



# IRISH PEASANT SONGS

The Words set to  
the proper OLD  
IRISH AIRS  
by P. W. Joyce,  
M.A., LL.D., M.R.I.A.



The  
TALBOT  
PRESS  
DUBLIN

## PREFACE.

THE peasant songs of Ireland written in English are, as a rule, very inferior to those in Irish; for the good reason that the song-writers were only imperfectly acquainted with English, while they were quite at home in Irish. The Irish language, as it were, ran in their blood: and indeed it runs in our blood at the present day, whether we speak Irish or not; for our English is everywhere coloured with Irish idioms.

Our Anglo-Irish peasant songs are, in fact, for the most part poor and worthless. But not all. I have been able to select, from a vast collection—partly preserved in my own memory, partly printed on rude broadsheets—a considerable number by no means deficient in merit, and some really good.

However opinions may vary as to the words, no one, I think, will question the beauty of the airs: and the whole selection is at least fresh and wholesome, like a breeze from the heather of *Λαῖον-να-ὄρμαοῦάν*.

P. W. J.

LYRE-NA-GRENA, LEINSTER ROAD,  
RATHMINES, DUBLIN,  
*April, 1906.*

Lillian Rogers.  
May 1935.

# IRISH PEASANT SONGS

(In the English Language)

WITH THE WORDS SET TO  
THE PROPER OLD IRISH AIRS

BY

P. W. JOYCE, M.A., LL.D., M.R.I.A.

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"ANCIENT IRISH MUSIC"  
"A SOCIAL HISTORY OF ANCIENT IRELAND"  
"OLD CELTIC ROMANCES"  
ETC., ETC.

[A NEW IMPRESSION]



KNOCKANELLHO,  
CARRICK ROAD,  
DUNDALK,  
DUBLIN.

DUBLIN  
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## I. THE IRISH GIRL.

THIS beautiful air, and the accompanying words, I have known since my childhood; and both are now published for the first time.\* I have copies of the song on broadsheets, varying a good deal, and much corrupted. The versions I give here of air and words are from my own memory, as sung by the old people of Limerick when I was a child; but I have thought it necessary to make some few restorations.

The "Red red rose" is common in Irish peasant songs; and I have one song where it comes in exactly as in this verse of Burns —

"Oh, gin my love were yon red rose  
That grows upon the castle wa' ;  
And I mysel a drap o' dew  
Into her bonnie breast to fa' !  
Oh, there beyond expression blest,  
I'd feast on beauty a' the night,  
Seal'd on her silk-saft faulds to rest,  
Till fley'd awa by Phœbus' light."

The corresponding verse of the Irish peasant song is (I write it from memory) :—

I wish my love was yon red red rose  
That grows on the garden wall,  
And I to be a drop of dew,  
Among its leaves I'd fall—  
'Tis in her sacred bosom  
All night I'd sport and play,  
And pass away the summer night  
Until the break of day.

Burns took the idea, and partly the very words, from a Scotch peasant song—as was his custom—and with the magic touch of genius changed it to his own exquisite stanza.

These observations are merely preliminary to the following song :—"The Irish Girl."

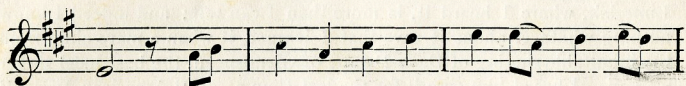


1. As I walk'd out one eve - ning down by a riv - er

\* More than half a century ago I gave this air to Dr. Petrie: and now I find—after printing the above—that it is included in the Stanford-Petrie collection of Irish Music recently published (No. 657): with my name acknowledged. But the words have never hitherto been published.



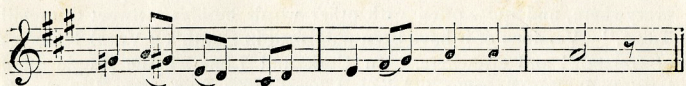
side, While ga-zing all a - round me An I - rish girl I



spied; A ro - sy red was on her cheeks, And



coal - black was her hair; And cost - ly were the



robes of gold This I - rish girl did wear.

2.

The little shoes this maiden wore  
Were of a Spanish brown ;  
The mantle, on her shoulders,  
Of silk 'twas wrought all round.  
Her modest face, her gentle ways,  
Have left my heart in pain,  
And I'd range this world all over  
My Irish girl to gain.

3.

I wish my love was a red red rose,  
To bloom in yon garden fair,  
And I to be the gardener,  
That rose would be my care.

I'd tend the pretty flowers all round—  
Sweet-william, pink, and rue,  
Primrose and thyme—but most of all,  
Sweet rose, I'd cherish you.

4.

I wish I was a butterfly,  
I'd light on my love's breast ;  
I wish I was a nightingale,  
To sing my love to rest ;  
I'd sing at morn, I'd sing at eve,  
A love-song sweet and slow ;  
And year by year I will love my dear,  
Let the wind blow high or low.

(See page 16 below, for another song to this air.)



KNOCKAMILLON  
CARRICK ROAD,  
DUBLIN

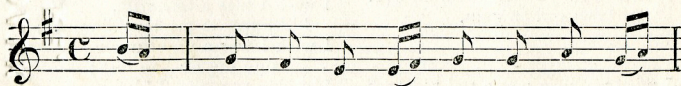
## II. SWEET COOTEHILL TOWN.

THIS song comes from Cootehill in the County Cavan. How it got to Limerick, where I heard it, is more than I can tell; and indeed I know nothing whatever about it save that I learned it when a mere child from the inimitable singing of Dave Dwane of Glenosheen, the best local singer we had. I heard him sing it for the last time at an "American Wake," *i. e.* a meeting of friends on the evening before the departure of several young people for America, as a farewell celebration. The song was very suitable for the occasion: and poor Dave—who was himself going away with the others—sang it with such intense feeling and power, that the whole company—men, women, and children—were in tears. That is now more than sixty years ago; and to this hour I find it hard to restrain tears when I recall the scene.

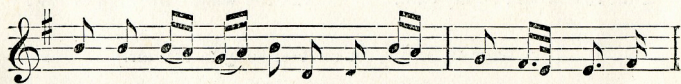
The air I think belongs to Munster; for I heard it played and sung everywhere, and quite often with other words besides "Sweet Cootehill Town." Versions of it have been published in Smith's "Vocal Melodies of Ireland," and elsewhere. In Cork and Limerick the people often sang to it Burns's song, "Adieu, a heart-warm fond adieu," so that it was commonly known by the name of "Burns's Farewell."

The Cootehill words are now published for the first time. The last verse presents a pleasing picture: ἀδῆ, ἴάροισι ζευρ! How seldom we see it realised!

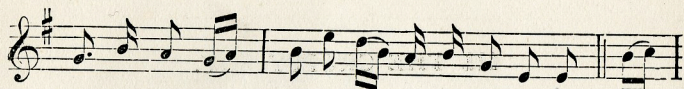
Since writing the above, Mr. Patrick O'Leary of Graignamanagh—an excellent authority on Irish Folk Music and Song—has informed me that, in his part of the country—Kilkenny and Carlow—this song is usually sung at the little gatherings of friends on the evening before the departure of emigrants for America: as I heard it sung in Limerick.



1. Now fare you well, sweet Coote - hill town, The



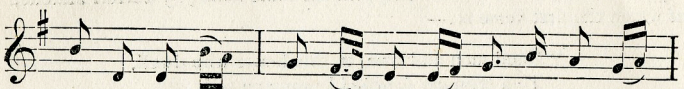
place where I was born and bred; Thro' sha - dy groves and



flower - y hills, My youth - ful fan - cy did ser - e - nade. But



now I'm bound for A - mer - i - kay, A coun - try that I



ne - ver saw ; Those pleas - ant scenes I'll al - ways mind, When



I am ro - ving far a - wa.

2.

The pleasant hills near Cootehill town  
Where I have spent my youthful days ;  
Both day and night I took delight  
In dancing and in harmless plays.  
But while I rove from town to town,  
The memory in my mind shall stay  
Of those pleasant happy youthful hours  
That now are spent and passed away.

3.

I hope kind fate will reinstate—  
That fortune's face will on me smile,  
And safe conduct me home again  
To my own dear native Irish isle :  
When my comrades all and friends likewise  
Will throng around and thus will say,—  
“ We will sing and play as in days of old :  
So you're welcome home from far away ! ”

KNOCKATELLO,  
CARRICK ROAD,  
DUNDALK,  
IRELAND.

## III. THE CROPPY BOY.

THIS song was a great favourite in the southern and south-eastern counties: and I have known both air and words from my childhood. I published the air and the first verse of the song in my "Ancient Irish Music." I have a broadsheet with the words rudely and very incorrectly printed. The words, of course, date from 1798: but the air is much older.

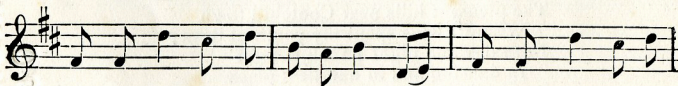
There is a pretty well-known modern Ninety-eight song—but not a "peasant song"—to this air and with the same name, by Carroll Malone, of which the first verse is.—

"Good men and true, in this house who dwell,  
To a stranger *bouchal* I pray you tell  
Is the priest at home, or may he be seen?  
I would speak a word with Father Green."

*Slow and expressive.*



'Twas ear - ly, ear - ly, all in the spring. The



pret - ty small birds be-gan to sing; They sang so sweet and so



glor - ious-ly, And the tune they played was sweet lib - er - ty.

2.

'Twas early, early, last Thursday night,  
The yeoman cavalry gave me a fright;  
The fright they gave me was to my downfall:—  
I was prisoner taken by Lord Cornwall.



3.

'Twas in his guard-house I was confined,  
And in his parlour I was closely tried ;  
My sentence passed and my spirits low,  
And to Duncannon\* I was forced to go.

4.

My sister Mary in deep distress,  
She ran downstairs in her morning dress,  
Five hundred pounds she would lay down,  
To see me walking through Wexford town.

5.

As I was walking the hills so high,  
Who could blame me if I did cry,  
With a guard behind me and another before,  
And my tender mother crying more and more.

6.

So farewell, father and mother too,  
And sister Mary, I have but you ;  
And if e'er I chance to return home,  
I'll whet my pike† on those yeomen's bones !

(By an oversight I omitted to state, in the First Edition, that the copy of this air given by me to Dr. Petrie long ago—nearly the same as here—is printed in the lately published Stanford-Petrie Collection, with my name acknowledged.)

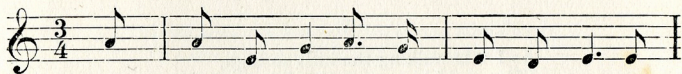
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\* Duncannon, the government fortress and prison on the Wexford side of Waterford harbour.

† Pike: *i.e.* a croppy-pike, the favourite weapon of the rebels of Ninety-eight: and a formidable weapon it was.

## IV. HANDSOME SALLY.

I LEARNED this pretty ballad, air and words, from constantly hearing it sung at home in my childhood, and I never heard it elsewhere. Further than this I know nothing about it: but I believe it commemorates a real event. I am not aware that it was ever printed before, either air or words.



1. Young men and maid-ens I pray draw near; The



truth to you I will now de - clare; How



a young la - dy's heart was won; All



by the lov - ing of a farm - er's son.

2.

As she walked out through a silent grove  
 Who should she meet but her own true love:  
 "Kind sir," she said, "and upon my life,  
 I do intend for to be your wife.

3.

“ Now I have got a vast estate  
My father left to me of late ;  
And heir of that then you shall be,  
If you consent, love, and marry me.”

4.

“ O fairest creature, it cannot be  
That I should be wedded unto thee,  
Since I am going for to be wed  
To Handsome Sally, your waiving-maid.”

5.

“ If that be true that you tell to me,  
A bitter pill I will prove to thee,  
For shipping I'll take immediately,  
And I'll sail with Sally to Floridee.”

6.

As they were sailing upon the main,  
This wicked wretch contrived a scheme,  
While Handsome Sally lay fast asleep  
She plunged her body into the deep.

7.

When to the shore she did return,  
Her wicked conscience did her burn,  
And in her mind she could find no rest,  
Until the truth she had confessed.

8.

Hanged and burned then was she,  
For her sad crime and her cruelty :  
So two fair maids were by love undone,  
And in Bedlam lies the farmer's son.

## V. THE RAMBLER FROM CLARE.

THIS is a Ninety-eight song, which tells its own story. It was very popular in Munster sixty years ago ; and I picked up the air from hearing it among the people. I also retained in memory part of the words ; but I subsequently found the whole song printed on a broadsheet, though greatly corrupted. So far as I know, air and words are now published for the first time. There is a different air with the same name in the Stanford-Petrie collection of Irish music.



1. The first of my jour-neys is ve - ry well known ; I



straight took my way to the Coun - ty Ty - rone, Where the



young men and mai - dens they used me well there, And they



call'd me the stran - ger and the Ramb - ler from Clare.

2.

'Twas there I enlisted in the town called The Moy ;  
 But with so many masters I could not comply :  
 I deserted next morning—the truth I declare—  
 And for Limerick city starts the Rambler from Clare.

3.

Then like a deserter, while myself I concealed,  
I was taken and brought to the town of Rathkeale ;  
Then off to headquarters I was forced to repair :—  
Now the jail is the lodging of the Rambler from Clare.

4.

I took off my hat and I made a low bow,  
In hopes that the colonel would pardon me now ;  
The pardon he gave me was hard and *severe* :  
'Twas—“ Bind him, confine him ; he 's the Rambler from Clare ! ”

5.

'Twas then the United Men\* marched to the town ;  
They attacked and they conquered with fame and renown ;  
The jail they broke open and rescued me there,  
And they made full commander of the Rambler from Clare.

. . . . .  
The rebels fight some successful battles under  
the Rambler's command.  
. . . . .

6.

So now that I'm titled a United Man,  
No more can I stay in my own native land ;  
And off to America I must repair,  
And leave all the friends of the Rambler from Clare.

7.

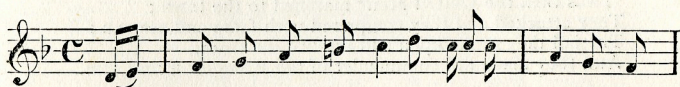
Farewell to my comrades wherever you be,  
And likewise my sweetheart, young Sally Magee ;  
Our sails they are spread and the wind it blows fair :—  
“ He's gone—God be with him—he 's the Rambler from Clare ! ”

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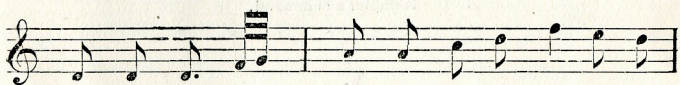
\* United Men : *i.e.* they belonged to the “ United Irishmen ” the widely-spread secret society by which the Rebellion of 1798 was chiefly directed.

VI. MY MIND IT IS UNEASY.

THIS song is an example of the consummate taste and skill of those unlearned old song-writers in suiting words to music: for both song and air are characterised by intense sadness. I learned both in childhood; I never heard either air or song outside my own home; and I do not believe that they have ever been printed. Though the words are rude and artless, it is well worth printing them for their passionate earnestness, as well as for the sake of preserving the lovely air.



1. My mind it is un - eas - y for a fair lass that



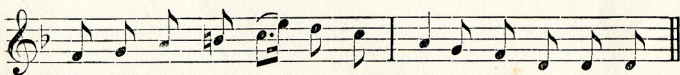
lives near home; For love it has en - snared me, I



ne - ver am let a - lone; O love it has en -



snared me, which caus - es my head to reel; She's the



fair - est in this na - tion, that fair lass I do es - teem.

2.

The looks of my dear darling would charm a heart of steel ;  
Each evening and each morning the pains of her love I feel :  
Her cheeks are like the roses that grow in the month of June,  
And her lips are like the coral, the model of sweet nature's bloom.

3.

Not wealth or great estate, dearest maiden, that makes me moan ;  
Your cattle or your lands I crave not, but you alone :  
Give me your hand in earnest ; don't leave me with cold disdain ;  
For one kind word from your fair lips would ease me of all my pain.

4.

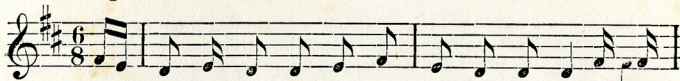
But when I asked your parents, my suit they at once denied ;  
So now the case is altered, for you refuse to be my bride .  
It's little you know the danger attendant on perjury—  
The vows and protestations you daily have made to me.

## VII. RORY THE BLACKSMITH FROM IRELAND.

THIS is not exactly a peasant song in the usual sense of the words: but I hope it will be let pass as an exception. The old air—which I have selected for its fine swing—I give from memory as I learned it in my youth: but with some modification. It has not been hitherto published. The words are my own.

The old Irish name Rory figures well in Irish literature: most readers will remember “Rory of the hills,” and “Our hope is in God and in Rory O’More.”

*With spirit.*



Now who is this stur-dy young black-smith I see, with his

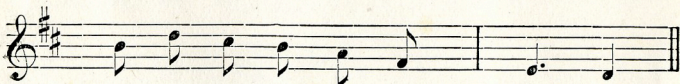


hamm-'ring and forg-ing and sing-ing in glee? “O, I

*Ad lib.*



come from a land striv-ing hard to be free”: Says



Ro - ry the Black - smith from Ire - land.

I.

Now who is this sturdy young blacksmith I see,  
With his hamm'ring and forging and singing in glee?  
“O, I come from a land striving hard to be free”:  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.



2.

"I come from old Erin of ancient renown,  
A land under England, her laws, and her crown,  
A land where the people are wrong'd and kept down":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

3.

"And here in Chicago I work day by day;  
And at night, when I'm thinking, I earnestly pray  
That good luck may attend on that land far away":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

4.

"But I'm told that at home they have now made a stand,  
That leaders and people are joined hand in hand,  
All working together to free the Old Land":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

5.

"Ah, that is the fairest land under the sun,  
And now she will prosper while centuries run;  
For Home Rule is coming as sure as a gun":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

6.

"Then Freedom, with smiles, will return to our shore,  
Our trade and our commerce will flourish once more,  
Our schools and our scholars will shine as of yore":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

7.

"When our Parliament meeting in Dublin I see,  
When gentle and simple are happy and free,  
Then, please God, I'll go back to my home by the Lee":  
Says Rory the Blacksmith from Ireland.

NOTE ON "THE IRISH GIRL," PAGE 2, ABOVE.

IN my childhood I picked up a song to this air from hearing the elder members of my family sing it. It is not a peasant song; but it was evidently suggested by "The Irish Girl." I am under the impression that it was taken from one of the Irish Penny Journals or Magazines; but though I have searched all the volumes of that class on my book-shelves, I have failed to find it. I give it here from memory: and I am quite sure I give it correctly.

VIII. OH, COME WITH ME, MY IRISH GIRL.

1.

Oh, come with me, my Irish Girl,  
To climes beyond the sea;  
For oh, thou art the brightest pearl  
In my heart's treasury.  
I may regret my native isle,  
And ties as yet unripen;  
But oh, where'er thy graces smile  
Shall be my home, my heaven.

2.

And thou wilt soothe me with thy sighs,  
Should sickness cloud my brow;  
And bless me with those angel eyes,  
Should fate my spirit bow.  
And I will cling till death to thee,  
In weal, or woe, or peril,  
And bless my lot, whate'er it be,  
With my sweet Irish Girl.





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