

*The Mountainy Singer* (1909)

Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil

&

*Mearing stones : leaves from my note-book on tramp in Donegal* (1911)

Joseph Campbell

I am the Mountainy Singer

I am the mountainy singer—  
The voice of the peasant's dream.  
The cry of the wind on the wooded hill,  
The leap of the fish in the stream.

Quiet and love I sing—  
The carn on the mountain crest,  
The cailin in her lover's arms.  
The child at its mother's breast.

Beauty and peace I sing—  
The fire on the open hearth,  
The cailleach spinning at her wheel,  
The plough in the broken earth.

Travail and pain I sing—  
The bride on the childing bed.  
The dark man laboring at his rhymes,  
The ewe in the lembing shed.

Sorrow and death I sing —  
The canker come on the corn,  
The fisher lost in the mountain lock,  
The cry at the mouth of morn.

No other life I sing.  
For I am sprung of the stock  
That broke the hilly land for bread.  
And built the nest in the rock !

The mountainy singer (1919)

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## SUNLIGHT

UNLESS you have seen the sun you cannot know anything. Sunlight is better than wisdom, and the red of the fairy-thimble more than painted fans.

## TURF-CUTTING

IN the Lochros district, when the weather begins to take up, about the middle of May, the farmers repair to the moss on the north side of the Point, and start cutting the banks. The turf is then footed (sometimes by girls) along the causeway ditches, and when properly seasoned—say about the middle of July—is piled in stacks on high ground convenient to the moss, and covered on top with a lot of old mouldering “winter-stales,” to keep the rain off it. “Winter-stales” are sods that have been left over from the previous season’s cutting—the wet setting in and leaving the bog-roads in such a state that no slipe or wheeled car could get into them. Of course, most of the carrying in Donegal is done by creel or ass-cart; but in the Lochros district turf is scarce, and the farmers on the Point are obliged to keep horses to draw the turf in from the moss on the north side of the Owenea river, some miles off, and over roads that are none too good for wheeled traffic. In some cases I have noticed the “winter-stales” built up in little beehive-shaped heaps on dry ground, to be carted or creeled away as soon as the weather begins to mend. But it is only the more provident farmers who do this.

## HIS OLD MOTHER

“My old mother’s ailing this twelvemonth back,” said a man to me to-day. “I’m afeard she’ll go wi’ the leaves.”

## A DAY OF WIND AND LIGHT BLOWN RAIN

A DAY of wind and light, blown rain, with the sun shining through it in spells. Aighe river below me, brown and clear, foaming through mossed stones to the sea. Trout rising from it now and again to the gnats that skim its surface. Glengesh mountain in the middle distance—a black, splendid bulk—dropping to the Nick of the Bealach on the left. Meadows in foreground bright with marigolds, with here and there by the mearings tufts of king-fern, wild iris and fairy-thimble.

## LYING AND WALKING

To lie on one’s loin in the sun is all very well, but walking is better. It is over the hill the wonders are.

## ORA ET LABORA

NOON of a summer’s day. I see a man in the fields—a wild, solitary figure—the only living thing in sight for miles. He is thinning turnips. Slowly a bell rings out from the chapel on the hill beyond. It is the Angelus. The man stands up, takes off his hat and bows his head in the ancient prayer of his faith. . . . The bell ceases tolling, and he bends to labour again.

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## TWO THINGS THAT WON'T GO GREY

I MET a woman up Glengesh going in the direction of the danger-post. She seemed an old woman by her look but she more than beat me at the walking. When we got to the top of the hill I complimented her on her powers. “ ’Deed,” says she, with a deprecating little laugh, “ and I’m getting old now. I’m fair enough yet at the walking, but I’m going grey—going fast. A year ago my hair was as black as that stack there”—pointing to a turf-stack out in the bog—“ but now it’s on the turn. And I tell you there’s only two things in the world that won’t go grey some time—and that’s salt and iron.”

## RUNDAL

I SEE a green island. It is hardly an island now, for the tide is out, and one might walk across to it by the neck of yellow-grey sand that connects it with the mainland. It is held in rundal by a score of tenants living in the mountains in-by. Little patches of oats, potatoes, turnips, and “ cow’s grass” diversify its otherwise barren surface. There are no mearings, but each man’s patch is marked by a cairn of loose stones, thrown aside in the process of reclamation. The stones, I see, are used also as seaweed beds. They are spitted in the sand about, like a *cheval de frise*, and in the course of time the seaweed carried in by successive tides gathers on them, and is used by the tenants for manure.

## PÚCA-PILES

“ What are these ?” I asked an old woman in the fields this morning, pointing to a cluster of what we in the north-east corner call paddock-stools, and sometimes fairy-stools. “ Well,” said she, “ they’re not mushrooms, anyway. They’re what you call Púca-piles. They say the Púca lays them !”

## THE ROSSES

BOG and sky : a boulder-strewn waste, with salt lochs and freshwater lochs innumerable, and a trail running up to a huddle of white clouds.

## A COUNTRY FUNERAL

DEATH, as they say, has taken somebody away under his oxter ! I was coming into Ardara this morning from the Lochros side, and as I came up to the chapel on the hill I heard the bell tolling. That, I knew, was for a burying : it was only about ten o’clock, and the Angelus does not ring until midday. Farther on I met the funeral procession. It was just coming out of the village. The coffin, a plain deal one covered with rugs, was carried over the well of a side-car, and the relatives and country people walked behind. The road was thick with them—old men in their Sunday homespuns and wide-awakes, their brogues very dusty, as if they had come a long way ; younger men with bronzed faces, and ash-plants in their hands ; old women in the white frilled caps and coloured shawls peculiar to western Ireland ; young married women, girls and children. Most of them walked, but several rode in ass-carts, and three men, I noticed, were on horseback. The tramping of so many feet, the rattle of the wheels and the talk made a great stir on the road, and the movement and colour suggested anything but a funeral. Still one could see that underneath all was a deep and beautiful feeling of sorrow, so different to the black-coated, slow-footed, solemn-faced thing of the towns. As the coffin approached I stood into the side of the road, saluted, and turned back with it the *tri céimeanna na trocaire* (three steps of mercy) as far as the chapel yard.

## YOUTH AND AGE

AN old man came dawdling out of a gap by the road, and he stopped to have a word with me. We were talking for some time when he said : “ You’re a young man, by the looks of you ? “ I laughed and nodded. “ Och,” says he, “ but it’s a poor thing to be old, and all your colt-tricks over,” says he, “ and you with nothing to do but to be watching the courses of the wind !”

## SUMMER DUSK

SUMMER dusk. A fiddle is playing in a house by the sea. “ Maggie Pickens” is the tune. The fun and devilment of it sets my heart dancing. Then the mood changes. It is “ The Fanaid Grove” now, full of melancholy and yearning, full of the spirit of the landscape—the soft lapping tide, the dove-grey sands, the blue rhythmic line of hill and sky beyond. The player repeats it. . . . I feel as if I could listen to that tune forever.

## A NOTE

DARKNESS, freshness, fragrance. Donegal fascinates one like a beautiful girl.

## THE PEASANT IN LITERATURE

IT has been said before that there is too much peasant in contemporary Irish literature, especially in the plays. The phenomenon is easily explained. Ireland is an agricultural country, a country of small farms, and therefore a nation of peasants ; so that a literature which pretends to reflect the life of Ireland must deal in the main with peasants and the thoughts that peasants think. And peasants’ thoughts are not such dead and commonplace things that I, who have learnt practically all I know from them, can afford to ignore them now. The king himself is served by the field. Where there is contact with the unseen in this book, with the mysteries which we feel rather than understand, it is because of some strange thought dropped in strange words from a peasant’s mouth and caught by me here, as in a snare of leaves, for everyone to ponder. Impressions, with something of the roughness of peasant speech in them and something of the beauty, phases of a moment breathless and fluttering, the mystery of the sea, the thresh of rain, the sun on a bird’s wing, a wayfarer passing—those are the things I sought to capture in this book.

## AN INSLEEP

WE were talking together the other evening—an old woman and myself—on a path which leads through the fields from Glengesh mountain to Ardara wood. We had got as far as the stream which crosses the path near the wood when she stopped suddenly. She looked west, and scratched her eyebrow. “ I’ve an insleep,” says she. “ I hadn’t one this long time !”

## WATER AND SLÁN-LUS

WHAT is more beautiful than water falling, or a spray of *slán-lus* with its flowers ?

## BY LOCHROS MÓR

THE heat increases. The osmunda droops on the wall. The tide is at full ebb. A waste of sea-wrack and sand stretches out to Dawros, a day’s journey beyond. I see two figures, a boy

and a girl, searching for bait—the boy digging and the girl gathering into a creel. The deep, purring note of a sandpiper comes to me over the bar. It is like the sound that air makes bubbling through water, I listen to it in infinite space and quietness.

### RIVAL FIDDLERS

I WAS talking to a fiddler the other evening in a house where there was a dance, up by Portnoo. I happened to mention the name of another fiddler I had heard playing a night or two before in Ardara. “Him, is it?” put in my friend. “Why, he’s no fiddler at all. He’s only an old stroller. He doesn’t know the differs between ‘Kyrie Eleison’ and ‘The Devil’s Dreams’!” He became very indignant. I interrupted once or twice, trying to turn the conversation, but all to no purpose; he still went on. Finally, to quiet him, I asked him could he play “The Sally Gardens.” He stopped to think for a while, fondling the strings of his instrument lovingly with his rough hands; then he said that he didn’t know the tune by that name, but that if I’d lilt or whistle the first few bars of it, it might come to him. I whistled them. “Oh,” says he, “that’s ‘The Maids of Mourne Shore.’ That’s the name we give it in these parts.” He played the tune for me quite beautifully. Then there was a call from the man of the house for “The Fairy Reel,” and the dancers took the floor again. The fiddlers in Donegal are “all sorts,” as they say—farmers, blacksmiths, fisher boys, who play for the love of the thing, and strollers (usually blind men) who wander about from house to house and from fair to fair playing for money. When they are playing I notice they catch the bow in a curious way with their thumbs between the horsehair and the stick. At a dance it is no uncommon thing to see a “bench” of seven or eight of them. They join in the applause at the end of each item, rasping their bows together on the strings and stamping vigorously with their feet.

### NATURE

A POOR woman praying by a cross; a mountain shadowed in still water; a tern crying; the road ribboning away into the darkness that looks like hills beyond. Can we live every day with these aspiring things, and not love beauty? Can we look out on our broad view—as someone has said of the friars of the monastery of San Pietro in Perugia—and not note the play of sun and shadow? Nature is the “Time-vesture of God.” If we but touch it, we are made holier.

### SUNDAY UNDER SLIEVE LEAGUE

It is Sunday. The dawn has broken clear after a night’s rain. The sunlight glitters in the soft morning air. The fragrance of peat, marjoram, and wild-mint hangs like a benediction over the countryside. A lark is singing; the swallows are out in hundreds. The road turns and twists—past a cabin, over a bridge—between fringes of wet grass. It dips suddenly, then rises sheer against a wisp of cloud into the dark bulk of Slieve League behind. I see the mountainy people wending in from all parts to Mass. I am standing on high ground, and can see the hiving roads—the men with their black coats and wide-awakes, and the women with their bright-coloured kerchiefs and shawls. Some of them have trudged in for miles on bare feet. They carry their brogues, neatly greased and cleaned, over their shoulders. As they come near the chapel they stop by the roadside or go into a field and put them on. The young girls—grey-eyed, limber slips from the hills—are fixing themselves before they go in of the chapel door. They stand in their ribboned heads and shawls pluming themselves, and telling each other how they look. The boys are watching them. I hear the fresh, nonchalant laugh and the kindly greeting in Irish—“*Maidin bhreagh, a Phaid,*” and the “*Goidé mar tá tú, a Chait?*” The men—early-comers—sit in groups on the chapel wall, discussing affairs—the weather,

the crops, the new potato spray, the prospects of a war with Germany, the marrying and the giving in marriage, the letters from friends in America, the death and month's mind of friends. The bell has ceased ringing. The men drop from their perch on the wall, and the last of them has gone in. The road is quiet again, and only the sonorous chant of the priest comes through the open windows—"Introibo ad altare Dei" and the shriller response of the clerk, "Ad Deum, qui laetificat juventutem meam."

### THE NIGHT HE WAS BORN

WE were talking together, an old man and myself, on the hill between Laguna and Glen. The conversation turned on ages—a favourite topic with old men [1]—and on the degeneracy that one noticed all over Ireland, especially among the young. "And what age would you take me for?" said he, throwing his staff from him and straightening himself up, "Well, I'm a bad hand at guessing," said I, "but you're eighty if you're a day." "I'm that," said he, "and more. And would you believe it," said he, "the night I was born my mother was making a cake!"

### THE LUSMÓR

THE *lusmór*, or "great herb"—foxglove,

That stars the green skirt of the meadow,

is known to the peasantry by a variety of other names, as for example, *sian sléibhe*, "sian of the hills" (it grows plentifully on the high, rough places); *méarachán*, "fairy-thimble"; *ros gréine*, "little rose of the sun"; and *lus na mban-sidhe*, "herb of the elf-women, or witch-doctors," etc., etc. It is bell-shaped, and has a purplish-red colour. As Dr. Joyce observes, it is a most potent herb, for it is a great fairy plant; and those who seek the aid of the *Daoine Maithe*, or Good People, in the cure of diseases or in incantations of any kind, often make use of

Drowsy store.

Gathered from the bright *lusmór*,

to add to the power of their spells. It is a favourite flower in Highland, otherwise Gaelic Scotland; and the clan Farquhar, "hither Gaels," have assumed it for their badge.

### DERRY PEOPLE

DONEGAL is what I call "county-proud." Speaking of Derry—the marching county—an old woman said to me the other day: "Och, there's no gentility about the Derry people. They go at a thing like a day's work!"

### A CLOCK

I WAS going along the road this evening when I came on a clock (some would call it a black beetle), travelling in the direction of Narin. The poor thing seemed to have its mind set on getting there before dark—a matter of three miles, and half an hour to do it in! The sense of tears in me was touched for the clock, and I stooped down to watch it crawling laboriously along in the dust, over a very rough road, tired and travel-stained, as if it had already come a long way; climbing stones (miniature Errigals) twenty times as high as itself; circumventing others, falling into ruts headlong, and rising again none the worse for its awful experience; keeping on, on, on, "with a mind fixed and a heart unconquered." I couldn't help laughing at

first, but after five minutes I felt a sort of strange kinship with the clock—it was a wayfarer like myself, “ a poor earth-born companion and fellow-mortal”—and I stood watching it, hat in hand, until it disappeared out of view. The last I saw of it was on the top of a stone on rising ground, silhouetted against the sunset. Then it dropped over . . . and I resumed my journey, thinking.

### CARRICK GLEN

HERE there is quiet ; quiet to think, quiet to read, quiet to listen, quiet to do nothing but lie still in the grass and vegetate. The water falls (to me there is no music more beautiful) ; a wayfarer passes now and again along the road on his way into Carrick ; the sea-savour is in my nostrils ; the clouds sail northward, white and luminous, far up in the sky ; their shadows checker the hills. If the Blue Bird is to be found this side of heaven, surely it must be here !

### A SHUILER

I WAS talking to a stonebreaker on the road between Carrick and Glen when a shuiler passed, walking very fast. “ A supple lad, that,” says the stonebreaker. “ The top o’ the road’s no ditch-shough to him. Look at him—he’s lucky far down the hill already.” He dropped his hammer, and burst into a fit of laughing. “ He’s as many feet as a cat !” says he.

### TURKEYS IN THE TREES

THE gruesomest sights I ever saw in my life— turkeys roosting among the branches of the trees at a house above Lochros. You would think they were birds with evil spirits in them, they kept so quiet in the half-darkness, and looked so solemn.

### A PARTY OF TINKERS

A PARTY of tinkers on the high road—man, wife, children, ass and cart. A poor, back-gone lot they are surely. The man trails behind carrying one of the children in a bag over his back. The woman pushes on in front, smiling broadly out of her fat, drunken face. “ Oh, God love ye for a gentleman,” she whines in an up-country *barróg* which proclaims her a stranger to the place. “ Give us the lucky hand, gentleman, and may the Golden Doors never be shut against ye. Spare a decent poor body a copper, and I’ll say seven ‘ Hail Mary’s’ and seven ‘ Glory be to the Father’s, for ye every night for a week. Give us the lucky hand, gentleman.” I throw her a penny, not so much out of charity as to get rid of her, and the cavalcade moves on. Over the hill I hear her voice raised in splendid imprecation on the husband. Such coloured speech one only hears from peasants and strolling folk, who are in touch with the elemental things—the wonders and beauties and cruelties of life.

### TEELIN, BUNGLASS, and SLIEVE LEAGUE .

It is a lovely summer’s day, warm and fragrant and sunny. We have just come from Mass at Carrick chapel, and are following the road that leads south by the harbour up to Teelin village. Numbers of people are on the road with us—mostly women and girls, for the men have remained behind to smoke and to talk over the week’s happenings in the different ends of the parish. The groups go in ages—the old women with the old women, the marriageable girls with the marriageable girls, the younger girls with the girls of their own age. There is a crowd of little boys, too—active as goats, dressed in corduroys or homespuns, and discussing in Irish what they will do with themselves in the afternoon. Some will go bathing in the harbour, others will go up to the warren by Loch O’Mulligan to hunt rabbits, others will

remain in the village to watch the men and bigger boys play at skittles in a cleared space by the high road. I pick up with a quiet-eyed lad—the makings of a priest or a scholar, by his look—and in a short time I am friends with the crowd. If one could see me behind I must look like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, so many children have I following alongside me and at my heels. They come to know by my talk that I am interested in Irish—an enthusiast, in fact—and they all want to tell me at once about the Feis at Teelin, and about the great prizes that were offered, and how one out of their own school, a little fellow of eight years, won first prize for the best telling of a wonder-tale in the vernacular. The quiet-eyed lad asks me would I like to see Bunglass and the great view to be had of Slieve League from the cliff-head. I tell him that I am going there, and in an instant the crowd is running out in front of us, shouting and throwing their caps in the air—delighted, I suppose, at the prospect of a scramble for coppers on the grass when we get to the end of our journey. For boys are boys the world over, let the propagandists carp as they will ! and when I was young myself I would wrestle a ghost under a bed for a halfpenny—so my grandmother used to tell me, and she was a very wise and observant woman. We have come to Teelin village—a clean, white-washed little place on a hill, built “ all to one side like Clogher”—and from there we strike up to the right by a sort of rocky, grass-covered loane which leads to the cliffs. We pass numbers of houses on the way, each with a group of gaily-dressed peasants sunning themselves at the door. The ascent is gradual at first, but as we go on it gets steeper, and after a while’s climbing we begin to feel the sense of elevation and detachment. The air is delightfully warm, and the fragrance of sea and bracken and ling is in our hearts. In time we reach Carrigan Head, with its martello tower, seven hundred feet odd over the Atlantic. Southwards the blue waters of Donegal Bay spread themselves, with just the slightest ripple on their surface, glinting in the warm sunlight. In the distance the heights of Nephin Beag and Croagh Patrick in Mayo are faintly discernible, and westwards the illimitable ocean stretches to the void. From Carrigan Head we follow a rough mountain trail, and in a short time reach Loch O’ Mulligan, a lonely freshwater tarn, lying under the shadow of Slieve League. Back of the loch a grassy hill rises. We climb this, the younger boys leading about fifty yards in front, jumping along the short grass and over the stones like goats. Arrived at a point called in Irish *Amharc Mór*, or “ Great View,” a scene of extraordinary beauty bursts on us. We are standing on Scregeighter, the highest of the cliffs of Bunglass. A thousand and twenty-four feet below us, in a sheer drop, the blue waters of Bunglass advance and recede—blue as a sapphire, shading into emerald and white where they break on the spit of grass-covered rock rising like a *sceilg-draoidheachta*, or “ horn of wizardry,” out of the narrow bay. Right opposite us is Slieve League, its earn a thousand feet higher than the point on which we stand. In the precipitous rock-face, half-way up, is a scarped streak called *Nead an Iolair*, or the Eagle’s Nest. The colouring is wonderfully rich and varied—black, grey, violet, brown, red, green—due, one would think, to the complex stratification and to the stains oozing from the soft ores, clays, and mosses impinging between the layers. We step back from the cliff-edge, and sit down on a flat slab of stone, the better to enjoy the view, and the boys spread themselves out in various attitudes over the short grass before and behind us. They are conversing among themselves in Irish, speaking very rapidly, and with an intonation that is as un-English as it can possibly be. The thickened I’s and thrilled r’s are especially noticeable. To hear these children speak Irish the way they do makes one feel that the language of Niall Naoi Giallach is not dead yet, and has, indeed, no signs of dying.

One could spend a day in this place sunning oneself on the cliff-head, or loafing about on the grass, enjoying the panorama of mountain and sea and sky spread in such magnificence on all sides. But we have promised to be back in Carrick for lunch, and already the best part of the forenoon is gone. “ *Cad a-chlog é anois ?* ” I ask one of the boys. He looks into the sky, calculates for a while, and answers : “ *Tá sé suas le h-aon anois. Feach an ghrían.* ”



(It is upwards of one o'clock now. Look at the sun.) In a remote, open country like this the children are wonderfully astute, and well up in the science of natural things. Coming up the hill I had noticed a number of strange birds, and when I asked the crowd the names of them in Irish they told me without once having to stop to think. We are ready to go now, but before setting out we decide on having a scramble. My friend, R. M., takes a sixpence from his pocket, puts it edge down on the turf, and digs it in with his heel, covering it up so that no sign of it is visible. He then brings the boys back over the grass about a hundred yards, handicapping them according to age and size. One boy, the youngest, has boots on, and he is put in front. At a given signal—the dropping of a handkerchief—the race is started, and in the winking of an eye the crowd is mixed up on the grass, one boy's head here, another's heels there, over the spot where the sixpence is hidden. Five minutes and more does the scramble last, the boys pushing and shoving for all they are worth, and screaming at the top of their voices. Then the lad who reached the spot first crawls out from underneath the struggling mass, puffing and blowing, his hair dishevelled, the coat off him, and the sixpence in his hand !

We have got back to Carrick, an hour late for lunch, and with the appetites of giants. We met many people on the road as we returned, all remarkably well-dressed—young men in the blue serge favoured by sailors, and girls in white ; a clerical student, home on holidays from Maynooth, discussing the clauses of Mr. Birrell's latest Land Bill with a group of elderly folk ; big hulking fellows with bronzed faces, in a uniform that I hadn't seen before, but which a local man told me was that of the Congested Districts Board ; and pinafores children. One young man we noticed sitting on a rock over the water with his boots off, washing his feet, and several boys sailing miniature boats made out of the leaves of flaggers.

#### THE SHOOTING STAR

I WAS out the other evening on the shore to the northward of Lochros, watching the men taking in the turf from the banks where it had been footed and dried. The wind was quiet, and there was a great stir of traffic on the road—men with creels, horses and carts, asses and children driving them. An old woman (a respectable beggar by her look) came by, and we started to talk. We were talking of various things—the beauty of the evening, the plentifulness of the turf harvest, the sorrows of the poor, and such like—when she stopped suddenly, and looked up into the sky. She gripped my arm. “ Look, look,” she said, “ a shooting star !” She blessed herself. There was a trail of silver light in the air—a luminous moment—then darkness. “ That's a soul going up out of purgatory,” she said.

#### SUNDAY ON THE ROAD BETWEEN CARRICK AND GLENGESH

SUNDAY on the road between Carrick and Glengesh. It is drawing near sunset. We pass a group of country boys playing skittles in the middle of the road—quite a crowd of them, big, dark fellows, of all ages between twenty and thirty-five. Some are lolling on the ditch behind, and one has a flute. Farther on we come on a string of boys and girls paired off in twos with their arms about each other's waists, like a procession on Bride's Sunday. The front pair are somewhat ill-matched. The man is old and awkward in his walk, yet cavalierly withal ; the girl is young and pretty, with a charming white laundered dress and flowers in her hair. As our car passes they wave their hands to us as a sign that they are enjoying the fun quite as much as we are. We are rising gradually towards the Pass. Below us the road ribbons away through miles of bog to Slieve League. There is a delightful warmth and quietness in the air. The smoke of the cabin chimneys, as far as one can see, rises up in straight grey lines, “ pillaring the skies of God.” The whole landscape is suffused with colour—browns and ambers and blues—melting into infinity.

## A ROANY BUSH

“ Do you see that bush over there ?” said an old man to me one day on the road near Leckconnell—a poor village half-way between Ardara and Gull Island. “ It’s what they call a roany bush. Well, it’s green now, but in a month’s time it’ll be as red as a fox’s diddy, and you wouldn’t know it for berries growing all over it.”

## AUGUST EVENING

AUGUST evening, moonrise A drift of ponies on the road. I heard the neighing of them half an hour ago as I came down the glen, and now I can see them, a red, ragged cavalcade, and a cloud of dust about their heels. There are some fourteen ponies in the drift, and three young fellows with long whips are driving them. They give me the time of day as I pass. One of them turns back and shouts after me : “ Would you happen to have a match on you, gaffer ?” He is a stout-built lad, with a red face, and a mat of black hair falling over his eyes. I feel in my pocket for a box, and give him share of what I have. He thanks me, and I pass on. The air is damp and fragrant, and wisps of fog lie along the ditches and in the hollow places under the hills. The newly-risen moon touches them with wonder and colour.

## NEAR INVER

A YELLOW day in harvest. A young girl with a piece of drawn-thread work in her lap, sunning herself in the under wisp of her father’s thatch. I come on her suddenly round a bend in the road. She is taken by surprise (almost as completely as I am) . . . draws her legs in, settles her clothing, half smiles, then hangs her head, blushing with all the *pudor* of abashed femininity. I pass on.

## ALL SUBTLE SECRET THINGS

ALL subtle, secret things—the smell of bees, twilight on water, a woman’s presence, the humming of a lime-tree in full leaf, a bracken stalk cut through to show the “ eagle” in it—all speak to me as to an intimate. I know and feel them all.

## A MADMAN

I PASSED an old fellow to-day between Ardara and Narin, doubled up in the ditch with his chin on his knees, and staring at me out of two red eyes that burned in his head like candles.

“ Who’s that old fellow ?” I asked of a stonebreaker, a perch further down the road.

“ Oh, never heed him,” says he—“ he’s mad. This is the sixth. There’s a full moon the night, and he ever goes off at the full o’ the moon. Was he coughing at you ? God, you’d think he was giving his last ‘ keeks,’ to hear him sometimes !”

## LAGUNA

UNDER Crockuna; a thousand feet up. Interminable red bog. A cluster of hovels on the tableland ; one set this way, another that, huddling together for company sake, it seems, in this abomination of desolation. A drift of young children play about on a green cleared space between the holdings. (In Donegal one sees young children everywhere.) They run off like

wild-cats at our approach, screaming loudly and chattering in Irish as they run. A rick of turf, thatched with winter-stales ; a goat tethered ; a flock of geese ; tufts of dyed wool—red and green and indigo—spread on stones to dry ; the clack of a loom from the house nearest us ; a dog working sheep beyond.

#### NEAR LETTERKENNY

A SHEEPDOG with a flock of geese (a most unusual charge, I'm sure) halted by a bridge on their way to market. The owner squats smoking under the parapet—a darkavis'd man, with the slouch hat, slow eye, and wide, mobile mouth of Donegal. I greet him, and pass on.

#### SHAN MAC ANANTY

Up Glengesh The hills of the Pass close in darkly on either side of me. The brown road rises between them in devious loops and twists to the sky beyond. There is the smell of bog-myrtle and ling in the air, and the sound of running water. The silence is awful. I am going along quiet and easy-like, with hardly a thought in my head, when near a sodded shelter, almost hidden from view in a cluster of fuchsia bushes, I come on a little lad of about three years of age. He can't be older, I fancy, he is so small. He runs out in front of me, scared somewhat at my approach, as quaint a figure as ever I looked at. I shout at him and he stops, pulling the hat which he wears—and it is big enough to be his father's—over his face, and laughing shyly at me out of one corner of it. His hands are wet, I notice, a blue-red colour, and sticking with grass—as if he had been “feeling” for minnows in the stream which runs alongside the road. He has a pair of homespun jumpers on, very thick, and dyed a crude indigo colour, a shirt and vest, and his legs are bare and wet up to the knees. I ask him in English “where he comes from,” “who is his father,” “who is his mother,” “where he lives?” He doesn't answer, only pulls the hat deeper over his head and laughs into it. I put the question to him then in Irish. . . . The words were hardly out of my mouth when he gave a leap in the air. I felt as if something had struck me in the face—something soft and smothering, like a bag of feathers—and I was momentarily blinded. When I looked again who should I see but Shan Mac Ananty, my *leaprachán* friend from Scrabo in Down, running out in front of me, in a whirl of dust, it seemed—a white, blinding cloud—giving buck-jumps in the air, and dancing and capering about in the most outlandish fashion possible.

“So it's you, Shan?” I said, when I had recovered my breath. I wasn't a bit afraid, only winded.

“Ay,” says he. “I didn't know you at first. The English is strange to me.” Then with a quaint grimace : “What are *you* doing up here?”

“And what are you doing up here yourself, Shan?” says I. “I thought Scrabo was your playground.”

“You're right, son,” says he. “The old fort *is* my playground, but the smoke—the smoke from the mill chimneys—chases me away at times, and I come up here for an airing. And, anyway, you mustn't forget that I'm king of the fairies of Leath-Chuinn,” says he.

“And so you are,” says I. “I clean forgot that. And do you be in Donegal often?” I asked.

“Once in a spell,” says he. “I travel the townlands in turn from Uisneach to Malin,” says he, “and it takes me a year and a day to do the round. I saw you at Scrabo in June last,” says he, “but you didn't see me.”

“ When was that, Shan ?” says I, thinking.

“ On the night of the twenty-third,” says he. “ There wasn’t a fire lighting as far as I could see ; and I could see from Divis to the Horns of Boirche, and from that over to Vannin.”

A shadow darkened his queer little face. “ Ah,” says he, “ they’re changed times. I was an old man when Setanta got his hero-name, [2] and look at me now,” says he, “ clean past my time. No one knows me, barring yourself there. No one can talk to me ; and at Scrabo it’s worse than here. They’re all planters there,” says he, “ all strange, dour folk, long in the jaw and seldom-spoken, and with no heart in the old customs. Never a John’s-Fire lighted, never a dance danced, never a blessing said, never a . . . ”

He stopped, and I turned to answer .... but Shan was gone ! Nothing in sight for miles—nothing living—only a magpie walking the road, and a *toit* of blue smoke from a cabin away down in the glen.

### A POOR CABIN

A POOR cabin, built of loose whin rubble; no mortar or limewash ; thatch brown and rotting. Dung oozing out of door in pig-crew to north, and lying in wet heaps about causey stones. A brier, heavy with June roses, growing over south gable-end ; rare pink bloom, filling the air with fragrance.

### THE FLAX STONE

OUTSIDE nearly every house in Donegal—at least in the north-western parts of it—is the *Cloch Lin*, or “ Flax-Stone.” This is a huge wheel of granite, half a ton or more in weight, revolving on the end of a wooden shaft which itself turns horizontally on an iron spike secured firmly in the ground. The purpose it serves is to “ break” the flax after it has been retted and dried. On the long arm of the shaft tackling is fixed for the horse supplying the motive power—much in the same way as it is in a pug-mill or puddling machine used in the old days by brick-makers. The flax is strewn in swaths under the wheel, which passes over it repeatedly, disintegrating the fibre. The scutch-mill, of course, is a more expeditious way of doing the work, but Donegal folk are conservative and stick to the old method—which must be as old, indeed, as the culture of flax itself is in the country.

### AFTER SUNSET

I WAS coming through Ardara wood the other evening just after sunset. There was a delightful smell of wet larch and bracken in the air. The road was dark—indeed, no more than a shadow in the darkness ; but a streak of silver light glimmered through from the west side over the mountains and lay on the edge of the wood, and thousands of stars trembled in the branches, touching them with strangeness and beauty. As I approached the village I met an old woman—I knew she was old by her voice—who said to me : “ Isn’t it a fine evening, that ?” “ It is,” said I. “ And look,” said she, “ at all the stars hung up in the trees !” Farther on I came on a number of women and girls, all laughing and talking through other in the half-darkness. I was out of the wood now and almost into the village, and there was light enough to see that they were carrying water—some with one pail, others with two—from the spring well I passed on my way up. This, I believe, is a custom in Ardara. [2] The grown girls of the village go out every evening after dark-fall, if the weather happens to be good. They meet at the well, spend half an hour or so chatting and talking together, and then saunter home again in groups through the darkness, carrying their pails, just as I saw them on this particular

evening. When I got to the village the windows were nearly all lit up. The white and white-grey houses looked strange and unearthly in the darkness. The doors were open, and one could see a dark figure here and there out taking the air. Over the roofs the stars shone and the constellations swung in their courses—the Dog’s Tail, the Dragon, the Plough, the Rule, and the Tailor’s Three Leaps ; and although there was no moon one could see the smoke from the chimneys wavering up into the sky in thin green lines. The fragrance of peat hung heavily on the senses. There wasn’t a sound—only a confused murmur of voices, like the wind among aspen-trees, and the faint singing of a fiddle from a house away at the far end of the street. Even the dogs were quiet. I passed through the Diamond, down the long main street next the shore, and like Red Hanrahan of the stories, into “ that Celtic twilight, in which heaven and earth so mingle that each seems to have taken upon itself some shadow of the other’s beauty.”

### THE DARKNESS AND THE TIDE

“ What time o’ day is it ?” My interrogator was an old man I met the other evening in a loaney running down from the back of Lochros to the sands of Lochros Beag Bay, near where the old fish-pass used to be. I looked at my watch, and told him it was five-and-twenty past seven. “ Oh,” said he, “ is it so much as that ? The darkness and the tide’ll soon be coming in, then.”

### ERRIGAL

THE hill of Errigal climbs like a wave to the sky. A pennon of white cloud tosses on its carn. Its sides are dark. They slope precipitously. They are streaked and mottled here and there with patches of loose stone, bleached to a soft violet colour with rain. Not a leaf of grass, not a frond of fern roots on these patches. They are altogether bare. Loch Nacung, a cold spread of water, gleams at the bottom, white as a shield and green at the margin with sedge. Dunlewy chapel, with its round tower—a black silhouette in the ’tween-light —and the walls of the Poisoned Glen beyond.

### THE SORE FOOT

“ It’s a provident thing,” a tramp said to me the other day, “ to lay something by for the sore foot.”

### ASHERANCALLY

A ROAR, as of breakiug seas. We are approaching the open Atlantic, but though its salt is bitter on our lips, our view is obscured by sand-dunes. Then, as we round a bend in the road, the Fall of Asherancally breaks suddenly on us, tumbling through a gut in the mountainside—almost on to the road it seems. We stand under it. We watch the brown bulk of water dropping from the gut-head and dancing in foam on the rocks a hundred feet below. The roar is deafening. One might shout at the top of one’s voice, and yet not be heard. The air is iridescent with spindrift, which shines in the sun and sprays coolingly on our cheeks. We lean on the bridge parapet, watching and listening.

### ORANGE GALLASES

I CAME across an old man to-day out in Lochros—a shock-headed old fellow in shirt and trousers, carrying water from a spring well near the Cross, and a troop of dogs snapping at his

heels. “ You don’t seem to be popular with the dogs ?” says I, laughing. “ Oh, let them snap,” says he. “ It’s not me they’re snapping at, but my orange gallases !”

### THE HUMAN VOICE

THE human voice—what a wonder and mystery It is ! “ All power,” said Whitman, “ is folded in a great vocalism.” I spoke to a man to-day on the roadside, near Maghery. He was a poor, raggedy fellow, with a gaunt, unshaven chin and wild eyes, and a couple of barefooted children played about the mud at his feet. He answered me in a voice that *thrilled* me—deep, chest-full, resonant ; a voice, that had he been an educated man, might have won fame for him, as a politician, say, or a preacher, or an actor. And voices like his are by no means uncommon along the western seaboard of Ireland. Men address you on the road in that frank, human, comrade-like way of Irishmen, out of deep lungs and ringing larynxes that bring one back to the time when men were giants, and physique was the rule rather than the exception. In such voices one can imagine the Fenians to have talked one with the other, Fionn calling to Sgeolan, and Oisín chanting the divine fragments of song he dreamed in the intervals of war and vengery. Will Ireland ever recapture the heroic qualities—build personality, voice, gesture—or, as Whitman puts it : “ Litheness, majestic faces, clear eyes”—that were hers down to a comparatively late period, and in places have not quite died out even yet ? I believe she will.

### LOCH ALUINN

A GREY lock, lashed into foam by wind from nor’ westward, lapping unquietly among reeds that fringe its margin. Boulders everywhere—erratics from the Ice Age—bleached white with rain. Crotal growing in their interstices, wild-mint, purple orchises and the kingly osmunda fern. A strip of tilled land beyond—green corn, for the most part, and potatoes. Slieve a-Tooy in the distance, a blue shadowy bulk, crossed and recrossed by mist-wreaths chasing one another over it in rapid succession. A rainbow framing all.

### THE OPEN ROAD

THE open road, the sky over it, and the hills beyond. The hills beyond, those blue, ultimate hills ; the clouds that look like hills ; the mystery plucked out of them, and lo, the sea, stretching away into the vast—white-crested, grey, inscrutable—with a mirage dancing on its furthest verge !

[1] He had the Old Age Pension.

[2] Cuchulain, the Hound of Ulster, a contemporary of Conchubhair MacNeassa, who was—so tradition has it—born on the same night as Christ.

[3] In fact, a “ go of water” is a byword there—“ Many a girl met her man in a go of water !”

Mearing stones : leaves from my note-book on tramp in Donegal (1911)

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