



# THE ISLES OF FLAME

A  
ROMANCE OF THE INNER HEBRIDES  
IN THE DAYS OF COLUMBA

BY  
M. E. M. DONALDSON

Illustrations in Colour by Isabel Bonus

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*“Propter hoc in ignibus glorificate Dominum: in insulis maris nomen  
Domini, Dei Israel.”—ISAIAH xxiv. 15*

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TO  
MY FRIENDS  
M. H. AND I. M.  
IN MEMORY OF  
MANY DAYS OF DELIGHT SPENT TOGETHER  
AMONGST THE ISLES OF THE  
INNER HEBRIDES



## PREFACE

VENERATION for the days that are past and the men of old time, if it be a consistent sentiment, involves a reverent handling of any subject associated with their history. Departure from well-attested facts, or falsity of setting, alike bear witness to a mind unattuned to a living past, and thus to one rendered incapable of presenting a convincing or sympathetic picture of it. Those in whom the historic sense is in any way developed, feel moreover, that violence done in the treatment of historic subjects is in the nature of a sacrilege. Lack of a scrupulous regard for fidelity to historic truth inflicts very real wounds upon those who can project their spirit into bygone ages which, in the realms of an instructed imagination, are re-created, becoming as truly living as the present, with friends as dear and intimate as those still in the flesh.

It is for this reason that the sight of some ancient fane, after it has been subjected to the devastating process miscalled "restoration"—as, alas, in the case of Iona's famous shrine—arouses an intense indignation. It is not only the gross act of vandalism perpetrated on the actual fabric, which is responsible for this feeling, but much more the irreparable destruction of that subtle

atmosphere with its underlying sense of continuity with the past, which is perhaps the best intangible heritage which our ancient buildings have to offer us.

On a par with these works of destruction, and, at root, arising from the same lack of historic perceptions, are the "historical" romances which violate history to such an extent as to convey an utterly erroneous impression of the periods of which they are supposed to give a picture. Perhaps this is more notably the case when English writers, advertising, at Scotland's expense, their ignorance of Scotland and things Scottish on every page, essay novels purporting to deal with Scottish history. The majority of these only succeed in making the student of history writhe, and the hot temper of the Celt rise to white heat at the audacity of the Sassenach.

Therefore a Scot would try to do better: at least in making the attempt there is the consolation that it is scarcely possible to do worse.

An enthusiasm for history; an endeavour to assimilate the past told in its archæological remains; and a whole-hearted devotion to the beloved Isles of which these pages speak, suggested this romance of the days of the co-Apostle of Scotland.

As regards fidelity to history, the author believes that no more serious departure from ascertainable facts than some few anachronisms of date can be charged against the book. \* Fictitious characters,

\* To correct this, a short chronology precedes the list of the modern names of the islands mentioned in this romance.

such as Korna the Queen, and Drostan her little step-son, of course have been introduced ; and in accordance with such further license as a writer of historical romance may legitimately take, in some places historical characters take part in scenes unrecorded in history.

The main points of the tale, however, those upon which it is based, *i.e.*, the Conversion of Brude and the Martyrdom of Donnan and his Companions, are facts of history. By a careful study of the great authority for this period, Adamnan's *Life of S. Columba*, it is hoped that the character of that great Saint has been portrayed with some fidelity to life. In some instances, as in the case of Columba's conversation with Brude on page 62, and the preaching of Donnan on page 180, extracts from the writings of such Fathers as S. Augustine of Hippo and S. Cyril of Jerusalem have been adapted, as affording a better idea than could any original writing, of such words as might have been spoken under such circumstances in this age. Similarly, the office of Holy Baptism found in the Stowe Missal, as the only Celtic Baptismal Order extant, is that upon which the scene in Chapter VI. is based.

The author desires to acknowledge a debt of gratitude to Mr. Ludovic MacL. Mann, F.S.A. Scot., who, with characteristic kindness, and despite his busy life, was good enough to spare time for the discussion of some archæological points which are still moot questions or in dispute

Beyond this personal sense of obligation, there is the wider one under which he has placed all who take any interest in Scottish Pre-History by the wonderful Prehistoric section of the Palace of History at the recent Scottish Exhibition, for which section he was responsible. Whilst thus making acknowledgment of this availing of the labours and research of Mr. Mann, he must not be held responsible for any inadvertent archæological inexactitudes which may be discoverable in this romance.

As far as the literary side of the book is concerned, the author would place on record boundless indebtedness to the second of the two friends to whom the volume is dedicated. Whilst to the first is due its inception, without the encouragement and invaluable co-operation of the second, the romance would never have been written.

The artist also has spared no pains to give a faithful presentment of the people and their surroundings; and Mr. Mann, who saw four of the original pictures, commended them for this quality. Thus readers, in the pictures, may rely on looking upon something more authentic than the portrayal of that Columban episode which, by shewing, with a peculiarly cruel irony, the Celtic monks with Roman tonsure, disgraced one of the "pageants" of the late Scottish Exhibition. In the last illustration, Miss Bonus has chosen to depict a stone church, like that of Columban date whose remains are still found upon Eileach an Naoimh. This is



archæologically interesting as shewing the persistency of Cyclopean architecture from pre-historic times. The outline of the cover design is that of the peaks of Rum as seen from Eigg.

Incidents, such as that of the Ordination of Aidan as King, of the crane, and of Erc the Robber, are taken from the aforementioned biography of the great Abbat of Iona. With regard to the first-named event, some readers may be interested to know that the stone of the Kings of Dalriada is still to be seen at Dunadd in Crinan, Argyllshire; and that it was the late Marquess of Bute who, in his *Scottish Coronations*, suggested as not improbable that the civil ceremonies at Dunadd may have followed upon the consecration of Aidan on Iona—the first recorded sacring of a King in Britain.

The story of the water-horse in Chapter XX. is still told upon Eigg.

For the rest, the pages of such standard authorities as Reeves in his edition of Adamnan in the series of *Scottish Historians*; Skene's *Celtic Scotland*; Anderson's *Rhind Lectures on Scottish Archæology*; and Warren's *Liturgy and Ritual of the Celtic Church*, have been laid under contribution in an attempt to secure an accuracy as exact as possible in the presentment of the common life, dwellings, and ecclesiastical customs of the period. This will account for the absence of all such ancient myths as still find credence in the popular mind—the supposition that S. Columba

was a Culdee, and similar errors traceable to Hector Boece.

It may be well to leave no doubt in the minds of any reader as to the identity of the places mentioned in the following pages, therefore a list of them is given on the succeeding page. For the benefit of those unacquainted with Latin, chapter and verse of the Psalms, etc., quoted, are also given there, preceded by the number of the page upon which they occur.

M. E. M. DONALDSON.

SLIGACHAN INN,  
ISLE OF SKYE,  
*July, 1912.*

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

“Then the Queen knew that her worst fear was come to pass,” - - - - -	<i>Frontispiece</i>
“A child catching at his habit, Columba paused to fondle him,” - - - - -	<i>page 57</i>
“The voice of the mighty spirit of the mountains spoke in my ear,” - - - - -	„ 78
“A child cried to me for deliverance from shadowy arms outstretched to claim him,”	„ 97
“Watching the little birds, called by the brethren the servants of Bride,” - -	„ 132
“Without the door of the Sanctuary, Donnan . . . . . stood calmly waiting, - -	„ 183



## CHRONOLOGY

- 563.—May 12, Whitsun Eve: S. Columba lands on Iona.  
 565.—Conversion of King Brude, at Inverness.  
 574.—Ordination of Aidan on Iona as King of Dalriada.  
 583.—Death of Brude.  
 597.—Death of S. Columba on Iona.  
 617.—April 17, Easter Day (?): Martyrdom of S. Donnan and  
       his Companions on Eigg.
- 

## THE ISLES OF FLAME

THE SCIAN ISLE	-	-	-	-	-	-	Skye.
THE NESSIAN FORTRESS	-	-	-	-	-	-	Inverness.
THE MALEAN ISLE (OR MALEA)	-	-	-	-	-	-	Mull.
THE ISLE OF STAVES	-	-	-	-	-	-	Staffa.
HII	-	-	-	-	-	-	Iona.
COLOSO	-	-	-	-	-	-	Colonsay.
HINBA	-	-	-	{ Eileach an Naoimh, one of the Isles of the Sea (Garvelloch Isles).			
THE EGEAN ISLE (OR EGEA)	-	-	-	-	-	-	Eigg.
RUIM	-	-	-	-	-	-	Rum.

## KEY TO QUOTATIONS IN LATIN

Page 28—Psalm ii. 8.

„ 34—Psalm xi. 2.

„ 35—Psalm xi. (5, A.V. ; 6, P.B. version).

„ 54—Psalm iii. (7, A.V. ; 6, P.B. version).

„ 56—S. Luke i.

„ 61—Psalm xlv. 1.

„ 63-64—“Dost thou renounce Satan ?”

“I renounce.”

“And all his works ?”

“I renounce.”

„ 64—Psalm xlii. 1, 2.

„ 65—“Dost thou believe in God the Father Almighty ?”

“I believe.”

“And dost thou believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, born and suffered ?”

“I believe.”

“And dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit, the Catholic Church, the Remission of sins, the Resurrection of the flesh ?”

“I believe.”

„ 66—Psalm cxix. 105.

„ 98—“All ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord.”

„ 127—Psalm xcvi.

„ 158—“Therefore, with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven . . . Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory !”

„ 159—“Draw nigh and take the Body of the Lord ;  
And drink the holy Blood for you outpoured.”

„ 168—Psalm xvi. (6, A.V. ; 7, P.B. version).

„ 186—S. Luke ii. 29, 30, 32.

„ 197—Psalm xxi. 1, 2.

## PROLOGUE

“O AEGIR, god of the sea, a sign, a sign!”

Prone on the beach lay the captive, bound hand and foot, straining at his thongs in fierce effort to reach the water's edge.

“I, son of the foam, have worshipped thee in storm and calm, in light and darkness: grant now what I ask of thee, O Aegir, throned on the billows!”

Heedless of the pain, the captive put forth his might till blood told where the leathern thongs had bitten into his flesh.

A few spans only separated him from his desire; but even as he paused in his efforts, the distance lengthened, for the tide stole silently out to sea.

Undaunted, the captive strained after more than the caress of cooling waters.

“Aegir, deal kindly with me: give me a token! One touch from thy lips to-night, and 'twill be thou who will bear me to Valhalla to-morrow!”

But the tide stole relentlessly out to sea.

Thus mocked, the captive railed aloud against Aegir, and with furious effort threw himself on his back to turn his gaze upward.

“All-Father Odin, god of the burning eye, a sign, a sign!”

Clouds hid the face of the dying sun, and the mountains in grey armour stood coldly aloof.

"Hear, Father Odin!" cried the captive again.

As if in answer to the cry, the sun burst forth from his prison, in red anger lapping the mountains in flame till they glowed like some grim fortress alight.

"Odin has answered! Not by water but by fire shall I gain Valhalla!" and, satisfied, the captive's head fell over on the beach.

Slowly the anger died out of the sun's glow, and soft clouds descending, spread a soothing mantle over the sky. Then, their work done, gently as they had come, they withdrew, leaving the angry peaks calmed and bathed in a flood of tender light.

## CHAPTER I

WITH eyes gleaming and fangs afoam, two giant hounds, scenting prey ahead, bounded over the moorland to the shore. Heedless of the group of tribesmen gathered there, on they sped, in unerring course towards the place where some helpless victims of war awaited their fate. Close in the dogs' wake ran two men, panting and affrighted, for behind them thundered a voice in tones of wrathful command:—

“Back, hounds! Freulin! Rornal! Back, I say!”

At sound of that voice, the two men trembled. Dark as the wings of the night, her hair wind-tossed, and in her eyes the glint of anger, a woman leaped from her horse alongside of them. With the freedom of a savage, she sprang at the wretches, seized a shoulder of each man with a grip of iron, and dashed them against the rocks.

“Weaklings!” cried she, “are my hounds to be free at will? To your feet, slaves! Call the dogs off the prisoners! They die not yet, but ere they go to their doom, ye shall have met yours!”

“Queen Korna is not wont to grudge her favourite hounds their prey, nor yet to shew pity for the captive!” called out a voice in playful raillery. The woman turned to face a man stal-



wart and strong as a pine of the forest, bearing high on his shoulder a little lad.

"Wouldst have our pastime spoiled for the hounds' pleasure?" demanded she. "See yonder waves, how they leap, hung'ring for the captive Norsemen! Shall they go unsatisfied because, forsooth, the dogs would rend them? Come, Brude, set the boy on my horse."

"Woman, 'tis for the King to command, and for Korna to obey!" flashed forth Brude, striding onward with the boy still on his shoulder. "Let us to Briochan yonder, and learn what manner of spell he hath laid on the prisoners."

The Queen snatched angrily at her horse's mane, and leaped upon his back. "Ever the boy!" she muttered between her teeth, and in a passion of jealousy struck her horse fiercely.

In temper curbless as his mistress, the steed reared, and careering wildly, sought to throw her. Brude, accustomed to Korna's conflicts with man and beast alike, kept on his path unmoved. The lad, however, lacked not interest in the doings of his step-mother. He had no fear for her, for was not she the Queen, and next in power to the King his father? As he looked on the struggle, his only thought was a wonder.

"Father, does the horse know that he carries a queen?"

"He will know it right soon, Drostan my son, for who but a queen could subdue such a steed as he?"

"Father, are kings and queens always more powerful than other folk?" questioned little Drostan again.

"Yea, truly, my son, that are they. But look, Briochan there guards the spoils of our latest victory, and now we go to yield them to the waves!"

As Brude came near the water's edge, with one strong arm he raised Drostan from his shoulder to the summit of a rocky knoll, and with the bound of a deer, sprang beside him, beckoning the Queen to share their throne. But for the nonce, Korna heeded him not. Triumphant in her contest with the horse, she alighted on the shore, and received from her trembling slaves the hounds they once more held in leash. The strength of the two men was scarce sufficient to hold the great animals from the prostrate captives, but in the presence of their mistress the dogs were quieted and fawned in clumsy devotion at her feet. With a passing caress for them, Korna commanded four of the tribesmen to seize the keepers of the hounds.

"There, in the pathway of the tide, with their heads above ground, bury them upright! And as ye see death steal upon them, think of your own fate should ye also fail in your service!"

Her command obeyed, Korna ascended to her place beside the King, whence he was holding converse with Briochan.

Small and spare was that dread *druí*, yet by reason of his mystic powers even Korna quailed when his keen eyes were set upon her.

"Send the Norsemen, bound hand and foot, through the waters tethered to the sterns of yonder boats," spake Briochan, "and the waves being our allies shall make an end of them!"

The King rose to address his people, and at his rising the dull faces of the tribesmen lighted up in fierce expectancy.

"Hearken, my warriors! We are come to prove what manner of oarsmen ye be, and with yonder Norsemen each tethered to the stern of a boat, shall ye shew your skill. First strive ye for possession of the captives, then let each victor race out to yonder rocky islet with his burden. Four by four shall ye put out to sea, and the man who returns in shortest time bearing his captive lifeless, shall receive for reward my royal bracelets. Speed ye now to the contest!"

Like the rush of tempest, over rocks and boulders, the tribesmen every one bore down upon the prostrate Norsemen. In their wild eagerness they hustled and fought each with the other, and Brude, his little son on his knee, laughed good-naturedly. Drostan in excitement clapped his hands; but Korna, despite her love for such scenes, sat erect and still, darkly frowning in the jealousy which gnawed at her heart. And as the snake fastens his glittering eyes on his prey, so Briochan with folded arms stood by and watched the Queen.

Out of the struggling mass of tribesmen, battling for possession of the captives, there came forth



first one and then another with his helpless burden. Some were half-borne, half-dragged along the rough shore: others, in stronger hands, were lifted bodily and laid at the water's edge. At the royal signal, four boats roughly hollowed out of great tree trunks, were launched, and to the stern of each, a Norseman was tied, an ell for the length of his tether. A second signal, and amid the yelling of the tribesmen left behind on the beach, the boats sped away. In their wake the sea, churned by the frantic struggles of the captives to keep their heads above water, shewed a white trail on its emerald surface. At last, one sturdy Pict rounded the islet, but turning too swiftly, his helpless victim caught in a jutting rock, and in a moment, both captor and captive were striving together in the waves. Loud in derision rose hoarse cries from the Picts ashore. Some amongst those furthest from the sea, fancied they heard other voices from a distance mingle with their own, and turned in surprise; but speedily forgot their wonderment in the excitement of the first boat's landing. Briochan came quickly down from beside the King to see if the captives were indeed lifeless, that so the prize might be justly claimed; but when the mangled body was drawn up on the beach, there was no need for his office.

The sound of distant voices was now growing clearer, and soon caught the King's quick ear. Even while he questioned Korna as to its meaning, the strain swelled, and looking in the direction

whence it came, Brude beheld a little band of strange men wending their way towards him. At this sight, the King put Drostan from his knee, setting him behind the Queen, and himself stood up, the better to discover what manner of men these were, and if they came as enemies. The captives and the racing all forgotten, Korna, like a lioness ready for the spring, eagerly caught at the King's shoulder.

"Thinkest thou they are come to give battle, Brude?"

The King was scanning the advance of twelve men in long white habits. Their leader was distinguished by his hood thrown back, and shewed a shaven strip stretching from ear to ear across his fair hair. This and also the men's strange attire puzzled Brude, who had never seen their like before.

"What thinks Briochan?" asked the King, and anxious for the safety of Drostan, charged one of the *druadh* to convey the boy out of sight where no evil eye might fall upon him.

The voices of the twelve, chanting in an unknown tongue, stirred a strange hatred within the heart of the *druí*. As he answered the King his face was darkly evil, and in his eyes the look of one who foresees a coming doom.

"The thunder of war is in the winds, O King—war to the end of all things: war in which thou shalt face fighting fiercer than any thou hast yet known! In spirit I hear the mountains echo the

din of conflict, and through their high peaks rolls the clash of arms!"

Like sparks struck from flint, the dark eyes of Korna flashed.

"Thy words go home to my soul, O Briochan! For the strong and the brave the joy of battle is life itself; yet are such men as these indeed worthy of our weapons?"

Fierce of aspect and rudely armed, the Pictish warriors grouped themselves beneath the royal knoll, and threatened the further advance of the strangers.

But ere the King could give the word to fall upon the little company, a strong voice smote plainly upon the ears of the tribesmen in their own tongue—

"Peace, we come in peace!"

Full of proud scorn followed the words of Korna.

"Said I not so? These are not men but a feebler folk whom it were best to disdain. Let us back to the races: our captives——"

"Woman, be silent!" commanded Brude, and with his hand made sign for the Picts to hold back.

His form tall and upright, his broad face aglow and bronzed as leaves in autumn; his eyes bright with the soft light of the stars, the leader of the unknown company halted before the King. Raising his arm to the sky, this stranger cleft the air with a mystic sign, and awe fell upon all,

save, perchance, Korna and Briochan. By his side, close as a shadow, stood a smaller man, who, in the Pictish tongue, echoed the words which, clear as the sound of running water, fell from his master's lips.

"Give ear to me, O King! In spirit was I shewn a dark sea in a darkened land. Above the roar of ocean I heard the cries of those in torment mingle with shouts of glee; and I am come to still the uproar on the sea and to lighten the darkness in the land. Lord King, give answer, what mean those still forms on the shore?"

"Take heed lest this man cast an evil spell upon thee!" whispered Briochan.

But the King, fascinated by the stranger's wondrous voice, and seeing naught of sinister import in his aspect, paid no heed to the *druí*, and answered—

"Those be some Norsemen whom we overcame in war, and whom the waves have overcome in play! Others yet await a contest with the billows, and thou shalt see the sport, if it be that for which thou art come hither."

"Nay, O King, we come not to see life taken, but to see it given, and we ask at thy hands the lives of these captives!"

"If thou wouldst have the spoils of war, go, do battle for thyself, white stranger, and leave us to our contests! They be over stirring for the eyes of weaklings!" burst forth the Queen, shaking off the hand the King laid upon her.



But Brude questioned—

“Who art thou that comest to me with so bold a request?”

“Columba, warrior of Christ—mightiest of Kings! I come with weapons more powerful than any of which thou hast knowledge; and thus armed, I ask of thee, O King, the lives of these captives!”

“Hear the man boast of his evil powers, my son! Take heed, if not for thyself, for the boy Drostan,” urged Briochan in the King’s ear.

“I have already seen to the lad’s safety,” returned Brude; then spoke again with Columba.

“Thou wouldst have the Norsemen? Nay, they are ours by right, and they shall have the same chance of life as did their fellows!”

“And that chance of life is certain death, bold stranger, if thou wouldst know the issue!” spoke out the Queen from the store of her malice.

“The greatest issue truly,” answered Columba gravely. “But if thou wilt work thine own will, O King, yet grant me this: should the captives return to the shore with life, let them be my portion!”

“Ha, ha, list to the madman!” laughed Korna, and Briochan echoed her scorn.

The King laughed too, but this time he answered, not unmindful of the warnings of the *druí*—

“If thou dost mean no evil, thy request is granted. But vain is thy hope, for the waves are

clamourous, and their prey cannot escape them. Harken to their hungry roar!"

Once more the boats put out, each with its trailing burden : again the shouts of the Picts rent the air, and this time eyes were turned in mockery on Columba and his fellow fools. They, with heads bowed and hands clasped, silently awaited the issue. Then out of the boat that first touched the land, the rower sprang, and dragging his vessel clear of the waves, awaited with the sure confidence of the victor the appearance of his victim's body. It came. The head moved ; the lips parted in a sound which reached the ears of the amazed beholders, gazing open-mouthed at so great a marvel.

"*Postula a me, et dabo tibi Gentes hereditatem tuam!*" cried Columba, in a voice of mighty exultation.

The second boat grounded, and the third and fourth together, but of them all not one brought a dead man to shore. As each victim came in view, Columba sang for joy of heart, and more radiant still grew his countenance as he and his fellows gently tended the captives, severing their bonds, chafing their cold and stiffened limbs, and binding the wounds wherewith they were so sorely gashed.

Columba, bending over one victim, heard a murmur—

"By fire I go to the Hall of the Chosen—thou hast no power over me, O Aegir of the waves!"

But the monk, understanding not the Norse tongue, knew not what he said.

Meanwhile the King, amazed at this token of power wielded by Columba, marvelled at it in a strange silence that Briochan, for all his desire, dared not break.

Upon the Queen, too, sat a spell. From her face the look of hate raised by Columba had vanished, and with eyes that had a new light in them she gazed on another of the stranger band. The man that thus found favour in her sight was noble as Columba in bearing, but of other fashion. He was shorter of stature and pale of face, and his eyes, blue-grey, looked out into a land of far distances. As she gazed on him, the seed of a new passion was sown in the heart of Korna, and she loved Donnan, the mystic of Hii.

## CHAPTER II

THAT night Briochan sought Korna in secret, for in his mind he had a deep-laid scheme. With the craft of a fox, he purposed working upon the Queen for his own ends, and first he would have her prevail with the King to set out towards the royal fortress on the banks of the distant Ness. As the snow melts before the sun, so Briochan felt that his hold on Brude would wane before the influence of Columba, whose wonder-working had already made impress upon the King. In this fashion the *druì* spoke to Korna, but the Queen, with her thoughts on the dark-haired monk of whom she would fain see more, laughed lightly at Briochan's fears.

"Art thou—chief *druì*, deeply learned in every art—afraid of twelve stranger weaklings?"

"This I know, O Queen, that in the presence of Columba, my power is as naught."

"Hie thee back to thy schooling then, Briochan, and we will seek out some other of the *druadh* whose spirit is less craven than thine!"

"Woman, thou talk'st idly, as one who is blind might speak. Follow, and I will show thee somewhat to give thee pause."

Through the dark forest Briochan led the way, where, under the open sky, the moorland, breathing



the scents of night, stretched to the sea, whence echoed the plaint of lone birds. On walked the Queen and her guide, till they reached a bare space where was a rocky hollow. Stooping, the *druí* picked up an adder and held it out, stiff and motionless, in the palm of his hand. But Korna only laughed shortly and asked—

“Is this what thou hast brought me to see? Thinkest thou I have never seen one of my favourites dead before?”

“Thou wilt never again see one alive on this isle; such is the might of the man whose power thou thinkest it well to deride!”

“Is this truth?” questioned Korna. “And yet I marvel not so exceedingly, for as soon as I had looked on the man I felt an enmity towards him. In malice he has dared to destroy the playthings whereon my heart is most set; but he shall suffer for his daring for—Ha, look now, Briochan, what light is that dancing yonder in the darkness?”

“That, O Queen, is the evil eye of Columba seeking us out! Were I not here to warn thee, thou wouldst have trod in the wake of that light to thine undoing. Whoso follows that sinister eye, goes to his doom; for it lures men to the haunt of the marshland demon, who, with a strong arm, drags his victims down to the depths of the peaty bog.”

“Would that I might see the demon thus seize his prey!” murmured Korna, as with fascinated eye she watched the treacherous flicker of light.

“Had we but brought one of the tribesmen with us, I would have charged him to pursue the eye of evil. Ha, ha! it had given us new excitement to watch his struggles in the bog!”

But Briochan had other things in mind. Well he knew the jealousy which consumed the childless Queen concerning her little step-son. Korna, who would ever be first, could not brook that this child should rank supreme in the King's favour. Yet she knew that Brude's love for his first wife still lived, and that her child, Drostan, was his heart's best treasure. In this knowledge, the chief *druí* spoke—

“List to me, O Queen; I would ask of thee a question. Art thou content to be a thing of no account in the eyes of Brude? Assuredly, if Columba gain his favour, thy day is over, for no woman may as much as set foot upon the isle where he holds sway.”

“How knowest thou this, Briochan?” was the Queen's fierce question.

“Have I not heard of this man and his spells in the voice of rushing rivers, have not the demons of the forest spoken in mine ear, and do not they ever speak truth to me? If thou wouldst not have the boy Drostan usurp thy rightful place, harken to my words while yet there is time, O Queen!”

Not darker were the clouds brooding over the mountains than was the face of Korna as she listened to the *druí*.

"Is it by reason of the coming of Columba that Brude would linger on this accursed isle? Tell me, then, how we may move the King to hasten back to the banks of the Ness?"

It was well for Briochan that passion dulled the Queen's vision, else in the clear light of the moon she had marked the triumph in his look as he answered—

"Let Brude but fear that Columba hath cast an evil spell on the boy Drostan, and thou shalt persuade him to flee this isle for the royal fastness."

"Didst thou not but this past day urge the same fear upon the King to none effect?"

"But how if the boy be taken with a sickness, will not the King then fear for him?" the *druí* was quick to urge.

Visions of revenge filled Korna, and her thoughts flew far ahead while the *druí* was speaking.

"Thou wilt then give me poison for the boy?" she questioned eagerly, clutching Briochan's wrist.

Very exultant was she at the prospect of the child whom Brude so loved being stricken with the evil eye and brought low. Once rid of him, she could gain the place she coveted, and rejoice in undisputed sway.

"Aye, thou shalt have a potion of which, if the boy drink, he shall be fever-tossed, and in his fever he will rave of the spirits that torment him. Then shalt thou tell the King it is the work of the man Columba, and so long as the boy is on the Scian Isle, so long will the monk exert his baleful

influence. Thus will Brude be brought to flee these strangers, and their power over us will be ended."

The Queen giving eager assent to this plan, Briochan left her, and went to prepare the draught which was to work such ill on little Drostan. As Korna, resting amongst the heather, looked out on the night, she was for a time held in the great silence. But not for long, for her eyes were quick to mark a figure on the coast-line, standing out like some rock against the sky. Instantly she was on the alert, knowing it from the outline to be one of the band of monks. Was she beholding an incantation over the sea: was it, mayhap, even Columba himself raising evil spirits from the ocean bed? The woman who had no fear for the blackness of the forest nor for the eerie cries of night, feared neither any mortal. She would discover what this monk did, and, lithe as a serpent, made her way, snakelike, through the heather and over the short grass towards him. All the while the man stood looking out over the sea, and as Korna approached him, the brightness of the northern summer night shewed clearly the pale features of the mystic Donnan. He was reciting the psalm *In Domino confido*, and as Korna lay still some hundred paces distant, the strange words fell upon her ear—

*"Quoniam ecce peccatores intenderunt arcum, paraverunt sagittas suas in pharetra, ut sagittent in obscuro rectos corde."*



"What dost thou here, monk of the grey eyes, casting forth thy words to wander out over the ocean and be lost? Throw ye thus a spell over the waters in the dead of night when the *druadh* sleep and may not oppose thee?"

The woman, radiant in the moonlight with the primeval beauty of the savage, stood before the monk, who turned and looked upon her without start or surprise.

"*Dominus interrogat justum et impium: qui autem diligit iniquitatem, odit animam suam,*" was all his answer.

He gazed far out over the sea, and as the moon made for herself a pathway of light over the dark waters, so his spirit cleft a way through the darkness beyond.

"Thy words are strange to me, O son of another land! I would have thee speak with me in mine own tongue. Tell me, I pray thee, whence hath this man Columba his power? Dwells it in the sea, and dost thou here invoke it for thyself?"

"Woman, 'tis but with thy voice that thou desirest to know of Columba's power: thy heart desires not his GOD. When thou hast laid aside thy passions and put away thy thoughts of evil, then go thou to Columba, and he will shew thee of a GOD from Whom all power cometh."

"Thy meaning is as strange to me as of late were thy words in an unknown tongue, yet would I fain have answer from thee rather than from Columba, for him I hate!"

“I will hold no converse with thee, woman, for thine eyes tell of the evil that lurks within thee! Get thee to Columba, and from him, perchance, thou shalt learn wisdom.”

Korna, in a manner new to her untamed nature, still pleaded with him, heeding not that he continued his office regardless of her presence.

“Monk of the dark-wreathed brow, hearken to me! A Queen who never before hath waited on any man’s pleasure now awaiteth thine!”

So soft her tone, so caressing her voice, Brude would scarce have known her for his Queen. But Donnan, with hands clasped and eyes raised towards the sky, heard her not. At last the Queen, perceiving that here was something which she could not fathom, stole away and left Donnan alone in the world of spirit.

## CHAPTER III

THE wind blew in great gusts, threatening a storm, as a scattered company slowly made its way through a country where there was but faint trace of any track. In front rode Brude the King by the side of a rude litter of skins, whereon lay a little restless figure ; while behind echoed the tramp of the horses of Korna and Briochan, who were riding together on their way to the Nessian fortress.

In the rear straggled the tribesmen, some in charge of the Queen's dogs, others dragging boats over the broken ground which lay between the loch they had just quitted and the next stretch of water. The main body of the Picts chattered freely amongst themselves in their uncouth tongue, but Brude, with his ever watchful eye on the litter, was silent, and those about him passed but few words.

Soon the company came to a halt on the shore of a loch, and, as the foremost of them waited for the launching of the boats, there came a distant growl of thunder. Dismounting, the King tenderly lifted his little son, who, in the grip of a strange fever, had been tossing fretfully under his covering of ox-hide. The rain was now falling heavily, but little Drostan, folded in his father's arms, felt none

of it. Again the thunder gave utterance to its anger and the lightning flashed out, but, heedless of all save his boy, and motionless as the hills around him, Brude stood waiting to embark.

Then it was that Briochan slipped from his horse and went quickly to the King's side. The Queen was once more frowning darkly at the sight of little Drostan so tenderly guarded in his father's arms. Her favourite hounds came leaping about her feet, but in her present mood she rebuffed them with blows.

Meanwhile, Briochan was speaking in the King's ear—

“Did I not warn thee, O King, of the evil eye of Columba, and has it not come to pass even as I foretold? Yet the hour has now come when it lies in my power to conquer the demon which, at the bidding of this monk, hath seized upon thy son. Give me the boy that I may save him : he and I will into yonder boat together.”

So full of authority was the voice of the *druí*, and with such confidence did he deliver himself, that, without a word, the anxious King yielded his little son, still murmuring fretfully, into Briochan's arms.

The storm waged warfare rudely against the boats as they struggled through the water. In the foremost, Briochan, holding the boy in his left arm, kept his eye on the sullen mass of clouds above. Brude, watching closely, saw him grasp in his right hand a small drinking-vessel, and, as



the next flash cleft the sky, dart the bowl quickly into the water where the lightning had struck. Bringing up the cup again, Briochan put it to Drostan's lips, and the King, as his boat drew alongside, could see how eagerly his little son drank therefrom.

"All will now go well with the boy!" the *druí* called. "In the water I gave Drostan to drink, have I imprisoned the power of the air, who will strive with and kill the evil demon in him. See, already the child is at rest!"

The King started up, and his eyes were gladdened by the sight of his little son sleeping peacefully in Briochan's arms.

"If thou hast indeed restored my son to health, thou shalt ask what treasure thou wilt, and it shall be thine!" he cried, the joy in his strong voice carrying clearly through the tempest.

The boats were now all afloat, and together with the horses swimming by their side, gallantly breasted their way through the angry waters. In the storm, a fierce war was raging. The wind contested the sway of the rain, and the blast swept its rival over the face of the loch, roaring mightily in its victory. But high above the noise of wind and rain rose the clash of cloud opposing cloud, and the hills re-echoed the roar from peak to peak.

Against this warfare of nature, Korna was powerless. Vainly she urged her serfs to bring her boat alongside that of Briochan, but though she wrenched the oars from out their hands to ply them herself,

for once her strength counted as naught. The whirling blast mocked her and the thunder roared a defiance against which her strength was as the strength of a babe new-born.

Briochan marked her efforts, and rejoiced that they were fruitless, for it was in his crafty mind to turn to good account the triumph of the storm-spirits over the Queen.

Not till the Picts had landed on the last stage of their journey, and Drostan, still soundly sleeping, had been restored to his father's arms, did Korna get speech with the *druí*. He had foreseen this encounter, and his 'cunning was prepared to oppose her fury.

The storm was slackening now, but on the crests of the hills mists were gathering and creeping slowly downward into the valley. Grasping Briochan's bridle, the Queen drew his horse apart from the body of the company, and when out of hearing, savagely questioned him—

"Art mad or a fool?" she demanded, "that when the boy was like to die thou must needs revive him?"

"An wert thou thyself not mad of jealousy, O Queen, thou wouldst see that the way of safety lies in the boy's recovery!"

"In restoring to Brude the light of his eyes, well thou knowest that thou dost darken the path of Korna! Were the child Drostan for ever out of sight, who but I would stand next in power to the King? Shall I for ever rank but second in

the Kingdom—I, who am born to rule? Must I yield obedience to Brude, and when the darkness hath devoured him, shall Drostan rise up in his place, and likewise command me? Nay, false *druí*, I tell thee, nay: the day must come when Korna shall rule alone!”

“Calm thyself, Queen Korna, and summon thy reason to consider this thing. Had the boy died ——”

“Had the boy died,” broke in Korna, “not only had my path been clear, but the spell cast by Columba over the King had been shattered for ever! Thinkest thou Brude would give further ear to the man who had taken the life of his darling?”

“The spell of Columba *is* broken for ever, for the spirits whom our fathers worshipped have triumphed over the white monks! At thy bidding did I strike the boy down, but at bidding of these mighty spirits did I restore him, for they would make use of him. Wilt quarrel with the powers of the earth themselves, rash Queen?”

“A curse on them an they set their will against mine!”

“If thou forswear them, thou sealest thy fate. In these spirits alone is our hope. What but their might stands between us and the spells of these white monks, who would suck the manhood out of our warriors, and leave grown men weak as babes? Wouldst have it thus?”

“What reck I of the spirits of their power?” returned Korna sullenly.

The mist was fast advancing towards them as Briochan in stern tones made answer—

“Dost thou dare question the boundless sway of those mighty powers, impious woman? Art thou both blind and deaf? Who but they raised the mighty storm through which we have fared only a short space since? In that tempest of what account was thy power, O Queen? Did not mine own eyes behold thee, helpless as a leaf in the arms of the river spirit? Did he not hold thee in his strong grasp that thou shouldst not hinder the boy's recovery? Sawest thou not the angry flash of his eye in the clouds, his hands swaying the waters; heardst thou not his voice triumphing in thine ear? And now that the spirits enfold us in the trail of their garments, wouldst have further token from them?”

Narrowly Briochan watched the Queen. Under the spell of his piercing eye, her spirit quailed, and she felt a strange fear fasten upon her. Subdued, her defiant glance fell, and she had no answer to make.

Briochan laid his hand upon her.

“Swear—swear by this grey robe of the spirits, to yield me thine obedience!” he commanded, as one who might not be gainsaid.

As though in a trance, Korna answered—

“I swear!”

Then, in silence, continuing the journey to the royal fortress, the Queen and the chief *druí* passed out of sight and were lost in the wide realm of the reigning mist.



## CHAPTER IV

**I**N the pale dawn of the morning after the homecoming of the Picts, Korna, attended by two tribesmen and her hounds, went forth to hunt. Tracks, but lately made by wild boar, led towards the river, and following these, with noses to the ground, the hounds were soon in full cry. On the river bank the dogs gave tongue; and the Queen, hard in their wake, saw that they held at bay a young boar. Though small in size, he was not lacking in spirit; and with blood-shot eyes and fierce tusks he charged the hounds, inflicting many a jagged wound upon them. The Queen called off her dogs, desiring to attack the boar single-handed, but maddened by their hurts, the animals still made furious onslaught on their enemy. Korna commanded her attendants to drag the hounds away, and stood impatiently watching the men's vain attempts to obey.

Then on a sudden she herself, the light of battle in her eye, with raised spear plunged into the conflict. Forcing the dogs to give way, she was ready to strike home as the boar turned furiously upon her. But at that moment, one of the infuriated dogs, no longer to be held in check, overthrew the Queen. Like a flash the boar was upon her and ripped open her arm. Passionate



with pain and anger, and regardless of her streaming wound, the Queen sprang to her feet. The fierce animal made another onslaught, but she, with savage ferocity drove her spear into a vital part. Not until the dogs had torn the body of the boar to pieces did Korna seek the water's edge to bathe her wound, having given command the while that the hound which had caused her fall should be soundly beaten.

Seated on a boulder by the river-side she laved her arm, striving to staunch the bleeding. Hard by, some conies were at play among the sun-kissed bracken, and Korna laughed to see an eagle swoop to earth and the next moment soar aloft with one of the little creatures quivering in his talons.

Seeing naught further of interest, the Queen's thoughts wandered to the pale-faced monk with the far-seeing eyes, and she sighed, pondering how she might in secret return to the Scian Isle in pursuit of him. Musing thus, her keen eyes wandered over the country, and to her amaze, away in the distance, beheld a white company, which could be none other than that of the monks. Their faces were plainly set towards the royal fortress, and the Queen, though her heart leapt for joy at the unexpected nearness of Donnan, was yet enraged that Columba should thus have followed after Brude, whom she had thought removed for ever from his influence.

"His power must be mighty indeed," mused Korna, "else would he fear to beard in his

stronghold a King who of a surety would wreak vengeance upon the man whom he suspected of casting an evil spell on his son." But as her thoughts turned again to the monk she loved, her face softened, and in place of planning how she might thwart Columba, she meditated how Donnan might be parted from his companions and become hers.

"I may yet persuade him to tell me of the spirit whence Columba hath his power. Then would I summon it to do my bidding to the undoing of Briochan, for the *druí* hath dealt falsely with me."

Thus musing, a cunning artifice came to her mind, and she called one of the Picts who, with his fellow, was intent on cutting away the tusks of the dead boar.

"Seest thou yonder the company of white monks? Haste thee after them with all speed! Say to them that one, who lies sore-wounded by the river-side, hath bidden thee bring thither the monk, Donnan, who so skilfully tended the hurts of the captives on the Scian Isle. See to it that thou bring'st no other than Donnan, but let him not know 'tis the Queen who asketh for him. Now haste thee for thy life!"

Fleet of foot, the Pict sped off to do the bidding of his mistress, whereupon she hailed the second man. Him she charged to gain the fortress before the monks, that the King might be warned of their advent, and be in readiness to guard against the coming of Columba and his spells.

Left alone on the edge of the wood by the river-side, as she held her arm under the water, Korna, her softened mood in tune with Nature, heard voices all around her.

"Wouldst defy the demon of the forest?" rustled the trees, "beware!"

"Fool, fool, thou wilt not gain the heart of Donnan!" rippled the river mockingly.

"Thou hast drunk of my blood, O River, and yet wouldst thou wound me afresh? Hold thy peace!"

Aloud Korna rebuked the spirits of the waters, but the river laughed on. And the Queen, withdrawing her arm from its soothing caress, allowed the wound to bleed freely on the moss.

"If he but see tokens of my sufferings, his heart may be touched," she mused, and leaning against a boulder, eagerly waited the coming of the mystic.

Soon the sound of rustling in the bracken made her heart beat fast, but closing her eyes, she feigned faintness; and not till Donnan had torn a strip from his own vesture and was binding up the wound, did she open her dark eyes upon him. No word passed his lips, but he looked on the Queen compassionately, as though in pity for more than the gaping wound on her arm.

"I thank thee for thy service, monk of the eyes that dream! Thy skill shall be well rewarded; yet say, what brings thee into this far country?"

“I am come at the bidding of One Who overruleth all lands, and my reward is in the Habitations of Light where He dwelleth.”

“It is the man Columba of whom thou speakest?”

“Nay, but of Him, God and Man, Lord of all things that were, and are, and ever shall be.”

“If thou hast a new spirit, other than our spirits, I would fain hear of Him, for the spirits whom our fathers worshipped have mocked me and set me at naught, and I would be avenged upon them.”

“O woman, in such mind thou canst not discern aught of the things of the true God!”

“Yet tell me how I may know of them, for having seen the wonders wrought by the company on the Scian Isle, I would learn thy secret! Know, too, that Briochan counsels Brude against the monks, and what hope of conquest hast thou so long as Briochan hath the King’s ear?”

“Briochan availeth naught, for his power is not from above.”

The Queen’s face was aglow with unwonted light, and she was forgetful that her voice should be feeble as she answered—

“Listen, O servant of this new God! If thou wouldst serve thy God, come, dwell among us to teach us the things of which thou hast spoken! I am Queen, mighty and resistless, and even the King shall not oppose what I have ordained. Briochan shall be brought low, yea, even to the ground, and in his place shalt thou stand. Think, then, what might will be thine! Greater shalt



thou be than thy master Columba, and if indeed thy God prevail over the mighty spirits of whom we have knowledge, then thou shalt have power such as none other *druì* hath had before thee! Thou shalt command even Korna, the Queen—What! Will not these things suffice to tempt thee—what more wouldst thou have?”

“Woman, in vain dost thou offer vanities, seeing that I come not to bear authority but to serve in lowliness. But if thou wilt put away thy pride and humble thyself as a little child, thou shalt find understanding.”

Korna's wrath, surging up on the instant, overleapt her love, and she cried—

“Who art thou, pale monk, that darest bid a Queen so to abase herself? 'Tis meet for serfs to be lowly, but I the Queen bear rule over the land, and I will tread under foot any who will dare oppose me!”

“Truly, O Queen, dost thou rule over many servants, yet thyself art slave to many passions. I, too, am servant, but of One Who left the Throne of Godhead that He might become the Servant of all men. In His Name, I adjure thee, cast out the evil spirit that is within thee! I will have thee in remembrance that so it may come to pass, for until thou art of other mind, thou dost but defy Him Who fashioned thee for Himself. Think on what I have spoken, and the Lord be merciful unto thee!”

Before the Queen could make reply, Donnan



had left her, disappearing ere she realised that he was indeed gone.

Darkly brooding over her failure to tempt the monk to her service, Korna wandered on by the riverside, and again its voice of mocking laughter caught her ear.

“Ha, ha, what said I, Queen Korna? Fool, fool!”

As the Queen turned away she was quick to retort—

“Not so, O spirit of the river: too soon thou mockest! If Donnan cometh not by choice, by force shall he come! No fool am I!”

Plunging into the forest, brushing aside all that barred her path, and regardless of her wounded arm, Korna the Queen defiantly made her way back to the fortress.

## CHAPTER V

IN the little town within the outer walls which encircled the royal fortress, the inhabitants were grouped together, occupied in divers pursuits. Some half-score children played around the dry-built stone dwellings, and several were painting rude figures of animals on each other's chests, after the manner of their elders. In another quarter, men fresh from the chase quarrelled amongst themselves as they flayed the spoil. Others fought for the skins, to dress them in rough fashion with the rounded stones made for such purpose. The children who hovered around, played with the dogs, casting amongst them whatever morsels of flesh fell from the huntsmen's knives; and laughing gleefully as the hungry animals fought for possession.

But by far the largest number of the Picts was grouped about a roaring fire where a deer was being roasted. Two men turned the spit, and the rest, licking their lips as the pleasant odour of the roasting meat assailed their nostrils, greedily eyed the carcase. Ere it was wholly cooked, they seized on it, and fed hungrily. Tribesmen from a further distance soon hastened to join them, eager to fight for a share in the meal, and after the

rending of the limbs, the carcase itself was hacked to pieces.

As the Picts thus feasted, gnawing the meat from the bones, and devouring whatever portion of the animal they had torn away, a man, hot and panting, dashed through the open doorway of the outer wall, demanding to know where he might find the King.

"He is within," answered a tribesman, jerking his head in the direction of the tower.

Then through the portals of the broch itself sped the breathless runner. In the large centre space before him, were gathered the chief men of war, some sharpening their weapons, others smoothing staves with bored stones which they worked up and down the wood, the rest idly conversing with the *druadh*. A little apart sat the King, fitting a spearhead to a staff. Hastening to throw himself at the royal feet, the tribesman gave his message—

"Mighty chief, the Queen hath bidden me tell thee that the white strangers from the Scian Isle draw nigh!"

As the man spoke, the King ceased work upon his weapon and his face darkened; whilst sensible of some unusual stir, Briochan came forth from one of the cells in the massive walls of the broch.

"Hath this man brought ill tidings to thine ear, my son?" he questioned.

"Columba and his company are at hand," replied the King shortly, plucking at his beard as he pondered what he should do.

Briochan's eye flashed fury.

"Sayest thou that the man who strove to compass the death of Drostan approaches again? As thou lovest the lad, avenge thyself on him! An thou hast a care for thy son's safety, send him to the further eirde-house while there is yet time."

"The boy is safe here within his cell. A woman in whom I have trust, watches over him, and I myself am here to guard him."

"What availeth thy guard against the powers of evil when they be near the boy?"

"Can they who wrought such wonders on the Scian Isle indeed be workers of evil?" mused the King, half to himself, for he was strangely drawn to the monks.

"They have bewitched thee, Brude, if thou hast forgotten the ill the chief of them wrought on Drostan!"

"I would I might be satisfied 'twas indeed he who brought about the boy's illness, seeing that he hath never looked upon the child, and knoweth not indeed that I have a son."

"Did not I, thy faithful *druí*, tell thee, O King, what was revealed to me in the roar of the sea? Was it not thus I learnt that it was none other than the man Columba who delivered the boy into the hand of ruthless demons? Was it not I who recovered the boy, and restored him in health to thee? Is then thy reward but to doubt me when I counsel wisely? Wilt thou indeed welcome those who would rob thee of thine only son?"



Nay, bar the gates after thou hast sent the boy into a place of safety beyond the range of the tall monk's evil eye, and come, set these pestilent strangers at defiance!"

The King answered nothing, but straightway gave command that Drostan, in charge of his nurse and with sufficient escort, should be conveyed to a cunningly-contrived underground dwelling some distance from the fortress. And as the woman bore forth the sleeping child in her arms, the King, with eyes following his little son, addressed himself to the messenger who awaited his bidding—

"Go, tell the men at the outer defences that, after their young lord Drostan hath passed through, they bar the gate, and mount guard against the coming of the monks, who may not enter here."

Then turning to Briochan, the King said—

"Let us to the walls of the tower that we may watch for them. As thou hast before defeated the spells of Columba, so now thy greater power shall prevail over him yet again."

The King and the *druí* ascended the summit of the broch, where their outlook ranged wide over a fair and pleasant country, through which coursed the Ness, a broad stream of silver. Neither was slow to espy the small white company, which was now but little distant from the fortress. With hatred in his eyes, Briochan spoke—

"Let us be for ever rid of these monks! Send forth thy tribesmen at the gate to slay them!"



But to this counsel the King would not lend ear. With Drostan safely bestowed, for himself he feared no harm which might be wrought by the white strangers, despite their spells. The little company of eleven, headed by the towering figure of Columba, staff in hand, advanced unmolested, and halted before the outer gate.

"Be thou my mouthpiece, Briochan, and bid the monks begone!" commanded the King.

Eager to defy the men he so hated, the *druí* shouted across the distance—

"In the name of Brude the King, I command that ye betake yourselves hence with all speed, lest our warriors fall upon and utterly destroy you!"

And back came the answer through the mouth of Cruithne the interpreter—

"Peace, we come in peace!"

"What have strong men armed to do with peace? The door is closed against you, and it is war! Once more I bid you depart, and trouble us no more with your evil spells!"

For answer, Columba with calm dignity of bearing and uplifted face fearlessly strode to the closed door, and making the sign of the Cross, cried aloud—

*"Exurge Domine, salvum me fac, Deus meus!"*

Then in sure confidence, laying his hand against the gate that hindered his entry, lo, the bar that held it was broken in twain, and the door gave way before him! After he and his little following

had passed through the ranks of the affrighted guard, Columba stood still for a moment with head bowed. The King, speechless with amaze, gazed down upon the wonder-worker from the top of the broch. But the rage of the *druí* was boundless as he turned upon Brude—

“Thou hadst done well hadst thou for ever rid thyself of this fellow, O Brude! Yet remember Drostan, and go, beard Columba thyself with sword in hand!”

Roused out of his stupor, the King descended, Briochan in his wake, and with drawn sword bore down upon Columba, who still stood passive with bowed head.

“What meanest thou by this new assault of black magic, O Columba?” demanded Brude fiercely. “Is it not enough that thou has already wrought evil upon our best beloved? Do battle with me, for I would be revenged upon thee!”

Columba raised his head, and whilst Cruithne interpreted the King’s speech, he looked with eyes of admiration upon the swelling thews which stood out like knotted cords on Brude’s upraised arm. But ere the interpreter had finished, another of the monks, unable to endure the King’s threatening posture, boldly set himself between the sword and Columba. He who had thus ventured forth made the Holy Sign over the King’s outstretched arm, and instantly it was stayed in such fashion that Brude could not move it.

Then spoke Cainnech the monk in his own Pictish tongue—

“Lord King, thy words betoken thou art deceived! Let thy stiffened arm be the sign whereby thou mayest know I speak truth!”

“Believe him not, it is not truth but a lie to which his magic witnesseth!” hissed Briochan.

The King, unable to move his arm, was awed and silent, and Cainnech pursued his speech.

“Wouldst thou have yet other token, O King? Thou hast been the victim of this cunning *druì*, for if in the sight of God we are given power to smite, it is but that in the same strength we may restore. Let this further sign bear witness that through yon *druì*, and not through Columba nor his company befel the ill of which ye have spoken. If thou art willing to lend attentive ear to the tidings we bring, thy hand shall regain its power. Thus shalt thou know that no breath of hurt hath come upon any of thy people through the monks of Hii. Wilt listen to the message of peace we are come to proclaim?”

Once again the bearing of the monks made its impress upon Brude, and despite the urging of Briochan he answered—

“I will listen—I make no further promise!”

Even as he spoke, he felt the use of his arm return to him. Light shone in the faces of the monks, and the wondrous voice of Columba brake forth into singing—

“*Magnificat anima mea Dominum!*”

So he rejoiced, and his companions took up the strain till the song was ended. Then with gentle courtesy Columba, through Cruithne the interpreter, craved the King's favour that they might be seated to hold converse together. For answer, Brude took the arm of Columba, and bidding Cruithne come with them, led the Abbat within the broch. Filled with the same zeal that fired their leader, the rest of the brethren went amongst the tribesmen to talk with them.

As for the *druì*, routed and sullen, he stole unseen from the fortress to seek the Queen, his ally, that with her he might take counsel.

When Brude and Columba had communed together, and the Abbat would have departed, the King besought him to take up his abode in the fortress, but Columba answered that this might not be. Gathering together his brothers, he took farewell, promising to return on the morrow further to unfold the mysteries of holy things.

The monks were escorted by Brude himself to the outer gate, and a child catching at his habit, Columba paused to fondle him, saying—

“Ah, little one, our mission were not in vain did we go hence having done no more than add to our family one such as thee!”

“What said Columba?” queried the King; and Cruithne interpreted.

Now Brude knew not it was the family of God of which Columba spake; and thinking the Abbat would fain bear away with him some Pictish



children to swell his family on Hii, resolved to keep Drostan still in hiding, for he was now fully assured that Columba knew naught of his existence.

Having left the fortress behind them, the white company were seeking some solitary place where they might pass the night in the manner enjoined by their rule, when Donnan the mystic appeared. Prostrating himself before Columba, he besought that he might have speech alone with him. And so it was that on to the wide moorland they passed, and Donnan opened his grief in the attentive ear of Columba.

“Father, I am sore wounded in spirit, and thus would I lay bare my soul before thee, if haply through thy ministry the Lord will grant me healing.”

Now of all the brethren Donnan was the one most dear to the heart of the Abbat, and with a voice compassionate and tender he answered—

“Nay, my son, that may not be, by reason of a vision which was granted me yesternight.”

Donnan’s head sank low on his breast, and he faltered—

“Alas, I feared too vile was I ——”

“Nay, my most dear son, therein thou art far from the truth! It is not meet that one of lower destiny should be confessor to an heir of red martyrdom.”

Donnan looked up startled, and amaze mingled with joy in his eyes.

“Have I heard aright, O my father? Can one







so soil-stained as I attain the crown of exceeding glory?"

Columba's eyes grew dim, yet shone with the light of a mighty love, as he stretched out his arms and drew Donnan towards him, answering—

"Last night, as I communed in spirit, I was lifted far above all earthly thought. In a vision I beheld the chariots of God, even thousands of Angels, bearing upward through thick clouds of smoke many souls ruddy with the seal of highest martyrdom. As in wrapt awe I wondered who were these, far over the sea of glass I heard the choir of Seraphim chanting in one acclaim—  
'Donnan, warrior of Christ, and his company have triumphed gloriously! Alleluia!'"

The voice of Columba broke, and he said no more. Tears filled his eyes as he folded in his arms his well-loved son, who sank his head on the Abbat's shoulder, and there kept long silence. Then they parted, still in silence, going east and west.

Meanwhile Brude, returning from a visit to the eirde-house whither Drostan had been conveyed, passed across the moor. The night was radiant with moon and stars, but the King, chancing to meet Donnan, marked that more radiant still was the face of the monk.

"By thy face, O monk, thou hast heard glad news this night!" spake Brude.

"Yea, in very truth, Lord King, for now I know I am held worthy to suffer for the name of Him Whom we preach."

Once again in that great day of amazement the King stood lost in wonder.

“Dost thou indeed rejoice, knowing thou art called to suffering?”

“Yea, O King, for as it is written, though we suffer in the sight of men yet is our hope full of immortality. As gold in the fire shall God the Lord try us to prove us worthy of Himself, and God Himself shall be our exceeding great reward.”

Then as each went on his own way, the words of Donnan the mystic sank deep in the heart of Brude the King. He knew that he had at last heard of a God in Whom was power, for that in this God was the beginning and the end of all things.

## CHAPTER VI

EARLY next morning Briochan sought the King and strove again with all his might to turn him from Columba; but in vain was every effort of his cunning. Persuaded at last that Brude was intent on further intercourse with the monks, Briochan bethought him to waylay Columba, and in some other manner to thwart the King's purpose. Taking with him his fellows, the chief *druí* came upon the little band of brethren as, singing their Office, they advanced towards the royal fortress. Briochan sought to put an end to the chanting, so that the Picts might not be attracted by the sound. But again he was foiled, for raising his voice high above all others, Columba sang—

“*Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum dico ego opera mea regi,*” and so far did the sound carry that distance became as though it were not. With the appearance of the tribesmen, wondering what new portent lurked in the ringing tones of the tall monk, the last hopes of the *druí* were shattered, and once more in triumph Columba came to Brude.

The King had many riddles that he would have solved, and in this wise, through Cruithne the Pict, he questioned the Abbat—



“Thou hast said, there is but one God. Answer me then, Who is God, and where is His dwelling-place? Hides He amongst the clouds, or abides He upon the earth? Doth He inhabit the rivers or the sea? Dwells He amongst the mountains or in the valleys? Declare unto me more of the knowledge of thy God, O Columba, and tell me how He may be found!”

And the Abbat having heard the matters which troubled the King's spirit, answered him—

“Harken, O King, and in such measure as it is given to men to have knowledge of Divine Mysteries, thou shalt be satisfied in thy desires. There was a day when I too sought God. I asked the earth and it answered, I am not He; and all that is upon the earth made like confession. I asked the sea and the creeping things that have life, and they likewise answered, We are not God: look thou above us. Then sought I answer of the winds and the gales, but the whole air with its inhabitants replied, We are not God. I looked upward into the heavens, questioning sun, moon, and stars, and they too gave answer, We are not He Whom thou seekest. Then besought I all the creatures that assailed the doors of my outward senses saying, Ye have said to me of God that ye are not He: tell me, then, somewhat of Him; and with a mighty voice they all gave answer, By His Hands were we made!”

In such fashion did Columba, preparing the way for the Laver of Regeneration, unfold to the King

the mysteries of the Being of God. And in the faith born of the Light that lighteth every man did Brude hearken and believe.

. . . . .

A gentle rain had passed over the land, bedewing all things in a grateful shower. The smile of the sun, new-wakened, made each leaf gleam as though bathed in tears of crystal. Soft white clouds, like the wings of angels, swept the blue of the sky ; and as from a censer, waves of odorous mist rose from the warm earth. The song of birds voiced the gladness of creation, and the swelling murmur of the river echoed it in deeper tone. Dragon-flies with many-hued wing flashed to and fro over the waters : there was nothing lacking to make glorious the Sanctuary of the earth.

On the banks of the river the Pictish tribesmen were gathered in gaping wonderment. Brude the King stood forth boldly in the company of the monks, who had come hither to enlist him by mystic Rite into the fellowship of the King of kings. By the side of Brude stood Donnan as his surety ; behind were Comgall and Cainnech. Cruithne as interpreter and Columba as chief minister faced the King.

The great solemnity ran its appointed course. Brude, having received the first Unction with holy oil, heard Columba question—

“ *Abrenuntias Satanae ?* ”

Taught by Donnan to translate into the strange

tongue of the Office the answer of his heart, Brude replied—

“*Abrenuntio.*”

“*Et omnibus operibus?*” pursued the Abbat, his grave eyes searching the King’s face.

Unflinchingly Brude answered again—

“*Abrenuntio.*”

As his voice broke the silence, there was a stir behind him amongst the tribesmen. Columba, looking up swiftly, saw that it was Korna and her attendants for whom the Picts made way. There, on an eminence whence she might look over the heads of the people, the Queen halted. In one hand she held a sword: in the other, a human head all gory, as one exulting in her savagery. Her face aglow with the triumph of having slain an enemy, she viewed in utmost scorn the strange scene beneath her.

Heedless of her baleful presence, Columba, calm and serene of spirit, besought the Lord in secret for the soul of his new-gained son ere, with hands extended and face uplifted, he continued the Office.

Voicing the cry of the spirit, on the King’s behalf he sang—

“*Quemadmodum desiderat cervus ad fontes aquarum: ita desiderat anima mea ad te, Deus.*”

And with like fervour, Comgall, Cainnech, and all but one of the brethren took up the strain in response thereto—

“*Sitivit anima mea ad Deum fontem vivum.*”

The voice of Donnan alone was silent, for in the spirit he was far away, and so remained for a long space.

When the time came for Brude to make open confession of the Faith, thrice did Columba question him thereon.

*"Credis in Deum Patrem Omnipotem?"*

And Brude, remembering Whose Hands had fashioned the world and all things in it, answered—

*"Credo."*

*"Credis et in Jhesum Christum Filius Ejus Unicum Dominum nostrum, natum et passum?"*

And the King, thinking on the things of which Columba had spoken concerning the Redeemer of all mankind, answered again—

*"Credo."*

*"Credis et in Spiritum Sanctum, Æclesiam Catholicam, Remissionem peccatorum, Carnis resurrectionem?"*

And mindful of the work even then being wrought by the Lord the Life-Giver, Brude answered a third time—

*"Credo."*

Having thus made solemn profession in the face of his people, the King descended with Columba into the hallowed water of the river. At the hand of the Abbat he received in the Threefold Name of his confession, the gift of adoption, and was thereafter sealed on his forehead with the Holy Unction. Then came the vesting in the white robe of the baptised, but as Columba placed



the chrisom over Brude's head, a mocking laugh echoed above them, and the Queen, pointing her sword in derision at her lord, made a sport of him.

"What think ye, warrior Picts, of a King made monk?"

On a sudden she ceased, and her arm fell to her side. Her voice had summoned Donnan back to earth; he had turned and looked upon her, and as her eyes met his, in an instant she was silenced. Moreover Columba was now tracing the Holy Sign on the palm of the King's right hand, and at sight of that dread token, Korna secretly quailed.

But scorn sat still upon her face as she saw the Abbat stoop to wash the feet of the King, whilst the monks radiant sang joyously—

*"Alleluia! Lucerna pedibus meis verbum tuum, Domine."*

The final prayers were said, and the Holy Rite having thus been brought to its close, the assemblage of Picts went their way, the three monks of their race with them.

When Donnan had departed by himself, Columba was left alone with the King.

"Now that thou hast in Baptism put on Christ, my son, thou goest forth to wage the Lord's warfare with weapons of mystic might. Thou art now of the enlightened, and as thou hast kindled the torch of faith, see that thou maintain it unquenched. Of this, if thou art ever mindful, it shall prosper with thee, for thy hand is made mighty with the token of the Lord's Passion."



While thus Columba spoke with the King, the Queen had stealthily followed in the footsteps of Donnan; and when she thought they were wholly out of sight of all men, she swiftly gained the monk's side. Her weapon as well as her awful trophy had been cast away, and not as a savage Queen, but as a woman, rarely beautiful with the glow of a great passion in her face, Korna laid her hand upon the arm of Donnan. The monk turned, and seeing who touched him, shrank back, and raised his arm, forbidding her nearer approach.

Mindful, however, of his office, it was still in gentleness that he addressed her—

“Have my prayers for thee been answered, O Queen? Hast thou sought me to learn how thou mayst become of the enlightened, even as thy lord?”

As the sun when a cloud passes before it, so was the face of Korna when Donnan spoke of the King.

Scornfully she replied—

“Nay, I have no mind to place my neck under the yoke of the man Columba, or at his bidding to quench the fire of my spirit in the river which he hath bewitched! Not so will I yield the glory of my strength. Nay, O monk of the wondrous eyes, to thee alone will I pay homage!”

Donnan sought to stay her, but in vain. Now the torrent of Korna's passion was hot upon her, she seized his arm with a grip as of iron.

“Thou shalt not spurn me, man of my desire, for

there is no woman in all the land like unto me for beauty or for strength. My beauty outshines that of all other women, as the light of the moon outshines that of the stars. And for strength, who can surpass me? Without weapon many a man have I felled at a blow : even now am I returned from slaying a mighty enemy with but one stroke of my sword ! ”

“ Cease thy vaunting, woman ! The tale of such deeds doth repel me —— ”

“ I will not be silenced, O Donnan ! Thy cursed monkhood would strangle the man that still lives within thee, and I would have thee cast away that which wrecks thy manhood. Throw off thy monkish habit : unite thy life with mine, O Donnan, and in this land shall arise a power greater than it has yet known. Consider—I am Queen—the warriors will follow me rather than Brude made monk, and all power in this land shall be mine : yet at thy feet am I content to lay all that I have. It is thine to do with as thou wilt, if thou dost but repay me with thy love. ”

The woman in a frenzy of entreaty again caught at Donnan’s hand. A shudder passed through the monk’s frame, and as though she had been a viper, he freed himself from her touch, exclaiming—

“ *Vade, Satana !* ”

And retreating from her as from an accursed thing, he spoke in words cold as an icy blast—

“ Return to thy husband, woman, for his thou art alone ! Into the lives of those who are vowed

to God in our Order, women enter not. Yet did I speak as man and not as monk, I would have no dealing with thee, for thou art an offence to true manhood, by reason of thine unhallowed passions. Know then, that from the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head thou art doubly accursed in my sight. In mine eyes thy beauty is as vileness; thy strength as brute force; thy power as dust and ashes: all these things my soul abhors! Yet the need of thy soul will I still have in remembrance, and for its redemption will I not cease to plead. Again I charge thee, trouble me no further, but get thee back to the King thy rightful lord!"

So securely was Donnan hedged about by purity of heart, that the Queen in her unholy passion dared not approach him again. But as she stood gazing after his swiftly retreating form, she cried aloud—

"Thou mayst cast me off now, O monk, but not for ever! Though thou art as ice to me, the fire of my love shall at last melt thy heart. In its flame shall thy monk's habit be consumed and thou shalt surely turn to me! Now I will go seek the King as thou badest me, for I would make merry over him!"

On his way to the fortress, still vested in his chrisom and more kingly than ever in his bearing, Brude was greeted by Korna with words of derision.

"Goest thou to take thy place amongst the old women and puling babes, Brude that once was first amongst strong men?"

Brude's head was held high, and his eyes were lit with an inner light, as he announced boldly—

“To-day am I more King than I have yet been, and King of the Picts—men, women, and babes—will I be so long as this land is the land of my dwelling!”

“Ha, ha! harken, ye spirits of the hills! Heard ye ever of a king who hath drowned his manhood and cast away his sword?”

“Thou speakest foolishly, O Korna, knowing not what is required of those who follow after the God of the ages.”

“Where is thy sword, thou that like a weakling art wrapt about with monkish trappings?”

“My sword will ever be ready in a goodly cause. With it will I defend my people from assaults of the enemy, though no longer will I seek unprovoked warfare.”

“Said I not truly thou wert man no longer, for on thine own confession thou wilt henceforth avoid that which best becomes manhood? What availeth it to be king if the king smite not when and where he listeth? What of thy slaves, O Brude: wilt thou no longer slay them when they obey not thy commands?”

“An their offence merit it, they shall not escape punishment; but no more will I soil my hands in the blood of those guiltless of blood-shedding.”

“For that thou art become recreant! Not without good hope of gain did Columba covet thy power. Well did he mark the craven strain in



thy blood, and cast a spell on the waters of yonder river, so that he who went into them king came forth coward! Thus thou art now but King of cowards!"

The taunts of the Queen goaded Brude to a fury, and the flame of it leapt to his eyes, yet he strove valiantly with himself for mastery, and answered coldly—

"Thou art far from the truth, my Queen, for by virtue of the mystic Rite which thou dost ignorantly deride, my strength is doubled. No coward am I!"

But Korna, moved to further raillery by the King's command of himself, mocked him yet the more.

"Nay, but thou hast become puny as the monks whose garb thou hast borrowed. No longer canst thou engage in the chase for fear of soiling thy white raiment. Now thou wilt pass thy days with the feeble, or keep fearful guard within the fortress gates, while I, thy Queen, will ride to the hunt or wage war in thy stead upon the enemy! I will rule the kingdom whilst thou dost learn of Columba to sing some monkish strain."

Brude's face grew dark as the thundercloud: the veins on his temples stood out like thick cords, and under his shaggy brows his eyes blazed wrath. Stooping, with one hand he lifted a great stone lying at his feet, as though he would fain hurl it at his tormentor; but, recovering himself, cast it with little effort some fifty feet distant, so that with a



mighty splash it fell into the river. Then he stood with arms folded, and still holding himself in check with great effort, sternly rebuked the Queen—

“Woman, thou art over-daring : beware lest at last I fail to curb my anger, and do thee grievous hurt.”

And seeing that Korna was minded to taunt him still further, Brude abruptly turned upon his heel and strode away from her.

Pursuing his way, he mused—

“Loudly do men acclaim the mighty warrior, yet now know I that a far harder thing is it to subdue the storms of anger than to overcome in battle the fiercest foe !”

As for the Queen, thwarted and baffled in her purpose, there was naught left but to exhaust her evil mood in solitude by the swiftly-flowing river.

## CHAPTER VII

WITHIN the gloomy confines of a cave, high up on the hillside, and many leagues distant from the royal fortress, Briochan sat awaiting the Queen. So dark was the night that the blackness within the cave was not deeper than the blackness without. The tallow-fed wick of moss in the sandstone lamp gave so weak a flicker that it scarce could pass for light in so dense a gloom. The *druí* sat at the mouth of the cavern looking out into the darkness, as though he fain would pierce it and see beyond; while overhead bats flitted in and out. From time to time an owl, with silent swoop, fastened upon its prey, and the hoot of the night-bird was the only sound telling of life in the grim silence which held the land spell-bound.

Here Briochan was in secret hiding till the time was ripe for him to wreak his vengeance upon Brude. On the day of the King's baptism had the chief *druí* openly vowed undying enmity against the monks, whereupon Brude had passed sentence of exile on him. Ere he left the country of the Picts for ever, Briochan pondered with anxious thought how, aided by Korna, he might avenge himself upon the King.

All unknown to the Queen, he had witnessed

her entreaty of Donnan. Fearing that her passion for the mystic might cause him to lose his own hold over her, Briochan had secretly summoned Korna to his cave, so that he might cunningly shatter for ever the spell of the monk.

The *druí*, knowing that the Queen dared not flout his summons, kept patient watch for her by a fire which he had kindled that its light might direct her steps. Sounds from the blackness below gave token of Korna's approach, and soon she appeared, riding a mountain pony sure of foot upon the hill tracks.

When the beast had been tethered at the far end of the cave, the Queen, dishevelled and wrathful, seated herself within the glow of the fire and demanded to know wherefore she had been summoned to this lone place.

Armed with resistless weapons, the *druí*, as one whose mission was to thrust and spare not, answered her—

“Not I, but the spirits of the earth, have summoned thee, O Queen, for thou has dealt treacherously with them, having forsworn thine oath to me, their servant!”

Very haughtily, Korna questioned him as to his meaning.

“Did not the spirits see thee cast thyself at the feet of the monk Donnan? Did not they hear the flow of thy passionate outpouring, wherein thou wert false to thy vow? Thinkest thou to deceive them, O woman?”

The Queen, disarmed by confusion, made no answer.

Briochan relentlessly pursued his stern rebuke.

"Yea, O Queen, black is thy guilt! Who art thou to pour scorn on thy lord in that he hath flouted the spirits whom we venerate, when thou thyself, their sworn servant, hath dealt deceitfully with them? Against thee, awful is the anger of the powers. An thou dost not repent and make amends for thy treachery, terrible is the judgment which will fall upon thee!"

"If the all-powerful spirits are minded to slay me, think not that in dying I shall die other than Queen!" flashed forth Korna, who could not long brook such speech.

Briochan raised himself to deliver his message of terror, and in the ruddy glare of the fire very sinister was his aspect. Deep set in his withered face, his small eyes, keen as daggers, transfixed the Queen; and as he spoke, his voice grew louder and louder, till it seemed as though it were the voice of the storm-wind in full blast.

"Dost think to die?" he questioned in derision. "So to deal with thee were merciful of the supreme powers whom thou hast outraged in yielding to thy passion for the pale monk. Nay, death were pleasant, and not so will the powers of the world be avenged on thee. Another shall be Queen in thy stead. The spirit of the tempest shall sweep thee from the mountain top, and thou shalt be dashed to the ground to lie in the dust thereof.



Thou shalt be slave of the meanest in the land ; and, moreover, the anger of all those thou hast set at naught shalt thou feel. The thunder with mighty roll shall deafen thee for ever to all sound. Nevermore shalt thou hear the call of the hunt nor the cry of battle. The lightning also shall rebuke thy bold defiance, for with its flash shall thine eyes be seared, and henceforth shalt thou live in the blackness of eternal night. Nevermore shalt thou see the sun ascend to his throne of glory nor sink to rest on his couch of gold !”

Fearless as she was, Korna quailed now as the *druí* threatened her with a doom so awful.

“Stay them, Briochan, stay them, for I repent me of my false dealing, and as their faithful servant will I return to the service of the spirits whom our fathers honoured !”

“If thou wert to be trusted, O Korna, thy promise of repentance alone had sufficed. But since thou hast proved faithless, the outraged spirits require further token of thy good purpose towards them, if their vengeance shall be stayed.”

A sudden thought seized the mind of the Queen, how she might at once appease the angry powers and at the same time satisfy her longings for revenge on Brude.

“Cry to them, Briochan, that I will yield them the King’s son to be *druí*, even as thou art ! Thus shall his devotion be secured to them for ever, and he shall uphold their sway against both Brude and Columba !”



Briochan laughed harshly, and his laugh was like that of some exulting demon of the cave, for this was none other than the very design for which he himself had been scheming.

“An thou dost indeed make so acceptable an offering, the wrath of the spirits, my masters, will vanish; nay, more, thou shalt know the outpourings of their high favour. Yet first swear thou to yield Drostan into my hands ere I leave the land of the Picts for ever.”

And once again the Queen swore fealty to the spirits.

Briochan now knew that he might with safety unfold the plan that he had in his mind, whereby Korna would be the more surely bound in his toils and further advance his vengeance on the King.

In passing to and fro from a retreat that he had upon the Scian Isle, the chief *druí* had noted an island, strange of form, which he knew to be unknown to the Queen, Upon this would he set his snare to entrap Korna.

“Listen, O Queen, for since thou wilt make such amends, thou shalt hear of the wondrous vision that was but lately granted me. I was out amongst the hills of the Scian Isle when the storm came upon me, and a voice in the gale urged me onward and upward. ‘Higher, higher!’ it shrieked, till I found myself on the crest of the mountain, lapped about in thick mists. As I rested, wondering wherefore I had been brought

up thither, the voice of the mighty spirit of the mountains spoke in my ear, bidding me keep mine eyes intent before me. Even as I gazed, a powerful hand rent the mists asunder, and my startled eyes beheld slowly arise from the blue depths of the ocean a beauteous island, long and low. Serene and stately was the isle to look upon; its highest cliff towering in solitary majesty, throned amid the clouds like the guardian of the surrounding ocean. As I wondered what might be the meaning of this fair vision, a spirit arose from the height of the island, and, great as was the seeming distance, his voice sounded clearly in mine ear. 'A throne set in the seas awaits a mighty ruler. I, the maker of the island, have moulded those mountains as I would. My hands have fashioned as playthings the stubborn rocks upon the shore, and the mighty pillars as portals of my dwelling upon the height. Great boulders have I cast about in my wrath, for I am mighty in strength, and none but the strong shall rule in my domain.' When he had thus spoken, the columns of the great cliff opened to receive back their lord, and in a moment had closed upon him. Then did the mists slowly creep down again till the veil was drawn over the shimmering emerald of the sea and the purple glory of the island. As I made to descend the mountain, a voice came to me again, saying, 'Thou hast seen the seat of a mighty kingdom that shall be : go, seek one meet to bear dominion therein !' "





With eager interest Korna had listened to the *druí*, and now he had finished her whole being was aquiver with expectancy.

"How is this island of promise called?" she questioned.

"That I know not," lied the wily *druí*. "I asked of the spirit who had shown me the vision, and he answered that I might not yet know, but that in due time the name should surely be revealed to me."

"Why hast thou told me of this vision? Answer me, Briochan, for I am in torment as to its import! Knowest thou of one fitted to come into so great an inheritance?"

"Had not Brude——"

"Brude!" broke in the Queen in an outburst of wrath. "Dost thou make mention of him who hath cast off thy faith and made thee exile?"

"Calm thyself, O Korna! I named Brude but to say of him that had he not fallen away from our ancient worship he would have been the elect monarch of the island of forth-shadowed fame. But since the rule of the sea is the gift of the spirits who give life to all things, it may not be yielded but to one true and faithful in their service."

The Queen upstarted, proud and radiant in her savage beauty.

"Not in vain, O Briochan, hast thou sought a ruler for the island of promise. Royal of race and excelling in strength, lo, she stands before thee!"



As though he heard not, the *druí* pursued his speech.

"All who are bewitched by the monks are bereft of power to rule. Only one favoured of the mighty spirits may build up this coming kingdom."

"Shall it be greater even than the kingdom of the Picts?" broke in Korna, aflame with a burning ambition.

"Yea, far greater; for the fame of the kingdom of the Northern Picts shall die out, even as a fire hungering for fuel wanes for lack of it. So must all upon whom the monks have cast their spell wither and fade till they die!"

"They have laid no harmful finger upon me! I, the Queen, am without taint of their monkhood; and with my prowess, which none can surpass, I would fain reign supreme in a dominion of mine own!"

"If I speak what I heard in the storm wind, there is hope for thee, O Korna, if thou but beware of the white monks' snares!"

"Their curse will soon be lifted from off the land, O *druí*, for speedily do they set forth eastward, and the King goeth with Columba to guide his steps."

The Queen was beside herself with exultant joy, and Briochan knew he had not spread his net in vain.

"Thy news is good, Queen Korna, but the reward is not yet to thee, and if thou wilt indeed secure it, listen how thou mayst hope to compass

thy desire. If thou hast truly said that Brude journeys eastward with Columba, then indeed have the powers fought on thy side and given thee opportunity of which thou must take the utmost vantage. First, have great care that thou dost not provoke the King's anger against thee; do thou endeavour to please him, so he may have no suspicion of thee. Then, when he and the monks are sped, and Drostan is in my power, thou shalt summon the tribesmen together. Thou shalt tell them their only hope lies in thee, for that those upon whom the monks have poured bewitched waters have no strength left to fight against the enemy. Bid them that be men cast off their fealty to Brude, and call upon them to put themselves under thine authority. Tell them that the spirits who possess the earth have promised thee a mighty kingdom, and urge every man who would have part in the glory of it to come after thee. Then, having gained thy following, thou shalt make for the sea-coast of the west, whither the vision pointed. And thus wilt thou be ready, when the name of the island is revealed, to enter into possession thereof."

"Yea, I will give good heed to thy counsel, and so soon as the King is sped, will I humour Drostan to go with thee."

"It will be well if thou givest Brude to imagine the child dead. Let loose the royal wolves about the eirde-house, that, finding them there, the King may believe his son to be devoured."

"Thou hast a pretty cunning, O Briochan, and thy plan befitteth well my mood! I will do this deed; yet tell me, whither dost thou betake thyself and when shall I meet thee?"

"I go to the Scian Isle, that there I may abide by the shores of the dread Loch Coruisk of which thou wottest, where dwell those powers whose mighty aid I would again invoke. There shalt thou seek me on the fourteenth day after the full moon, when nights and days be equal in length."

"I will not fail thee on that day, O Briochan; and now the darkness breaks, I must away, that I may persuade the boy to go with thee. Fare thee well, good *druí*, an thou wouldst speak further with me, I will return hither when thou requirest. Luarch the *druí* mayst thou trust as thy messenger, for though Brude believeth he followeth after the accursed monks, yet is he true to me."

Following the lead of her pony down the steep slope of the hillside, Korna soon was swallowed up in the darkness.

As for Briochan, it was with a mind well content that he retired to rest, satisfied that he had the Queen and Drostan wholly in his power; and that from his grasp they could not escape.

## CHAPTER VIII

**B**RUDE had marked with inward rejoicing and no little thankfulness that of late a change had come over the Queen. She still shunned the monks, and would harken to none of their teaching, but she showed no open enmity towards them. Neither did she molest any of the Picts who, after the example of their King, had given ear to the message of peace. In like manner had she ceased from her mocking raillery of Brude, though still there came a gleam as of flint in her eye and her lip curled whensoever he betook himself to the worship of his new-found God. On her part, she marked with amaze that, save in the matter of wanton warfare, the pursuits of the King differed in no wise from those of the days before his baptism ; nor had the Faith of the white Christ lessened his courage one whit.

One day when the lust of the chase was hot upon the Queen, they had gone forth hunting together. After a long run, the hounds brought to bay a stag, and Korna, reckless nigh to madness, had gone perilously near to the hunted animal. With blood-shot eyes and streaming wounds, the stag made ready to charge her ; and she had been done to death had not the King, swift as an arrow from bow, flung his arm about her and thrown her



aside, himself taking her place. Half-dazed, Korna lay where she had fallen, watching Brude seize the antlers of the stag, and in one mighty effort overthrow and speedily dispatch the frenzied animal. Korna marvelled at this token of his unspoilt courage, yet spoke but few words.

When the time came that Columba would depart eastward, Brude, mindful of his promise to escort the monks in his own person, suffered many a pang at thought of so long a parting from Drostan, the child of his heart. Columba still had no knowledge that the King had a son, for Brude had charged the tribesmen that they should never speak of the boy before the brethren. Ever since the words spoken by Columba to the Pictish child, the King had been very fearful concerning Drostan, dreading that the Abbat should desire to bear away the little lad to Hii. He knew well that Columba had withheld no sacrifice when the call came, yet felt that he himself could not surrender his only son to the monastic Order. Thus it was that in secret every day the King visited Drostan, and each day the boy begged for release from his dull prison-house underground, until the King promised that very soon should he be delivered from it.

Ere yet Columba set forth to the east, he dismissed Donnan with his blessing to the Scian Isle, where he would have the mystic of Hii fulfil a short mission, whilst the Abbat himself entered upon a new field of labour. As companion to



Donnan, Columba sent Cruithne, having no longer need of his interpreter now he could himself hold converse in the Pictish tongue.

Now ready to quit the fortress on the Ness under the royal escort, Columba and his monks were come to bid the Picts farewell. Brude had summoned the tribesmen together, and charged them to live peaceably under obedience to Korna the Queen until his return. And when Columba had lifted up his hand and blessed the Picts, he and his little company departed eastwards.

The time was at last come for which Korna had waited in that patience enjoined upon her by Briochan. Very craftily had she laid her plans, with Luarch the *druí* as her accomplice; and soon as the King and the monks were departed, the twain betook themselves with eager steps to the eirde-house where Drostan was concealed. As they drew near to the large knoll of grass, by the side of which the hiding-place was contrived, they saw the lone figure of the tribesman on guard, and made their way towards him.

"Is the young Lord Drostan within?" demanded Korna of the man, and he gave answer—

"Yea, O Queen: he sleeps in the chamber while Ruan the nurse keeps watch beside him."

"I trow he will not lament to quit this burrow for ever!"

"Nay, O Queen! Oft my young lord crieth out at the dulness of this solitary waste. Yet for the most part hath he disported himself above

ground, and only when some monk came in sight have I bidden Ruan take him within."

"I marvel not the boy tires of the warren, since he is no coney!" laughed the Queen, then gave order—

"Make clear the opening: I would speak with my stepson!"

Obedient to her command, the tribesman strode forward to part on either side the stunted growth of gorse, which cunningly concealed the entrance to the underground dwelling. As with bent frame he did this, Luarch, advancing noiselessly behind him, swiftly drew forth a club and felled the tribesman with fatal blow to the ground. No groan betrayed the deed that was done, and while the *druí* dragged the body out of sight Korna, stooping low beneath the stone lintel, entered the eirde-house. Between the door-posts of stone she passed, and along the low narrow passage with its rude flint walls roughly flagged overhead which led into a small chamber. Here, in the light of a sandstone lamp set in the wall, she espied the nurse seated beside Drostan asleep on his bed of heather.

The Queen drew near to the child and bent over him ere she whispered—

"So the child sleeps? Follow me without, then, good woman, that the young lord be not wakened, for I would speak with thee."

Having thus said, the Queen retraced her steps, and in her wake came the nurse. Awaiting the

return of his mistress, the *druí* stood by the gorse bush, his club poised, and as the nurse with head bent low appeared through the opening, Luarch felled her even as he had felled the man. While the *druí* covered up all traces of his handiwork, Korna returned to the bed of the sleeping child, and stood looking upon him curiously. There he lay upon his back, with arms outstretched, and as she held the lamp over his rosy face and sturdy limbs, the Queen could not but confess him a boy most fair to look upon. Albeit Drostan's refusal would not have thwarted her fell designs, if it were possible Korna would so humour the little lad, that of his own free will he should depart with Briochan.

The Queen laid her hand with unwonted lightness of touch upon the child's shoulder, that she might rouse him gently, the while she called him by name.

Drostan stirred uneasily, rubbing his eyes, and sleepily murmured—

“Is it still night? I am so tired of the darkness!”

“Wake, my boy, wake, for thy mother is come to bring thee out into the light of day, and never more shalt thou return to this dark hiding-place!”

The child started up at the sound of a strange voice, and cried—

“Where is Ruan? I would have my nurse!”

“Thou canst not have her, boy: for nevermore will she return to thee. But I am here to take

thee back to the tribesmen, amongst whom thou mayst again disport thyself, and thou shalt don this bright-hued skin in place of that dull hide."

The child readily made the exchange, dropping the old garment on the ground.

"Take my hand, little lad, and I will lead thee from this dark place: thou shalt no longer play with fear."

"Nay, but I have naught to do with fear, for my father would have me be a man; yet I love not this darkness."

When they were come out into the open, Drostan looked upward with blinking eyes, and clapped his hands gleefully.

"Hurrah, the fire is lit again in the sky! Two days ago it went out, and I feared that never more would it be kindled."

In his delight, the boy raced to and fro on the green sward, but after a while he came to the Queen and, looking up, asked her—

"Where is my father? I would fain speak with him."

"Thy father is gone on a long journey, boy. But come thou and sit by me on this knoll, where thou canst look out over the swell of the ocean; for I would have thee listen to what I will tell thee."

"Is it a tale such as my father is wont to tell me?"

"Rather it is a fair picture I would paint for thee, of a place most rare—a wonderful playground where all little lads would fain be."



"O, then show me the picture!" cried the child.

"Look out over the ocean and tell me, dost see where the white sea-horses race to the shore?"

Drostan, all eagerness to look where the Queen pointed, started up by her side, and placed his little hand upon her shoulder, gazing upon the marge of the swelling tide.

"Yea, yea, I see them leaping with many a bound and frolic!"

"Dost see beyond, where the sea gulls fly till they become as tiny specks in the sky, the great mountains dimly rising? There, further than thine eyes can see, is the land of delight I would picture for thee."

"Is it the home of the sea gulls?"

"Yea, there they nest amongst the cliffs and feed their little ones. It is, moreover, a fair place where little lads, such as thou, may learn the strength of life, and grow up men of valour."

"Like unto my father?" questioned Drostan again.

"Even like unto him, boy. It is a land full of wonders, where hills like mighty giants rise to uphold the sky. Locked securely in the hollow of those hills is a lake of most mysterious waters. Out of it pours a stream of boisterous passions, which bites deeply into the rock on its headlong course to the sea. Those who are beside the stream can follow it down, as it cuts out its way, buffeting many a great black boulder in its path



ere it pours its anger into the quiet bosom of the ocean."

"I like not that angry stream. 'Tis those things that be merry that I love most."

Korna, unused to the weaving of tales for children, frowned; but endeavoured anew to paint a picture that might allure him.

"Those that like not the brawling stream may dwell on the shores of the sea, for there are other delights, in which thou, little lad, wouldst find rare pleasure. Out yonder before us, the sea is wondrous green, and yet its shades are dull beside the bright hues of the sea of which I speak. Thou canst look down into its clear depths, where is sand of a whiteness such as thou hast never seen. Out of the sand shoot great and strange plants which wave in the waters, beckoning all who see them come down into the forest of the deep. Therein, too, are fish of silver, darting in and out——"

"O, that I would surely love!"

"Thou shalt be satisfied, my Drostan," replied Korna, well pleased to have at last captured the child's fancy. "By the sea shore, too, there is a great cave——"

"I care not for caves—they are but eirde-houses!" exclaimed Drostan quickly.

"Nay, child, but the cave of which I speak is far other. It is a large and pleasant room of light, looking out full upon the sea. For those who enter, there are many wonders. There the sea-

horses have their stables, and thou canst catch their tossing white manes, and ride upon their backs, for thou shalt be King of the Waves ! ”

“ Shall I indeed rule over the sea, even as my father ruleth over the land ? ”

“ Yea, little lad, for the waves will acclaim thee king with a mighty roar. ”

“ I will go within that cavern, if thus the waves will have me for ruler. Doth aught else happen in this great cave ? ”

“ Yea, there are days when the spirit of the wind blows upon his pipes, playing a tune whereto the wavelets dance, and thou mayst dance with them. At night, the little spirits that dwell in the heights of the cave slip down by the big drops of water turned to stone, that hang from the roof. While the little lads lie asleep, these kindly sprites keep watch around them, so that their slumbers are guarded and their dreams of delight are not broken. Then when morning dawns, they wake each boy, and tell him of some new game to play. Wouldst like to go to this land of delights, little Drostan ? ”

“ Yea, that would I ; but how can I reach it ? ”

“ Briochan, who made thee well when thou wert ill, goeth thither to-night, and he will take thee with him and take good care of thee. ”

“ Nay, but I would not go before my father returns ! ”

“ If thou wilt go with Briochan, thou wilt be going nearer to thy father, ” replied the Queen,

scrupling not to lie if thus the child's consent might be won.

"Then will I go, for if my father is in the land of which thou hast spoken, he will be right glad to have me with him again."

"Truly that he will," answered Korna with a grim smile, rising from her seat on the ground, and continued, "Let us hasten, then, that we miss not Briochan; for if he set forth without thee, thou wilt be parted longer from thy father."

Eager now to do her bidding, the child danced along by the way she led him, till they came to the place where, all expectant, Briochan lay in hiding. Unseen by any of the tribesmen, the Queen delivered her little stepson, in charge of Luarch, into the hands of the exiled *druí*, and as she watched the distance enfold them, she exulted indeed, for that the first part of her crafty scheme of vengeance had succeeded, and her courage now leapt to engage in her next enterprise.

. . . . .  
When, some few days hence, the King returned to his royal fortress, to his amaze he found a dire state of things awaiting him. The tribesmen that remained told him that the Queen had taken a following of some half their number to enter into possession of an island kingdom. And when Brude demanded fiercely where was their young lord Drostan, a great fear fell upon the Picts, for they could not answer.

On the instant the King and his men made frantic search for the child. Without the eirde-house, Brude marked traces of the ravages of beasts of prey ; and, searching, found the mangled remains of two bodies. Within, to his unutterable anguish, the King made discovery of a little coat of skin, and for a while was stunned by the horror it betokened.



## CHAPTER IX

A BOAT under full sail ploughed its way through the waters of the Loch of Hell. Fair weather and a steady breeze gave promise of a passage swift and safe to far Loch Scavaig ; and both Briochan and Luarch rejoiced thereat, for neither was skilled in the craft of the seaman. Great, too, was the delight of little Drostan, for in this winged flight over the gleaming waters he found the fulfilment of many joys of his dreamland. Was he not also on his way to his father and to the cave wherein the Queen had promised he should be crowned King of the Waves?

Thinking on this, Drostan, bending over, sought converse with the wavelets rippling round the boat, for he thought they had come to acclaim him lord.

“ Little waves, I am here to frolic with you : I will command and ye shall obey ! ”

Anon, to his joy, he would espy a fish in the blue depths, and crave its shining armour : then the gulls following in the wake of the boat captured his fancy, and he would fain sail through the air upon their wings.

The *druadh*, intent upon the sailing of the ship, spake but little, and heeded not the child's eager

questioning concerning the wonders that passed before his excited eyes.

Guarded on either side by giant mountains, scarred and torn in the wars of many a storm, the loch wound its long course; and past many a rocky islet whereon the stately heron made its home, the boat sped on its way. But as the little vessel neared the mouth of the loch, a change came upon the face of the waters, and, looking upward, Briochan saw that clouds of ill-omen were fast gathering on the mountain tops. Little Drostan, worn out by his adventures, had fallen asleep in the bottom of the boat, and still in dreams sailed upon the scenes through which he had been flying.

The force of the wind had so much abated that there was scarce enough now to fill the sail. A sullen calm had settled upon the loch, and on all around fell an ominous darkness. The *druadh*, fearful of what might befall them, counselled together if they would seek the land ere the storm burst. But even as they questioned, the tempest swept down upon the loch, and before it the little ship was driven helpless as a leaf in the wind. The gale wrested the direction of their course out of the hands of the *druadh*, and vain were their efforts to regain mastery of the boat.

Upon both fell a great fear for their lives. In the fierce gusts of the storm wind they saw the wrath of the spirits, and wondered wherein they

had angered the power who spanned the mountain tops and blew down upon them in this exceeding fury.

While the *druadh* fain would have turned southwards out of the yawning mouth of the loch, the boat was blown straight ahead, where the Scian Isle was blotted out in the blackness. In the Sound, the waters raged wildly, and leaping waves hurled themselves over the boat, threatening to engulf it.

Rudely awakened by the tumult, Drostan started up and cried out in alarm, asking what had befallen them. But the *druadh* sternly bade him be still; and, terror-stricken at the sight of the angry monsters whom he had last seen as playmates, the little lad flung himself on the bottom of the boat, sobbing bitterly.

Meanwhile Luarch did what he could to clear the vessel of water, and Briochan held grimly to the mast. It seemed to the chief *druí* as though the fell day of doom were closing upon the land, so thick was the darkness which enwrapped them. He could hear, not very far distant, the dull roar of breakers crashing upon the coast upon which they were fast being driven. Suddenly, even as he took thought how they might save themselves, the boat was dashed upon the rocks, and those in it cast into the raging sea. Each for himself, struggling wildly in the waters, the *druadh* made desperate efforts and at last gained the land, without a thought for the little lad, whom they left







tossing upon the billows at the mercy of wind and wave.

. . . . .

On the shores of the bay, guarded by mighty cliffs, on the eastern coast of the Scian Isle, Cruithne, the interpreter, lay asleep in the pale darkness of the starlight. As he slept, Donnan the mystic, his face lit with the dawn of the morning on his soul, stooped over his companion and gently roused him from slumber.

"Brother, we must set sail forthwith on our homeward way, by reason of a vision that hath befallen me. Therein I beheld an islet near by the mouth of hell, and from it there cried to me a child for deliverance from shadowy arms outstretched to claim him."

At once alert, Cruithne arose, and his eyes ranged over the sky, wherein the stars with dimmer light gave token of approaching day.

"Were it not well, my brother, to wait for the breaking of the dawn?" he questioned.

"Nay, for the exceeding great need of the child brooks no delay, and with the blessed angels to company us on our journey, night is as day."

Thus they launched their coracle upon the face of the grey waters, and were soon speeding upon their way. A gentle breeze bore them along under their rude sail, and in the hidden joy that possessed Donnan, he cried—

"Yea, verily hath the Lord made the winds His

angels, for, lo, we are compassed about by those blessed spirits who do Him service!"

Beholding with the vision of the spirit the ministry of those heavenly beings who move all the forces of nature, he broke forth into the *Benedicite Omnia Opera Domini*. Right through the canticle he sang, and as they sailed on that calm sea through the stillness of night into daybreak, the ears of Cruithne were opened. The voice of his companion exhorted all created things to glorify the Lord, and none were silent, those amongst them that were voiceless making response by the voices of their angels. Thus the choir of all creation joined in the hymn raised by the mystic, so that never by mortal man was Lauds so divinely sung.

With the unfolding of the day, heralded by this Office, came the blackness of storm and tempest; but long ere it was fallen upon them, Donnan had lowered the sail, for where the wings of the angels were spread, there was no longer need of it. Calm and serene, the monks sat in their frail coracle, knowing no fear, though the storm with ever-increasing force raged about them. In the height of the tempest, the eyes of Donnan kept patient watch for the lifting of the darkness. He judged they were indeed in the very mouth of hell, and was eager to descry the islet of his vision, so that he might snatch the child from the fate that threatened.

When the passion of the storm had spent itself,

the mists slowly rolled away, and at last the coast-line upon their right hand could be dimly seen. Drawing nearer and nearer into the land, Donnan beheld a rocky islet, and hither he steered the coracle, knowing it to be the place shewn him in the vision. Landing, and making careful search, they found, lying amongst the sea-wrack, a little form, still and helpless, with eyes closed, a crimson streak slashing the white forehead.

Falling on his knees beside the child, Donnan tenderly raised him, his eyes full of compassion. With infinite gentleness he pressed some cordial between the blue lips, chaffing the numbed limbs in eager desire to revive the life haply still within. Cruithne, meanwhile, had fetched water, and was bathing the hurt on the boy's forehead ere, with skilful hand, he bandaged the wound with a strip torn from his raiment. Then Donnan wrapped his own woollen habit round the little chill form and enfolded it in his arms, that thus he might give of his own warmth to the child. Great was the joy of the monks when they saw the eyes of the little lad slowly open, and his lips part in a faint moan; for then they knew the child had indeed been given to them.

"Truly, thou art a fair boy!" said Donnan, looking upon the face of the waif in his arms.

As though he made answer, Drostan faintly murmured—

"I am King of the Waves: let them not harm me!"



“Poor little lad, his mind wandereth!” said Donnan to his companion. “Yet since he hath been borne to us upon the waves, let us name him ‘Gilthonna,’ when he shall be gathered into our family by the saving waters of Baptism.”

When the child, comforted and warmed, had fallen into a peaceful sleep, the monks carried him to the coracle, and launched out on the now peaceful waters, steering a course for their home on sea-girt Hii.

## CHAPTER X

WHEN he was recovered from the stupor which held him, Brude questioned the tribesmen further concerning Drostan. But no hope did they give him, for after that which they had seen in the eirde-house, they were persuaded the child was indeed devoured.

“Though it be in very truth the hide that was worn by my little son, yet may not he have escaped from the jaws of the evil beast, casting off his coat in his flight? May it not be that thus fleeing in terror for his life, he hath lost himself in the mazes of our wild land and in some pathless track still wandereth, seeking his way home?” questioned Brude.

Then spake one of the *druadh* and said—

“Nay, O King, the child is indeed devoured, and thou shalt see him no more for ever. Such is the vengeance which the spirits whom thou hast outraged have wreaked upon thee.”

“Give not ear, O my Brother, to one who as yet knoweth not that it is but foolishness he speaketh,” urged Sedna, the monk whom Columba had left at the Nessian fortress to bring the tribesmen into the way of life.

“I will hearken to none, but will reason in the

matter for myself," answered Brude. "Be gone that I may have peace."

And there, when he was left alone, Brude paced ceaselessly to and fro, unable to rest because of the mighty conflict which, raging within him, racked his spirit.

How had this loss of his heart's best treasure befallen him? In other case, he had thought evil to his little son had been wrought by the hate of Briochan or by the jealousy of his Queen. But the chief *druí* had been banished or ever Brude had set forth with Columba; and Korna, with opportunity to grasp a sole sway such as she had ever coveted, would take no further thought for working ill to Drostan. Was it indeed truth that the *druí* had spoken? Were the spirits whom he had renounced in very deed more powerful than the God to Whom he had yielded his service? He would make trial by prayer, in which Columba set such store, and the answer should show him where lay the truth. The God of the ages dwelt in the highest Heaven, so the Abbat had taught him, and Brude, thinking to make closest approach to Him, set forth to climb the highest mountain. The summit gained at last, throwing up his arms and gazing into the cloud-swept sky, he wildly invoked the God of Columba.

"O Spirit, Who claimest to be greater than all other spirits, prove to me Thine almighty power! If Thou knowest all things, Thou knowest where is my little son, the love of my heart. Bring

Thou him to this mountain top at the time of sunrise on the morrow, then shall I be satisfied that Thou art indeed the God of all power and might, and never more will I question Thy dominion of the world."

With hope rekindled, Brude now sped down the hillside. Entering the fortress, he brushed violently aside alike all who came near him, and those who would speak with him, and seizing upon some food and a warm hide of skin, again he sought the mountain top.

Night had now fallen, and cold and chill was the blast which, howling round the crags and swaying the trees, caused the King to start eagerly forward, thinking these sounds might herald the approach of his little son, led upward by the Spirit. Soon the rain began to fall in torrents, but Brude, wandering ceaselessly through the darkness, heeded it not, watching for the first glimpse of light which might shew to him the little form for which his heart was sore a-hunger. At last came the first faint promise of dawn, and Brude, in breathless expectancy, stood upon the very summit of the mountain, listening and watching: at his feet the hide, and beside it a meal spread ready for the boy. Gradually rocks and trees took shape in the dimness, and the keen eye of the King searched near and far.

"Will he be asleep or awake, my little son? Will he be cold and hungry when he cometh back to me?" mused the stricken father, unconscious



that he himself stood in sore need of food, and was well nigh numb with the cold.

At last a warm glow of light told Brude that the hour of sunrise was indeed come. Clearer and yet more clear grew the unfolding dawn, while each green thing of earth rejoiced in the return of its lord the sun after the long night of tempest and torrent. But as warmer glowed the colour which tinged the sky, greyer and more wan grew the face of the King.

Still his restless eye scanned each rock and rise of the ground, but in vain. The moments dragged their weary course into hours, until at last it came home to him that the time of sunrise was indeed come and gone; that no little feet were running towards him, that no little voice was calling to him, and that henceforth his life would be empty of its joy.

Then Brude fell upon his face in dumb despair, and in fierce anger against the Spirit who had failed him. . . . .

The day was well-nigh spent, and the sun whose rising had brought such healing and such hurt, was setting when Sedna came upon Brude. Of all that dwelt in the Nessian fortress he alone had dared to venture forth in search of the distraught King, though none of the tribesmen but were in anxiety concerning their lord. The monk gently placed his hand upon the shoulder of the prostrate man, whereupon Brude started up

and seeing Sedna, glared with wild eye upon him, cursing Columba and all his company.

"Get thee hence and trouble me no more," he cried. "Because of thy lies which I, fool that I was, took to be truth, this anguish is fallen upon me. Now know I that my son is indeed perished, and that thy God is powerless to help."

"Thou art distraught," answered the monk compassionately, never flinching from the threatening of the King. "When thou art recovered, thou wilt be assured that thy son still liveth."

"Mock me no further, lest I slay thee!" again cried the King, repelling the advances of Sedna.

"Though thou slay me, the truth of God abideth. Thy son is not dead but liveth, and thou shalt see him again."

Thus steadfastly persisted the monk, and with gentle words of wisdom so wrought upon Brude that at last the King yielded to his guidance, and suffered himself to be led back to the royal fortress. There in the comfort of fire and food, Sedna reasoned further with him. Not till far into the night did the man of peace leave the King, but when he departed, it was in the glad assurance that Brude had regained his hold upon the Faith of the ages.

## CHAPTER XI

ON the shore of the Firth of Loarn, led by Korna the Queen, the Picts who had cast in their lot with her awaited the revealing of the island of destiny. Here, in full view, were clustered the Isles of the Sea, and beside them many more, both great and small. There were those whereon the red deer roamed; others whereon the heron reigned; there were rocky crags, home of divers sea birds; and wave-swept barren islets, haunts of the seal. In the mind of the Queen, many of these might well be the island of promise.

But there was other reason for her choice of this outlook during the time of waiting. Looming upon the right was the huge mass of the Malean Isle, whose lofty snow-clad peaks soared serenely above the rusty robe of winter cast about its shores. Round its farthest point the Queen knew was Hii, where dwelt Donnan of her desire; and thither her heart was drawn with ardent longings, so that when she thought upon him, even in the chase, her skill failed her. Marking this, the tribesmen marvelled amongst themselves, questioning if some evil spirit had fastened upon her.

At length, one day so strong became the grip of this passion, that Korna would no longer to the

hunt, but sat high upon the shore, gazing out over the sea in the direction of Hii. Seated thus, she took thought once more how this monk, who had hitherto spurned her, might be won. Surely it had been because of the potent spell cast about him by the presence of Columba, that Donnan had heretofore resisted her entreaties. With the Abbat in a far country, could the simple monk longer refuse to share with a Queen the glory of her coming kingdom? Quite sure was she that, parted from Columba, Donnan would yield to her allurements. The Abbat, she mused, could not yet be returned to Hii, whilst Donnan must long since have gained its shores.

Greatly uplifted by these thoughts, and with set purpose to win Donnan, the Queen had yet to ponder what tale should be told the tribesmen ere she left them to bring back one of the hated monks. Her wit was not long in devising a cunning story, and summoning her company at the close of day, she held speech with them.

“Hearken, elect of the Picts, hearken! This time of weary waiting will shortly be at an end, when I go to seek Briochan the *druì*, according to his bidding. Then shall ye know where is the island of our destiny, that we may sail thither to enter into the promised kingdom. In the days that are before us, as I have told ye aforetime, we shall know greatness ne’er dreamt of by any other race, if we be but ready to grasp it. Whence in the past have ye seen power before which all



other quailed and was as naught? Was it not in the magic of the monks, who withstood all the forces of which we have knowledge? How then, if when we are come into our kingdom, these cursed monks engage against us? How may we hope to oppose their spells, or how guard ourselves against them? I will tell you! To-morrow will I go alone to Hii, where dwell these white strangers, and thence, by cunning they wot not of, will I take captive a monk who shall abide in our company for ever. With such an one in our midst, we need have no fear of his brethren, for driven by torture if need be, he shall oppose spell with spell. Without some monk on our side, how may we go forth to slay Columba and his accursed brood, as I would go forth to slay them? What think ye of this, my warriors?"

The tribesmen, lusty-throated, shouted in answer—

"We will as thou wilt, even as thou hast said, O Queen!"

Then did the heart of Korna rejoice as she thought that her passion for Donnan would soon be satisfied. Ere in the morn she set sail for Hii, the Queen arrayed herself with the richest of her ornaments. Then when she had combed out her long tresses, dark as the raven's wing, she bent over a quiet pool of the stream close by, and judged herself as radiant as night when the stars are aglitter.

Amongst the tribesmen who followed after the

Queen, the mightiest in stature was one named Gormal, and him she set over the others in her absence. Then eager joy in her heart, she embarked for the island of the monks, and, with the wind in her favour, came with speed on her journey. After rounding the ross of the Malean Isle, another island came in view, for which the Queen steered, thinking it to be Hii, and in her ardour, felt no longer the bitter cold of the winter's day.

Nearer and nearer drew the little boat into the dark low-lying rocks of its coastline, and the sail lowered, she sought a haven on its rugged shore. But as she came upon the opening of a small loch, and was about to enter, her eyes met a sight so strange that in wonder she ceased to row.

There in the sea, immovable as a rock, stood a man, the water up to his neck, singing in the strange tongue which ever accompanied them, the strains beloved of the monks. No melody made pleasant the quavering voice of this stranger, a man well stricken in years, whom Korna knew for one of the brotherhood, since on his crown was the shaven strip after their fashion. She now was satisfied that this was indeed the isle she sought ; but lost in amaze at the sight of one enduring the chill of the icy water for so strange a purpose, she delayed a while to see what further the monk would do.

Since by this time his Office was well nigh finished, Korna had not long to wait ere he left

the water and stood upon the shore, looking over the ocean.

The Queen, now standing upright in the boat, saw with further amaze that there came out of the water after him a great seal, and lay upon his feet, as though to warm them with the grateful heat of its soft body.

The call of other seals broke the spell which held the Queen, whereupon she ran her boat into the shore, and was soon landed upon the beach. As she advanced towards the monk, he was bestowing his blessing upon the kindly animal, which, at the approach of a stranger, made with clumsy speed into the sea.

The monk, only then conscious of the presence of an intruder, demanded—

“What dost thou here, woman, thus breaking in upon the *desert* where I would be alone?”

“I would have speech with the monk Donnan—tell me where I may find him,” answered Korna.

“He whom thou seekest is laid low by fever upon Hii, whereon no woman may set foot,” answered the ermerite.

Korna, in great dismay, questioned further:—

“Is not this then Hii?”

“Nay, it is the Isle of Erraid, whose solitudes I have sought that through subduing of the flesh, I may soar unhindered in the spirit. Thus I pray thee, leave me in peace!”

“Thinkest thou, old man, that thy dull company would tempt me to stay on this bleak isle?”

sneered Korna. "I go to Hii, for despite his fever, I will have speech with Donnan!"

"Be warned, O woman, lest a terrible fate o'ertake thee! I have said thou mayst not set foot on Hii, for it is encircled by blessed spirits, who gird it about with a wall of flame; and through this wall such as thou mayst not pass and live!"

Korna, her head held high in scorn, answered not, as she launched her boat upon the water and made her way out of the loch. Yet thinking upon the warning in the light of the knowledge of the monks' powers, her daring failed her, and she had little mind to encounter alone the invisible guardians of Hii. Moreover, she knew of no weapon which she might oppose to a wall of flame.

Reasoning thus, the Queen came into the open sea again, to mark a boat with one solitary figure sailing towards her from the mainland. A man standing in the boat made evident sign that he would have her await his approach. Korna, seeing it was one of her own tribesmen, impatiently beckoned him to hasten, and as the distance between them lessened, he cried beseechingly—

"Turn, O Queen, turn with me to the mainland, that we may be avenged upon the foe!"

"Foe, sayest thou? What foe?" questioned Korna, sharply, the blood tingling in her veins at thought of conflict.

"Thou hadst scarce departed, O Queen, when Gormal, with the cravings of hunger upon him,



betook himself to the edge of the forest, where was our fire with a meal preparing thereat. On a sudden from the wood I heard a cry as of a man mortally wounded. Running towards the quarter whence it came, I found Gormal all but sped, and with scarce enough breath to tell me that two men of strange tribe had fallen upon him, robbed him of his meat and thereafter fled. Then with all speed did I set sail after thee, O Queen, if haply I might gain upon thee to pray thee turn! We would be avenged for the slaughter of our brother!"

At these tidings, the Queen no longer hesitated what she would do, the lust of battle for the nonce o'erleaping her passion for Donnan. Springing into the messenger's boat, and fastening her own behind it, together they set sail in the direction of the mainland.

## CHAPTER XII

**S**NOW was falling heavily as the Queen once more stood amongst her tribesmen, and questioned them concerning that which had befallen in her absence. And when they had told her, since none could say with any surety where the enemy might be found, she sent forth, in different directions, four men to spy out the land.

Awaiting their return, Korna busied herself with preparations for fight, and with fierce purpose in her eye, saw to it that the men in all things made themselves ready for battle. Some of her followers she sent out to hunt the red deer, that there might be a fresh hide for the use of the slingsmen, who made thongs thereof to bind about their stone-balls, which, thus made captive, they wielded as weapons. The hills around echoed with the din of hammers and with the noise of weapons being sharpened upon stones. More quiet in their craft, other men skilfully plied the axe, shaping for themselves round shields of wood, and with gouges made circles of ridges upon their outer surface.

Later on in the day, the Queen, standing upon an eminence, ordered her warriors in fighting array, and put them to the proof in obeying her commands for battle.

Thus passed the hours till nightfall, when the spies returned, one with tidings that the enemy was encamped some twenty miles to the north, on the shores of a sea-loch.

"How many in number be they?" questioned Korna.

"Some two hundred and fivescore," answered the spy.

"And we are but two hundred," muttered the Queen.

Then, addressing herself to the man, she gave rough command—

"After we have supped, thou shalt lead on, fellow, that we may come upon the enemy ere the day break."

Their meal being ended, the Picts moved northward, making in the darkness what speed they could over the broken, snow-clad ground. Birds, roused from their rest by the passage of the tribesmen, flew affrighted to right and left, awaking the silence with cries of alarm. Deer likewise fled from their path, and from the distance came the howling of approaching wolves; but the Picts heeded this not, knowing that the flaming lights they bore would secure them against attack.

The snow had ceased, but as the company, passing through a forest of trees, brushed against the heavily laden boughs, many torches were put out by the snow-wreaths that fell upon them. Pushing on in the blackness, one of the men stumbled and fell, breaking his leg; but despite

his piteous entreaties not to be left a prey to the wild animals of the forest, his fellows passed on unheedingly.

Men less hardy than these Pictish warriors had well-nigh succumbed to the stress of that dread journey, for naught that barred their direct path sufficed to stay the progress of the dauntless Queen. Not only did she hazard thin sheets of ice which oftentimes broke beneath their feet, but where the lochs were not frozen, she was foremost to cross them, plunging boldly into their icy waters, and shewing utmost scorn for a tribesman who, overcome by the cold, cried for help ere he sank for the last time in the chill depths. Before the warriors had come to an end of their march, many of their number, disabled or exhausted, had been left to die in their tracks, for Korna forbade that men who could not bear their part in battle should cumber the ranks.

Great was the anger of the Queen when day-break overtook them ere they were at the end of their journey, but at last the guide made known to Korna that they were within a short distance of the foe. As she gave order that her warriors should steal down upon the camp and surround it, taking cover wherever they could, one of her bodyguard caught his foot in a hole hidden by the snow, and in falling, was impaled upon his own spear. The shrieks of his agony rent the air, and Korna, in a fury of wrath that their approach should thus be heralded, herself made an end of him with her dagger. But



too late. The warning had been given, and blackness as of night sat upon the face of the Queen when she heard the blast of the enemy's war-trumpet. Bidding her bowmen keep the shelter of the woods, and thence shoot their arrows upon the camp below, she herself, armed with sword and shield, called upon all other of the warriors to follow her.

Coursing over the ground with what speed was possible, Korna soon gained the outskirts of the camp, and saw the roused enemy hastily assembling themselves together for fight.

With a mighty shout, the Queen and her tribesmen swept like a tempest down the slope in resistless onslaught. Then in the furious conflict arrows mingled, iron smote upon iron, spear countered spear, and the slingsmen wrought hideous havoc, cracking many a skull with their balls of stone. The shrieks of the wounded under foot were drowned by the shouts of frenzied foemen, fighting for their lives. And mad with the lust of warfare, ever in the forefront with her cry of vengeance, fought Korna, rushing upon the foe with blood-stained sword and dashing aside with her shield every weapon that was opposed to her.

"Slay, slay! Onward, onward, drive them into the waters!" she cried to her men, who, fired with her own spirit, followed closely upon her, smiting about them with strokes of iron.

Before such a hurricane the enemy fell back, and with shouts of exultation the Picts pressed

upon them, driving them with resistless force towards the sea-loch. Gallantly the leader of the foe sought to rally them, and the Queen, seeing this, singled him out for combat, but ere she could gain his side, an arrow had pierced his throat and he fell prone. Cursing her fate, which had thus despoiled her of her prey, Korna turned to face a man who aimed at her a blow so furious that, in countering it, her sword was broken. Ere she could snatch another weapon from the hands of her warriors, this man had wounded her grievously upon the head. But the warm blood flowing over her face only served to infuriate the Queen, and springing upon her foe, with redoubled strength she caught his weapon upon her shield, wresting it out of his grasp, and, quick as lightning, drove her dagger home to his heart.

Brushing the blood out of her eyes, heedless that she trampled over the bodies of the slain, and still shouting, "Slay, slay!" the Queen and her warriors with tireless arms swept the foe before them into the loch.

The tide was low, and its waters, too swiftly flowing to freeze, swirled tumultuously in their narrow bed. Soon the enemy were in the midst of the loch, battling wildly in the whirlpool to gain the further shore. Vain was their every effort. Once in the grip of the icy waters, there was no release, and those Dalriadans who had escaped the hands of the Picts fell a helpless prey to the whirling tide.

## CHAPTER XIII

OVER the sea, a small coracle was sailing southward between islands which, like uncut gems of ocean, adorned its silvern surface. A gentle breeze filled the sail, whose mast and yard together made sign of the Cross, thus bearing aloft steadfast token of the service upon which the craft of Hii were ever engaged. At the helm sat Columba, and beside him was his faithful servant Diormet, handling the sail. As they were borne over the gleaming waters, the Abbat, with prayer in his heart, sang his own hymn of the seafarer—

Our Polestar, Father, be !  
As we sail o'er Thy main :  
Guide us with sleepless Eye,  
Through storm and danger.  
Our Steersman be Thou, Son !  
Thy Hand upon the helm,  
Shall safely take our craft  
Past reef and whirlpool.  
Spirit, soft Wind of Heav'n,  
Fill Thou our flutt'ring sail,  
Bear us on ocean voyage :  
Thy Voice our comfort.  
Our Hope, Thou great Three-One !  
Be with us, tempest-toss'd :  
Bring us at deathless dawn  
Home to Heav'n's Haven.

When Columba was at an end of the hymn, Diormet, his eyes radiant, spoke—

“O Master, methinks that after such strain is the melody which the blessed Angels make in Heaven!”

But Columba shook his head and kept silence, his eyes upon a great cliff, rising tall and stark with sloping brow out of the waters ahead, as though it had been at one time a part of the mainland and had been wrenched away by giant hands and hurled out to sea.

While still he gazed thereon, the voice of Diormet once more broke the silence.

“Master,” he cried, “we have sprung a leak, and I fear me that the boat is like to be swamped unless we put speedily ashore.”

Looking down on the instant, the Abbat saw that it was even as Diormet had said, and that from one side the water was running into the coracle.

“I will steer for yonder mighty cliff,” said Columba. “Meanwhile must we bale out the water, lest we be indeed sunk ere we may gain a port of refuge.”

Then together did the Abbat and his faithful servant toil to keep the boat clear of water, but for all their labour, it gained steadily upon them ere they were wholly under the lee of the island for which they were making. When they were abreast of it, Columba looked around for some landing-place, and presently headed the coracle into a tiny bay under the shadow of a cliff whose



stones were strangely fashioned in curves like giant ribs, gaunt and grim. On the further side, a strange islet, abristle with blocks of rock, gave shelter: and bringing their boat into this quiet haven, Columba and Diormet sprang ashore.

Between them, they drew the coracle safely to land, unlading it of its store of food, and when it was overturned, they found there was a leakage in its covering of hide.

Leaving the little vessel high upon the shore, the twain set out to discover some place where they might pass the night, hoping at daybreak to find wherewithal to mend the leak.

Evening had been drawing on rapidly, and now in the darkling sky above them, a few stars were shyly aglitter, but were not as yet come to their full radiance. The moon in her soft sheen gave promise of a brightness which should soon dim the flaming torch borne by Diormet. In its unsteady light, the servant and his master took their way over the curiously fashioned blocks of stone which rose like steps at the base of the pillared cliff.

"Verily, this is an isle of staves," said Columba, as he passed his hand down the columns and felt their straight form.

"Never have I seen their like on any land," said Diormet, wonder in his eyes.

Onward they passed, climbing along the path till they came to an end of the island, and turning the corner with the care of those who know not where their feet may next be set, lo, a greater

wonder lay before them. Out of the darkness, the inside of a giant cave slowly took form, and the torch held high shewed lines of mighty pillars—some soaring aloft till they were lost in unfathomable darkness, others broken off midway.

As torchbearer, Diormet led the way along the narrow ledge into the yawning blackness of the cavern. Columba, following close after him, stirred a stone, which, falling into the deep waters below, awoke the sleeping silence of the cave, and the roused echoes bore the sound eerily from height to height. Still onward pressed Diormet with hand stretched out before him till at last he touched stone, and knew that the end of the cave was reached. Turning, both he and the Abbat were once more looking out to sea and sky, now framed in a lofty arch of blackness. Moon and stars had gained their full lustre, and in glad radiance illumined the night.

Well-nigh dazed by this dreamlike beauty, the two men stood still, and deep was the impress made thereby upon the spirit of Columba. Yet his was the voice that first broke the silence in which they were holden.

“Not here may we pass the night, my son. Let us retrace our steps and find quarters elsewhere.”

Seeking now the heights, on all sides as they climbed rose the cries of countless sea-birds, and Columba blessed them whose domain had given him and his servant the refuge they had sought.

In a sheltered hollow which they found upon

the top of the island, they laid them down to rest ; and Diormet, looking upon the multitude of the stars ere slumber claimed him, thought they could be none other than the eyes of the Angels keeping watch over the world.

Long before morning dawned, the sleepers were awakened by sounds as of thunder booming in vasty deeps beneath them.

"It is the noise of the waves breaking within the great cave," said Columba.

"Yea, Master," answered Diormet. "Yet had we not learned truth, we had thought it the anger of some dark spirit of the isle, threatening us with evil."

"Verily, my son, we are mercifully delivered from any fear of the terror by night. *Deo gratias!*" answered Columba, ere once more he closed his eyes in sleep.

In the morning before the Abbat was awake, Diormet stole away softly, going down to the shore to gather driftwood, and likewise to fetch bread, fish, and the skin of milk which they had brought with them in the boat. Returning with his burden, he found the Abbat afoot, and, kindling a fire, soon the servant had the fish cooking thereat. As they sat at their meal, some rock pigeons circled overhead, and Columba, knowing that his own birds would surely come to him, stretched out a hand with bread, to which they flew trustfully, feeding from his open palm. Turning for further supply of food, Columba's

keen eye descried several heads raised above the edge of the cliff, but in no wise disturbed, he steadfastly pursued his purpose. Nevertheless, the Abbat saw that a small horde of men was surely stealing upon them, and after he had satisfied the hungry birds, he rose up and walked calmly towards the stealthily advancing company.

In amaze that this unarmed man did not flee them, the men came to a sudden halt, whilst their leader lowered his weapon.

In salutation of the company, Columba cried out—

“Well met, brothers! We were driven on this island by reason of a leak in our boat, and here are we stayed, seeking a hide wherewith to mend it. Canst thou supply our need? Do so, and we will well repay thee.”

“What wilt thou with skin to mend a boat?” questioned the chief in scorn. “Thy request is but folly, and know, moreover, that thy boats and likewise the lives of thy companions, whom doubtless thou hast in hiding, are ours, for we brook no invasion of our island.”

“Verily, we fear thee not, though we are but two,” answered Columba. “Come, and I will shew thee the boat which is covered with skin, that thou mayest know it is truth I have spoken. Mayhap thou thyself wouldst make one in like fashion, for the coracles of Hii may be put to greater use than other boats of which thou hast knowledge.”



Not in such manner was the leader of the barbarians wont to be met, and he before whom most men quailed, himself now tasted of fear, thinking the white stranger to be bold in the power of some subtle spell cast about him.

Seeing the chief hold back and divining his thoughts, the Abbat spoke again—

“We are but simple men of peace from whom there is naught to be feared; yet from us mayest thou learn that of the craft of the sea which may stand thee in good stead.”

Without waiting answer, Columba took his way down to the place where lay the coracle, and after some little hesitation, the chief followed him. In amaze at a boat so cunningly contrived, all the barbarians stood around, and when Columba had shewn him how such another might be fashioned, the chief gave order that an ox-hide should be brought and given to the white stranger. And as with skilful hands the Abbat and his servant affixed the hide over the leak, the chief looked on with interested eye.

In such manner did Columba win to himself the rovers of the sea who dwelt upon the Isle of Staves. After farewells and the promise of a speedy return to teach them further things of which they had no knowledge, the Abbat and Diormet launched their coracle and set sail for Hii.

The sun was setting over the isle they were leaving behind them, and as the glow of soft colour held his eyes, Diormet spoke—

“My Master, lo, this splendour of sunset calleth to mind the vision of *Tir nan òg*, the land of everlasting youth, that is seen by our people of dreams. The Gael, when he cometh to his last hour, findeth himself standing upon the shore, gazing out westwards towards the sinking sun. Moving swiftly towards him, he seeth a white galley, rudderless, and borne neither by sail nor oar, but directed and drawn solely by the great longing which is in his heart. When it is come to the shore, he entereth it, and thence is he carried over the sea of gold into the very heart of the sun itself, the home of his desire.”

“God bless thee, my son, and bring thy white ship safe into the eternal Haven,” said Columba, fondly, and the coracle, gaining the gleaming pathway which the dying sun had made upon the surface of the sea, was speedily folded in its soft radiance.

## CHAPTER XIV

“*L AUS DEO!* Our Father Columba cometh! Even now in the Sound have I seen his coracle!”

Thus joyously proclaimed a monk to all the brethren he passed, as he sped on his way with the good tidings to the monastery. The news was told to Baithene the co-arb of Hii who, with a “*Deo gratias!*” caused the bell of the Church to be rung that thereby all the brethren might be summoned to him. In obedience to the call, each one left his work or his devotions to do whatsoever the co-arb should enjoin upon him. When the Abbat’s home-coming was made known to them, with great gladness did they follow Baithene down to the shore, that there they might receive their Father with the greetings of loving children.

Gathering about Port na Muinntir, they waited in eager expectancy for the landing of Columba. As the coracle came into port, many a ready hand was thrust out to draw it ashore; and when the foot of the Abbat was set upon the island, all the brethren bowed themselves to the ground before him.

And, his eyes wet with tears of joy, Columba bestowed a blessing upon his prostrate children.

The monks risen again, the Abbat greeted each with a kindly salutation, but Baithene the co-arb, his cousin, he embraced. In his search through the ranks of the assembled brethren, his keen eye had failed to light upon his best loved son, and in anxious tone he questioned the co-arb—

“Is not Donnan yet returned to Hii? Among all that are here I see him not.”

And Baithene answered—

“He hath been sore stricken with fever, my Father, and still lieth prone in his cell. For though the fierce fire which sometime consumed is abated, its ravening hath left him worn and feeble.”

The face of the Abbat was troubled as he heard the ill-tidings. Nevertheless, though he longed straightway to press to the side of his stricken son, lifting up his voice, he cried—

“Let us to the House of the Lord, that there we may give thanks for our brother’s recovery and for this my home-coming!”

The clear voice of Columba was borne to Donnan on his bed of straw, and as the silver tones fell upon his ear, the heart of the sick monk echoed a glad amen. While in the Sanctuary of God, the psalm *Cantate Domino canticum novum, cantate Domino omnis terra* was raised, Donnan secretly joined therein, and his spirit rejoiced, for he knew that his weary eyes would soon be gladdened by the sight of his beloved Father.

To little Gilthonna beside him, he whispered—



"Our Father Columba is returned, and very soon shalt thou look upon him of whom I have so often spoken, and whom thou wilt surely love even as I do."

"I cannot love him as I love thee, my Donnan," answered little Gilthonna. "Yet will I strive to love him well."

As he spoke, his small hand gently stroked the hot brow of the sick monk, and he kissed his cheek. But when the doorway of the cell was darkened by a tall figure, stooping to enter, Gilthonna withdrew from beside Donnan, for he knew this was Columba who had come at last. And as the Abbat crossed over to the monk, the little boy slipped out of the hut, so that they were left alone together.

"Dear son!" exclaimed Columba, in tones that quivered with feeling.

"My Father!" feebly answered Donnan, as Columba after blessing him, had embraced him.

Then together they sat in the silence that is no silence: in the stillness spirit communed with spirit, and they experienced the fullness of earthly joy.

First Donnan spoke, and in faint voice said—

"I would speak with thee on high matters, my Father——"

"Nay, but thou shalt keep silence therein till thou art stronger, my son. Forget not the obedience thou owest me!" the Abbat added smilingly, as Donnan strove to plead against delay.

"Then will I not have long to wait, my Father, for thy return hath already brought increase of strength to my frame, and soon shall I be as vigorous of body as I have been aforetime," answered the monk, pressing Columba's hand in farewell.

In leaving the hut of wattle, the Abbat's eyes fell upon a little lad, patiently waiting without. Since the child was strange to him, Columba with a smile that was as sunlight upon his face, questioned—

"Who art thou, little one?"

The boy answered in the Pictish tongue—

"I know not yet thy speech, though I would fain master it," whereat Columba repeated his question in the same tongue.

"I am called Gilthonna," answered the boy, gazing fearlessly into the kindly face of the Abbat.

"How didst thou happen here? An thou hast a tale to tell, let us sit together upon this rock, and I will listen to thy story."

"Yea, I will sit beside thee, for thou art like the lost father of my dreams, and art also like unto my dear Donnan."

"Then thou dost love Donnan, little lad?"

"Yea, that I do right truly, for it was he who delivered me from the waves, and hath made me one of the family of God, so that I no longer lack a Father."

"Thou art a son after Donnan's own heart!" said Columba, as he stroked the child's fair hair.

"Dost thou not know how thou camest into the sea, or whence it was that thou didst come?"

"Nay, for I can remember but little of the days that are past. Yet I think that I am a King's son, for that I was surely made King of the Waves," answered Gilthonna, with little brow wrinkled, trying to recall lost memories.

Ere he rose to leave, Columba kissed him, for his heart was drawn to this child whose strange adventures were doubtless the cause of his fanciful imaginations.

Free again to rejoin Donnan, Gilthonna entered the monk's cell, and seeing he slept not, whispered in his ear—

"Thy Father put his arm about me like I was his own little son, and I love him too. But thou art my Donnan whom I love before all other."

Next morning the mystic was so much better, that the brother skilled in leechcraft who came to tend him, had marvelled at the change, but that he knew how the coming of Columba ever wrought wonders upon those that were sick. And when Gilthonna would have waited upon him, Donnan sent him forth to disport himself, saying he had no longer need of any tending.

Though already the little lad had many friends amongst the brethren, most of whom could converse with him, there was that in Columba which drew all children to him, even as the sea draws the rivers into its great embrace. Thus Gilthonna first made his way to the rising ground whereon,

set apart from the other cells, stood the Abbat's hut of oaken planks. As he came in view of the door, he saw that Columba was there occupied in some strange pursuit; and the Abbat, looking up and seeing the child's wondering gaze, called to him—

“Come nigh, little lad, for thou art welcome! Wouldst see what I do?”

Gilthonna came near and saw with amaze that Columba with great diligence was tracing curious signs upon a parchment, making faithful copy from an open book at his side. Wondering at the strange handicraft of the Abbat, the boy questioned—

“What dost thou therein?”

“It is a copy that I make of the Divine Songs that are sung in the worship of the Lord, little lad,” answered Columba. “Some day when thou art older, mayhap thou wilt desire to do likewise, and I myself will teach thee.”

Later in the day, when Gilthonna sat with some of the working brothers who were fishing in the Sound, and talked of what he had seen, he heard how great a scribe the Abbat was accounted, yea, even across the seas in his own land of Eirinn.

In the coracle with the fishermen the boy found great delight, but since the cold of the day was biting, the ever-watchful monks, noting his blue limbs, brought him speedily to land, and bade him recover warmth by racing upon the shore. Gilthonna loved the white sands, and despite the



bleak season of the year, would oftentimes lie thereon, watching the little birds, called by the brethren the servants of Bride, as they ran to and fro on the shore. Though now he shrank from the touch of the water, he still loved to watch his little subjects the wavelets dance over the sands, leaving behind them the tracks of their frolics.

On this day, Gilthonna did not stay long upon the shore, for a sudden thought had come into his mind, which he was eager to follow. Thus he took his way over the *machar* where the working brothers tilled the fertile land, to the wild uplands where others tended the sheep. As he passed by, each man gave him kindly greeting, but with none did Gilthonna stay to help in their labours as was his wont; for he was intent on a search for flowers, that he might gather them in token of his love for Donnan.

He knew that early in the year blossoms were shy of appearing, and hid themselves where'er they might amidst the grass, and in nooks and crannies of the rocks. In such places did he make search, and with a cry of delight, hailed his first discovery. Peeping up from amongst many leaves, like little stars of gold, were bright lesser celandines, and after happening upon these he found yet more golden treasure. A low murmur told where a tiny stream trickled on its way, and drawn by the call of the little clear voice, Gilthonna, stooping down, found the gleaming king-cup, brother of the celandine. The boy spied also





the pale-hued primrose, and eagerly garnered of it into his golden store, whereby the cell of Donnan should be gladdened. With his treasures clasped tightly in both hands, Gilthonna sped back to the monastery, and as he drew near to the *vallum* which encircled it, he heard the bell of the Church call the brethren from work to worship.

Now, Donnan had taught him that even the Angels obeyed this summons, and the little lad was afeared lest the blessed spirits should miss him from his place, so now he joined the brethren that he might sing with them. At the close of the Office, ere any of the monks had left the sanctuary, the boy stole quietly away, and with eager feet ran to the cell of Donnan.

Softly he entered, that he might not wake his dear brother should he sleep; and seeing the eyes of the monk were closed, Gilthonna gently laid the flowers on the sleeper's breast. Then with beating heart, the little lad left him, smiling to think that when Donnan awoke, he would perchance suppose that the gathered gold had been dropped there by the hand of an Angel.



## CHAPTER XV

WHEN Mattins was ended on the morrow after his home-coming, the Abbat stole softly into the cell of Donnan to see how it fared with the sick man. Finding him peacefully sleeping, and Gilthonna curled up on a little bed of straw at his feet, Columba with thankful heart left his dear son to set forth on that oversight of the whole island which from time to time he was wont to make. Ere yet he left the monastery, he greeted with kindly words some of the brethren who were busied in the building of a new hut; for that by reason of the many that claimed the hospitality of Hii, it was needful to add to the number of the guest-chambers. With skilful fingers they wove the wattle in and out of the stakes driven upright into the ground, hoping to make an end of their task by nightfall, so that their Father on his return might bless the new-made building. Passing without the *vallum*, the Abbat made the saving Sign upon the door of every building in his path. The cart-house, the barn, the stable, the mill, the kiln, and the bake-house, each had his blessing, and of all that were within, whether man or beast, none could think he had been overlooked, but might each one alike rejoice in the love of the Abbat for all brethren.

The wind blew keenly from the east, and so clear was the air that the Abbat, making his way to Port Rona, thought that never before had he seen with such plainness the furthest peaks of the Malean Isle. From the distance, the music of labour in lusty strokes smote pleasantly upon his ear, and soon he gained the shore where a company of stalwart lay-brothers wrought upon divers craft.

After their customary salutation of the Abbat, the master-craftsman would have him scan the lines of the boat which they were fashioning from oaken planks, for Columba was skilled in such matters, as became one who had sailed many times and oft upon the sea.

The Abbat's eye keenly scanned this unfinished boat, and at some points he had it shaped in other fashion to its greater advantage upon the water. Nor lacked he interest in craft of different sort, but commended the skill with which some workmen plied the axe in hollowing out mighty trunks of oak, and likewise those who covered with hides the light coracles of wicker, for the monks ever bore with them on a journey, boats of lighter build for making passage over loch or river.

Meanwhile, across the Sound a little fleet slowly made its way, each boat towing trees hewn from the thick forests of the Malean Isle. Looking up from his work and catching sight of the vessels, the master-craftsman spoke—

“Verily, Silnan and his company are right

welcome! They come not a whit too soon, for we are at an end of our oaken planks, and I would have more hewn from those logs they bring to finish this craft whereon we now labour."

"Brother Silnan cometh on other errand also," said the Abbat, "for behold, a stranger with him in the coracle!"

The brethren, ever ready with a welcome, paused in their work to see what manner of visitor it might be who thus approached their shores. But when the boat came into the haven, and the company were landed, the brothers perceived, by reason of the watch kept over him, that the stranger was some evil-doer brought for judgment. When the man stood before Columba, Silnan, who had him in charge spoke—

"Father, at thy bidding have we captured upon Malea, the robber, Erc of Coloso. As thou didst truly foretell, we found him hidden beneath his boat which, that it might not be espied, he had covered with grass amongst the sand-hills. Under cover of night did he sail to our Isle of Erraid where the sea-calves breed, and after killing many of them, he bore them thence as booty. What wilt thou that we do with him, O Father?"

Columba looked compassionately upon the robber who, though gaunt and famished of aspect, yet made a show of defiance as he faced his judge.

"Tell me, brother Erc," the Abbat urged in gentle tone, "why didst thou so savagely slaughter our sea-calves?"

“For that the pangs of hunger laid hold on me and mine, and no nearer home could I discover aught that would feed the flames which were consuming us. Had I been less feeble from lack of food, I had not been overcome by thy followers to fall a prey to thy doom. Long hunger and want have taken the heart from me, so I would that thou make a speedy end of me.”

“Nay, poor man,” answered Columba; “thy tale claims pity rather than punishment. When thy hunger is appeased, freely shalt thou depart, and if again thou findest thyself in any sore stress, take not the goods of others, but come hither, and thy needs shall be supplied.”

And the while Erc stared dumbly in amaze, the Abbat, turning to one of the brethren, gave order—

“Go, Lugbe, furnish the boat of this brother with all the food that may be bestowed therein, so that he return not empty-handed to his home.”

When this was done, and Erc well feasted upon the flesh of sheep, it was the Abbat himself who launched the boat of the robber, invoking a blessing upon his voyage, and promising to visit him thereafter on Coloso, his island home.

Now, it was upon that self-same isle that Columba had landed first after his exile, but would not abide thereon, for that from the heights of it, Eirinn, dear to his heart, might still be dimly seen. With this in his thoughts, the Abbat took his way inland towards the *machar*, and it was not long ere



his mind, forsaking Coloso, dwelt with yearning upon his Motherland. A great longing for Eirinn surged up in his heart and took possession of him, so that by reason of it he suffered once more the pangs known but to those living in exile. The brethren who tilled the fields, noting as he passed the sadness in his eyes, thought it due to the sickness of Donnan, and little recked that there was a sickness which gripped sorely at their Abbat's own heart. But the sheep and the cattle which greeted him on his path with clumsy devotion, and his own white horse, knew something amiss with their kindly elder brother who blessed them as was his wont, bidding them rejoice in their rich pastureland. Then leaving all the brethren behind him on the *machar*, the Abbat pressed forward in his pain over the undulating sandhills, through the long coarse grass and stubborn heather, and on into the shades of the forest.

"O Eirinn, my Motherland, would that the sight of thee might gladden mine eyes!" he cried aloud, throwing his hood from off his head as though he would that his words might be borne on the wings of the fleeting wind across the seas to the land of his desire.

And when Port na Churraich came in sight, Columba recalled that eve of the Feast of Pentecost when he and his twelve companions first had landed on Hii, and how they had climbed this hill on the left to descry whether they were indeed out of sight of Eirinn. There, on the crest of the

hill, stood sentinel the pile of stones they had raised—the “Cairn of the Back Turned to Eirinn”—for that from that height the land of their love was no longer visible.

“O memorial of my misery, thou art set there in token of the sin wherefore I am justly exiled!” cried the Abbat, in exceeding bitterness of spirit.

As though in answer to his cry, Columba heard a voice urging him to climb to the cairn. Thinking it might be the prompting of a demon whom he must resist, he crossed himself; but the voice did not cease to urge him upward, so no longer did he withstand its bidding.

When he had gained the summit of the height, Columba stood by the cairn, his face set towards his homeland, gazing out over the rolling main where the sea-birds winged their restless flight. But his eyes saw not the creatures of the air whom he loved: not for him that day the joy of any work of creation—save one alone.

In sore longing he cried once more—

“O my Motherland, would that thy fair green robe were spread before me to satisfy my hungry eyes! O for one glimpse of thy groves of oak—thy fields of emerald! Yet, O Lord, Thou knowest I pine not for these by reason of ingratitude, but because of the earthly longing in my heart for the country of my birth! Almighty Lord, I acknowledge before Thee that exile is my just portion, and I ask not for sentence to be recalled against me. For what is exile from my fair home on

earth, so it be not exile from Thy fairer Home in Heaven? Yet, O Lord, for the comfort of mine eyes do I crave sight of Eirinn—one glimpse to set at rest the aching of my heart!"

As thus the Abbat held passionate entreaty with the Lord, again the voice came to him, and this time he heard it in further exhortation. "Thou hast thy desire: for one short space the veil of distance is uplifted!"

Then with trembling joy the Abbat beheld, and lo, far out at sea, yet plain to his eyes, lay the Isle of Eirinn, stretched in radiance before him. With a great satisfaction glowing in his heart he gazed upon it, and well comforted, gave thanks for this further token of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE boy Gilthonna stood without the cell of Donnan, watching some redbreasts at his feet feed upon the crumbs which he had thrown to them. These little fellows of the bright eyes were his chief favourites, and coming daily to visit him, would often perch upon his shoulder. To each did Gilthonna give a name, and each day he was quick to miss any of their number that were absent. Well he loved the song of his little brothers, and oft would he urge them to sing in quire, after the manner of the other brethren, the praises of the Lord their Creator. To-day great was the child's delight, for he had made discovery of a nest which two of the company had snugly built in a hole they had found in the *vallum*. But now as he watched for the owners of the tiny home, the shrill scream of a merlin in the distance put his little comrades to hasty flight. Gilthonna, looking up after them and waving regretful farewell, saw that Columba stood alone at the door of his hut. The boy, ever eager to be of service, ran on the instant to ask if there was aught he could do for the Abbat.

“Nay, little lad, for I have but now bidden Diormet go in search of one of the brethren whose



coming I await. Yet I thank thee for thy willingness to serve me," answered Columba, placing in kindly fashion his hand upon the boy's fair head.

And as Gilthonna would have departed, he stayed him saying—

"Tarry here, little brother of Donnan, for as thou so lovest thy brethren of the air, thou wilt find pleasure in accompanying Conin upon the mission which will be his to fulfil. Come thou within an thou wilt, for I have not yet safely bestowed mine inkhorn, and it is very precious to me."

Then for the first time did Gilthonna enter the Abbat's hut, and was quick to note wherein it differed from those of the brethren, for that he saw no trace of bed there, only in one corner a pillow of stone resting upon the bare ground.

"Father Columba," questioned the boy, "dost thou never take rest in sleep?"

"Yea, verily, little lad: why askest thou so strange a question?"

"For that herein thou hast neither straw nor hide for bed."

The face of Columba was grave as he made answer—

"Too fond of ease and of indulgence is this mortal body of mine. It hath shelter at nightfall from both wind and rain under this roof, and therewith must it be content."

Ere Gilthonna could question further, Diormet returned, bringing with him Conin who, after he

had prostrated himself before the Abbat, silently awaited his pleasure.

“Yestere’en, my brother, the longings of the natural man within me overmastered those of spiritual desire, and albeit the Lord had pity upon my weakness, yet is it seemly that to-day I should deny myself the joy of welcoming a stranger guest who cometh to us across the seas from our own Eirinn. Wherefore I have sent for thee that when our guest alighteth in distress on a strange isle, he may yet be comforted by one awaiting to do him service. Get thou, therefore, with this little lad as companion, to our western coast, and about the ninth hour, a crane well-nigh spent by buffetings from contrary winds, will fall upon the shore. Lift him therefrom with all gentleness, and have him in thy tending for three days, feeding him with care. At the end of that time, thou wilt find he hath renewed his strength and longeth to return to Eirinn, his well-loved land and ours. So let it be, and for the sake of that common fatherland, shew him all brotherly love. This I lay upon thee.”

So it was that Conin and Gilthonna sped to the bay of the *machar*, the little lad full of eager expectancy scanning the sky for the appearing of the crane that was to be their guest. The wind blew in great gusts, so that the sea, despite the half-tide, shewed a fretful surface, and broke upon the shore in murmurings of dull dispeace. Pacing the sands, the brother and his little companion kept patient watch, Gilthonna full of questionings

concerning all things that were around them, alike on earth, in sky, and on sea. Presently there came a heavy sound as of imprisoned thunder, and lo, from amongst the black rocks by the sea, there shot up a great fountain of water. Gilthonna was first to espy this strange sight, and cried—

“Look, look, Conin, the sea in its anger hath broken through the hard rock!”

Together they stood and gazed marvelling upon this strange thing. There was a pause after the column of water had sunk to earth; a renewed roar from hollow depths to herald its re-appearing, and then again the great column of water shot upward, each time attaining a greater height. All the while this continued, Gilthonna and Conin were spell-bound with wonder until the fountain began to wane, rising now to a lesser height each time, and at last sinking away altogether.

“We must needs ask our Father Columba to tell us how this wonder of the waters cometh to pass,” mused the boy, and as still the crane came not he would hear some tale of Columba. So Conin, still keeping watch, began the story of Scannlan the Thirsty. And in this fashion did he tell the tale of the Prince of Ossory whom Aedh, Prince of Eirinn, held captive.

“In the hands of Aedh, son of the King of Eirinn, was Scannlan Mor, son of the King of Ossory, as hostage, and for him did our Father Columba become surety that he would be released at the end of a year. But when that time was

passed, Aedh would neither set Scannlan free nor accept other hostage for him. Now with great barbarity had the captive been treated. Round about him had been built a hut of wicker without any other opening therein, save one small space for the passage of food. And of that he was given but scant supply and moreover all that he had was salted, so that great became the thirst of Scannlan, nor was this in any wise slackened by the small draught of ale given him daily. Beside this torment, nine great chains were put upon him, and many warriors kept watch over him ——”

“Was he so mighty a man that they feared he might burst his chains, and break forth from his prison?” questioned Gilthonna.

“Nay, little brother, rather that those who passed the cell of Scannlan might not venture to succour him. For on all who passed by he cried out for water, that the thirst wherewith he was tortured might be quenched. At last the news of these things was brought to our Father Columba, whereupon he wept bitter tears, and hastening to the great gathering of Drumceatt, there demanded the release of Scannlan. ‘Nay,’ answered Aedh, stubbornly; ‘in the hut where he lieth shall Scannlan die.’ ‘Naught further will I say to thee, O King,’ answered Columba, ‘but I will pray the Almighty that it be pleasing to Him that when I go to Mattins, none other than Scannlan shall appear to take the sandals from off my feet ere I enter the Sanctuary of the Lord.’



Having thus spoken our Abbat departed to Derry, and scarce had he left than a thunderbolt fell upon the Hill of Drumceatt, so that great fear came upon all there assembled, and set free by an Angel, Scannlan made his way straight to the Black Church of Derry. There, as Columba passed into Mattins, it was none other than Scannlan who stooped to take the sandals from off the feet of the Abbat, whereupon ——”

“Look, look!” broke in Gilthonna, laying one hand upon Conin, and with the other pointing over the sea. “Is not that the poor crane whose coming we await?”

“Yea, methinks it is none other,” answered Conin, arising and gazing intently upon a bird that with great wings flapping, as though exhausted, slowly rose and fell in the air.

“If I hold out mine arms, dost thou think he will fly into them?” questioned Gilthonna.

“Thou canst but make trial,” answered Conin, smiling the while upon the eager boy.

So Gilthonna stood with arms outstretched, offering the crane a warm haven, but as it reached the shore the bird, almost lifeless, fell fluttering upon the sands. Then Conin with hands of tenderness raised his stricken guest, and on his breast bore him to the monastery. Gilthonna, running by his side, spoke words of comfort to the bird, telling him of the love of the brethren for all creatures, and of Columba’s special love for everyone who came from his own land.

“Mayhap, since brother crane belongeth to Eirinn,” said Gilthonna to Conin, “our Father Columba will honour him by setting apart for his shelter the new-built hospice.”

And thus it fell out, for there it was that the gentle hands of Gilthonna fed the starving bird; and the Abbat blessed both him and Conin, for that they had so lovingly tended the poor victim of the sea-winds.

At the ending of three days, as Columba had foretold, the bird, greatly recovered, shewed signs of his desire to return whence he came. Rising into the air, and circling first to discover his proper course, he made flight with grateful cry towards Eirinn, while both Conin and Gilthonna watched his passage until he became but a speck in the world of sea and sky.

## CHAPTER XVII

COLUMBA was not long returned to Hii ere tidings came to him that the brethren upon Hinba had sore need of him. Therefore, with all speed went he to their aid, his mind at ease concerning Donnan, for he was assured that his beloved son was making good recovery.

. . . . .

Some few days later, the early morning light shewed two boats speeding with well-filled sails towards the shores of Hii, and soon they had gained the shelter of Port na Muinntir. As they grounded almost side by side, a stranger of noble bearing sprang on to the sand, and approaching the other boat, reverently saluted the Abbat, still seated within.

"Welcome, my son. Thou art not an unexpected guest," said Columba, gravely.

"Alas, Father Abbat," spake the man, "I, Aidan, cousin of Conall, King of Dalriada, am but a bearer of ill-tidings, for my cousin is fallen in warfare which Korna, Queen of the Picts, waged against him."

His prophetic vision thus fulfilled, Columba veiled his face in sorrow, for it was Conall who had granted him the land of Hii. By reason of

this news, and since the brethren had not yet set forth upon their labours, the Abbat straightway gave order that they should rest and prepare themselves to celebrate the Holy Mysteries for the soul's needs of Conall.

Ere they betook themselves to the Sanctuary, Columba spoke with Aidan.

"My son, know that thou art set apart by God to rule over the kingdom of Dalriada, for in a vision have I seen thee preferred above thy brother Eoghan, who, according to ancient law and in the eyes of men, should succeed to Conall."

Thus did it come to pass that with sorrow in his heart, for he would fain that Eoghan should reign in Dalriada, did Columba ordain Aidan to be King, laying his hands upon his head in blessing, and speaking to him in words of prophecy and exhortation.

Aidan, ere he left the island, questioned of Columba—

"But, my Father, how shall my people of Dalriada acknowledge me as King, seeing that my brother Eoghan is rightful heir?"

"Nay, thou art rightful heir, my son, since God hath given thee right," answered the Abbat. "This will I make plain in letters which thou shalt deliver to the chief men of Dalriada, so that they shall acclaim thee King."

So Aidan went forth, and in virtue of his sacring at the hands of the great Abbat of Hii, he was accepted as successor to Conall in Dalriada, and



in the presence of a mighty concourse of people was installed after the manner of that Kingdom.

Amidst the tumult of the tribesmen acclaiming him with shouts and with smiting of sword upon shield, was he lifted high as their elect lord, whereupon seven priests vested him in white garments in token of the purity of life whereby a King is best adorned. Then did the venerable Bishop take him by the hand, and set his right foot in the print that is upon the stone of the Kings of Dalriada, thereby signifying that Aidan should follow in their footsteps, as thereafter he swore to do. With wise words of exhortation, the historian of the tribe then placed the sword of his fathers in the King's right hand, and the white rod of rule in his left. And as Aidan stood there, raised above the heads of the people, stalwart and splendid in the glory of kingship with which he was now fully invested, the chief bard chanted the long line of his descent. Thus came to an end the inauguration of the new Lord of Dalriada.

Meanwhile, upon Hii, Columba pondered deeply, wondering how his dear son Eoghan would receive the tidings that he had been supplanted by Aidan his brother. Even as he mused, Eoghan, greatly distraught in spirit, sought the Abbat of Hii; and after he had been tenderly embraced by Columba, spake thus—

“I am in sore trouble, my Father, for that they have but now borne me the tidings that Conall, alas, is passed from hence, and now am I heir to

Dalriada. I know that thou wouldst have me reign over my people, for hast thou not schooled me with care that I might be fitted for so great a task? But my spirit shrinketh from it, and fain would I serve God amongst the brethren here on Hii. Counsel me, O my Father, if I may be delivered from this burden of kingship, or if I must e'en take it upon me!"

Great was the wonderment and joy of the Abbat that Eoghan besought him in this fashion, and he made answer—

"Thy wish was granted or ever thou didst give it voice. Aidan thy brother is already ordained King of Dalriada."

In thankful amaze, Eoghan questioned—

"How did this come to pass, O my Father?"

And the Abbat answered—

"Not many days hence I was upon the isle of Hinba, and there in a mighty exaltation of spirit I beheld the vision of an Angel of the Lord, holding in his hand a mystic book of the Ordination of Kings. This he bade me read, and I saw therein the name of thy brother Aidan inscribed instead of thine, O Eoghan, whom I love with a greater love. And I willed not to ordain thy brother for that thou wert rightful heir, whereupon the Angel smote me, telling me it was the will of the Lord that Aidan should reign instead of thee. Upon the two nights following also, did the Angel appear to me, whereupon I set sail for Hii, and even as I landed, lo, thy brother landed also, and him forth-

with did I ordain King of Dalriada. Now know I that it was but my ignorance that would have thee bear rule in the land, for the Lord hath known the wish of thy heart and hath granted it to thee."

Thus did Columba and Eoghan rejoice together, and so it came to pass that a few days hence in the Sanctuary of the Lord, Eoghan on bended knees rehearsed after the Abbat the vow of the brethren, and in token of the brotherhood into which he was admitted, was shaven from ear to ear, after the manner of the monks of Hii.

## CHAPTER XVIII

ON the fourth day of the Abbat's home coming, Donnan was so greatly recovered that Columba could no longer restrain him from speaking of the things that lay upon his heart. As they sat together, the mystic unburdened himself, and thereafter made petition in the attentive ear of the Abbat.

"First would I tell thee, my Father, the tale of the little lad upon whom the name Gilthonna was bestowed in the Sacred Laver," began Donnan. "By reason of some heavy blow which hath befallen him, his memory of past days is well-nigh void."

And after the telling of the vision and its fulfilment, he continued—

"Albeit the child was revived before we again set sail for home, yet as the day drew to its close, Gilthonna shewed sore need of the warmth of fire, so we cast about where the coracle might be conveniently landed for the night. Sailing close by the Inner Isles, we were borne past Ruim, and looking towards Egea, lo, I beheld as it were a shadowy hand from out the clouds make sign of the Cross over the island; and a voice said, 'Who will kindle fire in the isle to be a beacon light in the wilderness of ocean?' Thus I knew that the Lord of the earth had marked



Egea for Himself, and for a space my tongue refused speech. When words came again, I questioned Cruithne thereon, but his eyes had been holden and he had not seen the sacring of the Isle. Nevertheless, we were of one mind to seek shelter on its shores, and rounding the furthest point, where haply the high cliffs might hold some cave, we espied one wherein we passed the night. In the morning as soon as there was light sufficient to guide my steps, I left the sleeping child in the care of Cruithne, that I might discover what people dwelt upon the island. Following a track up the cliff, I came out upon a path, climbing upward to the strange mass of rock which rears its head high over the sea. Under its shadow I found some half-score men tending sheep, and no little amazed by their friendly bearing, I spoke with them. They told me that before me had come another in our habit with the message of peace, which they had heard gladly. I learnt also how that, ere this messenger departed, they besought him to send one who would dwell with them for ever. Was it thou, O my Father, who thus went amongst these kindly people, promising to them the words of life?"

And Columba answered—

"Yea, and I have not been unmindful of that promise made them."

"Father, this is what I would beg of thee," broke in Donnan, "that thou wouldst of thy favour, and despite mine unworthiness, send me

forth to these souls that hunger! But a little while, and the last trace of bodily infirmity will have left me, and in body as in spirit shall I be strong and ready for such mission. Bid me go tend these sheep without a shepherd, that they which are astray in the wilderness may be gathered into the one Fold!"

Now the heart of Columba, in its human longing, was very heavy when he heard the request of his dear son, for he knew that the parting he had hoped was yet far distant, even now drew nigh; and that this was the beginning of the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning Donnan. Yet after a space, he laid his hand upon the monk, saying—

"Go, and the Lord prosper thee, my son! Thou shalt indeed have thy heart's desire, for the Egean Isle is surely set apart for thy labours."

Then upon the soul of Donnan there fell a calm such as heretofore, lacking full satisfaction of the longings of the spirit, he had never known.

When again he spoke, he had yet other request to make of the Abbat.

"My Father, ere I depart from Hii, I would that I might see Cailtan advanced to the priesthood. As deacon he hath this long time served faithfully in the sacred ministry, yet is he too humble of himself to seek higher Order."

"Thou hast well spoken, my son, and when Cronan the Bishop cometh hither again, I will pray him to lay hands upon Cailtan, for I too know him to be most worthy."

When the news of the forthcoming mission to Egea was spread about, the brethren wondered amongst themselves whom the Abbat would send with Donnan. Many of them longed with fervent longing that they might company him, to share with him in the high glory of red martyrdom. Amongst these, was Torquil, a lay brother, one of those Norse captives whom Columba had borne with him from the Scian Isle. Great was this man's desire to go forth, if haply he in his turn might save others, and this was all his prayer as he worked patiently at the mill, grinding the grain for the needs of the monastery.

While the strength of Donnan returned to him apace, and yet the brothers questioned who would be sent forth with him, Cronan the Bishop came to Hii, and was received by Columba and the brethren with the honour they ever paid to those of his Order. To celebrate his coming in fitting manner, the Abbat proclaimed a feast day, whereupon the monks, as was their custom, abstained from all labour. Then it was that Columba begged the Bishop to lay his hands upon Cailtan, who had been preparing with much prayer and fasting for the high Office of the Priesthood. Cronan gladly consented thereunto, and vesting himself in white, as in the garment of joy, and wearing the crown of his Order upon his head, betook himself with the brethren into the Sanctuary for the ministering of the solemn sacrament.

Thus was Cailtan ordained presbyter by the

laying on of the hands of the Bishop, who likewise anointed the palms of his hands with holy oil, and put the stole upon both his shoulders in token of the yoke of Christ. When the time of the Sacred Oblation was come, the Bishop in his humility, would have the Abbat join with him in offering the Holy Sacrifice, as presbyter was wont to join with presbyter. But Columba would not, out of the great reverence he bore for the highest Order of the ministry, since it was given to a Bishop to offer alone.

When the venerable Cronan was gone from amongst them, the Abbat knew that the time of parting from his dearly loved son was come, and that now he must make choice of those that should accompany him. Thus he set apart them whom he deemed most meet for the ingathering, and of the number was Torquil the Norseman.

Concerning Gilthonna, Columba in secret was greatly troubled. By reason of his vision of red martyrdom, he would fain keep the little lad with him on Hii, and when he talked with Donnan on the matter, the mystic was of like mind. Yet hearing they would part him thus from his beloved Donnan, Gilthonna clinging to him, besought the Abbat with tears that he too might go to the Egean Isle. Columba at last gave halting consent, in the faith that the little lad was of other destiny than his companions; and the boy being comforted, all things were forthwith set in order for the going forth of Donnan and his company.



In the dark hour before the dawn of the day appointed for their departure, all the brethren, bearing lights, assembled in the Sanctuary; that as the family of the Lord, they might together celebrate the Holy Mysteries. With Columba, Donnan stood before the Altar, in order that for the last time in the flesh, the Father and his dear son might join together in offering the Sacred Oblation.

As with hands outstretched they pleaded the Lord's Passion on behalf of the souls of all the Faithful in whatsoever state, they were wrapt in the spirit, and knew no more of the confines of earth. . . . Nearer and nearer the Divine Office drew to its height. . . . There came the sound as of the passing of a gentle wind, and the hush of the great silence fell upon the Sanctuary. . . . Bowed low in the awful Presence, the brethren with faces veiled, softly sang—

*"Ideo, cum Angelis et Archangelis, cumque omni militia cœlestis exercitus. . . . Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt cœli ac terra gloria tua . . . !"*

Gilthonna, looking up, if haply he might gain a glimpse of one of the blessed spirits, saw in awe and wonder that the torches of the brethren were dimmed by a cloud of light of exceeding brightness that rested upon the Altar.

And Donnan, brought within the veil, perceived that Heaven and earth were not sundered, and

time and space were no more ; for that the Light of the Presence knit together in one fellowship all souls, both of them that were under the Altar, and of them that in all lands worshipped about it. When Columba turned to give to his children who were to leave him, the Food of the voyager, in the ears of Donnan it was the Angels who sang the invitation of approach—

*“ Sancte venite, Christe Corpus sumite ;  
Sanctum bibentes quo redempti Sanguine.”*

The Abbat, dissolved in tears, gave the final blessing, and there was a long silence ere at last the brethren rose from their knees to pass out of the Sanctuary of the Lord.

Into the refectory they went to break their fast ere the little company set forth from the silver shores of Hii. In solemn silence was the meal partaken, and thereafter the Abbat rose and all the monks with him that they might cross to Camus Cuil an t'Saimh, whence Donnan was to sail for the Isle upon which the Lord had set His seal.

Two coracles were drawn high upon the beach, ready prepared with food, sails and oars for the voyage ; and when the brethren were gathered there, four from amongst them, bidden by the Abbat, bore the boats over the white sands to the water's edge.

As he stood in the forefront of the company, ready to bless their departure, the eyes of Columba

were undimmed, though his heart was full of tears in the knowledge that never again on earth should he see Donnan or any of his companions. In the presence of them all, he dared not trust himself to embrace his dear son. Only Gilthonna did he take in his arms, that the little lad might kiss him ere he dismissed them with his blessing.

Out from the shore of the Isle which was the home of their hearts, sped Donnan and his company in the coracles whose fluttering sails bore them further and further from the Bay of the Ocean Nook.

Then the brethren, beckoned by Baithene, stole quietly back to the monastery, leaving the tall form of the Abbat upon the beach alone, gazing with yearning eyes out to sea, where his spirit went out after the children of his heart.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE nights and days were equal in length, and it was now the fourteenth day after the full moon, upon which, as he had appointed, Briochan looked for the coming of Korna. In conjuring up his vision of the island of promise, the chief *druí* was assured that ambition alone would suffice to raise up a kingdom for the bold Queen. In order to impress her still further, he would prophesy what she would see there, and to this end he sent Luarch to the Egean Isle to spy out the land. This *druí* had returned with the tale that Donnan and a company of monks had settled amongst the Egeans, and were seeking to draw them away from the faith of the *druadh*.

Now Briochan knew full well that the influence of Donnan over the Queen was greater than his own, and despite her vows, he feared the overthrow of his power so long as the spell of the monk's grey eyes was upon Korna. In the news that Luarch brought, he saw the favour of the mighty spirits towards him, for that now Donnan was delivered into his power. Eagerly he awaited the coming of the Queen, by whose hands he purposed that the blow to Donnan should be dealt, for he would have her wing an arrow into her own heart.



At noon on this day, as Briochan rested in a hollow high upon the black rocks whence his eyes could sweep the ocean, he saw, far out at sea, a little fleet of boats; and knew as they drew near, that the day of his triumph approached.

In the foremost boat sat Korna, on fire to come into her promised kingdom. But not alone, for she would go thither in company with Donnan. Although in her thirst for vengeance, she had left for the nonce her quest of the mystic, he yet shared her heart with the desire for the kingdom that was to be.

The isles, cloud-capped, glowed purple in the distance; the sky was radiant in a fresh mantle of blue flecked with white; the sea shimmered in hues of emerald; the grim mountains ahead, with splintered crests, gleamed in the sunlight, yet Korna heeded none of these. The boat was scarce aground ere she rose from her seat, and leaving her warriors to follow her, leapt to land.

Briochan, coming down from his couch of rock to meet the Queen, marked that, staggering, she sank down upon the nearest boulder; and when he gained her side, saw that she was faint from many wounds. From some, the blood still oozed, and where it was staunched, it had dried upon her arms and face, so that she was in very truth a spectacle of horror.

"Hast thou been in battle, O Korna, or was it in the chase that thou didst receive such hurt?" questioned the *druí*.

"I made war upon strange tribesmen, for that they fell upon the chiefest of my warriors and slew him," answered the Queen. When somewhat recovered, she continued—

"As I fought, my sword brake in my hand, and thus was I at the mercy of the foe till I gained other weapon. Nevertheless the battle was to us, for they lost their King and were driven into the waters. But tell me, O Briochan, where is that island that is promised me, for my men clamour to take possession thereof?"

"It is the Egean Isle, O Queen, wherein all power is stored up for thee. Yet ere thou mayst enter into it, thou must, in thanksgiving for their gift, offer sacrifice to the spirits who have thus favoured thee."

"I am ready to sacrifice, O Briochan, even if the powers of the air would have of my warriors for victims!" cried the Queen, eagerly.

The tribesmen, seated on the ground round about her, looked at one another, fear in the eyes of all, and in some a smouldering hate beside.

"Nay," answered Briochan; "the spirits of might require not the sacrifice of men but of monks——"

"I go to Hii e'er ever I set foot on Egea!" cried Korna, wild-eyed; "and there will I slay the man Columba and all his cursed brood ere his spells be set against us in the coming kingdom! Then shall I be for ever rid of these evil strangers, and the spirits will likewise be satisfied!"

Now that which Korna spoke pleased Briochan mightily. Fearful that she should discover Donnan to be amongst the monks on Egea ere they were put to the sword, he had craftily planned to tell the Queen that the all-powerful spirits would have the monks fallen upon and slain in the night. But another and a surer plan flashed across his mind as he heard the words of the Queen, and he said—

“Thou dost well to harry the nest of the serpent when thou art recovered from thy wounds, for none could oppose to Columba greater strength than thine. Yet there are broods of monks other than those upon Hii, for already Columba threatens with his spells even thy kingdom upon Egea. It is there that the mighty spirits will have the monks destroyed ere the promise is fulfilled to thee.”

The Queen, being privily set upon first securing Donnan, answered stubbornly—

“I have vowed a vow that I go first to Hii!”

“I have said it is well,” replied Briochan, smoothly; “yet since the resistless spirits brook no delay, what sayest thou if I fall upon the monks of Egea in thy name, while thou dost betake thyself to Hii?”

Now Korna did not purpose that all the warriors should go with her to Hii. Mindful of the wall of flame, she would not now go thither unattended, but deemed that very few of her tribesmen would suffice to slay the monks while they slept by night, while she herself would, by subtlety, save Donnan. Thus she was speedy to answer—

“Go in my name and prosper, O Briochan, for I will leave half this company of warriors here that they may go forth with thee to slay the monks in my kingdom—or to burn them in their huts, an thou wilt!” she added with a laugh.

And Briochan laughed with her, for now he was assured that there was no escape for Donnan, who must perish ere Korna landed upon Egea.

After that the Queen’s wounds had been tended by the skilful hands of the *drui*, who poured balm upon them, bound them up, and gave her a potent cordial to drink, Korna divided her followers. Leaving one half to do the bidding of Briochan, with the other the duped Queen set sail for Hii.

The chief *drui* was now left to ponder how he might best compass his fell designs. He feared that, were he to land with a following which could not be hid from the eyes of the monks, their magic would be again aroused, and he once more be discomfited. Thus he resolved to sail to Egea by himself; that landing stealthily, he might gain the ear of the people, and persuade them to rise up and fall upon the strangers in their midst, portraying them as men in whom lurked evil spirits seeking to destroy the island.

So Briochan did as he had planned, but all in vain was his mission. Naught that he could say would persuade the islanders to rise up against the men of peace who dwelt amongst them. At length, inwardly wroth but dissembling his feelings, the *drui* returned to Loch Scavaig, thence to let



loose upon Egea, wolves whose fangs would spare none that were upon the island.

Since he had made no reckoning of the number of the tribesmen left upon the Scian Isle, Briochan was all unaware that, in his absence, six men had taken to flight. And Luarch, fearing punishment, held his peace herein, since the blame of their escape would have fallen upon him.

It had happened that amongst the tribesmen left by Korna were some that had been cruelly mutilated by order of Briochan. He, delighting in putting his victims to the torture, had caused the tongue of one man to be torn out, whilst others lacked an eye or an ear, or showed flesh seared by hot irons. Therefore these hated the chief *druí* with a black hatred, and vowed amongst themselves that they would never do his bidding. Moreover, being smitten in heart by reason of their desertion of Brude, who had ever shewn himself a chief worthy to be followed, they be-thought themselves to return to him.

As they questioned how they should do this, one of them counselled—

“Let us first be revenged both upon Briochan and the woman who was ready to sacrifice us to the spirits, and now hath yielded us into the hands of the chief *druí* our sworn foe! Let us return to the royal fortress and tell King Brude of this island that is to be a mighty kingdom! An come we with such tidings he will pardon our desertion and receive us gladly; and we will fight with him

against both Briochan and the Queen for possession of the Egean Isle ! ”

They who hearkened to these words gave token of their agreement therein, and when night fell, slipped away from their fellows, seized upon a boat which they had made ready aforetime, and set out on the voyage to the River Ness.

## CHAPTER XX

THERE was naught in the being of Donnan but throbbed with joy as he went about the Isle of Egea in the pursuit of his calling.

Fair alike in form and feature, the island was ever arrayed in garments of beauty, while low at its feet the sea paid fitting homage. Oftentimes the kindly hand of the sinking sun would set a crown of gleaming gold upon its brow, or wreath its head in a wealth of tender colour. Donnan, looking upon these things with glowing eyes, saw faintly mirrored, as in a vision, the Home of fadeless beauty. In the simple folk of the island he likewise rejoiced, for they stretched out eager hands towards the light borne to them by the brethren, so that Donnan hungered above measure for the dawn of the Pascal festival, which was now nigh at hand. On the eve thereof, there were many who in the Sacred Laver purposed to put on the garments of light, that as the first torch-bearers of Egea, they might fitly meet the Crucified on the morn of His Rising.

Whene'er he thought on these things, the heart of Donnan sang—

*"Funes ceciderunt mihi in præclaris: etenim hereditas mea præclara est mihi."*

On an eminence to the right of the bay of the landing-place, the Abbat of Egea had built a humble Sanctuary for the worship of the Lord, and the cells of the brethren round about it after the manner of Hinba, for they were for the most part of stone. From the midst of these dwellings the love of the little company went abroad, encompassing all that were upon the island, both of man and beast.

Not only of the things of the world to come did they teach the Egeans, but many a craft beside of which their race had no knowledge. Naught knew they of fishing, since the *druadh* had set a ban upon all that move in the waters; and Gilthonna, teaching the islanders how they might gain the treasures of the deep, passed many a joyous hour.

Endless were the delights which the little lad found upon the island. With Torquil the Norseman as his companion, he loved to roam over the moors, climbing to the uplands in search of the lochans hidden in their hollows. When they came upon one, did not the tiny waves, knowing Gilthonna for their king, ripple over its surface to salute him? And below the cliffs amongst the rude dwellings of the Egeans was the well which had been blessed by Columba, and thither Donnan himself had taken Gilthonna that together they might drink of its hallowed waters.

But the shores ever held the greatest wonders for the boy, and thereon when the tide was far out,



he would walk hand in hand with Torquil. In many a quiet pool where the sky was mirrored, the little lad thought that the white clouds were fallen amongst the ferns of the sea—green, brown, and crimson—which floated in the water. The low caves upon the coast would Gilthonna not enter, saying they were eirde-houses where it was always night; but the Norseman understood not his meaning, though he questioned the boy thereon many a time.

One day the little lad came upon a small bay of sand wherein Torquil thought the voice of the sea was surely imprisoned, for as Gilthonna ran over its dry bed, it made music in their ears. Here the boy danced with glee, often gazing over to the high peaks of Ruim across the sea, and would scarce move until the soft hand of night, shrouding the island, beckoned him home.

. . . . .  
Lugbe the monk, accompanied by an Egean who rendered willing service to the brethren, took his way towards Gruline. He purposed there to instruct the men who had made their dwellings amongst the mighty rocks which strewed the hill-side on that part of the island.

The day was drawing to its close, and in the waning light, the towering head of the great Scurr before them seemed to the brother more than ever a sight of wonder. On the top of the hill they were climbing a cairn was raised, and Lugbe questioned whose resting-place it marked.

“Two giants lie there, my master,” answered the Egean. “Of one I know naught, but the other lived upon Eilean Chasgaidh. A mighty warrior was he, and we buried him here with his sword and spear by his side that, in the hunting-forests whither he hath passed, he might not find himself without weapon.”

“Therein, indeed, thou didst bear witness to a mighty truth,” began the monk, but ere he could say more, cries of distress broke upon their hearing; and soon, coming towards them, appeared a woman, frenzied and panting from hard running.

When she was nigh them, Lugbe questioned—

“Wherefore art thou so distraught, my sister?”

“The water-horse hath seized my daughter, mine only child!” she wailed in answer, and flinging herself upon the ground, she ceased not to cry—

“*Och, ochan!*”

In vain did Lugbe strive to comfort the woman, telling her that the maid might surely be recovered.

“Nay, nay,” she moaned; “already the water-horse hath devoured her!”

Seeing there was naught else to be done but to wait patiently till the poor woman’s grief was somewhat spent, Lugbe turned to the Egean who stood by affrighted, and questioned him of the matter.

“Dost thou know aught of the water-horse of which this woman raves?”

"Yea," answered the islander, with a shudder and a look of terror in his eyes.

"Whilst we tarry here keeping watch by our sister, tell me what thou canst, for never before have I heard of this creature."

"Albeit he is good to look upon when in the shape of man, yet then doth he but deceive the eye, for he is an evil monster who dwelleth in one of the lonely lochans amongst the hills, and preys upon the fairest maidens of this isle."

"Dost thou know her that is daughter to this poor woman?"

"Yea, she is the maiden of the dark tresses, and but a few days ago, she came home from the hills where she had been herding, with the tale of a handsome stranger who there had joined her. Together had they climbed over the moorland, and when at last they sat down to rest awhile, the stranger laid his head on the lap of the maid of the dark tresses, and thus fell asleep. Quietly at first had the girl sat singing, but after a while her fingers fell a-playing with the yellow locks of the sleeper. Then did she perceive that amongst his hair were leaves of fresh water plants, and she knew that her companion was none other than the dread water-horse. Horror came upon her, so that for a while she sat as though turned to stone. But recovering, forthwith she used all her skill to remove his head from off her lap without arousing him. One of his hands held tightly within its grasp a portion of her clothing,

but cutting away the piece, at last she freed herself from him and fled homewards like the wind. She told that as she ran, his angry voice followed her, vowing by all the water in the clouds and in the hills that he would yet claim her for his own. Now hath he indeed fulfilled his vow, and this mother hath lost her child."

"Of a surety thy water-horse is none other than one of the black host of demons that war against us in this world, and who may not be overcome except by prayer and fasting," quoth Lugbe.

As he spoke, three men appeared, coming from the direction of Gruline. They halted by the side of the woman, and stared dully down at her, knowing not what to say in presence of her grief.

"Whence come ye, brothers?" questioned Lugbe, and one of the men answered—

"We have returned from making vain search for the maiden of the dark tresses."

"What befell the maid that ye went in search of her?" again asked the monk.

"She was seated near by us on a hillock, as there at noon we sat chatting idly together," answered the man who had already spoken. "On a sudden, a stranger youth appeared, and ere we could divine his purpose or hinder him, he had seized the maiden in his arms, and had borne her swiftly over the hill out of our sight. At first fear held us, for we knew the stranger to be the water-horse who had thus come to fulfil his threat.



Then we broke off twigs of the elder and of the rowan to ward off his spells, and made after him, but no trace of the water-horse or of his victim could we find."

Having heard this tale, Lugbe was not slow to determine what should be done.

"Abide thou here with this poor woman that when she is somewhat recovered, thou mayst persuade her to return to her own home," he commanded one of the men, while to the others he said—

"Shew us, I pray you, the track that this demon hath taken, for mayhap we may yet find the maiden and restore her to her mother."

The islanders shook their heads, and one answered—

"Yesternight the *Eun Ban nan Corp* was seen flying near the ground, and it rested by the dwelling of the maiden of the dark tresses. A sure omen of coming death is the white bird, and thus are we well assured the maid is no more."

Nevertheless, the man beckoned Lugbe and his companion to follow him. Now, night was well nigh fallen, and as they passed one of the dwellings in Gruline, the guide went in, returning again with flaming torches, and with these held aloft to light their steps, the four men plunged into the gathering darkness. But although they sought amongst the hills and lochs until the torches gave out, only the echoes from the cliffs gave answer to their calls. Taking shelter amongst some fallen rocks

near which they found themselves, the little company slept until the dawning day recalled them to their search. At last, on the marge of a lochan deep hidden within the hills, its waters dark and full of brooding shadows, one of the men gave a cry, and stooping, picked up a piece of clothing. Holding it up to view he called—

“What further token need we? The maid of the dark tresses hath indeed been devoured, for by this loch of the water-horse have I found her garment. See here whence she did cut the piece which freed her from the monster’s grasp when he fell asleep at her side!”

Hereafter Lugbe could urge no further search, but descended with the islanders towards Laig. Issuing from the grim mountain-loch was a stream imprisoned underground in a deep-cut bed by some great boulders fallen from the rugged hillside. As they passed over this hidden watercourse, the faces of the Egeans grew white with terror, for in the deep noise of its flow they heard the voice of the water-horse muttering darkly. Hastening their steps, they at last gained the hollow of Laig where their fears departed; and they called on Lugbe, there to behold a tiny lochan, which was the footmark left by a giant of Moidart who once had stepped upon Egea.

But Lugbe, troubled in heart, gave but little heed to the tale, for he was in haste to reach the monastery. There he sought Donnan, whom he found with Gilthonna at his side, holding converse

with Torquil the Norseman. Now Torquil had shewn himself skilled in working upon stone, and the Abbat would have him fashion a cross that might be set up to mark the spot where first the faith of Christ had been proclaimed upon the island. But when he heard the tale that Lugbe told, Donnan went then no further in this matter with Torquil, but forthwith set out for Gruline, if haply he might bring comfort to the poor mother. And with him, at his own plea, went Gilthonna.

After much search amongst the people of Gruline, they found the woman under the high cliffs upon the rugged shore. She sat there solitary, and though now she was wholly calm, it was the calm of hopelessness that possessed her, and in her face was the look of dark despair.

“Go to her, little lad, and give her of thine own sweet comfort,” said the Abbat, seeing her thus, and marking likewise the eyes of pity that Gilthonna turned upon her. “I will leave thee alone with her, and will come again to thee anon.”

Kissing the boy's upturned face, the Abbat left him, to pray for the poor creature whilst the child strove to fulfil his mission. Gilthonna gently drew near to the woman, who looked upon him with dull eyes, but uttered no sound nor yet motioned him away.

When the boy stood before her, he questioned shyly—

“Wilt thou let me speak with thee, for I am in

like case with thee, having lost both father and mother, though now I lack not in any wise?"

The dull look in the woman's eyes for an instant gave place to a hungry gleam, but instead of making answer, she asked him—

"Why dost thou come to me?"

"For that the tale of thy daughter hath filled my heart with tears, and I would fain strive to comfort thee."

The passion of the woman's grief burst forth anew, and she cried—

"There is no comfort for me who have lost mine only child! Had she but died, I had buried her with comb and mirror, that she might dress her long dark tresses to delight the eyes of the warriors in the hunting forests beyond. But now the water-horse hath devoured her, she is utterly perished, and I am for ever bereft of my child."

"Nay, nay," urged Gilthonna, seating himself on the ground beside her and seeking to put his little arm about her whilst he looked up into her face. "Thy daughter is in the garden of the Lord of Life, and thou at the close of thy earthly life mayst go and find her there. My brother Donnan can teach thee how that fair garden is gained ——."

"Nay, but she is devoured," moaned the woman.

But Gilthonna persevered in his task of love.

"Donnan hath taught me, so I know it is truth, that neither man nor beast, neither waves of the sea nor flames of fire can devour the spirit of man.



The spirit of thy daughter liveth and awaiteth thy coming."

"Doth she indeed await me? If that be truth, then let me go to her! O tell me where I may look for her!" cried the woman starting up, her eyes wild with longing.

But Gilthonna stayed her, and spoke beseechingly to her.

"Nay, thou dost not understand. Thou must await with patience what time the Lord shall call thee also to His garden, and then, if thou hast lived in His fear, will He give thy daughter back to thee."

Thus the boy spoke with the woman, unfolding to her the simple truths which he had learned from the brethren. He strove moreover to picture to her the exceeding loveliness of Paradise, the garden of the Lord, infinitely surpassing the beauty of the Egean Isle. He told her likewise of the joy of the blessed who live in that Land of Light, so that, little by little, comfort crept into the heart of the sorrowing mother.

When he saw in the distance the figure of the Abbat approaching once more, Gilthonna asked—

"Wilt thou take me for thy little lad, for I would fain find a mother?"

Donnan, reaching them, saw the boy folded tenderly in the arms of the forlorn woman, and was glad. He bade her be of good comfort, and looking up, she answered him—

"Yea, this little lad verily hath given me

comfort, for he hath told me I shall meet my daughter again. Yet I would that I knew she were indeed out of the power of the water-horse who hath claimed her."

"Lead me, sister, to this loch where thou sayest that evil spirit hath his dwelling," answered Donnan, "thence in the might of the Great Name it shall be driven forth for ever."

Thus climbing up the cliffs from the sea-shore and rounding the mighty Scurr, Donnan and Gilthonna, led by the woman, gained the bare wide-swept moorland, and following the broken course of a stream, came at last upon the dark lochan in its fastness of grim and craggy hills.

Here the woman stopped, shuddering.

"Into these depths hath my daughter been dragged," she cried, her sobs breaking out afresh.

Then Donnan came forward, and stooping, cleaved the waters with the sign of the Cross, exorcising the evil spirit.

And after he had blessed the waters, the Abbat spake again words of comfort to the heart of the sorrowing mother.

Assured at last that her child was safe from evil, the woman retraced her steps, and now in her peace of mind the evening light was brighter to her than had been the sunshine of the morning.

## CHAPTER XXI

THE great Forty Days were drawing to their close, and on the fifth day of the week the islanders were gathered about a rude cross, listening with wonder-struck faces to the preaching of Donnan the Abbat.

“Hearken, O my children! Lend attentive ear that ye may learn wherefore God, the King of Heaven, reigned from the Tree! Think with awe upon Him Who, having by His spiritual Hands created all things, stretches forth human hands that in their embrace He may encompass the whole world! Will ye indeed longer refuse to have God-made-Man reign over you?”

Thus did Donnan, in the power of the Passion, plead with the islanders, so that still more yielded to the great call from the Rood; and in the holy calm of the morrow, the first fruits of harvest were ingathered. Amongst them was the mother of the maiden of the dark tresses, and for her did Gilthonna stand as sponsor.

Awaiting the blessed tryst that would come with the dawn, Donnan kept solitary vigil all night high upon the moorlands. And when the joyous day of expectancy was fully come, all the enlightened gathered together in the Sanctuary of the Lord that they might offer at His Feet those

gifts most precious to the Heart of the Mighty Conqueror.

As there the King of Heaven came to His humble earthly throne, in the company of the Blessed and of the Holy Angels, the brethren bowed low in adoration. With hearts that cried, "All hail!" they paid Him homage and greeted Him Lord and Master. . . . When Donnan left the Altar, the light that shone upon his face told his companions that their Abbat had been upon the holy mount. . . .

The joyous day wore on in the peace of Easter, and when the noonday office was ended, Donnan, passing from the Sanctuary, held out a hand for Gilthonna, and led him forth into the soft caress of the sunlight.

At the door of the little Church, a young deer browsed, and as the Abbat and the child went southward along the cliffs, the animal followed after them. All the while they walked Gilthonna kept silence, for he had seen the eyes of the Abbat, and they were as those of one who saw into far distances beyond the range of earth. Now the brethren had told the boy that oftentimes Angels companioned Donnan and spoke with him, and Gilthonna was sure that thus they did now, wherefore he would not break in upon their converse.

When at last the steps of Donnan were stayed, in a voice which was beautiful as it had indeed been that of some heavenly visitant, he spoke—



“Little lad, I would tell thee what the eyes of my spirit have beheld of that which will shortly come to pass. Borne on the wings of the wind, a boat speedeth over the sea towards this island, so that when I, thy brother, attain to the Haven where I fain would be, thou shalt find again thy father to watch over thee. Fear not, little one, for when he cometh, thou wilt surely know him as of old, and to him thou shalt be the gift of God doubly bestowed.”

“Wilt thou not stay with me also, dear brother Donnan?” questioned Gilthonna wistfully.

But though his heart hungered for the boy, mightier longings drew Donnan from earthly loves, and he answered—

“Nay, little lad, for the Abbat must not forsake his children when eventide draweth nigh.”

“Will it be long ere my father come?” again questioned Gilthonna.

“Perchance he will not come till the light wanes. Yet, lest thou shouldst miss him, watch here, and this little brother deer shall bear thee company. In place of the brethren, Angels shall watch o’er both thee and the gentle roe. And now, wilt thou kiss me farewell, little lad, ere I set out upon the Homeward journey?”

For answer, Gilthonna ran to Donnan, and, twining his little arms about the neck of the Abbat, gave all the love of his heart in the embrace. Then Donnan put the boy down, and with many a backward glance at the little figure





standing with one arm round the deer and sobbing against its neck, the Abbat, with swelling heart, took his way by the headland whence he had come.

. . . . .

As the bell called the brethren to vespers, three large boats came to land just below the monastery, and therefrom Briochan led, eager for slaughter, the company of Korna's warriors. Knowing that the hour of his triumph was at hand, the chief *druí* in exultant spirit bade the tribesmen follow him up the slope of the cliff and across the little stream to the place where the monastery was set.

The little company of monks was now assembled in the Sanctuary, and about to begin the Office, when the unwonted tumult of the rude warriors assailed their ears. Bidden to stay within while the Abbat went forth, the brethren wondered within themselves if even now the hour of their trial drew nigh.

Without the door of the Sanctuary, Donnan, who knew that that which had been foretold indeed approached fulfilment, stood calmly awaiting the advance of Briochan and his horde of barbarians. When they were face to face, the *druí*, putting out his hand to stay the rush of the Picts, who with brandished weapons, pressed forward, cried exultingly—

“Thinkest thou, O Donnan the dreamer, to oppose thy puny power to mine? Know then



that now thou canst avail nothing against me, for that the mighty spirits who fight with us, have rendered these warriors proof against thy spells; and they are come to slay thee and all thy company!"

"Yea, for so the King of Heaven of His loving-kindness hath foreordained, and we are ready," answered the serene voice of the Abbat.

The *druí* stared at Donnan, and in unbelief questioned—

"Wouldst not thou then flee death?"

"Nay," answered Donnan, "for this festival of life wherein we to-day rejoice, is the pledge that death is but the gate of the Life which is unending."

"Thou art mad with over much dreaming, O monk!" scoffed Briochan; "or perchance thou thinkest that because of thy fearless bearing I will forbear to put thee to the sword."

"Nay, nor I nor any of my company shrink from such weapons as thou dost wield; yet would I ask one grace of thee. It is the hour of eventide when we are wont to render to the Lord of life thanksgiving for the day that is past. Ere ye fall upon us, grant that within this building we may offer our last worship in this present world."

With cunning leer, Briochan answered—

"Think not to deceive me, crafty monk! Thou wouldst return thither that thou mayst complete the spell that even now thy fellows may perchance be weaving, thinking to bring us to confusion!"

“Wouldst thou, O *druí*, desire to delay thy feasting didst know a banquet awaited thee? And for us God’s board is truly spread, whither we would hasten, ushered thereunto by your kindly weapons. Nay, we who welcome your appearing, seek to do you no ill!”

There was that both in the countenance and voice of Donnan which dispelled Briochan’s doubt; and believing now that the Abbat spoke truth, the *druí* answered—

“So be it then as thou desirest! Yet hasten thee within, and speed ye with your worship, for we would begone from this island ere sunset.”

And so Donnan came again amongst the brethren, telling them they had surely been chosen by the God of hosts to advance His kingdom in the laying down of their lives, and that, in but a little while, they would keep yet more joyous Easter festival in the garden of the Lord. After that he had exhorted them to endure courageously for a little space, the brethren with unfaltering voices began their last Office.

Without the walls, Briochan had need to summon all his skill to hold back the Picts, lusting for blood, from entering to slaughter the monks.

“How may we fall upon them pent up in so small a building?” growled one of the tribesmen in the hearing of the *druí*.

Instantly there flashed across the mind of Briochan the words of the Queen concerning the monks of Egea: “Burn them an thou wilt!”

The thought pleased the *drui* mightily, and he laughed as he made resolve that the words which had fallen from the lips of Korna should give forth the doom of the man upon whom her passion was set. Thus he raised his arm in the manner which ever gained silence for him, and when all ears awaited his speaking, he said—

“What say ye, men of the Picts, to burn these rats in their trap whence there is no escape? Tear down the cells that are of wattle for fuel to pile about this building, and from the fire which glows in the hall may ye pluck brands to set the fuel ablaze!”

“Yea, yea!” came the answering shout of the warriors, who forthwith rushed upon the wattle cells, and wrenching them to pieces with powerful arms, heaped this fuel round about the Sanctuary and in at the doorway.

Ere yet the monks were come to the end of their Office, the savage horde of Picts, no longer to be held at bay, rushed upon the Church with live brands snatched from the fire in the refectory. And as the angry flames leaped about the House of the Lord and caught hold upon its roof of thatch, the voices of the brethren, never wavering, rose in triumph, singing their own requiem—

“*Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum, in pace. Quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum. . . . Lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuæ Israel.*” . . . .

Thus passing into the Land of Everlasting Light, Donnan and his companions kindled a Flame which shone out from the little Isle and far beyond the sea, spreading over the mainland till the darkness fled before it and the Sun of Righteousness was revealed in glory.

. . . . .

That same night upon Hii, Columba called to him Diormet. The heart of the Abbat was heavy with sorrow, yet his face was untroubled as he spoke to his faithful servant—

“My son, I would have thee go bid the brethren be ready at dawn to offer the Holy Oblation. For, lo, I have heard from over the sea a voice exultant crying, ‘By fire I gain the Home of the chosen!’ Then saw I the Isle of Egea all ruddy with the glow of red martyrdom, and behold, a great company of Angels by the pathway of light bore the souls of Donnan and his companions to the abodes of the blessed.”

Thus it was that, as day dawned, the whole family of Hii met together to celebrate in the Holy Mysteries the birthday of their brethren. On behalf of his beloved son and the little company, Columba besought the Lord that He would cleanse them of their offences. And the brethren in the great silence before the Throne prayed likewise for their brothers that, being set free from the ocean of their sins, they might gain that Port where rest the tempest-tossed.



## CHAPTER XXII

WITH naked backs bent to the oars, the sturdiest of the tribesmen urged the boats of Queen Korna over a still sea, for there was no breath of wind in the air. But the Queen was not content, albeit so mightily did the men strain at the oars that the thews upon their powerful arms stood out like bands of iron, and the sweat poured from their brows.

"Faster, faster!" she cried, in her mad desire to gain the home of Donnan and carry him captive—by force if need be. To attain her end, she again dissembled with the Picts.

"An ye cannot make greater speed over the waters, the kingdom of promise is lost to us! Would ye give those cursed monks time to weave their spells ere we have seized the mightiest of them, to use his black art on our behalf?"

There was no answer, but from one of the toilers in her boat a groan escaped, and, enraged that a slave should dare to murmur, Korna commanded a warrior beside her to lay the lash about the shoulders of the offender. As the man did her behest, the Queen watched her victim writhe, and, all her savagery roused, cried again—

"They be all alike idlers: let each share the sting of the whip!"

Goaded by pain, the unhappy oarsmen laboured with groans which they could not withhold, and in this frantic effort, Korna's boat shot ahead of the others. A grim smile overspread her face, and she exclaimed—

“’Twas even as I said, the dogs were lazy!” and would have given order that the like should be done in each boat, but that the stretch of water between them was already too great.

In her eagerness to gain Hii, the Queen took no further heed of the other vessels, but continued her mad race over the sea, and although the sail still hung limp upon the mast, soon far out-distanced her followers.

But ere the boat was fully come into the Sound of Hii, a little puff of wind arose, blowing against them. And as she cursed at its tardy rising and contrary direction, Korna espied a coracle wherein were seated monks plying some strange craft in the waters, with lines cast over the side of the vessel. When she was come close upon them, rising in the boat, she cried aloud—

“Tell me, ye of the shaven crowns, where may I find Donnan?”

And one answered her—

“He hath been this long time upon the Egean Isle.”

As the light pales on the sea when a cloud passes over the face of the sun, so the colour faded from the cheeks of Korna. The flame died out in her eyes, and she sank back in the boat.

To the amaze alike of monks and warriors, she sat for a while as if turned to stone, while the ever-strengthening breeze blew her dark hair unheeded about her face.

On a sudden, she sprang up wildly, seizing her sword, and her mad passion made the oarsmen to tremble.

"I would be alone," she cried, "and that without delay! Yet take your choice, slaves! Either cast ye yourselves into the sea, or perish by my sword! Which will ye?"

As the men, panic-stricken, gaped at her like dumb animals, the monk who had before spoken, called out to them—

"Take to the water, men of the oar! Fear not to drown, for ye shall find speedy refuge in our coracle, and we will befriend you!"

The Queen threatening them with brandished weapon and fierce looks, the oarsmen threw themselves upon the pity of the more merciful sea, and soon were safe in the coracle of the monks.

Then with trembling hands, the distraught Queen hoisted the sail and headed the boat for the Egean Isle. Throughout the long voyage, a strange fear ate into her heart and held her in thrall. In agony of mind she bit her lips and dug her nails into the palms of her hands, causing the blood to flow.

The day was fast waning ere she gained sight of Egea, and with eyes keen as an eagle's fixed upon the island, she saw a small point of light

break out upon the right. Was it only by reason of the ever-lessening distance that the light seemed to be waxing greater, or was it indeed spreading, she asked herself, her eyes strained upon the distant headland? Nay, the light grew apace, shooting out hither and thither, ever widening, its glow gaining in strength, until it seemed as though the whole of the headland were lapped in its fierce embrace.

Then the Queen knew that her worst fear was come to pass, and that she was too late. With a cry as of a wounded animal in sore pain, she rocked herself to and fro in the boat, and still she gazed upon the height where the angry flames, like famished wolves, leapt around their prey. With the horror in Korna's eyes mingled a vengeful gleam as she thought on Briochan who had wrought the deed, and she knew herself outwitted. Before she came into land, the hunger of the fire had been appeased, and all that was left to tell of the fierce flames which had beat about the Sanctuary, were the blackened walls and the glowing embers upon the ground.

In wild despair, the Queen, leaping upon the rocks, sped hot foot up the cliff-track to the place where stood the shell of the House of the Lord. All around, untouched by the fire, were the cells of the monks, and the ruins of those torn down for fuel. No sign of life was there anywhere. Wholly distraught, Korna rushed in and out of the cells, and made frantic search everywhere, but there



was none to give answer to her cry for Donnan, and no sound save the cry of the sea-birds.

Scarce knowing what she did, Korna turned her back upon the scene of desolation, and racing blindly along the cliffs towards the bay of the landing-place, saw not a boat which was sailing into the haven.

"Donnan, Donnan!" she moaned ever and again in a voice broken by despair. On a sudden her flight was stayed by a small figure which started up in front of her, and in surprise at any life upon that island of desolation, the Queen's eyes were opened.

But with sight came a new horror, for in the dim light, it seemed to Korna as if the pale spirit of her little stepson had risen from the prison of the earth to reproach her and to add to her torment. With a groan of agony, she darted forward to the edge of the high cliffs to cast herself headlong upon the black rocks below.

As she passed him, however, Gilthonna caught at the hide she wore, and held tightly to it, crying—

"Throw not thyself to the waves, lady, for they will surely devour thee! Think not they will spare thee, for they sought even the life of Gilthonna who is their King!"

Korna turned upon him with dazed eyes, and looking into his face questioned—

"Canst thou be the boy Drostan?"

Then ere the child could make answer, she

turned from him, and flinging herself upon the green sward, buried her head in her arms. Gilthonna, at a loss what he should do, and looking around for help, saw that a boat was come to land in the little haven. Forgetting aught else save that now surely was come the father whom he must welcome, he waved his arms and hailed them that were come out of the boat with all the strength of his little voice.

Yet it was a long space ere he beheld in the distance coming toward him some flaming torches, and as they drew nearer, by their light he saw that in the forefront strode a man tall and kingly in his bearing. At first sight of the little figure, this man stood still in amaze, then, bidding his companions halt, with arms outstretched to Gilthonna, in broken voice he cried—

“My little son! Yet must mine eyes surely mock me, for my Drostan is no more!”

“Father, father!” cried the boy, a mist rolling from his clouded brain, and a great joy possessing him. “Thou art the father I loved when I dwelt in the black eirde-house! And yea, then was I called Drostan, but now is my name Gilthonna who am little brother of Donnan!”

“My son, my son!” cried the King, with a great tenderness, lifting the boy in his powerful arms and folding him to his breast.

After a little space, Brude, still holding Drostan, seated himself upon a mound, and eagerly questioned the child how he had come to be upon the

Egean Isle. Drostan told him how that Donnan, a monk of Hii, had rescued him from the waves, and how since then, they had lived together in the company of the brethren. Then the King knew that for hatred of him, either Briochan or Korna had stolen Drostan from the royal fortress.

When next the little lad spoke, he asked—

“My father, hast thou seen that yonder lies a woman? She, too, called me Drostan, but her face I could not see ere she cast herself upon the ground.”

With a start, Brude set down his son, and looked where the boy had pointed. But the Queen had risen from the ground, and now, with savage defiance in her wan face, still bearing traces of her wounds and the ravages of despair, she confronted the King.

“What dost thou here, woman? What further ill wouldst thou work?” he questioned fiercely, putting his arm about Drostan to shield him from her.

“I would slay Briochan, for that I came here seeking Donnan whom I loved, but to find that the false *druí* had put him to death by fire. But if already Briochan be slain, there is naught else I would do, for now that the monk of the grey eyes is wrested from me for ever, all desire is passed from me. Thus will I not resist thy sword, nor seek to divide thy kingdom. Put an end to me forthwith, and then wilt thou have no further cause to fear for the safety of thy boy.”

A great struggle was taking place in the heart of the King. The longing of the natural man for vengeance was not dead within him. Having slumbered awhile, it now leapt into life, and thinking on all he had suffered by reason of her jealousy and cunning, fierce was his desire to slay the woman before him. But he remembered the Christ to Whom he was pledged, and in his thankfulness for the recovery of Drostan, his thirst for vengeance was stayed. And at last he found words—

“I have no further fear for the boy, O Queen, for henceforth shall he be our joint care, and thou shalt train him that he may grow strong and as skilful in the chase as thou thyself. Wilt thou return now with us to the old home on the Ness whither we go?”

Korna, as she listened, seemed deadened with stupor, and only when Brude held out his hands to her did she find voice to question—

“Thou speakest thus? Why dost thou not slay me, who have wrought thee naught but ill?”

“For that I follow after the white Christ Who is Lord of life, and will have all men forgive, even as He forgiveth.”

As the Queen stood silent in wonder, the King called Drostan to him, saying—

“Get thee to the Queen, little son, and tell her thou wilt love her.”

And Drostan went, but he said other than that which the King had bidden him.



“On the morrow will I try to love thee, but now, fain would I sleep, for I am weary. And in the morning, my father, will I take thee to my dear brother, Donnan.”

With bitter cry Korna turned aside as the child named the monk whom she mourned, and the King made for his little son a bed in the heather under the stars, and there rested beside him, leaving the Queen to her thoughts.

And while Brude and Drostan slept peacefully, Korna, with her hands clasped about her knees, sat still and silent, gazing out into the night. Ere the day came, her thoughts took voice, and she mused aloud—

“Ye are but vain mockers, O spirits of the earth! What have ye bidden me do that I have not done? What of those things ye promised, have ye yielded me? False are ye as the *druadh* your servants: yea, false even as Briochan the chiefest of them! It is the white Christ Who conquereth. I have held Him to scorn, yet hath He vanquished me at last!”

## EPILOGUE

IN solitude, gazing seaward, sat Briochan, the chief *druí*, bereft of power and bereft of hope.

A soft mist, o'erspreading land and sea, blended them together in a grey haze of desolation.

But little by little, as a veil is lifted by gentle hands, so the vapoury cloud slowly rose off the face of the silent sea, higher and higher until it was lost in the trackless paths of the sky. Faintly, as though seen through tears, the multitude of the mainland mountains stole once more into sight, drifts of grey mist still lingering over them like mournful memories of the past.

The gloom of the morning, however, was but a passing mood. A gentle breeze, heralding the sun's approach, drove the loitering mists from his path; and the sun, triumphing at last, rose to his seat high in the heavens.

A little boat, far out at sea, sped swiftly over the blue of the waters and passed out of sight into the golden sunshine of unsullied day.

. . . . .

And in the Sanctuary of the Lord on Hii, the brethren sang—

*"Domine in virtute tua lætabitur rex: et super salutare tuum exultabit vehementer.*

*"Desiderium cordis ejus tribuisti ei; et voluntate labiorum ejus non fraudasti eum."*