

James Stephens is one of the writers who produced the works that have come to be called the Celtic Revival. In the late Victorian era writers in Ireland, Scotland and Wales had their own renaissance of the classical works of medieval celtic literature. In Ireland this revival took on an added dimension as it became associated through figures such as Yeates and Maude Gonne with the struggle for Irish Independence. Ultimately the rediscovery of classical celtic poetry and prose gave a language, a history and a nationalistic justification to the rebels. William Butler Yeates, John Millington Synge, Oliver St. John Gogarty, James Joyce and Samuel Beckett are all renowned worldwide for their contributions to international literature. Be it on stage or in prose, they brought a poetic flavour to their art, a free flowing and lilting verse that permeates all their work. This signature blank verse gives an ancient grandeur to the literature of the period, carrying echoes of the ancient celtic poets, and redolent of Chaucer and Shakespeare. James Stephens is less well known than his compatriots, but no lesser in quality. If anything his is the purest voice of the Celtic Revival. He is easily on a par with writers such as John Milton and Edmund Spenser, who wrote similarly high works of art. But the beauty of Stephens is that his subject is the folklore of daily Irish life. Happy and jolly tales of leprechauns and fairies, small events of great import, the philosophy of field and wood. It is at once grand and accessible. The tales have a childlike attraction and simplicity to them that is belied by the quality of the prose. Whether reading for a bit of fantasy, a good laugh, or to study literature, you will not regret reading these tales.

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