

The song lore of Ireland

Erin's story in music and verse

Redfern Mason

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Erin's bardic poems, ballads and folk-songs carry her story back to the Christian dawn and even earlier. They are history with the added charm of a personal note, a thrill of actuality, not to be found in annals and chronicles. They sing the hopes and fears of the people in epic moments of their national life. When we read the story of Clontarf, we sympathize in a far-off way with the issues there decided. But who among us feels the loss of Brian as did his friend Mac Liag, the poet? He wrote of the dead monarch as an aide de camp might have written of Washington, as Rudyard Kipling has written of Lord Roberts. This poetic narrative of battles fought and won is a golden commentary extending throughout the whole course of Irish history. In many cases the poets were participants of the scenes they described; for it was the bard's duty to accompany his prince on the field of battle and incite him to deeds of valor. The songs about Hugh O'Donnell and Patrick Sarsfield were sung by men whose fortunes were bound up with those of their leaders. Music was made to serve the selfsame end, and the twofold tradition is as vivid as it is intimate. This tradition enables us to appreciate the true inwardness of Irish history in a way that the tomes of the annalist utterly fail to do.

From the cradle to the grave the Irishman's life is set to music. It begins with the lullabies of infancy; keening ends it, when the spirit leaves the body. Work has its songs as well as play; there are love-songs and dances, and never are the songs so beautiful as when the lover is poet. Devotion turns to song instinctively; so do joy and sorrow, longing and despair. Nothing so great, nothing so small but the Irishman may put it into verse and enrich it with melody.

In telling this story the attempt is made to place in relief everything that throws light on the character of the Gael—his manner of life, his ideals, his attitude toward the supernatural. The spirit in which the task is undertaken is frankly Irish. No writer taking the traditional English view of dominant races and subject peoples could do it justice. For ages England has tried to make Ireland English—English in custom, English in speech, English in religion. The experiment has lasted seven centuries; yet the Irish are almost as Gaelic to-day as ever. More than that, they have made Irishmen of the invaders themselves. Norman barons, Elizabethan adventurers, Stuart "Undertakers," Cromwellian Ironsides, all have come under the spell. If it had not been for difference in religion, Ireland would have presented a united front to England, and Erin's right to govern herself could not have been withheld. When, therefore, reference is made to persecution, the intention is not to establish invidious distinctions, but to draw attention to the alien spirit of English rule.

It was the words of an Irish servant girl that set the writer thinking on this subject. He was a boy then. It was the time of disturbances and coercion acts. He asked the girl what it was the Irish people wanted. "They want to be free," she answered. Every English lad is brought up to believe that England is the home of liberty and that, where the Union Jack flies, slavery cannot exist. Yet here was an Irish girl, palpably sincere, who said Ireland was not free. Her words lay in the writer's heart, germinated and bore fruit in the belief in Ireland for the Irish. There is nothing in this attitude of mind disloyal to England's best self; for true love of fatherland cannot rest on the slavery of others.

The more the songs of Ireland are understood—the story they tell, the conditions which gave them birth, the nature of Gaelic music and the manner of its preservation—the better the Irish genius will be appreciated, and from appreciation springs sympathy, which is the mother of helpful kindness.

The Beginnings

MUSIC and poetry were the means by which the ancient inhabitants of Ireland gave expression to their deepest feelings and reached out toward things beyond the world of sense. Together they form a tradition—a tradition still vital and operative, through which we touch hands with the poets and musicians of a past that antedates the Christian era. The golden chain of music-makers unites us with the harpers who sat in their appointed places on the hill of Tara and, with their music, “softened the pillow” of Cormac Mac Art, high-king of Erin. That was in the first century after Christ. Bards and minstrels taught their craft to younger men and the successors of Cormac’s servitors knelt before St. Patrick, when he came on his apostolic mission. “Never,” one of them exclaimed, “never again shall my harp sing the praises of any God save Patrick’s God.” And from that time forward they accompanied the saint on his missionary journeys. Bard and minstrel led the rejoicings over the defeat of the Danes at Clontarf and mourned the death of Brian and Murcad. The songs of Erin were carried into the Holy Land by Irish harpers ; minstrel heroes penetrated into the camp of the Anglo-Norman invaders and emulated the deeds of Saxon Alfred. They sang Erin’s songs in hall and cottage, in defiance of Tudor kings, fanning the flame of patriotism with tales of dead heroes and old-time battle fields. Poets and musicians, themselves proscribed, grieved for exiled Tyrone and Tirconnel ; they sang the dirge of Owen Roe O’Neill. They mourned the ire of Cromwell, and women and children murdered in hundreds about the cross of Drogheda. With a loyalty as devoted as it was misplaced, they upheld the cause of the dissembling Stuarts. In happier moments, all too few, they exulted with Patrick Sarsfield ; they sang the praises of the Rapparees ; they gloried in the charge of Clare’s men at Fontenoy. In the Penal Days they were partners in danger and martyrdom with Ireland’s priests, hunted like beasts of prey, with no place to lay their heads. Never in the long night of seven centuries of foreign oppression have these men ceased to proclaim the cause of Irish nationality. Languishing in prison, done to death as traitors, they were still true to their cause. From the coming of Strongbow to “Ninety-Eight,” from “Ninety-Eight” to our own day, the poets of Ireland have sung to authentic Irish strains an Erin by right free and independent, in chains truly, but with soul unfettered, irreconcilable to any ideal save that of Ireland for the Irish, “from the center to the sea.”

Irish song is the expression of the Celtic genius in music and verse, in everyday life and in history. Understood aright, it will turn foreign contempt of Erin to foolishness and expose to scorn the false shame of a few unworthy Irishmen and the descendants of, Irishmen when Erin and the things of Erin are spoken of. John of Salisbury tells us that in the Crusade headed by Godfrey of Bouillon the concert of Christendom would have been mute had it not been for the Irish harp. Gerald Barry, the Welsh monk and historian, hater of the Irish though he was, declares that Erin’s harpers surpass all others. That was in the twelfth century. Ireland’s musical skill had won her fame long ages before that, however. When the wife of Pepin of France wanted choristers for her new abbey of Nivelles, it was not to Italy, to Germany, or to England that she sent, but to Ireland. That was in the seventh century. In Elizabethan days the songs of Ireland won praise even from her enemy and traducer, Edmund Spenser. Shakespearean enigmas, long insoluble, become plain in the light of the poet’s acquaintance with Celtic lore. Bacon of Verulam declared that of all instruments the Irish harp had the sweeter note and the most prolonged. Irish airs found their way into the virtual books of Tudor and Jacobean days. Byrde and Purcell wrote variations on Irish tunes. As in peace, so it was in war. England’s battles have been fought and won to Irish music. The

United States won its freedom to the strains of "All the Way to Galway," known all over the world as "Yankee Doodle," and, while the English marched out of Yorktown, the pipes squealed the tune of "The World Turned Up-side Down." Beethoven, Mendelssohn, and Berlioz all confess the beauty of Irish melody.

People have not always acted, however, as though they were aware of these facts. Only a generation has gone by since a professor of Trinity College had the courage of his ignorance to declare that, prior to the coming of the Normans and Saxons, Ireland had no culture worthy of a civilized race. The maker of that observation focussed in one small identity the ignorance and prejudice which, for centuries past, have made English people incapable of understanding the Irish character. At the very time that this official know-nothing was airing his folly the patient labors of Irish archaeologists were bringing to light treasure of Irish art and literature which to-day fills the scholars of the world with delight and amazement. It is as though a new planet had swum into the firmament of knowledge.

The great pathbreaker of scientific Celticism was Eugene O'Curry. There is in the ability of this remarkable man to extract from ancient manuscript the spirit of the Gaelic past something seer-like and druidic. His work is an evocation of centuries long imagined dead, but, in reality, only sleeping, like the princess in the fairy-tale, until a lover's kiss should awaken them. O'Curry dissipates the night of misconception, amplifies the mental horizon of humanity, and re-creates the ancient Celtic world.

What O'Curry did for Celticism in its literary aspect, George Petrie achieved in the domain of music. The work of these men and of scholars like Dr. Douglas Hyde, the Joyces, Dr. Sigerson, and their coadjutors enables us to take a view of Erin in what may be termed her lyric aspect ; to see her when, moved by joy or grief, she seeks solace in song. Then the Irish folk is its own historian. The songs of the people are free from guile or pretense or the bias of the professional historian ; they tell what is in the singer's heart, its loves and its hates, its longings, its aspirations, its ideals. They are the cry of the natural man ; the people sing them with the accent they use when they speak to God. Nothing is too great, nothing too small, for these confidences entrusted to poetry and music. The intimate things of family life are in them—the mother to her baby as she croons it to sleep, the lover to his sweetheart, the father by the side of his motherless children. Theirs also is the song of the thrush in the morning ; the voice of the plowman urging on his team ; the reek of the peat smoke is in them ; they echo the hue and cry of hunter and hounds and the music of the waves on the beach. They are Erin's own speech. In days of oppression and secrecy she is Kathaleen na Houlihan, she is Moireen na Cullenan ; she is the "Little Black Rose." In later days, when the dawn appears not so hopelessly far off, she is Erin's glorious self and her smile puts new courage into Irish hearts.

Strange words to be penned by an Englishman ; yet what Briton would not write them, if Erin were Britannia and Britannia Erin.

The earliest allusions to music in Irish story refer to the harp, or, to give it its ancient Celtic name, the cruit. The harper figures in the most ancient tales and the harp is regarded as the primitive instrument. Its origin is the theme of the most ancient legends. O'Curry, in his Gaelic explorings, came across an old story with the title of "The Defense of the Great Bardic Company" in which the unknown author tells how the first harp came to be made. It is the tale of a man and his wife. Cull, the son of Midhuel, is the man, and Canoclach Mhor the woman. Canoclach hated her husband and fled away from him. But he as persistently followed her. Through forest and wilderness she still flew before him and, in her wanderings, she reached the seashore of Camas. As Canoclach walked over the ribbed sand, she came upon the skeleton of a whale and the wind, passing through the sinews of the dead monster,

made a murmuring. Listening to this strange music the woman fell asleep, and her husband, who was hard on her trail, came up. He greatly marveled how it was that his wife had fallen asleep and, casting about in his mind for a reason, he decided it must be the sounds made by the wind in the tightly strung sinews of the whale. Then the latent artist in Cull asserted itself. What nature had effected by chance he would do by design. He went into the wood and, taking a limb of a tree, he made it into the framework of a harp. He put strings upon it made from the sinews of the whale, and that is how the first harp came to be made.

This tale of Cull and Canoclach belongs to the same family of stories as the Grecian fable of the lyre. This human nature of ours demands a starting point from which to set out on the road of inquiry. If history and personal experience have nothing to say the imagination builds up a rainbow-hued might-have-been. The fable of the harp is a fantasy of this kind framed of "such stuff as dreams are made of." It sorts well with the Celtic temper and will serve admirably as a point of departure.

A constant mingling of fact and fancy characterizes these early Celtic tales, and it is oftentimes no easy matter to draw the dividing line between them. A story of the warfare of the Tuatha de Danann and the Fomorians illustrates this difficulty. It also shows that, even where the imagination appears most unbridled, there is apt to be a sub-stratum of truth which it is worth the utmost pains of the investigator to find. This battle is supposed to have taken place about 1800 years before the Christian era. On the one hand were the Tuatha de Danann, the then possessors of Ireland, a mysterious people who are supposed to have migrated from Greece and whom the Celtic imagination endowed with magical powers. On the other hand were the Fomorians, the sea-born people, vikings of an earlier age. That this conflict took place in the remote past and that the Fomorians were defeated with great slaughter is credible tradition. For we must remember that the national self-consciousness of the Irish people has been uninterruptedly Celtic for more than 2000 years. The speech of the Irishman of the twentieth century is in essence the same speech as the Gaelic of his ancestor in the days when the Roman eagle saw Erin afar off, but did not adventure near. The laws of pagan Ireland, with comparatively slight revision, persevered until the time of the Stuarts, and their spirit dwells in the heart of the people to this day. So it is with the genius of Gaelic poetry and music. The Irish people were never conquered in the sense that the people of Gaul and Britain were conquered. They never lost their language ; their racial characteristics continued vital and aggressive ; enemy after enemy was assimilated. Danish sea kings became Irishmen ; the Norman settlers in Ireland forgot their native speech and were soon " more Irish than the Irish themselves" ; within a hundred years of Oliver's battles, the descendants of Cromwell's Ironsides were talking Gaelic, and as Irish in their way of thinking as though they had been the issue of an unbroken succession of Irish ancestors. This tenacity of racial instinct makes Irish tradition a living link between the Celtic past and the civilizations of to-day. Each successive wave of foreign immigration only served to enrich the main Celtic stream.

Imbedded as it were in the chronicle of deeds of blood, we find details which throw a vivid light on Irish culture. Treasure trove of this kind is found in this ancient battle of the Northern Moytura fought between the Fomorians and the Tuatha de Danann. In addition to the story of the fighting, it gives us a classification of music which was in use among the ancient Irish long before the birth of Christ. An episode in the battle accounts for the introduction of this apparently extrinsic matter. The Fomorians, in their retreat, carried off the harp of the Tuatha de Danann. This loss was regarded as a serious matter, possibly on account of the value of the instrument, possibly also because of magical virtues attributed to it. The King of the Tuatha de Danann, his Dagda or chief druid, and a champion named Ogma set out to try to get it back again. They found the Fomorians feasting and there, on the wall of the banqueting chamber, hung the harp. But the music was silent within it, for the instrument was spellbound and would not answer to any touch save that of the Dagda. The druid called to the

instrument and, leaping down from the wall, it charged through the feasting Fomorians, killing nine unfortunate persons who happened to be in its way. What follows may best be told in O'Curry's translation of the Gaelic original :

It (the harp) came to the Dagda : and he played for them the three feats which give distinction to a harper, namely the Soontree (which, from its deep murmuring, causes sleep): the Gauntree (which from its merriment causes laughter) ; and the Goltree (which, from its melting plaintiveness, causes tears). He played them the Goltree until their women wept tears ; he played them the Gauntree until their women and youths burst into laughter ; he played them the Soontree until the entire host fell asleep. It was through that sleep that they (the three champions) escaped from those who were desirous to kill them.

This is not the language of musical savants ; it is the language of poetry. But it is admirably descriptive and, even at this day, we can feel its substantial accuracy, due allowance being made for bardic warmth and the impressionableness of an unsophisticated race. While the classification does not include all the varieties of tune made use of by the Irish at the present day, nevertheless it indicates three kinds of melody which they have always cultivated with singular felicity. The Soontree, or sleepy music, is represented by Erin's lullabies, which are admittedly the most beautiful in the world ; the Goltree, or music of sadness, includes the keens and laments ; the Gauntree, or mirthful music, embraces the jigs and reels danced on many a village green in happy hours. If this classification were set forth in a single manuscript only it might seem of comparatively small significance. But it recurs again and again and its manifestations are strikingly various. In one the Preludes of the Cooley Cattle Raid which took place in the first century of the Christian era, and is celebrated in an epic that is to the Irish what the Song of the Nibelungs is to the Germans, an account is given of the origin of these " three feats which give distinction to a harper." The description is obviously an allegory ; but it is none the less interesting on that account. The three classes of music are called three brothers. Their mother was Boand, one of the fairy people, from whom the Boyne has its name, and their father was Uaithne, a name of three-fold significance, one meaning being harmony in poetry or music. Here is the pith of the legend, for which also we are indebted to O'Curry :

At the time that the woman (their mother) was in her labor, it was crying and mourning with her in the intensity of her pains, at the beginning. It was laughing and joy with her in the middle of them at the pleasure of having brought forth two sons. It was repose and tranquillity with her on the birth of the last son, after the weight of the labor : and it was on that account that each one of them was named after a third part of the music. Boand then awoke from the repose. " Accept thou thy three sons, O passionate Uaithne," said she, " in return for thy generosity : namely, crying music, and laughing music, and sleeping music."

Another interpretation of the three names is given in the story of the wooing of Scathach by Finn Mac Cool foremost of the champions of the Red Branch, that pagan chivalry which has given Erin so many burning names. Scathach and Finn fall in love with each other at first sight. Before she follows her lover to the bridal couch, Scathach asks for the harp.

The household harp was one of three strings.
Methinks it was a pleasant jewel :
A string of iron, a string of noble bronze
And a string of entire silver.
The names of the not heavy strings
Were Suantorrhles : Geantorrhles the great :
Goltarres was the other string,
Which sends all men to crying.

If the pure Gollteargles be played
 For the heavy hosts of the earth.
 The hosts of the world, without delay.
 Would all be sent to constant crying.
 If the merry Gentorrgles be played.
 For the hosts of the earth, without heavy execution
 They would all be laughing from it.
 From the hour of the one day to the same of the next.
 If the free Suantorrgles were played
 To the hosts of the wide universe.
 The men of the world—great the wonder—
 Would fall into a long slumber.

Here each of the three kinds of music is associated with a particular string. Are we to accept the idea of a three-stringed harp literally ? Or were there three different registers, one of strings of iron, another of silver, a third of bronze ? It is easy to associate silver with the sweet music of slumber and iron with woe. Nor is it inconceivable that bronze may have the ring of light-heartedness. But unless the strings were stopped by the fingers into different lengths so as to produce different notes, after the manner of the violin, we should only have a single note for each kind of music.

We can only hope that literary or archaeological store as yet unrevealed will give us the key to the mystery. An old sculpture at Ullard, dating back to the ninth century, shows us that in those days the Irish were familiar with the idea of a harp without a forepost, and O'Curry hoped that the bogs—which at once conceal and preserve so much of Ireland's past—will deliver up one of the antique instruments.

Meanwhile these ancient stories of the harp and the makers of music are proof incontestable of the possession by the ancient Irish, centuries before Saxon or Norman set foot in the land, of a musical aesthetic to parallel which we must turn to the ancient Greeks. In the story of Cull and the harp the attitude of the Celt is that of the natural philosopher ; he is scientific, rationalist, experimental. In the tale of the Dagda, on the other hand, he looks upon the phenomena of music through the windows of the soul. The harp will give up its secret to none save the Dagda alone, and he is the possessor of supernatural powers. The realm of the supernatural was not so remote from the ancient Celts as it is from us. Even within the last two hundred years, we find the people attributing the beauty of the music made by certain harpers to a fairy mistress, who dwelt within the instrument and whispered to her lover. In the allegory of Boand and Uaithne, music is given human form, with a fairy woman for mother and harmony incarnate for sire. Melody, the element of music in which the highest creative genius expresses itself. Is given a supernatural origin ; while harmony, the part of music into which calculation most enters, is credited to man. Music is thus defined as a human art, with an added quality borrowed from the supernatural.

Nor is this idea only to be met with in the poems of learned bards. It finds expression in the term " Fairy music," a phrase coined by the people to describe certain melodies of a haunting subtlety, such as the famous " Song of the Pretty Girl Milking Her Cow." So rich is the folk-lore of this phase of the subject that the songs of faerie and the spirit world will claim treatment apart.

The belief that music is the result of the mingling of the human and the supernatural is the deepest word of the Celts on the philosophy of the art. Perhaps it is the deepest word ever uttered ; for what have Grecian subtlety, Roman order, or German transcendentalism said which carries us further ?

The Bards and Minstrels

If we would enter into the spirit of Irish song our minds must be impressed with a definite image of its makers, what manner of men they were, their training and discipline, the place they filled in public life. Fortunately, on this subject we have authentic information going back many centuries.

The ancient Irish drew a sharp distinction between the bard and the musician. The bard was a poet, learned in the complex metres of Gaelic verse, a composer of panegyrics and elegies, of odes and satires. When, as was often the case, his verses were intended to be sung, he generally entrusted that duty to a vocalist, whom an instrumentalist accompanied upon the harp. The sole occupation of the bard was poetry and it gave ample scope for the play of his gifts. If he was a man of ability and character, swift to catch the drift of public sentiment and give it eloquent expression, his voice would take on almost prophetic ring ; he became patriarchal, the counsellor and judge of kings. This seer-like aspect of the bardic character has riveted itself on the popular imagination, and time and error have distorted the image into the picturesque but unhistoric harp-player, white-robed and bearded, with which all are familiar. Alas ! for sentiment, that druidic wight is pure fantasy and misconceit ; he never had a historic original.

Before Dane, Norman and Saxon had begun to break up the primitive Gaelic polity, the bard had a legal status as definite and stable and more honored than the professions of lawyer and doctor to-day. The would-be bard was apprenticed at an early age to an ollave or doctor of the craft and followed a novitiate which varied in length according to the degree of hardship aspired to. The highest bardic rank was that of a File or arch-poet and to graduate to this office asked a dozen years of a man's life. Master and pupil lived together and, under the traditional law of the Brehons or Gaelic judges, the master was bound to teach the student his art without harshness, while the latter had to render his master obedience and help to support him. Not all the novices, however, went through the exacting twelve years' course. Bardic knowledge sufficient to equip the average practitioner of the art was given during the first seven years. As a natural consequence hardship had different degrees. We are told in the Book of Rights that the rights and privileges of the kings " are not known to every prattling bard." " It is not the right of all bards, but the right of a File to know each king and his right." For the File was doctor among poets. Bardic rights and privileges were guarded by the law ; the bards had their allotted place at the royal table ; it was even specified what part of the roast should fall to their share. They were the friends of kings. Brian Boru used to visit his arch-poet, Mac Liag, and gave him rich presents. The voice of the bard was heard in the councils of the kingdom ; no man was beyond reach of his sharp-toothed satire. So great indeed was their power at one time, and so notorious their abuse of it, that the extinction of the whole bardic order was seriously contemplated. But St. Columba acted as peace-maker ; a compromise was arrived at and thereafter the bards were subject to a stricter discipline.

To the primitive bardic age we may probably refer the rann or verse in which are set forth the qualifications of poets. They are to have :

Purity of nature, bright without wounding ;
Purity of mouth without poisonous satire ;
Purity of learning, without reproach ;
Purity of husbandship.

Every great chief had several bards and they ranked according to ability. It was the duty of the ard-file or chief bard to celebrate the deeds of his master and the family, to make birthday odes and compose laments. He accompanied the chieftain into battle ; he sang the glories of

the clan in the very presence of the enemy ; he was the eye-witness of his master's prowess. Such was the bardic estate in the Celtic prime. But the inroads of the Danes and the desolation which they spread over the land weakened the ascendancy of the ancient order. The Norman invasion swept away much of what the Danes had left. Yet so tenacious are the Irish of established tradition and usage, that Camden, the English historian, writing in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, tells how the chieftains have their brehons, or judges ; their historians, physicians, bards and harpers. The pursuit of these professions was hereditary, one family devoting itself to medicine, another to poetry, a third to music. Each man had land assigned to him for his support.

These professions were taught in Irish colleges, which were so highly considered that kings and princes took a personal interest in them. They were indeed in direct lineal succession with the Irish schools to which, in the seventh and eighth centuries, the young noblemen of Britain and the mainland of Europe had resort, as the home of learning. Even to the last the professors were eminent scholars, and in early days the appointment of the examiners lay with the arch-poet of the king.

Valleys and woodlands remote from the city were chosen sites for the colleges, and no youth from near by was allowed to be a student, for fear lest family and friends should hinder his work. The college itself usually consisted of a long, low group of white-washed buildings, warmly thatched. The interior was monastic in its simplicity. There was a large general meeting hall where the students gathered. Here the chief ollave or doctor would address them and give out a subject for poetic composition ; here too centered the social life of the school. Early in the morning the students assembled and, having heard a discourse and been given a subject to work upon, they breakfasted and retired to their rooms. A bed, a clothes rail, a couple of chairs were all the furniture. Window there was none; for the ollaves believed the light of day and glimpses of the world without incompatible with the concentration necessary for bardic composition. The student flung himself on the bed and gave his mind to poetic creation. To have a fine idea was not sufficient ; it must be expressed in orthodox form. Towards the close of day a servant came round with candles and each student wrote down what he had composed. Supper followed and the evening was spent in social converse.

In the Gaelic prime students were billeted on the people, like soldiers, or maintained by patrons. Even in later days the people from round about would bring provisions and, at the beginning of the school year, the students made presents to the professors.

The old order lingered on till the close of the seventeenth century, though many of the bards were killed during the Cromwellian invasion. It was the war between William of Orange and the Jacobites and the penal laws, however, that brought final destruction on the ancient Gaelic academies. The Williamite code made it a prison offense for any Catholic to teach. That ordinance, rigorously enforced, dealt a death blow to the bardic colleges. They utterly ceased to be and, if it were not for a description in the "Memoirs of Clanrickarde," published in 1720, even the all too meager account here given would be unavailable, though references to the schools are frequent in Gaelic literature for more than a thousand years.

It must not be imagined, however, that the members of the individual professions always kept themselves within the strict letter of their calling, or that everyone who made poetry was a bard, or everyone who played or sang a musician. Even in the heyday of Celticism we find the professions coquetting with each other. For example, we are told in the Book of Lecan that "When Felin Mac Criffin, monarch of Erin, was in Cashel of the Kings, there came to him the abbot of a church, who took his little eight-stringed harp from his girdle and played sweet music and sang a poem to it." Here we have a churchman who is also both musician and poet. The fact is significant, for we may be sure that, if ecclesiastics played the harp,

bards often did the same, though it was no part of their profession. Adamnan, the seventh-century biographer of St. Columba, tells us that the poet Cronan “ sang verses after the manner of his art.” Here the poet was a musician also.

Passages in poems dating from the thirteenth century onward picture a type of artist who was both poet and musician. Gilla Bride Mac Conmee is a good example. Mac Conmee, who was born in Ulster towards the end of the twelfth century, took service under Donnchadh Cairbre O’Brien, chief of the Dalcassians. His long sojourn in Alba or Scotland earned Mac Conmee the surname of Albanach. O’Brien sent him to try to recover a harp which had fallen into the hands of the Scotch. In this mission, however, Albanach was unsuccessful, and he laments his failure in a poem which the good fortune that watches over works of genius has brought down to us. Was Albanach a poet or a musician ? That is the question. The manner of the poem calls him a poet ; its matter proclaims him a musician. He surely had in him the stuff of which bards are made. Even in O’Curry’s literal translation we feel the glow of genius. He asks that the harp may be brought to him until, upon it, he may forget his grief. He wishes for the life of the evergreen yew tree that he may have the keeping of the harp in repair. What is this if not the authentic speech, the idiom, of the musician ?

Bring unto me the harp of my king.
Until upon it I forget my grief—
A man’s grief is soon banished
By the notes of that sweet-sounding tree.
He to whom this music-tree belonged
Was a noble youth of sweetest performance.
Many an inspired song has he sweetly sung
To that elegant, sweet-voiced instrument.
Many a splendid jewel has he bestowed
From behind this gem-set tree ;
Often has he distributed the spoils of the race of Conn,
With its graceful curve placed to his shoulder.
Beloved the hand that struck
The thin, slender-sided board ;
A tall, brave youth was he who played upon it
With dexterous hand, with perfect facility.
Whenever his hand touched
That home of music in perfection,
Its prolonged, soft, deep sigh
Took away from us all our grief.
When into the hall would come
The race of Cas of the waving hair,
A harp with pathetic strings within
Welcomed the comely men of Cashel.
The maiden became known to all men
Throughout the soft-bordered lands of Banba ;
It is the harp of Donchadh cried everyone—
The slender, thin and fragrant tree.
O’Brien’s harp ! sweet its melody,
At the head of the banquet of fair Gabhran ;
Oh ! how the pillar of bright Gabhran called forth
The melting tones of the thrilling chords.
No son of a bright Gaedhil shall get
The harp of O’Brien of the flowing hair ;
No son of a foreigner shall obtain

The graceful, gem-set, fairy instrument !
 Woe ! to have thought of sending to beg thee,
 Thou harp of the chieftain of fair Limerick—
 Woe ! to have thought of sending to purchase thee
 For a rich flock of Erinn's sheep.
 Sweet to me is thy melodious voice,
 O maid, that wast once the arch-king's ;
 Thy sprightly voice to me is sweet.
 Thou maiden from the Island of Erin.
 If to me were permitted in this Eastern land,
 The life of the evergreen yew tree,
 The noble chief of Brendon's hill.
 His hand-harp I would keep in repair.
 Beloved to me—it is natural to me—
 Are the beautiful woods of Scotland.
 Though strange, I love dearer still
 This tree from the woods of Erinn.

Albanach does not stand alone, however. Chance has preserved for us some verses written by a poet who was confessedly both a singer and a player upon the harp. Doncad Mor was his name, Lenox his home, and he flourished in the fourteenth or fifteenth century. The picture of the poet-musician, worn in years, with faltering voice and fingers that no longer sweep the strings with their old mastery, is documentary. It would have fascinated Balzac. Here are two verses of the poem, in Dr. Sigerson's translation :

Grieve for him whose voice is o'er
 When once more called to meet with men ;
 Him whose words come slow as sighs,
 Who ever tries and fails again.

Never now he swells the air.
 Nor rolls the fair and faultless lay—
 Harp he cannot set aside.
 Nor wake, when tried, Its minstrelsy.

Other examples may be cited. First, in order of time, comes Carrol O'Daly, with whose name tradition has linked that loveliest of melodies, "Eileen Aroon." A hundred years ago it was commonly thought of as "Robin Adair" and, with its added Caledonian lilt, few ever dreamed that it came from Ireland. But when Thomas Moore wrote "Erin, the tear and the smile in thine eye," the melody was heard once more in Irish form and took its place as the queen of folk song. But the endearing refrain, "Eileen Aroon" ("Eileen, Darling")—has in it an appeal that Moore cannot rival. Moreover, the song has enriched Gaelic with the salutation, "Cead mille Failte," "A hundred thousand welcomes," surely the most hearty welcome in any language. Tradition says the song is the outpouring of O'Daly's passion for Eileen Kavanagh. Kavanagh was a chieftain and the family drove O'Daly out of the country and tricked Eileen into believing her lover untrue. Careless now what became of her, she agreed to marry the man of her kinsmen's choice and the time was fixed for the celebration of the nuptials. But there came an uninvited guest, none other than O'Daly himself. Nobody recognized him in his harper's disguise, not even Eileen herself, until, taking up his harp, he burst into this devout love song. While he sang "Wilt thou or wilt thou go with me, Eileen Aroon?" she gave hint a glance that was answer enough. That night the lovers fled away and were united. It is a legend and it ought to be true.

Rating the evidence at its lowest worth, it shows that people were familiar with the idea of artists who were at once poets, composers and instrumentalists. To modern ears the word minstrel describes him most accurately

As late as the reign of Elizabeth, the makers of verse and its singers were regarded as two different professions. Edmund Spenser says that the Irish have bards who are to them “instead of poets,” and adds that their profession is “to set forth the praise or dispraise of men in their poems and rhymes,” which compositions, he declares, “are at so high request and estimation amongst them that none dare to displease them for fear of running into reproach beyond their offense and to be made infamous in the mouths of men.” What follows closely touches the point at issue—“For,” says our author, “their verses are taken up with a general applause and usually sung at feasts and meetings by certain persons whose proper function that is which also receive some great rewards and reputation besides.”

Down to the beginning of the eighteenth century, the bardic strain continues. Then came the penal laws like a blight, and the schools were destroyed. Shane Claragh Mac Donnell is the last Irishman to whom the title of bard can accurately be given. Those who apply the name to Carolan are slipshod in their use of terms. Mac Donnell was exclusively a poet and lamented Erin’s misfortunes in the great bardic manner. He was a “rank” Jacobite and, on several occasions, he had to save his life by fleeing from his enemies the bard hunters. John Tuomy, who mourned Mac Donnell in a fine lament, might have been a bard in the strict sense of the term had he been given the proper training. But he had to get such education as he could in the “hedge schools”—classes held by roadway, under the canopy of heaven, and taught by men who risked imprisonment as Catholic schoolmasters to give Irishmen the education they wanted. Even the bardic sessions held at Bruree and Charleville, where poets recited in friendly rivalry before the people, were suppressed.

The bard must tread the higher walks of poetry ; his verse must tell of Ireland’s past or voice her aspirations. When, therefore, people call Turlough O’Carolan the “Last of the Bards,” they are guilty of a solecism. O’Conor of Balinagare, Carolan’s patron, called him an oirfídeadh, a musician. This name is too narrow, however, to be accurate. Carolan was a harpist of remarkable skill, though the story of his having vanquished Geminani, the distinguished violinist, in a trial of skill must be relegated to the limbo of fable. He did earn that musician’s commendation, however, by correcting a composition which had been altered to deceive him. But it was in original composition that Carolan showed his real genius. His songs and harp pieces are melodious and full of character, in spite of his mistaken imitation of Corelli. As a poet he won wide celebrity, though he rarely essayed anything but sentimental ditties and drinking songs, dedicated for the most part to his patrons. What he might have done, if he had had his sight—he was blind from youth up—and if he had had such a musical training as fell to Bach or Handel, can only be conjectured. Beethoven, glancing over a few of his songs, was quick to perceive the genius in them. The stories told of Carolan show him to be a high-spirited, chivalrous gentleman. In his youth he had a sweet-heart, Bridget Cruise, whose name lives in one of his songs. When the pair had been parted twenty years and more, Carolan went on a pilgrimage to the wild locality known as St. Patrick’s Purgatory. Assisting some of the company in a difficult place, he took the hand of a lady. “By the word of my gossip,” he exclaimed, “that is the hand of Bridget Cruise.” And he spoke truth. The episode is slight enough ; but it could only have happened to an extraordinary man. In his last illness Carolan asked O’Flynn, the butler at Alderford, the residence of his lifelong patron, for a drink. O’Flynn gave him some whiskey and, after draining it off, Carolan addressed his attendant in the following verse :

I have traveled round, right through Conn’s country.
And I have found millions strong and valiant ;

But, by my baptism, I never found in any part
One who quenched my thirst right, but William O'Flynn.

It was the last flash of the poet's genius, and soon afterwards he closed his eyes in death. The butler at Alderford should not be confused with that churlish O'Flynn who once refused O'Carolan admission to the wine cellar. Him the poet immortalized in an ironical quatrain :

Alas ! O Dermot O'Flynn,
That it is not you who guard the door of hell ;
For it is you who would not let anyone approach you
Wherever you would be doorkeeper.

When the news of Carolan's death got abroad, the whole country poured forth to do him reverence. Sixty clergymen, Catholic and Protestant alike, were present at the funeral. They loved the man and knew that he stood for something that was best in the Irish race. The wake lasted four days and Carolan's old friend, Mrs. Dermot, joined the women mourners, " to weep," as she said, " for her poor gentleman, the head of Irish music." Hardiman tells how " on each side of the hall was placed a keg of whiskey, which was replenished as often as empty." Nor was the dead man without friends to mourn him in numbers he himself would have loved. His admirer, Mac Aib, wrote a lament which Dr. Sigerson has put into English :

My grief, my wounding, my anguish.
My sickness long.
Thy sweet harp-chords now languish
Without touch or song.
Who hence shall make music, vying
'Mid chiefs for aye.
Since thou, my friend, art lying
Cold in the clay ?

St Francis, St Dominic, listen,
St. Clare and all.
Ye host of the saints, who glisten
On heaven's high wall;
Give welcome to Torolach's spirit
Your ramparts among.
And the voice of his harp hear it
With glorious song.

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