

**Robert Dwyer Joyce, M.D. / James J. Walsh.**

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Walsh, James J. 1865-1942.  
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**Publication/Creation**

New York : Publisher not identified, [1900]

**Persistent URL**

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/c2ehz22m>

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ROBERT DWYER JOYCE, M. D.<sup>1</sup>

BY JAMES J. WALSH, M. D., PH. D., LL. D.

IN the fall of 1876 there appeared from the press of Roberts Brothers in Boston a volume of the *No Name Series* called "Deirdre." This series was published without the name of the authors, and, though the individual novels were to be written according to the publisher's announcement by eminent authors, the authorship was to remain an inviolable secret. The success of each of the volumes was expected to depend entirely on the writer's ability to catch and retain the reader's interest without any reference to the author's prestige or previous reputation. The first volume of the series was "Mercy Philbrick's Choice" which received an extremely warm reception, and the authorship of which became one of the mooted problems in all the literary journals of the day. It was rather surprising, then, to have a long poem appear as the second number of the series, and still more surprising to have that long poem on an Irish subject and evidently written by an Irish-American.

The success of "Deirdre," however, fully justified the publisher's choice in the matter. Long poems are usually not popular reading, yet this Irish epic proved to have elements of interest in it that made it one of the popular books of the day. We are likely to think that the standard of taste of readers was higher at that time

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<sup>1</sup>The material for this was first used as an address at a dinner of the Celtic Medical Society of New York City.



than at the present when the best sellers are usually the frothiest of romances. Within three months nearly five thousand copies of "Deirdre" had been sold, and then, in spite of the assurance of the inviolability of the secret of the author's name, it began to be generally understood that the writer was Robert Dwyer Joyce, a physician of Boston, who had made many friends during the scarcely ten years that he had been in that city, and who, in spite of carrying on a lucrative practice, had succeeded in making himself known as a literary man in some of the best circles of literary Boston.

It has been a matter for some little astonishment that "Deirdre" and its sister epic "Blanid," another long poem by Dr. Joyce, whose subject matter is also taken from the old heroic Irish legends, should not have received more attention during the progress of the Gaelic revival. There is no doubt at all that the old Irish folk-stories were put worthily into verse by this Irish-American poet, and it is indeed doubtful whether any version of the story of Deirdre is more beautiful, certainly none is more tender or without objectionable features than this version of twenty years ago. Like his great friend, John Boyle O'Reilly, and like many another of the poetic geniuses who have a poignant sympathy for life, Joyce was not destined to reach old age. He was not much more than fifty when death came to him in 1883, and, though only twenty-four years have passed since that time, there are very few people who now recall with any distinctness the details of his career, or the impetus that he gave to interest in Gaelic traditions and old Irish history so long before the beginning of the modern Gaelic movement.

During a short stay in Dublin some two years ago I had the privilege and the pleasure of meeting his brother, Dr. Patrick Weston Joyce, who is not a physician but is indeed a doctor of many things Irish, and who is known



for his many volumes on matters relating to Irish history. So many interesting personal details about his brother, the poet, came up in this conversation that it has seemed worth while to put them and other gathered details on record in order that when, during the course of next year, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the death of Joyce shall come around there may be at least a meagre store of information with regard to the poet-physician who did so much to add prestige to his race and his Church in the Boston of the seventies. For Boston was not then the Irish Catholic city that it has become, and there were still many prejudices harbored, especially by the literary classes, for the breaking down of which actual contact with a literary man of the misunderstood race and Church could do more than any amount of controversy or of argument. Joyce is, besides, a worthy subject for the pages of the RECORDS of the American Catholic Historical Society because he was one of those whose life was not selfish, but was devoted to a definite purpose besides that of merely making his living or earning money to transmit to posterity. Money had little to do with anything that Joyce took in hand, and his influence on men was all the greater for his forgetfulness of self. In his poetical preface to *Blanid*, his last long work, he summed up his aims as a poet better than it can be done by a stranger's hand.

And not for gold I sang, nor foolish greed  
 With easy steps to reach Fame's hallowed ground;  
 For love of Song I piped my sylvan reed,  
 And sometimes too essayed a bolder sound  
 To wake men's souls to nobleness, and found  
 Each effort to my heart new guerdons bring,  
 And though few laurels wreath my temples round,  
 My task is wrought in stirring even the string  
 Of the bright harp that yet beneath thy touch shall ring.



Robert Dwyer Joyce was born in the county of Limerick, Ireland, in 1828. His family belonged to the old family of the Joyces from the Joyce country so-called in the county of Galway. The fact that they are generally called the fighting Joyces will serve to account for the strain of martial ardor that runs through Joyce's poetry, that is if any such explanation is ever needed for such a characteristic in Irish poetry. Most of the poet's writings were to be concerned with warlike events and legends and with military story. The old family name of the Joyces in the long ago had been Jorse, which very probably points to an Iberian or Spanish origin. The Celts from the northern coast of Spain frequently made incursions on the coast of Ireland, and somehow the west coast seems to have suffered more from them than the east. They appear to have traded more or less regularly with the east coast, but to have gone on piratical expeditions on the western coast of the island. Occasionally they landed on the coast and established themselves. This would account for the many Spanish characteristics that may be noted among the population along the west coast, a notable example of it being in the people of the Claddagh, the famous old fishing suburb near the city of Galway. Sometimes the foreign element seems to have been rather exclusive, and to have maintained its identity with racial characteristics of its own. More often, however, as might be expected from the temptations of the sight of the fair Irish girls, its members were tempted to marry outside of the clan, thus accounting for the many dark-eyed, very dark-haired girls with long black lashes, the Maureen Dhus and Kathleen Dhus of the west coast, who so startlingly remind the traveller at times of their Spanish ancestry.

The Joyce family, from which Robert Dwyer Joyce was descended, had established itself not far from the



city of Limerick, and at the time of the poet's birth was living in Glen Oisin. Joyce was even more distinguished on his mother's side than on his father's. Among his maternal ancestry are numbered many of the renowned Irish military geniuses of Europe. The penal laws at home and English oppression drove these soldiers of genius to fight continental battles, and the lives of many of them illustrate very strikingly the truth of the remark made by the Duke of Marlborough, "Cursed be the laws that deprived me of such soldiers." Count William O'Dwyer died a marshal in Russia, and John O'Dwyer was made an hereditary count of the Austrian empire for saving the life of the Emperor Joseph in battle. The head of the French branch of the family is known as Count Haudois, a curious transformation of the original Dwyer. The representative of the house commanded part of the French advance line at the battle of Solferino.

The family has not been unknown in literature, apart from the poet Robert Joyce. His brother, Patrick Weston Joyce, is, as I have said, a distinguished antiquarian and writer of many volumes relating to Irish history and Irish customs. He is probably the greatest living authority on the old Brehon laws. He is still alive at the age of nearly seventy-five. Another literary celebrity in the family in the generation just past was Thomas O'Donnell O'Callahan, a first cousin of the Joyces, who was descended on the mother's side from the celebrated Shawn O'Dhear an Glanna, (*anglice* John O'Dwyer of the Glen), known as the poet huntsman, who flourished in Munster in the seventeenth century. Each generation, indeed, of the O'Dwyer side of the house has had a great warrior or a great poet for the last three centuries at least.

Dr. Joyce received his early education at an ordinary country school, situated not far from his home, which



paid special attention to English and the classics. As his brother said of him: Without being, at that time, at least in boyhood, aware of it himself, he was singularly observant; and as he was heard to say in after life, every feature of the old hills, every aspect of vegetable life, and all the voices and movements of animated nature remained firmly fixed in his memory. This minute observation of nature was turned to good account afterwards; for nothing can exceed the realistic naturalness of his word-pictures of flowers, trees, birds, and animals of various kinds in his poems, and more especially in his epic of "Deirdre."

His passion for poetry developed itself very early. And with him it was not the result of mere artificial study or cultivation, but really and truly an inborn, all-absorbing passion that grew with him as part and parcel of his mind, just as his muscles grew with his body. Even when a mere boy, he might often be heard repeating to himself in a low voice, with extraordinary enthusiasm, favorite passages from Shelley, or Pope, or Milton, or Moore; and, as might be expected, in some of his youthful poems the influence of these authors was plainly discernible.

Subsequently he attended Queen's College at Cork, and, after teaching for some time, made his medical studies in the same city. During this period he dipped into poetry occasionally and there was a clear prefigurement of his future poetic career. Literature seems to have been his first love, but very early in life he realized that at most it would be a crutch but never a good staff, and so he followed the advice of Coleridge who suggested that, as far as possible, a literary man should always have some other occupation, though without the addition to the aphorism which we owe to Oliver Wendell Holmes, who was later to be an intimate friend of Joyce, that as



far as possible also the literary man should confine himself to the other occupation. His brother wrote in his obituary in the Dublin Freeman's Journal:

"During the interval between 1857 and 1865 he resided first in Cork and afterwards in Dublin, and supported himself partly by writing and partly by the prizes and scholarships of the college, for he never competed for a scholarship that he did not win. It would be instructive to describe in detail the sort of life he led from about 1854 till he took his degree in 1865—instructive to these thousands of young people who are under the delusion that mere natural abilities will enable them to spring upwards without trouble or toil. During these ten or eleven years the career of the rising poet was a life of incessant labour—studying the ordinary subjects of his college course, and the extraordinary subjects for prizes and scholarships. But it was withal a pleasant life."

For a time while in Dublin devoting himself to medical practice, as far as it came to him, and to medical study for which the Irish capital has at all times during the last century furnished magnificent opportunities, Dr. Joyce still continued to cultivate the Muses and devote himself to literature. For a time he was professor of English Literature at the preparatory college of the Catholic University in Dublin. This was just after Newman's time at the famous institution.

Joyce was scarcely more than a boy when he began to display his poetic ability by the brilliant rendition into verse of many of the old Irish legends and stories which in his hands became very striking ballads that appeared in various Irish magazines and newspapers. He was for a time a leading contributor to "The Harp," a Cork magazine, though he did not write under his own name, but under the *nom de plume* Feardana. He was also a contributor to the "Dublin Hibernian Magazine" and to the



“National Monthly.” He seems to have realized, however, that the opportunities open to him in Ireland were rather limited, in his profession at least, and accordingly when he was about thirty-five he came to this country and settled in Boston. In earlier life he had sung very patriotically that he would not abandon his native country in lines that might very well be made the slogan of those most interested in the modern Gaelic movement, and the watchword of those who believe in Ireland for the Irish,—and also in the Irish for Ireland. The burden of his song was :

No, I'll be true for life to you,  
And stay at home, dear land.

But the temptations and allurements of America proved too much for him, as it did for so many other of the rising young Irishmen of the last half of the nineteenth century.

He was not long in Boston before he had acquired a good medical practice, and then he set himself once more to the cultivation of literature in whatever leisure hours he could snatch from duty. The sordid details of medical practice seem to have had little of his attention. Dr. Frederick Shattuck, of Boston, who remembers him very well, recalls the fact that he kept no books, but did only a cash business, and so could count out for himself each day exactly how much he had made.

He was kind of heart and did not hesitate to give up his time to the poor, but the labor of keeping book-accounts seemed too derogatory to his sense of professional dignity, and took away precious time that he might devote to literature. He insisted, then, that all his patients who could afford it should pay him at the time of the consultation.

Joyce's first literary venture of any ambition was a



volume of "Ballads, Songs and Romances," originally published by James Duffy in Dublin in 1861. This was reprinted in Boston in 1872. In the meantime Joyce had written a prose work called "Legends of the Wars in Ireland" which was published by John Campbell in Boston in 1868. It contains the dedication, "To John Savage, Esq., in admiration of his genius as a poet and in testimony of his sterling worth as an Irishman and a patriot." This was only another tribute that serves to show how much "the gentlest of all gentle Savages" had entered into the hearts of the finest spirits among the Irish in America at this time.

Some of these charming old poetic legends introduce historical matter of considerable importance. On the other hand, some of them reflect Joyce's professional interest. "Rosaline, the White," for instance, is the sort of a doctor's story with which Conan Doyle began his career as a writer of fiction. "The Little Battle of Bottle Hill" serves to illustrate Joyce's familiarity with the country around Cork and Mallow. He had made most of his medical studies in Cork and knew the neighborhood well. "The Fair Maid of Killarney" is a tale of Ross Castle near the Lakes which well deserves to be read by any one who wants to know something of the legends and traditions and enter into the spirit of the beautiful place. The first paragraph contains a bit of etymology probably unfamiliar to most people, since Joyce talks of the ross or peninsula from which the castle derives its name. One of the longest of the legends is "The House of Lisbloone," a legend of Sarsfield, that breathes Irish martial ardor worthy of his Dwyer and Joyce ancestry, of the blood that ran in his veins from both sides of the house. Other tales that illustrate his liking for the neighborhood of Mallow are "The Chase from the Hostel" and "The Legend of Mallow."



His next book followed nearly the same lines as its predecessor and bore the title "Irish Fireside Tales." It was published by Patrick Donohue in Boston in 1871. Joyce himself confesses in the preface that they were only imitations of the old Irish Shanachies,—the stories told by the old wandering Irish story-tellers, so many of which have proved in the Gaelic revival to be of the greatest possible value in helping in the restoration of Irish myths and traditions as well as in preserving the Gaelic tongue.

Always in prose or verse it was his beloved Ireland, her legends and traditions that he dwelt on. As he sang later on in life :

“ Though many a field I’ve searched of foreign lore  
 And found great themes for song, yet ne’er would I  
 Seek Greece, or Araby, or Persia’s shore  
 For heroes and the deeds of days gone by ;  
 To my own native land my heart would fly,  
 Howe’er my fancy wandered, and I gave  
 My thoughts to her and to the heroes high  
 She nursed in ages gone, and strove to save  
 Some memory of their deeds from dark oblivion’s wave.”

Joyce’s real triumph as a literary man did not come, however, until the publication of "Deirdre, an Irish Epic," which appeared, as we have said, as the second in the *No Name Series*, then being issued by Roberts Brothers in Boston. We have already said that it created quite a furore in Boston; but that it attracted almost as much attention, from literary folk at least, outside of New England can be appreciated from the fact that the *New York Times*, then, as now, a good guide to the literary interests of the time, gave "Deirdre" a three-column review, from which we extract the following passages as illustrative of the opinions expressed by literary critics throughout the country generally:



“The editors of the *No Name Series* have been very happy in the choice for their second volume. As a rule, publishers shake their heads at a whole volume consisting of one poem, but in this case there can be no reasonable belief that they will regret their venture. Deirdre is a poem belonging to the camp of the epics, without attaining so much of a national character as we readily associate with the word epic. It is legendary history put in verse. Morris has been doing this for many years past, and if people are beginning to be cloyed a little at his long pages of smooth verse, nevertheless his Greek and Norse tales have been wonderfully successful. Deirdre is in many ways like those poems, and when one first strikes into the regular gallop of its metre there is a disposition to assign it to the same category. But a little further examination proves Deirdre to be like Morris' work only in the most external qualities. The lines are of the same length and rhyme simply, without alternate rhymes, and the subject is in a broad sense something like some of those sung by 'the poet of an empty day.' But beyond that the similarity is at an end. The region from which Deirdre comes, the soil into which this poem strikes its roots, is an old, old land which has furnished inspiration to untold poets, a land continuously neglected by the people who have owed most to it in a literary sense, and one which has had a literature and an army of poets before Saxons knew how to read and write. It is Ireland which was the mother of Deirdre and the tragical history which an anonymous poet has put into fine, strong, flowing English verse. The American author draws on the same fountain of legendary history, the same springs of poetic inspiration that made MacPherson celebrated from one end of Europe to the other for his translations and adaptations under the name of Ossian. Indeed, the name of Deirdre has been used by MacPherson, but in so confused and enigmatical a manner that one is tempted to believe he only had a comparatively late version of it—a sort of magnificent poetical commentary on it. Readers of Ossian will remember the chapter called Darthula. It has a strong flavor of the old Irish legend of Deirdre, except that MacPherson has made



her lover a Scotch (or Albanian) Prince, who goes to Ireland, instead of an Irish Prince—Naisi, the son of Usnach, who flies with her to Scotland, and returns only to be killed.”

The success of “Deirdre” was not alone American, however, but, as might be expected, was also Irish. An excellent review of it and of the rest of Joyce’s poetry appeared in that most precious of literary magazines, *The Irish Monthly*, Volume VI, page 55, in the year 1878. *The Irish Monthly* was then, as now, under the editorship of that gentlest of critics, yet best of literary guides, the poet priest of Ireland, Father Matthew Russell, the brother of Sir Charles Russell, afterwards Lord Russell, of Killowen, the High Chancellor of England. Father Russell did not hesitate to say that “Deirdre is one of the most important additions that have been made to the poetical literature of our country since the publication of Mr. Sam Ferguson’s Congal.” He concluded his critique of Joyce’s work by saying: “Let us hope that Irish literature has not heard the last of the name of Robert Dwyer Joyce.” We may say at once that it had not, for already Dr. Joyce had another long poem in contemplation, “Blaid,” which was to equal the success of “Deirdre” in popularity in America and in Ireland.

With regard to the meter adopted by Dr. Joyce, Father Russell, who is so distinguished a poet himself that his judgment in the matter deserves to be listened to with respect, said:

“He has shown courage and judgment in choosing as his meter the fine old herioc ten syllable measure rhyming in couplets—freed, however, from that elaborate balancing of sense and sound which is for the most part splendidly effective in Pope and for the most part tiresomely sing-song in the Popelings who imitate the manner of that great poet.”

After a verdict like that, the rest of us may well feel



assured that there is real merit in Dr. Joyce's verse, not only of a literary but of a technical order, and that his poem evidently deserves to be more widely read than has been its fate in recent years. Trouble has always been brought to Ireland and to Irishmen by the beauty of their women, and the story is only one of the earliest exemplifications of this fact.

The argument of Deirdre as Dr. Joyce pieced together the old Irish legends runs as follows :

The King of Eman goes to a banquet in the house of Feilimid, his Story-teller. During the festivity, Deirdre, the daughter of Feilimid, is born. Caffa prophesies of her future beauty, and of the destruction it will bring on Eman and on the King and nobility. The nobles thereupon demand the death of the infant; but the King orders her to be shut up in a strong place till she grows old enough to become his wife. In course of time, Deirdre and Naisi, son of Usna, fall in love with one another; and Naisi and his two brothers carry her away to Alba, and take military service under the King. The Albanian King falls in love with Deirdre, and tries to compass the death of Naisi and his brothers, who escape with Deirdre to a certain beautiful island in the sea. Thence they are decoyed by the King of Eman, who gives surety for their safety. They return under the guarantee of Fergus, son of Roy; but the King, breaking his oath, has them murdered on the Green of Eman, and the poem ends with the lamentations of Deirdre, and her death.

Certain of the passages of Deirdre will serve to show very well its poetic qualities and the charm of the style, as well as the effective working up of the details of the old Irish story. An excellent idea of the way in which Dr. Joyce could use some of the long similes that Homer made popular in epic literature may be derived from the



following selection with regard to the captive eagle, and the same passage will also serve to show something of the yearning of his patriot heart for the soil that he had left. Its sympathetic quality in this respect made it one of the most popular quotations from the poem at the time of its publication, at least as far as concerned the Irish and Irish-American journals of various kinds.

“Alas! alas!” said Fergus, “on a day  
 When I was young, I ploughed the salt-sea spray  
 With venturous keel, 'mid bare Farocan Isles;  
 And there, well practised in the woodman's wiles,  
 I snared a great sea eagle in his home  
 On a wild crag, deep-scarred by wind and foam,  
 And on my galley's deck with brazen chain  
 Bound him; and with all dainties of the main  
 Fed him, until my cleaving keel of brass  
 Cut the swarth sands 'neath high Dunevan's Pass  
 On Wrin's shore. My fortress-gate beside  
 I placed him, and with kingly pomp and pride  
 Clasped a gold collar round his neck; but aye  
 He drooped and pined for his cold rock and gray,  
 And whistling blasts and tumbling surges' boom.  
 One morn, when mead and wood with summer's bloom  
 Were bright, and heaven was bright, I passed him by  
 And marked his drooping wing and cheerless eye,  
 And smit with sudden ruth unclasped his chain,  
 When up into the blue he soared again  
 With a fierce cry of gladness, and shot forth  
 On lightning wing to his beloved north,  
 And barren crags and ever-booming seas!  
 So with a man! Though all the braveries  
 And gold and purple and the smiles of kings,  
 Yea, all the joys of life this fair earth brings,  
 Reward him in his exile, what are they,  
 When, waking from his slumbers day by day,  
 He sees not—heaven or hell, whate'er it be—  
 The land belov'd of his nativity?”



There is no more beautiful passage in the poem than that in which is described the meeting of the lovers which has in it all the graces and charms of youthful love and a musical quality that shows how well Dr. Joyce has succeeded in mastering the old-time and rather conventional vehicle that he had adopted for his poem. There are not many more effective love passages in our modern poetry than this which has all the simplicity and directness, and yet the charming sympathetic qualities of what falls little short of being very great poetry.

Graceful he leant upon his javelin shaft,  
 And often to himself full low he laughed  
 With joy, as love's deep fountain bubbled up  
 From his great heart, like sweet wine o'er its cup  
 Poured by a generous hand. Oft-times he eyed  
 With eager look the green glade's bosky side ;  
 For on that day old Lavarcam had said  
 Young Deirdre should walk down the woodland glade,  
 Freed for the moment by her subtle tongue  
 From the sharp nurse's watching. And not long  
 Looked Naisi, till amid these bowers of spring  
 He saw his loved one's garments glittering  
 In the soft sunny light that seemed to throw  
 Around her face a triple glow  
 Of glory to his eyes, as she drew near.  
 And not with throbbing heart of doubtful fear,  
 Nor yet with trembling limbs and sidelong eye,  
 She stepped into the glade, but proud and high,  
 And bold in her white innocence she came  
 Before him, wondering at his mighty frame,  
 And the fair fashion of his martial dress,  
 And gleaming arms, and his great comeliness.  
 A space she beamed on him her glorious eyes  
 In happiness of heart and mute surprise.



Then cried,

“ Ah! well I know that thou art he  
I saw long syne from out the beechen tree,  
Mine own beloved that I have kept enshrined  
Within my constant heart and lonely mind!”

Said Naisi: “ O thou maid, stretch forth thine hand  
That I may feel thy presence warm and bland,  
That I may think thee not a vision sweet,  
A phantom that mad knights in wildwoods meet!”

Then hand met hand; and, as they touched, great fears  
Disturbed her heart, and rose the shining tears  
Into her violet eyes, as well she thought  
How near destruction's sharp brink they were brought  
By keeping of their tryst.

“ Alas! alas!”

She cried, “ must Caffa's dread words come to pass,  
And must we two, in our fair youthful bloom,  
For loving of each other meet our doom?  
Speak to me, love! Am I not all to thee?”

Then Naisi's dark eyes lightened lovingly  
Upon her, as he answered,—

“ Thou art mine  
For evermore, belov'd! And I am thine  
For evermore; and whether we may shun  
Our doom or not, our hearts, O love, are one  
In life or death!”

Then from her forehead fair  
She brushed a silken ripple of bright hair  
That from the flood of her rich tresses stole,  
And looked with wordless love into his soul,  
And said,—

“ Now, Naisi, I can bear the worst,  
Death in its many shapes, the desert's thirst,  
The dungeon's hunger, or the burning stake,  
Unfearing and unflinching for thy sake!”



Then Naisi straightened high his martial form,  
 And with love's ardor grew his heart full warm  
 And sanguine that all things were fair and good.  
 And there, as in that sunny glade they stood,  
 All beautiful they seemed as glorious Nied,  
 The War-God, and his ever-blooming bride,  
 Bava, within the heaven beyond the hills!  
 And now forgetting all the pains and ills  
 That threatened them they talked of love alone,  
 Heart unto heart, till nigh their hour had flown,  
 And from their fond dream they awoke.

The description of the beginning of the tragic culmination of the story is doubtless its masterpiece. The discovery of the beauty of Deirdre by the king's old counselor, and the complete possession that she took of his mind, remind one inevitably of Homer's old men before the walls of Troy who looked upon Helen and thought her so beautiful that her beauty was worth even the long years of siege that Troy had to suffer, though now they were ready to insist that she should be sent back. The delicate treatment of the rather difficult subject of the temptation, the presence of her child, and Deirdre's indignation at the king, are all so many manifestations of Joyce's Gaelic nature, and of the social purity of the race so prone to be the distinguishing characteristic in all of those who have remained faithful to the old creed. Notwithstanding the delicacy of the situation there is nothing in it that even the most sensitive of young persons might not read without a blush.

It chanced upon a morn of early spring,  
 When flowers began to bloom and birds to sing,  
 That Starn, the royal Steward, passing by  
 The camp of Usna, cast his prying eye  
 On Deirdre, as she sat beneath a tree  
 Outside her tent door. Long and curiously



He eyes her from the grove wherein he stood,  
 Then walked away in silent gladsome mood,  
 Like one who by a lucky chance hath found  
 Some treasure rare long hidden underground.  
 Yet said he nought until the king came home  
 From hostile shores washed by the North Sea's foam,  
 Where he and his and Usna's host imbrued  
 Their spears in blood, and many a tribe subdued,  
 Then went he to the king.

“Now by thy head!  
 And by my father's hand, O King!” he said,  
 “The gem of gems I've found thee. I have seen  
 In Usna's camp bright Beauty's peerless queen,  
 The wife of Naisi,—beautiful beyond  
 All youth's imaginings or day-dreams fond,—  
 Yea! yea! so beautiful that I—even I—  
 Stood for a moment in wild ecstasy  
 And blessed the Gods that made her! Take her then  
 Unto thy throne, and slay these stranger men  
 In open hall, or bid me privately  
 To slay them!”

But the King said, “Far from me,  
 O Starn! be that fell day when Friendship's band  
 And Honor's law I break with mine own hand,  
 Then tempt me not.”

But Starn said, “Though the blood  
 Within thy heart from childhood frozen stood,  
 'Twould melt, O King, before her face divine,  
 And run through all thy veins like boiling wine!

But go thyself. Watch from the grove and see,  
 Then try and measure what thy love shall be!”

And the King sought the grove himself, and saw;  
 And Friendship's sacred tie and Honor's law,  
 And fear and shame, and sense of wrong and right,



Fled from his maddened bosom at the sight,  
 And in their stead there burned a raging flame  
 Of blindfold love no power on earth could tame.  
 "O Starn," he said, "go seek her privily,  
 And promise all a queen should have from me!"

One morn while King and prince a hosting made  
 Far in the west; while every grove and glade  
 Around the camp with fragrant bloom was bright  
 Of daises, primroses, and shamrocks white,  
 And hyacinths that with their trembling bells  
 Like a blue robe from heaven shone down the dells,  
 Twinkling with diamond dew-drops,—to the screen  
 Of the sweet grove the old man came unseen,  
 And looked, and by the tent found Deirdré there,  
 Sitting and weaving flowers in garlands fair  
 To crown her little boy, who on her knee  
 Laughed in the dancing shadows of the tree  
 That o'er them spread, rustling with young birds' wings.

"Sweet is the song each bird of beauty sings  
 To him that owns it," Starn thought, as he came  
 Out from the grove and told his tale of shame  
 And purpose dread. Then rose the loyal wife,  
 Grasping her babe full firm.

"Now, by thy life,  
 O aged dog!" she cried, "come here no more!  
 Thy little King! Upon our native shore  
 The true hand of a King worth ten like thine  
 I cast away for this brave lord of mine!  
 Begone! and leave me to my thoughts alone!"  
 He fled, and sinking down she made her moan,  
 Claspng her child and rocking to and fro  
 In trembling fear and new-awakened woe!

To us who are now in the midst of the modern Gaelic movement it seems surprising that Dr. Joyce should not have added some notes to the poem in order to show its



place in the cycle of Gaelic legends and to add to its literary value by hinting at least at some of the historical data that inevitably gather round the name of Deirdre. It would seem to have been an excellent opportunity to interest American readers in old-time Irish events and literary allusions. There was, however, so little attention paid to such things at that time that probably Dr. Joyce deemed them as superfluous and very unlikely to be read. He did provide certain notes with regard to the geography of the places mentioned in "Deirdre," and this must have added not a little to the interest of the poem by giving its scenes local habitations and names. This portion of the accessories of the poem deserves to be read quite as much as the argument, and shows how thorough was Dr. Joyce's knowledge of the old Irish traditions and legendary places.

"The action of this poem begins near Armagh, in the north of Ireland, at the ancient palace of Emania, wherein dwelt at that time Connor, the renowned and powerful king of Ulster. It then changes northward to the coast opposite Rathlin Island, whence, finding their fleet burnt by the king's troops, the Usnianian princes fly westward, till they arrive at the sound between Tory Island and the mainland, where the galleys of the Fomorian pirates are lying at anchor. There their herald is treacherously slain by Talc, the Fomorian king, and they betake themselves towards the south till they come to the beautiful plain of Ibris Domnan, in Mayo, where they accept the hospitality of Keth, the great captain of the troops of Mab and Olild, joint sovereigns of Conaught. Thence they proceed westward to the coast of Ibris Domnan, where they slay the Fomorians and capture their fleet, in which they sail away round the northern shores for Alba or Scotland. Crossing that part of the Atlantic between the Giant's Causeway, Isla and Alba, anciently called the



Sea of Moyle, they sail northward by the coast of Cantyre, and at last take refuge, and build their dun, or town, near Lock Etive, in Argyle. Here they accept military service under the young Albanian king, who, hearing of the exceeding beauty of Deirdre, falls in love with her. Thereupon the three Usnianian princes, with Deirdre and their tribe, take refuge in one of the Hebridean Islands, whence after some time they are decoyed by the agents of the king of Ulster. They sail again back to the Irish coast and land at Beal Farsad, now Belfast, whence they march inland to Emania, where the action of the story ends with the slaughter of themselves and their whole tribe."

About three years after "Deirdre" a second long poem entitled "Blanid" was published, this time with Dr. Joyce's name. "Blanid" was also taken from the old Irish folk-stories. Most people will recall that this was the name given by John Boyle O'Reilly to one of his daughters, she who, when a little one, as readers of O'Reilly's poems may remember, so constantly asked "Is it true?"<sup>1</sup> It seems probable that it was his admiration for Joyce's poem and its author that dictated the name.

The argument of "Blanid" is given thus by the author: "Blanid (The Blossom-Bright), daughter of the king of the Isle of Man, is sought in marriage by the princes of Western Europe. She refused them all. At length she falls in love with Cuhullin, the son of her father's most powerful enemy. The princes form a league to win her, and gathering their fleets, sail to Dun Dalgan, where they

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<sup>1</sup> TO MY LITTLE BLANID.

I told her a story, a fairy story,  
 My little daughter with eyes of blue.  
 And with clear, wide gaze as the splendors brightened,  
 She always asked me—"Oh, is it true?"  
 \* \* \* \* \*  
 Wise child! I wondered how much she knew.



elect Cuhullin leader of the expedition. They besiege and sack the stronghold of Mana. At the distribution of the spoils, Blanid, by a stratagem, is won and taken away by Curoi, prince of South Munster. Cuhullin pursues Curoi, and overtakes him at the foot of the Mountains of Blama, where they fight for the possession of Blanid. Cuhullin is vanquished, and Curoi bears Blanid away in triumph to the south. After some time the lovers meet again, and with the help of Blanid's foster-mother, make a plot for the slaying of Curoi, which is done on the night of the Feast of Samhain, and Blanid is borne away to Eman by Cuhullin. Curoi's minstrel follows them, and at the hunting feast of Rincan-Bears dashes down his harp, seizes Blanid, and throws himself with her over the verge of the great rock into the sea beneath, where they are lost forever."

"Blanid" was not received with the enthusiasm that greeted "Deirdre," yet its reception was most cordial, and it received many favorable notices of which the following from a Boston daily may be considered a fair sample:

"The story of Blanid is mild, tender and pathetic. Dr. Joyce has remarkable powers of versification; his lines are full and free and musical; he has a great love for flowers and trees and all the beautiful things in the external world, but he loves them chiefly in sunshine; it is the sunshine glories that he sings. . . . The fresh, sweet atmosphere of both 'Deirdre' and 'Blanid' is healthful to breathe; the reader has always a sense of sunshine and breeze and deeds done in the daylight. . . . There is no question of Dr. Joyce's grace and skill, . . . of his true poetic gifts and spirit." (Daily Advertiser.)

In the metrical preface to "Blanid" Dr. Joyce dedicated his book to the great Irish poet of the modern times yet to be born.



O Thou, to come, though yet perchance unborn,  
 My country's Poet, prince of bards, sublime  
 'Mongst those who in the Future's gleaming morn  
 Will make great music, in thy manhood's prime  
 And day of fame remember me, and climb  
 My Hill of Rest, and take thy musing way  
 Unto the place of tombs, and with sweet rhyme  
 Stand thou beside my headstone lone and gray,  
 And strike thy sounding harp and sing no little lay!

Dr. Joyce considers that he will be indeed amply repaid if Ireland's great poet shall find anything suggestive for his own muse in the humble efforts of a predecessor, who willingly lays all his work at his feet.

In this some bloom of Fancy may'st thou find;  
 Heroes and heroines from the dusky haze  
 Of Eld I've called, and limned them, heart and mind,  
 As best as I could, in all their thoughts and ways  
 Of love and war; and if it win thy praise  
 And thy approving smile, I ask no more  
 Than this, to add one green leaf to thy bays  
 In learning and in song my country wore  
 When all the world was dark, save her, in the days of yore.

In a way these words seem almost premonitory, for "Blanid" was to be Dr. Joyce's last work. His health began to fail in the following year, and there were some domestic infelicities that occupied his mind to the exclusion of poetry. Blanid was published in 1879, when its author was in his fifty-second year, and further works of even higher order were confidently anticipated from him by his friends, but their hopes were destined to disappointment.

Dr. Joyce's health began seriously to fail about the middle of the year 1882. At a time when he was ill able to bear a shock he had two sunstrokes: this was followed



by an acute attack of pneumonia, which would have killed a man of less robust frame. As it was, he barely escaped with his life, and the attack left him in a state of utter feebleness. Finding he was not getting any better, he ventured across the Atlantic at the earnest solicitation of his brother in the vain hope of regaining his health in his native air. At his brother's house everything that medical skill and devoted care could accomplish was done for him, but his constitution was utterly shattered, and he gradually grew weaker. He faced death with perfect calmness and intrepidity; and, comforted by the consolations of his religion, and surrounded by loving friends, he died peacefully on the evening of the 24th of October, 1883. He was about fifty-five years of age and much might have been expected from the years apparently still owed to him, for he came of a long-lived family, but there was no murmuring, only the Christian resignation that might be expected of one of his race and creed.

Dr. Joyce, like John Boyle O'Reilly, had gained noteworthy social prominence in Boston. His talents secured him admission to the literary circles of the American Athens, and his genial manners and brilliant conversational powers soon made him many friends. He became almost universally beloved for his amiable ways and thoroughly Gaelic offhand manner. He had been a very wide reader and had an excellent memory. There were but few subjects with regard to which he could not talk interestingly, and his combination of interest in science and in literature made him an all-around man whose judgments usually had a depth and an originality not to be expected from the man whose devotion has been given to only one subject. After the publication of "Deirdre" the success of that book and his acknowledged poetic ability made him much sought for. There was scarcely any household in Boston that would not have



considered itself honored by Joyce's presence. He had the Celtic love for light-hearted recreation, and a Bohemian strain that made him a special favorite among literary and artistic folk. Few men were better known among those whom it was worth while knowing in Boston in his time than Dr. Joyce.

A Boston paper in wishing him *bon voyage* at his departure thus speaks of him:

"Dr. Joyce returns to the land of his birth after an unbroken absence of twenty years, during which time he achieved distinction here in medicine as well as in literature. He at once attracted attention for his professional ability and fidelity, and obtained a large practice. His kindly nature led him to give a goodly number of young medical students the benefit of his advice and encouragement, and he presided over classes of physicians, who derived great benefit from his practical instruction. He was also a lecturer in the Harvard Medical School for a time."

This lectureship at Harvard which is spoken of by the *Boston Reporter* was not a regular teaching position on the Harvard faculty. I have taken some trouble to ascertain just what was Joyce's status in this matter. Professor Fitz who remembers him very well does not recall that he was ever regularly attached to the teaching staff of the University. Dr. Frederick Shattuck, however, remembers that his father, then Professor of Medicine at the Harvard Medical School, employed a number of young physicians to do some demonstration work in connection with the Chair of Medical Practice. These were not regularly attached to the faculty but were considered to be extra-mural teachers. After a time the Harvard Faculty considered that this new departure was not advisable, and accordingly the older Dr. Shattuck had to disband his corps of teachers who had proved very



enthusiastic helpers and whose services had been very much appreciated by the medical students. This seems to be the basis for the declaration that Dr. Joyce was for a time a teacher at Harvard.

The demands of his practice as well as the allurements of literature must have left him little time for medical teaching, still less for investigation. Besides, like many another of Irish nationality, Dr. Joyce had to provide first of all for his living expenses, and teaching positions in medicine at that time except the highest were notoriously ill-paid. His fame is ample without the additional claim of medical teaching honors. Few men of his generation impressed themselves so deeply on their immediate contemporaries, and while accomplishing this he had the supreme satisfaction of following the bent of his genius, not allowing himself to be driven helplessly by the current of the times but living his life for himself, for his native country and for poetry.

Col. 7149  
22/9/16







