

The Hermit Songs

At Saint Patrick's Purgatory

Pity me on my pilgrimage to Loch Derg!
O King of the churches and the bells
Bewailing your sores and your wounds
But not a tear can I squeeze from my eyes!
Not moisten an eye after so much sin!
Pity me, O King!
What shall I do with a heart that seeks only its own ease?
O only begotten Son by whom all men were made,
Who shunned not the death by three wounds,
Pity me on my pilgrimage to Loch Derg
And I with a heart not softer than a stone!

Church Bell at Night

Sweet little bell, struck on a windy night,
I would liefer keep tryst with thee
Than be with a light and foolish woman.

St. Ita's Vision

'I will take nothing from my Lord,' said she,
'unless He gives me His Son from Heaven
In the form of a Baby that I may nurse Him.'
So that Christ came down to her
in the form of a Baby and then she said:
'Infant Jesus, at my breast,
Nothing in this world is true
Save, O tiny nursling, You.
Infant Jesus at my breast,
By my heart every night,

You I nurse are not a churl
But were begot on Mary the Jewess
By Heaven's light.
Infant Jesus at my breast,
What King is there but You who could
Give everlasting good?
Wherefore I give my food.
Sing to Him, maidens, sing your best!
There is none that has such right
To your song as Heaven's King
Who every night
Is Infant Jesus at my breast'.

The Heavenly Banquet

I would like to have the men of Heaven in my own house;
with vats of good cheer laid out for them.
I would like to have the three Mary's,
their fame is so great.
I would like people from every corner of Heaven.
I would like them to be cheerful in their drinking.
I would like to have Jesus sitting here among them.
I would like a great lake of beer for the King of Kings.
I would like to be watching Heaven's family
Drinking it through all eternity.

The Crucifixion

At the cry of the first bird
They began to crucify Thee, O Swan!
Never shall lament cease because of that.
It was like the parting of day from night.
Ah, sore was the suffering borne
By the body of Mary's Son,

But sorer still to Him was the grief
Which for His sake
Came upon His Mother.

Sea Snatch

It has broken us, it has crushed us, it has drowned us,
O King of the starbright Kingdom of Heaven!
The wind has consumed us, swallowed us,
As timber is devoured by crimson fire from Heaven.
It has broken us, it has crushed us, it has drowned us,
O King of the starbright Kingdom of Heaven!

Promiscuity

I do not know with whom Edan will sleep,
but I do know that fair Edan will not sleep alone.

The Monk and His Cat

Pangur, white Pangur,
How happy we are
Alone together, Scholar and cat.
Each has his own work to do daily;
For you it is hunting, for me, study.
Your shining eye watches the wall;
My feeble eye is fixed on a book.
You rejoice when your claws entrap a mouse;
I rejoice when my mind fathoms a problem.
Pleased with his own art
Neither hinders the other;

Thus we live ever
Without tedium and envy.
Pangur, white Pangur,
How happy we are,
Alone together, Scholar and cat.

The Praises of God

How foolish the man who does not raise
His voice and praise with joyful words,
As he alone can, Heaven's High King.
To whom the light birds with no soul but air,
All day, everywhere laudations sing.

The Desire for Hermitage

Ah! To be all alone in a little cell with nobody near me;
beloved that pilgrimage before the last pilgrimage to Death.
Singing the passing hours to cloudy Heaven;
feeding upon dry bread and water from the cold spring.
That will be an end to evil when I am alone
in a lovely little corner among tombs
Far from the houses of the great.
Ah! To be all alone in a little cell, to be alone, all alone:
Alone I came into the world,
Alone I shall go from it.

Knoxville: Summer of 1915

It has become that time of evening when people sit on their porches, rocking gently and talking gently and watching the street and the standing up into their sphere of possession of the trees, of birds' hung havens, hangars. People go by; things go by. A horse, drawing a buggy, breaking his hollow iron music on the asphalt: a loud auto: a quiet auto: people in pairs, not in a hurry, scuffling, switching their weight of aestival body, talking casually, the taste hovering over them of vanilla, strawberry, pasteboard, and starched milk, the image upon them of lovers and horsemen, squaring with clowns in hueless amber.

A streetcar raising its iron moan; stopping; belling and starting, stertorous; rousing and raising again its iron increasing moan and swimming its gold windows and straw seats on past and past and past, the bleak spark crackling and cursing above it like a small malignant spirit set to dog its tracks; the iron whine rises on rising speed; still risen, faints; halts; the faint stinging bell; rises again, still fainter; fainting, lifting, lifts, faints foregone: forgotten. Now is the night one blue dew.

Now is the night one blue dew, my father has drained, he has coiled the hose. Low in the length of lawns, a frailing of fire who breathes... Parents on porches: rock and rock. From damp strings morning glories hang their ancient faces. The dry and exalted noise of the locusts from all the air at once enchants my eardrums.

On the rough wet grass of the back yard my father and mother have spread quilts. We all lie there, my mother, my father, my uncle, my aunt, and I too am lying there. They are not talking much, and the talk is quiet, of nothing in particular, of nothing at all in particular, of nothing at all. The stars are wide and alive, they seem each like a smile of great sweetness, and they seem very near. All my people are larger bodies than mine, with voices gentle and meaningless like the voices of sleeping birds. One is an artist, he is living at home. One is a musician, she is living at home. One is my mother who is good to me. One is my father who is good to me. By some chance, here they are, all on this earth; and who shall ever tell the sorrow of being on this earth, lying, on quilts, on the grass, in a summer evening, among the sounds of the night. May God bless my people, my uncle, my aunt, my mother, my good father, oh, remember them kindly in their time of trouble; and in the hour of their taking away.

After a little I am taken in and put to bed. Sleep, soft smiling, draws me unto her: and those receive me, who quietly treat me, as one familiar and well-beloved in that home: but will not, oh, will not, not now, not ever; but will not ever tell me who I am.