

# Bools' Conney.

## A STORY AND A PRAYER.

[FROM THE IRISHMAN.]

CONOR O'DEVANY, aged and hoar,  
The sainted Bishop of Down, was meek  
And very feeble, for full four score  
Troublous years had rolled them o'er  
His being, and smitten his brow and cheek,  
When the English seized him in the year  
Of Christ eleven and sixteen hundred,  
And decreed—for of God feared they never a fear—  
That hanged by the neck he should be, and ere  
His body in death's embrace had slumbered,  
To quarters it should be torn and sundered.

At the time whereat the virtue-mailed  
Heart of the bishop bowed before  
His doom, a priest, who away had sailed  
With the exiled earls—whom the nation wailed—  
To the brave dear France's glittering shore,  
And journeyed back to the olden land,  
Though persecution's storm thundered,  
By a dying peasant seen to stand,  
The *Amor Amorum*\* in his hand,  
Was seized—while the angels before God wondered—  
And sentenced to hanged be and quarter sundered!

The prelate had often been the guest  
Of the mighty Hugh in green Tyrone;  
Oft in the robes of his office dress'd  
Read the holy Mass in his house, and blessed  
That "kingly king" without a throne;  
Mayhap, had counselled the chieftain brave,  
And spent long hours of the evening time  
Planning with him how the land to save,  
And when he had fled from it o'er the wave  
Mourned him; this was the prelate's crime.  
(Death! how I chafe as I make the rhyme!)

And Patrick O'Loughrane, the priest,  
Who, as I say had sailed to Gaul,  
Came back to the Island with love increased  
By her sorrows, and never ceased  
To pray for her freedom, the tyrant's fall,  
And carried the chalice through and through  
The darkened land in his woe sublime,  
Shrove the quick and dying. When this they knew,  
What should my loved English do  
But seize brave Patrick for his crime.  
(How burneth my heart as I write the rhyme!)

The Bishop asked that the Priest should be  
Sent to his death before himself.  
Lest the horror of his, and the agony  
His watching eyes should upon him see,  
Should weaken his courage, or glint of wealth  
Corrupt him. But forth in the crowded street  
Spake the priest when the confessor's words had ended—  
"Go on before to the Judgment Seat,  
I shall follow; it is not meet  
High Bishop as thou should be unattended,  
Let our blood be mingled here and blended!"

And so by the necks they hanged the men  
(While angels at God's great patience wondered!)  
And the frightened people, who came forth when  
The executions were over, then

Marked by the blood where their frames were sundered!  
And dipped their handkerchiefs in the gore  
And kept them as relics. (Oh, brothers, where  
Are those dead banners? Hang they o'er  
The paths of your lives? Do they float before  
Your eyes each day in the whispering air  
That breathes in the village and city fair?)

Oh, friends, whom I tell the dread tale to,  
You may ask—"Oh, man is it right and good  
And truly loving, then, for you  
And treading in spirit the dark path through,  
To tell us a tale of wrong and blood?"

Yes, it is good! for in my heart  
I hear the loud shouts of my fierce desire,  
And why should you not to the city mart  
Or country cottage doorway start,  
To gaze on the skies for the blaze of fire,  
Though those nights spying for it mine own eyes tire?

O God of my fathers? Thy great name  
Hath oft been confessed in this olden land—  
Confessed was by men in the face of shame,  
'Mid the lurid light of their roof-beam's flame  
Till swept from their lips by the bloody brand!  
O Father, look on the land these days,  
Create in the Island from shore to shore  
Hearts with such bright love lit always  
Of THEE and dear Ireland as erst did blaze  
In those of that priest and high Bishop hoar!

Hark!! Oh, no! oh, woe! 'tis but thunder's roar.  
Dublin, November, 1876. P. O'C. MacL.

\* St. Bernard calls the Holy Eucharist "Love Loves"

## "FLOWERS OF THE FREELANDS."

BY THOMAS BRACKEN.

Of the many productions that yearly appear under the name of poetry, there are but few deserving of the title. There is nothing more common than for people to imagine that they are masters of the poetic art, and nothing more rare than for such an imagination to be justified by fact. False and absurd images, mawkish sentiments, and selfish affections when written in lines that scan or rhyme are in numberless instances believed by those who are unfortunate enough to originate them to be that which, of all things, must be true to nature, and wholly destitute of self; for it has been well said that the poet is one who sees deeply into the inmost being of things, and there discerns the harmony that lies at the foundation of all that has been created, so that his very thoughts, catching the infection, become musical, and of necessity are poured out in song; and again, that "it is only when purged of selfishness that the intellect becomes fitted for receiving the inspiration of genius." *Poeta nascitur, non fit*; the adage is old and trite, but all utterances that are plainly true must in the course of time become hackneyed, which however makes them none the less useful, but rather testifies to their value, and the universality of their acceptance. The poet, then, truly so called, sings by nature; art cannot fit him with his strains. Culture may improve those talents that have been born with a man, and education may expand his mind, add vigor to his thoughts, and force and elegance to his expression; but there is a limit beyond which these things cannot pass, and they are impotent to open the eyes that from their birth have been closed, or to attune the voice to notes descriptive of that which the sense of vision has never taken cognizance of.

"I have poured out my freshest emotions in song, because I found it the most congenial way of expressing what I felt." So writes in his preface the author of the work of which we now propose to treat, and in the volume which he has produced we find the most ample testimony to the truth of his assertion. It is very evident that these poems are the genuine "wood-notes" of nature, unmarred by an artificial thought, and free from all affectation of expression. They bear the impress of simplicity in its best sense, and bespeak a genius as truly to the manner born as that which enabled Villon to solace himself by song in the murky dungeons of the Châtelet, or Beranger to behold in the "Fire of the Prisoner" a thousand bright and beauteous images.

But let us again hear our author speaking of his verses. "They are not" says he "exotics upon the cultivation of which a large amount of care has been expended, but simple wild bush blossoms that have received but slight attention in their growth." This also is just, and herein lies a principal charm of these compositions, akin to that—although at a distance, for it would be flattery to say otherwise—which distinguishes the songs of a world renowned poet to whom we have already referred, and whose strains though delicate and refined as the rarest exotic, are still so redolent of the soil whereon they were breathed forth, that they have frequently reminded us of those indigenous plants that gain an additional beauty by blooming here and there in early spring sooner than their fellows, and which thus become more delightful than the most precious nurseling of a hot-house. But though these "Flowers of the Freeland" claim to be no more than "wild bush blossoms," they frequently bring before us much that would adorn a flora putting forward greater pretensions, and that closely borders upon the sublime. Take for example a passage that occurs in "Orakau"; a poem which may be described as a compressed epic, and which is of remarkable vigor and beauty all through:—

"Again the fiery-throated cannon roared aloud for blood,  
Again the hungry eagle swooped and shrieked for human food;  
Again wild spirits soaring, saw their shattered corpses lie  
In pools of gore, and still was heard the fierce, defiant cry,  
'Ka Hawhai tonu! Aké! Aké! Aké! Aké!'"

The third line in particular is especially striking, suggesting to us as it does an echo of the *Divine Comedy*, an echo faint indeed, but which nevertheless could have had no existence, were it not that it had been awakened by one worthy of the royal name of poet.

It is not, however, only when writing on themes of unusual magnitude, such as that of war which has inspired so many great singers, that Mr. Bracken shows the true poetic faculty of seeing deeper into things than that which lies upon their outside. The simplest offspring of nature as well as for him a meaning, whose truth it is impossible for us not to recognise, and which is explained in a manner full of grace. What can be more familiar to us than the orchard, with its homely fruit trees, now blushing with the bloom of spring, and now bending beneath their burden of the autumn, but except in winter when everything is forlorn, always beautiful. This early caught the fancy of the poet, and we find in the Provencal minstrelsy of the middle ages at least one *aubade* in which the scene of the voluptuous creations of the Troubadour is laid beneath the flowering apple branches. Swinburne also, in our own time, has chosen like surroundings wherewith to illustrate a lyric which he has written on the plan of the impure literature of the *langue d'oc*; and more happy than he is many times in his high sounding emptiness, or his foul strains of the sewer or the hospital, he has in a few words brought before our eyes a charming picture—

"Clear apple-leaves are soft upon that moon  
Seen side-long like a blossom in the tree."

But, though they may be less sonorous, much more beautiful, and infinitely more pregnant and suggestive of high thoughts, are those lines which, amongst others hardly inferior, we find traced by the pen of our author—

"Rills and brooks and birds are singing  
Nature's psalms and hymns and glees  
And the morning breeze is swinging  
Censers on the orchard trees."

What is it in the poet's art that avails so vividly to bring before us whatever it be that its magic undertakes to call up?