

of the Scottish Border;" Lockhart's translations open up to us the vista of Spanish balladry; Madame de Chenier in modern Greece, and Herder and Grimm in Germany, deserve the eternal gratitude of their countrymen, for their collection and preservation of these unwritten records of their nations' history; and what these have done for their respective countries, O'Rielly and Hayes have done for Ireland. They have gathered together the scattered flowers strewn along the path of Erin's history, and bound them into a bouquet, sweeter and more beautiful than any formed from the rhythmical traditions of other lands.

By those who are inclined to depreciate the ballad, it should be borne in mind that in addition to its historical importance, it is the germ of all poetical composition, and the source from which sprang some of the greatest master-pieces in all languages. The epic and the drama, those two most powerful interpretations of the poetic art, are the one but an expansion, the other but a metamorphosis of the ballad: while the *Iliad* is a series of ballads sung by their author, as he strolled through the land of his sires; the *Aeneid*, an extended tale, surpassing the *Iliad* in polish and rhetorical beauty, but constructed upon the ballad plan. Shakespeare's "*Merchant of Venice*" owes its origin to an old ballad by Gernutus, and King Lear also is said to have been inspired by an old metrical legend.

But both its historical importance and its influence upon literature are superseded by its intrinsic value, as the *Shibboleth* of true poetic genius. Though the simplest, it is at the same time the sublimest species of poetical composition; and a man's success as a balladist may be taken as a sure criterion whereby to catalogue him, either as one of Nature's poets, or as a mere artificer in verse. For the balladist must be one who can shut out the present world from his sight, travel back in spirit to the times whereof he writes, throw himself heart and soul into the events he records, and become for a time an actor in the scenes he describes. There is no room in the ballad for far-fetched metaphor and highly-wrought description. The poet must trust to the inspiration of nature, and the language must pour out

simple and strong, untrammelled by the dictates of Art. It was in this way that Homer, Ossian and O'Carolan sang,—blind old bards all three,—but though Heaven's light was denied them, the light of the soul lit up their inner being, and pictured to them the rush of mighty armies and the bouts of god-protected heroes as vividly as if the scenes were being enacted before them; and the shouts of warriors and the clang of arms rang in their ears as loudly as they did around doomed Troy, or in the clannish wars of the Gael. None but the true poet is ever thus inspired, and favored of the Muses is he who can resign himself to the potent spell.

As far back as the days of Amergin, the chief bard of the Milesian colony the ballad is known to have existed in Erin, though the time of its introduction is as mysterious as the identity of her tower-builders. The Irish bards were of three classes, the *Fíleas* who celebrated the glories of war and the mysteries of religion; the *Brehons*, who poetized the laws and sang them to the people; and the *Seanachies*, who played the parts of historian and antiquarian. In these old days nearly every household of any note had its *Seanachie*, who sang the deeds of the family chiefs in war, and traced the family stream back to its source in the dim ages of the past. The princes of the people were very partial to the bards, and treated them with fatherly love. Schools were founded for their education wherein the course of instruction lasted seven years, at the end of which time they received the degree of *Ollamh*, when they would go forth and sing the glories of their ancient chiefs, praise in sweet song the rites of their religion, or lift their voices in laudation of the scions of noble sires. The degree of honor accorded them may be gathered from the fact, that whereas the common people were allowed but one color for their raiment, the bards were permitted a robe of four different shades, but one less than worn by the king himself. The people treated them with the deepest reverence, looking upon them as hallowed beings. Considering the superstitious nature of the people and the age in which they lived, this is scarcely to be wondered at. For even now, in this