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An Bunan Buidhe

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An Bunan Buidhe

Translated from the Irish by THOMAS MacDONAGH

The yellow bittern that never broke out
In a drinking bout, might as well have drunk ;
His bones are thrown on a naked stone
Where he lived alone like a hermit monk.
O yellow bittern ! I pity your lot,
Though they say that a sot like myself is curst—
I was sober a while, but I'll drink and be wise
For fear I should die in the end of thirst.

It's not for the common birds that I'd mourn,
The black-bird, the corn-crake or the crane,
But for the bittern that's shy and apart
And drinks in the marsh from the lone bog-drain.
Oh ! if I had known you were near your death,
While my breath held out I'd have run to you,
Till a splash from the Lake of the Son of the Bird
Your soul would have stirred and waked anew.

My darling told me to drink no more
Or my life would be o'er in a little short while ;
But I told her 'tis drink gives me health and strength,
And will lengthen my road by many a mile.
You see how the bird of the long smooth neck,
Could get his death from the thirst at last—
Come, son of my soul, and drain your cup,
You'll get no sup when your life is past.

In a wintering island by Constantine's halls,
A bittern calls from a wineless place,
And tells me that hither he cannot come
Till the summer is here and the sunny days.
When he crosses the stream there and wings o'er the sea,
Then a fear comes to me he may fail in his flight—
Well, the milk and the ale are drunk every drop,
And a dram won't stop our thirst this night.