

## Mythographic Ireland

### *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, And Superstitions of Ireland*

Lady Wilde  
(“*Speranza.*”)

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### *Ancient Legends of Ireland*

THE ancient legends of all nations of the world, on which from age to age the generations of man have been nurtured, bear so striking a resemblance to each other that we are led to believe there was once a period when the whole human family was of one creed and one language. But with increasing numbers came the necessity of dispersion ; and that ceaseless migration was commenced of the tribes of the earth from the Eastern cradle of their race which has now continued for thousands of years with undiminished activity.

From the beautiful Eden-land at the head of the Persian Gulf, where creeds and culture rose to life, the first migrations emanated, and were naturally directed along the line of the great rivers, by the Euphrates and the Tigris and southward by the Nile ; and there the first mighty cities of the world were built, and the first mighty kingdoms of the East began to send out colonies to take possession of the unknown silent world around them. From Persia, Assyria, and Egypt, to Greece and the Isles of the Sea, went forth the wandering tribes, carrying with them, as signs of their origin, broken fragments of the primal creed, and broken idioms of the primal tongue—those early pages in the history of the human race, eternal and indestructible, which hundreds of centuries have not been able to obliterate from the mind of man.

But as the early tribes diverged from the central parent stock, the creed and the language began to assume new forms, according as new habits of life and modes of thought were developed amongst the wandering people, by the influence of climate and the contemplation of new and striking natural phenomena in the lands where they found a resting-place or a home. Still, amongst all nations a basis remained of the primal creed and language, easily to be traced through all the mutations caused by circumstances in human thought, either by higher culture or by the debasement to which both language and symbol are subjected amongst rude and illiterate tribes.

To reconstruct the primal creed and language of humanity from these scattered and broken fragments, is the task which is now exciting so keenly the energies of the ardent and learned ethnographers of Europe ; as yet, indeed, with but small success as regards language, for not more, perhaps, than twenty words which the philologists consider may have belonged to the original tongue have been discovered ; that is, certain objects or ideas are found represented in all languages by the same words, and therefore the philologist concludes that these words must have been associated with the ideas from the earliest dawn of language ; and as the words express chiefly the relations of the human family to each other, they remained fixed in the minds of the wandering tribes, untouched and unchanged by all the diversities of their subsequent experience of life.

Meanwhile, in Europe there is diligent study of the ancient myths, legends, and traditions of the world, in order to extract from them that information respecting the early modes of thought prevalent amongst the primitive race, and also the lines of the first migrations, which

no other monuments of antiquity are so well able to give. Traditions, like rays of light, take their colour from the medium through which they pass ; but the scientific mythographic student knows how to eliminate the accidental addition from the true primal basis, which remains fixed and unchangeable ; and from the numerous myths and legends of the nations of the earth, which bear so striking a conformity to each other that they point to a common origin, he will be able to reconstruct the first articles of belief in the creed of humanity, and to pronounce almost with certainty upon the primal source of the lines of human life that now traverse the globe in all directions. This source of all life, creed, and culture now on earth, there is no reason to doubt, will be found in *Iran*, or Persia as we call it, and in the ancient legends and language of the great Iranian people, the head and noblest type of the Aryan races. Endowed with splendid physical beauty, noble intellect, and a rich, musical language, the Iranians had also a lofty sense of the relation between man and the spiritual world. They admitted no idols into their temples ; their God was the One Supreme Creator and Upholder of all things, whose symbol was the sun and the pure, elemental fire. But as the world grew older and more wicked the pure primal doctrines were obscured by human fancies, the symbol came to be worshipped in place of the God, and the debased idolatries of Babylon, Assyria, and the Canaanite nations were the result. Egypt—grave, wise, learned, mournful Egypt—retained most of the primal truth ; but truth was held by the priests as too precious for the crowd, and so they preserved it carefully for themselves and their own caste. They alone knew the ancient and cryptic meaning of the symbols ; the people were allowed only to see the outward and visible sign.

From Egypt, philosophy, culture, art, and religion came to Greece, but the Greeks moulded these splendid elements after their own fashion, and poured the radiance of beauty over the grave and gloomy mysticism of Egypt. Everything hideous, terrible, and revolting was banished from the Greek Mythology. The Greeks constructed no theory of a devil, and believed in no hell, as a distinct and eternal abode for the lost souls of men. The Greek gods were divinely beautiful, and each divinity in turn was ready to help the mortal that invoked him. The dead in Hades mourned their fate because they could no longer enjoy the glorious beauty of life, but no hard and chilling dogmas doomed them there to the tortures of eternal punishment. Earth, air, the heavens and the sea, the storms and sunshine, the forests and flowers and the purple grapes with which they crowned a god, were all to the Greek poet-mind the manifestations of an all-pervading spiritual power and life. A sublime Pantheism was their creed, that sees gods in everything, yet with one Supreme God over all. Freedom, beauty, art, light, and joy, were the elements of the Greek religion, while the Eternal Wisdom, the Great Athene of the Parthenon, was the peculiar and selected divinity of their own half divine race.

Meanwhile other branches of the primal Iranian stock were spreading over the savage central forests of Europe, where they laid the foundation of the great Teuton and Gothic races, the destined world-rulers ; but Nature to them was a gloomy and awful mother, and life seemed an endless warfare against the fierce and powerful elemental demons of frost and snow and darkness, by whom the beautiful Sun-god was slain, and who reigned triumphant in that fearful season when the earth was iron and the air was ice, and no beneficent God seemed near to help. Hideous idols imaged these unseen powers, who were propitiated by sanguinary rites ; and the men and the gods they fashioned were alike as fierce and cruel as the wild beasts of the forest, and the aspects of the savage nature around them.

Still the waves of human life kept rolling westward until they surged over all the lands and islands of the Great Sea, and the wandering mariners, seeking new homes, passed through the Pillars of Hercules out into the Western Ocean, and coasting along by the shores of Spain and France, founded nations that still bear the impress of their Eastern origin, and are known in

history as the Celtic race ; while the customs, usages, and traditions which their forefathers had learnt in Egypt or Greece were carefully preserved by them, and transmitted as heirlooms to the colonies they founded. From Spain the early mariners easily reached the verdant island of the West in which we Irish are more particularly interested. And here in our beautiful Ireland the last wave of the great Iranian migration finally settled. Further progress was impossible—the unknown ocean seemed to them the limits of the world. And thus the wanderers of the primal race, with their fragments of the ancient creed and mythic poet-lore, and their peculiar dialect of the ancient tongue, formed, as it were, a sediment here which still retains its peculiar affinity with the parent land—though the changes and chances of three thousand years have swept over the people, the legends, and the language. It is, therefore, in Ireland, above all, that the nature and origin of the primitive races of Europe should be studied. Even the form of the Celtic head shows a decided conformity to that of the Greek races, while it differs essentially from the Saxon and Gothic types. This is one of the many proofs in support of the theory that the Celtic people in their westward course to the Atlantic travelled by the coasts of the Mediterranean, as all along that line the same cranial formation is found. Philologists also affirm that the Irish language is nearer to Sanskrit than any other of the living and spoken languages of Europe ; while the legends and myths of Ireland can be readily traced to the far East, but have nothing in common with the fierce and weird superstitions of Northern mythology.

This study of legendary lore, as a foundation for the history of humanity, is now recognized as such an important branch of ethnology that a journal entirely devoted to comparative mythology has been recently started in Paris, to which all nations are invited to contribute—Sclaves, Teutons, and Celts, Irish legends being considered specially important, as containing more of the primitive elements than those of other Western nations. All other countries have been repeatedly overwhelmed by alien tribes and peoples and races, but the Irish have remained unchanged, and in place of adopting readily the usages of invaders they have shewn such remarkable powers of fascination that the invaders themselves became *Hibemicis ipsis Hiberniores*. The Danes held the east coast of Ireland for three hundred years, yet there is no trace of Thor or Odin or the Frost Giants, or of the Great World-serpent in Irish legend ; but if we go back in the history of the world to the beginning of things, when the Iranian people were the only teachers of humanity, we come upon the true ancient source of Irish legend, and find that the original materials have been but very slightly altered, while amongst other nations the ground-work has been overlaid with a dense palimpsest of their own devising, suggested by their peculiar local surroundings.

Amongst the earliest religious symbols of the world are the Tree, the Woman, and the Serpent—memories, no doubt, of the legend of Paradise ; and the reverence for certain sacred trees has prevailed in Persia from the most ancient times, and become diffused among all the Iranian nations. It was the custom in Iran to hang costly garments on the branches as votive offerings ; and it is recorded that Xerxes before going to battle invoked victory by the Sacred Tree, and hung jewels and rich robes on the boughs. And the poet Saadi narrates an anecdote concerning trees which has the true Oriental touch of mournful suggestion :—He was once, he says, the guest of a very rich old man who had a son remarkable for his beauty. One night the old man said to him, “ During my whole life I never had but this son. Near this place is a Sacred Tree to which men resort to offer up their petitions. Many nights at the foot of this tree I besought God until he bestowed on me this son.” Not long after Saadi overheard this young man say in a low voice to his friend, “ How happy should I be to know where that Sacred Tree grows, in order that I might implore God for the death of my father.”

The poorer class in Persia, not being able to make offerings of costly garments, are in the habit of tying bits of coloured stuffs on the boughs, and these rags are considered to have a

special virtue in curing diseases. The trees are often near a well or by a saint's grave, and are then looked upon as peculiarly sacred.

This account might have been written for Ireland, for the belief and the ceremonial are precisely similar, and are still found existing to this day both in *Iran* and in *Erin*. But all trees were not held sacred—only those that bore no eatable fruit that could nourish men ; a lingering memory of the tree of evil fruit may have caused this prejudice, while the Tree of Life was eagerly sought for, with its promised gift of immortality. In Persia the plane-tree was specially revered ; in Egypt, the palm ; in Greece, the wild olive ; and the oak amongst the Celtic nations. Sometimes small tapers were lit amongst the branches, to simulate by fire the presence of divinity. It is worthy of note, while on the subject of Irish and Iranian affinities, that the old Persian word for tree is *dar*, and the Irish call their sacred tree, the oak, *darragh*. [1]

The belief in a race of supernatural beings, midway between man and the Supreme God, beautiful and beneficent, a race that had never known the weight of human life, was also part of the creed of the Iranian people. They called them *Peris*, or *Feroüers* (fairies) ; and they have some pretty legends concerning the beautiful *Dukhtari Shah Periân* the “ Daughter of the King of the Fairies,” for a sight of whose beauty men pine away in vain desire, but if it is granted to them once to behold her, they die. Every nation believes in the existence of these mysterious spirits, with mystic and powerful influence over human life and actions, but each nation represents them differently, according to national habits and national surroundings. Thus, the Russians believe in the phantom of the Ukraine, a beautiful young girl robed in white, who meets the wanderer on the lonely snow steppes, and lulls him by her kisses into that fatal sleep from which he never more awakens. The legends of the Scandinavians, also, are all set in the framework of their own experiences ; the rending and crash of the ice is the stroke of the God Thor's hammer ; the rime is the beard of the Frost Giant ; and when Balder, their Sun-God, is beginning to die at Midsummer, they kindle pine-branches to light him on his downward path to hell ; and when he is returning to the upper world, after the winter solstice, they burn the Yule-log, and hang lights on the fir-trees to illuminate his upward path. These traditions are a remnant of the ancient sun worship, but the peasants who kindle the Baal fires at Midsummer, and the upper classes who light up the brilliant Christmas-tree, have forgotten the origin of the custom, though the world-old symbol and usage is preserved.

The *Sidhe*, or Fairies, of Ireland, still preserve all the gentle attributes of their ancient Persian race, for in the soft and equable climate of Erin there were no terrible manifestations of nature to be symbolized by new images ; and the genial, laughter-loving elves were in themselves the best and truest expression of Irish nature that could have been invented. The Fairies loved music and dancing and frolic ; and, above all things, to be let alone, and not to be interfered with as regarded their peculiar fairy habits, customs, and pastimes. They had also, like the Irish, a fine sense of the right and just, and a warm love for the liberal hand and kindly word. All the solitudes of the island were peopled by these bright, happy, beautiful beings and to the Irish nature, with its need of the spiritual, its love of the vague, mystic, dreamy, and supernatural, there was something irresistibly fascinating in the belief that gentle spirits were around, filled with sympathy for the mortal who suffered wrong or needed help. But the fairies were sometimes wilful and capricious as children, and took dire revenge if any one built over their fairy circles, or looked at them when combing their long yellow hair in the sunshine, or dancing in the woods, or floating on the lakes. Death was the penalty to all who approached too near, or pryed too curiously into the mysteries of nature.

To the Irish peasant earth and air were filled with these mysterious beings, half-loved, half-feared by them ; and therefore they were propitiated by flattery, and called “ the good

people,” as the Greeks call the dread goddesses “ the Eumenides.” Their voices were heard in the mountain echo, and their forms seen in the purple and golden mountain mist ; they whispered amidst the perfumed hawthorn branches ; the rush of the autumn leaves was the scamper of little elves—red, yellow, and brown—wind-driven, and dancing in their glee ; and the bending of the waving barley was caused by the flight of the Elf King and his Court across the fields. They danced with soundless feet, and their step was so light that the drops of dew they danced on only trembled, but did not break. The fairy music was low and sweet, “ blinding sweet,” like that of the great god Pan by the river ; they lived only on the nectar in the cups of the flowers, though in their fairy palaces sumptuous banquets were offered to the mortals they carried off—but woe to the mortal who tasted of fairy food ; to eat was fatal. All the evil in the world has come by eating ; if Eve had only resisted that apple our race might still be in Paradise. The Sidhe look with envy on the beautiful young human children, and steal them when they can ; and the children of a Sidhe and a mortal mother are reputed to grow up strong and powerful, but with evil and dangerous natures. There is also a belief that every seven years the fairies are obliged to deliver up a victim to the Evil One, and to save their own people they try to abduct some beautiful young mortal girl, and her they hand over to the Prince of Darkness.

Dogmatic religion and science have long since killed the mytho-poetic faculty in cultured Europe. It only exists now, naturally and instinctively, in children, poets, and the child-like races, like the Irish—simple, joyous, reverent, and unlettered, and who have remained unchanged for centuries, walled round by their language from the rest of Europe, through which separating veil science, culture, and the cold mockery of the sceptic have never yet penetrated.

Christianity was readily accepted by the Irish. The pathetic tale of the beautiful young Virgin-Mother and the Child-God, for central objects, touched all the deepest chords of feeling in the tender, loving, and sympathetic Irish heart. The legends of ancient times were not overthrown by it, however, but taken up and incorporated with the new Christian faith. The holy wells and the sacred trees remained, and were even made holier by association with a saint’s name. And to this day the old mythology holds its ground with a force and vitality untouched by any symptoms of weakness or decay. The Greeks, who are of the same original race as our people, rose through the influence of the highest culture to the fulness and perfectness of eternal youth ; but the Irish, without culture, are eternal children, with all the childlike instincts of superstition still strong in them, and capable of believing all things, because to doubt requires knowledge. They never, like the Greeks, attained to the conception of a race of beings nobler than themselves—men stronger and more gifted, with the immortal fire of a god in their veins ; women divinely beautiful, or divinely inspired ; but, also, the Irish never defaced the image of God in their hearts by infidelity or irreligion. One of the most beautiful and sublimely touching records in all human history is that of the unswerving devotion of the Irish people to their ancient faith, through persecutions and penal enactments more insulting and degrading than were ever inflicted in any other land by one Christian sect upon another.

With this peculiarly reverential nature it would be impossible to make the Irish a nation of sceptics, even if a whole legion of German Rationalists came amongst them to preach a crusade against all belief in the spiritual and the unseen. And the old traditions of their race have likewise taken firm hold in their hearts, because they are an artistic people, and require objects for their adoration and love, not mere abstractions to be accepted by their reason. And they are also a nation of poets ; the presence of God is ever near them, and the saints and angels, and the shadowy beings, of earth and air are perpetually drawing their minds, through mingled love and fear, to the infinite and invisible world. Probably not one tradition

or custom that had its origin in a religious belief has been lost in Ireland during the long course of ages since the first people from Eastern lands arrived and settled on our shores. The Baal fires are still lit at Midsummer, though no longer in honour of the sun, but of St. John ; and the peasants still make their cattle pass between two fires—not, indeed, as of old, in the name of Moloch, but of some patron saint. That all Irish legends point to the East for their origin, not to the North, is certain ; to a warm land, not one of icebergs, and thunder crashes of the rending of ice-bound rivers, but to a region where the shadow of trees, and a cool draught from the sparkling well were life-giving blessings. Well-worship could not have originated in a humid country like Ireland, where wells can be found at every step, and sky and land are ever heavy and saturated with moisture. It must have come from an Eastern people, wanderers in a dry and thirsty land, where the discovery of a well seemed like the interposition of an angel in man's behalf.

We are told also by the ancient chroniclers that serpent-worship once prevailed in Ireland, and that St. Patrick hewed down the serpent idol *Crom-Cruadh* (the great worm) and cast it into the Boyne (from whence arose the legend that St. Patrick banished all venomous things from the island). Now as the Irish never could have seen a serpent, none existing in Ireland, this worship must have come from the far East, where this beautiful and deadly creature is looked upon as the symbol of the Evil One, and worshipped and propitiated by votive offerings, as all evil things were in the early world, in the hope of turning away their evil hatred from man, and to induce them to shew mercy and pity ; just as the Egyptians propitiated the sacred crocodile by subtle flatteries and hung costly jewels in its ears. The Irish, indeed, do not seem to have originated any peculiar or national cultus. Their funeral ceremonies recall those of Egypt and Greece and other ancient Eastern climes, from whence they brought their customs of the Wake, the death chant, the mourning women, and the funeral games. Sparta, on the death of a king or great chief, they had a wake and “keen” not common to the rest of Greece, but which they said they learned from the Phœnicians ; and this peculiar usage bears a striking resemblance to the Irish practice. All the virtues of the dead were recited, and the Greek “Eleleu,” the same cry as the “Ul-lu-lu” of the Irish, was keened over the corpse by the chorus of hired mourning women. The custom of selecting women in place of men for the chorus of lamentation prevailed throughout all the ancient world, as if an open display of grief was thought beneath the dignity of man. It was Cassandra gave the keynote for the wail over Hector, and Helen took the lead in reciting praises to his honour. The death chants in Egypt, Arabia, and Abyssinia all bear a marked resemblance to the Irish ; indeed the mourning cry is the same in all, and the Egyptian lamentation “Hi-loo-loo ! Hi-loo-loo !” cried over the dead, was probably the original form of the Irish wail

The Greeks always endeavoured to lessen the terrors of death, and for this reason they established funeral games, and the funeral ceremonies took the form of a festival, where they ate and drank and poured libations of wine in honour of the dead. The Irish had also their funeral games and peculiar dances, when they threw off their upper garments, and holding hands in a circle, moved in a slow measure round a woman crouched in the centre, with her hands covering her face. Another singular part of the ceremony was the entrance of a woman wearing a cow's head and horns, as Io appears upon the scene in the Prometheus of Æschylus. This woman was probably meant to represent the horned or crescented moon, the antique Diana, the Goddess of Death. The custom of throwing off the garments no doubt originally signified the casting off the garment of the flesh. We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we carry nothing out. The soul must stand unveiled before God.

In the islands off the West Coast of Ireland, where the most ancient superstitions still exist, they have a strange custom. No funeral wail is allowed to be raised until three hours have elapsed from the moment of death, because, they say, the sound of the cries would hinder the

soul from speaking to God when it stands before Him, and waken up I the two great dogs that are watching for the souls of the dead in order that they may devour them—and the Lord of Heaven Himself cannot hinder them if once they waken. This tradition of watching by the dead in silence, while the soul stands before God, is a fine and solemn superstition, which must have had its origin amongst a people of intense faith in the invisible world, and is probably of great antiquity.

The sound of the Irish keen is wonderfully pathetic. No one could listen to the long-sustained minor wail of the “Ul-lu-lu” without strong emotion and even tears ; and once heard it can never be forgotten. Nor is there anything derogatory to grief in the idea of hired mourners ; on the contrary, it is a splendid tribute to the dead to order their praises to be recited publicly before the assembled friends ; while there is something indescribably impressive in the aspect of the mourning women crouched around the bier with shrouded heads, as they rock themselves to and fro and intone the solemn, ancient death-song with a measured cadence, sometimes rising to a piercing wail. They seem like weird and shadowy outlines of an old-world vision, and at once the imagination is carried back to the far-distant East, and the time when all these funeral symbols had a mysterious and awful meaning. Sometimes a wail of genuine and bitter grief interrupts the chant of the hired mourners. An Irish keen which was taken down from the lips of a bereaved mother some years ago, runs thus in the literal English version—

“ O women, look on me ! Look on me, women ! Have you ever seen any sorrow like mine ? Have you ever seen the like of me in my sorrow ? Arrah, then, my darling, my darling, ’tis your mother that calls you. How long you are sleeping. Do you see all the people round you, my darling, and I sorely weeping ? Arrah, what is this paleness on your face ? Sure there was no equal to it in Erin for beauty and fairness, and your hair was heavy as the wing of a raven, and your skin was whiter than the hand of a lady. Is it the stranger must carry me to my grave, and my son lying here ?”

This touching lament is so thoroughly Greek in form and sentiment that it might be taken for part of a chorus from the Hecuba of Euripides. Even the “Arrah” reminds one of a Greek word used frequently by the Greeks when commencing a sentence or asking a question, although the resemblance may be only superficial.

The tales and legends told by the peasants in the Irish vernacular are much more weird and strange, and have much more of the old-world colouring than the ordinary fairy tales narrated in English by the people, as may be seen by the following mythical story, translated from the Irish, and which is said to be a thousand years old :—

#### The Horned Women.

A RICH woman sat up late one night carding and preparing wool, while all the family and servants were asleep. Suddenly a knock was given at the door, and a voice called—

“ Open ! open !”

“ Who is there ?” said the woman of the house.

“ I am the Witch of the One Horn,” was answered.

The mistress, supposing that one of her neighbours had called and required assistance, opened the door, and a woman entered, having in her hand a pair of wool carders, and bearing a horn on her forehead, as if growing there. She sat down by the fire in silence, and began to card the wool with violent haste. Suddenly she paused and said aloud : “ Where are the women ? They delay too long.” Then a second knock came to the door, and a voice called as before—“ Open ! open !”

The mistress felt herself constrained to rise and open to the call, and immediately a second witch entered, having two horns on her forehead, and in her hand a wheel for spinning the wool.

“ Give me place,” she said ; “I am the Witch of the Two Horns,” and she began to spin as quick as lightning.

And so the knocks went on, and the call was heard, and the witches entered, until at last twelve women sat round the fire—the first with one horn, the last with twelve horns. And they carded the thread, and turned their spinning wheels, and wound and wove, all singing together an ancient rhyme, but no word did they speak to the mistress of the house. Strange to hear, and frightful to look upon were these twelve women, with their horns and their wheels ; and the mistress felt near to death, and she tried to rise that she might call for help, but she could not move, nor could she utter a word or a cry, for the spell of the witches was upon her.

Then one of them called to her in Irish and said—

“ Rise, woman, and make us a cake.”

Then the mistress searched for a vessel to bring water from the well that she might mix the meal and make the cake, but she could find none. And they said to her—

“ Take a sieve and bring water in it.”

And she took the sieve and went to the well ; but the water poured from it, and she could fetch none for the cake, and she sat down by the well and wept. Then a voice came by her and said—

“ Take yellow clay and moss and bind them together and plaster the sieve so that it will hold.”

This she did, and the sieve held the water for the cake. And the voice said again—

“ Return, and when thou comest to the north angle of the house, cry aloud three times and say, ‘ The mountain of the Fenian women and the sky over it is all on fire.’ ”

And she did so.

When the witches inside heard the call, a great and terrible cry broke from their lips, and they rushed forth with wild lamentations and shrieks, and fled away to Slievenamon, where was their chief abode. But the Spirit of the Well bade the mistress of the house to enter and prepare her home against the enchantments of the witches if they returned again.

And first, to break their spells, she sprinkled the water in which she had washed her child’s feet (the feet-water) outside the door on the threshold ; secondly, she took the cake



which the witches had made in her absence, of meal mixed with the blood drawn from the sleeping family. And she broke the cake in bits, and placed a bit in the mouth of each sleeper, and they were restored ; and she took the cloth they had woven and placed it half in and half out of the chest with the padlock ; and lastly, she secured the door with a great cross-beam fastened in the jambs, so that they could not enter. And having done these things she waited. Not long were the witches in coming back, and they raged and called for vengeance.

“ Open ! Open !” they screamed. “ Open, feet-water !”

“ I cannot,” said the feet-water, “ I am scattered on the ground and my path is down to the Lough.”

“ Open, open, wood and tree and beam !” they cried to the door.

“ I cannot,” said the door, “ for the beam is fixed in the jambs and I have no power to move.”

“ Open, open, cake that we have made and mingled with blood,” they cried again.

“ I cannot,” said the cake, “ for I am broken and bruised, and my blood is on the lips of the sleeping children.”

Then the witches rushed through the air with great cries, and fled back to Slievenamon, uttering strange curses on the Spirit of the Well, who had wished their ruin ; but the woman and the house were left in peace, and a mantle dropped by one of the witches in her flight was kept hung up by the mistress as a sign of the night’s awful contest ; and this mantle was in possession of the same family from generation to generation for five hundred years after.

#### The Bride’s Death-Song.

ON a lone island by the West Coast there dwelt an old fisherman and his daughter, and the man had power over the water spirits, and he taught his daughter the charms that bind them to obey.

One day a boat was driven on the shore, and in it was a young handsome gentleman, half dead from the cold and the wet. The old fisherman brought him home and revived him, and Eileen the daughter nursed and watched him. Naturally the two young people soon fell in love, and the gentleman told the girl he had a beautiful house on the mainland ready for her, with plenty of everything she could desire—silks to wear and gold to spend. So they were betrothed, and the wedding day was fixed. But Dermot, the lover, said he must first cross to the mainland and bring back his friends and relations to the wedding, as many as the boat would hold.

Eileen wept and prayed him not to leave, or at least to take her to steer the boat, for she knew there was danger coming, and she alone could have power over the evil spirits and over the waves and the winds. But she dared not tell the secret of the spell to Dermot or it would fail, and the charm be useless for ever after.

Dermot, however, only laughed at her fears, for the day was bright and clear, and he scorned all thought of danger. So he put off from the shore, and reached the mainland safely, and filled the boat with his friends to return to the island for the wedding. All went well till

they were within sight of the island, when suddenly a fierce gust of wind drove the boat on a rock, and it was upset, and all who were in it perished.

Eileen heard the cry of the drowning men as she stood watching on the beach, but could give no help. And she was sore grieved for her lover, and sang a funeral wail for him in Irish, which is still preserved by the people. Then she lay down and died, and the old man, her father, disappeared. And from that day no one has ever ventured to live on the island, for it is haunted by the spirit of Eileen. And the mournful music of her wail is still heard in the nights when the winds are strong and the waves beat upon the rocks where the drowned men lay dead.

The words of the song are very plaintive and simple, and may be translated literally—

“ I a virgin and a widow mourn for my lover.  
Never more will he kiss me on the lips ;  
The cold wave is his bridal bed,  
The cold wave is his wedding shroud.  
O love, my love, had you brought me in the boat  
My spirit and my spells would have saved from harm.  
For my power was strong over waves and wind,  
And the spirits of evil would have feared me.  
O love, my love, I go to meet you in heaven.  
I will ask God to let me see your face.  
If the fair angels give me back my lover,  
I will not envy the Almighty on His throne.”

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The three great sources of knowledge respecting the shrouded part of humanity are the language, the mythology, and the ancient monuments of a country.

The Irish race were never indebted to the written word. The learned class, the ollamhs, dwelt apart and kept their knowledge sacred. The people therefore lived entirely upon the traditions of their forefathers, blended with the new doctrines taught by Christianity ; so that popular legend, and these two elements remain indissolubly united to this day. The world, in fact, is a volume, a serial rather, going on for six thousand years, but of which the Irish peasant has scarcely yet turned the first page.

FRANCESCA SPERANZA WILDE.

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