

It has been objected by some critics of Hayes' compilation of Irish ballads, that many selections included therein are scarcely worthy of the name, being mere fiery effusions of Irish sentiment. I should like to ask such critics what a ballad should be if not "fiery." A ballad writer must be one deeply imbued with his subject, who feels keenly every sentiment he expresses. In most ballads, especially those of a political or historical kind, wherein martial exploits or revolutionary incidents are recounted, there must be two sides. One of these sides the poet must adopt, and there must be no lukewarmness in the treatment of his theme. For the ballad must be written under the spell of inspiration, and under the highest tension of poetic feeling. It is written when the feelings are roused to the highest pitch, and the soul burns with love or anger, or whatever passions may be called forth by the theme. How can cool deliberative judgment be expected when the spirit is under such a strain? It would be folly to require it. It would mar the beauty of the entire poem and change its very nature to introduce the effects of the operations of the soul when in its calmer moods into this species of composition. It would be absurd to contend for such procedure. Simplicity and fire are the *differentia specifica* of the ballad, and the integrity of the poem is in direct ratio to their degree of eminence. It is through lack of this very "fire" that

many of our foremost modern poets have failed as balladists, though they have won distinction in other branches of the poetic art. It is the presence of this "fire" that elicits that wild, enthusiastic applause which is invariably accorded the proper recital of "Fontenoy," "The Revenge" and ballads of their rank. Its presence is accounted for by the fact that the poet felt every word he wrote, expressed his thoughts while under the spell of poetic inspiration, and with the passionate bitterness of a partizan. Viewed in this light the very objection against Irish "fire" becomes a compliment to the Irish balladists, and an acknowledgment of their excellence.

A revival of the ballad has occurred in recent years among contemporary Irish and Irish-American poets, many of whose effusions are highly creditable compositions. This augurs well for the future of Irish ballad poetry. For the fund of themes is inexhaustible; Ireland's history rich in romance, daily furnishes incidents worthy of the poet's pen. And there can be no doubt that the inspiration which gave birth to the songs of the ancient bards, the inspiration that awoke the harp of Ossian, of Amergin, of O'Carollan, still lives, and will stir the strings of many a lyre to thoughts as noble and patriotic, and in measures as melodious and sweet as ever emanated from the gifted singers of those old days.

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He jests at scars that never felt a wound.

—SHAKESPEARE.