

often admired by some of the best judges that have referred to the subject; and its singular adaptation to poetry remains a perpetual monument of the national taste; and has, no doubt, contributed to the celebrity of the Irish bards in pagan, as well as in Christian times. Every family of distinction retained a poet and a harper; and the poet's person and residence were always esteemed sacred, in the midst of all the turbulence which sometimes prevailed.*

One duty of the bard was to attend his patron in the field of battle; to animate him during the engagement; and to celebrate his exploits in poetic numbers. The ode composed on such occasions was called *Rosg-Catha*, or the eye of battle. A great number of these odes are preserved in ancient manuscripts, and are said to be not only beautiful, but animating to the highest degree. The effect may be easily conceived which they were calculated to produce on the minds of ambitious and imperfectly civilized chieftains when engaged with an enemy; and the veneration in which this order of men were universally held by the people was almost without precedent in any other country.

Nor was it merely in the time of war that the services of the bard were required by his patron, but the funeral obsequies could not be properly performed without his aid. It was the peculiar office of the bard to compose the funeral dirge, which was chanted by a chorus of minstrels who were retained for such services. The heroism of the departed, and his supposed virtues, were celebrated in affecting strains; whilst the solemnity of the procession to the last resting-place of the defunct could not fail to produce an extensive effect upon the minds of the spectators.

* MacPhers. Crit. Dissert., Dis. XIX.