

THE FAIRY MUSIC.—1

SEAGAN S. CAOLTE.

Hast thou heard the music of the fairy host,—
 These numbers soul-entrancing!—
 When the dells and valleys are by shadows crossed,
 And the last beam is glancing

O'er the shimm'ring waters, flushing with its glow,
 Each westward-looking mountain;
 And haloing the cloudlet mirrored deep below,
 In glassy pool and fountain?

Dost thou stray when lonely by the haunted rath,
 Girdled with thorny bushes?
 There the gentle people watch to cross thy path;
 There music oft outgushes

Like the notes delicious of a distant flute
 O'er silent waters thrilling,
 Or the clear-tongued clearsech, (2) or the soft-voiced lute,
 The soul with rapture filling.

To the strain enchanting if thou givest ear
 Thy senses shall forsake thee;
 And from home and kindred ere a day and year
 Pining *they* shall take thee.

Where the gloomy lakelet nestles 'mid the hills,
 This music loves to linger,
 Mingling with the laughter of the gushing rills,
 Waked by an eerie finger.

There the lark and throstle haunt the water's edge,
 The witching notes to treasure;
 There the fern and mallow, and the sword-leaved sedge,
 Nod to the gentle measure.

When a cloud is o'er thee, dark with sighs and tears,
 Softly it will come stealing,
 Dulling all thy senses, calming all thy fears,
 To thy sad heart appealing.

Call then on the Virgin, ask in fervent prayer,
 That aid refused thee never;
 And in dying cadence ling'ring on the air,
 'Twill fade from thee forever.

Travellers benighted oft its sweet notes hear
 By whinny glen and hollow ;
 And see a faint light gleaming 'mid the shadows drear,
 Enticing them to follow :

If they drawing nearer, hearken to the strain,
 Behold the strange musician ;
 Eyes shall, sore with watching, their coming seek in vain,—
 Death ends the weirdsome vision.

Where the clust'ring berries of the rowantree wave
 Rocked by the wind's caresses—
 By man's foot untrodden—there hides many a cave
 In whose deep recesses

These sweet sounds, unearthly, ever-varying wail ;
 And lights, no eyes dare number,
 Gleam round mighty heroes of the ancient Gael, 3
 There laid in mystic slumber.

There sleeps Finn, (4) the bright-haired, 'mid his chiefs who
 roved
 O'er Allen Hill tent-crested ;
 Dermot (5) and sweet Oisín, (6) the warrior bard beloved,
 And Cuchullin (7) great-breasted.

All the knights of Ullad (8) who trod Emain Green
 And banquetted with Conor ;
 Conn, the never-beaten; Meave, the peerless queen, (9)
 And Goll, (10) the soul of honour.

Waiting for that dawning when these lights shall gleam
 On every hill in Erin ;
 And the Gael, this music sweet as of a dream
 Valley and dell shall hear in.

Then these trance-bound heroes, waking to the fight,
 'hali free their suff'ring sireland—
 Then the sun of freedom, bursting through the night,
 Shall shine once more on Ireland.

1. In the evening after sunset the peasantry state that a beautiful weird music is occasionally heard issuing from the old raths, forts, sheeauns, fairy rings, cashels, towers, &c. that are scattered in such abundance over the country. They call this the "ceol shee," or fairy music. If anyone should be unfortunate enough to listen to it willingly, the fairies will acquire an influence over that person it would appear, and spirit him or her away before "a day and year" has expired. Some wonderful legends are told of children, maidens, etc. being thus taken by the fairies, a 'figure of clay,' exactly resembling the person, being left in place at the apparent death.—S. S. C

2. Clearsech, a small harp for accompanying the voice.

3. It is believed in some parts of Ireland that the great Gaelic heroes of antiquity are not dead, but await, in a state of enchantment, the time when their services will be required to free their country.—S. S. C.

4. The Fianna, Fenian or National pagan militia of Ireland, was organised about the commencement of the Christian era to resist the Romans who were over-running Britain at the time. Finn M·Cool, who lived during the reign of Conn of the hundred battles, was their greatest captain, and under him they acquired an extraordinary degree of power. After Finn's death, and when his grandson Oscar, the son of Oisín (Esheen), was their chief, they, having displayed rebellious proclivities were annihilated at the battle of Gabhra, the site of which is contiguous to Tara, by the reigning Ard Rígh, Carbry of the Liffey, the great grandson of Conn, at which battle Oscar and their principal warriors were slain; a rupture between the Fianna of Connaught and Munster much helped to this sad termination, the Connaught men supporting the Ard Rígh. The Fianna were divided into seven battalions, each having its own peculiar ensign. One showed a branch of the rowan-tree or mountain ash in full leaf and berry. Finn's particular ensign, which was always placed outside the door of his tent, bore a representation of the sunburst rising from the sea. The hill of Allen in Kildare was their principal camping ground, and they lived by hunting, fishing, and occasionally by cutting their neighbours' throats, the Britons being in perpetual dread of them. The forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and seas of Erin were their perquisites. They were the athletes of the period; the physical tests, running, jumping, &c, to which applicants for admission were subjected, being very severe, and the great ambition of the young men of the time was to obtain admission into this magnificent corps. The legendary literature of Gaelic Ireland embraces two "cycles"—that of the 'Red Branch' or the heroic, of which the great pagan queen of Connacht, Meave and her chief warriors, and Conor M·Nessa and his red branch knights, are the central figures; and the Fianna or Oisín cycle. Queen Meave's excursion into Louth to carry off Dare's famous bull is the most important of the historical romances of the Red Branch cycle. This is called the "Tain Bo Cuailgne," or the poem of the cattle spoiling of Cooley. The most pathetic of the legendary romances of this cycle is that which relates the tragic fate of Deirdre, and the deaths of Naisi, Ainle, and Ardan. Red Branch knights the three sons of Usnach, who were treacherously murdered by Conor M·Nessa. This murder excited the undying hatred of Fergus M·Roy, one of the chiefs of the "Red Branch" knights, against Conor who was King of Ulster; he, Fergus, having pledged his word for their safety if they returned from exile in Scotland, and led to a seven years' war between Connaught and Ulster (Fergus retiring to Connaught after the murder and succeeding in gaining the sympathy of Meave and her principal warriors). The Finian or Oisín cycle consists of tales and poems relating the achievements, adventures and wars of Finn M·Cool and his comrades the principal warriors of the Fianna. It embraces the reigns of six Ard Ríghs *i.e.*, Conn of the Hundred Battles, Conary II., son-in-law of Conn; Art the Solitary, son of Conn; Lewy, nephew of Art, Cormac Uffada son of Art and Carbry of the Liffey, who defeated and smashed up the Fianna at the battle of Gowra. The question who the Fenians or Fianna were is a matter of debate amongst Gaelic students. Keating attributed the formation of the corps to Sédna II., Monarch of Ireland, more than four hundred years before the Christian era. I think Tuathal, the son of Fiachra V., more deserving of the credit. The first civil war broke out in his reign. The plebeians, who were the descendants of the soldiers, mechanics and labourers of every kind that had accompanied the sons of Milesius from Spain, were treated with great injustice at the time, about 73 A.D. They, joining with the remains of the Firbolg and Danaan races, revolted, put the King and all the nobility they could seize upon to death, and raised to the throne Carbry, surnamed Cathead, a Firbolg prince (not to be confounded with Carbry of the Liffey, who reigned two hundred years later). Tuathal, the son of Fiachra,

however, escaped; and in flying for refuge to his grandfather the King of Scotland, is believed to have fallen into the hands of Agricola, a Roman General, then completing the conquest of Britain, who carried him captive to Rome. Tacitus says: "In the fifth year of the campaigns of Agricola, one of the kings of Ireland expelled by an intestine commotion, fell into his hands; the General detained him in his camp under the guise of friendship, but watched him closely as one who might, on the first opportunity, become a useful instrument in the design he had formed of attempting the conquest of Ireland" (Tacitus life of Agricola, page 499). Tacitus also adds that he saw this prince in Rome and heard him say that he, with a little aid from the Romans, could easily reduce the country to subjection. The plebeians under Cathad held the island for twenty-five years, but governed it so badly that it was unanimously decided to recall Tuathal (or Toole) and hand him over the sovereignty. On his return he displayed not only the courage eharacteristic of his nation, but also prudence, and in all his actions the skill that distinguishes a man formed in the best schools, which were those of the Romans at that time. He reigned thirty years and died in 125 A.D. The Fianna militia was organised to resist Roman aggression, and the man who had dwelt amongst and had been educated by those people best knew how that could be done. The Romans never faced the Fianna, and if the magnificent corps had been sustained the political past of Ireland might have been different. They, whom the greatest military power of ancient times avoided, could easily have made short work of marauding Dane and thieving Norman, but, as usual, the jealousy and ambition of the chiefs of the Fianna brought about the corps' destruction. The Fianna derived their name from Fiadh, a deer, by the hunting of which they principally subsisted, the country being covered with forest and abounding in wild animals at the time. They were the purveyors of flesh to the Ard Righ. Finn, son of Cool, son of Trenmor, son of Besna, was not a giant. 'The man of the open palm who never told a lie' was, according to ancient Gaelic storytellers, not much taller than the average man. Deep blue eyes, ruddy cheeks, and hair 'luminous as the sun,' around his personality accumulated the literary matter pertaining to the Fenian or Oisinic cycle. Hero, patriot, philosopher and poet. Finn was the ideal of the Gael before the Bearla was adopted, but now, alas! with the loss of the ancient tongue the ideal, generally speaking, is forgotten. The fate of Finn and his two hounds Bran and the Tiger are favourite subjects of Finian story and legend. Oisín sings thus of Finn as translated by Doctor Hyde:—

"The desire of my hero who feared no foe,
Was to listen all day to Drumderrig's sound,
To sleep by the roar of the Assaroc,
And to follow the dun deer round and round."

"The call of Oscar upon the chase,
The tongue of the hounds on the Finian's plain,
Then a seat with the men of the bardic race—
Of these delights was my hero fain."

Finn was treacherously slain by the three sons of Ugruin at Athbrea on the Boyne. (283 A.D.) S. S. C.

5. Dermott O'Deeney was a celebrated hero of the Fianna. The elopement of Grainne, daughter of Cormac MacArt and wife of Finn, with Dermot, and Finn's pursuit and rage, is one of the principal legends remaining to us of the Finian cycle.—S. S. C.

6. Oisín (Essheen) was the chief bard of the Fianna and the son of Finn: He thus sings of himself:—

"Finn MacCool is the father of me
Whom seven battalions of Finians fear,
When he launches his hounds on the open lea,
Grand is their cry as they rouse the deer."