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by T. W. Rolleston**

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Title: Sea Spray: Verses and Translations

Author: T. W. Rolleston

Release date: April 7, 2014 [EBook #45346]

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK SEA SPRAY: VERSES AND TRANSLATIONS ***

**SEA SPRAY: VERSES
AND TRANSLATIONS
BY T. W. ROLLESTON**

[1]

MAUNSEL AND CO., LIMITED,
96, MID. ABBEY ST., DUBLIN

1909

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TO
THE LADY OF THE RING

[3]

Thanks are due to Messrs. Harrap & Co., London, for permission to include in this volume three poems which are introduced into the writer's forthcoming prose book, "The High Deeds of Finn and other Bardic Romances of Ancient Ireland." The poems in question are *Cois na Teineadh*, *Midir the Proud*, and the *Song of Finn*. Some others have appeared in the *Spectator*, the *Irish Homestead*, and the *Westminster Gazette*, to the editors of which acknowledgments are due.

[4]

CONTENTS

[5]

	PAGE
SEA SPRAY	7
MARCH WINDS	10

MIDIR THE PROUD INVITES QUEEN ETAIN TO FAIRYLAND	12
THE SPELL-STRUCK	14
COIS AN TEINEADH	15
WILLIAM MORRIS	17
TO JOHN O'LEARY	18
THE GRAVE OF RURY	19
SONG OF MAELDUIN	21
THE SHANNON AT FOYNES	22
SONNET	23
A RAILWAY JOURNEY	24
CYCLING SONG	28
BALLADE OF THE "CHESHIRE CHEESE"	31
DORA	33
A RING'S SECRET	34
MOONRISE IN THE ELSTER TANNEN-WALD	35
AFTER ALL	36
EVENSONG	37
IN MEMORIAM: J. T. C. H.	39

[6]

TRANSLATIONS

	PAGE
THE BATTLE OF SALAMIS	43
THE DEAD AT CLONMACNOIS	47
SONG OF FINN IN PRAISE OF MAY	48
WENN ICH AN DEINEM HAUSE	50
EIN FICHTENBAUM STEHT EINSAM	51
ZWEI KAMMERN HAT DAS HERZ	52
LADY ISLAND	53
THE THREE RINGS	54

[7]

SEA SPRAY

What shall we do with our day? you ask—
“ June day fair to the heart’s desire—
Lie in the meadow, and lounge and bask
Over books and tobacco? Or do you aspire
To conquer the summit that yesterday
We marked for our own ere your visit end?
Or shall we go riding, or fishing? Nay,
For the scent of the sea’s on the air, my friend.
We shall go to the head of the reedy lake,
And there, in a brake by a fir-grove, find
Two long canoes with arching deck,
Sea-riders, strong for a day of wind;
And oh, what a song shall the bright wind sing us
When clear of the shallows and clear of the sedge,
While the narrowing stream and the ebb-tide swing
us
’Twixt sea and mountain to Wicklow Bridge!

But here beware! for the ebb goes roaring
Through half the arches, and half are dry,
And stakes and stones are ready for goring
Your Rob-Roy’s timbers as down you fly.
And beyond the Bridge, in the deep sea-current,
Where the rope-maze crosses from quay to quay,
You’ll need your head and your arm I warrant,
To fight the eddies and find your way.
There lifts your prow with the long pulsation
That tells how near us the glad seas are!
There lifts the heart with the old elation,
To meet the surf at the harbour-bar!

[8]

The North wind marshals the ranks of ocean,
And on they sweep with a strength serene,
Till the tide-race ruffles the mighty motion
And curls the crests of the rollers green.
The breakers flash on the sand-bank yonder,
And the cavern’d curve of the rock-walled bay
Is loud with clamour of hoarse sea-thunder
As the wave recoils in a blast of spray.

And I know a cleft among grim rock-masses,
Where if wind blow strong and the light come fair,
When the sea-cave roars and the spray-jet flashes,
“ rainbow floats in the sunny air.

At the Head’s wild verge, where the tideways
quicken,
And eddies hollow the smooth sea-caves,
Our Rob-Roys plunge as the breakers thicken,
And bury their decks in the rearing waves.
We round the Point in the surge and welter
Of clashing billows and blinding foam—
Then mile on mile, in the cliff-wall’s shelter,
In calm new seas to the South we roam.

[9]

O bays of Wicklow, and gorse-crown’d headlands
Whose scent blows far on the seaward breeze,
How oft have I yearned in the tranquil midlands
For one brave shock of your lifting seas!
How oft it may be in days hereafter
Shall rise the thought of you, phantom-fair,
Shall steal the sound of the sea-waves’ laughter
On ears grown dull with time and care!
Waves, wash my spirit, and lonely places,
If well I loved you, and aught you knew,
Mark deep my heart with immortal traces
Of shining days when I dwelt with you!

[10]

MARCH WINDS

Wind, O wind of the Spring, thine old enchantment
renewing,
How at the shock of thy might wakens within me a
cry!
Out of what wonderful lands, never trodden by man,
never told of,
Lands where never a ship anchored or trafficker
fared,
Comest thou, breathing like flame till the brown
earth flames into blossom,
Quick'ning the sap of old woods swayed in thy
stormy embrace,
Rousing in depths of the heart wild waves of an
infinite longing,
Longing for freedom and life, yearning for Springs
that are dead!
Surely the far blue sea, foam-fleck'd with the speed
of thy coming
Brighten'd in laughter abroad, sang at the feet of
the isles,
Sang in a tumult of joy as my soul sings trembling
with passion,
Trembling with passion and hope, wild with the
spirit of Spring.
Ah, what dreams re-arise, half pain half bliss to
remember,
Hearing the storm of thy song blown from the
height of the skies:—
*Something remains upon earth to be done, to be
dared, to be sought for,
Up with the anchor once more—out with the sails
to the blast!*
*Out to the shock of the seas that encircle the
Fortunate Islands,
Vision that burns in the blood, home of the Wind of
the Spring.*

[11]

[12]

MIDIR THE PROUD INVITES QUEEN ETAIN TO FAIRYLAND^[1]

Come with me, Etain, O come away,
To that Oversea Land of mine!
Where music haunts the happy day,
And rivers run with wine.
Careless we live, and young and gay,
And none saith 'mine' or 'thine.'

Golden curls on the proud young head,
And pearls in the tender mouth—
Manhood, womanhood, white and red,
And love that grows not loth
When all the world's desires are dead,
And all the dreams of youth.

Away from the cloud of Adam's sin!
Away from grief and care!
This flowery land thou dwellest in
Seems rude to us and bare,
For the naked strand of the Happy Land
Is twenty times as fair.

Come, Etain, come to thine ancient home,
And let these mortals be,
Whose world is a glimmer of rainbow foam
On the breast of a boundless Sea!
We shall watch it go, as we watch'd it come,
From the Kingdom of Faëry.

[13]

^[1] This poem is based on an Irish original in "The Courtship of Etain." See Leahy's *Heroic Romances of Ireland*, vol. i., p. 26.

[14]

THE SPELL-STRUCK

She walks as she were moving
Some mystic dance to tread,
So falls her gliding footstep,
So leans her list'ning head;
For once to fairy harping
She danced upon the hill,
And through her brain and bosom
The music pulses still.

Her eyes are bright and tearless,
But wide with yearning pain:
She longs for nothing earthly,
But oh, to hear again
The sound that held her breathless
Upon her moonlit path—
The golden fairy music
That filled the lonely rath!

Her lips have felt strange kisses
And drunk the wine of death,
Nor earthly love nor laughter
Shall stir their tender breath.
She's dead to all things living
Since that November Eve,
And when They call her earthward,
No living thing will grieve.

COIS NA TEINEADH

Where glows the Irish hearth with peat
There lives a subtle spell—
The faint blue smoke, the gentle heat
The moorland odours tell

Of white roads winding by the edge
Of bare untamed land,
Where dry stone wall or ragged hedge
Runs wide on either hand

To cottage lights that lure you in
From rainy Western skies;
And by the friendly glow within
Of simple talk, and wise,

And tales of magic, love or arms
From days when princes met
To listen to the lay that charms
The Connacht peasant yet.

There Honour shines through passions dire,
There beauty blends with mirth—
Wild hearts, ye never did aspire
Wholly for things of earth!

Cold, cold this thousand years—yet still
On many a time-stained page
Your pride, your truth, your dauntless will,
Burn on from age to age.

And still around the fires of peat
Live on the ancient days;
There still do living lips repeat
The old and deathless lays.

And when the wavering wreaths ascend,
Blue in the evening air,
The soul of Ireland seems to bend
Above her children there.

[16]

[17]

WILLIAM MORRIS

† *Oct.* 4, 1896

Singer of Jason's quest and Sigurd's doom!
Teller of vision-haunted wanderings!
Who touched a strange new music from the strings
Of old Romance—a space amidst the gloom
Of cloudy centuries thou didst illumine;
And there thy word a dreamlike splendour flings
On crown and helm—and even the tears of things
Brighten thy morning world's immortal bloom.

Yet some, great Craftsman, reverence thee more
That Beauty, coldly throned among the stars,
Came at thy lure to tread the homely earth:
And, sweet and kindly as in days of yore,
Played with our children, graced our household
cares,
And knelt content by many a quiet hearth.

TO JOHN O'LEARY

Dedication of a Book of Irish Verses by various hands^[2]

Because you suffered for the Cause;
Because you strove with voice and pen
To serve a Law above all laws
That purifies the hearts of men;

Because you failed, and grew not slack,
Not sullen, not disconsolate,
Nor stooped to seek a lower track,
But showed your soul a match for Fate;

Because you hated all things base,
And held your country's honour high;
Because you wrought in Time and Space
Not heedless of Eternity;

Because you loved the nobler part
Of Erin,—so we bring you here
Words such as once the Irish heart
On Irish lips rejoiced to hear:

Strains that have little chance to live
With those that Davis' clarion blew,
But all the best we have to give
To Mother Erin and to you.

^[2] "Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland, 1888."

THE GRAVE OF RURY

Clear as air, the western waters
 evermore their sweet unchanging song
Murmur in their stony channels
 round O'Conor's sepulchre in Cong.

Crownless, hopeless, here he lingered;
 felt the years go by him like a dream,
Heard the far-off roar of conquest
 murmur faintly like the singing stream.

Here he died, and here they tomb'd him,
 men of Fechin, chanting round his grave.
Did they know, ah, did they know it,
 what they buried by the babbling wave?

Now above the sleep of Rury
 holy things and great have passed away;
Stone by stone the stately Abbey
 falls and fades in passionless decay.

Darkly grows the quiet ivy,
 pale the broken arches glimmer through;
Dark upon the cloister-garden
 dreams the shadow of the ancient yew.

Through the roofless aisles the verdure
 flows, the meadow-sweet and foxglove
 bloom;
Earth, the mother and consoler,
 winds soft arms about the lonely tomb.

Peace and holy gloom possess him,
 last of Gaelic monarchs of the Gael,
Slumbering by the young, eternal
 river-voices of the western vale.

Ruraidh O'Conchobhar, last High King of Ireland, spent the closing fifteen years of his life in the monastery of St. Fechin at Cong, Co. Mayo. His grave is still shown in that most beautiful and pathetic of Irish ruins. Some accounts have it that his remains were afterwards transferred to Clonmacnois by the Shannon.

[20]

[21]

SONG OF MAELDUIN

There are veils that lift, there are bars that fall,
There are lights that beckon and winds that call—
Goodbye!

There are hurrying feet, and we dare not wait;
For the hour is on us, the hour of Fate,
The circling hour of the flaming Gate—
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

Fair, fair they shine through the burning zone,
Those rainbow gleams of a world unknown—
Goodbye!

And oh, to follow, to seek, to dare,
When step by step in the evening air
Floats down to meet us the cloudy stair—
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

The cloudy stair of the Brig o' Dread
Is the dizzy path that our feet must tread—
Goodbye!

O all ye children of Nights and Days
That gather and wonder and stand at gaze,
And wheeling stars in your lonely ways—
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

The music calls and the Gates unclose,
Onward and upward the wild way goes—
Goodbye!

We die in the bliss of a great new birth.
O fading phantoms of pain and mirth,
O fading loves of the old green Earth,
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

THE SHANNON AT FOYNES

Into the West, where o'er the wide Atlantic
The lights of sunset gleam,
From its high sources in the heart of Erinn
Flows the great stream.

Yet back in stormy cloud or viewless vapour
The wandering waters come,
And faithfully across the trackless heaven
Find their old home.

But ah, the tide of life that flows unceasing
Into the luring West
Returns no more, to swell with kindlier fulness
The Mother's breast!

SONNET

*On reading a Dublin newspaper in the train,
April 16, 1904*

Night falls: the emerald pastures turn to grey,
Young stars appear, a mystic beauty thrills
The dusk above the line of far-off hills,
Where late the splendours of the end of Day,
Sad and majestic, flamed and passed away.
In dust and thunder speeding to the Sea
The train flies on, yet eve's serenity,
Great and untroubled, holds the world in sway.

Then, turning from that realm of lofty life,
Again my eyes upon the printed page
Fall, and again I hear but cries of rage,
Brawlers and bigots, every word a knife;
While Thought, the fair land's fairest heritage,
Lies drowned in clamour of ignoble strife.

A RAILWAY JOURNEY

We've cleared the station—free at last
From darkness, din, and worry;
By red-brick villas, shady roads
And garden-plots we hurry.
And now green miles of pasture-land
Flit by, with budding hedges,
And far to Southward I can see
The purple mountain ridges.

My fellow-travellers pretermite,
Seeing there is no danger,
That anxious glance with which we greet
The presence of a stranger.
Whom have we? First, some man of means
(I guess), brow-wrinkled, dull-eyed,
His face the index of a soul
By cares unworthy sullied.

And then a lady, whom I deem
Some mask of Fashion merely;
And last, a maid of nineteen years,
Who, since I've seen her clearly,
Has won the careless glance I gave
To linger, as delighted
As with some green-rimmed waterspring
In midst of deserts blighted.

What is her charm? Not very fair,
Nor luring to the senses—
And yet her frank and girlish grace,
Her lack of small pretences,
Her clear, unconscious hazel eyes,
Pure lips, and simple neatness,
Fill my heart as I gaze on her
With deep and tender sweetness.

The train has rolled without a break
For half an hour or more, perhaps;
My wealthy cit has fall'n asleep,
Will soon begin to snore, perhaps;
Kind Morpheus touch'd him as he scanned
The last returns of traffic—
The lady clad in furs and silks
Is trifling with her *Graphic*.

The maiden looks with dreaming eyes
As wood and field and river
Flash past our roaring carriage-wheels
In whirling dance forever.
What are the thoughts that smooth her brows
To such content, I wonder,
While clangs about our silent group
The railroad's rhythmic thunder?

But now more slow the landscape moves—
We reach a little station—
And how the maiden's face has changed,
Lit up with expectation!
A brother, with his sister's eyes,
Brown-cheeked from sun and heather,
Awaits her; and with half a sigh
I watch them leave together.

The heavy train regathers speed,
And minute after minute
The country station drops behind—
Some spell is surely in it!
For now my fellow-travellers seem
No mark for peevish scorning—
Those withered lives had surely once
The innocence of morning.

[25]

[26]

But ah, the world's use, soon or late,
Dispels the early glamour,
And faint the spheral music rings
In this incessant clamour!
Save when, at times, in some strange lull
Of tyrannous self-seeking,
The heart of memory is thrilled
By ancient voices speaking.

[27]

And then the cloud in which we walk
Rolls by us, and from dreaming
We wake to see the primal world
In beauty round us gleaming;
Then common things to common eyes
Their secret life surrender,
And glow beneath the light of day
With visionary splendour.

.

What wrought me so? I only know
I bowed in homage ardent
Before some high mysterious Power
A heart a little hardened.
That glory flashed upon a soul
By doubt and self o'erladen,
When all I saw in very sooth
Was but a simple maiden.

[28]

CYCLING SONG

In the airy whirling wheel is the springing strength
of steel,
And the sinews grow to steel, day by day,
Till you feel your pulses leap at the easy swing and
sweep
As the hedges flicker past upon the way.
Then it's out to the kiss of the morning breeze,
And the rose of the morning sky,
And the long brown road, where the tired spirit's
load
Slips off as the leagues go by!

Black-and-silver, swift and strong, with a pleasant
undersong
From the steady rippling murmur of the chain—
Half a thing of life and will, you may feel it start and
thrill
With a quick elastic answer to the strain,
As you ride to the kiss of the morning breeze,
And the rose of the morning sky,
And the long brown road, where the tired
spirit's load
Slips off as the leagues go by!

Miles a hundred you may run from the rising of the
sun
To the gleam of the first white star;
You may ride through twenty towns, meet the sun
upon the downs
And the wind on the mountain scaur.
Then it's out to the kiss of the morning breeze
And the rose of the morning sky,
And the long brown road, where the tired spirit's
load
Slips off as the leagues go by!

Down the fragrant country-side, through the
woodland's summer pride
You have come in your forenoon spin;
And you never would have guessed how delicious is
the rest
In the shade by the wayside inn,
When you've sought the kiss of the morning
breeze
And the rose of the morning sky,
And the long brown road, where the tired spirit's
load
Slips off as the leagues go by!

Oh, there's many a one who teaches that the shining
river-reaches
Are the place to spend a long June day;
But give me the whirling wheel and a boat of air and
steel
To float upon the King's highway!
Oh, give me the kiss of the morning breeze
And the rose of the morning sky,
And the long brown road, where the tired spirit's
load
Slips off as the leagues go by!

[29]

[30]

[31]

BALLADE OF THE "CHESHIRE CHEESE" IN FLEET STREET^[3]

I know a home of antique ease
Within the smoky city's pale,
A spot wherein the spirit sees
Old London through a thinner veil.
The modern world, so stiff and stale,
You leave behind you, when you please,
For long clay pipes and great old ale
And supper in the "Cheshire Cheese."

Beneath this board, Burke's, Goldsmith's knees
Were often thrust—so runs the tale—
'Twas here the Doctor took his ease,
And wielded speech that, like a flail,
Thresh'd out the golden truth: All hail
Great souls! that met on nights like these,
For talk and laughter, pipes and ale,
And supper in the "Cheshire Cheese."

By kindly sense, and old decrees
Of England's use you set your sail—
We press to never-furrow'd seas,
For vision-worlds we breast the gale;
And still we seek, and still we fail,
For still the "glorious phantom" flees⁴—
Ah, well! no phantoms are the ale
And suppers of the "Cheshire Cheese."

[32]

Envoi

If doubts or debts thy soul assail,
If Fashion's forms its current freeze,
Try a long pipe, a glass of ale,
And supper at the "Cheshire Cheese."

[3] Meeting-place of The Rhymers' Club, 1892, 3.

[4] ... "Graves from which a glorious phantom may
Burst to illumine our tempestuous day."—SHELLEY.

[33]

DORA

I know not whether I love you, Dora:
Your beauty moves me, I know not how—
Your eyes that shine with a joy unspoken,
Your pride and sweetness of bosom and brow.
But I had not deemed that our earth could fashion
Of flesh and spirit so rare a thing—
And you lift my heart with the nameless passion
That stirs young blood in the dawn of spring.

I know not whether I love you, Dora,
Nor if you be what a man may wed.
Whence came that glory of ancient Hellas
That seems to hover about your head?
Have you roamed with Artemis, talked with Pallas?
Did Hera lend you that look sublime?
Did Bacchus give in a rose-wreathed chalice
That conquering charm of the youth of Time?

I know not whether I love you, Dora,
But well I know you are not for me,
So darken'd and marr'd with the bitter travail
Of things that are not, and fain would be.
Keep, keep for ever your grace and gladness,
Bend once to bless me your brow of snow—
Then meet me next like some far-off sadness,
Some dead ambition of long ago.

A RING'S SECRET

Can you forgive me, that I wear,
Dearest, a curl of sunny hair,
Not yours—yet for the sake of Love,
And tender faith it minds me of?
'Tis in this quaint old signet ring,
A curious, chased, engraven thing
That in some window charm'd my eye
And told of the last century.
Pure gold it was, but dull and blotch'd,
And bright'ning it one day, I touch'd
A spring that oped a little lid;
And there, for generations hid
In its small shrine of pallid gold—
They made such toys in days of old—
A shred of golden hair lay curl'd;
Worth all the gold of all the world,
Perchance, to him who shrin'd it so:

Ah, 'twas a hundred years ago!
But, dearest, if he loved as I,
He loves unto eternity.

MOONRISE IN THE ELSTER TANNEN-WALD

Darker than midnight, to the midnight sky
Rises the valley-ridge with all its pines.
Above that gloom a growing radiance shines,
Where the full moon floats up invisibly.
Now, half-revealed, she lifts her disk on high,
When on it, lo! in black and spectral lines
One blasted tree so wild a form designs,
That fear and wonder hold the watcher's eye.

The minutes pass—and nothing looks the same,
But tangled in a web of silver light
Lies the great forest, dreaming and at rest.
Yet deep in memory's core abides that sight
One moment outlined on the mountain crest—
A Shape that writhed upon a pool of flame.

AFTER ALL—

When the time comes for me to die
To-morrow or some other day,
If God should bid me make reply,
'What wilt thou?' I shall say:

O God, Thy world was great and fair,
Yet give me to forget it clean;
Vex me no more with things that were,
And things that might have been.

I loved, I toiled—throve ill and well,
Lived certain years, and murmur'd not.
Now grant me in that land to dwell
Where all things are forgot.

For others, Lord, Thy purging fires,
The loves reknit, the crown, the palm.
For me, the death of all desires
In deep, eternal calm.

EVENSONG

In the heart of a German forest I followed the winding
ways
Deep-cushioned with moss, and barr'd with the sunset's
slanting rays,

When out of the distance dim, where no end to the path
was seen,
But the breath of the Springtime clung like a motionless
mist of green,

I heard a sound of singing, unearthly-sad and clear,
Rise from the forest deeps and float on the evening air.

And I thought of the spirits told of in dark old forest lore
Who roam the greenwood singing for ever and evermore;

And I stopped and wondered and waited, as nearer the
music grew,
Louder and still more loud—till at last came into view

A troop of Saxon maidens, tanned with the rain and sun,
A burden of billeted wood on the shoulders of every one!

[38]

The strong steps never falter'd, the chanting passed away
In the fragrant depths of the woodland, and died with the
dying day.

No spirits in truth! yet it seem'd, as awhile in dreams I
stood,
That a music more than earthly had passed through the
dark'ning wood.

And it seemed that the Day to the Morrow bequeathed in
that solemn strain
The whole world's hope and labour, its love, and its
ancient pain.

[39]

IN MEMORIAM: J. T. C. H.

In hours of respite from the strife
That kills the careless joy of life,
How often, friend, have you and I
Lived o'er those golden days gone by,
When eager hand and eager eye
Against the humming salt sea-breeze
Drove our light craft through breaking seas;
Or when beneath enchanted woods
We floated, where the shadow broods
On still black waters, and delayed
A little in the chequer'd shade
To watch, far down the shining stream,
The golden summer sunlight gleam
On the green banks of storied Boyne.

Ah, in those happy days how well
Did wood and field and water join
To weave the wild earth's mighty spell!
Gone, gone! and you are also gone,
On dark tides that you sailed alone;
And scarcely more for you than me
Those days are done! O, morning sea,
Where all the morning in our blood
Sang, as we faced the glittering flood!
O, bays the wild sea-murmur fills,
And hot gorse-perfume from the hills!
O, lonely places, echoing
With sound of waters, wave or stream,
Haunted by timid foot and wing,
I see you now but in a dream—
Old days, old friends, we part, we part;
Yet still your memory in my heart
Lives, till the heart be dust; and then
Beyond this realm of Where and When,
Something of you shall linger yet,
And something in me not forget,
When all the suns of earth have set.

[40]

[41]

TRANSLATIONS

[43]

THE BATTLE OF SALAMIS

From "The Persians" of Aeschylus

[Except for inscriptions, this contemporary narrative of the Battle of Salamis is the earliest piece of written Greek history extant. The splendour and force of the original make it one of the greatest pieces of battle-narrative in the world, and defy adequate rendering. But it is noticeable that not only is the description ablaze with the passion of war, but the plan and tactics of the fight, which was probably even a more decisive event in world-history than that of Marathon, are given with a map-like precision and clearness.

The narrative is placed in the mouth of a messenger sent by Xerxes to his mother, Atossa, to tell her of the catastrophe. I have followed the text of Paley.]

ATOSSA

And is Athena's city yet unsacked?

MESSENGER

Men were her city-wall—unbroken yet.

ATOSSA

Then tell me of the fight at Salamis.
Who first began the onslaught—was't the Greeks?
Or made his swollen fleet my son too bold?

MESSENGER

Began? Some Power malign began it all!
Some God that hated Persia. First, there came
A Greek deserter from the Athenian host.
"Keep watch," he said, "for at the dead of night
Our benches shall be manned, our fleet dispersed;
They will escape you in the narrow seas."
This Xerxes heard, O Queen, and never saw
The Greek man's guile, nor knew the Gods his foe.
To all the captains of the fleet he sent
This order: "When the sun his fiery beams
Hath hidden from the earth, and night holds all
The empire of the air, then set your ships,
Some ranged in threefold line to guard the friths
And close up all the roaring waterways,
Some to patrol the Isle of Salamis.
And mark ye, should the Greeks escape their doom
By one unguarded outlet, 'tis decreed
Your heads shall fall for it." So spake the King,
Haughty, infatuate, knowing not the end.
And dutifully they obeyed his word.
Supper was first prepared; each oarsman then
Looked to his tholepin and bound fast the oar.
Then, as the sunlight faded from the earth,
And night came on, the rowers went on board,
And with them every well-trained fighting man;
And soon from squadron unto squadron rolled
Down the vast lines the cheering of the fleet,
As each one rowed to his appointed place.

[44]

So all night long the captains made us cruise
Hither and thither, every ship we had;
And now the night was spent, yet never once
The Greeks had tried our watch in secret flight.
But when the white steeds of the God of Day
Mounted the sky, and light possessed the land,
Then from the Greeks a mighty chant was borne,
Triumphant, to our ears, and every cliff
Of sea-girt Salamis pealed back the strain.
And fear possessed us every one, O Queen,
And staggering doubt; for not as if in flight
Rose the great pæan then among the Greeks,
But as when brave men cheer themselves for fight.
Then the heart-kindling trumpet spake, and then
We heard the thunder of a thousand oars

[45]

That swung together at the steersman's cry,
And all at once the sounding furrows smote.
Then soon full clear their charging line we saw,
The right wing leading, and the main array
A little after; and ere long we heard
Such cries as these: "On, children of the Greek!
Now for your fatherland, for freedom now!
For wife and child, and for your fathers' homes!
Now for the temples of your fathers' Gods!
To-day we fight for all!" So cried they still,
Nor were we Persians dumb, but sent them back
Shouting for shouting. Little time there was
To range our lines, until the brazen beaks
Crash'd in among us. First, a ship of Greece,
Leading the onset, rent off all the prow
From a Phœnician. Each then sought a foe;
And first we stemm'd the torrent of their charge,
But soon our multitudes in the narrow seas
Were thronged and hampered, nor could any now
Bear help to other—yea, and many a time
Friend hurtled upon friend, or rent away
With shearing prow her whole array of oars.
Meanwhile the Greeks around us fiercely charged
From every side at once; the lighter barques
Were soon o'erset; the very seas were hid,
So strewn with wreck and slaughter; every strand
And jutting rock-ledge was with corpses piled.
We pressed in ruinous disordered flight,
All that was left of Persia's mighty fleet;
While they, like fishers when the tunnies swarm
Within some narrow inlet, slew amain
With aught that hand could seize—with shivered
oars,
Fragments of wreck, they stabb'd, they stunn'd, they
clove;
And out beyond the channel shrieks and wails
And panic fear possessed the open sea.
Gods! could I speak, nor cease for ten full days,
I had not told how thick disasters came!
Know this, that never since the world began
Perished in one day such a host of men!

[46]

[47]

THE DEAD AT CLONMACNOIS

From the Irish of Angus O'Gillan

In a quiet-water'd land, a land of roses,
Stands Saint Kieran's city fair,
And the warriors of Erin in their famous
generations
Slumber there.

There beneath the dewy hillside sleep the noblest
Of the Clan of Conn,
Each below his stone: his name in branching Ogham
And the sacred knot thereon.

There they laid to rest the Seven Kings of Tara,
There the sons of Cairbrè sleep—
Battle-banners of the Gael, that in Kieran's plain of
crosses
Now their final hosting keep.

And in Clonmacnois they laid the men of Teffia,
And right many a lord of Breagh;
Deep the sod above Clan Creidè and Clan Connall,
Kind in hall and fierce in fray.

Many and many a son of Conn the Hundred-Fighter
In the red earth lies at rest;
Many a blue eye of Clan Colman the turf covers,
Many a swan-white breast.

SONG OF FINN IN PRAISE OF MAY^[5]

From the Irish.

May Day! delightful day!
Bright colours play the vales along.
Now wakes at morning's slender ray,
Wild and gay, the blackbird's song.

Now comes the bird of dusty hue,
The loud cuckoo, the summer-lover;
Branching trees are thick with leaves;
The bitter, evil time is over.

Swift horses gather nigh
Where half dry the river goes;
Tufted heather crowns the height;
Weak and white the bogdown blows.

Corncrake sings from eve till morn,
Deep in corn, a strenuous bard!
Sings the virgin waterfall,
White and tall, her one sweet word.

Loaded bees of little power
Goodly flower-harvest win;
Cattle roam with muddy flanks;
Busy ants go out and in.

Through the wild harp of the wood
Making music roars the gale—
Now it slumbers without motion,
On the ocean sleeps the sail.

Men grow mighty in the May,
Proud and gay the maidens grow;
Fair is every wooded height,
Fair and bright the plain below.

A bright shaft has smit the streams,
With gold gleams the water-flag;
Leaps the fish, and on the hills
Ardour thrills the flying stag;

And you long to reach the courses
Where the slim swift horses race,
And the crowd is ranked applauding
Deep about the meeting-place.

Carols loud the lark on high,
Small and shy, his tireless lay,
Singing in wildest, merriest mood
Of delicate-hued, delightful May.

[5] I am much indebted to the beautiful prose translation of this song by Dr. Kuno Meyer which appears in *Ériu* (the Journal of the School of Irish Learning), vol. i., Part ii. In my free poetic version an attempt has been made to render the rhyming and metrical effect of the original, which is believed to date from about the ninth century.

WENN ICH AN DEINEM HAUSE

From the German of Heinrich Heine

I Pass beneath thy dwelling
Each morning, and am fain,
My child, to see thee watching
Still at thy window-pane.

With black-brown eyes of wonder
Thou dost my going scan:
“Who art thou, and what ails thee,
Thou sorrowful foreign man?”

I am a German poet,
Among the Germans famed—
There, when they count their greatest,
My name is also named.

And, little one, what ails me
Ails Germans not a few;
Count they the sorest sorrows,
They name my sorrows too.

EIN FICHTENBAUM STEHT EINSAM

From the German of Heinrich Heine

There stands a lonely Pine-tree
On a bare northern height.
'Mid ice and snow he slumbers,
Wrapped in his mantle white.

He dreams about a Palm-tree
In far-off Eastern lands,
That droops, alone and silent,
Above her burning sands.

ZWEI KAMMERN HAT DAS HERZ

From the German of P. Neumann

μάλα γέ τοι τὸ μεγάλας ὑγείας
ἀκόρεστον τέρμα, νόσος γὰρ αἰεὶ
γείτων ὁμότοιχος ἐρείδει.

ÆSCH., Ag.

Two chambers hath the heart:
There dwelling
Live Joy and Pain apart.

Is Joy in one awake?
Then only
Doth Pain his slumber take.

Joy, in thine hour, refrain—
Speak softly,
Lest thou awaken Pain.

LADY ISLAND, ON THE CHIEMSEE, BAVARIA

From the German of Victor Scheffel

O'er the placid lake at even glides our boat, alone and
slow,
In the sunset stand empurpled domes of everlasting snow,
From an island in the twilight dimly rise a convent's walls:
With the chimes the chant of vespers from the grey old
minster falls—
*Sempiterni Fons amoris, Consolatrix tristium,
Pia Mater Salvatoris, ave Virgo virginum!*
Softly rising, falling, mingling, dying, comes the solemn
song,
And in dreamy undulations air and lake the tones prolong.
Still the oars, and still the heart in worship, as the sweet
bells toll,
And I feel as though God's angels bore to heaven a blessèd
soul.

THE THREE RINGS: A FABLE

*From Lessing's "Nathan der Weise"*⁶

[Since Plato, no writer has understood better than Lessing the dramatic conduct of a philosophic dialogue. The following colloquy is a beautiful example of his art and of his thought.

Nathan is a Jew, famed for his wealth and for his wisdom, living in Jerusalem at the time of the Third Crusade. In the following scene he has just been summoned to the presence of the Sultan Saladin. He supposes that a loan of money is the Sultan's object. Instead of this, he finds that it is his reputed wisdom which has gained him the interview. Nathan is a man who cannot have taken his beliefs in spiritual things without examination; here, then, says Saladin, are three faiths contending for mastery, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Mahomedan. Each claims to be the true and only true religion. The claim cannot be true of more than one of them. Which of them, in his inmost soul, does Nathan hold to be justified? That he may have time to collect his thoughts, Saladin leaves the Jew alone for a while before he answers. Nathan, who does not yet know Saladin, is at first very doubtful of the *bona fides* of the Musalman prince in making this inquiry of him.]

ACT III, SCENE 6

NATHAN

(alone)

H'm, h'm. A strange request. Where do I stand?
What will the Sultan with me ... what? I come
Prepared for money, and he asks for ... Truth!
And this he needs must have as bare and bright
As if the truth were coin!... Aye, were it coin,
Old, well-worn coin, that men tell out by weight,
Such might I find him! But new-minted coin—
The stamp's enough: you fling it on the board
And there's an end—not thus can Truth be told!
Doth he conceive that truth is to be poured
From head to head like gold into a bag?
Who's here the Jew, I or the Sultan?... Yet
Suppose in very truth he asks for Truth?
How then? And verily it were too little,
Too paltry a suspicion, to believe
He used the truth but as a snare.... Too little!
Ah, what is then too little for the great?
Why should he break into my house? A friend
Would surely knock and listen at the door
Before he entered. I must tread with care.
But how? but how? To play the stolid Jew,
That ne'er will pass ... still less, no Jew at all;
For 'then' he'll say, 'why not a Musalman?'
Let me think.... Ha! I have it now. That saves me!
Not children only can one satisfy
With fables.... He is coming. Let him come!

[55]

Enter Saladin.

SALADIN

I have not come too quickly? Thou hast brought
Thy meditation to an end? Then speak!
None hears but I.

[56]

NATHAN

Nay, all the world may hear
For aught I care!

SALADIN

So clear and confident
Is Nathan in his wisdom? Ha! this I deem
To be a sage indeed! Nothing to hide,
Never to palter—but to stake his life,
His blood, his goods, and all, upon the truth!

NATHAN

Yea ... if need were ... and if the truth were served....

SALADIN

One of my titles, Betterer of the World
And of the Law, I hope from this day forth
To bear with right.

NATHAN

Truly, a noble title!
Yet, Sultan, ere I trust myself with thee,
Wholly and unreserved, I ask thee first
To hear a fable from me.

SALADIN

Wherefore not?
From childhood I have ever loved to hear
Fables, well told.

NATHAN

Well told? ah, that indeed
Is scarce a quality of mine!

SALADIN

Again
So proudly modest? Well, speak on, speak on!

NATHAN

In the grey morn of Time, there lived i' the East
A man, who owned a ring of priceless worth,
Gift of a well-loved hand. For stone it bore
An opal, where a hundred lovely tints
Played, and where dwelt the magic power to make
Well-pleasing in the sight of God and man
Whoever wore it in this faith—What wonder
It never left the owner's hand? what wonder
He made provision to retain it ever
In his own House, an heirloom for all time?
Thus did he order it: He left the Ring
First to his best-belovèd son, ordaining
That he in turn should leave it to the son
He dearest loved; and so to the dearest ever.
And still the owner of the Ring, apart
From precedence of birth, by that alone
Should bear the sway.... Sultan, you follow me?

SALADIN

I follow thee. Proceed!

NATHAN

And so the Ring
Descended, till at length it came to one
Who had three sons, all dutiful alike,
Whom therefore he, perforce, must love alike;
Only, from time to time the first would seem
Most worthy of the Ring, and then the next,
And then again the third,—as each he found
Alone with him, the other two not by
To share his overflowing love. To each
His heart's fond weakness made him pledge the
Ring.

Thus all went smoothly ... while it could. But now
His time to die draws near, and, sore perplexed,
The good man rues that two of the three sons
That trusted in his word, must soon be left
Deceived, affronted.... Mark, now, his device!
All secretly he summons to his aid

[57]

[58]

“ cunning craftsman, and commands him fashion
After the pattern of his Ring, two others;
No cost, no labour to be spared, to make them
Like to the first, in every point alike.
And so 'tis done; and when the craftsman brings
The finished work, not even the father's eye
Can tell his own ring from the copies. Now
Joyfully doth he summon to his side
His three sons, one by one, and, one by one,
Gives each his blessing—and a ring—and dies.
Sultan, thou hearest me?

SALADIN

Yes, yes, I hear!
Come, will thy fable soon be told?

NATHAN

'Tis told
Already, for the rest is evident.
Scarce is the father dead when comes each son
Bearing his ring, and claims to be the lord
And ruler of the house! What follows then?
Examinations, quarrellings, complaints—
In vain! Among the rings, the one true Ring
Remains for all eyes indistinguishable.—

*[After a pause in which he waits for
the Sultan's reply.]*

Well-nigh as indistinguishable, Sultan,
As here, for us, to-day, the one true Faith.

SALADIN

How? This shall be thine answer to my question?

NATHAN

Nay, this shall but excuse me, if I trust not
My judgment to decide among the rings,
Made by the Father to the very intent
That they should never be distinguished.

SALADIN

Yea,
The rings!... Thou playest with me! I had deemed
The three religions, whereof question is,
Were easily distinguished, even to points
Of food, and drink, and clothing!

NATHAN

Only not
In this one thing—their proofs. All rest alike
On history, or written or handed down.
And history we take—is it not so?—
On faith and trust alone. Whose faith, whose truth,
Shall we confide in most? Surely in those
Of our own folk, whose blood we are, whose proofs
Of love were given us from our childhood up,
Who ne'er deceived us, saving when, perchance,
'Twere better for our weal. If this be so,
How can I less in my forefathers trust
Than thou in thine? Or take the other side:
Can I demand from thee that thou shouldst charge
Thine ancestors with lying, but for this,
That mine be justified? Again, the Christian
To both of us may plead the like defence.
Art thou not answered?

SALADIN

(aside)

[59]

[60]

By the living God
The man is right! I must be dumb.

NATHAN

Now turn we
Back to our rings again.—I said, the sons
Made their complaints: each one before the Judge
Made oath that from his father's very hand
He had the Ring—and so in truth he had—
After his father's promise, long before, [61]
That one day he should own the Ring and all
Its rights—and this no less was true. The father,
Each one averr'd, could ne'er have played him false.
Rather than credit this—rather than nurse
Against so loved a father, such a thought,
How fain soever he had been to think
Nothing but good of them, he must believe
His brothers guilty of foul treachery.
But surely one day he would find a way
To unmask the villains—he would be avenged!

SALADIN

And now, the Judge? I am intent to hear
What thou wilt put into his mouth. Speak on!

NATHAN

On this wise spake the Judge: "Either ye bring
Right soon your father here before me, else [62]
I spurn you from my seat. What! think ye I
Am here to answer riddles? Or do ye wait
Until the true Ring find a tongue and speak?
Yet stay! 'Tis said that in the true Ring lives
" magic gift, to make the owner loved—
Well-pleasing before God and man. So good,
This shall decide the cause; for never, surely,
In this the false can emulate the true.
Which of the three of ye is best beloved
By the other twain? Marry, speak out! Ye are dumb!
Mysterious power, that only backward works,
Not outward from within! Lo, each of you
Loves best of all—himself! So are ye all
Deceived, and all deceivers. All your rings
Are manifestly false. Belike the true
Was irrecoverably lost; and so
Your father, to conceal the loss, made three
In place of one."

SALADIN

Excellent, excellent!

NATHAN

"And so," the Judge continued, "if ye now
Are bent on Law, on that alone, and counsel [63]
Such as I can, will none—I bid you hence.
But, if I counselled you, my rede were this:
Take ye the matter simply as it lies.
Each from your father had his ring—let each
Be well persuaded that the ring he holds
Is the true Ring. It may be that your father
Was minded to maintain the tyranny
Of the one Ring no longer. And 'tis certain
He loved you all, and loved you each alike.
Would not have one exalted, one oppressed.
Mark that! and be it yours to emulate
His great impartial love. Strive, each of you,
To show the Ring's benignant might his own;
Yea, help the mystic power to do its kind,
With gentleness, with loving courtesy,
Beneficence to man, and unto God
The deep devotion of the inmost soul.
And when, full many a generation hence,

Within your children's children's children's hearts
The mystery of the Ring is manifest,
Lo! in a thousand thousand years, again
Before this judgment-seat I summon you,
Where one more wise than I shall sit and speak.
Now go your ways." So spake the modest Judge.

SALADIN

God! God!

NATHAN

And now, O Saladin, if thou
Art confident that thou indeed art he,
The wise, the promised Judge....

SALADIN

O God! I? dust! I? nothing!

NATHAN

What moves the Sultan?

SALADIN

Nathan, Nathan,
The thousand thousand years are not yet done!
Not mine that judgment-seat! Enough—farewell!
But henceforth be my friend.

[64]

[6] The concluding twenty lines of this translation have appeared in the writer's "Life of Lessing" (Walter Scott).

FINIS.

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