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The Banshee

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THE BANSHEE.  
(By J. BARTLEY SHEA.)

## Part I.

When silence sweeps the chords of night  
Upon the lonely mere  
Evoking sounds too low, too light,  
Too sweet for mortal ear;  
When Moonlight weaves a web of gold  
Athwart the silent glen  
The Banshee's wailing tale is told  
To sympathetic men.  
For, not amid the winter's storm  
Upon the rocky shore  
Where floats above the waves a form  
That shrieks above their roar—  
Not there where hover fiends of gloom  
The gentler Shee is seen  
But in the glen or by the tomb  
Or 'neath the forest-green.  
Low, low she croons the livelong night  
Nor breaks the wild-birds' rest.  
Lone, lone on Maluin's misty height  
She tabors on her breast;  
She looks across thy tow'rs Dun-Cuidhe  
And down o'er Cualagh Bay  
And wails her dismal monody  
For heroes past away!  
I saw her on the mountain-height  
Betwixt the dark and dawn  
More tenuous than the gauzy light  
That on the uplands shone;  
And oh! the sadness of her song  
Vibrating long and low  
Swapt o'er my heart like thoughts of wrong  
That rise from long-ago!  
Sad pilgrim from another age,  
Sad sage of darker times  
That porest o'er the tainted page  
Of mutual wrath and crimes,  
When I would sing of unborn years  
In other notes than thine  
Teach me thy song, its woes, its fears,  
And I will teach thee mine.

## Part II.

Perhaps 'twas but an empty dream,  
Perhaps a vision true,  
But while the moonlight's lonely beam  
Lay shimm'ring on the dew  
I thought I sat on Maluin's height  
And watched the sparkling sea,  
And Hope was seated on my right  
And on my left the Shee.  
And soft the woful Banshee spoke  
(The genius of the Past)—  
Her accents scarce the stillness broke  
That o'er the earth was cast:—  
"My life is hidden with thy sires  
And all their dreams are mine,  
I hover round their smoulder'd fires,  
And wail the hopes they tine.  
"And I have seen them, race on race,  
Like sea-waves, come and go,  
Have seen them sink and leave no trace  
Nor name that man may know;  
And all I loved to-night are gone  
Like mists from off the hill,  
Their fight unfought, their work undone,  
For failure follows still!  
"And ev'ry race that rises now  
Is meaner than the last,  
And ne'er will come an age, I trow,

So glorious as the Past;  
The stone on Kill-Catheerin's sod  
Is all with mosses grown,  
And they who once that acre trod  
Are deader than the stone!  
"Beneath that stone in yonder dell  
Ancestral bones decay  
But there ancestral hopes as well  
And dreams, lie dead as they;  
For commerce comes and Faith decays  
And old ideals die,  
And all alone to weep and praise  
Thy fathers, here am I!"  
And sad she looked, and sad she sigh'd  
And sad she wrung her hands  
The spirit whom in days of pride  
No mortal understands;  
While slowly up the distant height  
Clomb the re-nascent day  
And sad upon the waning night  
Her accents died away!

## Part III.

Then Hope behold the growing dawn  
On Hungry's rugged brow,  
And hiled afar the lightsome morn  
And glad she spoke, I trow!  
"Thou son of long-departed sires  
But heir of better days  
Behold where Morning lights his fires  
And sheds auspicious rays!  
"Thy fathers fought a losing fight  
And dreamed delusive dreams,  
They lived in darkness, thou in light,  
Live as the light beseems.  
For yonder dawning typifies  
A day that yet shall be,  
Whose glorious dawning shall arise  
On men whose souls are free!  
"Look thou on history's chequered page,  
What do its lines reveal?  
The Future holds the golden age  
The Past the age of steel!—  
Thy fathers' hopes were empty dreams,  
Their aspirations small,  
Their voice the wordless voice of streams  
That in the tempest call!  
"But God hath taught thee to aspire  
And give thy thoughts a tongue  
Hath touched thy frigid soul with fire,  
And shown thee right and wrong.  
Oh! thank the God who gave unrest  
And taught thee to rebel,  
Who bade thee seek and love the best  
Where'er that best may dwell.  
"Seek not all beauty in one hue,  
All sweetness in one chord,  
Nay, in a broader, higher view  
Hold thou the Truth adored;  
And let all truth become thy creed,  
All earth become thy home,  
E'en so shall ev'ry worthy deed  
Thy race's deed become!  
"For why shouldst thou contract thy mind  
To any age or race  
Whose soul enfranchis'd cannot find  
On earth a resting-place?  
No! wide as is the starry heav'n  
And free as is the day  
So wide, so free to thee is giv'n  
A soul to disobey!"