

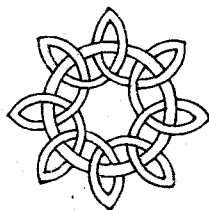
# PIANO LYRICS FROM THE HEBRIDES

Book II.



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## THE TROUTLING OF THE SACRED WELL.

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**I**N the Holy Wells of the Isles there lived, through generations, a trout which, in the thoughts of the folk, was accounted pious as a monk and wordly-wise as a Druid. To such a trout went the maid of the song for tidings of her absent lover.

Troutling, grey-blue silv'ry seer o' yon well,  
Tell me where is now my love,  
Roves he East, roves he West?  
Sails he homeward,  
Or at back of sun lies he sleeping?

KENNETH MACLEOD.

# THE TROUTLING OF THE SACRED WELL. <sup>1</sup>

From the Outer Hebrides

MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER.

Andante con moto. (♩ - about 54)

Prayerfully and smoothly flowing.

Piano.

*dolce e sostenuto.* *espressivo.*

*with passionate pleading*

*pleading held back a little.* *f* *p* *ten.*

*una corda.*

*mp* *a tempo.* *pp*

*una corda*

I HEARD the air used here as a theme sung at a *waulking* in the Isle of Barra in the summer of 1911. These waulking songs are probably among the oldest of the surviving songs of the Isles. Communal labour tends to conserve the chants used in its practice, and in waulking, (shrinking and fulling of the home-made cloth), which calls for the collaboration of from ten to twenty neighbours, the heavy, long sustained, steadily rhythmical work could only be performed with the help of strongly rhythmical song.

At a waulking the young men take no active part, they look on from a respectful distance by the open door or skylight window of the barn where the women, young and old, are seated at work. No doubt the lads make note the while of the particular maiden they hope to see home after the function, but the onlookers here are not essential. The real source of joy for the women lies in the strangely exhilarating effect of continuously repeated bodily movements accompanied by song.

At this waulking we were women only, the men were out with the boats, and the women were already tired with a hard day's herring-packing. Yet the stirring old waulking songs dispelled weariness and stimulated even the aged leaders to long-sustained exertion.

The cloth to be shrunk was blanketing, and, for the process, a long narrow table had been improvised in a candle-lit barn. The women were seated on benches on either side. At one end stood a wooden tub in which the blanket was soaking in dilute ammonia. From the tub it was lifted and gathered in the hand like a thick woollen scarf, then stretched down the table to the far end, where, turned back on itself, it lay along the boards like an elongated "U."

The seated women, grasping in both hands the portion of thick scarf which lay before them, lifted it and began slowly to beat it rhythmically on the boards, the two sides alternating in movement.

An old woman, one of two song-leaders, began to croon softly. And, as one listened, a quaint refrain shaped itself, a theme fashioned in strong rhythmic and melodic outlines, calculated, like a fugue subject, to impress itself easily on the memory. This was caught up and repeated by the workers *tutti*. A verse phrase of a more recitative-like character, perhaps consisting of only eight notes to eight syllables, was then intoned by the leader, and this was followed by a second refrain, longer than the first, but again of a strongly rhythmical character. This, in its turn, was caught up and repeated in chorus. And now the leader sang the alternating verse portions only, leaving the refrains to the other women. But the musical interest was not yet exhausted, for the leader skilfully varied the verse themes, and I have tried in vain to catch and note *all* the changes rung on a few notes by one of these capable, practised singers of the Isles.

As the workers get heated with the excitement of tone and rhythm and carried away by the hypnotic effect of repetition, the work becomes more and more rapid, and the cloth passes gradually round the table sunwise. The possibilities of one song having been exhausted a second is intoned by a fresh leader, who, in her turn, sets the pattern of the refrain or refrains (some songs have only *one* recurrent refrain), and exercises her skill also in the improvisation of verse strains.

The words that were sung to this old fulling air were in themselves an epitome of the old island life. The men, in their boats, go a-fishing or a-reiving, and the women, left on the Isle, cultivate the soil and think sadly maybe of their absent loved ones. And with characteristic Celtic "vivifying love of excess," like the woman in this song, they may comfort themselves by conjuring up, as she does, all the fine things they will make to grow on the Isle, down there in the leafy lagan (hollow), where the "birds are singing their own bird-rapture."

Peas will be growing, beans too will grow there,  
Grow will barley, grow will oats there,  
In *quaichs* of yellow gold will ale grow!

Gone is the boat, gone thou my lover.  
*Dh' fhalbh am bata, Dh' fhalbh thu leannan.*

MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER.

# ORAN LU Aidh.

## An Island Felling Scene.

"In yon green hollow, cuckoos are singing,  
Singing ilk bird its own bird-rapture.  
Sad I and lonely, sorrowful crooning,  
Gone now the boat, gone now my lover.

*Ancient Felling song*

From Barra

MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER.

*With an ever forward swinging rhythm. (♩ = 60)*

Piano.

First system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *f* with vigour.

Second system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *p*, *p gracefully*. Includes fingerings: 1, 3, 1, 2, 1, 3.

Third system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *f* with vigour, *leggiero*.

Fourth system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *p gracefully*.

Fifth system of musical notation. Treble clef, bass clef. Dynamics: *f*.

*Poco riten.*

*Passionately.*

*Red.* \* *Red.*

*al Primo tempo.*

R.H. R.H. *rit.*

L.H. *with good full tone.* L.H.

\* *Red.* \*

R.H. L.H. *martellato* *ff*

*Red.* \* *Red.*

*p Gracefully.*

\* *Red.* \* *Red.* \* *Red.*

*cresc.* *f*

\* *Red.* \* *Red.* \* *Red.* \*

*p leggiero.*

*p leggiero.*

*with renewed vigour.*

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

**Meno mosso.**

*f with passionate yearning.*

Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \*

*p*

\* Ped.



Al primo tempo.

*p gracefully.*

*mf*

*p*

*morendo.*

## THE DEATH-CROON.<sup>1</sup>

IN the days of the old Celtic church, the Death-croon was chanted over the dying by the *anam-chara*, the soul-friend, assisted by three chanters. Later on, the rite passed into the hands of *seanairean a' bhaile*, the elders of the township, and the *mnathan-tuiridh*, the mourning-women, the latter eventually developing into a professional class, whose services could always be obtained for a consideration. In more recent times, the *bean-ghluin*, the knee-woman, the midwife, was also the *bean-tuiridh*, the mourning-woman, and as the friend of the folk in the coming and the going of life, was regarded with the greatest veneration both by young and by old. To this day the knee-woman of the isles chants her runes and celebrates her mysteries in the houses of birth and of death, but always with closed doors—metaphorically, at any rate. As recently as eighteen years ago, a Death-croon was chanted over a dying person in the Island of Eigg.

An ceò 's an drùchd,  
An drùchd 's an ceò,  
An ceò 's an drùchd  
An sùil mo ghràidh,  
An sùil mo ghràidh,  
A Thì dh' fhosgail an t-sùil òg,  
Dùn i an nochd an clò a' bhàis,  
An clò a' bhàis.

The mist the dew,  
The dew the mist,  
The mist the dew  
In the eye of my love,  
In the eye of my love.  
Thou who did'st open the young eye,  
Close it to-night in the sleep of death,  
In the sleep of death.

From the nineteenth to the sixth century is a far cry, but the Death-croon brings the two together. St. Donnan of Eigg and fifty of his *muinntir*, his disciples, had suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Queen of the Isle, and were sleeping their first night's death-sleep in the churchyard now known as *Cill-Donnain*. At midnight *solus an àigh*, a blessed light, was seen above the graves, and voices were heard chanting a croon of which only a few lines have been handed down.

<sup>2</sup> Is moch a chuireas a' ghrian fàilt air Donnain,  
Is moch a sheinneas an t-ian àilleachd Donnain,  
Is moch a dh' fhàsas am fiar air ùir Donnain.  
Sùil bhlàth Chrìosd air an ùir,  
Reulta na h-iarmailt air an ùir,  
Cha bheud cha bheud a dh' ùir Donnain.

Early gives the sun greeting to Donnain,  
Early sings the bird the greatness of Donnain,  
Early grows the grass on the grave of Donnain,  
The warm eye of Christ on the grave,  
The stars of the heavens on the grave,  
No harm, no harm to Donnain's dust.

And said the old folk of Eigg: The Queen and her maidens saw the light and heard the singing and, way of the women! wonder brought them towards the churchyard. And, sure, there must have been *tàladh*, fascination, in the light, for as *it* would move *they* would follow, and did it not bring them little by little, and not little was that same little, to the loch <sup>3</sup> you know yourself, the one in which the *each-uisge*, the water-horse, lives—and, O Mary Mother, was it not there the judgment was!

In the isles the black loch among the hills is always associated with death and unholy deeds and croons. The sea, with its ebb and its flow, is suggestive of life. If it has the terrible strength, it has also the nobility, of the lion. But the loch among the hills is a snake—black and slimy, with death in its eye. A tale and a croon <sup>4</sup> will tell the rest.

On a night there was, it befell a *pears-eaglais*, a cleric, to be returning from the hill to the shore-clachan, and what came upon him but the weather of the seven elements—and what can be worse than that! Since he could not do better, he did the best he could, and his only choice being an evil, he took shelter in a cave under a rock. He had not been long there when a great white lightning sudden-flashed before his two eyes, and in the glare he saw a deep black loch between two precipices; and O Blessed Being of the Graces! beside the loch was a man in the death-throe, and three wizards crooning over him—a lean black wizard, a bald grey wizard, and a sleek yellow wizard.

<sup>1</sup> Learned by the writer, partly from his aunt, Janet Macleod, and partly from Raonaid Campbell, a native of Eigg; stray lines were afterwards got from Catriona Macleod, Trotternish, Skye, but she said they were part of a *piobaireachd* which was much played at funerals in olden days.

<sup>2</sup> *Iain Og Morragh*, the poet-schoolmaster of Eigg in the early part of the 19th century, began one of his songs in praise of the island with the lines:

Is moch a chuireas a' ghrian fàilt air Stròdha.  
Early gives the sun greeting to Stròdha.

<sup>3</sup> Still called *Loch nam ban mór*, "the loch of the big women."

<sup>4</sup> The tale and the croon were got from old Vincent MacEachin, Island of Eigg.

**Ars' am baobh cáol dubh :**

Ospag, ospag, fhir a th' ann!  
'Nuair bhios tu thall, 'nuair bhios tu thall,  
Bidh tus' an laimh, bidh tus' an laimh,  
Speachan an diugh, meanbhagan am màireach,  
'Gad itheadh, 'gad thachas, 'gad mhàmadh,  
Thall thall,  
Fhir a th' ann.

**Ars' am baobh maol glas :**

Ospag, ospag, fhir a th' ann!  
'Nuair bhios tu thall, 'nuair bhios tu thall,  
Bidh tus' an laimh, bidh tus' an laimh,  
Fitheach os do chionn, giogan ad shùil,  
Nathair-nimhe 's i teachd dlùth, 's i teachd dlùth,  
Thall thall,  
Fhir a th' ann.

**Ars' am baobh caol buidhe :**

Ospag, ospag, fhir a th' ann!  
'Nuair bhios tu thall, 'nuair bhios tu thall,  
Bidh tus' an laimh, bidh tus' an laimh,  
Gaoth 'ga reothadh feadh an t-seilich,  
Guin is fuachd mar uisge goileach,  
Thall, thall,  
Fhir a bh' ann.

**Said the lean black wizard :**

Torture, torture, man that be!  
Over there, over there,  
Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,  
Wasps to-day, midges to-morrow,  
Eating thee, itching thee, tumouring thee,  
Over there, over there,  
Man that be.

**Said the bald grey wizard :**

Torture, torture, man that be!  
Over there, over there,  
Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,  
A raven above thee, a thistle in thine eye,  
A venom-serpent coming nigh, coming nigh,  
Over there, over there,  
Man that be.

**Said the sieek yellow wizard :**

Torture, torture, man that be!  
Over there, over there,  
Thou shalt be bound, thou shalt be bound,  
Wind a-freezing through the willows,  
Stinging cold, like scalding water,  
Over there, over there,  
Man that was.<sup>5</sup>

And while the wizards were at the croon, the cleric was making the *caim*, the sacred circle, round about himself; and once he had made the picture of the Cross on it and blessed it in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he knew then that no evil could come upon him, howsoever long till cock-crow—but for all that, O man of my heart, the loch was deep and the loch was black!

From the hills, the last refuge of paganism, the Death-croon leads us to the sea and the Iona coracles. A world of years ago (said an old Eigg woman),<sup>6</sup> long long before Prince Charlie landed in Moidart, the folk there were fierce and dark and ignorant; they kept *Bealltainn*, Beltane, better than Christmas or Easter Sunday, and (O Mary Mother, sain us from evil!) it is said they would even be praying to the serpents. Columba of my love heard of this, and it gave him a sore heart that people should be so far in their own light as to turn their back on heaven and the saints—sure, he was ever the *ailleagan*, the beauteous-one, son of a king and grandson of a king, and he might have been a king himself, had that been his wish—but to get back to my tale, he sent two of his monks to Moidart to teach the folk there the good Christian ways of the church. But were they not the foolish ones, the folk of Moidart! They would not listen to the monks, and at last the younger of the two said: "We will return to Iona and leave the seven curses of the church on Moidart." In the dusk of evening the two were down on the shore, with their coracle in sailing trim, and something in their faces which no wise person would wish to see. "I hear the dip of oars," said the younger one, "and the sound is making for the point further down." Wonder soon brought them to the spot, and what they saw was a coracle gliding away into the darkness, a lady-lord clothed in white lying on the strand, and a baby boy sucking a cold breast. And the older monk began to chant the Death-croon over the dead, but I do not know what the words were, for it is said he never chanted that croon again, but always a better one. Before he was through with it, the eyes of the baby boy were upon him. "She is not dead," said the little one, "but she always loses life and milk when the monks of Iona lose their heat-love for the folk." What more? O treasure of my heart, miserable creatures like us may not know what passed between the Blessed Mary and her Son and the monks of Iona—but, at any rate, the two men returned to their coracle and made a hole in her.

KENNETH MACLEOD.

<sup>5</sup> Witches and wizards were notorious for tricky diction. One of their worst curses went forth disguised as a blessing: *An Ti bh' air Neamh 'gad bheannachadh*, "The Being that was in Heaven bless thee." "May He do that same," said the unwary ones, and at once the curse took a grip of them. "May the Being that is in Heaven sain us," said the wise ones—and lo! the curse disappeared in black smoke.

<sup>6</sup> Peggy MacCormick—*Peigi Bhàn*. She and her brother, Vincent MacEachin, carried with them into the grave legends and runes which, had they been noted down, would have made quite a remarkable volume.

# THE DEATH CROON.

(An Cronan Bais.)

Home thou'rt going to-night to the Winter Ever-house,  
The Autumn, Summer, and Springtide Ever-house.

Youth-sleep of Jesus, Life-sleep of Jesus, Glory-sleep of Jesus.  
Love-sleep of Jesus, Joy-sleep of Jesus, Peace-sleep of Jesus,  
Sleep, and put from thee thy ev'ry woe.

Sleep of seven virtues on thee, — sleep of seven moons upon thee,  
Sleep of seven slumbers on thee, — softly sleep, softly free from woe,  
Softly to sleep, — softly to sleep, — softly to sleep, — softly to sleep.

Kenneth Macleod.

As Traditionally sung by KENNETH MACLEOD.

For Piano by  
MARJORY KENNEDY-FRASER.

**Lento.**

Piano. *pesante ma dolce. p*

*with both pedals.*

\* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

\* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

*tre corde*

\* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

*p* *dim.* *pp* *ad lib.*

\* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

mf p mf p mf p

\* Led. \* Led. \*

R.H.  
L.H.  
mf

Led. \* Led. \* Led. \* Led. \* Led.

f p f

\* Led. \* Led. Led. \* Led. \* Led. Led. \*

p f p f p

Led. \* Led. \* Led.

mf mp

\* Led. \* Led. \* Led. \* Led. \* Led.

*Triumphant.*  
 R.H. L.H. R.H. L.H.  
*legatissimo.*  
**f**  
 \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

*legatissimo.*  
 R.H. L.H. R.H. L.H.  
 \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

*Peacefully.*  
**p** *morendo* **pp**  
 \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

**p**  
 \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.

**ppp**  
 \* Ped. \* Ped. \* Ped.