

THE STORY OF NAISI.

(From Ferguson's "Irish History before the Conquest.")

CONOR, King of Ireland, had educated a beautiful damsel, keeping her secluded from all mankind till she should be of an age to become his wife. Her name, Deirdré, signifying *alarm*, had been bestowed at her birth by the Druid Cathbad, and was prophetic of the long train of conflict and disaster to which her charms gave rise. Notwithstanding the precautions of Conor, she saw and loved Naisi, the son of Usnach. He was sitting in the midst of the plain of Emania, playing on a harp. Sweet was the music of the sons of Usnach—great also was their prowess; they were fleet as hounds in the chase—they slew deer with their speed. As Naisi sat singing on the plain of Emain he perceived a maiden approaching him. She held down her head as she came near him, and would have passed in silence. "Gentle is the damsel who passeth by," said Naisi. Then the maiden, looking up, replied, "Damsels may well be gentle when there are no youths." Then Naisi knew it was Deirdré, and great dread fell upon him. "The king of the province is bethrothed to thee, oh damsel," he said. "I love him not," she replied: "he is an aged man. I would rather love a youth like thee." "Say not so, oh damsel," said Naisi, "the king is a better spouse than the king's servant." "Thou sayest so," said Deirdré, "that thou mayest avoid me." Then plucking a rose from a briar, she flung it towards him, and said, "Now thou art ever disgraced if thou rejectest me." "Depart from me, I beseech thee, damsel," said Naisi. "If thou dost not take me to be thy wife," said Deirdré, "thou are dishonoured before all the men of thy country after what I have done." Then Naisi said no more, and Deirdré took the harp, and sat beside him playing sweetly. But the other sons of Usnach, rushing forth, came running to the spot where Naisi sat, and Deirdré with him. "Alas!" they cried, "what hast thou done, oh brother? Is not this damsel fated to ruin Ulster?" "I am disgraced before the men of Erin for ever," said Naisi, "if I take her not after that which she hath done." "Evil will come of it," said the brothers. "I care not," said Naisi. "I had rather be in misfortune than in dishonour; we will fly with her to another country." So that night they departed, taking with them three times fifty men of might, and three times fifty women, and three times fifty greyhounds, and three times fifty attendants; and Naisi took Deirdré to be his wife.

After wandering through various parts of Ireland, "from Easroe to Ben Edar, and from Dundelgan to Almain," the fugitives at length took shelter in Scotland, where they found an asylum on the banks of Loch Etive. The loss of three warriors of such