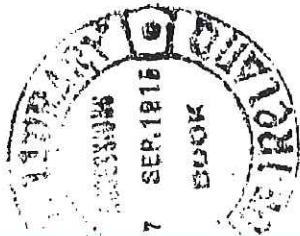


COZAR DON LEIGTOIR ÓS.

I HAVE gone to a great deal of care and trouble to gather together the traditional songs contained in this collection and the music to which they were sung by the people of the Irish-speaking districts. I undertook the work at the urgent request of Canon Martin Murphy, of the Cathedral, Cork, one of our most enthusiastic Gaelic Leaguers. He represented to me the great need there was for suitable Irish song books for our schools. The work proved more laborious and troublesome than I had anticipated. I was encouraged to persevere in it by the help of more than one devoted friend, notably by the invaluable help of Áine Ní Ráջálluig, the lady professor of traditional singing in Ballygeary Irish College, Co. Cork. The learner may rely on it that the music in "Fuinn na Smól" faithfully represents the rendering of the airs as heard from the traditional singers. There are, of course, touches in the traditional rendering of our Irish songs, different in different singers, which cannot be put on paper. But even here justice is done in many cases to traditional rendering in these booklets. As an example take "Seán Ó Duibhín & 'Sleanna" in No. 5; "Coir an Éoiréid"; or "Eiblin & Muin"; or "Spailpin & Muin."

The editing of the words was a work of great labour. I consulted Ripeápo Ó Fógluó, from whom I received much valuable help, and An t-Éoiréid which I met. Laoջaime on many of the difficulties which I met. To the latter I am deeply indebted. Songs which were handed down from mouth to mouth for perhaps two



1842
1843
1844

hundred years were bound to suffer occasionally by changes which obscured the sense in some passages. I venture to say that this difficulty has been satisfactorily overcome.

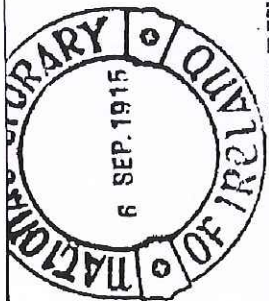
As to the literary value of this collection, I will let Gaelic Leaguers and others judge from the following extracts from letters written to me by our best Irish speaker and scholar, Canon Peter O'Leary. They were written to me in answer to questions concerning difficulties which I met in the editing. I take this opportunity of expressing my deep gratitude to him for them, as well as for the permission cheerfully granted of prefixing them as an introduction to my book.

As to the music, I wish to say that *Áine Mí Rághallaigh* deserves the principal share of the credit due for rescuing from oblivion the lovely airs contained in this book. They would, almost for a certainty, be dead and gone fifty years hence, many of them, only for their publication in this collection.

In Part 2, page 11, second last line, I write *tem bmaí* *čam*. It is so pronounced by all native speakers. In Part 1, page 29, the spelling of *cómpáó* in line 6, and of *Síorbé* in line 8, is explained by the manner in which the traditional singer sang the two notes.

Πάτριος ὁμεινός

Δε̄ C132, 1913.



EXTRACTS FROM CANON PETER O'LEARY'S LETTERS.

CASTLELYONS, *January, 1910.*

Those songs which you have put into those little books constitute one of the most valuable things we now possess for the benefit of the language. They are full up of most beautiful idiomatic turns of expression which there is no possibility of finding anywhere else. When people are making efforts, as many people now are, at conversing in Irish they will find those little books of yours exceedingly helpful. I tried to put as many of those idiomatic turns as I could into my books, but I find in those songs a lot of them which I had completely forgotten or never heard at all. If all the songs were in one book that book would be most valuable in the sense I speak of. Perhaps you are only thinking of the value of the music. The value of the idioms is, I think, greater.

It is probable also that some people are making little of your work and discouraging you. They are shortsighted people, and there are a lot of them around us. They do not see the value of the Irish language to the race whose ancestors have been using it in the past. They do not see what the loss of the language would be to that race. Already, even though our people have not advanced very far in the recovery of the language, the nation's backbone has grown strong to a degree which is a surprise to a person taking the trouble to watch the process.

I saw a remark somewhere lately to this effect:—
"The language of the nation was an effectual barrier against infidelity when that language was in vigorous existence. But that barrier does not exist now because the language is not spoken at all."

That is a terrible mistake. The very efforts which a considerable section of the nation is now making to recover the use of the language are forming themselves into a barrier against infidelity, even stronger than the barrier which the language formed when it was spoken all over the country. And why? Because neither the people nor the language were respected then, either at home or abroad. No one had a particle of respect then for ourselves nor for our language, and we our-

selves had no respect for ourselves or for our language. The present movement has changed all that. A large portion of us have now a very high degree of respect both for ourselves and for the language. I remember a long time ago hearing a remark from a student in Maynooth when I was a student there. The remark came at the end of a discussion about national self-respect:—

"Every nation in existence," said he, "has something to point to and to be proud of. We have not a single thing to be proud of."

If he lives still he can now point to the Irish language and to the movement for its preservation, and he can say, "Yes, we have something now to be proud of, something which no other nation possesses now, our own Irish speech, and it is more beautiful than the speech of any other nation." There is nothing in the world so wholesome for a nation as national self-respect. The language movement is rousing within us all that national self-respect. Everything which gives strength to the movement adds to that rousing. That rousing of national self-respect is the strongest of all barriers against not only foreign infidelity, but against all sorts of foreign literary dirt and filth. Those songs which you have been collecting are one of the strongest forces in the rousing.

February 20th, 1910.
I have read the book (No. 2) over carefully. The songs are splendid, and they are exactly the *people's own speech*, the very thing we want.

September 12th, 1910.
There is a vast difference between the "poems" composed by our present-day Irish writers and the poems composed by the dead poets of the last century or two. There is more real poetry in Gíll Óair than in the very best of the works of your living poets, or than in all of them together. Take the two first verses of "An tAbairt ag an tCathair." There is a touch in those two verses which beats Horace to rags! The dolefulness is exquisite satire. I have never seen a nicer laugh at a love-sick spoony than there is in the words: "Agur m'fí is the more exquisite. It is inimitable. The more doleful it is utterly unknown are the best."
"Δι' βρωτὴν καὶ λαοί" is a very fine song. It is possible that the words "le vit mo theapatal" may not be easily

understood. This "vit" means the inconvenience of the "want" of being able to take care of himself which his "theapatal" caused to him. It does not mean the want of "theapatal," but the want caused by it.

In "Gíll Óair" we have the words "an t-airpean coimhne." "Coimhne" is the word, not "binn." It means "sublime."

It is a splendid expression as applied to the Most Holy Sacrifice. The reason why I have gone so carefully over this little book is because the real old songs in it are gems of the first water. I say the old songs. The old songs are poetry of the highest type: They flowed, by a natural force from the very heart of the poet. Then they are full of natural touches, apparently simple, but producing an effect which no degree of educational skill could produce. In fact they are exactly the touches which educated skill is calculated to prevent rather than to produce.

"Jimmy mo míle róp" is full of such touches. And mind they are not that apotheosis of trifles which English poetry is full of. They are simple, natural touches; but, taken as a whole, they are the expression of a terrible force.

Then take "An t-uball." The line "cúirí sí rópuit agur cóimhne víge." Could anything be more true! Could anything be at all more natural! Then the beautiful apple turned out to be a "Phaistin ml"! And then "Go raib fé n-a féo acu Δι' βρωτὴν βρωίν."

Perhaps one of the best examples of this combination of simplicity and power is "Gíll Óair." If I begin to read that song and give my mind its head, do you know what happens? Before I have got through the piece the tears are gushing from my eyes! It is the most powerful thing I have ever read. Where is the living one of our would-be Irish poets who could bring a tear from my eye? Well you see that it is no wonder that I am most anxious that these songs should go into the hands of our children perfectly free from blenishes. You are doing a splendid work! Try and do it as splendid work ought to be done.

October 29th, 1912.

I have just gone over the songs in MS. I have marked a few little things, especially a point about sequence of tenses. The "Craigeasá malluigte" is good (No. 5). The Irish is of a superior description. The fun is a pleasing departure from the usual "rreáibean." It is well worth printing.

November, 1912.

I have never heard such a vocative case as "A éumain." "A éumain" is what I have always heard. It is very likely that the phrase has been always addressed to a woman, and that there was no possibility of saying, "A éumain." There is no such vocative as "A íróin." It has ever and always been "A íróin" whether addressed to a man or to a woman. I have said, "A íobul" in my sermons as a vocative. I heard a preacher once say "A íobuil." I was quite sure he meant a vocative plural! I was about ten years old and there was a visitation and there were a number of congregations present. I thought that was the reason why he said "A íobuil." I understood afterwards that the reason he said it was because he had learned most of his Irish out of books.

The phrase "A íobuil" used as a vocative singular has for me, or for any native speaker I have ever known, the significance that the word "íobuil" in that phrase is the name of some individual person or thing.

November 13th, 1912.

I have to say again that your book of songs will be a treasure, not only as far as the music goes, but also as far as genuine Irish speech goes. These little books of yours are most valuable as repositories of idiomatic turns of expressions in the Irish language. We are face to face now with a most mischievous business. People are writing "Irish" books and they are only inventing the Irish which they write! They are endeavouring to force their books upon the schools. Your little book will be of infinitely more value than any of those would be "classical" productions.

December, 1912.

The song beginning "A n maoin í núbé" is really grand. It is one of the best of its kind that I have seen. In fact it has a Horatian look. Then "Duan na Saoihre"—it is a splendid song. The difference between those old songs and the very best of our new songs is that those old songs breathe the very spirit and mind of the people of their time, whereas the new songs breathe the more or less anglicised spirit of the present day. There is another difference. Very few of the writers of the new songs have a single ray of the true spirit of poetry in them, whereas those old fellows were born poets. Those old songs were composed by born poets for a public

which was a complete master of every phase of the speech used. The members of that public were keen and expert critics of the propriety of every turn of expression used, and of the beauty of every picture presented by the fancy or imagination of the poet. Hence when a new song came all admired it, but each admirer knew well, simple as the thing was, that he himself could not have produced it. What a sinking of the heart those old critics would experience if they heard some of the songs which are produced now!!

Stick to the old songs. Perhaps by degrees the taste of the old honey may come to be experienced again by the force of repeating the words.

February, 1913.

In reading those songs through many things have come into my mind. In the first place the hard things that have been said about our poor Spéir-bean are all wrong. If all the songs about the Spéir-bean were collected in one book we would have one of the most beautiful books in any language. That book would show the wonderful richness of our language. You would have in it the same idea expressed in hundreds of different ways, and all most beautiful and most interesting and essentially Irish. Take this idea—"A casob-fólc mair ón búrde 'n-a tóiprib," i.e., "in torches." What an uncommon simile, and how beautiful! I don't think I ever heard a head of hair compared to "flaming gold." Here it is. I tell you the Spéir-bean poetry has been very much wronged! This book of yours will be a storehouse of beautiful turns of expression. "Géanna" represents only one person. This book will give us a peep into the Irish minds of all the best men during a good many years, and in that peep we will see Irish uncontaminated by English.

February 17th, 1913.

I am looking over the little books which you sent me some days ago. I am examining them closely. As I told you, the book which they will make when put together will be one of the most valuable in the movement. They are full up of the idioms which were in the mouths of Irish speakers during the last two centuries in this country and which would be utterly lost but for your having collected those songs. The real value of the book will be seen when, in the near future under Home Rule, the rising generation of the people will be looking in

earnest for genuine Irish forms of speech. Then the Irish which is being at present written by sticklers for "classical" Irish will be flung aside with contempt, and those songs will be scrutinised in order to get at the *true* stuff.

March 27th, 1913.

You have no idea of the value of those songs as fountains of idiomatic turns of expression. They will begin to be drawn upon as soon as people begin to converse in Irish, and some are beginning to do that already. Whenever I am in doubt about an idiom it is back to some one of those old songs I go for the correct form. In fact correctness is not to be found elsewhere. It is in those old songs that the only true Irish is to be found. The Irish in all these songs is grand. It is splendid even where the passing of the songs through many mouths has cut up the sense. It has cut up the sense, but it has left the fragments sound. They are perfect as fragments. You may break up a piece of gold, but it is gold still. This book of yours will be real gold.

April 5th, 1913.

I have been speaking to several priests recently, and all admit that those songs of yours are storehouses of true Irish idioms. If the songs were all in one little volume it would be a regular reference book regarding idiomatic constructions.

April 15th, 1913.

There is one thing which I had in my mind when I was writing to you. I am not sure whether I put it down in black and white. It is this. The songs have a double value. They give us the genuine Irish speech in a purer form than any form in which it is given elsewhere. The idioms are crystallised in these songs. No person can change or corrupt them. The old music is also crystallised. The music clings to the forms of speech and the forms of speech cling to the music. Take the phrase: "A 'bunne bi cium go fóil . . ." Just see how the words of that phrase and their sense get entwined around each other, and how they flow through the heart and soul of the singer and of the listener, producing an effect which can be felt but which there is no possibility of describing.

We have in those songs not only "music wedded to immortal verse," but "immortal music wedded to immortal verse."

May 15th, 1913.

I have already told you about the usefulness of these songs as a repository of genuine Irish words which are almost gone out of use, and which must be brought into use again soon. One word is the word "foḡairtá." The word has been a great puzzle in the phrase "foḡair na ppéire." The puzzle is cleared away here as it is plain that "foḡairtá" is "of a bright red colour." So that "foḡair na ppéire" means "the bright red colour of the sky."

The other word is "cáinte póg," "crowds of kisses." I have often been anxiously looking out for a good Irish word for "a crowd," and have failed to find one to my satisfaction. I knew the word "cáin," but was not quite sure that it would do for a "crowd," in general. I see now that it is just the word. As "cáinte póg" is good Irish, "cáinte anything" is good. And there could be no better authority for an Irish usage than *EOḡAN RUAD*. (These words are found in song "Do Rinneab D'fhling Aeráé," *CUIO* 47.)

peadair na laojáinne.

Cairléan na listáin,
Co. Connaught.