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Two Poems on the Shannon

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TWO POEMS ON THE SHANNON

I.

Diarmaid O Briain cct.

- 1 A Shionainn Bhriain Bhóroimhe,
iongnadh is méad do gháire,
mar sguire dod ghlóraighe,
ag dol siar isin sáile!
- 2 Gluaise láimh ré Bóroimhe,
téighe láimh ré Ceann Choradh,
ag moladh Mhic Mhór-Mhuire,
go bráth bráth as binn t'foghar.
- 3 An port as a dtéighesi,
ó Shliabh Iarainn, ga neimhcheilt,
lór a luaithe téighisi
tré Loch Ríbh tré Loch nDeirghheirc.
- 4 Ag dol tar Eas nDanainne
nocha nfhéadthar do chuibhreach;
as ann do-ní an ramhaille,
ag dola láimh re Luimneach.
- 5 O Luimneach an mhearsháile
go dtéighe a n-Inis Cathaigh,
láimh re port ar Seanáinne,
caidhe th' imtheacht 'na dheaghaidh?
- 6 Fa imlibh ar bhfearainne
meinic théighe in gach ionam,
ar ais tar Eas Danainne,
ag dul san bhfairge a Shionann.
- 7 Bóinn is Siúir is Sein-Leamhain
agus Suca na[ch] sriobhmall,
adeirit na deighleabhair
gurab uaisle tú a Shionann.

THE IRISH REVIEW

II.

Tadhg Og O Huiginn cct.

- 1 A Shionann Chuinn Chéadchathaigh,
deacair leanmhain do léimeann :
nocha nfhaca h'éntsamhail
leath a bhus do mhuir Eireann.
- 2 A mhaighreach bhog bhairrleabhair,
iomdha fiodh áluinn umad :
mór an éagcóir t'ainmneaghadh
ó dhuine d'fhearaibh Mumhan.
- 3 Dúthcha dhuit bheith againne,
dá bhféachtha dona fáthaibh :
Gleann Gaibhle as é t'athairsi,
an Bhréifne as í do mháthair.
- 4 Mar mhusglas do mhór-bhuinne
goirid bheag ó Shliabh Raisean,
nochan ó Bhrian Bhóroimhe
do budh cóir bheith dot bhaisdeadh.
- 5 Dá ndearnta-sa orainne,
ó do cuireadh thú a seilbh mbréige,
do-bhéarmaois do chomhairle
duit iompúdhd dod thír féine.
- 6 A bhuinne mhall mhín-iasgach,
fan hiomdha adhbha éarlamh,
ó do-ní sealbh sír-iasacht,
ní racha tú ar a ndéanamh.
- 7 Do-ghéan-sa do chosnamh-sa
le Diarmaid ar son dána,
agus cosnaid Connachtaigh
ris tú ar thoradh lámha.
- 8 Mas uime do iarradar
tú ar bheith láimh ré Luimneach,
do bhádhús a nIarmhumhain,
'snocha dearna dhíom Muimhneach.

TWO POEMS ON THE SHANNON

- 9 As leathrom an t-ordachadh
do shíol Bhriain bheith dár sreabhaibh,
'snach abraid síol cConchobhair
gurab leó Laoi nó Leamhain.
- 10 Dá madh le gach comharsain
fonn gach fir oile, a Shionann,
máseadh is do Chonnachtaibh
leath amuigh dhíot, a Shionann.
- 11 Muimhnigh má do-rinneadar
sealbh dot bhuinne saor sriobhard,
créd do-bheir ar Mhidheachaibh
gan dol ad sheilbh, a Shionann?
- 12 Ceisd iongnadh ort agoinde,
a Chríostd thoicthigh gach ionam,
nar cuireadh a n-aithearrach
abhann romhad, a Shionann?
- 13 Abair riom, a Ogh-Mhuire,
chuirios bláth fiond ar fhiodhcholl,
créd tug ar Bhrian Bóroimhe
gan dol ad sheilbh a Shionann?
- 14 Roinntear Eire fhóid-ghreanta
le Fionntan, mar fuair Iollann,
ataoi-si don chóigeadh-sa
ó shoin anuas, a Shionann.

Translation

I.

Diarmaid O Briain sang:

- 1 O Shannon of Brian Boraimhe, the wonder and the greatness
of thy smile, as thou stillest thy voice, going westwards into
the sea!
- 2 Thou movest beside Boraimhe, thou goest near to Cenn Coradh,
praising Great Mary's Son, for ever thy voice is sweet.

THE IRISH REVIEW

- 3 The spot from which thou comest is Sliabh Iarainn—I hide it not—full speedily thou goest through Loch Ree and Loch Derg.
- 4 Going over Eas Danainne (Dunass Rapids) thou canst not be held in check: then it is that thou lingerest, when passing westwards from Limerick.
- 5 From Limerick of the rushing tide, till thou comest to Inis Cathaigh, past the dwelling of our own Seanán, whither goest thou thereafter?
- 6 Around the borders of our land often dost thou go, yea always, and again over Eas Danainne, going into the sea, O Shannon.
- 7 The Boyne and the Suir and the ancient Laune, and swift-streamed Suca, good books declare that thou art nobler than they, O Shannon.

II.

Tadhg Og O Huiginn sang:

- 1 O Shannon of Conn of the Hundred Fights, it is hard to follow thy leaps: I have not seen one like thee on this side of Ireland's sea.
- 2 O salmonful stream, of soft, smooth surface, many a lovely wood surrounds thee: a great wrong it were to name thee from any of the men of Munster.
- 3 By nature thou art ours, if sound reasons be regarded: Glen Gavlin is thy father, Brefney is thy mother.
- 4 As thy mighty current awakens but a little space from Sliev Rushel, it is not after Brian Boraimhe that it were right to christen thee.
- 5 If thou wouldest be said by me, since thou hast been taken into fraudulent possession, I would counsel thee to turn back to thine own land.
- 6 O stately river of smooth fish, on whose bank is many a habitation of saints, since unending loan makes possession, thou shalt not go at their disposal.

TWO POEMS ON THE SHANNON

- 7 I will in verse defend thee against Diarmaid, and the men of Connacht defend thee against him by the strength of their hands.
- 8 If this is their claim to thee, that thou passest by Limerick, I have been in West Munster, and it has not made me a Munsterman.
- 9 It is an unjust arrangement that the Children of Brian should meddle with our rivers, while the Children of Conchobhar do not say that the Lee or the Laune is theirs.
- 10 If each man's land always belongs to his neighbour, why then the men of Connacht own the land beyond thee, O Shannon.
- 11 If the men of Munster have taken possession of thy noble, swelling current, why do not the men of Meath claim thee, O Shannon?
- 12 I have a strange question for thee (O Christ blessed for ever!) has any other river been put before thee, O Shannon?
- 13 Tell me, O Virgin Mary, that bringest the white blossom upon the hazel in the wood—why did not Brian Boraimhe take possession of thee, O Shannon?
- 14 Ireland of beautiful swards was divided by Finntan, as Iollann found; from that time onwards thou are part of this province, O Shannon.

NOTE.—The above graceful verses are part of a poetic debate of a common type, of which the best known example is the so-called Contention of the Bards at the beginning of the 17th century. In the present case each of the disputants wrote a second poem, and finally the case was summed up by a third poet, who decided on historical grounds that the Shannon was a Northern river. Boraimhe, or Borumha, which suggested the dispute is the old fortress on the bank of the Shannon, from which Brian took his title. The date of the poems is uncertain. O'Reilly assigns the first to the year 1600. But if the second poet is the well-known one of the name, the dispute must be referred to the 15th century. Both poems are found in the Book of the O'Connor Don, written at Ostende in 1632, but I have followed rather the text of a MS. in the Royal Irish Academy.

OSBORN BERGIN.