

most practical day; disposed though we may be to ridicule their class, we cannot but be impressed by the fact that there was something intensely chivalric and savoring of the highest romance in the sight of these white-haired bards accompanying their king to battle, their flowing robes marking the hottest of the fight, shouting the inspiring war-strains of the clan, and recounting the mighty deeds of former chieftains for the emulation of the bucklered warriors round them. What lungs these old singers must have had, and how their inspiring voices must have rung out above the din of war!

But soon the hymn of peace was to float over the land and the war-song to be relegated to the past. With the advent of Christianity the old pagan bards disappeared, and the ballad was used to clothe the sentiments of the new religion, and the aspirations of the Christian soul by St. Columbanus and others in the favored language of the Church. Yet the Gaelic songs still existed in out of the way places, and for centuries the time honoured love for the fight, and its recital in verse lived in the people's hearts. During these early Christian times Ireland was famed for her learning. Schools and colleges dotted the land, to which students from all parts of Europe flocked for instruction. Though the continent was in a turmoil, quiet reigned in Ireland, and with the arts of peace were cultivated all the branches of science then known. But towards the end of the eighth century the temple of Janus was opened by the advent of that barbarous horde of Danes, who swept like a pestilence over the land burning and destroying all that came in their way. Erin's libraries were among the first institutions that felt the flame, and with them the accumulated literature of centuries was forever lost. There was scarcely breathing space between their expulsion and their return in the twelfth century, and hardly was quiet restored again when those infamous penal laws were inaugurated which proved the death-blow to literature and the arts. During the reigns succeeding their promulgation, the bards were persecuted as public pests, were banned and forced to flee for their lives into the thicknesses of the forest and the crannies of their native hills. Eliza-

both enacted most stringent laws against the bards, including them among peddlers, common players, rogues, vagabonds and sturdy beggars, which inspired Dr. Bull to write satirically.—

“When Jesus went to Janus' house
Whose daughter was about to dye,
He turned the minstrels out of doors
Among the rascal company.
Beggars they are with one consent,
And rogues by act of parliament.”

Edward I acted with like severity against the Welsh bards, when he first formed the plan of subjugating that country. These facts merely go to show the political influence of the ballad. This poetry of nature, when it flows freely from the heart, has a most powerful effect upon men. The bards, strolling through the country, recalled in their verses the liberty and national glory of former days, rebuked men for their lethargy, and by magnifying the deeds of their ancestors, stirred many up to emulate them. The old fire still smouldered in the peoples' breasts, and only required this breath to fan it into new flame. And so the bards were dangerous; and so the government endeavoured to stamp them out. As easy would it have been to exterminate the Irish people as the bards. Their songs lived with them through all the long years of strife and persecution, the very fact of their preservation demonstrating the intense nationality and patriotism of that people who could still adhere to the old beliefs, and still foster the old loves in song, even when the so doing endangered their possessions, their liberties, and their very lives.

Times of war and revolution, of great national upheaval and political cataclasm, though they may be favorable to the inspiration, perhaps even to the production of literature, are most unfavorable to its preservation; and therefore is it extraordinary that through all these trying centuries the ancient ballads were preserved intact, and floating down through the ages, the ringing war-chant, the chivalrous tale, the sweet pathetic song of love, the mystic legend of fairy-land, are borne to us upon the stream of time, little the worse of the long and stormy voyage.

The latter part of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the present one have furnished a galaxy of Irish ballad