

Irish minstrelsy. Being a selection of Irish songs, lyrics, and ballads

H. Halliday Sparling

1888

Lament of The Evicted Irish Peasant. [1]

The night is dark and dreary,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe ! [2]
And the heart that loves you weary,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
For every hope is blighted,
That bloomed when first we plighted
Our troth, and were united,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe.

Still our homestead we behold,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
But the cheerful hearth is cold,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
And those around its glow
Assembled long ago,
In the cold, cold earth lie low,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !

'Twas famine's wasting breath,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
That winged the shaft of death,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
And the landlord, lost to feeling,
Who drove us from our sheeling,
Though we prayed for mercy kneeling,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !

O 'twas heartless from that floor,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
Where our fathers dwelt of yore,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
To fling our offspring—seven—
'Neath the wintry skies of heaven.
To perish on that even,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !

But the sleety blast blows chill,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
Let me press thee closer still,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !
To this scathed, bleeding heart,
Beloved as thou art ;
For too soon—too soon we part,
 A gradh geal mo chroidhe !

Anonymous.

When Eire first rose from the dark-swelling flood,
God blessed the green island, and saw it was good ;
The emerald of Europe, it sparkled and shone,
In the ring of the world, the most precious stone.
In her sun, in her soil, in her station thrice blest,
With her back towards Britain, her face to the west,
Eire stands proudly insular, on her steep shore,
And strikes her high harp 'mid the ocean's deep roar.

But when its soft tones seem to mourn and to weep,
A dark chain of silence is thrown o'er the deep ;
At the thought of the past the tears gush from her eyes,
And the pulse of her heart makes her white bosom rise.
O sons of green Eire, lament o'er the time
When religion was war, and our country a crime ;
When man in God's image inverted His plan,
And moulded his God in the image of man.

When the interest of state wrought the general woe,
The stranger a friend, and the native a foe ;
While the mother rejoiced o'er her children oppressed,
And clasped the invader more close to her breast ;
When, with pale for the body and pale for the soul,
Church and State joined in compact to conquer the
whole ;
And, as Shannon was stained with Milesian blood,
Eyed each other askance and pronounced it was good.

By the groans that ascend from your forefathers' grave,
For their country thus left to the brute and the slave,
Drive the demon of Bigotry home to his den,
And where Britain made brutes now let Eire make men.
Let my sons like the leaves of the shamrock unite,
A partition of sects from one footstalk of right ;
Give each his full share of the earth and the sky,
Nor fatten the slave where the serpent would die.

Alas for poor Eire, that some are still seen
Who would die the grass red from their hatred to Green ;
Yet, O when you're up and they're down, let them live,
Then yield them that mercy which they would not give.
Arm of Eire, be strong ! but be gentle as brave !
And, uplifted to strike, be still ready to save !
Let no feeling of vengeance presume to defile
The cause, or men of, the Emerald Isle.

The cause it is good, and the men they are true,
And the Green shall outlive both the orange and blue !
And the triumphs of Eire her daughters shall share,
With the full swelling chest, and the fair flowing hair.
Their bosom heaves high for the worthy and brave,

But no coward shall rest on that soft-swelling wave ;
Men of Eire ! awake, and make haste to be blest,
Rise—Arch of the Ocean, and Queen of the West !

Dr Drennan.

•

THE FAMINE YEAR.

WEARY men, what reap ye ?—Golden corn for the stranger.
What sow ye ?—Human corpses that wait for the avenger.
Fainting forms, hunger-stricken, what see ye in the offing ?—
Stately ships to bear our food away, amid the stranger's
 scoffing.
There's a proud array of soldiers—what do they round your
 door ?—
They guard our master's granaries from the thin hands of
 the poor.
Pale mothers, wherefore weeping ?—Would to God that
 we were dead ?
Our children swoon before us, and we cannot give them
 bread.

Little children, tears are strange upon your infant faces,
God meant you but to smile within your mother's soft
 embraces.—
O we know not what is smiling, and we know not what is
 dying ;
But we're hungry, very hungry, and we cannot stop our
 crying.
And some of us grow cold and white—we know not what
 it means ;
But, as they lie beside us we tremble in our dreams.
There's a gaunt crowd on the highway—are you come to
 pray to man,
With hollow eyes that cannot weep, and for words your
 faces wan ?—

No ; the blood is dead within our veins—we care not now
 for life ;
Let us die hid in the ditches, far from children and from
 wife ;
We cannot stay and listen to their raving famished cries—
Bread ! Bread ! Bread ! and none to still their agonies.
We left our infants playing with their dead mother's hand :
We left our maidens maddened by the fever's scorching
 brand :
Better, maiden, thou wert strangled in thy own dark-twisted
 tresses—
Better, infant, thou wert smothered in thy mother's first
 caresses.
We are fainting in our misery, but God will hear our
 groan ;

Yet, if fellow-men desert us, will He hearken from His
 throne ?
Accursed are we in our own land, yet toil we still and toil ;
But the stranger reaps our harvest—the alien owns our soil.
O Christ ! how have we sinned, that on our native plains
We perish homeless, naked, starved, with branded brow like
 Cain's ?
Dying, dying wearily, with a torture sure and slow—
Dying as a dog would die, by the wayside as we go.

One by one they're falling round us, their pale faces to the
 sky ;
We've no strength left to dig them graves—there let them
 lie.
The wild bird, if he's stricken, is mourned by the others,
But we—we die in Christian land,—we die amid our
 brothers,
In a land which God has given us, like a wild beast in his
 cave,
Without a tear, a prayer, a shroud, a coffin, or a grave.
Ha ! but think ye the contortions on each livid face ye see,
Will not be read on Judgment-day by eyes of Deity ?

We are wretches, famished, scorned, human tools to build
 your pride,
But God will yet take vengeance for the souls for whom
 Christ died.
Now in your hour of pleasure—bask ye in the world's
 caress ;
But our whitening bones against ye will rise as witnesses,
From the cabins and the ditches in their charred, uncoffined
 masses,
For the Angel of the Trumpet will know them as he passes.
A ghastly spectral army, before the great God we'll stand,
And arraign ye as our murderers, the spoilers of our land !

Lady Wilde.

•
THE SHANNON.

River of billows, to whose mighty heart
 The tide-wave rushes of the Atlantic sea ;
River of quiet depths, by cultured lea,
 Romantic wood, or city's crowded mart ;
River of old poetic founts, that start
From their lone mountain-cradles, wild and free,
 Nursed with the fawns, lulled by the woodlark's glee,
And cushat's hymeneal song apart :
River of chieftains, whose baronial halls,
 Like veteran warders, watch each wave-worn steep,
Portumna's towers, Bunratty's royal walls,

Carrick's stern rock, the Geraldine's grey keep —
River of dark mementoes ! must I close
My lips with Limerick's wrong, with Aughrim's woes ?

Sir Aubrey de Vere.

•
MY LAND.

SHE is a rich and rare land ;
O she's a fresh and fair land ;
She is a dear and rare land—
This native land of mine.

No men than hers are braver—
Her women's hearts ne'er waver ;
I'd freely die to save her,
And think my lot divine.

She's not a dull or cold land ;
No ! she's a warm and bold land ;
O she's a true and old land —
This native land of mine.

Could beauty ever guard her,
And virtue still reward her,
No foe would cross her border—
No friend within it pine !

O she's a fresh and fair land,
O she's a true and rare land !
Yes, she's a rare and fair land—
This native land of mine.

Thomas Davis.

•
SONG FROM THE BACKWOODS.

DEEP in Canadian woods we've met,
From one bright island flown ;
Great is the land we tread, but yet
Our hearts are with our own.
And ere we leave this shanty small,
While fades the autumn day,
We'll toast old Ireland ! dear old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

We've heard her faults a hundred times,
The new ones and the old,
In songs and sermons, rants and rhymes,

Enlarged some fifty-fold.
But take them all, the great and small,
And this we've got to say :—
Here's dear old Ireland ! good old Ireland
Ireland, boys, hurra !

We know that brave and good men tried
To snap her rusty chain,
That patriots suffered, martyrs died,
And all, 'tis said, in vain ;
But no, boys, no ! a glance will show
How far they've won their way—
Here's good old Ireland ! loved old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

We've seen the wedding and the wake,
The patron and the fair ;
The stuff they take, the fun they make,
And the heads they break down there.
With a loud “ hurroo ” and a “ pillalu,”
And a thundering “ clear the way ! ”
Here's gay old Ireland ! dear old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

And well we know in the cool grey eyes,
When the hard day's work is o'er,
How soft and sweet are the words that greet
The friends who meet once more ;
With “ Mary machree ! ” and “ My Pat ! 'tis he ”
And “ My own heart night and day ! ”
Ah, fond old Ireland ! dear old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

And happy and bright are the groups that pass
From their peaceful homes, for miles
O'er fields, and roads, and hills, to Mass,
When Sunday morning smiles !
And deep the zeal their true hearts feel
When low they kneel and pray.
O dear old Ireland ! blest old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

But deep in Canadian woods we've met,
And we never may see again
The dear old isle where our hearts are set,
And our first fond hopes remain !
But come, fill up another cup,
And with every sup let's say—
Here's loved old Ireland ! good old Ireland !
Ireland, boys, hurra !

T. D. Sullivan, 1857.

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 milkmaid 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 is 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 are 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 hedgerow 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 !

James Orr.

•
RÓISÍN DUBH. [4]

From The Irish.

[This song was composed in the reign of Elizabeth, to celebrate the Irish hero, *Hugh Ruadh O'Donnel*, of Tyrconnell. By *Róisín Dubh*, supposed to be a beloved female, is meant Ireland.]

O my sweet little rose, cease to pine for the past,
For the friends that came eastward shall see thee at last ;
They bring blessings and favours the past never knew,
To pour forth in gladness on my *Róisín Dubh*.

Long, long, with my dearest, through strange scenes I've
gone,
O'er mountains and broad valleys I still have toiled on ;
O'er the Erne I have sailed as the rough gales blew,
While the harp poured its music for my *Róisín Dubh*.

Though wearied, O my fair one ! do not slight my song,
For my heart dearly loves thee, and hath loved thee long ;
In sadness and in sorrow I still shall be true,
And cling with wild fondness round my *Róisín Dubh*.

There's no flower that e'er bloomed can my rose excel,
There's no tongue that e'er moved half my love can tell ;
Had I strength, had I skill the wide world to subdue,
O the queen of that wide world should be *Róisín Dubh*.

Had I power, O my loved one, but to plead thy right,
I should speak out in boldness for my heart's delight ;
I would tell to all round me how my fondness grew,
And bid them bless the beauty of my *Róisín Dubh*.

The mountains, high and misty, through the moors must go,
The rivers shall run backward, and the lakes overflow ;
And the wild waves of old ocean wear a crimson hue,
Ere the world sees the ruin of my *Róisín Dubh*.

Thomas Furlong.

•
I'M VERY HAPPY WHERE I AM.

A Peasant Woman's Song. 1864.

[“ A few days ago I stood on the North Wall and watched the emigrants embarking for the Far West, as I have often stood on the quays of New York to see them arrive in America. While chewing the cud of many sweet and bitter fancies over this sad review, and picturing to myself the fate of each group as it passed, a chord in the old harp, which every Irishman wears in

his breast, twanged in a minor key, and I heard a young Irish wife in the backwoods of Ohio singing this strain.”]

I'm very happy where I am,
Far across the sea ;
I'm very happy far from home,
In North Amerikay.

It's lonely in the night, when Pat
Is sleeping by my side,
I lie awake, and no one knows
The big tears that I've cried ;

For a little voice still calls me back
To my far, far counthrie,
And nobody can hear it speak,
O nobody but me.

There is a little spot of ground
Behind the chapel wall,
It's nothing but a tiny mound,
Without a stone at all ;

It rises like my heart just now,
It makes a dawning hill ;
It's from below the voice comes out,
I cannot keep it still.

O little Voice ! ye call me back
To my far, far counthrie,
And nobody can hear ye speak.
O nobody but me !

Dion Boucicault

•

THE FAIR HILLS OF IRELAND.[5]

Translated From The Irish.

[Said to have been written by an Irish student in France.]

A PLENTEOUS place is Ireland for hospitable cheer,
Uileacan dubh O ! [6]

Where the wholesome fruit is bursting from the yellow
barley ear ;

Uileacan dubh !

There is honey in the trees where her misty vales expand,
And her forest paths in summer are by falling waters fanned ;

There is dew at high noontide there, and springs i' the
yellow sand,

On the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Curled he is and ringleted, and plaited to the knee,
Uileacan dubh O !
Each captain who comes sailing across the Irish sea ;
Uileacan dubh O !
And I will make my journey, if life and health but stand,
Unto that pleasant country, that fresh and fragrant strand,
And leave your boasted braveries, your wealth and high
command,
For the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Large and profitable are the stacks upon the ground ;
Uileacan dubh O !
The butter and the cream do wondrously abound,
Uileacan dubh !
The cresses on the water and the sorrels are at hand,
And the cuckoo's calling daily his note of music bland,
And the bold thrush sings so bravely his song i' the forests
grand,
On the fair hills of holy Ireland.

Samuel Ferguson.

•

DRIMIN DONN DILIS [7]

O Drimin donn dilis ! the landlord has come,
Like a foul blast of death has he swept o'er our home ;
He has withered our roof-tree—beneath the cold sky,
Poor, houseless and homeless, to-night must we lie.

My heart it is cold as the white winter's snow ;
My brain is on fire, and my blood's in a glow.
O Drimin donn dilis ! 'tis hard to forgive
When a robber denies us the right we should live.

With my health and my strength, with hard labour and toil,
I dried the wet marsh and I tilled the harsh soil ;
I moiled the long day through, from morn till even,
And I thought in my heart I'd a foretaste of heaven.

The summer shone round us above and below,
The beautiful summer that makes the flowers blow !
O 'tis hard to forget it, and think I must bear
That strangers shall reap the reward of my care.

Your limbs they were plump then—your coat it was silk,
And never was wanted the methers of milk ;
For freely it came in the calm summer's noon,
While you munched to the time of the old milking croon.

How often you left the green side of the hill,
To stretch in the shade, and to drink of the rill !

And often I freed you before the grey dawn,
From your snug little pen at the edge of the bawn.

But they racked and they ground me with tax and with rent,
Till my heart it was sore, and my life-blood was spent ;
To-day they have finished, and on the wide world,
With the mocking of fiends from my home was I hurled.

I knelt down three times for to utter a prayer,
But my heart it was seared, and the words were not there ;
O wild were the thoughts through my dizzy head came,
Like the rushing of wind through a forest of flame.

I bid you, old comrade, a long last farewell ;
For the gaunt hand of famine has clutched us too well ;
It severed the master and you, my good cow,
With a blight on his life, and a brand on his brow.

John Walsh.

[1] Von Raumer, making a tour in Ireland, tries to explain to his own country-people the state of things produced by the landlord land laws of this country thus :—“ How shall I translate *tenant-at-will* ? Shall I say *serfs* ? No ; in feudal times serfdom consisted rather in keeping the vassals attached to the soil, and by no means in driving them away. An ancient vassal is a lord compared with the present tenant-at-will, to whom the law affords no defence. Why not call them *Wegjagdbare* (chaseable)? But this difference lessens the analogy—that for hares, stags, and deer, there is a season during which no one is allowed to hunt them, whereas tenants-at-will are hunted all the year round. And if any one would defend his farm (as badgers and foxes are allowed to defend their cover), it is here denominated ‘ rebellion ! ’ ”

[2] *A ghragal mochree*—O bright love of my heart !

[3] Erin.

[4] *Róisín Dhu*—Little Black Rose.

[5] *Ban-chnoic Eirean óg*—literally *the fair hills of Virgin Ireland*.

[6] “ O round black head ”—a refrain associated with the air of which it is the name and to which this song is written. It was a common thing for Irish writers to adopt an air and refrain without any reference to the meaning of the latter.

[7] “ *Druim-fionn* ” white-backed, is the favourite name of a cow in Irish. The title means “ the dear brown white-backed (cow). ”

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