

Fiona Macleod affects one at first like all great artists—the impulse is to quote, to let the books speak for themselves. As they are now issued in revised edition, his work includes sketches of Gaelic life from primitive times to our own day. We see the past in the present, the present in the past. “It is of least moment,” he said, “what is in the tale: it is of the moment what atmosphere of ideal beauty has remained with it out of the mind of the dreamer who shaped it, out of the love of generations for whom it has been full of a perpetual sweet newness as of summer-dawn, for whom it has been as fresh as moon-dew glistening on banks of thyme along old grassy ways.” But, while this is true, he has freed himself from many limitations by being able to isolate completely this life of which he writes.

It is worthy of note that the style shows marked improvement from the first editions to the last. There is a perfection in these which the early ones lack. With his subject matter he could easily have fallen into the grave fault of affectation. His sincerity and earnestness saved him from this, but anything that savoured of mannerism in his early work has disappeared in the polished form. As one reads one cannot but feel that this art, conscious as it was at first, became easier for the later books, a joy to the writer himself as to us today. The language is music. The sentences are always effective. The choice of simple words combined to form a strange atmosphere and compel admiration for him as an artist in language alone. There is a special vocabulary, not of dialect words only but of English words in daily use; a list could be made if one were so ruthlessly analytical of the words and expressions which especially are distinctive of these books. It is unforgettable, this art of Fiona Macleod's. It is, however, not merely art which we recognise in these books, but a dream of loveliness, beauty and truth.

The stories are old and modern, of Celtic times, Viking, Christian, and the present. The influence of each shows distinctly in the life of the time and in the succeeding generations. But the dominating themes are the same in every age—life and love and death.

“The great winding sheets that bury all things in oblivion are two: Love, that makes oblivious of life; and, Death, that obliterates Love.”

And always the scenes are painted against the sky and sea, in the colour and light and sound of nature, of which our life is but a part.

The purely pagan tales have a joyousness and fearlessness and a freedom from soul struggle that seems to come with Christianity. In *Deirdré*, an old Celtic story retold, sorrow is not pain, while joy becomes something almost supernatural. It has none of the savagery of the stories of Viking times, nor the bitter poignancy of the stories of soul-struggle. In these we see the truth of the Christian religion as it appeared in the West in the dawn of history, the secret of its appeal and consolation in all the centuries. It is remarkable that the conflict here between Christianity and paganism is not as brutal nor as savage as in Continental Europe. The legend of Saint Bride is exquisitely illustrative of this, while Cathal of the Woods shows the virility with which the surging blood of the old instincts threw aside the shielding severities of the new religion.

“Destiny” is the master word of the men and women of whom Fiona Macleod has written. They live as Fate directs their living:

“None knoweth a better thing than this:
The Sword, Love, Song, Honour, Sleep.
None knoweth a surer thing than this:
Birth, Sorrow, Pain, Weariness, Death.”

They met the good things with joy, the sure things with an endurance and courage which robbed them of their terror.

It is perhaps in expressing love, its moods and influence, that Fiona Mac-