

The Savage loves his native shore

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The Cabinet

Of

Irish Literature :

Selections from the works of the

Chief poets, orators, and prose writers

Of Ireland.

With Biographical Sketches and Literary Notices,

Charles A. Read, F.R.H.S.,

Author of " Tales and Stories of Irish Life," " Stories from the Ancient Classics," &c.

VOL. II.

JAMES ORR.

BORN 1770 — DIED 1816.

[James Orr was born in 1770 at the little village of Ballycarry, between Larne and Carrickfergus, and in early life followed the trade of a journeyman weaver. When the *Northern Star*, the organ of the United Irishmen, was established in Belfast he became one of its poetical contributors, being already well known in his own neighbourhood as " the Poet of Ballycarry." Orr believed in the cause which he advocated ; his poetry was not mere verse-making, but the genuine outburst of his heart ; and he soon became an affiliated member of the political union. In 1798 he took an active part in the battle of Antrim, and as a consequence was obliged to go into hiding. For a time he skulked about from place to place, but at last, being conscious that he was not guilty of any really criminal action, he appeared before the authorities and surrendered himself. He was sent to prison, where he lay for a long time ; but as nothing like an overt act of treason could be proved against him, except by his own confession, he was in the end set free on condition of transporting himself to America. He fulfilled this condition, and on the outward passage wrote his pathetic " Song of an Exile." In America he did not remain many years ; matters had rapidly improved at home, and he returned to his native village and his original loom. But his misfortunes seem to have had a depressing influence on his spirit, for after his return his poetic efforts were much inferior to those of earlier times, and soon ceased altogether.

Orr died on the 24th of April, 1816, on the spot where he was born, leaving behind him at least one song, " The Irishman," which will live so long as there are men to deserve its name.]

The Irishman.

The savage loves his native shore,
Though rude the soil and chill the air ;
Then well may Erin's sons adore
Their isle, which nature formed so fair.
What flood reflects a shore so sweet
As Shannon great, or pastoral Bann ?
Or who a friend or foe can meet
So generous as an Irishman ?

His hand is rash, his heart is warm,
But honesty is still his guide ;
None more repents a deed of harm,
And none forgives with nobler pride ;
He may be duped, but won't be dared—
More fit to practise than to plan ;
He dearly earns his poor reward,
And spends it like an Irishman.

If strange or poor, for you he'll pay,
And guide to where you safe may be ;
If you're his guest, while e'er you stay
His cottage holds a jubilee.
His inmost soul he will unlock,
And if he may *your* secrets scan,
Your confidence he scorns to mock,
For faithful is an Irishman.

By honour bound in woe or weal,
Whate'er she bids he dares to do ;
Try him with bribes—they won't prevail ;
Prove him in fire you'll find him true.
He seeks not safety, let his post
Be where it ought, in danger's van ;
And if the field of fame be lost,
It won't be by an Irishman.

Erin ! loved land ! from age to age
Be thou more great, more famed, and free ;
May peace be thine, or, shouldst thou wage
Defensive war, cheap victory.
May plenty bloom in every field
Which gentle breezes softly fan,
And cheerful smiles serenely gild
The home of every Irishman !

Song of an Exile.

In Ireland 'tis evening—from toil my friends hie all,
And weary walk home o'er the dew-spangled lea ;
The shepherd in love tunes his grief-soothing viol,
Or visits the maid that his partner will be ;
The blithe milk-maid trips to the herd that stands lowing ;

The west richly smiles, and the landscape is glowing ;
The sad-sounding curfew, and torrent fast-flowing,
Are heard by my fancy, though far, far at sea !

What has my eye seen since I left the green valleys,
But ships as remote as the prospect could be?
Unwieldy, huge monsters, as ugly as malice,
And floats of some wreck, which with sorrow I see ?
What's seen but the fowl, that its lonely flight urges,
The lightning, that darts through the sky-meeting surges,
And the sad-scowling sky, that with bitter rain scourges
This cheek care sits drooping on, far, far at sea !

How hideous the hold is !—Here, children arc screaming—
There, dames faint through thirst, with their babes on their knee !
Here, down every hatch the big breakers are streaming,
And there, with a crash, half the fixtures break free !
Some court, some contend, some sit dull stories telling ;
The mate's mad and drunk, and the tars tasked and yelling ;
What sickness and sorrow pervade my rude dwelling !—
A huge floating lazar-house, far, far at sea !

How changed all may be when I seek the sweet village :
A hedge-row may bloom where its street used to be ;
The floors of my friends may be tortured by tillage,
And the upstart be served by the fallen grandee ;
The axe may have humbled the grove that I haunted,
And shades be my shield that as yet are unplanted,
Nor one comrade live who repined when he wanted
The sociable sufferer that's far, far at sea !

In Ireland 'tis night—on the flowers of my setting
A parent may kneel, fondly praying for me ;—
The village is smokeless—the red moon is getting
That hill for a throne which I hope yet to see.
If innocence thrive, many more have to grieve for ;
Success, slow but sure, I'll contentedly live for :
Yes, Sylvia, we'll meet, and your sigh cease to heave for
The swain your fine image haunts, far, far at sea !

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