

**AN ORIGINAL AND
NATIONAL POEM IN
SPENSERIAN STANZA. THE
LAST BARD OF LIMERICK**

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An original and national poem in Spenserian stanza. The last bard of Limerick by James O'Leary

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JAMES O'LEARY

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AN ORIGINAL AND NATIONAL POEM IN
SPENSERIAN STANZA.

(One iambus of the sixth verse is removed to the eighth.)

THE
East Bard of Limerick.

BY THE
REV. JAMES O'LEARY,

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY AND MATHEMATICS, PROFESSOR AT ST COLMAN'S COLLEGE, FERMOY.



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1865.

280. 6. 103

βῆ δ' ἀκέων παρὰ θῖνα πολυφλοίσβοιο θαλάσσης.
πολλὰ δ' ἔπειτ' ἀπάνευθε κίων ἤρᾱθ' ὁ γεραίός.

τίσειαν Δαναοὶ ἐμὰ δάκρυα σοῖσι βέλεσσιν.

Hom. II., A. 34-42.


"Silent he wandered by the sounding main,
Till, safe at distance, to his God he prays:

Avenge thy servant, and the Greeks destroy!"

Popé's Trans.



INTRODUCTION.

O the Irish race, of what creed soever, wheresoever found, subjects of whatever government, followers of whatever avocation, I do—with what welcome I cannot opine—inscribe the following Poem. Its hero may be no unfit image of the scattered and unlucky people from whom he is supposed to have sprung, and, as such, may be acceptable not only to those who have wandered, or have wandering friends, from Ireland, but also to those who have come and settled in that ancient land.

Every nation has some, so to speak, representative of its national life. Of this kind was Arminius to the ancient Germanic tribes. Scott has elaborated many characters illustrative of Scotland's history. England's glory is painted in the heroes of Shakespeare's pages. In short, some being—historic, traditionary, or fictitious—dwells in the national mind, and is thence transferred to verse or prose. With the exception of the Irish Exile in "There came to the beach a poor exile of Erin," I might not name a truthful character for Ireland. Indeed, such a being is difficult to be found or conceived. Were I to assign a cause, I should adduce the absence of a grand, unanimous, patriotic feeling, living in the minds of aristocracy and yeomanry, permeating the masses, and dear to the whole population.

In Scotland, every man, whether of Glasgow or Edinburgh, Highlands or Lowlands, of the Grampian Hills or the Orkney Isles, is the representative of, and sacred to, the Scottish nation. To nobles and peasants his honour is the honour of themselves

and their country. No matter with whom the Scotchman may come in collision, no matter where he may find himself, he knows that he has a national feeling at his back. He loves his country, and his country loves him. There is a splendid, developed, and harmonious sympathy among all classes. The pride with which an Englishman glories in his fatherland is known throughout the whole world. No Roman would, with more exultation, say, "*Civis Romanus sum*," than he, "*Civis Anglicanus sum*." What shall I say of the American, the Italian, or the Frenchman? But with the unreservedness, the independence of the Scotchman, or the Englishman, or the American, or the Italian, or the Frenchman, does the Irishman profess "*I am an Irishman?*" Is there spread through all Ireland—consecrated by the lapse of ages and the usage of generations—cherished by the educated and uneducated—a noble, national sentiment which views, guards, and sanctifies alike the inhabitant of Connaught and Leinster, of Munster and Ulster, of Galway, Dublin, Limerick, Cork, Wexford, Tralee, Ballyshannon, Belfast? If there be, Irishmen would not have roamed through the world like Jews. If that national bulwark were in Ireland, she would not be as she is,—had it been there, she would not have been depopulated.

There is, however, among all classes, the knowledge that she has suffered and is suffering; and of Ireland, in that respect, the Lumneach Bard is the representative. The wars of the Stuarts had been over,—the French fleet had ruffled the waters of the Shannon too late for the redemption of Ireland,—the sons of Erin had marched with banners flying, drums beating, and all the honours of war, from the walls of Limerick, and had abandoned Ireland for ever. The Lumneach Bard had chosen not to emigrate—had, after witnessing the departure of his warlike companions, observed England's means of conciliating the insurrectionary Celts, and was slowly wandering homeward to die in his native country.

THE LAST LUMNEACH BARD.

I.

DEEP in his soul a festering wound he fed ;
A spark of life still lit his aged eye ;
His flowing locks swept round a stately head,
Scattered and hoar, no more of saffron dye :
And he did bear the mien that durst defy
The oppressor's ire, the soldier's stroke.
Of stranded fortune, yet of lineage high,
Lordly he moved with a large stick of Irish oak,
A minstrel who had failed to sunder Ireland's yoke.

II.

In pensive mood he paced Kilmallock hill,
And to the Shannon's tide he rolled his eyes—
He viewed the land—he stood—he felt the thrill
Which doth in the proud patriot spirit rise,
When freedom wooed in fight for ever flies.
And he did gaze on Limerick's wide plain,
That rich and green laugh'd to the skies,
On beauteous tree-lined ways and fruitful fields of grain,
On dales and groves, and on the glorious "golden vein!"

III.

Then in his soul a wild emotion rose
Of rankling fury sinking to despair,
And his proud spirit, harrowed up with woes,
Would fain again the brunt of battle dare.
He pondered o'er his many years of care,
Chequered and sad—a bootless toil ;
And he did wail that land, so blithe and fair,
Would lie robed in the mourning garb of Saxon spoil,
Its lords, it may be, trammelled never to recoil.

IV.

Yet o'er the expanse his eye delighted strayed,
And still he viewed the plain as 'twere his own ;
It was his native land, where he had played,
Child, boy, and youth, to warrior manhood grown.
There he had tuned his harp with gladdening tone,
For friends when gathered far and near
To join the joyous pattern. Of his own
Dear country he had sung ; and had to all been dear—
The poor man's friend, the orphan's aid, the dancers' cheer.

V.

He knew each hill, each stream, each village gay,
And loved with the warm pulse of Celtic soul,
From where the Galtees brown and frowning lay,
To the loud echoing of the Atlantic's roll.
Mong Galtees he had pressed to life's last goal
The flying game the peaks between ;
By Galtees he had roamed to view each knoll
Snow-crowned to splendid whiteness, or, sweet lovesome scene!
Rude mountain rocks rise from embroidery of green,