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Irish Riddles

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## IRISH RIDDLES

WHITLEY STOKES, D.C.L.

THE following fragmentary collection of riddles is found on page 179 of the Book of Fermoy, a vellum manuscript of the fifteenth century, preserved in the library of the Royal Irish Academy. It is, for some reason to me unknown, entitled, *Cesta Grega andso*, 'Greek questions here,' and is in the usual interrogatory form. Though more than half of the collection is now illegible, the legible portion seems worthy of publication as exhibiting some ingenuity, as embodying one or two curious bits of folk-lore, and as being far older than the only similar collection with which I am acquainted, viz., the dialogue between Find and Ailbhe, daughter of Cormac. Of this there is a seventeenth century copy in H. 1. 15, a MS. in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, p. 653. I believe that there is another recension of this dialogue in Stewart's *Highland Bards*, p. 545 ; but I have been unable to procure a sight of that book.

## CESTA GREGA ANDSO

1. Ca ní duibhi ina fiach ?  
Ni *ansa*, ainim an anfīrēoin.
2. Ca nī is gile anā in sneachta ?  
Ni *ansa*, ainim in fīrēoin.
3. Cí a cétescob robī artús ?  
Ni *ansa*, Arath mac Aroin.
4. Caidi iat na tri dūili amlabra dobeir fiss do chāch ?  
Ni *ansa*, .i. rose, menma, liter.
5. Ca duine nāch do duine, 7 ca duini is da duine, 7 ca duine is do dhāinibh ?  
Ni *ansa*, Adham, 7 Ebha, 7 Cain.
6. Ca hinadh don bith tar nach tānic in dili ?  
Ni *ansa*, Golgotha.

7. Canasa tic in lā, 7 ca conuir tēit, 7 canas tic in adhaigh,<sup>1</sup> 7 ca conuir tēit ?  
 Ni *ansa*, le grēin tic an lā 7 le grēin tēit. an adaig<sup>2</sup> immorro a talmuin tēit.
8. Cia is ūaisle dona luibhibh ?  
 Ni *ansa*, an lili, uair is āentadhach<sup>3</sup> a glaine 7 a balad risin Spirat Nāem.
9. Ca hingen inniseas gein a māthar 7 gan in mathair do faicsin ?  
 Ni *ansa*, in deathach thic dan tenid.
10. Ca hathair genes a mbroinn a inghine ?  
 Ni *ansa*, in tuisce isin oighridh.
11. Ca duine do bo marb fa dō 7 nachar gēnair acht ēinfhecht ?  
 Ni *ansa*, Lasarus, ro thodhiusc Issu<sup>4</sup> a talmain.
12. Caidet na tri sēta thathaigter o thús domhuin 7 nach faghar a slechta ?  
 Ni *ansa*, sēt mara, sēt ēn a n-aiēr, sēt nathrach ar cloich.
13. Ca mac nāch rucad 7 nāch bērthar 7 mac d' ainm fair ?  
 Ni *ansa*, in mac alla.
14. Caidet na bethaduigh nāchar cuired isin airc 7 tāinic aisti ?  
 Ni *ansa*, Luisifer rochuir anāl anunn tre imthnuth, co nderna lochait da marbad do gorta 7 do chaithium a mbid. Atconnuic Mich(ēl) ēsein, 7 ro cuir a anāl in . . . do marbad na lochat. . . .

## TRANSLATION

- What thing is blacker than a raven ?  
 Easy (to say) : the soul of the unrighteous.
- What thing is brighter than the snow ?  
 Easy (to say) : the soul of the righteous.

<sup>1</sup> MS. aghaidh.<sup>2</sup> MS. agaid.<sup>3</sup> MS. aentaghach.<sup>4</sup> MS. ihu.

3. Who was the first bishop that was at the beginning ?  
Easy (to say) : Arath son of Aaron.
4. What are the three dumb creatures that give knowledge to every one ?  
Easy (to say) : an eye, a mind, a letter.
5. Which human being was not of a human being, and which was of (one) human being, and which was of (two) human beings ?  
Easy (to say) : Adam, and Eve, and Cain.
6. Over what place of the world did the Deluge not come ?  
Easy (to say) : Golgotha.
7. Whence comes the day ? and on what path does it go ? and whence comes the night ? and on what path does it go ?  
Easy (to say) : with the sun comes the day, and with the sun it goes ; the night, however, goes into the earth.
8. Which is the noblest of plants ?  
Easy (to say) : the lily, for its purity and its odour are at one with the Holy Ghost.
9. What daughter tells of her mother's birth and without having seen the mother ?  
Easy (to say) : the smoke that comes from the fire.
10. What father is born in his daughter's womb ?  
Easy (to say) : the water in the ice.
11. What human being was dead twice and was born only once ?  
Easy (to say) : Lazarus, whom Jesus brought to life out of the earth.
12. What are the three roads that are frequented from the world's beginning, and their tracks are unseen ?  
Easy (to say) : the road of the sea ; the road of birds in air ; the road of a snake on a stone.

13. What son (*mac*) has not been brought forth, and will not be brought forth, and (yet) is named a son ?  
Easy (to say) : the *mac alla*, 'echo' (literally 'son of a cliff').
14. What are the animals that were not put into the ark and (yet) came out of it ?  
Easy (to say) : Lucifer through envy breathed within, and made a mouse to kill them (Noah and his family) and to consume their food. Michael beheld him, and breathed into (. . . a cat ?) to kill the mouse. . . .

Here the MS. becomes illegible.

## THE LEGEND OF ST. BRENDAN

DOMINICK DALY

THE pre-Columbian story, in varied forms, of a wonderful transatlantic land must be ranked as amongst the most ancient, widespread, and lasting of human legends. It was evidently old and familiar when Homer wrote the *Odyssey*, and if one might rely upon what Plato says about the Island of Atlantis and the ancient Egyptian priests, it pre-dated Grecian existence by many thousands of years. Its popularity endured through the pagan period, during the early and middle-age chronology, and even centuries afterwards.

The Celtic imagination of the peoples of the western shores of Europe was obviously greatly impressed by the romantic story, as is shown by the many early prose and poetic compositions which have survived to excite the interest of modern philosophers and antiquarians. Amongst those compositions are the Voyage of Bran, of the brothers Cora, of St. Brendan, of Mernoc, Maddoc, and others, which appeared in various Celtic languages and their translations.

Next to the Voyage of Bran (so learnedly and exhaustively treated upon in Mr. Alfred Nutt's two volumes) the so-called 'Legend of St. Brendan the Navigator' is perhaps the most