

IRISH READINGS

(Edited by A. M. SULLIVAN, M.P., and T. D. SULLIVAN, M.P.)

THE MEMORY OF THE DEAD.

From a speech of John B. Dillon, in proposing "The Memory of O'Connell" at a soiree of the Dublin Catholic Young Men's Society, on the 19th of January, 1863:—

The heart of a nation never ceases to beat so long as it cherishes the memory of its illustrious dead. The peasant of Tyrol swears by the name of Hofer that the foot of an invading foe shall never pollute his beautiful valleys. The chilled and bruised heart of Poland throbs with the warmth of recovered youth when it recalls the names of Sobieski and Kosciusko. Our own land, too, this Poland of the ocean, as it has been called, has not forgotten the names of those who have nobly labored or nobly died in her service. Though no longer amongst us, their influence is still felt. The valor of the soldier sustains our courage; the song of the bard still speaks to the heart; the voice of the orator calls out from the tomb; the blood of the martyr consecrates the soil to liberty. While honoring the memory of O'Connell to-night, which of us will not acknowledge the truth of those noble words of Grattan—"The public speaker may die, but the immortal fire will outlast the organ that conveyed it, and the breath of liberty, like the word of the holy man, will not die with the prophet, but survive him."

DR. PETRIE ON IRISH MUSIC.

George Petrie, LL.D., the eminent archaeologist, artist, and writer on Irish antiquities, to whose pen and pencil Ireland owes much, was born in Dublin in the year 1789. After a busy, an honored, and a useful life, he expired in the same city on the 17th of January, 1866. His name is best known in connection with his celebrated essay on the Round Towers of Ireland; but his writings on ancient Irish architecture, pagan and Christian remains, monuments, inscriptions, and kindred subjects, were very numerous and of great value. He was a great lover of the ancient music of Ireland, the peculiar beauties of which he well understood; and he formed a large collection of airs noted down by himself in the course of his various tours through the country, from the singing or the playing of the old people—airs which, but for such care, might ere long have been utterly lost. A full and highly interesting account of the life and labors of this distinguished Irishman, forming one large volume, has been published by Messrs. Longman, Green, and Co.; the editor, who has accomplished his task with great ability, being Dr. Stokes, of Dublin, who was an intimate and valued friend of the deceased archaeologist. The following passage from one of Petrie's letters, published in that volume, will show how warmly he felt on the subject of the ancient and neglected music of our land:—

Time will roll on and carry on its wings the arts and luxuries of a new civilisation, obliterating all the memorials of the old world, all the natural strength and freedom and tenderness that belonged to man in his

simpler and in his less artificial state, and which he has expressed in his works. But the depths of feeling that are expressed in the natural works of man in this state of imperfect civilisation, and particularly in the original music which comes direct from the heart, untrammelled by rules, will, however simple, possess charms of a more lasting and touching kind to those who retain the

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pure simplicity of man's nature, than the finest works produced by the brain or the fancy of the most skilful musician of a cold and artificial age.

The music of Ireland has hitherto been the exclusive property of the peasantry—the descendants of the ancient inhabitants of the country.

It is characteristic of their ardent and impassioned temperament, and expressive of the tone of feeling that has been for ages predominant. The upper class are a different race—a race who possess no national music; or, if any, one essentially different from that of Ireland.

They were insensible to its beauty, for it breathed not *their* feelings; and they resigned it to those from whom they took everything else, because it was a jewel of whose worth they were ignorant. He, therefore, who would add to the stock of Irish melody must seek it, not in the halls of the great, but in the cabins of the poor. He must accept the frank hospitality of the peasant's humble hearth, or follow him as he toils at his daily labors; but he must choose a season to do so—unlike the frightful Summer of 1822—when even "the song of sorrow" was only heard embodied with the song of death!

It is a great error to suppose that all the valuable melodies in Ireland have been gathered. I am satisfied—and I speak from experience, having for many years been a zealous laborer in this way—I am satisfied that not the half of the ancient music of the country has yet been saved from the danger of extinction. What a loss would these be to the world! How many moments of the most delightful enjoyment would be lost to thousands upon thousands, by the want of those most deeply touching strains. Dear music of my country! I cannot speak of it without using the language of enthusiasm: I cannot think of it without feeling my heart glow with tenderness and pride! Well may Ireland exult in the possession of such strains; but she will exult more when freedom shall bid her indulge the proud feelings that of right belong to her!

If the character of a people were to be judged by its national music—and is there a truer criterion?—where, in the world, would there be found a people of more intense sensibility—that sensibility, which, though it may, in its unconfined expansion, often ex-

ceed the limits within which cold prudence would confine it, is still the root of all genius, and the source of every generous feeling!

Could we suppose a being of another planet to come down to live among the inhabitants of this, ignorant of every language but music—that language of the heart—what strains would allure him like those of this green island? In what region would he be addressed with such eloquent language, whether of gaiety or tenderness, of sorrow or of joy, as in this bright land of song?

Alas for those who are insensible to its beauty! It is among them that the dull and ungenerous bigots will be found who spread poison in the land which they tread. Could music penetrate their stony hearts, the melodies of Ireland would make them weep for the ill they were the means of perpetuating on this unhappy island; and they would embrace that ill-treated people with a generous affection, anxious to make reparation for past injuries.

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