

In even course, nor splendid, nor obscure, 532
 'To steal through life among my villagers!
 The hum of the discordant crowd, the buzz
 Of faction, the poor fly that threads the air
 Self-pleased, the wasp that points its tiny sting
 Unfelt, pass by me like the idle wind
 That I regard not ; while the Summer Sylph,
 That whispers through the laurels, wakes the thought
 Of quietude, and home-felt happiness, 540
 And independence, in a land I love !

THE HARP OF HOEL.¹

- 1 It was a high and holy sight,
 When Baldwin² and his train,
 With cross and crosier gleaming bright,
 Came chanting slow the solemn rite,
 To Gwentland's³ pleasant plain.
- 2 High waved before, in crimson pride,
 The banner of the Cross ;
 The silver rood was then descried,
 While deacon youths, from side to side,
 The fuming censer toss.
- 3 The monks went two and two along,
 And winding through the glade,
 Sang, as they passed, a holy song,
 And harps and citterns, 'mid the throng,
 A mingled music made.

¹ This lyrical ballad is founded on a story connected with an old Welsh melody. I have placed the circumstance in the time of the Crusades. — ² Archbishop of Canterbury, who preached the Crusade in Wales. — ³ Monmouthshire.

- 4 They ceased ; when lifting high his hand,
The white-robed prelate cried :
Arise, arise, at Christ's command,
To fight for his name in the Holy Land,
Where a Saviour lived and died !
- 5 With gloves of steel, and good broadsword,
And plumed helm of brass,
Hoel, Landoga's youthful lord,
To hear the father's holy word,
Came riding to the pass.
- 6 More earnestly the prelate spake :
Oh, heed no earthly loss !
He who will friends and home forsake,
Now let him kneel, and fearless take
The sign of the Holy Cross.
- 7 Then many a maid her tresses rent,
And did her love implore :
Oh, go not thou to banishment !
For me, and the pleasant vales of Gwent,
Thou never wilt see more.
- 8 And many a mother, pale with fears,
Did kiss her infant son ;
Said, Who will shield thy helpless years,
Who dry thy widowed mother's tears,
When thy brave father's gone ?
- 9 God, with firm voice the prelate cried,
God will the orphan bless ;
Sustain the widow's heart, and guide
Through the hard world, obscure and wild,
The poor and fatherless.

10 Then might you see a shade o'ercast
Brave Hoel's ruddy hue,
But soon the moment's thought is past :—
Hark, hark, 'tis the trumpet's stirring blast !
And he grasped his bow of yew.

11 Then might you see a moment's gloom
Sit in brave Hoel's eye :
Make in the stranger's land my tomb,
I follow thee, be it my doom,
O CHRIST, to live or die !

12 No more he thought, though rich in fee,
Of any earthly loss,
But lighting, on his bended knee,
Said, Father, here I take from thee
The sign of the Holy Cross.

13 I have a wife, to me more dear
Then is my own heart's blood ;
I have a child, (a starting tear,
Which soon he dried, of love sincere,
On his stern eyelid stood) ;

14 To them farewell ! O God above,
Thine is the fate of war ;
But oh ! reward Gwenthian's ¹ love,
And may my son a comfort prove,
When I am distant far !

15 Farewell, my harp !—away, away !
To the field of death I go ;

¹ The Welsh tune is called the "Remembrance of Gwenthian," the name of the woman.

Welcome the trumpet's blast, the neigh
Of my bold and barbed steed of gray,
And the clang of the steel crossbow !

16 Gwenlhian sat in the hall at night,
Counting the heavy hours ;
She saw the moon, with tranquil light,
Shine on the circling mountain's height,
And the dim castle towers.

17 Deep stillness was on hill and glen,
When she heard a bugle blow ;
A trump from the watch-tower answered then,
And the tramp of steeds, and the voice of men,
Were heard in the court below.

18 The watch-dog started at the noise,
Then crouched at his master's feet ;
He knew his step, he heard his voice ;
But who can now like her rejoice,
Who flies her own lord to greet ?

19 And soon her arms his neck enfold :
But whence that altered mien !
O say, then, is thy love grown cold,
Or hast thou been hurt by the robbers bold,
That won in the forest of Dean ?

20 Oh no, he cried, the God above,
Who all my soul can see,
Knows my sincere, my fervent love ;
If aught my stern resolve could move,
It were one tear from thee.

- 21 But I have sworn, in the Holy Land,—
Need I the sequel speak ;
Too well, she cried, I understand !
Then grasped in agony his hand,
And hid her face on his cheek.
- 22 My loved Gwenthian, weep not so,
From the lid that tear I kiss ;
Though to the wars far off I go,
Betide me weal, betide me woe,
We yet may meet in bliss.
- 23 Fourteen suns their course had rolled,
When firmly thus he spake ;
Hear now my last request : behold
This ring, it is of purest gold,
Love, keep it for my sake !
- 24 When summers seven have robed each tree,
And clothed the vales with green,
If I come not back, then thou art free,
To wed or not, and to think of me,
As I had never been !
- 25 Nay, answer not,—what wouldst thou say !
Come, let my harp be brought ;
For the last time, I fain would play,
Ere yet we part, our favourite lay,
And cheat severer thought :

THE AIR.

Oh, cast every care to the wind,
And dry, best beloved, the tear !
Secure, that thou ever shalt find,
The friend of thy bosom sincere.

Still friendship shall live in the breast of the brave,
And we'll love, the long day, where the forest-trees wave.

I have felt each emotion of bliss,
That affection the fondest can prove,
Have received on my lip the first kiss
Of thy holy and innocent love ;
But perish each hope of delight,
Like the flashes of night on the sea,
If ever, though far from thy sight,
My soul is forgetful of thee !

Still the memory shall live in the breast of the brave,
How we loved, the long day, where the forest-trees wave.

26 Now bring my boy ; may God above
Shower blessings on his head !
May he requite his mother's love,
And to her age a comfort prove,
When I perhaps am dead !

27 The beams of morn on his helm did play.
And aloud the bugle blew,
Then he leaped on his harnessed steed of gray,
And sighed to the winds as he galloped away,
Adieu, my heart's love, adieu !

28 And now he has joined the warrior train
Of knights and barons bold,
That, bound to Salem's holy plain,
Across the gently-swelling main,
Their course exulting hold.

29 With a cross of gold, as on they passed,
The crimson streamers flew ;

The shields hung glittering round the mast,
And on the waves a radiance cast,
Whilst all the trumpets blew.

- 30 O'er the Severn-surge, in long array,
So, the proud galleys went,
Till soon, as dissolved in ether gray,
The woods, and the shores, and the Holms¹ steal away,
And the long blue hills of Gwent.

PART II.

- 1 HIGH on the hill, with moss o'ergrown,
A hermit chapel stood ;
It spoke the tale of seasons gone,
And half-revealed its ivied stone.
Amid the beechen wood.
- 2 Here often, when the mountain trees
A leafy murmur made,
Now still, now swaying to the breeze,
(Sounds that the musing fancy please),
The widowed mourner strayed.
- 3 And many a morn she climbed the steep,
From whence she might behold,
Where, 'neath the clouds, in shining sweep,
And mingling with the mighty deep,
The sea-broad Severn rolled.
- 4 Her little boy beside her played,
With sea-shells in his hand ;

¹ Islands in the Bristol Channel.

And sometimes, 'mid the bents delayed,
And sometimes running onward, said,
Oh, where is Holy Land !

5 My child, she cried, my prattler dear !
And kissed his light-brown hair ;
Her eyelid glistened with a tear,
And none but God above could hear,
That hour, her secret prayer.

6 As thus she nursed her secret woes,
Oft to the wind and rain
She listened, at sad autumn's close,
Whilst many a thronging shadow rose,
Dark-glancing o'er her brain.

7 Now lonely to the cloudy height
Of the steep hill she strays ;
Below, the raven wings his flight,
And often on the screaming kite
She sees the wild deer gaze.

8 The clouds were gathered on its brow,
The warring winds were high ;
She heard a hollow voice, and now
She lifts to heaven a secret vow,
Whilst the king of the storm rides by.

9 Seated on a craggy rock,
What aged man appears !
There is no hind, no straggling flock ;
Comes the strange shade my thoughts to mock,
And shake my soul with fears ?

10 Fast drive the hurrying clouds of morn ;
A pale man stands confessed ;
With look majestic, though forlorn,
A mirror in his hand, and horn
Of ivory on his breast.

11 Daughter of grief, he gently said,
And beckoned her : come near ;
Now say, what would you give to me,
If you brave Hoel's form might see,
Or the sound of his bugle hear !

12 Hoel, my love, where'er thou art,
All England I would give,¹
If, never, never more to part,
I now could hold thee to my heart,
For whom alone I live !

13 He placed the white horn to her ear,
And sudden a sweet voice
Stole gently, as of fairies near,
While accents soft she seemed to hear,
Daughter of grief, rejoice !

14 For soon to love and thee I fly,
From Salem's hallowed plain !
The mirror caught her turning eye,
As pale in death she saw him lie,
And sinking 'mid the slain.

15 She turned to the strange phantom-man,
But she only saw the sky,

¹ "Wales, England, and Llewellyn,
All would I give for a sight of William."

Giraldus, vol. i. p. 46.

And the clouds on the lonely mountains' van,
And the Clydden-Shoots,¹ that rushing ran,
To meet the waves of Wye.

16 Thus seven long years had passed away,—
She heard no voice of mirth ;
No minstrel raised his festive lay,
At the sad close of the drisly day,
Beside the blazing hearth.

17 She seemed in sorrow, yet serene,
No tear was on her face ;
And lighting oft her pensive mien,
Upon her languid look was seen
A meek attractive grace.

18 In beauty's train she yet might vie,
For though in mourning weeds,
No friar, I deem, that passed her by,
Ere saw her dark, yet gentle eye,
But straight forgot his beads.

19 Eineon, generous and good,
Alone with friendship's aid,
Eineon, of princely Rhys's blood,
Who 'mid the bravest archers stood,
To sooth her griefs essayed.

20 He had himself been early tried
By stern misfortune's doom ;
For she who loved him drooped and died,
And on the green hill's flowery side
He raised her grassy tomb.

¹ " Nearly through the centre of the hill that backs the village (Landoga) is a deep ravine, called Clydden-Shoots, which, when the springs are full, forms a beautiful cascade." —*Heath*.

21 What marvel, in his lonely heart,
 To faith a friendship true,
If, when her griefs she did impart,
And tears of memory oft would start,
 If more than pity grew.

22 With converse mild he oft would seek
 To sooth her sense of care ;
As the west wind, with breathings weak,
Wakes, on the hectic's faded cheek
 A smile of faint despair.

23 The summer's eve was calm and still,
 When once his harp he strung ;
Soft as the twilight on the hill,
Affection seemed his heart to fill,
 Whilst eloquent he sung :

When Fortune to all thy warm hopes was unkind,
And the morn of thy youth was o'erclouded with woe,
In me, not a stranger to grief, thou should'st find,
All that friendship and kindness and truth could
 bestow.

Yes, the time it has been, when my soul was oppressed,
But no longer this heart would for heaviness pine,
Could I lighten the load of an innocent breast,
And steal but a moment of sadness from thine.

24 He paused, then with a starting tear,
 And trembling accent, cried,
O lady, hide that look severe,—
The voice of love, of friendship hear,
 And be again a bride.

- 25 Mourn not thy much-loved Hoel lost,—
Lady, he is dead, is dead,—
Far distant wanders his pale ghost,—
His bones by the white surge are tossed,
And the wave rolls o'er his head.
- 26 She said, Sev'n years their course have rolled,
Since thus brave Hoel spake,
When last I heard his voice, Behold,
This ring,—it is of purest gold,—
Then, keep it for my sake.
- 27 When summers seven have robed each tree,
And decked the coombs with green,
If I come not back, then thou art free,
To wed or not, and to think of me
As I had never been.
- 28 Those seven sad summers now are o'er,
And three I yet demand ;
If in that space I see no more
The friend I ever must deplore,
Then take a mourner's hand.
- 29 The time is passed :—the laugh, the lay,
The nuptial feast proclaim ;
From many a rushing torrent gray,
From many a wild brook's wandering way,
The hoary minstrels came.
- 30 From Kymin's crag, with fragments strewed ;
From Skirid, bleak and high ;
From Penalt's shaggy solitude ;
From Wyndcliff, desolate and rude,
That frowns o'er mazy Wye.

- 31 With harps the gallery glittered bright,—
The pealing rafters rung ;
Far off upon the woods of night,
From the tall window's arch, the light
Of tapers clear was flung.
- 32 The harpers ceased the acclaiming lay,
When, with descending beard,
Scallop, and staff his steps to stay,
As, foot-sore, on his weary way,
A pilgrim wan appeared.
- 33 Now lend me a harp for St Mary's sake,
For my skill I fain would try,
A poor man's offering to make,
If haply still my hand may wake
Some pleasant melody.
- 34 With scoffs the minstrel crowd replied,
Dost thou a harp request !
And loud in mirth, and swelled with pride,
Some his rain-dripping hair deride,
And some his sordid vest.
- 35 Pilgrim, a harp shall soon be found,
Young Hoel instant cried ;
There lies a harp upon the ground,
And none hath ever heard its sound,
Since my brave father died.
- 36 The harp is brought : upon the frame
A filmy cobweb hung ;
The strings were few, yet 'twas the same ;
The old man drawing near the flame,
The chords imperfect rung :

Oh ! cast every care to the wind,
 And dry, best beloved, the tear ;
 Secure that thou ever shalt find
 The friend of thy bosom sincere.

37 She speechless gazed :—he stands confessed,—
 The dark eyes of her Hoel shine ;
 Her heart has forgotten it e'er was oppressed,
 And she murmurs aloud, as she sinks on his breast,
 Oh ! press my heart to thine.

38 He turned his look a little space,
 To hide the tears of joy ;
 Then rushing, with a warm embrace,
 Cried, as he kissed young Hoel's face,
 My boy, my heart-loved boy !

39 Proud harpers, strike a louder lay,—
 No more forlorn I bend !
 Prince Eineon, with the rest, be gay,
 Though fate hath torn a bride away,
 Accept a long-lost friend.

* * * *

This tale I heard, when at the close of day
 The village harper tuned an ancient lay ;
 He struck his harp, beneath a ruin hoar,
 And sung of love and truth, in days of yore,
 And I retained the song, with counsel sage,
 To teach *one* lesson to a wiser age !
