

*THE IRISH POEMS OF
ALFRED PERCEVAL GRAVES
SONGS OF THE GAEL
A GAELIC STORY-TELLING*

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SONGS OF SUMMER AND WINTER

(From the early Irish)

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This volume contains all those of my poems written under the influence of the Gaelic Revival that I care to preserve. They comprise lays laments, lullabies and love songs and ballads, many of them reproducing the old Irish measures and rhyme-schemes besides a collection of narrative poems set in a Shenachus frame, the story-tellers having fore-gathered over a good turf fire at a Gaelic League meeting.

I have here to acknowledge my indebtedness to Boosey & Co. for the use of lyrics published to music in “Songs of Old Ireland,” “Irish Folk Songs,” and “Songs of Erin,” to Novello & Co. for like leave to republish songs and ballads in their musical collection of “Irish Songs and Ballads,” and finally to Messrs. Breitkopf & Haertel for permission to reprint all the words of “Roseen Dhu,” which they publish in musical form.

FRED PERCEVAL GRAVES.

RED BRANCH HOUSE,
WIMBLEDON, *6th May*, 1908.

PREFACE

Is there anyone who has any acquaintance with Anglo-Irish literature who is ignorant of the immortalizer of the never-to-be-forgotten Father O’Flynn. Who that has ever heard that brilliant song but has desired a closer acquaintance with the other lyrics of its author. For a lyrist by nature is Alfred Perceval Graves ; his verses seem to come to him unsought or inspired by the national music of which he is so enthusiastic a devotee. In this respect he resembles, to my thinkings Samuel Lover more than any of our Anglo-Irish poets. I never used to open Lover that I was not reminded more or less of Graves, nor opened Graves that I was not reminded of Lover.

But this was in time gone by. Of late years there has come over much of Graves’ poetry a change, and to my mind a highly significant and suggestive change, which differentiates the Songs of the Gael from his preceding poems—from its predecessors in a manner which is quite unmistakable. I call the change significant and suggestive because it marks, in a manner that all may read, the effect of the Gaelic Revival upon one who does not know Gaelic, but who, being an Irishman and a scholar, has felt bound to keep in touch with the modern development of his country and her literature. Indeed, this new note in Mr. Graves’ poetry follows, I should think, almost naturally from the surroundings into which his manifold services to the Irish race abroad has thrown him of recent years. His good work in promoting

the endowment and study of Irish in London, his long labours as Hon. Secretary of the Irish Literary Society in London, and his helpful correspondence with Irish Irelanders over the bilingual methods of other countries, must naturally have had their reflex action upon his own creative genius.

It is, then, both noteworthy and of good omen to find that our real Irish literature—that written in the Irish language (which has been for the first time made generally available through the efforts of the Gaelic League and others during the last few years)—has found a sympathetic response in the Anglo-Irish poetry of Mr. Graves. This is a note which we almost entirely miss in Lover, though he has caught it in a couple of lyrics—notably, “A Mother Came,” and “What would you do, Love?” In this volume, however, those who know will find suggestions of Irish Ireland poetry upon almost every page. Could anything be more Irish than this, both in execution and conception?—

*I'm left all alone like a stone at the side of the street.
With no kind “Good-day” on the way from the many I meet.
Still with looks cold and high they go by, not one brow now unbends.
None holds out his hand of the band of my fair-weather friends.*

Neither Callanan nor Mangan could have caught the Irish tone and conception more truly than this, The inimitable Roving Pedlar is just the Red Haired Man's Wife, with the two lines of refrain so cunningly thrown in. The Songs of Summer and Winter are close translations from Kuno Meyer's prose, excellently done into the original not wholly uniform metre—

*Dull red the fern ;
Shapes are shadows ;
Wild geese mourn
O'er misty meadows.*

but, as I said, those who know will recognise free versions of Irish songs in many pieces whose significance will be lost upon the English reader—as in “The Song of the Fairy King,” “Alone, all Alone,” “When We're Apart,” “I Will not Die for Love of Thee,” “The Dirge of Oscur,” &c.

Nor is the sly note of roguishness which so eminently distinguishes former volumes absent from this one either. It is another characteristic which Mr. Graves shares with Samuel Lover, and which is so pleasant an accompaniment in a lyricist to whom every significant occurrence, mood, feeling, action, idea, tone, passion, suggests a subject for his muse—

*Le parfum d'un lis pur, l'éclat d'une auréole
La dernière rumeur du four.
La plainte d'un ami qui s'afflige et console,
L'adieu mystérieux de l'heure qui s'envole,
Le doux hruit d'un haiser d'amour.*

I find, then, the present volume an altogether interesting and suggestive one, not only for itself but also for the way in which it shows how the modern Irish-Ireland renaissance has already affected, and may in the future much more affect, the tone of Anglo-Irish poetry.

DOUGLAS HYDE.

RATRA, FRENCHPARK,
CO. ROSCOMMON.

THE FIRST WINTER SONG

Take my tidings !
Stags contend ;
Snows descend—
Summer's end !

A chill wind raging ;
The sun low keeping,
Swift to set
O'er seas high sweeping.

Dull red the fern ;
Shapes are shadows ;
Wild geese mourn
O'er misty meadows.

Keen cold limes each weaker wing.
Icy times—
Such I sing !
Take my tidings !

THE FIRST SUMMER SONG

Beltane ! the Season's star !
Enchanting then the colours are ;
Blackbirds flute a full lay,
Be there but a dart of day.

The loud cuckoo, of dusky hue,
Cries, " Hail ! splendid hour !"
He's gone, the churl of surly brow,
Every bough is now a bower !

Summer calls ; the river falls ;
The swift wild steed to the pool is gone ;
The heath outspreads her tresses bright ;
Soft and white is the cannavaun.

Tremors take the heart of the deer ;
Smooth and clear runs the tide ;
Season when the ocean sleeps.
And blossom creeps the earth to hide.

Bees with puny strength upbear
Through the air their burden sweet ;
Cows, mire-footed, mount the hill,
Ants their fill of honey eat.

Forest harps music sound;
The sail gathers ! Peace profound !
Hue on hue the mountain takes,
In misty blue melt the lakes.

A strenuous bard, the corncrake calls ;
The virgin falls fill their urns,
To the panting pool descanting
Till the rushes' talk returns.

Light aloft dart the swallows !
Melody follows the green hill's round ;
The soft rich mast is burgeoning fast,
The frogs in chorus croak around.

Dark is the peat as the raven's coat,
The cuckoo's note bids welcome wide—
The speckled trout from the stream leaps out ;
Long and strong is the warrior's stride.

Man flourishes ; in fair young pride
At his side the maiden buds—
Perfect each plain, majestic, mute—
From crown to root perfect each wood.

The sunny splendour how delightful !
Winter frightful far is fled.
With flower each orchard now is white full,
Such joyous peace has summer shed !

Amid the meadows, among bright petals,
Softly settles a flight of stares ;
Richly around the green field rustles,
Through and through it a white stream fares.

Wild longing is on you for racing horses,
The level courses the ranked lines hold,
And such bright shafts through the blue air shiver
Each flag in the river is flashing gold.

A little importunate one upspringing
Shrills and shrills his tremulous lay !
The lark it is, clear tidings singing
Of May of the colours, enchanting May !

THE SECOND WINTER SONG

Cold, cold until Doom !
The storm goes gathering gloom ;
Each flashing furrow a stream ;
A full lake every ford in the coom.

Sea large are the scowling lakes,
Thin sleet-spears swell to an host.
Light rains clash as shields on the coast ;
Like a white wether's fleece fall the flakes.

The roadside pools are as ponds,
Each moor like a forest uplifts,
No shelter the bird-flock finds,
Breech high the stark snow drifts.

Swift frost has the ways in his hold,
Keen the strife around Colt's standing stone,
And the tempest so stretches her fold
That none can cry aught but " cold" !

THE SECOND SUMMER SONG

Summer's here ! free, balm-blowing ;
Down the brown wood verdure's glowing ;
Slim, nimble deer are leaping ;
Smooth the path of seals is showing.

Cuckoos, echoing to each other.
Soothe to blest, restful slumber ;
Gentle birds glance on the hill-side.
And swift grey stags in number.

Restless run the deer—behind them
Pours the curled pack, tuneful baying ;
From end to end laughs the strand,
Where the excited sea is spraying.

By the playful breezes stirred
Drum Dail's oak tops dimly welter ;
While the noble, hornless herd
Seek in Cuan wood a shelter.

Every herb begins to sprout ;
The oakwood heights with green abound ;
Summer's in, winter's out !
Twisted hollies wound the hound.

Loud the blackbird pipes his lay,
The live wood's heir from May to May ;
The excited sea is lulled to sleep,
In air the speckled salmon leap.

The sun is laughing over the land.
To the brood of cares the back of my hand !
Hounds bark, tryst the deer,
Ravens flourish, summer's here !

SONGS OF THE SIDHE

THE KING'S CAVE

Rash Son, return ! Yon shores that dazzle
With glowing pleasaunce, glittering plain,
And crystal keep is not Hy-Brazil,
But some false phantom of the main.
And yon bright band thy vision meeting,
Their warbled welcome hither fleeting—
Oh, trust not to their siren greeting,
Oh, wave not, wave not back again !
But veil thine eyes from their entreating.
And list not their enchanting strain !

My Sovran Sire, no cruel vision
Compels my curragh o'er the deep !
Yea, have we seen the land Elysian,
Hy-Brazil, out of Ocean leap.
None ever knew it smiling nearer,
Or hearkened yet, a blessed hearer,
Its Virgin Chorus chanting clearer
O'er lulled Atlantic's cradled sleep.
That strain again ! What psalm sincerer
From Angel harps to Earth could sweep.

With hand to brow the Monarch hoary
Stood rapt upon the Western ray,
Till in a gulf of golden glory
The bright bark melted o'er the bay.
Then cracked the glass of calm asunder !
Then roared the cave the sea cliff under !
Then sprang to shore, with hoofs of thunder,
Mannanan's steeds of ghostly grey.
Yet ere the shock, a cry of wonder,
"Hy-Brazil here !" rose far away.

O LOVE, 'TIS A CALM, STARRY NIGHT

O love, 'tis a calm, starry night ;
No breath stirs the leaves below ;
My steed is at the door
And my ship is by the shore,
Then come down to me, my darling, and away, away
we'll go ;
Then come down, and far, and far away we'll go.

Your guardian is sleeping above.
Base churl, with his taunt and blow !

The house is all at rest ;
Only you that I love best
Like a busy mouse keep rustling to and fro,
To make ready still keep rustling to and fro.

Now soft you come stealing down the stair !
My heart it is all in a glow ;
O, stay your silent tears,
O, cease your maiden fears !
For the world's wealth I'd never from you go, or work
you woe !
For the world's wealth how could I use you so.

OVER HERE

Oh, the praties they are small.
Over here, over here !
Oh, the praties they are small.
Over here !
Oh, the praties they are small,
And we dig them in the fall,
And we eat them coats and all,
Full of fear, full of fear.

Oh, I wish we all were geese,
Night and morn, night and morn,
Oh, I wish we all were geese,
Night and mom !
Oh, I wish we all were geese,
For they live and die in peace,
Till the hour of their decease,
Stuffing corn, stuffing corn.

Oh, we're down into the dust,
Over here, over here !
Oh, we're down into the dust,
Over here !
Oh, we're down into the dust,
But the God in Whom we trust,
Will yet give us crumb for crust,
Over here, over here !

REMEMBER THE POOR

Oh ! remember the poor when your fortune is sure,
And acre to acre you join ;
Oh ! remember the poor, though but slender your store,
And you ne'er can go gallant and fine.
Oh ! remember the poor when they cry at your door

In the raging rain and blast ;
Call them in, cheer them up with the bite and the sup,
Till they leave you their blessing at last.

The red fox has his lair, and each bird of the air
With the night settles warm in his nest.
But the King who laid down His celestial crown
For our sakes, He had nowhere to rest.
Oh ! the poor were forgot till their pitiful lot
He bowed. Himself to endure ;
If your souls ye would make, for His Heavenly sake,
Oh ! remember, remember the poor.

A LULLABY

I've found my bonny babe a nest
On Slumber Tree ;
I'll rock you there to rosy rest,
Astore machree !
Oh, lulla lo ! sing all the leaves
On Slumber Tree ;
Till everything that hurts or grieves
Afar must flee.

I'd put my pretty child to float
Away from me,
Within the new moon's silver boat
On Slumber Sea.
And when your starry sail is o'er,
From Slumber Sea,
My precious one, you'll step to shore
On Mother's knee.

LIKE A STONE IN THE STREET

I'm left all alone like a stone at the side of the street.
With no kind " good day" on the way from the many I
meet,
Still with looks cold and high they go by, not one brow
now unbends,
None holds out his hand of the band of my fair-weather
friends.

They helped me to spend to its end all my fine shining
store,
They drank to my health and my wealth until both were
no more.
And now they are off with a scoff as they leave me behind,
" When you've ate the rich fruit, under foot with the
bare, bitter rind."

There's rest deep and still on yon hill by our old church's
side.

Where I laid you long ago, to my woe, my young one
year's bride.
Then, ochone ! for relief from my grief into madness I
flew.
Would to God ere that day in the clay I'd been covered
with you !

THE SONGS ERIN SINGS

I've heard the lark's cry thrill the sky o'er the meadows
of Lusk,
And the first joyous gush of the thrush from Adare's
April wood.
At thy lone music's spell, Philomel, magic stricken I've
stood,
When in Espan afar star on star trembled out of the dusk.

While Dunkerron's blue dove murmured love, 'neath
her nest I have sighed,
And by mazy Culdaff with a laugh mocked the cuckoo's
refrain,
Derrycarn's dusky bird I have heard piping joy hard
by pain.
And the swan's last lament sobbing sent over Moyle's
mystic tide.

Yet as bright shadows pass from the glass of the darkening
lake.
As the rose's rapt sigh must die, when the zephyr is
stilled ;
In oblivion grey sleeps each lay that those birds ever
trilled.
But the songs Erin sings from her strings shall immortally
wake.

ALONE, ALL ALONE

When westward I'm called,
'Tis not east I'd be going.
Should I sup the salt wave
With the pure spring to hand,
Or prefer the base weed
To the richest rose blowing,
Or not follow my own love
The first through the land ?

Oh, my heart is a fountain
Of sorrow unspoken,
A virgin nut-cluster
Untimely down torn !
And, oh, but my heart

Flutters bleeding and broken,
Like a bird beating out
Its wild life on a thorn.

His cheek is the hue
Of the blackberry blossom,
And blackberry blue
His dark tresses above ;
And I'm cryin' without,
Who should lie in his bosom,
And I doubt and I doubt
If he's true to his love.

'Tis time I should part you,
Proud, hurrying City ;
For your tongues they cut sharper
By far than your stone,
And your hearts than that same
Are more hardened to pity ;
So my love I'll go seeking,
Alone, all alone !

A LAMENT

Dark, dark drives the tempest o'er Erin to-day,
And rends the green leaf from the writhing oak spray ;
Thus struggling forlorn under Heaven's blackest cope,
Heart tortured we mourn the crushed crown of our hope.

Through foemen unnumber'd, in proud undismay,
To Freedom's pure heights he still won us the way ;
Till planting elate on the proud peak our flag.
The fierce bolt of fate dashed him dead from the crag.

Moan, hollow wind, moan ! weep, weep, heavy cloud,
Sob for sob, tear for tear, for the chief in his shroud !
Ochone ! and ochoro ! our Heart, Hand and Head,
To our black, bitter sorrow on the bier you lie dead !

OISEEN'S LAMENT FOR OSCUR

I sought my own son over Gowra's black field.
Where the host of the Fians was shattered,
Where fell all our mighty ones, and helmet and shield
O'er the red earth lay shamefully scattered.
I sought my own Oscur and my proud heart upheaped.
As at last on a lone ridge I found him.
His stern hand still clinging to the sword that had reaped
Swathe on swathe of the dead foes around him.
He held out his arms, though the drear mist of death
Had begun o'er his bright eyes to gather.
"I thank God," he faltered with his failing breath,
"That thou still art unhurt, oh, my father."

Then down, down I knelt by my heart's dearest one,
All else beside him forgetting ;
Till Oscur's proud spirit passed forth like the sun
In a red sea of glory setting.

THE FLIGHT OF THE EARLS

To other shores across the sea
We speed with swelling sail;
Yet still there lingers on our lee
A phantom Innisfail.
Oh, fear not, fear not, gentle ghost,
Your sons shall turn untrue !
Though fain to fly your lovely coast,
They leave their hearts with you.

As slowly into distance dim
Your shadow sinks and dies,
So o'er the ocean's utmost rim
Another realm shall rise ;
New hills shall swell, new vales expand,
New rivers winding flow.
But could we for a foster land
Your mother love forego ?

Shall mighty Espan's martial praise
Our patriot pulsed still.
And o'er your memory's fervent rays
For ever cast a chill ?
Oh no ! we live for your relief,
Till, home from alien earth,
We share the smile that gilds your grief,
The tear that gems your mirth.

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