



NOTES

Gaelic Poets

Before the Famine the Irish people spoke their native language, and there was current among them a body of popular poetry which came down, in some instances from very old fountains, and in others from poets of later times. Writers like Douglas Hyde and Stephen Gwynn have told the literary world of their surprise at finding old men and women, in the north and west, who could, even in our generation, repeat by heart long and difficult poetic renderings of the feats of Cuchullain and Fionn. More common was it to find among the old people a knowledge of shorter compositions, such as the lyrics composed by Rafferty or Pierce Ferriter and other bards who lived in the days when Irishmen, like loyal Scots, sang of the King over the Water. Among the songs of that period we have many of wonderful charm and beauty. Good judges tell us that for sheer melody of language they are almost unrivalled. The musical Gaelic syllables were set to haunting airs, and the songs sang themselves into the hearts of the people who passed them on to their children, from generation to generation. Notable among these old lyrics are: *Eibhlin a Ruin*, which so impressed Handel; *Am Culfhionn*, the air of which Moore borrowed for his loveliest melody; *Paisthin Fionn*, one of the most popular of all the old songs; and *'S A Mhuirnin Dilis*, which is one of the saddest lyrics in any language. Very popular was the fine poem, *Seaghan Ua Duibhir na Gleanna*, which was so well preserved by faithful tradition that we have often heard Irishmen who have been long years in New Zealand repeating stanzas of it which they learned from their parents in the distant days of their childhood. Lately, we published Sir Samuel Ferguson's rendering of it, but in the English it loses much of its beauty. The first stanza runs thus:

Ar eirghe dhem sa maidin, grian tsamhrad a' lasadh,
Chual an uail a' casadh, as ceol binn na ein;
Brioc as miolta gearra, crabhair no goba fada,
Fuaim ag an macalla, as lamhac gunnai treun.

A Story of Two Poets

There lived in Munster, about the middle of the eighteenth century, a poet named Daniel MacCarthy, better known by the nickname of "Dombnall na Buile," or Mad Daniel. At that time the Province of Munster was noted for many celebrated Irish poets. There lived another distinguished character at that period by the name of Dombnall na Tuille, or Daniel of the Flood, whose real name was Daniel MacCarthy, a man of great learning and affluence. The fame of these two bards spread throughout the entire country, and of course became known to each other. "Mad Daniel" was, we think, a native of Cork, and Daniel of the Flood lived in or around Killaloe, in the County of Clare. Donall na Buile, desirous of meeting his brother bard while on business to Killaloe, arrived late at his destination and, having knocked at the door, inquired was that the residence of "Daniel of the Flood."

"Yes," said a voice inside, "who are you that seek him?"

"I am 'Mad Daniel,'" was the reply.

He inside, thinking this might be a trick of some wag, readily conceived the idea of testing the identity of the man at the door, and as quick as thought said:

"Is minic a rug tuile fear-buile le fana."

(Oft a flood down its current a madman has taken.)

"Ni minici na gabh fear-buile tre tuile na slan rith."
(Not oftener than a madman through a flood ran unshaken)

was the instantaneous reply. Again the inmate not being fully satisfied, put the following question:

"Ceist a cuirim ort, a bhrathair, a mhic na mathair suaire,

Ce an mheid galun saie gheobhas anath so Chill-ath-luith?"

(Son of the cheerful mother, I a question put to you: How much water in full gallons, goes this ford to Killaloe?)

This, you will perceive, was a question not easily answered, and least of all was it within the limits of the "Rule of Three." It was disposed of, however, in the following manner:

"Is deacair a thomhas na cartaibh mar ta si laidir luaithe,

Acht an mheid na geobhaigh an ath do geobhadh si an fan o thuaign."

(To measure it is difficult, so rapid 'tis and strong, But what won't go the ford may go down th' eastern slope along.)

It is unnecessary to say that now the stranger was admitted and detained for a week, enjoying the pleasure and hospitality of an Irish home such as that which only Daniel of the Flood could provide.

Spoonerisms

In perhaps less than half a dozen instances, individuals' names have passed into the common coin of language and found places in dictionaries as nouns and verbs. Boycott, from Captain Boycott, has its recognised place in nearly every modern language; Burke has given us a verb, well-known if not of common use; Bowdler credits us with bowdlerise, the meaning of which every schoolboy knows. The eightieth birthday of Canon Spooner, Warden of New College, Oxford, reminds one that he is among the rather few living persons whose names have been thus immortalised.

Curiously enough, it is nothing more than a slip of the tongue that has immortalised him. It is a slip of the tongue that anyone may easily make, and that a great many people besides Canon Spooner have made. Mr. Asquith, for instance, was once in the midst of an impassioned speech when, getting momentarily muddled, he declared that he "would not abate one jit or tottle"! The mistake might have been called an Asquithism there and then had not the world learned to call it a Spoonerism. I daresay the good Canon has made a few slips in the course of his long lifetime, but it is sheerly incredible that he has made all that are ascribed to him.

One does not know quite how to sort out the true ones from the apocryphal, for probably the best Spoonerisms were not made by Canon Spooner at all, but by some ingenious person who deliberately invented them. Thus we do not know whether or not Canon Spooner really did visit Dulwich and, feeling hungry, ask for "the Dull Man at Greenwich," meaning "the Green Man at Dulwich," a famous hostelry. Neither do we know whether he really did "collide on the pavement with a man who had stopped to boil his icicle," or ask at the watchmaker's for a signifying-glass and then soothe the puzzled shopkeeper by saying that it did not magnify. I think, however, it is authentically vouched for that, being asked why he did not patronise a certain shop, he replied that he "preferred to steal at the doors."

Clever Spoonerisms are, of course, not difficult to invent, but they are not a high species of humor, and, indeed, are rarely very funny unless genuinely accidental. Adopted deliberately they are apt to bore one just as much as the succession of pointless puns that so often establishes a person's reputation for wit.

Puns

Puns are punishable, is a saying much in the nature of an offence itself. Otherwise, it is put that a pun is the lowest form of wit. And, it is generally agreed that the incurable punster's place is in outward

