

**PHARAIIS; A
ROMANCE OF
THE ISLES**

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Pharais; a romance of the isles by Fiona Macleod

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FIONA MACLEOD

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PHARAIS

A Romance of the Isles

BY

FIONA MACLEOD



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1907

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"Mithich domh triall gu tigh Pharais."

(It is time for me to go up unto the House of Paradise.)
Muireadhach Albannach.

*"How many beautiful things have come to us from
Pharais."*

"Bileag-na-Toscúit."

920000

To

E. W. R.

Dear friend, — While you gratify me by your pleasure in this inscription, you modestly deprecate the dedication to you of this story of alien life — of that unfamiliar island-life so alien in all ways from the life of cities, and, let me add, from that of the great mass of the nation to which, in the communal sense, we both belong. But in the *Domhan-Tòir* of friendship there are resting-places where all barriers of race, training, and circumstance fall away in dust. At one of these places of peace we met, a long while ago, and found that we loved the same things, and in the same way. You have been in the charmed West yourself: have seen the gloom and shine of the mountains that throw their shadow on the sea: have heard the wave whisper along that haunted shore which none loves save with passion, and none, loving, can bear to be long parted from. You, unlike so many who delight only in the magic of sunshine and cloud, love this dear land when the mists drive across the hillsides, and the brown torrents are in spate, and the rain and the black wind make a gloom upon every loch, and fill with the dusk of storm every strath, and glen, and corrie. Not otherwise can one love it aright: “*Tir nam Beann s’nan gleann’ s’nan ghaisgach,*” as one of our ancient poets calls it — “The land of hills, and glens, and heroes.” You, too, like

Deirdre of old, have looked back on "Alba," and, finding it passing fair and dear, have, with the Celtic Helen, said in your heart—

Inmain tìr in tìr ud thoir,
Alba cona lingantaibh ! . . .

[*"Beloved is that eastern land,
Alba of the lochs."*]

In the mythology of the Gael are three forgotten deities, children of Delbaithe-Dana. These are Seithoir, Teithoir, and Keithoir. One dwells throughout the sea, and beneath the soles of the feet of another are the highest clouds; and these two may be held sacred for the beauty they weave for the joy of eye and ear. But now that, as surely none may gainsay, Keithoir is blind and weary, let us worship at his fane rather than give all our homage to the others. For Keithoir is the god of the earth; dark-eyed, shadowy brother of Pan; and his fane is among the lonely glens and mountains and lonelier isles of "Alba cona lingantaibh." It is because you and I are of the children of Keithoir that I wished to grace my book with your name.

The most nature-wrought of the English poets hoped he was not too late in transmuting into his own verse something of the beautiful mythology of Greece. But while Keats spun from the inexhaustible loom of genius, and I am but an obscure chronicler of obscure things, is it too presumptuous of me to hope that here, and mayhap elsewhere, I, the latest comer among older and worthier celebrants and co-enthusiasts, likewise may do something, howsoever little, to win a further measure of heed for, and more intimate sympathy with, that old charm and stellar beauty of Celtic thought and imagination, now, alas, like so many other lovely things, growing more and

more remote, discoverable seldom in books, and elusive amid the sayings and oral legends and fragmentary songs of a passing race ?

A passing race : and yet, mayhap not so. Change is inevitable ; and even if we could hear the wind blowing along Magh Mell — the Plain of Honey — we might list to a new note, bitter-sweet : and, doubtless, the waves falling over the green roof of Tir-na-Thonn' murmur drowsily of a shifting of the veils of circumstance, which Keithoir weaves blindly in his dark place. But what was, surely is ; and what is, surely may yet be. The form changes ; the essential abides. As the saying goes among the islefolk : The shadow fleets beneath the cloud driven by the wind, and the cloud falls in rain or is sucked of the sun, but the wind sways this way and that for ever. It may well be that the Celtic Dream is not doomed to become a memory merely. Were it so, there would be less joy in all Springs to come, less hope in all brown Autumns ; and the cold of a deathlier chill in all Winters still dreaming by the Pole. For the Celtic joy in the life of Nature — the Celtic vision — is a thing apart : it is a passion ; a visionary rapture. There is none like it among the peoples of our race.

Meanwhile, there are a few remote spots, as yet inviolate. Here, Anima Celtica still lives and breathes and hath her being. She dreams ; but if she awake, it may not necessarily be to a deepening twilight, or to a forlorn passage to Tir Tairngire — that Land of Promise whose borders shine with the loveliness of all forfeited, or lost, or banished dreams and realities of Beauty. It may be that she will arise to a wider sway, over a disfrontiered realm. Blue are the hills that are far from us. Dear saying of the Gael, whose soul as well as whose heart speaks therein. Far hills, recede, re-