

biddin' an' I'll engage you'll soon have a pocket full of money."

Tom McEnciry was prevailed upon, he searched for his old harp, set it in order, so as to produce sounds as nearly resembling music, as could be nearly expected from such a musician, and such an instrument. Now, in order to comprehend the full extent of Tom's presumption, and of the nature of the competition, which the eloquence of his helpmate urged him to set at defiance it is necessary to bear in mind that the race of wandering bards in Ireland, was not yet extinct. The printing press, and the newspaper had not yet rendered man independent of the talents of those locomotive geniuses, whose business it was to travel from castle to castle, entertaining the lordly host or hostess, with the song, the tale, or the genealogical narrative, according to the mode in which they happened to find their hearers. The privileges and emoluments of those bards were considerable, and consequently, the candidates for the profession were numerous, and the course of education protracted and elaborate. They generally went in companies of twelve to the houses of the chieftains, and petty princes, about the isle, comprising in their number a poet, or filea, a erolarie or harper, a seanachie or antiquarian, together with a jester, and persons skilled in various field sports all of whom, when the time allotted had expired, having received their several fees shifted their quarters, and gave place to a new batch of rambling literati of the same description. The amount of their fees, and the degree of honor shown them in the number of their attendants, or persons who were appointed to wait on them, and in the length of time allowed to them to remain as guests, were regulated by the number or quality of their compositions. The many privileges and emoluments attached to the profession, gave rise to a degree of competition, which appears almost incredible. In the seventh century they are said to have comprised no less than a third of the male population of the kingdom; insomuch, that the monarch of that day, was obliged to restrict their number by law. Nor is it to be supposed that all which is related of their laws and customs, is a more

by-gone legend. The practise continued to a period long subsequent to the English invasion, and even at the present day, some individuals of the class are to be found at rural wakes and weddings and their compositions, though now limited to the entertainment of a humbler class of auditors, are not less popular than when told by the bedside of the monarch, desirous to forget the toils of state, or the provincial chief returning weary from the pleasures of the chase. But to return, Tom McEnciry set off early on a winter morning, like the Minstrel Boy, with

"his wild harp slung behind him,"

after bidding Mrs. McEnciry an affectionate farewell. The morning was fine though frosty, and Tom felt something of the spirit of adventure buoy up his heart, as his footsteps rung upon the hard and lone high-road. He remembered the outset of the renowned Jack and his eleven brothers, and found himself with a conscious elevation of mind, in much the same circumstances under which that favorite of fortune and many other great historical personages had set out on their career. He had not gone far, indulging these thoughts, when his attention was suddenly attracted by the sound of a strange voice at a distance.

"Good morning, Mr. McEnciry," said the voice.

Tom looked up and beheld a man coming down the hill, dressed in homely attire, but with something in his countenance and demeanour which revivited Tom's attention in spite of himself.

"Good morning, kindly," replied Tom, "although I don't know how you come to know my name, for I never saw you before in my life as I can call to my mind."

"Oh, I know you very well," said the stranger, "but pray tell me what is the reason of your leaving home so early in the morning, and at such a season of the year?"

"Hard times, then—the hard times," replied Tom with a mournful look.

"But is it hard times that makes you carry that old harp on your back?"

"The very same raison. I have nothin' to get at home an' I'm goin' about to see what would I make by playin' a