

## AN IRISH CATHOLIC NOVELIST.

## I.

An amiable trait in the character of Charles Dickens was his readiness to act as sponsor, as literary godfather, to the productions of promising young authors. Possessed of that sublime self-confidence which is characteristic of genius, he was never a prey to the timorous jealousy which causes meaner craftsmen to see in every fellow-worker a dangerous rival. During the period of his editorial connection with *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, he gave proofs of his shrewd discernment by introducing to the public several writers whose after productions are now valuable portions of our literature. It was in the pages of these periodicals that Wilkie Collins first evinced that talent for weaving mysterious and intricate plots which has made his name famous. Adelaide Procter, too, whose exquisite verses have delighted so many readers, both Catholic and Protestant, was a protégé of Dickens, sending, with the delicacy of a truly refined mind, her first verses to *Household Words* under an assumed name, lest the editor should be pained at being unable to accept the contribution of the daughter of Barry Cornwall.

But there is another lady whose first appearance in the literary world was made under the same gracious auspices, and whose writings are not as well known in America as they deserve to be. Rosa Mulholland is a journalist, novelist and poet of distinguished ability. Yet she has not been as successful as Mr. Collins or Miss Procter, with whom she began her career on an equal footing. The reason of this may be that her writings have not the devotional character which makes the latter a favourite with those of pious dispositions, while they are yet entirely free from the prurient sensationalism which commends to more worldly-minded readers the author of "The Woman in White."

Though pursuing three branches of her profession, Miss Mulholland is essentially a poet. It is not merely that her prose, like that of Father Ryan, is smooth and musical as verse, that it has more metrical rhythmical beauties than what the friends of Walt Whitman are pleased to style poetry; but it is the wealth of poetic imagery spread profusely over every page, the landscapes drawn with the strong, quick touches which dilettantism cannot hope to possess, the hidden beauties of nature shown to us, beauties which pass unnoticed by all but the poetic eye—it is this that shows that, though compelled perchance to follow more level paths, the author ever turns her gaze upwards to the heights of Parnassus.

This article does not propose to speak of the poetical works of Rosa Mulholland, to which no higher recommendation can be given than the generous praise of that scholarly poet and editor, the Rev. Matthew Russell, S. J., of the *Irish Monthly*. The writer desires to tell the readers of this REVIEW something of the charming and pure tales of this gifted author, hoping that they may be induced to read them, and believing that they will find the same pleasure in their perusal as himself.

"The Wild Birds of Killeevy" (New York: Hickey & Co) is one of the most fascinating and, at the same time, most wholesome works of fiction that can be placed in a young person's hands, not that our elders also will not find it very entertaining. As the sub-title tells us, it is a romance, not of the days of chivalry, of dragons and enchanted castles, not, as some might imagine, of those gallant exiles known as "The Wild Geese of Erin," but a romance of the nineteenth century. The characters are plain, everyday people (the hero and heroine, of course, excepted); there are no diabolical villains, whose images impress themselves on our minds, and give us nightmare after we have sat up reading till midnight. No harrowing episodes strain the nerves to a hysterical pitch, although there is plenty of sorrow, plenty of cruelty on the part of that hard-hearted goddess, Fate, who so delights (in novels at least) to keep loving hearts disunited. And yet it is a romance! Perhaps it is rather the method of treatment, than the incidents themselves, which constitute it such. Perhaps it is the halo of poetic

fancy which envelops all of the author's creations. Certain it is that there is here no trace of that absurd realism of which Howells and James are the apostles, which busies itself about the trivialities, the nothings of life. Can any poet be a realist of this type?

But the current is changing. The innate love of the heroic and the beautiful is beginning to reassert its claims, and it is devoutly to be wished that the returning tide will carry Miss Mulholland's romances into the haven of popularity.

To come back to our *Wild Birds*. They are an Irish boy and girl, Kevin and Fanchea, brother and sister, not by nature, but by the kindness of Kevin's mother, who took the orphan Fanchea into her poor cabin and reared her as her own daughter. Hand in hand they stand together on bleak Killeevy mountain, gazing out upon the blue ocean, and while the little maid pours forth a rushing torrent of song, the tall, awkward frame of her companion quivers with emotion which he endeavours, but vainly, to express in words. Deeply and bitterly he feels his own impotence. By the neighbours, and even his parents, Kevin is regarded as a dolt, who will never be of any use outside of his father's potato-patch. Good Father Ulick has found him incapable of mastering the rudiments of learning, and has given him up in despair. But he is Fanchea's hero. To her there is no one in the world so wise or so clever as Kevin; and her sunny childish faith in him is the sole ray of light which cheers him during his long night vigils when wondrous visions pass through his heated brain, maddened with the knowledge of its powerlessness.

But Fanchea is stolen by gipsies, who believe that the silver of her voice might be profitably converted into lining for their pockets; and Kevin must go out into the wide, wicked world, of which he is so ignorant, in order to search for her. The necessity of action seems to open the hidden springs of genius in his nature, which now begins its noble development. It is to London he goes, hardly knowing why, to begin his search. Hither, too, Fanchea flies on escaping from her captors, and here she dwells within a stone's throw of Kevin; her voice sounds in his ears as she sings one night in the streets, but they never come together.

Fanchea's friend, the warm-hearted, impulsive, melancholy little Signora, with her flowers, and her harp, and her hopes of some day painting a great picture, is a touching figure. The child writes home to Kevin, who is ever in her thoughts, but she can only address her letter to "Killeevy Mountain, Ireland," a place unknown to the postal authorities, and of course the loving missive is returned to her.

It would be forestalling a pleasure for our readers were we to tell them in detail how Fanchea comes to be adopted by eccentric old Lord Waldemar, who sees in her a future Patti or Nilsson; how Kevin educates himself with the assistance of a kind gentleman, Mr. Thistleton Honeywood, who encourages his literary aspirations, and induces him to cultivate his poetic talent; how Fanchea and Kevin both go abroad, and how the latter studies German mysticism in the person of the Baroness Ida, who bears some resemblance to Arnolia Lorraine in "Vivian Grey," but is a much more natural creation than any to be found in that splendid jumble of impossible characters and improbable incidents; how Fanchea is wooed in vain by young Captain Waldemar; how Kevin becomes the unconscious victim of the jealousy of his patron, who believes him in love with the Baroness; and how at last, in one of the beautiful churches of sunny Italy, the home of song, Kevin hears again the tones of that bird-like voice which has ever been present to him through the long weary years; and the grand Celtic strains of that familiar "Hymn of the Virgin Triumphant," sung so often on Killeevy's Mountain, draws Fanchea's hero and lover to her side; and the truant "Wild Birds" return together to the parent nest.

In the "Wicked Woods of Tobereevil" Miss Mulholland strikes a lower and less cheerful key. Mary Mourne is not so lovable a heroine as Fanchea, nor is Paul Finiston so noble a hero as Kevin. But although this novel does not possess the [subtle, indescribable charm which