

George MacDonald (1824-1905)

5 *Legend of the Corrievrechan*

Prince Breacan of Denmark was lord of the strand
And lord of the billowy sea;
Lord of the sea and lord of the land,
He might have let maidens be!

A maiden he met with locks of gold, 5
Straying beside the sea:
Maidens listened in days of old,
And repented grievously.

Wiser he left her in evil wiles,
Went sailing over the sea; 10
Came to the lord of the Western Isles:
Give me thy daughter, said he.

The lord of the Isles he laughed, and said:
Only a king of the sea
May think the Maid of the Isles to wed, 15
And such, men call not thee!

Hold thine own three nights and days
In yon whirlpool of the sea,
Or turn thy prow and go thy ways
And let the isle-maiden be. 20

Prince Breacan he turned his dragon prow
To Denmark over the sea:
Wise women, he said, now tell me how
In yon whirlpool to anchor me.

Make a cable of hemp and a cable of wool 25
And a cable of maidens' hair,

And hie thee back to the roaring pool
And anchor in safety there.

The smiths of Greydule, on the eve of Yule,
Will forge three anchors rare; 30
The hemp thou shalt pull, thou shalt shear the wool,
And the maidens will bring their hair.

Of the hair that is brown thou shalt twist one strand,
Of the hair that is raven another;
Of the golden hair thou shalt twine a band 35
To bind the one to the other!

The smiths of Greydule, on the eve of Yule,
They forged three anchors rare;
The hemp he did pull, and he shore the wool,
And the maidens brought their hair. 40

He twisted the brown hair for one strand,
The raven hair for another;
He twined the golden hair in a band
To bind the one to the other.

He took the cables of hemp and wool, 45
He took the cable of hair,
He hied him back to the roaring pool,
He cast the three anchors there.

The whirlpool roared, and the day went by,
And night came down on the sea; 50
But or ever the morning broke the sky
The hemp was broken in three.

The night it came down, the whirlpool it ran,
The wind it fiercely blew;
And or ever the second morning began 55
The wool it parted in two.

The storm it roared all day the third,
The whirlpool wallowed about,
The night came down like a wild black bird,
But the cable of hair held out. 60

Round and round with a giddy swing
Went the sea-king through the dark;
Round went the rope in the swivel-ring,
Round reeled the straining bark.

Prince Breacan he stood on his dragon prow, 65
A lantern in his hand:
Blest be the maidens of Denmark now,
By them shall Denmark stand!

He watched the rope through the tempest black
A lantern in his hold: 70
Out, out, alack! one strand will crack!
It is the strand of gold!

The third morn clear and calm came out:
No anchored ship was there!
The golden strand in the cable stout 75
Was not all of maidens' hair.

1867

(From *The Poetical Works of George MacDonald*. Vol. 2.
London: Chatto & Windus, 1893)