

POETRY AND IRELAND: ESSAYS BY
W. B. YEATS AND LIONEL JOHNSON

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POETRY AND PATRIOTISM

I

When Mr. O'Leary died I could not bring myself to go to his funeral, though I had been once his close fellow-worker, for I shrank from seeing about his grave so many whose Nationalism was different from anything he had taught, or that I could share. He belonged, as did his friend John F. Taylor, to the romantic conception of Irish Nationality on which Lionel Johnson and I myself founded, so far as it was founded on anything but literature, our Art and our Irish criticism. Perhaps his spirit, if it can care for or can see old friends now, will accept this apology for an absence that has troubled me. I learned much from him and much from Taylor, who will always seem to me the greatest orator I have heard, & that ideal Ireland, perhaps from this out an imaginary Ireland, in whose service I labour, will always be in many essentials their Ireland. They were the last to speak an understanding of life and Nationality, built up by the generation of Grattan, which read Homer and Virgil, and by the generation of Davis, which had been pierced through by the idealism of Mazzini, * and of the European revolutionists of

* Rose Kavanagh, the poet, wrote to her religious adviser, from I think Leitrim, where she lived, and asked him to get her the works of Mazzini; he replied, you must mean Manzone.

the mid-century. O'Leary had joined the Fenian movement with no hope of success as we know, but because he believed such a movement good for the moral character of the people, and had taken his long imprisonment without complaining. Even to the very end, while often speaking of his prison life, he would have thought it took from his Roman courage to describe its hardship. The worth of a man's acts in the moral memory, a continual height of mind in the doing of them, seemed more to him than their immediate result, if indeed, the sight of many failures had not taken away the thought of success. A man was not to lie, or even to give up his dignity on any patriotic plea, and I have heard him say, 'I have but one religion, the old Persian: to bend the bow and tell the truth,' and again, 'There are things a man must not do to save a nation,' and again, 'A man must not cry in public to save a nation;' and that we might not forget justice in the passion of controversy: 'There was never cause so bad that it has not been defended by good men, for what seemed to them good reasons.' His friend had a burning and brooding imagination that divided men not according to their achievement but by their degrees of sincerity, and by their mastery over a straight, and to my thought, too obvious logic that seemed to him essential to sincerity. Neither man

had an understanding of style or of literature in the right sense of the word, though both were great readers, but because their imagination could come to rest no placeshort of greatness, they hoped, John O'Leary especially, for an Irish literature of the greatest kind. When Lionel Johnson and Katharine Tynan, as she then was, and I myself began to reform Irish poetry we thought to keep unbroken the thread running up to Grattan which John O'Leary had put into our hands, though it might be our business to explore new paths of the labyrinth. We sought to make a more subtle rhythm, a more organic form than that of the older Irish poets who wrote in English, but always to remember certain ardent ideas and high attitudes of mind which were to our imagination the nation itself, so far as a nation can be summarised in the intellect. If you had asked an ancient Spartan what made Sparta Sparta, he would have answered, the Laws of Lycurgus, and many Englishmen look back to Bunyan and to Milton as we did to Grattan and to Mitchell. Lionel Johnson was able to take up into his Art one portion of this tradition that I could not, for he had a gift of speaking political thought in fine verse that I have always lacked. I, on the other hand, was more pre-occupied with Ireland, for he had other interests, & took from Allingham and Walsh their passion for

country spiritism, and from Ferguson his pleasure in heroic legend, and while seeing all in the light of European literature, found my symbols of expression in Ireland. One thought often possessed me very strongly. New from the influence, mainly the personal influence, of William Morris, I dreamed of enlarging Irish hate, till we had come to hate with a passion of patriotism what Morris and Ruskin hated. Mitchell had all but poured some of that hate drawn from Carlyle, who had it of an earlier and as I think, cruder sort, into the blood of Ireland; and were we not a poor nation with ancient courage, unblackened fields, and a barbarous gift of self-sacrifice? Ruskin and Morris had spent themselves in vain because they had found no passion to harness to their thought, but here was unwasted passion, and precedents in the popular memory, for every needed thought and action. Perhaps, too, it would be possible to find in that new philosophy of spiritism coming to a seeming climax in the work of Ernest Myers, and in the investigations of uncounted obscure persons, what could change the country spiritism into a reasoned belief that would put its might into all the rest. A new belief seemed coming that would be so simple & demonstratable, and above all so mixed into the common scenery of the world, that it would set the whole man on fire

and liberate him from a thousand obediences and complexities. We were to forge in Ireland a new sword on our old traditional anvil for that great battle that must in the end re-establish the old confident joyous world. But the while I worked with this idea, founding societies that became quickly or slowly everything I despise, one part of me looked on, mischievous and mocking, and the other part spoke words which were more and more unreal, as the attitude of mind became more and more strained and difficult. Miss Maud Gonne could still draw great crowds out of the slums by her beauty and sincerity, and speak to them of 'Mother Ireland with the crown of stars about her head.' But gradually the political movement she was associated with, finding it hard to build up any fine lasting thing, became content to attack little persons and little things. All movements are held together more by what they hate than what they love, for love separates and individualises and quiets, but the nobler movements, the only movements on which literature can found itself, hate great and lasting things. All who have any old tradition, have something of aristocracy, but we had opposing us from the first, though not strongly from the first, a type of mind which though it had lacked influence in the generation of Grattan, and almost lacked it in that of

Davis, has in ours made a new nation out of Ireland that was once old and full of memories.

I remember when I was twenty years old, arguing on my way home from a Young Ireland Society that Ireland with its hieratic Church, its readiness to accept leadership in intellectual things, and John O'Leary spoke much of this readiness, * its Latin hatred of middle paths and uncompleted arguments, could never create a democratic poet of the type of Burns, although it had tried to do so more than once, but that its genius would in the long run be aristocratic and lonely. Whenever I had known some old countryman, I had heard stories and sayings that arose out of an imagination, that would have understood Homer better than 'The Cotter's Saturday Night' or 'Highland Mary,' because it was an ancient imagination where the sediment had found the time to settle, and I believed that the makers of deliberate literature could still take passion and theme, though but little thought, from such as he. On some such old and broken stem I thought, have all the most beautiful roses been grafted.

* I have heard him say more than once, 'I will not say our people know good from bad, but I will say, that they don't hate the good when it is pointed out to them, as a great many people do in England.'

II

Him who trembles before the flame and the flood,
And the winds that blow through the starry ways;
Let the starry winds, and the flame and the flood
Cover over and hide, for he has no part
With the proud, majestic, multitude.

Three types of men have made all beautiful things. Aristocracies have made beautiful manners, because their place in the world puts them above the fear of life, and the countrymen have made beautiful stories and beliefs, because they have nothing to lose and so do not fear, and the artists have made all the rest, because Providence has filled them with recklessness. All these look backward to a long tradition, for being without fear, they have held to whatever pleased them. The others being always anxious have come to possess little that is good in itself, and are always changing from thing to thing, for whatever they do or have, must be a means to something else, and they have so little belief that anything can be an end in itself, that they cannot understand you if you say 'All the most valuable things are useless.' They prefer the stalk to the flower, and believe that painting and poetry exist that there may be instruction, and love that there may be children, and theatres, that busy men may rest, and holidays that

busy men may go on being busy. At all times they fear and even hate the things that have worth in themselves, for that worth may suddenly, as it were a fire, consume their book of Life, where the world is represented by cyphers and symbols; and before all else, they fear irreverent joy and unserviceable sorrow. It seems to them, that those who have been freed by position, by poverty, or by the traditions of Art, have something terrible about them, a light that is unendurable to eyesight. They complain much of that commandment that we can do almost what we will, if we do it gaily, and think that freedom is but a trifling with the world.

If we would find a company of our own way of thinking, we must go backward to turretted walls, to courts, to high rocky places, to little walled towns, to jesters like that jester of Charles the Fifth who made mirth out of his own death; to the Duke Guidobaldo in his sickness, or Duke Frederick in his strength, to all those who understood that life is not lived at all, if not lived for contemplation or excitement.

Certainly we could not delight in that so courtly thing, the poetry of light love, if it were sad, for only when we are gay over a thing, and can play with it, do we show ourselves its master, and have minds clear enough for strength. The raging fire and the

destructive sword are portions of eternity, too great for the eye of man, wrote Blake, and it is only before such things, before a love like that of Tristan and Iseult, before noble or ennobled death, that the free mind permits itself aught but brief sorrow. That we may be free from all the rest, sullen anger, solemn virtue, calculating anxiety, gloomy suspicion, prevaricating hope, we should be reborn in gaiety. Because there is submission in a pure sorrow, we should sorrow alone over what is greater than ourselves, nor too soon admit that greatness, but all that is less than we are, should stir us to some joy. Pure joy masters and impregnates; and so to world end, strength shall laugh and wisdom mourn.

III

In life courtesy and self possession, and in the arts style, are the sensible impressions of the free mind, for both arise out of a deliberate shaping of all things, and from never being swept away, whatever the emotion, into confusion or dulness. The Japanese as the fourth of their heroic virtues, have commended courtesy at all times whatsoever, and though a writer, who has to withdraw so much of his thought out of his life that he may learn his craft, may find many his betters in daily courtesy, he should never be without style, which is but high

breeding in words and in argument. He is indeed the creator of the standards of manners in their subtlety, for he alone can know the ancient records and be like some mystic courtier who, having stolen the keys from the girdle of Time, can wander where it please him amid the splendours of ancient courts. Sometimes it may be, he is permitted the license of cap and bell, or even the madman's bunch of straws, but he never forgets or leaves at home the seal and the signature. He has at all times the freedom of the well bred, and being bred to the tact of words can take what theme he pleases, unlike the shopkeepers, who are rightly compelled to be very strict in their conversation. Who should be free if he were not? for none other has a continual deliberate self-delighting happiness— style, the only thing that is immortal in literature as Sainte-Beuve has said, a still unexpended energy, after all that the argument or the story needs, a still unbroken pleasure after the immediate end has been accomplished—and builds this up into a most personal and wilful fire, transfiguring words and sounds and events. It is the playing of strength when the day's work is done, a secret between a craftsman and his craft, and is so inseparable in his nature, that he has it most of all amid overwhelming emotion, and in the face of death. Shakespeare's persons when the last darkness has gathered

about them, speak out of an ecstasy that is one half the self surrender of sorrow, and one half the last playing and mockery of the victorious sword, before the defeated world. The style is in the arrangement of events as in the words, in that touch of extravagance, of irony, of surprise, which is set there after the desire of logic has been satisfied and all that is merely necessary established, and leaves one, not in the circling necessity, but caught up into the freedom of self-delight: it is as it were, the foam upon the cup, the long pheasant's feather on the horse's head, the spread peacock over the pasty. If it be very conscious, very deliberate, as it may be in comedy, for comedy is more personal than tragedy, we call it fantasy, perhaps even mischievous fantasy, recognising how disturbing it is to all that drag a ball at the ankle. This joy because it must be always making and mastering, remains in the hands and in the tongue of the artist, but with his eyes he enters upon a submissive, sorrowful contemplation of the great irremediable things, and he is known from other men by making all he handles like himself, and yet by the unlikeness to himself, of all that comes before him in a pure contemplation. It may have been his enemy or his love, or his cause that set him dreaming, and certainly the phœnix can but open her young wings in a flaming nest, but all hope and hate

vanishes in the dream, and if his mistress brag of the song or his enemy fear it, it is not that either has its praise or blame, but that the twigs of the holy nest are not easily set afire. The verses may make his mistress famous as Helen or give victory to his cause, not because he has been either's servant, but because men delight to honour and to remember all that have served contemplation. It had been easier to fight, to die even, for Charles's house with Marvel's poem in the memory, but there is no zeal of service that had not been an impurity in the pure soil where the marvel grew. Timon of Athens contemplates his own end, and orders his tomb by the beachy margin of the flood, and Cleopatra sets the asp to her bosom, and their words move us because their sorrow is not their own at tomb or asp, but for all men's fate. That shaping joy has kept the sorrow pure, as it had kept it were the emotion love or hate, for the nobleness of the Arts is in the mingling of contraries, the extremity of sorrow, the extremity of joy, perfection of personality, the perfection of its surrender, overflowing turbulent energy, and marmorean stillness; and its red rose opens at the meeting of the two beams of the cross, and at the trysting place of mortal and immortal, time and eternity. No new man has ever plucked that rose, or found that trysting place, for he could but come to the understanding

of himself, to the mastery of unlocking words after long frequenting of the great Masters, hardly without ancestral memory of the like. Even knowledge is not enough, for the 'recklessness' Castiglione thought necessary in good manners is necessary in this likewise, & if a man has it not he will be gloomy, and had better to his marketing again.

IV

When I saw John O'Leary first, every young Catholic man who had intellectual ambition fed his imagination with the poetry of Young Ireland; and the verses of even the least known of its poets were expounded with a devout ardour at Young Ireland Societies and the like, and their birthdays celebrated. The School of writers I belonged to, tried to found itself on much of the subject matter of this poetry, and what was almost more in our thoughts, to begin a more imaginative tradition in Irish literature, by a criticism at once remorseless and enthusiastic. It was our criticism, I think, that set Clarence Mangan at the head of the Young Ireland poets in the place of Davis, and put Sir Samuel Ferguson, who had died with but little fame as a poet, next in the succession. Our attacks, mine especially, on verse which owed its position to its moral or political worth, roused a

resentment which even I find it hard to imagine to-day, and our verse was attacked in return, and not for anything peculiar to ourselves, but for all that it had in common with the accepted poetry of the world, and most of all for its lack of rhetoric, its refusal to preach a doctrine or to consider the seeming necessities of a cause. Now, after so many years, I can see how natural, how poetical even, an opposition was, that showed what large numbers could not call up certain high feelings, without the association of certain rhymes, or believe that we had not wronged the feeling when we did but attack the rhyme. I have just read in a newspaper that Sir Charles Gavan Duffy recited before his death his favourite poem, one of the worst of the patriotic poems of Young Ireland, and it has brought all this to mind, for the opposition to our School claimed him as its leader. When I was at Siena, I noticed that the Byzantine style persisted in faces of Madonnas for several generations after it had given way to a more natural style in the less loved faces of saints and martyrs. Passion had grown accustomed to those limbs and narrow eyes, which are almost Japanese, & to those gaunt hollow cheeks, and would have thought it sacrilege to change. We would not it is likely, have found listeners, if John O'Leary, the irreproachable patriot, had not supported us. It was as clear to him that a writer

must not write badly, or ignore the example of the great masters in the fancied or real service of a cause, as it was that he must not lie for it or grow hysterical. I believed in those days that a new intellectual life would begin, like that of Young Ireland, but more profound and personal, and that could we but get a few plain principles accepted, new poets and writers of prose would make an immortal music. I think I was more blind than Johnson, though I judge this from his poems rather than anything I remember of his talk, for he never talked ideas, but as was common with his generation in Oxford, facts, and immediate impressions from life. With others this renunciation was but a pose, a superficial reaction from the disordered abundance of the middle century, but with him it was the radical life. He was in all a traditionalist, gathering out of the past phrases, moods, attitudes, and disliking ideas less for their uncertainty than because they made the mind itself changing and restless. He measured the Irish tradition by another greater than itself, and was quick to feel any falling asunder of the two, yet at many moments they seemed but one in his imagination. Ireland, all through his poem of that name, speaks to him with the voice of the great poets, and in 'Ireland Dead' she is still mother of perfect heroism, but there doubt comes too.

Can it be they do repent
That they went, thy chivalry,
Those sad ways magnificent.

And 'in Ways of War' dedicated to John O'Leary,
he dismissed the belief in an heroic Ireland as but a
dream.

A dream! A dream! an ancient dream!
Yet, ere peace come to Innisfail,
Some weapons on some field must gleam,
Some burning glory, fire the Gael.

That field may lie beneath the sun,
Fair for the treading of an host:
That field in realms of thought be won,
And armed hands do their uttermost:

Some way, to faithful Innisfail,
Shall come the majesty and awe
Of martial truth, that must prevail
To lay on all the eternal law.

I do not think either of us saw that as belief in the
possibility of armed insurrection withered, the old
romantic nationalism would wither too, and that
the young would become less ready to find pleasure
in whatever they believed to be literature. Poetical

tragedy, and indeed all the more intense forms of literature, had lost their hold on the general mass of men in other countries, as life grew safe and the sense of comedy, which is the social bond in times of peace as tragic feeling is in times of war, had become the inspiration of popular art. I always knew this, but I believed that the memory of danger, and the reality of it seemed near enough sometimes, would last long enough to give Ireland her imaginative opportunity. I could not foresee that a new class which had begun to rise into power under the shadow of Parnell, would change the nature of the Irish movement, that, needing no longer great sacrifices, nor bringing any great risk to individuals, could do without exceptional men, and those activities of the mind that are founded on the exceptional moment. John O'Leary had spent much of his thought in an unavailing war with the agrarian party, * believing it the root of change, but the fox that crept into the badger's hole did not come from there. Power

* A small political organizer told me once, that he and a certain friend got together somewhere in Tipperary a great meeting of farmers, for O'Leary on his coming out of prison, and O'Leary had said at it: 'The landlords have given us some few leaders and I like them for that, and the artisans have given us great numbers of good patriots, and so I like them best: but you I do not like at all, for you have never given us any one.' I have known but one that had his moral courage, and that was a woman with beauty to give her courage and self-possession.

passed to small shopkeepers, to clerks, to that very class, who had seemed to John O'Leary so ready to bend to the power of others, to men who had risen above the traditions of the countryman, without learning those of cultivated life or even educating themselves, and who, because of their poverty, their ignorance, their superstitious piety, are much subject to all kinds of fear. Immediate victory, immediate utility became everything, and the conviction, which is in all who have run great risks for a cause's sake, in the O'Learys and Mazzinis as in all rich natures, that life is greater than the cause, withered, and we artists, who are the servants not of any cause but of mere naked life, and above all of that life in its nobler forms, where joy and sorrow are one, Artificers of the Great Moment, became as elsewhere in Europe protesting individual voices. Ireland's great moment had passed, and she had filled no roomy vessels with strong sweet wine, where we have filled our porcelain jars against the coming winter.

W. B. Yeats. August 1907.

The following essay was delivered as a lecture, and I have left out those unimportant opening words, which a lecturer finds necessary, that his audience may grow used to his voice and his appearance.

Lionel Johnson was small but delicately made, and with great dignity of manner, and he spoke with so much music that what had been in another monotony, became nobility of style. His reading or speaking of poetry befitted his own particularly, that had from scholarship and from the loneliness and gravity of his mind an air of high lineage, but even poor verses were beautiful upon his lips. I think no man ever saw him angry or petulant, or till his infirmity had grown on him, shaken from his self possession, and it often seemed as if he played at life, as if it were an elaborate ritual that would soon be over. I am certain he had prevision of his end, and that he was himself that mystic and cavalier who sang:

Go from me: I am one of those, who fall.
What! hath no cold wind swept your heart at all,
In my sad company? before the end,
Go from me, dear my friend!

Yours are the victories of light: your feet
Rest from good toil, where rest is brave and sweet.
But after warfare in a mourning gloom,
I rest in clouds of doom.

Have you not read so, looking in these eyes,
Is it the common light of the pure skies,
Lights up their shadowy depths? the end is set:
Though the end be not yet.

POETRY AND PATRIOTISM

It appears to be the creed of some critics, that in the Irish poetry of some sixty, fifty, and forty years ago, in the poetry of the *Nation* and of 'Young Ireland,' with their immediate predecessors and followers, we have a fixed and unalterable standard, whereby to judge all Irish poetry, past and present and to come. In the poetry of that great generation lies beauty, all beauty, and nothing but beauty. Against any living Irish poet, who writes in any style uncultivated then, is brought the dreadful charge of being artistic: and sometimes, if it be a very flagrant case, the unspeakable accusation of being English. Now, I heartily hate the cant of 'art for art's sake:' I have spent years, in trying to understand, what is meant by that imbecile phrase. Also, I have a healthy hatred of the West Briton heresy. Further, no Irishman living has a greater love, and a greater admiration, for the splendid poetry of Davis, Mangan, and their fellows. But I dislike coercion in literature: and it seems to me an uncritical dictation of the critics, when they tell a writer, that he or she is no true Irish poet, because he or she does not write rousing ballads, or half-humorous love songs, or rhetorical laments, or a mixture of historical and political verse; and because he or she takes exceeding pains, with his or her workmanship and art.

An attention to form and style is apparently an English vice: well! certainly it is an English thing, just as it was Greek and Roman, yes! and Irish also, once. The intricacy and delicacy, the artfulness and elaboration, of Gaelic and Cymric verse, are unparalleled in European literature: so minute, so detailed, so difficult was the attention paid to the technical side of poetry, that Irish and Welsh scholars of unblemished patriotism have deplored it as fatal, to the free poetical spirit. There is not a critic in Europe, who has written upon Celtic literature, without noting the singular charm, the *curiosa felicitas*, of Celtic style: we all know the admiration of Renan in France, of Arnold in England, for its grace and beauty. Music and poetry were held by our forefathers in an almost religious veneration: the poet passed through a long discipline of the strictest severity, before he reached the high dignities of his profession. There is no modern cultivator of arduous poetical forms, the ballade, rondeau, villanelle, triolet, sonnet, who endures half the labour, that was demanded by the ancient laws of Irish and Welsh metre. An Irish poet of to-day may lack a thousand Irish virtues: but if he give a devoted care to the perfecting of his art, he will have at least one Celtic note, one characteristic Irish virtue. While he is intent upon the artful turns and cadences of his

music, and the delicate choice of his words, striving to achieve the last graces and perfections possible to his work, he is at one in spirit with the poets of old Ireland. The old Irish forms are barely possible in English: but their spirit is attainable. And if he choose to take the more subtile and ingenious of English forms, he may do so, without the crime of borrowing from the enemy: for scarce one of them is native to England. Considering, to what magnificent uses Rome turned the forms and metres of Greece, and England those of France and Italy, without ceasing to be Roman and English; we need not fear, lest an Irish poet should cease to be Irish, if he study, and borrow, and adapt, the best achievements of foreign art, to the service of the Irish Muses. But Irish poetry to-day, I may be told, should be a national weapon: we want to reach and touch the hearts of our listeners, to fan the sacred fire, to be passionate and burning and impetuous. Why trouble about minute proprieties or delicate graces of art, so long as our verse go with a ring and a swing, celebrating the glories of Ireland, or with a sigh and a cry, lamenting her griefs? Is there not something cold-blooded and slow-pulsed, in writing without vehemence and a rush of sentiment? Leave metre-mongering to the young decadents and aesthetes of Paris & London: and let Irish verse sweep

unfettered as the Irish winds, and surge free as the Irish seas, and satisfy the Irish people. Well! like most stump oratory, that is very high and mighty and impressive: but it is not argument. Passionate impulse and patient pains are not incompatible. On the other side, there is sometimes an equally unreasoning depreciation of anything rhetorical, anything spontaneous: and the whole battle, the whole confusion, comes of ignoring the fact, that there are many legitimate kinds of poetry, that each & every kind has a right to live, and that we can only insist upon a poem's being good of its own kind. One most legitimate kind of poetry is the political and social poetry, that is directly practical in its appeal; propagandist poetry. At a time of national excitement, verse may be a tremendously of the national cause: verse that is a trumpet-call to action; verse full of great memories and of great prophecies; verse that denounces, inspires, triumphs, wails, in melodies memorable and moving. It may laugh, or weep, or shout the war cry: use the keenest satire, in the homeliest language, or thunder in the accents of a Hebrew prophet: it will be thrown off at a white heat, it must be ready at every turn, and never flag. It passes from singing of a thousand years ago, to singing of yesterday and to-morrow; from the champions of romance, to the champions of to-day.

It must be vehement and clear, emphatic and direct: it must employ all the resource of bold rhetoric, large phrases and great words. It must fall irresistibly into music, and be sung by the crowds in the street: it must stir the blood, and thrill the pulses, and set the heart on fire. Such verse was the best verse of Young Ireland: and I do not know, in any language, a body of political and social verse, at once so large and so good. Much of it rises far above the level of occasional verse, and is superb national poetry: some of it was written by men, who would have been poets under any circumstances, by the compulsion of nature, and the gift of fate. There is no lack of reasons, for the immense influence of this verse upon subsequent literature: for one thing, it was the first great general outburst of Irish verse in English; Moore had sung by himself, and not only in English, but in England. Now, for the first time, a mass of national literature came into existence, written in English by politicians, scholars, men of the learned professions, as well as by men of the people, all living and working for Ireland and in Ireland. No such literary glory had accompanied the rise of the United Irishmen, or any other national movement: it showed the world, that if the ancient speech of Ireland were doomed and dying, yet the Irish genius could express the Irish spirit in the

language of their conquerors, with no loss of national enthusiasm and national passion. Headed, as the movement was, by at least two or three men of literary genius, and a score or so of exceptional literary talents, its writings, and especially its verse, became, as it were, the sacred scriptures of the national cause. And for Ireland, they are indeed κτήματα ἐς αἰὲν, possessions for all time, justly venerated and loved. But this very splendour of achievement blinded, in some ways, the critical faculties: we have been tempted to forget, that the work, done in the rapture and heat of a great enterprise, must have the defects of its qualities. In many cases, the penalty paid for immediate success, won on an instant, was a lack of perfection, the abiding marks of haste. And much of the work, admirable alike in intention and in execution, had no pretensions to being work of the highest order: it belongs, definitely and decidedly, to the class of popular political verse. Now, whilst the peasant poetry, the folk songs, of most countries, and Ireland is no exception, are beautiful, and artistically excellent; the more purely political verse, the verse expressing national sentiments of hope or fear, defiance or doubt, are always inferior to the folk songs, and are often abominable. If there be a worse poem than *God save the Queen*, I do not know it:

‘Confound their politics,
Frustrate their knavish tricks !’

I ask you, is that poetry ? Is it even decent verse ? Does it show any fine and beautiful use of language ? Or take the *Marseillaise*, and the *Wacht am Rhein*: are they distinguished and superior examples of French and German poetry ? Yet to hear a vast multitude of French or Germans singing those songs, swayed with one storm of emotion, brings all the blood to one’s heart, and the tear to one’s eyes: the air seems charged with electricity. A regimental march may be very far from good music: but the first roll of the drums and shrilling of the fifes make many a man burn to be a soldier. It is simply and solely association, that has this magical effect: association can turn downright ugliness into a thing of beauty, or at the least, into something loveable. Think of some house, which you have known, all your life: it may be ugly, uncomfortable, and all that is distressing: but what a world of memories centre there, and make it the dearest place on earth to you ! It is the same with everything: remember Scott in Italy, blind to its beauty and its charm, hungering for the heather and the wild hills of his home, and murmuring old Jacobite songs in places golden with classic memories: or the Brontës, sick at heart in

glittering Brussels, with longing for their lonely Yorkshire moors. Think with what regret we consent to the necessary destruction of some church, or public building, no longer serviceable, but thronged with old recollections. I need not speak here of the Irish exile's hunger for his old home in the old land, however prosperous he be elsewhere, and however hard may have been the old life. It is in this way that things, in themselves undesirable, receive a consecration from memory, and habit, and association. The most magnificent lyric in the world could not replace *God save the Queen*, in the heart of a loyal Englishman. But associations do not alter facts: the house, the landscape, the poem, endeared to us, have no attraction for the stranger, the dispassionate critic, who do not feel their glamour. And so the verse of Young Ireland, good, bad, and indifferent, has been accepted altogether, as a memory to the older men, as a tradition to the younger: not wholly to the advantage of Irish literature, though much to the credit of Irish nature.

Perhaps, the most irritating mode of criticism is to complain of the thing criticized, for not being something else. A poet writes a little book of light songs; and he is told that this is all very well in its way, but why does he not try his hand at an epic? He writes, let us say, dreams and all manner of imaginative

things, in plaintive, lovely cadences, about the faeries, or about the mysteries of the world, birth and life and death, writing out of the depths of his own nature: and lo! instead of being grateful, we abuse him for not writing historical ballads, valiant and national, upon Patrick Sarsfield or Owen Roe. But what if he be wholly incapable of writing historical ballads? Shelley said of himself, that to go to him for human nature, was like going to a ginshop for a leg of mutton. Not every poet can be, or is bound to be, a Tyrtaeus. I know no greater patriotic poems than certain sonnets of Milton and Wordsworth; certain passages of Shakespeare and Spenser, Virgil and Dante; certain plays of Æschylus, and odes of Pindar: but not one of them could send the soldier on to death or victory, with such an heroism, as many a simple soldier's song could rouse: yet the simple song is not therefore the greater poetry. Except, may be, in some primitive societies, such as was possibly the Homeric, the greater poetry is not the most popular. Perhaps it should be: but that is another question. And when, as in our own country, there is a native instinct, that prompts the mass of the people to love music and poetry; and an ancient tradition of reverence towards them: we are not unnaturally disposed to estimate all music and poetry by the popular standards, and not always by the best

popular standards. Surely, we say, poetry that touches the heart of all, learned and unlearned, rich and poor, is the true poetry: let us be simple, unsophisticated, natural in our tastes. Let others write for cliques and coteries, and live upon academic applause or mutual admiration: we are content with a poetry popular and patriotic. It sounds very manly and independent, a refreshing contrast to the affected aestheticism of certain schools: but it cuts us off for ever from the company of the great classics. It is equally fatal, to be for ever clamouring for a great classic, and demanding him of all the fates. It is useless, to be perpetually longing for a man, who shall do for Ireland, what Scott did for Scotland: it is ungenerous and unjust, when a writer does his best in his own way, to say, that this is not the immortal work, which Ireland wants. We do not reproach a buttercup for not being a rose. I am inclined to think, that a nation does not produce its greatest art in times of storm and stress, but at and after the period of triumph: when the nation is exulting in its strength and glory, with a sense of new youth and health and joy. Melancholy, and sorrow, and the cry of pain, it has been said by some, are more poetical than serenity and ardour: for my own part, I do not believe it. Rather, I believe that the Irish poetry of

free and triumphant Ireland will have the wonderful joyousness and happy splendour of the old heroic and romantic Ireland, chastened and tempered by the seriousness inseparable from Christianity. Meanwhile, let us accept and encourage all excellence: there is room for all. Let us have our ringing rhetoric, strong verse with the clash of swords in it; our sorrowful dirges for the dear and dead of to-day, and of long ages past; our homely songs of laughter and of tears: but let us welcome all, who write for love of Ireland, even if they write in fashions less familiar. It is absurd, and insulting to Ireland, to think that Irish genius cannot make the Irish spirit felt in any form, that is good and fine of itself. Think of Farquhar and Steele, Goldsmith and Sheridan: they spent nearly their whole lives in England, among Englishmen, under the strongest English influences, and they wrote in English forms for English readers: yet we feel the grace, the gentle humour, the delicacy and charm, which stamp their work as Irish. After all, who is to decide, what is, absolutely and definitely, the Celtic and Irish note? Many a time, I have shown my English friends Irish poems, which Irish critics have declared to be un-Irish: and the English verdict has constantly been, 'How un-English! how Celtic! what a strange, remote, far-away beauty in the music and in the colour!' These poems, then, can find no resting place

in either country: are they to wait becalmed in mid-channel? The most singular criticisms are sometimes made upon these hapless poets. My friend Mr. Yeats has been informed that he is a disciple of Rossetti and of Tennyson: now, no two poets could be less like each other than Rossetti and Tennyson; and no one could be less like either of them, than Mr. Yeats. But he dares to write in his own style, upon his own themes: and because they are not the style and the themes familiar to us from old associations, we rush to the conclusion that he is treading in the footsteps of some English poet, despising Irish art. Another instance: I have heard it said, that the four volumes of Mrs. Hinkson show a steady increase in artistic power, but a noticeable decrease in the true Irish spirit of poetry: an extremely doubtful compliment to the true Irish spirit. Cardinal Newman tells us of the village schools in his youth, where the charge for teaching good manners was an 'extra twopence.' Is artistic workmanship in our poetry worth but an 'extra twopence?' What the critic meant was, that in Mrs. Hinkson's earlier work, there were a greater fluency and flow of sentiment, less restraint and careful finish, more obvious rhetoric and impulsiveness. The dainty delicacy of the later work, its mastery of rhythm and curbing of haste, were lost upon him: the idea that all art implies discipline and austerity of taste, a constant progress towards an

ideal perfection, though his earliest ancestors know it well, seemed strange to him. Perhaps the most familiar of English poems is Gray's *Elegy*: the two loveliest stanzas Gray ever wrote he deliberately rejected from the poem, because they seemed to him redundant, disproportionate, a dwelling too long upon one thought. Dante speaks of his long labour at his art, as the work which had made him lean and gaunt and worn. This passion for perfection seems to me as truly Celtic a thing, as the ready indulgence of sentiment: our illuminations, our penmanship, our work in stone and metal, all our arts of design, show an infinite love of taking pains. The very heretics among the Celts, as Pelagius and Erigena, exemplify the Celtic subtilty. But this *Battle of the Books* is not confined to the Celts of Ireland: the same question, in very much the same form; rages in Wales. Go to an *Eisteddfod*, or to any Welsh gathering of literary patriots: you will probably hear discussions upon the true Welsh spirit, upon English influence, upon the characteristics of the ancient literature & the new; upon the possibility of a Welshman's writing English, in a way patriotically and unmistakably Welsh. This patriotic anxiety for a national literature is an unimpeachable virtue: but it should be displayed with dignity and confidence. Many of us, at present, are somewhat agitated and

nervous; we ask hasty and suspicious questions: 'Is that quite Celtic? Is this book typically Irish? Yes! they are certainly fine poems, but are they not English in quality, have they the genuine national note, is it the work that a patriot should be doing?' All this is put forward, with a certain querulousness and captiousness: it seems to imply a certain distrust of the Irish genius, and of one another. And the tumult of our political passions is apt to disturb our judgments. I would rather read a fine poem upon Sarsfield & the Defence of Limerick, than upon Walker and the Defence of Derry: but if Colonel Saunderson, or Dr. Kane, were to give us a stirring poem upon the courage and endurance of Walker and the prentices of Derry, without ill-feeling and bad blood, I should reckon it a gain to our literature. Yet our Irish critic, who spoke his mind to that effect, might be thought a bit of an Orangeman at heart. It would be a case of *Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*: we should look with suspicion upon the poetical gifts of our political opponents. And there seems to be no place for a poet who, though he be intensely national in temperament and sympathy, may be unfitted by nature to write poetry with an obvious and immediate bearing upon the national cause. Imagine a poet, with no strong taste for history, no fierce rhetorical note in his music, no power

of stirring a popular enthusiasm; yet, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot, Irish, and nothing but Irish. Upon occasions of great emotion, a leader's death, a national victory, what you will, odes and songs may be forthcoming by the score from others: he will feel as deep a sorrow, or as wild a joy, but his Muse will be silent. He will talk of these things as much as others; or write as much about them in prose: but in poetry he has not the necessary gift. He is not proud of lacking it: he may be sorry that he has not that string to his lyre: but, at any rate, he has not got it, and so he cannot play upon it. And forthwith we have our doubts: we begin to think that such a poet is of no service to the cause. Or, perhaps, we ask him for an historical novel upon Ireland in Tudor or Stuart times; or for an epic of the Red Branch Knights, or the Irish Saints; or for a tragedy upon Emmet or Lord Edward: whilst his whole faculty and disposition may be lyrical, and meditative, and personal. Or, perhaps, we fall foul of his lyrics for not having certain simplicities and beauties, dear to us in the folk songs of our country: but who said that they had, or tried to have, them? There may be charms in the new verse, not less Irish, than the old. A wider, deeper, higher vision would recognise that Irish nationality and Irish patriotism can make themselves powerful, in a thousand forms,

and themes, of literature. Consider the many English echoes, or reproductions, or imitations, of Greek forms and themes: from Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, up to Mr. Swinburne's *Atalanta in Calydon*; they are intensely English, not really Greek. A living literature cannot help being national: it may feed upon the literature of the past, and of other nations; but if it be good literature, it must bear the sign and seal of its own nationality, and of its own age. Indeed, nationality lives in literature and art, when it is almost dead in other things: they are the expressions of the soul of a country, they are racy of the soil, they refuse to serve their country's conquerors. On the contrary, they take their captors captive, as history has told us a hundred times. A cosmopolitan artist, a citizen of the world, with no local patriotism in his heart, has never yet done anything memorable in poetry, or in anything else. Could all his wild philosophy, his vast pondering upon universal problems, his devotion to the poets and thinkers of Germany, make Carlyle anything but a Scotch Calvinist, a son of John Knox, a child of the Covenanters? Or could the wild romance, the brilliant levity, the mocking gaiety and cynicism, of his Parisian life, make the German and Jewish Heine anything but a son of the German Fatherland, and a child of the house of Israel? It is among

the strongest of earthly instincts, this clinging to our nationality and race: this, far more than diplomacy, has changed the face of Europe in our century, and may change it still more. Poetry and patriotism are each other's guardian angels, and therefore inseparable. Virgil's master was Homer, Dante's master was Virgil, Milton's masters were Dante, Virgil, & Homer: yet could four poems be less like each other, could four poems be more intensely national, than the *Iliad*, the *Æneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, and *Paradise Lost*? Unquestionably, we would rather have our poets choose Irish themes, and sing of Tara sooner than of Troy, of Ossian sooner than of Orpheus: but if they went to China, or to Peru, for their inspiration, the result would be neither Chinese nor Peruvian, but 'kindly Irish of the Irish' still. Our race is not lost by spreading itself over the world: and our literature would not lose its Irish accent by expeditions into all lands and times. Let Irish literature be de-Anglicized, by all means: away with all feeble copies of the fashionable stuff, that happens to amuse London society for a season; and even with mere copies of distinctly good English work. It is neither national, nor patriotic, to wait eagerly and humbly upon the tastes and the verdicts of the English public, and of the English press. But if we are to foster, encourage, and develop Irish literature, and not

least of all, Irish poetry, it must be with a wise generosity: in a finely national, not in a pettily provincial, spirit. Take the revival of German literature, and its emancipation from French influence: that great movement, which the Germans call the *Aufklärung*, and the French, the *éclaircissement*, of Germany. Beginning, practically, with Lessing and Winckelmann and Herder; continued by Goethe and Schiller, and later by Heine; it created the first splendid period of national German literature. It perpetrated endless absurdities: but it succeeded, and that, because of its free and liberal spirit. The pioneers and chiefs of the movement pressed everything into its service: Greek art and literature, all the arts of Italy, the Elizabethan drama, Macpherson's Ossian, the folk songs and ancient lays of many lands, the romance of the Middle Ages; all that an ardent curiosity, or a profound scholarship, could reach, was sought out and studied, and brought to bear upon the revival of German literature. And the result was magnificently German: there was no vague, cosmopolitan, unnational spirit in the results of that immense enthusiasm. One cannot read the memoirs, biographies, histories of that time, still less the poetry, without feeling oneself in the presence of an irresistible patriotism. And everything helped, every study and pursuit: if German prose,

of all ugly things, came to be written with the lucidity of Plato's Greek; if German poetry rose from the dead, and sang a thousand melodies upon a thousand instruments; it was because a deep desire for knowledge, a passionate ambition for true culture, taught the German poets the way to be German indeed; showed them how to preserve the ancient German virtues, whilst creating a new literature, which should be the glory of Germany. True, the social state of Germany, then, had little in common with the social state of Ireland now: yet the essential spirit of their movement is ours also. If we considered the causes and conditions of all that is greatest, in the Italian Renaissance, or in the Elizabethan outburst of literary glory, we should find similiar facts: the re-discovery of the ancient classic world; the re-discovery of the New World; the thirst for knowledge and experience; a sudden thrill of pride and hope in men's hearts, at the thought that Italy, England, their own countries, were rivalling, in their own national ways, the great records of the past; all this went to the creation of those great arts and literatures. France, too, in her romantic revival of 1830, turned to her own national uses, to uses completely French, whatever in Italy, Germany, England, Spain, she could lay her hands upon. Is Ireland to be the only nation which influences from

without are bound to ruin and unnationalize: the only nation incapable of assimilating to herself, of nationalizing and naturalizing, the heritage of art and learning, left by other nations? It was not so once: not in the early ages of Irish Christianity. If Saint Sedulius, of whom Dr. Sigerson has told us, were alive to-day, he would certainly find critics to call him unpatriotic, for taking a foreign metre, and ingrafting upon it Irish graces. As I have pleaded, let us have no coercion in Irish literature: I would add, let us have no protection. Like the Norsemen and the Normans, let all that is good in literature and learning enter Ireland, and become more Irish than the Irish. Even if, like the Norsemen and the Normans, it enters forcibly and against opposition, I am sure that the result will be the same: the Irish genius will captivate the foreign, and grow itself the stronger and more brilliant. You see, I have faith in the Irish genius: I do not believe that anything can so take possession of it, and pervert it, as to drive the nationality out of it. But perhaps, some of my distinguished audience are thinking that I am making much ado about nothing, all this time. Well! of course, no one here to-night distrusts the power and indomitable vigour of the Irish genius. But for some time, both in reading Irish papers from all parts of the world, and in discussing Irish matters with

Irishmen in England, I have undoubtedly found a certain amiable narrowness, now and then, here and there: a conservatism, rather obstinate than strong, less resolute than stubborn. Ask these conservatives to admit some good Irish qualities in this poem or in that novel, written within the last twenty years: the answer is, 'It's not what I call Irish: give me Mangan, give me Carleton.' Now, it is extremely easy to be less great than Mangan and Carleton; it is not impossible to be greater; but to *be* Mangan, to *be* Carleton, is a clear impossibility. It is only possible to aim at it by imitating them. Imitation may be the sincerest flattery, but it usually produces the worst literature. In Mangan's day, perhaps less fervent nationalists wished that Mangan would write like Moore: and perhaps they exhorted Carleton to study the graces of Miss Edgeworth, and the vivacities of Lady Morgan. The really great and imperishable poets, who adorned the middle of this century, had no such narrowness: we cannot imagine Mangan, jealously and anxiously discouraging new ventures of the Irish Muses: we cannot think of Davis, laying down absolute laws, upon what is and is not, verily Celtic and truly Irish. Again it is not the living scholars, most busy in preserving, elucidating, translating, and transmitting to posterity, the Gaelic literature of every age and kind, who

impose these fetters upon our modern literature. But I have heard some of my countrymen, who have no more Gaelic than I, and I have none, airily and easily blaming a veteran Irish poet, still among us, Mr. de Vere, for having no real Gaelic tone, no insight into the genuine ancient spirit. I should never be surprised to hear Canon O'Hanlon reproached for celebrating the Land of Leix in the Spenserian stanza: one of the few great English forms invented in England, and invented, too, by a very thorough-going enemy of the Irish cause. Again: in projecting some Irish publication, it is surely an open question, whether it should be solely and strictly confined to Irish themes; or whether, remembering that

*'One in name and in fame
Are the sea-divided Gaels,'*

it should sometimes include matters of collateral interest; contrasts and comparisons, in social and literary concerns, with our kinsmen in Wales and Brittany and Scotland. That, surely, is not opening the floodgates, and admitting cosmopolitan culture to overwhelm Ireland: yet such proposals have been denounced as unpatriotic. They may be inexpedient: but they can hardly be called criminal. It is this kind of exclusiveness, that has emboldened me

to protest: it seems to me a fatal interpretation of patriotism. That true son and servant of Ireland, Berkeley, used to make an execrable pun, and to say that he distinguished between patriotism and pat-riotism: it is the latter quality which produces this feverish alarm, lest Irishmen should forget Ireland, if they try to serve her, in ways savouring at all or seeming to savour, of novelty. It is the truer patriotism, which refuses to be panic-stricken, though it is willing to be prudent: a militant faith is one thing, and an irritable fussiness another.

I hope there is not an Irishman anywhere; certainly there can be none in the literary societies of Dublin and London; who does not agree with every word of Dr. Douglas Hyde's eloquent appeal, upon 'the Necessity for de-Anglicizing Ireland.' But I do not see, why Irishmen should not make raids upon other countries, and bring home the spoils, and triumphantly Celticize them, and lay them down at the feet of Ireland. It is pleasant to think of Goldsmith, dedicating his first famous poem, not to his great English friends, not to Reynolds or to Johnson, but to his poor Irish brother in his poor Irish home: pleasant to think of him, all through his sorrows and his triumphs, still remembering the old days in Ireland, and hoping to die in the old country.

‘And as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place, from whence at first she flew;
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return, and die at home at last.’

Horace was right, and his old proverbial wisdom has a good sense, as well as a bad: *patriæ quis exul, se quoque fugit: caelum, non animum mutant*: we may leave Ireland, but we could not, if we would, help being Irish. It is so with our poetry, and with all our fine literature: there is an Irish foundation, an Irish origin, for it all. Patriotism, said Dr. Johnson, is the last refuge of a scoundrel: and certainly there are many ways of being patriotic, as we have bitter cause to know. But our poetry has been, and is still, patriotic in the best of senses: it has been inspired by our country, in a magnificent variety of ways. It is not now under the discipline of ancient Ireland, the supremacy of Bardic colleges: it were a pity, were it to fall under the authority, and to be checked by the iron rod, of an unsympathetic criticism, and by the narrow spirit of a limited outlook. It may be that Irish poetry is in a state of change; losing, perhaps, some virtues, but gaining others; displaying in fresh forms, under new aspects, the glory and the beauty, the deeds and the dreams, the legend

and the history, of our country. Consider the fortunes of that marvellous cycle of epic and romance, which belongs to Wales, Scotland, Cornwall, Brittany, and Ireland; the story of King Arthur and his Knights. Malory in England first cast it into a comparatively modern English form, in his superb prose: Milton and Dryden both intended to write epics upon it, and unhappily did not: Sir Richard Blackmore, worst of English poets, unhappily did: English poetry abounds in references to it: in our own day, five English poets, three of them partly Celtic, Tennyson, Arnold, Hawker of Morwenstow, Mr. Swinburne, and Mr. William Morris, have treated it in manifold ways, with an extraordinary diversity of styles: but they have not modernised and spoilt it out of all recognition. Each in his way, with a different ethical and artistic aim, has paid homage to the enduring beauty, the enduring grandeur, of the ancient Celtic story. They have been utterly unable, by any Saxon perversity, to de-Celticize it: nor can the magnificent stories of our own country be robbed of their inherent Irish character, by any variety of treatment at the hands of Irish poets. But there is always a spirit of protest against literary change: 'This will never do!' cried the leading critic of the day, upon reading Wordsworth: Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Browning, Arnold, had plenty of scorn and discouragement to face. And the cry is

always: 'You are affected, you are effeminate, you are obscure, you are not like the good old poets of our childhood, you are running after false models, you are rejecting the traditions of our literature.' The wheel goes slowly round: and the despised and ridiculed young innovators become classics, and find burial in Westminster Abbey. It need not be otherwise in Ireland: where we clearly recognise excellence, it is rash to remonstrate with it for not being precisely our kind of excellence. Any clear and definite rejection of Irish aims and interests speaks for itself. Any poet, who sees no greatness and no beauty in Irish legend and history, from the beginning of the world up to to-day, could we imagine so blind a fool, condemns himself, and may write Anglo-Saxon epics for the English: but from the beginning of the world, and that is the only safe patriotic date for the beginning of Irish history, up to to-day, is a vast period, within which there is room for an infinite variety of themes, and moods, and manners. We are almost past the age in which Irishmen could disdain the Irish language, laugh at the Irish legends, and devote themselves entirely to English literature: if there be any vitality at all in the Irish literary endeavours of to-day, it lies in their freedom from that spirit of ignorant contempt, and in their determination to cherish our rich inheritance.

But at this point, let me illustrate part of what I mean, in saying that a certain change may be in course of progress in our poetry: for example, in one small point of rhythmical and metrical matters. In reading much Irish poetry of this century, we note the great amount of it that is written in swinging measures, anapæsts and dactyls; verse that gallops and leaps along: measures adapted or copied, in some cases, from the Gaelic. Now, since Gaelic and English are not the same language, the same or similiar metres have a different effect in each language: as in a most familiar case, that of the Greek and the Latin hexameter. Being, to my shame and sorrow, ignorant of Gaelic, I can only judge, by hearing them read, the effect of certain Gaelic metres; and that, of course, imperfectly: but the effect seems very different in the Gaelic, and in the English. It may well be that the metre is now statelier, now softer, in the Gaelic, than in the English: not to mention the absence in the English of much artful and elaborate assonance, alliteration, and kindred delicacies. Irishmen can partly reproduce Irish turns of expression in English, and give to the English language a certain Irish charm: but they cannot change its inherent character. Now, it is unquestionable that the loveliest English verse, the most stately, musical,

and sweet, has not been written in these rapid measures: from Chaucer to Tennyson, it has been mainly written in iambic and trochaic metres. Even the metrical accomplishments of Shelley, or of Coleridge, or of Mr. Swinburne, have not been able to give to the rapid swinging measures the dignity or charm of the others. Nor can Irish writers convey to them a dignity or charm, which in English they are incapable of receiving. But in some cases, it may be through Gaelic associations; in other cases, because these measures are excellent for popular purposes; our writers have been fond of them, & from Moore onwards, have often turned them to admirable account. But compare them with the grander measures: take the first lines of Mangan's *Lament for the Knight of Kerry*.

'There was lifted up one voice of woe,
One lament of more than mortal grief,
Through the wide South to and fro,
For a fallen chief.'

Now take the first lines from his *Dream of John Mac Donnell*:

'I lay in unrest— old thoughts of pain,
That I struggled in vain to smother,

Like midnight spectres haunted my brain—
Dark fantasies chased each other.'

As mere sound, it is incomparably inferior. Or take the first lines from a poem by D'Arcy McGee:

'Long, long ago, beyond the misty space
Of twice a thousand years,
In Erin old there dwelt a mighty race,
Taller than Roman spears;'

Now take the first lines from a poem by Florence MacCarthy:

'Come, Liberty, come! we are ripe for thy coming;
Come, freshen the hearts where thy rival has trod;
Come, richest and rarest! come, fiercest and fairest!
Come, daughter of science! come, gift of the god!'

One could dance to it, and it would be splendid to sing: but it cannot compare in beauty with the other rhythm. One would be exhilarating on a cracked fiddle or a banjo: the other has the majesty of a cathedral organ. Two more examples from Mangan: first, from the *Lament for the Princes*.

‘O woman of the Piercing Wail,
Who mournest o’er yon mound of clay,
With sigh and groan,
Would God thou wert among the Gael!
Thou wouldst not then from day to day
Weep thus alone.’

Now some lines from *Rury and Dervorgilla*.

‘Know ye the tale of the Prince of Oriel,
Of Rury, last of his line of kings?
I pen it here as a sad memorial
Of how much woe reckless folly brings.’

Again, the difference in dignity and charm is very great, but the swinging measures, in a vast variety, have been endeared and consecrated by a thousand associations with songs, and dances, and spirited ballads: and very delightful they can be. But if a living poet choose to leave them alone: and to concentrate his mind and ear upon the less rhetorical, and more delicate or stately rhythms; and in all his metrical work, to aim at conveying into English verse something of a Celtic effect; by paying to the capacities of English verse such attention, as the old Gaelic poets might have paid, were they living and writing in English now: why! he may promptly be asked,

where is his Irish spirit, and whether he thinks himself superior to the good old Irish rhythms. But alas! we have lost our own language, and English is not at all the same thing: we can, and we do, Irishize it to a great extent, as by the use of Gaelic turns of speech; and a most beautiful thing that Irish English often is, from the tongues and pens of our orators and of our writers. But there are limits to our possibilities in this direction: there are scarce any limits to our possibilities, in the direction of introducing beauties and graces into English verse, which in spirit and effect shall be truly Irish. To mention no living writers, Walsh and Callanan, Sir Samuel Ferguson and Allingham have done so with wonderful felicity: and the greatest Young Ireland poets, whatever certain of their admirers may think, were of course admirable artists, in spite of that passionate sincerity and ardent purpose, which some critics hold incompatible with a deliberate attention to art. It would be a characteristically Celtic achievement, were Irish poets to bring English verse to a perfection of music, finer of its kind in some ways, than anything yet achieved in England: as Mangan himself has done in his poem of unspeakable beauty, *The Ode to the Maguire*.

There is room for all: that is the sum and substance of what I have tried to say: that, and let us bear with

all, encourage all, and do our best to believe in all. But I never heard, that a difference of literary opinion was a mortal sin, on one side or the other. It would be pleasant, if we could persuade ourselves that a man may write, read, say, and do, all manner of things uncongenial to us; yet have quite as much patriotism, and as much Irish spirit, and as many Celtic notes, as ourselves. One would think, to hear some querulous criticism, that, as a rule, the ancient Irish, our ancestors, were a desperately monotonous race, all precisely similiar: and when we read of their conflicts, we are tempted to wonder, whether this champion fought that champion for lacking the Celtic note, and for not being exactly like himself. They were Celtic, they were the Gael; but they must have had, like every flourishing race under the sun, endless diversities of character, though but one spirit. It would be a dreary world, if we were all facsimiles of each other. But when we differ, let us, if it be possible, agree to differ, and not see treason and heresy against true patriotism, in every deviation from our own tastes. Our ancestors, in some parts, used to leave the right arms of their sons unchristened; or rather, since that is theologically meaningless, they thought they could leave them unchristened; to the intent, as the English martyr, Father Campion, puts it, that they 'might give a more ungracious

and deadly blow.' But the right arm armed with the pen can be dangerous: and from its ungracious and deadly blows, now and then, it would seem that the parents of some of our critics had successfully practised the old superstition. Righteous anger and patriotic indignation should be kept for proper occasions: there are quite enough of them without inventing more. Let our poets take their own way, and choose their own music: more than one melody can be played upon the Irish harp, and the more, the better. We have but the right to ask of them, that whatever they do, they do it with all their might; with all the patience, all the passion, that the thought of serving Ireland through song can give them. They are preparing the way for the triumph song, that the poets of a day to come will chaunt, with every splendour, every richness, every loveliness and grace, that Irish music has ever known. Remember, how Saint Patrick preached before the high king Leaghaire, and his court at Tara. There sat the great king, his court and his warriors round him, with anger in their eyes. But, as Saint Patrick spoke, a wonder happened: the tide ceased to ebb, the white deer forgot to drink by the river, the eagles hung poised in the air, the green leaves left off rustling, and a mystical, sacred silence fell upon Ireland. We want a silence to fall upon Ireland, a silence from lamentation and from conflict: and then, in that happy

dawn, the only voices will be voices of the Irish Muses, reigning in their old home; and the voices of the Irish people, speaking peace and goodwill, through all our loved and holy Ireland.

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