

ROMANCE OF IRISH HISTORY.

BY MRS. B—N.

Story of Deara, Princess of Meath.

LOFTY were the hills, and clear the streams, which owned the sway of Eric, King of Meath. Brave were the warriors who fought beneath his banner, and fair were the maidens who guarded them for the fight. Rich were the halls of Eric, with the spoils of conquered foes; but richer than the red gold and glittering gems, was the lovely daughter of the chief—Deara, the beautiful De-ra, the peerless flower of Inis-fail, whose name was enwreathed in song and whispered in melody, throughout the green isle. As a sunbeam amid the stars, was the daughter of Eric. Queen-like and majestic was her form, yet light and graceful as a daisy on the hills of Erin," the flowers bent not beneath her tread. Dark as the deep waters of a mountain lake, shone the eyes of Deara, and as the beams sparkle on its waves, so did the light of soul illumine their soft luster. Like threads of waving gold, fell the ringlets of her hair, around a neck, graceful as the swan's, and white as the cygnet—lovely the first blush of the young rose, was her cheek and smiles; the bright emanation of a happy heart played round the parted coral of her fairy lips. Great was the fame of Eric; but greater was Deara's, and unconquered chieftains and proud kings bow'd before her, vanquished by her beauty.

Among those who sought her hand, was O'Rourk the gallant Prince of Breffni. Richer far richer were the other suitors; but when did gold sway the purpose of an Irish heart? And to him did Eric betroth the hand of his daughter. Mighty was O'Rourk in the hall of council, as in the field of battle—he was famous in the land for stainless honour, and unvalued bravery. Like Bayard of France, he was styled "*sans peur et sans reproche*" and Deara fancied that she loved him. Yet it was not fancy, for the warm deep glow of young love was not the feeling she had for him. She but esteemed his virtue and admired his valour; love lay buried in her heart like a hidden spring, which was one day to gush forth, and overwhelm her in its strength. In truth, O'Rourk was not one to win a maiden like Deara; he was unskilled in all the gentler arts of peace, and could but speak as the sage adviser, or the fearless leader of a host. The forty years he had lived, had not been all sunshine, and their now had begun to mingle with his raven hair. Many a deep scar furrowed his brown cheek,

and his lofty brow shewed the traces care and thought had imprinted there. Never before, had O'Rourk known love, and it now glowed pure and bright as each other feeling of his noble spirit. The daughter of Eric might not be wed in secret, and splendid was the festival of her bridal. All the nobles of the land assembled to the palace of Eric, and each vied with the other in the number of their followers, and grandeur of their equipments. But far superior to them all, was Mac Murtagh, the young King of Munster. The armour of his warriors glittered brightest, and his banner floated higher than the rest. Mac Murtagh had just succeeded to the treasures and kingdom of his father. Youth yet bloomed on his cheek, but his name was not unknown in the annals of bravery. Tall and graceful as the mountain pine, was the form of the young chieftain, and his eye of clear Milesian blue, beamed like the glance of the falcon. Well was Mac Murtagh graced in the most courtly graces of the time, and so thought Deara, as she glided by his side through the dance, or listened to the soft strains of his harp, as it breathed forth praises of her beauty. Coldly did she hear the lay of the other minstrels, but when his tones fell upon her ear, a blush soft as the fading light of day, tinged her cheek; and those who can trace the feeling of the heart in the language of the eye, might have read love in the gaze of Mac Murtagh, as it met the soft glance of Deara.

Six days of the festival passed, and in song and revel sped the hours. The noon of the seventh found Deara before the altar as the bride of O'Rourk. The plighted path of an Irish maiden might not be recalled, or hers would have been so then, for Mac Murtagh had told his love, and she had heard the avowal; the passion each had for the other, burned all the brighter for concealment; and in her bridal hour, the brow of Deara wore a look of sadness. Strange did the simple plainness of O'Rourk appear amid the gay assemblage of the guests—to him it seemed as if the glory of Erin had departed, when he saw her sons, the descendants of "Bryan, the brave," arrayed in silk, and glittering with jewels; and in part he was right, for luxury had crept in and paved the way for the fall of the lovely island. But as yet, some true hearts beat there, and truer and braver than O'Rourk's, as he stood amid the festal throng, in the rude garb of a Milesian warrior. By his side gleamed a huge falchion, which had belonged to Uffa, a gigantic Dane, who had ravaged the coasts of Erin, till he fell