

IRISH MUSIC.

'Nought can make the pulses beat, or heart's blood leap along,
Like the soft and dulcet cadence of some proud old
Irish song.'

We need not be ashamed or afraid to compete with any other nation in the musical department. No country is so prolific in exquisite melodies as Ireland. They stand unparalleled, towering above those of any other land.

Who has not heard the "Harp that once," the "Coolin," the "Last rose of Summer," "Garryown," the "Meeting of the waters," the "Ministrel Boy," or other soul-inspiring airs, without a thrill of pleasure, if not of rapture, coming over his spirit and pervading all his faculties with a heartfelt emotion not soon to be forgotten. They rank with the compositions of Mozart, Haydn or Handel, with the fire and measured echoes of German and Italian music. The prefatory symphony of one of the best compositions of Haydn, the German composer, was taken from "Dhionla na Greua," an old Irish air. Handel said he would rather be the author of "Aileen Aroon," one of Moore's productions, than the most exquisite of his musical compositions, including, we suppose, his oratorio of "The Messiah," which he wrote under the inspiration of a Dublin audience, by whom he was received with unbounded enthusiasm after he came from London, where he nearly starved for want of patronage. More than the applause of the theatre, the praise of his operas, fantasies and overtures, on which his fame as a composer depended, he preferred to be the author of an Irish melody. It requires musical genius to appreciate a masterpiece. Handel's genius made him love the beauty of the air. It fell with spiritualized, elastic pleasure on the great master's ears. He felt the gem was there, the soul of song that requires no overwrought variations, no meretricious aids to heighten the fine emotions produced on the enraptured spirits by its intrinsic merit.

Ireland has truly earned the title, "Island of Song." In early days her bards were the most honored of men. Favors were bestowed on them, too. They sat at the right hand of the king at the festive board, and the ancient sumptuary law accorded them privileges as were accorded to none others except those of princely rank.

The warrior who had signalized himself by his prowess on the field of battle, who returned crowned with the laurels of victory, who was received with the acclamations of an admiring

people, did homage to the bard, as he alone could make his fame immortal, since the Irish people's great characteristic was a love for song. In latter days, when England, with a tyranny scarcely paralleled in the history of barbarous nations, strove to prevent the Irish race from being educated, they were kept familiar with the history of their bleeding country by the chronicles of the bards. Her sons rushed to battle to the beautiful strains of the harp, and the most valiant in battle were generally the most skilful on the instrument, "that once through Tara's halls its soul of music shed."

Music was universally cultivated, and it was mainly instrumental in keeping alive a warlike and national spirit in the land.

When England endeavored to subjugate the Irish, knowing the firm hold music had on that unconquered and unconquerable race, she sought to root it out of the land by means of the most horrible in history. Her soldiers burned our churches and records; they did all in their power to wipe out our traditions; with barbaric hate they tore the strings of our loved harp asunder; they silenced the peals of the organ, and banished the choral worship to forest gloom, silent cavern and rocky shore; and the Gregorian, so holy and calculated to raise the soul to heaven, was no longer to be heard within the borders of unhappy Erin. Thus the harp, stringless and silent,

"Now hangs as mute on Tara's walls
As if that soul were dead."

There is an inspiration in Irish music. Though moss-covered with age, it still bears the fragrance and beauty of youth. Its strains are unrivalled; coming down through the path of time, it becomes clearer to us as the sun's rays increase in heat while passing through the clouds. To its enlivening and soul-stirring strains, falling on the fiery Irish heart like sparks of electric fire, the Irish soldier has rushed on the foe with a dauntlessness unsurpassed by mortal men in the annals of war.

By the waters of Babylon the Hebrews sat down and wept when they thought of Zion. So by the waters of "strange, but happier lands," wretched with the dazzling gems of liberty, the poor "exiles of Erin" are often thrown into a weeping attitude when they listen to those sweet melodies which remind them of the beautiful isle of the sea. Tears in that case are not unmanly. It is only a tribute paid to the overwhelming emotions caused by the enchanting influences of our nation's music.