and depths, I heard the words  
 That make the great worlds and the soul of man.  
 But in the spirit I heard, and in the spirit  
 I shall remember.

BAITHEN.

Yet from all the tract  
 Of those tranced days and nights does no word live?  
 No drift or salvage of one dream escape  
 The engulfing silence? We would treasure it,  
 As 'twere an angel's message.

COLUMBA.

Would ye so?

Why, there is one dream I recall, but one;  
 First dreamt, alone remembered, 'gainst the wont  
 Of dreamers. Sooth! no angel's message is it.  
 A brother's all too human tale. But hear it.  
 That morn before my trance I sat and wrote  
 Awhile in David, but at *Quoniam*  
*Defecit in dolore vita mea,*  
*Et anni mei*—stayed, and loosed the pen  
 (So soon the old hand tires), and looked abroad.  
 Bleak in the slow spring lay our tiny glebe,  
 And bleak and near gaunt Malea, ribbed with snow.  
 A sudden hunger gnawed my heart: I thought  
 How the merle tunes his music on the lawns  
 Of our loved Erin, and from somewhere came  
 A searing whisper, 'Was it lost for this?  
 And has the white beard sped so well?' And then

R

At once the whole long island sojourn seemed  
 As empty as a faded afternoon.  
 And was it I, or the near demon, mocked  
 Our toils in Alba, 'here and there a rood  
 Planted; a shepherd, and a score of sheep:  
 And here a mountain chief half-tamed; and there  
 On rock or promontory a hermit left  
 (Lone as the ice bear on his travelling float  
 That topples him at last) to muse and pray  
 Seven years, and starve and pass.' O Baithen, then  
 For a moment, for a rebel moment rose,  
 What slept in me, not died, my nature's sin,  
 World's-pride, though faint, as in an old man's veins,  
 World's-pride, an ebbing, hungry, helpless sea  
 That crawls and mutters at the dead shore-foot,  
 And upward looks to where his vehement arms  
 Made throb the deep cliff and the panting caves  
 With transports of his strength. O Baithen, thou  
 Of constant souls most constant, sidesman true  
 On whose unshaken shoulder leant my strength  
 Oft in faint pause of war, thou'lt not believe  
 The tamed earth-lust could rise and wrestle and shake  
 The foothold of the immortal hope with doubt  
 Lest all were vanity: 'Fools of Heaven,' it hissed,  
 'Who sell true earth-gold for the golden cloud,  
 The good which shall not be.' Believe it not,

Brother: for this was dreaming, that which fell  
 Thereafter was the waking. For to earth,  
 As one who, swooning at the precipice-edge,  
 Clutches the safe sward's bosom, prone I fell,  
 Shuddering, and dumbly prayed the living Christ  
 Smite the doubt-demon o'er my cowering head.  
 And then—I cannot tell what happened then,  
 Nor if a moment passed me or an hour,  
 Or what of me it was that walked at large  
 Over an island plain 'twixt sea and sea,  
 Like to thy Ethica. One sat to weave  
 Beside a rush-bed: patiently he wove  
 And wove: I marked a smile that rippling made  
 Doubtful the lines of sorrow on his cheek,  
 And standing o'er him asked, 'What gladdens you,  
 Who seem so lone?' And he, as if no man,  
 But his sole thought had spoken, 'Who so glad  
 As he who loves much, being much forgiven?'  
 'Hast thou found peace,' I said, 'my Libran?' He  
 Turned dreaming-wise, and suddenly saw, and then  
 —O how to tell thee what a gaze of love  
 (My heart as at a fire was molten at it)  
 Clasped me about! 'Part me no more,' he cried,  
 'No more, great father,' and he reached a hand.  
 But, ere it touched, I was away, away.

Yet arms there were on me, I thought, but slim

And childish, and down rippled to my lap  
 Gold hair of Aidan's Hector. Aidan's self  
 Stooped to my shoulder, kissed the fair boy's brow  
 Half hidden there, and 'Man of God, thou sayest:'  
 He murmured, 'Yea, the anointed of the Lord,  
 By sign of who best loves our noblest. He  
 Shall pay thee for the sire.'

But there his voice  
 Changed to far off, and stern from tender. Helmed  
 Stood Aidan: on his brand the sinking moon:  
 And 'Fear not,' came the word, 'my soldiers: clear  
 Across the night I heard Columba's prayer.  
 He strikes on our side from the isle of Christ:  
 He, whom Christ loveth, loves us.' And thereat  
 A thousand faces glanced the moon, with eyes  
 Lit from a fire not hers.

But when I thought  
 To hear against their breasts the heathen wave  
 Roaring, behold! no heathen host, but one  
 Grey weary chieftain, coming, propped of twain,  
 From a skiff's side towards me, as I sat  
 Under Skye's pinnacles in a reddening eve.  
 'I, Raven of the Rock, am come to thee,  
 The Dove of Erin, for thou knowest Him  
 Whom I, not knowing, all a life have sought.  
 Give me the holy water, swear me His,

That I may be His man before I pass  
 To-morrow.' I wept, so shone in those worn eyes  
 The faith Christ lights unknown, without the word.  
 And eastward climbed the grey sail up the seas,  
 And on their summit flamed, as if a soul  
 Blossomed in fire and mounted.

Here a voice  
 Turned me. A man knelt by me, cowed as we,  
 Thick snows upon the cowl. For now the air  
 Was blind with snow, and nothing else I saw  
 But a great tabled stone, pillared on twain,  
 The wild man's altar: over it a cross  
 Glimmered, through drift. I raised the head. Ah me!  
 Dallan! who went not with us to the work:  
 Dallan! who after went, men said, to Alba,  
 But none knew whither. Pale he looked me o'er,  
 Not shamed, with eyes that searched me, till I spake,  
 'How fare you, brother?' Then he clutched my robe,  
 'Yea, yea! for brother I am, not traitor now:  
 Brother. I seek a lost sheep o'er the hills,  
 And die in the storm. Christ seek him! Thou, my sire,  
 Fear not to bless me. I have risen who fell.  
 Thy sorrowing eyes so wrought in me, I vowed,  
 Because I went not, I would further go  
 Than who went furthest. And I kept it hid,  
 That Christ alone on my unworthiness

Might look and less despise me. See, He wills  
The master whom I wronged should look on me  
And not despise me.' On my breast he lay.  
The white scud wrapped us eddying. Heart to heart  
We drank the joy of parted souls at one,  
In silence, curtained by the wandering storm.

BAITHEN.

Dallan! Pray heaven the truth be as the dream,  
For thou art prophet. And it ended so?

COLUMBA.

Ah! no: not so it ended, friend: not so . . .  
A moment suffer me . . . I will speak anon.

BAITHEN.

Nay, then, let be, my father. Other time,  
If this time pains, will serve us.

COLUMBA.

Baithen, stay.

No other time. Come near me: seat you close.  
Here, at my side; and lay your hand in mine.  
Ah! you remember now,—that night—the three,  
Who stemmed a stream together, hand in hand,

Through the dread, holy dark. They are not loosed,  
Those hands: for listen.

When the vision's wing  
Swept with me onward, 'twas as if I waked,  
So clearer was the dream than other dreams,  
So all the senses lived in it together,  
Undreamlike, nor I heard alone and saw,  
But felt the ruffling air, the prick of cold,  
The moorland savours. Dark against the dawn  
A shrine rose on a naked promontory.  
I neared: the door was wide, and round it stood,  
In-gazing, fingering edge of axe and brand,  
A hundred wolfish men, like wolves afret  
Nosing a sheep-door. Yet I passed them through.  
A priest bent o'er the chalice: right and left,  
Six brethren on a side, his Household knelt,  
Nor at the darkening door uplooked. The priest  
Rose upright. By the princely head I knew,  
O Baithen, our Mochonna. But he turned,  
To part with those doomed twelve the awful cup,  
And scarce I knew,—such sternly-tender change  
On lips and eyes the coming passion wrought.  
But me he called not to the feast, nor saw.  
Then when they rose and chanted, on their brows  
Death's shadow was not shadow but a fire,  
From inward breathed, as if God's finger there

Lit the white lamp that dies not. But for me,  
 My veins with helpless wrath beat in my head  
 And pity for the slain and slayer, the sheep  
 Wolf-fanged to rend the shepherd. He the while  
 All in a low clear voice untremblingly  
 Praying the peace of God, upcast his eyes  
 To where dawn's golden arrow smote the spark  
 High in the rafter: then he brought them down  
 Full over me, and still he saw me not:  
 But spake, 'O brothers tried, dear Company  
 Of the Red Martyrdom, as Christ has willed,  
 We die: and we have wrought no deed and no  
 Deliverance on the earth; and there will be  
 No name of us nor memory, save in these  
 Wild hearts that slay unknowing, who shall come  
 Through love of whom they slew to love of Him  
 For whom we die. Let us go hence, my friends.  
 And this one last time follow me.' He moved,  
 As if none stood between him and the swords.  
 'Will he not know me?' groaned my heart. He heard,  
 He looked—O with a look as if I stood  
 With still the severing mountain leagues between  
 —And said without the lips, 'Yea, yea, and thou,  
 With whom I die not, father—till white age  
 Join whom the red death sunders, O farewell!'  
 But there he caught his breath, for he had seen.

O there was never touch between us, eyes  
 Only, as spirit enfolds a spirit, close  
 Beyond all earth's embraces folded us  
 One age-long moment in the strain of love!  
 And joying I let pass to death my son.

My vision blinked and glimpsed again. A crowd  
 Made tumult; from the heart of it there came  
 A something, and a hand that closed on mine,  
 Viewless, with power, and drew me with it afar,  
 Yea, to the unimaginable afar,  
 Where the worlds are not, and the shining stair  
 Climbs to the timeless Presence: and there befell  
 What the soul locks within nor looks on more  
 This side the shadowy threshold. Yet in all  
 The glory of Heaven's golden overspill  
 One joy was master, and one strain in all  
 Her songs was burden and a beating heart:  
 For how that music spoke in blessed ears  
 I know not, but in mine it chanted still,  
 'There lives no glory but the living Love:  
 On earth the sowing and the flower above:  
 For Love the deed is and the meed is Love.'

O Baithen, and my deed on earth is done,  
 Some deed by me unworthy—I have loved.

And here have known the meed ; but elsewhere soon  
 Shall know, Christ willing, for my steps are nigh  
 The shadowy threshold of the shining stair,  
 Not backward to be crossed again. But you,  
 Who must rule after me, remember—nay,  
 How should I counsel one in whom our House  
 Such likeness of Love's own apostle finds ?  
 Yet, for I bought this knowledge at a price,  
 Fortune and home and fame and lust of will,  
 Hear it. No deed can live but only Love's :  
 No might of man nor fierceness, nor the craft  
 Of kingly nature, nor the seated will,  
 But one strong Spirit that not seeks her own.  
 Love therefore ye. There is no deed but love.

BAITHEN.

I cannot answer thee. This coming hour  
 Will orphan us in very truth. Go forth  
 Our glory. I will tarry, as I may.

SCENE III.

*The shore of Iona. A great wind blowing. RONAN alone.*

RONAN (*sings*).

Bluster and buffet thy fill,  
 Loud wind of the west ;  
 Wrangle and wrestle at will  
 Thy maddest, thy best,  
 Till the shaken sea cup overspill  
 On the far meadow's breast,  
 And with yeasty wave bubble the hill  
 And with foam flower is drest.  
 Blow wind, and blow ever, nor cease :  
 The storm to the minstrel is peace.

A day and a day and a day,  
 And ever the blast ;  
 A blast that hath rapt from his clay  
 Our strong one at last.  
 Blow wind, for thy tumults upstay,  
 With her weeping held fast,  
 My heart, as a cloud on its way  
 With its waters uncast.  
 She is borne, as a cloud, in the rush,  
 She will break, as the cloud, in the hush.

Why do we sing, my harp? He's gone we sang for,  
Sailing the great wind with his angel-guard  
To the house of God. I should have snapped thy strings  
Or given thee burial in the dumb sea-bed.

For the holy Isle's dark  
And her glory gone past her:  
The harp hath no mark,  
Nor the minstrel a master.

Buried thee? Yea, and followed thee. But he  
Hinders: the dead hand holds me: he that tamed  
The wild man out of Ronan, master still.  
'Live thou thy life, bard: Christ would have thee sing,'  
He told me once. Half heathen again am I,  
Missing him. Yet he holds me.

[*To DIORMIT, who comes round the rocks.*

Ah! fair brother.

What seek you?

DIORMIT.

Wilful Ronan, whom but you?

You only from the burial, you alone!  
Why, from his stall old Whitefrock followed us  
Stumbling in rear to watch him laid in earth,  
And weeping manlike tears as when he dropped  
His head in the Abbot's lap that last of morns.  
His Bard to fail him, and no creature else!

RONAN (*pointing*).

Diormit, what make the folk that cluster there  
Thick on the dunes beyond the strait?

DIORMIT.

Belike

They watched the burial train.

RONAN.

How knew they of it?

None passed such water of death to learn the news.

DIORMIT.

Nay, but old Aedh, that morrow of our grief,  
Shot over on the vanward of the gale,  
Swift as our wing-clipped raven, when a gust  
Caught him on Duni's height and blew him away  
To the far fisher's door. Aedh bides with them:  
The poor lame bird had winged as easily back.  
But wherefore, Ronan, wherefore you away?

RONAN.

I will not tell thee, boy. Nay, frown not you.  
I love you well, fair Diormit; and your years  
Are now as Ronan's own when first he loved  
Ronan's lost lord and Diormit's. Bear with me.  
I will not tell, because I cannot tell.

Yet, when the gale's rude trumpet suffers me  
 (As even now it blows a lessening note),  
 Perchance I'll tell the seas and all the stars.  
 Whom should I else? They are his kinsmen, they;  
 For he is brother of the star's white truth  
 And the sea's stormy glory. Let me be:  
 Go, gentle friend: we are well paired in sorrow,  
 But I must mourn him in my kind alone.

DIORMIT.

Well, you shall tell it to your stars and seas.  
 But they'll forget it all. So would not I,  
 When you will trust me with it, as we sit  
 Upon the warm lee of the Angel Knoll,  
 And watch the nearing sea-birds hover and pause,  
 Marking us, like the white-winged messengers  
 Seeking the master's soul four summers since,  
 Whom our prayer turned to heaven again. Alas!  
 We could not turn them twice. Live, Ronan, you:  
 Who keeps the great days with us, if you go?

[*Goes.*

RONAN (*sings*).

Harp of glory,  
 Harp of woe,  
 Magic bride to Ronan's hand troth-plighted  
 Once in magic youth and long ago,

Minstrel side by side,  
 Sung have we, O bride,  
 Field and air and wave in changing story:  
 Sung the morning's birth,  
 Sung the eastern hearth  
 Showering embers live on oakwood hoary.  
 On thy string was heard  
 Pipe of waking bird,  
 Throstle's heart-burst and the cushat's moan:  
 Sighed the vexed wind through thee,  
 Sobbed the low brook to thee  
 What to secret woods he told alone.  
 Then with chanting higher  
 Pealed we, harp of fire,  
 Loud on bounding chords the might of man:  
 Down thy rhythmic clash  
 Roared the onset crash,  
 Leapt thy wild breast under Ronan's span:  
 Hot the madness sprung,  
 While on air we flung  
 Fame of chief and warrior's faith unblamed:  
 Hand to harp, amain,  
 Harp to hand again  
 Tossed the fire and caught the fire and flamed.



Who was this had stolen upon our singing,  
 As on sunshine revel steals a cloud?  
 Awe was on us, and the strong, upspringing  
 Music faltered from her purpose proud.

Failed the glamour from our oakwoods haunted,  
 Rose such holier dreamland haunted more;  
 Paled the glory from the deeds we vaunted,  
 Here was greater than our kings of yore.

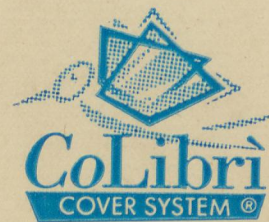
Songmate, him we sang not. Ah! what ailed thee,  
 Silent never else when hero passed?  
 Silent wert thou, and thy minstrel failed thee  
 Numb as charmed dreamer prison-fast.

Loved we not? O Christ, but hadst Thou given  
 Death for love's sake at the heathen's door,  
 Heart of Ronan by the doom-spear riven  
 Blithe for love had spilt its songful store.

Could love sing! But here was Love beyond her,  
 Love's high sister of the starry wing.  
 Stooped that dove-wing earthward. We the wonder  
 Saw and worshipped, but we might not sing.

Shall we mourn him,  
 Harp of fame,  
 Mourn as they who laid him with the worm?  
 Nay, for we across the blind night's roaring  
 Heard the beat of eagle vans upsoaring;  
 Heard, and knew our Strong One rode the storm.  
 Sing we glory for the deedful spirit  
 Homeward scaling,  
 Whence he sways us, and his deeds inherit  
 Rule unfailing;  
 Glory for the prince who pride's dominion  
 Gave for love's;  
 Yea, the valiant who the eagle's pinion  
 Changed for dove's.  
 Who are these who rise and hail him father,  
 Soldier-sons, and all the lands ingather,  
 Isle and island, height and highland, shore and shore?  
 'Neath the shade of our great spirit parted,  
 Mightier shadow of the mighty-hearted,  
 Strives a seed and lives a deed for evermore.

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ELECTION OF BISHOP.—SCENE IN THE WELLINGTON HALL, BELFAST, THIS MORNING DURING THE MEETING OF THE DIOCESAN SYNOD OF DOWN AND CONNOR AND DROMORE TO ELECT A BISHOP FOR THE UNITED DIOCESE.



Mrs. Toly at Hayes  
 East Gardens  
 Sand Rectory Ditchling  
 Downpatrick Hassocks  
 Co. Down Sussex  
Northern Ireland.

Whatso'er you find to do,  
Do it lads with all your might,  
Never be a **little** true,  
Or a **little** in the right;  
Trifles even lead to Heaven,  
Trifles make the life of man,  
So in all things, great and small things,  
Be as thorough as you can.

Let no speech its surface dim,  
Spotless truth or honour bright,  
I'd not give a fig for him,  
Who'd say any lie was white.  
He who falters, twists or alters  
Little atoms, when they speak,  
May deceive me, but believe me,  
To himself he is a sneak.

Help the weak if you are strong,  
Love the old if you are young,  
Own a fault if you are wrong,  
If you're angry, hold your tongue.  
In each duty lies a beauty,  
If your eyes you do not shut,  
Trust as surely and securely,  
As a kernel in a nut.

If you think a word will please,  
Say it, if it is but true,  
Words may give delight with ease,  
When no act is asked of you.  
Words may often soothe or soften,  
Gild a joy or heal a pain,  
They are treasures, yielding pleasures,  
It is wicked to retain.

24 1/2p: Fitzwilliam St  
Dublin.

W. 6. 17

Much love  
to you both  
from  
Dorothy

My dearest Aunt. I will  
Thank you & Uncle Harry so  
much for your birthday present & all  
your good wishes. The P.O. will be  
most useful. I will use it in pay-  
ing for the music lessons I am  
having by correspondence from the  
man in London that I wrote to  
Uncle Harry Richard about - do you  
remember her? - They are most help-  
ful & will work well. -  
Thank you too for your nice  
letter about my exam: - I am trying  
to work very hard for it. - The  
practising facilities you talk of  
sound splendid - I am so glad -  
& am trying for August! -  
I would <sup>have</sup> written sooner - but  
that I celebrated my birthday yes-  
terday by quite a whirl of gaiety:  
a garden party (in other words a

Charity bazaar) in the afternoon - at  
wh: I helped cousin brother in & Dan  
- well to sell ice-creams - & in the  
evening Mrs Coffey took me to the  
little Saturday dance at the  
Mac Swineys' - where I sneaky  
enjoyed my self. -

I have started - for my  
exam: - a course of private  
Harmony lessons with D<sup>r</sup> Lanchet.  
They are so interesting. -

I called on Miss Helen  
Dawson some days ago - she  
looks white & poorly - but Miss  
not weather ought to help  
her to pick up. again. -

I am so sorry to hear that  
Billie Redmond (John Redmond's  
brother isn't he?) is killed in  
his push in France. I sent  
A. E.'s emanation memorandum

great? - They say that all  
parties will come in but except  
of course the extreme Sinn Feiners  
& that their absence will be a  
help - not a hindrance!



