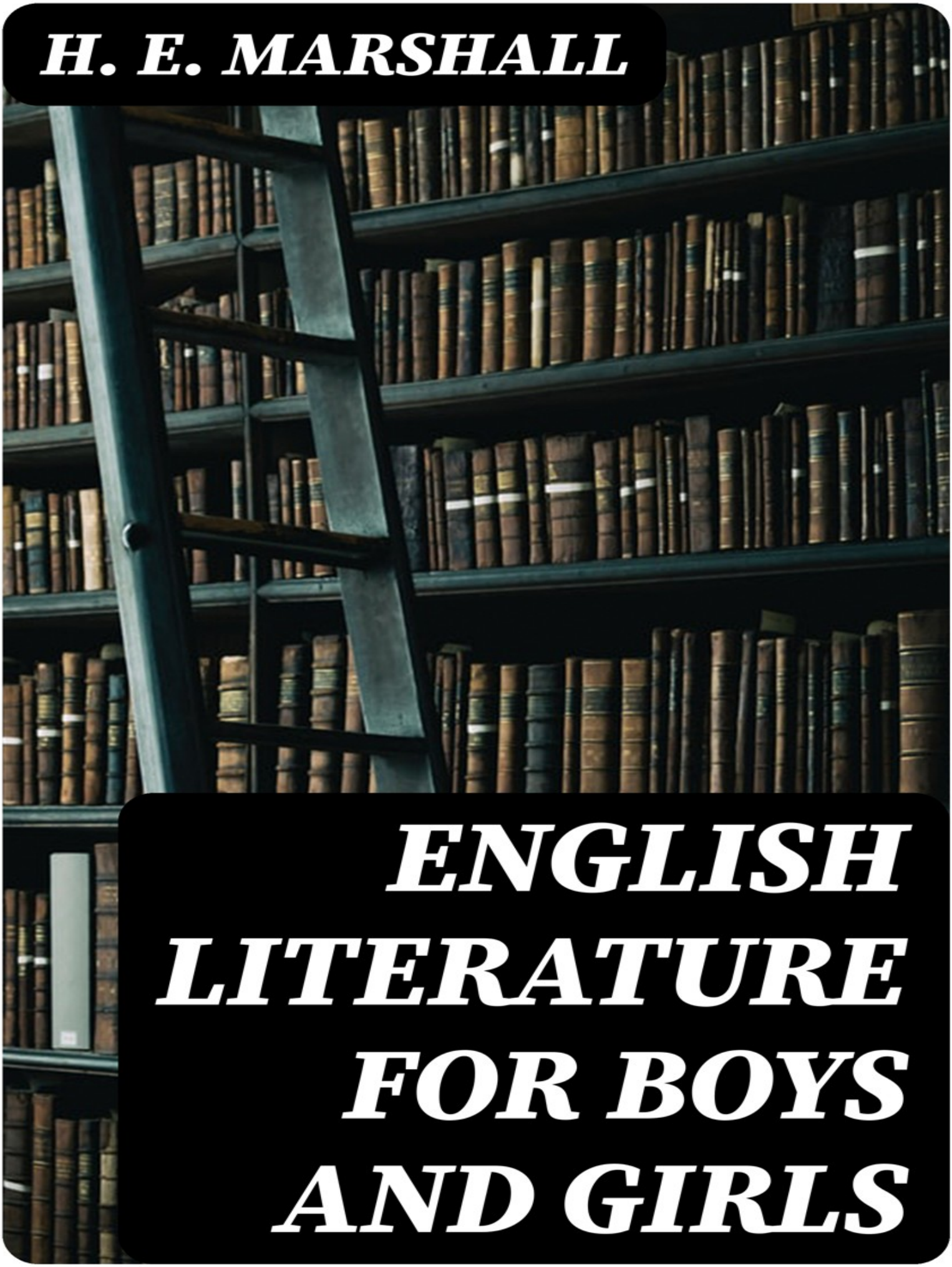
H. E. MARSHALL
ENGLISH LITERATURE FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

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EAN 8596547251958

DigiCat, 2022
Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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YEAR 7

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Chapter I IN THE LISTENING TIME

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HAS there ever been a time when no stories were told? Has there ever been a people who did not care to listen? I think not.

When we were little, before we could read for ourselves, did we not gather eagerly round father or mother, friend or nurse, at the promise of a story? When we grew older, what happy hours did we not spend with our books. How the printed words made us forget the world in which we live, and carried us away to a wonderland,

"Where waters gushed and fruit trees grew
And flowers put forth a fairer hue,
And everything was strange and new;
The sparrows were brighter than peacocks here,
And their dogs outran our fallow deer,
And honey bees had lost their stings,
And horses were born with eagles' wings."*

*Robert Browning.

And as it is with us, so it is with a nation, with a people.

In the dim, far-off times when our forefathers were wild, naked savages, they had no books. Like ourselves, when we were tiny, they could neither read nor write. But do you think that they had no stories? Oh, yes! We may be sure that when the day's work was done, when the fight or the chase was over, they gathered round the wood fire and listened to the tales of the story-teller.

These stories were all of war. They told of terrible combats with men or with fierce strange beasts, they told of passion, of revenge. In them there was no beauty, no tenderness, no love. For the life of man in those far-off days was wild and rough; it was one long struggle against foes, a struggle which left little room for what was beautiful or tender.

But as time went on, as life became more easy, in one way or another the savage learned to become less savage. Then as he changed, the tales he listened to changed too. They were no longer all of war, of revenge; they told of love also. And later, when the story of Christ had come to soften men's hearts and brighten men's lives, the stories told of faith and purity and gentleness.

At last a time came when minstrels wandered from town to town, from castle to castle, singing their lays. And the minstrel who had a good tale to tell was ever sure of a welcome, and for his pains he was rewarded with money, jewels, and even land. That was the true listening time of the world.

It was no easy thing to be a minstrel, and a man often spent ten or twelve years in learning to be one. There were certain tales which all minstrels had to know, and the best among them could tell three hundred and fifty. Of these stories the minstrels used to learn only the outline, and each told the story in his own way, filling it in according to his own fancy. So as time went on these well-known tales came to be told in many different ways, changing as the times changed.

At length, after many years had passed, men began to write down these tales, so that they might not be forgotten. These first books we call Manuscripts, from the Latin words manus, a hand, and scribere, to write, for they were all written by hand. Even after they were written down there were many changes made in the tales, for those who wrote or copied them would sometimes miss lines or alter others. Yet they were less changed than they had been when told only by word of mouth.

These stories then form the beginnings of what is called our Literature. Literature really means letters, for it comes from a Latin word littera, meaning a letter of the alphabet. Words are made by letters of the alphabet being set together, and our literature again by words being set together; hence the name.

As on and on time went, every year more stories were told and sung and written down. The first stories which our forefathers told in the days long, long ago, and which were never written down, are lost forever. Even many of those stories which were written are lost too, but a few still remain, and from them we can learn much of the life and the history of the people who lived in our land ten and twelve hundred years ago, or more.

For a long time books were all written by hand. They were very scarce and dear, and only the wealthy could afford to have them, and few could read them. Even great knights and nobles could not read, for they spent all their time in fighting and hunting, and had little time in which to learn. So it came about that the monks who lived a quiet and peaceful life became the learned men. In the

monasteries it was that books were written and copied. There too they were kept, and the monasteries became not only the schools, but the libraries of the country.

As a nation grows and changes, its literature grows and changes with it. At first it asks only for stories, then it asks for history for its own sake, and for poetry for its own sake; history, I mean, for the knowledge it gives us of the past; poetry for joy in the beautiful words, and not merely for the stories they tell. Then, as a nation's needs and knowledge grow, it demands ever more and more books on all kinds of subjects.

And we ourselves grow and change just as a nation does. When we are very young, there are many books which seem to us dull and stupid. But as we grow older and learn more, we begin to like more and more kinds of books. We may still love the stories that we loved as children, but we love others too. And at last, perhaps, there comes a time when those books which seemed to us most dull and stupid delight us the most.

At first, too, we care only for the story itself. We do not mind very much in what words it is told so long as it is a story. But later we begin to care very much indeed what words the story- teller uses, and how he uses them. It is only, perhaps, when we have learned to hear with our eyes that we know the true joy of books. Yes, hear with our eyes, for it is joy in the sound of the words that makes our breath come fast, which brings smiles to our lips or tears to our eyes. Yet we do not need to read the words aloud, the sight of the black letters on the white page is enough.

In this book I am going to tell you about a few of our greatest story-tellers and their books. Many of these books you will not care to read for yourselves for a long time to come. You must be content to be told about them. You must be content to know that there are rooms in the fairy palace of our Literature into which you cannot enter yet. But every year, as your knowledge grows, you will find that new keys have been put into your hands with which you may unlock the doors which are now closed. And with every door that you unlock, you will become aware of others and still others that are yet shut fast, until at last you learn with something of pain, that the great palace of our Literature is so vast that you can never hope to open all the doors even to peep inside.

Chapter II THE STORY OF THE CATTLE RAID OF COOLEY

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OUR earliest literature was history and poetry. Indeed, we might say poetry only, for in those far-off times history was always poetry, it being only through the songs of the bards and minstrels that history was known. And when I say history I do not mean history as we know it. It was then merely the gallant tale of some hero's deeds listened to because it was a gallant tale.

Now the people who lived in the British Isles long ago were not English. It will be simplest for us to call them all Celts and to divide them into two families, the Gaels and the Cymry. The Gaels lived in Ireland and in Scotland, and the Cymry in England and Wales.

It is to Ireland that we must go for the very beginnings of our Literature, for the Roman conquest did not touch Ireland, and the English, who later conquered and took possession of Britain, hardly troubled the Green Isle. So for centuries the Gaels of Ireland told their tales and handed them on from father to son undisturbed, and in Ireland a

great many old writings have been kept which tell of far-off times. These old Irish manuscripts are perhaps none of them older than the eleventh century, but the stories are far, far older. They were, we may believe, passed on by word of mouth for many generations before they were written down, and they have kept the feeling of those far-off times.

It was from Ireland that the Scots came to Scotland, and when they came they brought with them many tales. So it comes about that in old Scottish and in old Irish manuscripts we find the same stories.

Many of the manuscripts which are kept in Ireland have never been translated out of the old Irish in which they were written, so they are closed books to all but a few scholars, and we need not talk about them. But of one of the great treasures of old Irish literature we will talk. This is the Leabhar Na h-Uidhre, or Book of the Dun Cow. It is called so because the stories in it were first written down by St. Ciaran in a book made from the skin of a favorite cow of a dun color. That book has long been lost, and this copy of it was made in the eleventh century.

The name of this old book helps us to remember that long ago there was no paper, and that books were written on vellum made from calf-skin and upon parchment made from sheep-skin. It was not until the twelfth century that paper began to be made in some parts of Europe, and it was not until the fifteenth century that paper books became common in England.

In the Book of the Dun Cow, and in another old book called the Book of Leinster, there is written the great Irish

legend called the Tain Bo Chuailgne or the Cattle Raid of Cooley.

This is a very old tale of the time soon after the birth of Christ. In the book we are told how this story had been written down long, long ago in a book called the Great Book Written on Skins. But a learned man carried away that book to the East. Then, when many years had passed, people began to forget the story of the Cattle Raid. So the Chief minstrel called all the other minstrels together to ask if any of them knew the tale. But none of them could remember more than a few verses of it. Therefore the chief minstrel asked all his pupils to travel into far countries to search for the rest which was lost.

What followed is told differently in different books, but all agree in this, that a great chief called Fergus came back from the dead in order to tell the tale, which was again written down.

The story is one of the beautiful Queen Meav of Connaught. For many years she had lived happily with her husband and her children. But one day the Queen and her husband began to argue as to which of them was the richer. As they could not agree, they ordered all their treasures to be brought before them that they might be compared.

So first all their wooden and metal vessels were brought. But they were both alike.

Then all their jewels, their rings and bracelets, necklets and crowns were brought, but they, too, were equal.

Then all their robes were brought, crimson and blue, green, yellow, checked and striped, black and white. They, too, were equal.

Next from the fields and pastures great herds of sheep were brought. They, too, were equal.

Then from the green plains fleet horses, champing steeds came. Great herds of swine from forest and glen were brought. They, too, were equal.

Lastly, droves and droves of cattle were brought. In the King's herd there was a young bull named White-horned. When a calf, he had belonged to Meav's herd, but being very proud, and thinking it little honor to be under the rule of a woman, he had left Meav's herd and joined himself to the King's. This bull was very beautiful. His head and horns and hoofs were white, and all the rest of him was red. He was so great and splendid that in all the Queen's herd there was none to match him.

Then Meav's sorrow was bitter, and calling a messenger, she asked if he knew where might be found a young bull to match with White- horned.

The messenger replied that he knew of a much finer bull called Donn Chuailgne, or Brown Bull of Cooley, which belonged to Dawra, the chief of Ulster.

"Go then,' said Meav, "and ask Dawra to lend me the Bull for a year. Tell him that he shall be well repaid, that he shall receive fifty heifers and Brown Bull back again at the end of that time. And if Dawra should seem unwilling to lend Brown Bull, tell him that he may come with it himself, and that he shall receive here land equal to his own, a chariot worth thirty- six cows, and he shall have my friendship ever after."

So taking with him nine others, the messenger set out and soon arrived at Cooley. And when Dawra heard why the

messengers had come, he received them kindly, and said at once that they should have Brown Bull.

Then the messengers began to speak and boast among themselves. "It was well," said one, "that Dawra granted us the Bull willingly, otherwise we had taken it by force."

As he spoke, a servant of Dawra came with food and drink for the strangers, and hearing how they spoke among themselves, he hastily and in wrath dashed the food upon the table, and returning to his master repeated to him the words of the messenger.

Then was Dawra very wrathful. And when, in the morning, the messengers came before him asking that he should fulfill his promise, he refused them.

So, empty-handed, the messengers returned to Queen Meav. And she, full of anger, decided to make good the boastful words of her messenger and take Brown Bull by force.

Then began a mighty war between the men of Ulster and the men of Connaught. And after many fights there was a great battle in which Meav was defeated. Yet was she triumphant, for she had gained possession of the Brown Bull.

But the Queen had little cause for triumph, for when Brown Bull and White-horned met there was a fearful combat between them. The whole land echoed with their bellowing. The earth shook beneath their feet and the sky grew dark with flying sods of earth and with flecks of foam. After long fighting Brown Bull conquered, and goring White-horned to death, ran off with him impaled upon his horns, shaking his shattered body to pieces as he ran.

But Brown Bull, too, was wounded to death. Mad with pain and wounds, he turned to his own land, and there

"He lay down
Against the hill, and his great heart broke there,
And sent a stream of blood down all the slope;
And thus, when all the war and Tain had ended,
In his own land, 'midst his own hills, he died."*

*The Tain, by Mary A. Hutton.

The Cattle Raid of Cooley is a strange wild tale, yet from it we can learn a great deal about the life of these old, far-away times. We can learn from it something of what the people did and thought, and how they lived, and even of what they wore. Here is a description of a driver and his war chariot, translated, of course, into English prose. "It is then that the charioteer arose, and he put on his hero's dress of charioteering. This was the hero's dress of charioteering that he put on: his soft tunic of deer skin, so that it did not restrain the movement of his hands outside. He put on his black upper cloak over it outside. . . . The charioteer took first then his helm, ridged like a board, four-cornered. . . . This was well measured to him, and it was not an over weight. His hand brought the circlet of red- yellow, as though it were a plate of red gold, of refined gold smelted over the edge of the anvil, to his brow as a sign of his charioteering, as a distinction to his master.

"He took the goads to his horses, and his whip inlaid in his right hand. He took the reins to hold back his horses in his left hand. Then he put the iron inlaid breast-plate on his horses, so that they were covered from forehead to fore-foot with spears, and points, and lances, and hard points, so that

every motion in this chariot was war-near, so that every corner, and every point, and every end, and every front of this chariot was a way of tearing."*

*The Cattle Raid of Cualnge, by L. W. Faraday.

We can almost see that wild charioteer and his horses, sheathed in bristling armor with "every front a way of tearing," as they dash amid the foe. And all through we come on lines like these full of color and detail, which tell us of the life of those folk of long ago.

Chapter III ONE OF THE SORROWS OF STORY-TELLING

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The Tain gives us vivid pictures of people and things, but it is not full of beauty and of tender imagination like many of the Gaelic stories. Among the most beautiful and best known of these are perhaps the Three Sorrows of Story-Telling. These three stories are called: The Tragedy of the Children of Lir; The Tragedy of the Children of Tuireann; and Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach. Of the three the last is perhaps the most interesting, because the story happened partly in Scotland and partly in Ireland, and it is found both in old Irish and in old Scottish manuscripts.

The story is told in many old books, and in many ways both in prose and in verse. The oldest and shortest version is in the Book of Leinster, the same book in which is found The Tain.

The tale goes that one day King Conor and his nobles feasted at the house of Felim, his chief story-teller. And while they feasted a daughter was born to Felim the story-teller. Then Cathbad the Druid, who was also at the feast,

became exceeding sad. He foretold that great sorrow and evil should come upon the land because of this child, and so he called her Deirdre, which means trouble or alarm.

When the nobles heard that, they wished to slay the new-born babe. But Conor spoke.

"Let it not be so done," he said. "It were an ill thing to shed the blood of an innocent child. I myself shall care for her. She shall be housed in a safe place so that none may come nigh to her, and when she is grown she shall be my one true wife."

So it was done as King Conor said. Deirdre was placed in a safe and lonely castle, where she was seen of none save her tutor and her nurse, Lavarcam. There, as the years passed, she grew tall and fair as a slender lily, and more beautiful than the sunshine.

Now when fourteen years had passed, it happened one snowy day that Deirdre's tutor killed a calf to provide food for their little company. And as the calf's blood was spilled upon the snow, a raven came to drink of it. When Deirdre saw that, she sighed and said, "Would that I had a husband whose hair was as the color of the raven, his cheeks as blood, and his skin as snow."

"There is such a one," said Lavarcam, "he is Naisi the son of
Usnach."

After that here was no rest for Deirdre until she had seen Naisi. And when they met they loved each other so that Naisi took her and fled with her to Scotland far from Conor the King. For they knew that when the King learned that fair

Deirdre had been stolen from him, he would be exceeding wrathful.

There, in Scotland, Deirdre and Naisi lived for many years happily. With them were Ainle and Ardan, Naisi's two brothers, who also loved their sister Deirdre well.

But Conor never forgot his anger at the escape of Deirdre. He longed still to have her as his Queen, and at last he sent a messenger to lure the fair lady and the three brave brothers back to Ireland.

"Naisi and Deirdre were seated together one day, and between them
Conor's chess board, they playing upon it.

"Naisi heard a cry and said, 'I hear the call of a man of Erin.'

"'That was not the call of a man of Erin,' says Deirdre, 'but the call of a man of Alba.'

"Deirdre knew the first cry of Fergus, but she concealed it.
Fergus uttered the second cry.

"'That is the cry of a man of Erin,' says Naisi.

"'It is not indeed,' says Deirdre, 'and let us play on.'

"Fergus sent forth the third cry, and the sons of Usnach knew it was Fergus that sent for the cry. And Naisi ordered Ardan to go to meet Fergus. Then Deirdre declared she knew the first call sent forth by Fergus.

"'Why didst thou conceal it, then, my Queen?' says Naisi.

"'A vision I saw last night,' says Deirdre, 'namely that three birds came unto us having three sups of honey in their beaks, and that they left them with us, and that they took three sups of our blood with them.'

"'What determination hast thou of that, O Princess?' says Naisi.

"'It is,' says Deirdre, 'that Fergus comes unto us with a message of peace from Conor, for more sweet is not honey than the message of peace of the false man.'

"'Let that be,' says Naisi. 'Fergus is long in the port; and go,
Ardan, to meet him and bring him with thee.'"*

*Theophilus O'Flanagan

And when Fergus came there were kindly greetings between the friends who had been long parted. Then Fergus told the three brothers that Conor had forgiven them, and that he longed to see them back again in the land of Erin.

So although the heart of Deirdre was sad and heavy with foreboding of evil, they set sail for the land of Erin. But Deirdre looked behind her as the shore faded from sight and sang a mournful song: -

"O eastern land I leave, I loved you well,
Home of my heart, I love and loved you well,
I ne'er had left you had not Naisi left."*

*Douglas Hyde

And so they fared on their journey and came at last to Conor's palace. And the story tells how the boding sorrow that Deirdre felt fulfilled itself, and how they were betrayed, and how the brothers fought and died, and how Deirdre mourned until

"Her heart-strings snapt,
And death had overmastered her. She fell
Into the grave where Naisi lay and slept.
There at his side the child of Felim fell,

The fair-haired daughter of a hundred smiles.
Men piled their grave and reared their stone on high,
And wrote their names in Ogham.* So they lay
All four united in the dream of death."**

* Ancient Gaelic writing.

** Douglas Hyde

Such in a few words is the story of Deirdre. But you must read the tale itself to find out how beautiful it is. That you can easily do, for it has been translated many times out of the old Gaelic in which it was first written and it has been told so simply that even those of you who are quite young can read it for yourselves.

In both The Tain and in Deirdre we find the love of fighting, the brave joy of the strong man when he finds a gallant foe. The Tain is such history as those far-off times afforded, but it is history touched with fancy, wrought with poetry. In the Three Sorrows we have Romance. They are what we might call the novels of the time. It is in stories like these that we find the keen sense of what is beautiful in nature, the sense of "man's brotherhood with bird and beast, star and flower," which has become the mark of "Celtic" literature. We cannot put it into words, perhaps, for it is something mystic and strange, something that takes us nearer fairyland and makes us see that land of dreams with clearer eyes.

BOOKS TO READ

The Celtic Wonder World, by C. L. Thomson. The Enchanted Land (for version of Deirdre), by L Chisholm. Three Sorrows (verse), by Douglas Hyde.

Chapter IV THE STORY OF A LITERARY LIE

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WHO wrote the stories which are found in the old Gaelic manuscripts we do not know, yet the names of some of the old Gaelic poets have come down to us. The best known of all is perhaps that of Ossian. But as Ossian, if he ever lived, lived in the third century, as it is not probable that his poems were written down at the time, and as the oldest books that we have containing any of his poetry were written in the twelfth century, it is very difficult to be sure that he really made the poems called by his name.

Ossian was a warrior and chief as well as a poet, and as a poet he is claimed both by Scotland and by Ireland. But perhaps his name has become more nearly linked to Scotland because of the story that I am going to tell you now. It belongs really to a time much later than that of which we have been speaking, but because it has to do with this old Gaelic poet Ossian, I think you will like to hear it now.

In a lonely Highland village more than a hundred and fifty years ago there lived a little boy called James Macpherson. His father and mother were poor farmer people, and James ran about barefooted and wild among the hills and glens. When he was about seven years old the quiet of his Highland home was broken by the sounds of war, for the Highland folk had risen in rebellion against King George II., and were fighting for Prince Charlie, hoping to have a Stewart king once more. This was the rebellion called the '45, for it was fought in 1745.

Now little James watched the red coats of the southern soldiers as, with bayonets gleaming in the sun, they wound through the glens. He heard the Highland battle-cry and the clash of steel on steel, for fighting came near his home, and his own people joined the standard of the Pretender. Little James never forgot these things, and long afterwards, when he grew to be a man and wrote poetry, it was full of the sounds of battle, full, too, of love for mountain and glen and their rolling mists.

The Macphersons were poor, but they saw that their son was clever, and they determined that he should be well taught. So when he left school they sent him to college, first to Aberdeen and then to Edinburgh.

Before he was twenty James had left college and become master of the school in his own native village. He did not, however, like that very much, and soon gave it up to become tutor in a family.

By this time James Macpherson had begun to write poetry. He had also gathered together some pieces of old Gaelic poetry which he had found among the Highland folk.

These he showed to some other poets and writers whom he met, and they thought them so beautiful that he published them in a book.

The book was a great success. All who read it were delighted with the poems, and said that if there was any more such poetry in the Highlands, it should be gathered together and printed before it was lost and forgotten for ever. For since the '45 the English had done everything to make the Highlanders forget their old language and customs. They were forbidden to wear the kilt or the tartan, and everything was done to make them speak English and forget Gaelic.

So now people begged Macpherson to travel through the Highlands and gather together as much of the old poetry of the people as he could. Macpherson was at first unwilling to go. For one thing, he quite frankly owned that he was not a good Gaelic scholar. But at length he consented and set out.

For four months Macpherson wandered about the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, listening to the tales of the people and writing them down. Sometimes, too, he came across old manuscripts with ancient tales in them. When he had gathered all he could, he returned to Edinburgh and set to work to translate the stories into English.

When this new book of Gaelic poetry came out, it again was a great success. It was greeted with delight by the greatest poets of France, Germany, and Italy, and was soon translated into many languages. Macpherson was no longer a poor Highland laddie, but a man of world-wide fame. Yet it was not because of his own poetry that he was famous, but

because he had found (so he said) some poems of a man who lived fifteen hundred years before, and translated them into English. And although Macpherson's book is called The Poems of Ossian, it is written in prose. But it is a prose which is often far more beautiful and poetical than much that is called poetry.

Although at first Macpherson's book was received with great delight, soon people began to doubt about it. The Irish first of all were jealous, for they said that Ossian was an Irish poet, that the heroes of the poems were Irish, and that Macpherson was stealing their national heroes from them.

Then in England people began to say that there never had been an Ossian at all, and that Macpherson had invented both the poems and all the people that they were about. For the English knew little of the Highlanders and their customs. Even after the '15 and the '45 people in the south knew little about the north and those who lived there. They thought of it as a land of wild mountains and glens, a land of mists and cloud, a land where wild chieftains ruled over still wilder clans, who, in their lonely valleys and sea-girt islands, were for ever warring against each other. How could such a people, they asked, a people of savages, make beautiful poetry?

Dr. Samuel Johnson, a great writer of whom we shall hear more later, was the man of his day whose opinion about books was most thought of. He hated Scotland and the Scottish folk, and did not believe that any good thing could come from them. He read the poems and said that they were rubbish, such as any child could write, and that Macpherson had made them all up.

So a quarrel, which has become famous, began between the two men. And as Dr. Johnson was far better known than Macpherson, most people agreed with him and believed that Macpherson had told a "literary lie," and that he had made up all the stories.

There is no harm in making up stories. Nearly every one who writes does that. But it is wrong to make up stories and then pretend that they were written by some one else more famous than yourself.

Dr. Johnson and Macpherson were very angry with and rude to each other. Still that did not settle the question as to who had written the stories; indeed it has never been settled. And what most men believe now is that Macpherson did really gather from among the people of the Highlands many scraps of ancient poetry and tales, but that he added to them and put them together in such a way as to make them beautiful and touching. To do even that, however, a true poet was needed, so people have, for the most part, given up arguing about whether Macpherson wrote Ossian or not, and are glad that such a beautiful book has been written by some one.

I do not think that you will want to read Ossian for yourself for a long time to come, for the stories are not always easy to follow. They are, too, often clumsy, wandering, and badly put together. But in spite of that there is much beauty in them, and some day I hope you will read them.

In the next chapter you will find one of the stories of Ossian called Fingal. Fingal was a great warrior and the

father of Ossian, and the story takes place in Ireland. It is told partly in Macpherson's words.