

writers which is perhaps unequalled and certainly unexcelled in literature. The ballads of Moore, Mangan, Davis, Callanan, M'Gee, Williams, Gerald Griffin, Lover, Ferguson, Simmons, Irwin, Mrs. R. W. Wilde, J. Keegan, and a host of others form a veritable *thesaurus* of this species of poetical composition, beside which "Percy's Reliques," and Scott's "Border Songs" lose their lustre. They are generally characterized by strength of thought, depth of feeling, energy of expression, and a singular melody of versification, which lends them an especial charm. They evidence their authors' enjoyment of the Muses' rarest gift, the true poetic inspiration, that inspiration, short of duration because of its very intensity, which thrills the inspired nature to the core, and which manifests itself in a poem, by the sympathy it engenders in the reader's breast with the sentiments expressed. Their excellence would be better appreciated by quotations of the more beautiful ballads among them, but as space will not admit of this, a reference to the treasure-chambers wherein they are stored must suffice. Both Edward Hayes and John Boyle O'Reilly have collected these ballads and compiled them into volumes, which one never tires of reading. Scott says he remembers the tree beneath whose shade he used to spend whole days lost to the world, feasting upon Percy's "Reliques of Old English Poetry." Anyone who will lay down Percy's "Reliques" and take up Hayes' "Irish Ballads," if he be imbued with Scott's love for balladry, will immediately seek that tree.

A noteworthy feature in Irish ballad poetry is its infinite variety of metre, wherein it differs from that of most other lands. In both Lockhart's Spanish translations and Percy's "Reliques," the verses are marked by a wearisome sameness of metre almost throughout these volumes. In the Irish songs not only is the variety of metre remarkable, but the melodious flow of the verse is in many cases unsurpassed in the language. With what ease the numbers glide along, and how admirably the rhymes chime in, in D. F. McCarthy's "Alice and Una!"

"And then the dazzling lustre of the hall in which they muster—
Where brightest diamonds cluster on the flashing walls around ;

And the flying and advancing, and the sighing and the glancing,
And the music and the dancing on the flower-in-woven ground,
And the laughing and the feasting, and the quaffing and the sound,
In which their voices all are drowned !

But the murmur now is hushing there's a pushing and a rushing,
There's a crowding and a crushing, through that golden, fairy place,
Where a snowy veil is lifting, like the slow and silent shifting
Of a shining vapor drifting across the moon's pale face,
For there sits gentle Una, fairest queen of fairy race,
In her beauty, and her majesty and grace."

And again note the melody and ease of rhythm of R. W. Williams' "Fairies of Knockshagowna :"

"Advance ! advance ! for a farewell dance,
Ere the nighty pomp is o'er :
From a mushroom's cone shall our pipers drone,
The sward our elastic floor ;
While the Phooka-horse holds his frantic course
Over wood and mountain fall,
And the Banshees croon a rhythmic rune
From the crumbling, ivied wall !

The strict adaptability of metre to the theme is another point worthy of note. In the pathetic and emigrant ballads this is specially evident. J. C. Mangan is particularly fecund in plaintive metres, yet Thomas Davis has perhaps eclipsed even him in "My Grave," one stanza of which runs thus :

"Shall they bury me in the Palace Tombs,
Or under the shade of Cathedral domes?
Sweet 'twere to lie on Italy's shore ;
Yet not there, nor in Greece, though I love it more.
In the wolf or the vulture my grave shall I find ?
Shall my ashes career on the world-seeing wind ?
Shall they fling my corpse in the battle mound,
Where coffinless thousands lie under the ground ?
Just as they fall they are buried so—
O, no ! O, no !

A vein of sadness is traceable through nearly all Irish song, and it is in the pathetic ballad that the rarest gems of verse are to be found. Doubtless the tenor of Erin's history is accountable in a great degree, for the dominance of this sad chord in the nation's lyre. Among these plaintive effusions a few of the more deeply touching are Moore's "She is far from the Land;" D. F. McCarthy's "The Irish Emigrant's Mother;" J. Keegan's "The Holly and Ivy Girl;" "The Dying Girl" by R. D. Williams, and "The Exile's Request" by T. D. McGee,