

Our Portrait Gallery – No. XLI

[Note: The actual piece about Bunting really begins half way down Page 3.]

EDWARD BUNTING



Amongst the many indications observable of a tendency towards right thinking in our own beloved portion of the empire, the writings of some of our local cotemporaries might lead us to the conclusion that, as a people, we are beginning to entertain feelings of interest and pride in the illustrious men of our own country, who, by their virtues or well-directed talents, have contributed to our stock of happiness, and made the name of Irishman deservedly respected: and, could we be satisfied that such is the fact, we might well rejoice at an evidence so incontrovertible of our advance in the social state, and indulge the best founded hopes of an ultimate national greatness.

Towards such a desirable result we have ourselves endeavoured to contribute – with pure intentions certainly, though, we fear, not always well or wisely; for we acknowledge with regret, that, in common with our literary cotemporaries, the human idols we have set up for popular worship, have not always been of that class deserving such reverence, while some eminently entitled to it, have been allowed to rest in darkness. And as, working with various hands, we are necessarily, to a great extent, as well the reflectors as leaders of public opinion, we fear that this acknowledgment may be taken as a proof that, as yet, the country has made but small progress towards that mental character which is indicative of high civilization.

It is the same with nations as with individuals – we can judge of them unerringly by the company which they keep: and that country which takes to its affections those only who

minister to its faults, its prejudices, or its worldly selfish interests, has no more claim to the reputation of true greatness, than the man who makes knaves and sycophants his familiar associates. As old Aesop has told us, the jewel on the dunghill was worthless to the cock, in comparison with the grain of barley which contributed to his bodily comfort; and the noblest works of human genius, the noblest qualities of human virtue, will be little esteemed by a semi-civilized people, in comparison with those coarser mental qualities on which they are predisposed to feed and content to wither.

Can we, then, honestly say, that amongst us, as yet, the men who have been most applauded, and held up to popular admiration, have been chiefly of those distinguished for the former qualities or for the latter; the men deserving of a nation's regard, for the enduring happiness they have contributed to confer upon it, or the men who, by their craft and dishonesty, their reckless animal courage, or their misapplied talents in the furtherance of factious objects, have contributed to retard and too often obstruct its progress. Alas! we fear not.

Nor have we, perhaps, in a country so unhappily circumstanced – from many concurring causes unnecessary to be stated here – a right to expect that for a time it can be otherwise.

Yet we have no reason to despair, or, perhaps, even to complain overmuch. A bright and glorious light is obviously illuminating our long darkened-horizon, and is daily becoming more and more refulgent. It is the conquering light of education; and it is our duty as well as our interest to do our utmost in the right direction of its beams, so that they may penetrate the most darkened and unwholesome recesses of the national mind, and we call upon our literary cotemporaries to aid us, not coldly, but ardently and wisely, in this good work.

And in the holding up to our countrymen, as objects to be honoured or imitated, the illustrious men of Ireland, either of the present or past times, let them in future be less of the fighting or of the talking classes, for we have had enough of them, and they have but rarely deserved such glorification. Let our worthies be chiefly of the peaceful and intellectual kind, who have laboured for good for its own sake, and the satisfaction of their own consciences.

Let them be of the pastors who have most worthily fulfilled their duties to their Divine Master, by the inculcation of the principles of peace, and charity, and brotherly love – of the physicians who have most eminently distinguished themselves in their god-like calling, and we have had many such, by the alleviation of human suffering, and whose benevolence has been equal to their skill – of the lawyers whose eloquence and intellectual attainments have been devoted not to selfish aggrandizement and the purposes of faction, but to the furtherance of order, truth, and justice.

Let them be of the politicians who, whatever may have been their errors, have laboured solely for their country's good – of the men of learning and research, who have given us pictures of the past, not distorted to mislead us, but, by their truth, to enlighten and guide us for the future. Let them be of the poets and men of literature, who have best sounded the depths of the human heart to show us how much there is in it not earthy, but derived from heaven.

Let them, again, be of the men of science, who, by their labours, have made us more deeply appreciate the omnipotence of the Creator and Sustainer, by making us more acquainted with the wisdom and goodness of his wondrous works. And of the men of arts – the painters and sculptors, who, by the exercise of their fine sensibilities, backed by a laborious intellectual

toil, have given us a deeper insight into the mysterious principles of beauty which reigns throughout those works – the architect, who has best taught us how to construct works conducive to our national glory, and according with the spirit of that mysterious beauty which reigns in the works of God, and to erect fit temples to His honour, and for His praise.

And, lastly, of the musicians, who, gifted with the same fine sensibilities, and employing the same toil, through a different organ of sense, by no vain, or trifling, but by a right and solemn direction of their art, have drawn down strains of melody and harmonies from heaven, to elevate, or soothe, or soften our earthly tendencies, and given us the purest pleasure receivable through the senses of which our nature is susceptible. Of such should be the men whom a nation should take to their affections, and whose memories it should hold in honour; but not of these alone, for there are many other modes by which the nobler qualities of man's nature may be exercised for the benefit of his country and kind, which should equally entitle him to our reverence, and which, though from their unobtrusive nature they may fail to meet such return, will be sure of their reward from a higher dispenser ; and when, of such, a nation proudly boasts, it may also assert its right to be considered civilized, and the claim will be allowed – but not till then.

But, our readers will exclaim, what in the world has all this, – we confess somewhat common-place, though, we trust not, useless, – sermonizing to do with the portrait of the poor Irish musician placed at the front of our article. Have patience, reader, for a moment, and we shall enlighten you. Be it known to you, then, that we have been beguiled into it unconsciously by the consideration, that, at a period when we are making daily some fuss about our nationality, and genius, and so forth, and lauding to the skies the memories of men whose claims to such honour are often very doubtful, the said musician – Edward Bunting – was allowed to be carried to the grave, and to slumber there, without even the tribute of a newspaper paragraph to do his memory honour! He was of no party, and therefore honoured of none.

And yet this unhonoured man was the preserver of his country's music – a treasure, of which, perhaps, more than any other they possess, they may be justly proud, for it is peculiarly their own – the unmistakable evidence of a soul in the national character, deep, noble, most tender and impassioned, and from which any amount of improvement or of greatness may under happy circumstances be anticipated – a copious stream of melody so exquisitely touching that it is sure to reach the hearts of and be honoured by all who happily have music in their souls, yet which is doubly powerful on the hearts of those of which it is the true expression, and which from a thousand associations should be ever dear to them.

For ourselves, who can only claim to be in part Irish by blood, though, we trust, wholly so in heart, we confess that had we been without this treasure our affections for our country would not be, or ever have been, as intense as they now are. That music has been the dearest enjoyment of our leisure hours when our minds required rest – a precious uniting link around the domestic hearth – and a priceless solace under the pressure of worldly cares and sorrows; and as we ever felt, while he was amongst us, a most grateful and affectionate regard for the man who had supplied us with so much pure happiness, so, we can do no less than honour his memory now that he is in the grave.

But this is not the only, though it is the greatest claim, which the memory of Edward Bunting has to our regard. It is to him that, in a certain sense, we owe the origin and existence of those

exquisite lyrics of our national poet so honourable to our country as well as to himself, and from which, more perhaps than any other of his works, his memory will be sure to live. It was the early collection of Irish melodies published by Bunting that first called up, and we may well believe supplied to some extent the inspiration exhibited in so many of those immortal works; and we may well hope that they will yet awaken in the minds of future poets of our country powers not less deserving of honour than his own.

As the poet himself says: –

If the pulse of the patriot, soldier, or lover,
Have throb'd at our lay, 'tis thy glory alone,
I was *but* as the wind, passing heedlessly over,
And all the wild sweetness I waked was thy own.

But let us quote our poet's own frank acknowledgment of a fact so honourable to Mr. Bunting's memory. It is found in the Preface to the fourth volume of Mr. Moore's collected poetical works, and which contains his *Irish Melodies*:—

“There can be no doubt,” the poet writes, “that to the zeal and industry of Mr. Bunting his country is indebted for the preservation of her old national airs. During the prevalence of the Penal Code the music of Ireland was made to share in the fate of its people. Both were alike shut out from the pale of civilized life; and seldom anywhere but in the huts of the proscribed race could the sweet voice of the songs of other days be heard. Even of that class, the itinerant harpers, among whom for a long period our ancient music had been kept alive, there remained but few to continue the precious tradition; and a great music meeting held at Belfast in the year 1792, at which the two or three still remaining of the old race of wandering harpers assisted, exhibited the last public effort made by the lovers of Irish music, to preserve to their country the only grace or ornament left to her, out of the wreck of all her liberties and hopes.”

“Thus what the fierce legislature of the Pale had endeavoured vainly through so many centuries to effect – the utter extinction of Ireland's minstrelsy – the deadly pressure of the Penal Laws had nearly, at the close of the eighteenth century, accomplished; and, but for the zeal and intelligent research of Mr. Bunting, at that crisis, the greater part of our musical treasures would probably have been lost to the world. It was in the year 1796 that this gentleman published his first volume; and the national spirit and hope then wakened in Ireland, by the rapid spread of the democratic principle through Europe, could not but insure a most cordial reception for such a work; – flattering as it was to the fond dreams of Erin's early days, and containing in itself, indeed, remarkable testimony to the truth of her claims to an early date of civilization.”

“It was in the year 1797 that, through the medium of Mr. Bunting's book, I was first made acquainted with the beauties of our native music. A young friend of our family, Edward Hudson, the nephew of an eminent dentist of that name, who played with much taste and feeling on the flute, and, unluckily for himself, was but too deeply warmed with the patriotic ardour then kindling around him, was the first who made known to me this rich mine of our country's melodies – a mine, from the working of which my humble labours as a poet have since then derived their sole lustre and value.”

Having, now, as we trust, sufficiently established Edward Bunting's claim to a place – and a distinguished one too – in our "Portrait Gallery", we proceed to lay before our readers a sketch of his life, such as our limited space and scanty materials will permit us to supply.

Like many of those who have rendered our country most worthy service, Edward Bunting, as his name indicates, was of English origin, at least by the male side. His father, who was by profession an engineer, was a native of Derby, who came over to this country to direct the works at the Dungannon colliery; and who, marrying an Irishwoman, remained and died here, leaving three sons after him, who were all musicians, and of whom Edward was the youngest. It was, however, of his descent through the mother's side that Edward Bunting was most proud to boast. She was the lineal descendant of a certain chief of an ancient clan, of the Hy Niall race, seated in Tyrone, – named Para, or Patrick Gruama O'Quin, who was killed in arms in July, 1642; and it was to this origin that Bunting attributed his musical talents, as well as certain strong Irish predilections, for which he was, through life, remarkable.

He was born at Armagh, in the month of February, 1773. At a very early age he had the misfortune to lose his father, who left him unprovided for; and, at the age of nine, having already shown a decided predilection for music, he was removed to Drogheda, where his eldest brother, Anthony, – an estimable gentleman and citizen of Dublin, who yet survives him, – was then located as a music teacher and organist. Here he remained for two years, during which he received musical instruction from his brother, and made such progress in his art, that his fame spread to Belfast, whither, at the age of eleven, he proceeded, at the invitation of Mr. Weir [Ware], then organist of the church there, to take his place at the instrument, while that gentleman made a visit to London.

It was very soon discovered at Belfast that the boy substitute was a better organist than his employer, and Mr. Weir was glad to secure his services as assistant, by articles, for a limited number of years. While thus engaged he had, in addition to his duties as assistant or sub-organist at the church, to act also as deputy teacher to Mr. Weir's pupils on the piano-forte, throughout the neighbouring country; and the zeal of the young master to fulfil his duties were often productive of the most ludicrous results: for his young lady pupils, who were often many years older than himself, were accustomed to take his reproofs with any thing but angelic temper, and we have heard him tell how a Miss Stewart, of Welmot [Wilmont], in the County of Down, was so astonished at his audacity that she indignantly turned round upon him and well boxed his ears.

After a few years spent in this manner, he became a professor on his own account; and as his abilities as a performer had become developed, his company was courted by the higher class of the Belfast citizens, as well as by the gentry of its neighbourhood, and, in short, the boy prodigy became an idol amongst them. But, need we say that this was a most perilous position for a young man, subject to no control, imperfectly educated, with social temperament, and high animal spirits; obtaining, with ease, sufficient means to supply his wants, and without any higher objects of ambition to gratify than that which he had already compassed. Or should we wonder that, courted and caressed, flattered and humoured, as he was, he should have paid the usual penalty for such pampering – that his temper should have become pettish, and his habits wayward and idle – doing every thing as he liked, with a reckless disregard of what might be thought of it.

Such, indeed, is – or, at least, has been – but too commonly the fate of young musicians precociously gifted with extraordinary powers, and who, falling into premature habits of incurable dissipation, have seldom realized, in after life, the promises of excellence their early talents had given. It was happily not so with Bunting. Wayward and pettish he remained through life, and for a long period – at least occasionally – idle, and, we fear, dissipated; for hard-drinking was the habit of the Belfastians in those days. But, while still young, not more than nineteen, an event occurred, which gave his ardent and excitable temperament a worthy object of ambition on which to employ it, and which necessarily required a cultivation of his powers, to enable him to effect it.

The event we allude to was the assemblage, at Belfast, in 1792, of the harpers from all parts of Ireland – the aged and feeble minstrels who had given pleasure in a state of society now rapidly undergoing a radical change; and on this occasion the young Bunting was employed, by the committee of directors, to commit to writing the melodies of which they were, in many instances, the sole depositories. This was a task, for the accomplishment of which the nature of his mind peculiarly fitted him, and he entered upon it with enthusiasm; for his mind was deeply imbued with the political feelings so prevalent amongst the middle classes of the locality at the time; and his musical sensibilities led him, as, indeed, they did throughout his subsequent life, to consider melody the important – the *sine qua non* quality of musical composition.

It was fortunate, moreover, that there was a person so fitted for the task at hand at the time, to undertake it; for it would have been a happy chance, that if any other musician had been employed, he would not, in the prejudiced spirit of the time, have held in contempt the strange and wild strains, so unlike anything that he had been accustomed to regard as good music, often feebly performed, and barbarized by rude harmonies, and that, having accomplished his task in this spirit he would not have allowed the tunes to have shared the fate to which the minstrels were fast hastening, whose harps had given them utterance.

But in how different a spirit it was that Bunting laboured, will be best stated in his own words, as they are found in the preface to his last splendid and valuable volume: –

“The hope of being enabled, by reviving the national music, to place himself in the same rank with those worthy Irishmen, whose labours have, from time to time, sustained the reputation of the country for a native literature, had, the Editor admits, no inconsiderable share in determining him on making the study and preservation of our Irish Melodies the main business of his long life, and, he is free to confess, the same hope still animates him in giving these, the last of his labours, to the public. But what at first incited him to the pursuit, and what has chiefly kept alive the ardour with which, for nearly fifty years, he has prosecuted it, was, and is, a strong innate love for these delightful strains for their own sake; a love for them which neither the experience of the best music of other countries, nor the control of a vitiated public taste, nor the influence of advancing years, has ever been able to alter or diminish.”

But, as he proceeds:—

“The occasion which first confirmed the Editor in this partiality for the airs of his native country, was the great meeting of the Harpers of Belfast, in the year 1792. Before this time, there had been several similar meetings at Granard, in the county of Longford, which had excited a surprising degree of interest in Irish music, throughout that part of the country. The

meeting at Belfast was, however, better attended than any that had yet taken place, and its effects were more permanent, for it kindled an enthusiasm throughout the North, which still burns bright in some warm and honest hearts.”

“All the best of the old class of harpers – a race of men then nearly extinct, and now gone for ever – Denis Hempson, Arthur O’Neill, Charles Fanning, and seven others, the least able of whom has not left his like behind, were present.”

“Hempson, who realized the antique picture drawn by Cambrensis and Galilei, for he played with long crooked nails, and in his performance ‘the tinkling of the small wires under the deep tones of the bass,’ was peculiarly thrilling, took the attention of the Editor with a degree of interest which he can never forget. He was the only one who played the very old – the aboriginal music – of the country; and this he did in a style of such finished excellence, as persuaded the editor that the praises of the old Irish harp in Cambrensis, Fuller, and others, instead of being, as the detractors of the country are fond of asserting, ill-considered and indiscriminate, were, in reality, no more than a just tribute to that admirable instrument and its then professors.”

“But, more than any thing else, the conversation of Arthur O’Neill, who, though not so absolute a harper as Hempson, was more a man of the world, and had travelled in his calling over all parts of Ireland, won and delighted him. All that the genius of later poets and romance writers has feigned of the wandering minstrel, was realized in this man. There was no house of any note in the North of Ireland, as far as Meath, on the one hand, and Sligo, on the other, in which he was not well known and eagerly sought after. Carolan had been his immediate predecessor, and those who have taken any interest in the life of the elder minstrel, will readily recognize the names of Charles O’Conor, of Belanagar, Toby Peyton, of Lisduff, James Irwin, of Streamstown, Mrs. Crofton of Longford, Con O’Donnell, of Larkfield, Squire Jones, of Moneyglass; not to detain the reader with a longer enumeration, all of whom are to be found among the list of O’Neill’s friends and entertainers.”

“He had also, when a youth, been through the South, where his principal patron was the famous Murtagh Oge O’Sullivan, of Bearhaven, a man who led quite the life of an old Irish chieftain, and whose memory is still vividly preserved in the lays and traditions of the county of Cork. O’Neill was of the great Tyrone family, and prided himself on his descent, and on supporting, to some extent, the character of a gentleman harper. Although blind from his youth, he possessed a surprising capacity for the observation of men and manners. He had been the intimate friend of Acland Kane, who had played before the Pretender, the Pope, and the King of Spain. He himself had played on Brian Boru’s harp, strung for the occasion, through the streets of Limerick, in the year 1760; in a word, he was a man whose conversation was enough to enamour any one of Irish music, much more one so enthusiastic in *every thing Irish* as the editor.”

Of the excellence of the melodies in this first collection of Bunting’s, it is scarcely possible to speak in terms too high. There is hardly an air in it undistinguished for beauty and character; and, as a whole, it is confessedly superior in this particular to either of the more splendid volumes which he afterwards produced. It has now been long out of print, and too generally forgotten; but the majority of its airs have been made familiar to the world by the genius of Moore, to whom it served as a treasury of melody, as may be gathered from the fact, that of the sixteen beautiful airs in the first number of *The Irish Melodies*, no less than eleven were

derived from this source. And yet he did not exhaust its wealth. Lover, who came to it for gems of melody after him, found there the exquisite air, *Mary do you Fancy Me*, which he worthily made known as *The Angels' Whisper*, and the air, *I'll follow you over the mountain*, – the exquisitely tender beauty and naturalness of which gave a refreshing dash of sentiment to his pleasant popular extravaganza of *Rory O'More*.

And there still remain in this store-house of song, unnoticed, airs of a vocal character of equal beauty to any that either Moore or Lover has extracted from it – too intensely Irish, perhaps, in their structure for fashionable ears and tastes, but not the less touching to Irish feelings – and for which only a poet of the highest powers and musical sensibility could furnish appropriate words. Such, for example, is the very first air in the collection – *If to a foreign clime I go* – which Bunting placed in that prominent position from his intense admiration of it, and which we know he considered as the most ancient and characteristically Irish tune in the collection.

Of the popular success of this collection, Bunting himself has spoken but moderately; and, indeed, though it may have had a tolerable sale in his own immediate locality of Belfast, and among the patriotic portion of the middle classes elsewhere in Ireland, we have strong reasons for believing that it never, to any extent, found its way into the houses of the higher orders; and hence the feelings of surprise at the novelty as well as of admiration of the beauty of these melodies experienced by the public generally when they were reproduced by Moore, and forced upon their attention by the fascination of the songs to which he united them.

Such, alas, has been – we trust it will not be over – the baneful influence of party prejudices in Ireland, that nothing, however pure in its essence, could have a chance of escaping it – an influence so mischievously perverting, even to minds of the highest intellectual order, that it would appear to have led Mr. Moore himself to attribute the very origin as well as beauty of our melodies to the Penal laws! – an honour to which, we need not say, they are in no way entitled. Alas, as the poet has himself written –

Erin, thy silent tear never shall cease –
Erin, thy languid smile ne'er shall increase,
Till the rainbow's light
Thy various tints unite,
And form in Heaven's sight
One arch of peace.

It was not till four years after this meeting that Bunting gave his first collection of *Irish Melodies* to the world; but, that he was not, during these years, either idle or apathetic in the collection of matter for his work, will be abundantly proved by his own brief statement, as given in the preface already quoted: –

“Animated,” he says, “by the countenance and assistance of several townsmen of congenial taste and habits, of whom his excellent friend, Dr. James M'Donnell, is now, alas! the only survivor, and assisted, to a great extent, by O'Neill and the other harpers present on this memorable occasion, the Editor, immediately after the termination of the meeting, commenced forming his first collection. For this purpose he travelled into Derry and Tyrone, visiting Hempson, after his return to Magilligan in the former county, and spending a good

part of the summer about Ballinascreen and other mountain districts in the latter, where he obtained a great number of admirable airs from the country people.”

“His principal acquisitions were, however, made in the province of Connaught, whither he was invited by the celebrated Richard Kirwan, of Cregg, the philosopher, and founder (rather President) of the Royal Irish Academy, who was himself an ardent admirer of the native music, and who was of such influence in that part of the country, as procured the Editor a ready opportunity of obtaining tunes both from high and low. Having succeeded beyond his expectations, he returned to Belfast; and in the year 1796 produced his first volume, containing sixty-six native Irish airs never before published.”

But whatever may have been the popular success of this collection, or the amount of fame or respect which it gained for its author, it is certain, at least, that it did not secure to him any pecuniary recompense for his labours, or for his loss of time and the expenses of his journeys in the collection of its materials; in fact it did not even repay the expenses of its publication, for, though it was presented to the public at the very moderate price of ten shillings and sixpence, it was put out of the market immediately after its appearance by a considerably cheaper edition, thrown off by one of the piratical publishers of Dublin at the time, – and who was commonly known by the name of *Mud* Lee—so that whatever money may have been made of the work, a very small portion of it found its way into Bunting’s pocket.

But though such a result would, with most men, have been sufficient to deter them from any further labour of the same unprofitable kind, it had no such influence on a temper so enthusiastic as his. Gain in money was not the primary or influencing object which led him to produce it – indeed he never exhibited even a prudent tendency in that direction till the support of a wife and children imperatively required it; and, as at that time he found no difficulty in obtaining, by the practice of his profession, even more than sufficed for his wants, if not for his pleasures, it is most probable that its failure in that way was a matter of indifference to him.

And so, cheered on by the admiration and encouragement of Dr. M’Donnell, and some other friends in Belfast, he went on journeying and collecting and arranging what he gathered, – draining O’Neill, and old Hempson, of Magilligan, then above a hundred years of age, of all their hereditary knowledge of the art of playing upon the harp, as practised by their predecessors, – and having the provinces travelled by agents qualified to note down the melodies for him, as well as the original Irish songs to which they were sung; for it was at this time his intention, in his future publications, to bring out both together – a project, however, which the prevailing want of merit in the words, and other causes, obliged him subsequently to relinquish. The results eventuated in the publication of his second collection – a splendid volume – proposed as the first of a new series, and which appeared in 1809.

It is most probable, however, that, considering the dilatoriness of Bunting’s habits, the appearance of this volume was somewhat hastened by the publication and extraordinary success of the first and second numbers of Moore’s *Irish Melodies*; and it is certain that a natural spirit of emulation excited him to attempt a vain rivalry with it by the adaptation of English words to most of the vocal airs, and a more successful one, by an expensive splendour of typography, not to be found in the musical publications of that poet – for it is easier to command good paper, engraving, and printing, than good poetry. We have often, indeed, heard it asserted – we will not, however, vouch for the truth of the statement, as we

never heard it corroborated by Bunting himself – that some time after the publication of his first collection, Mr. Moore offered to supply him with words for the finer vocal airs in his possession, and that Bunting either declined or neglected to avail himself of such assistance. But, be that as it may, it is certain that he deeply regretted, when it was too late, that he had not secured the aid of the great lyrist – though it may be doubted that two instruments so differing in character would have run long together in smooth harmony – and he endeavoured to supply the loss of it, as he thought, he best might, by engaging the co-operation of the poet Campbell, who was then in the zenith of his fame. But, if the well of Campbell’s genius ran deep and clear, it was exceedingly difficult to pump anything out of it; and so, after a long delay, and innumerable fruitless applications, Bunting was ultimately obliged to content himself with two indifferent songs, and permission to use two of the poet’s ballads, written long previous to the agreement, and which, however excellent they confessedly were, in their way, were entirely out of their place in a collection of Irish melodies. Failing in this expected aid, Bunting had to look about for assistance among the minor poets of England, but lyrical talents were then a rarer article to find than now, when they are less valued, and he was at last obliged to fall back on such aid as a lady in the North of Ireland could give, by furnishing him with mediocre translations of what would appear to be but mediocre words of Irish songs. But, notwithstanding the want of merit – or so-so-ishness – generally, of the words associated with so many of the airs, this volume was not only a beautiful but a truly valuable one; and though, as a whole, it was not so rich in melodies of the finest character as his first volume, it yet contained very many in no degree inferior – equally new to the public, and, moreover, arranged with such an exquisite grace, skill, and judgment, as at once placed its editor, in the opinion of the musical world, in the foremost rank of British musicians, and as the most accomplished of those of his own country. This, alas! was the only reward it procured him. Like his former collection, its sale barely paid the expenses of its publication, and this chiefly through his friends in the North, who had become subscribers to the work, to encourage him to undertake it. It was too costly, too repulsively learned – with a long historical dissertation on the antiquity of the harp and bagpipe pre-fixed – to give it a chance of suiting the tastes or purses of the class of society which had bought the earlier work; and among the higher classes there was then too little of Irish taste to incline them to receive it. And so, after a fruitless effort to force a sale for it, while in his own hands, Bunting was at length glad, for a trifling sum, to transfer it altogether into those of his publishers – the Messrs. Clementi; and, like its predecessor, the work is now rarely to be seen in Ireland.

While this volume was in course of preparation for publication, as indeed it was his habit both before and after it, he paid frequent visits to London, to which he was attracted no less by his taste for intellectual society than by his love for good music; and in which he had the happiness to make many valuable friends. At the hospitable table of the Messrs. Longman he had the pleasure of meeting the men most distinguished in literature; and at the Messrs. Broadwoods’ he was made known to the most eminent men of his own profession. At these houses he used to delight his hearers by his performance of the Irish music; and with the Broadwoods in particular, he was on this account, as well as others, throughout his long life, an especial favourite; so much so, that on his last visit to London, in 1839, they presented him with a grand piano-forte, which they allowed himself to choose out of their extensive manufactory. The intimacies which he had formed with the most eminent of his musical brethren were often no less permanent, and we remember well the delight of Catalani at seeing him when she paid her last visit to this country, and a portion of the curious dialogue which took place between them on that occasion. Take the following as an example:–
Catalani – “Well, my dear Mr. Bunting, how glad I am to see you looking so strong and

well.” Bunting, with a shrug – “Ugh, ugh, no madam, I’m growing fat and lazy like an old dog as I am.” Catalani, looking alarmed and thoughtful – “Ah, indeed, Mr. Bunting – and I too am growing fat and lazy, like an old dog as I am – no that’s not the word – like an old bitch, Mr. Bunting – like an old bitch!”

In 1815, he visited Paris, while the allied sovereigns were there, after the battle of Waterloo; and on this occasion his portly, well-fed, English appearance procured him the honour of being harmlessly blown up, by a mass of squibbs and crackers being placed under him as he was taking a dose on a seat in the Boulevards, by a crowd of mischievous Frenchmen, who, surrounding him, followed up the explosion with roars of laughter, and exclamations of Jean Bull! Here, too, he made intimacies with many of the most eminent musicians, whom he no less delighted by the beauty of the Irish airs, which he played for them, than he surprised them by the assurance which – with a Scottish love for his country, superior to any other love – he gravely gave that the refined harmonies with which he accompanied them were equally Irish, and contemporaneous with the airs themselves. “Match me that,” said Bunting, proudly, to the astonished Frenchmen, as, slapping his thigh, to suit the action to the word, he rose from the piano-forte, after delighting them with the performance of one of his finest airs.

But we are warned that our space is nearly exhausted, and that if we get into this strain we shall not know where to stop, and so we shall endeavour to be more grave and brief. Led by his love for music, and particularly of the organ, which was at all times his favourite instrument, he passed from France into Belgium, where, from the organists of the great instruments at Antwerp and Harlaem, he acquired much knowledge, which it was our good fortune to have often heard him display on our own organ at St. Patrick’s.

We now approach an eventful epoch in Bunting’s life, which though of little interest in the biography of the musician, is always of importance in the history of the man, and to which we may be permitted to allude, inasmuch as that it had a permanent and beneficial influence on his habits and character during the subsequent years of his life. The event to which we allude was no less than his marriage in 1819, to a lady in every respect worthy of him, the sister of the late Rev. Mr. Chapman, who had been a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin.

In consequence of this connexion, Bunting was induced to remove from the scene of his early labours and triumphs, and make Dublin the place of his future residence, where Mrs. Bunting, though a Northern by birth, had been with her family for some years located. And a desire to be near his beloved brother, Mr. Anthony Bunting, who had been for some years settled here, had also, no doubt, its share in influencing him to this removal. Hitherto, it should be observed, he had for a period of more than forty years been living at little cost with the respectable family of the M’Crackens at Belfast, to whose house he had been invited when he arrived there at the age of eleven, “getting and spending” as he pleased, but certainly not saving.

He had now to commence house-keeping on his own account – to begin the world as we might almost say – to earn his bread in a new locality, where he was comparatively little known, and where he would have to contend with professors of his art, of high powers and established reputations – and that at an advanced period of life, when the mind is as indisposed to form new friendships or associations, as the public is to reciprocate them. Yet he was not unsuccessful. Through the influence chiefly of his Northern connexions, he soon got into extensive practice as a teacher in the higher circles, and was appointed organist of St.

Stephen's Chapel; and thus toiling daily and without rest he was enabled to support a growing family in respectability, and had the happiness to leave them able, if required, by the exercise of their own talents to provide for themselves.

It was during this latter section of his life, and under such circumstances, that he in part collected and entirely arranged the great body of melody which he gave to the world in 1840, as *The Ancient Music of Ireland*; nor was the labour to him a light one, for there is scarcely an air in it which he did not arrange and re-arrange, again and again, till he had exhausted all the changes which his fine fancy and artistic skill could suggest. But it was to him a labour of love – the pleasant employment of his evening leisure hours, as often as a broken state of health, and the increasing weight of years, would allow him to engage in it. And this not from the expectation of pecuniary gain, which, though he was not indifferent to such a recompense, the fate of his former works gave very little hope of, but from the not unworthy ambition to leave his name fixed upon the history of the literature and art of his country.

Indeed we have reason to know that while thus labouring he was not even sanguine in the hope that he should be able to do more than leave the work after him finished for better times, for he had little expectation that he should find a publisher, either musical or literary, who would be willing to undertake the publication of a work of this novel mixed nature – fit for the gentleman's library, as well as for the lady's drawing-room – and who should allow him, without regard to expense, the uncontrolled indulgence of his wishes and tastes, as well in the matter as in the typographical style of it, for without such privilege Bunting would never have disposed of it. Such spirited publishers, however, he happily found in our own city, the Messrs. Hodges and Smith, who, fully appreciating the national importance of the work, undertook its publication in a kindred spirit to his own.

As we have already very fully expressed our opinions of the importance and merit of this charming volume, in a review of it published in our number for January, 1841, it will not be deemed necessary that we should dilate upon them here, and we shall therefore only remark, that in addition to a very able dissertation upon the history and practice of music in Ireland, consisting of a hundred pages, it contains no less than a hundred and fifty melodies, one hundred and twenty of which had never been before published. These airs are all arranged for the pianoforte, and, with two or three exceptions are without words, to a union with which, after the publication of his previous collection, Bunting had an insuperable dislike.

Of the success of this work as a pecuniary speculation we are not in a position to speak. We believe, however, that its sale, though not equal to its deserts, has not been inconsiderable, and that it still continues; so that, though it never made any return to its author during his lifetime, it may be ultimately remunerative, to some extent, to his survivors. But it was not for such reward that Bunting toiled, and its publication was, for the very few years which he survived it, not only a matter of the greatest happiness and consolation to him, but it excited him to devote the leisure of those years to the re-arrangement of the airs in his two previous collections in a style uniform with those of the last volume; "it being," as he stated, "his ambition, as he was the first to give to the world a regularly arranged selection of our national airs, to terminate his labours by leaving behind him a complete, uniform, and, he trusts, very nearly perfect collection of Irish music." And thus – with the ruling passion strong in death, he departed this life, as we trust for a better, on the 21st of December, 1843, aged 70, and was interred in the cemetery of Mount Jerome.

Edward Bunting was in size above the middle stature, and he was strongly made, and well-proportioned. His somewhat English face was also symmetrical, and its expression manly and independent, full of intelligence and character, and must in youth have been eminently handsome. And though his manners might be found fault with as occasionally rough and unpolished, in appearance at least he was always the gentleman. His mental qualities were naturally of a high order and remarkably extensive, for though they had never received culture, or been applied in a systematic way to any kind of study, but that of his art, there were few departments of knowledge in which he did not take an interest, and learn something. He had a fine perception of, and an enthusiastic love for the beauties of nature, and a high appreciation of the charms of poetry, and of all the fine arts, though in most of them his judgment was circumscribed.

In short he was in every thing a lover of beauty, and it was this sentiment that enabled him to appreciate so truly, and free from professional prejudice, the excellence of our native music, and that marked his own musical performance with a charm which the more powerful and brilliant execution of greater instrumentalists could rarely equal. Strong in his attachments, he was an affectionate husband, father, brother, and friend; but as his temper had been spoiled by indulgence and want of control in early life, it was sometimes necessary for his friends to bear a little with this infirmity, which, however, to those he loved, was never more than a passing cloud upon the sunshine of his genial nature, and hence his friends were not numerous. But that he was susceptible of the warmest and most lasting attachments is abundantly proved by the fact of his residence in friendship with the M'Cracken family for a period of forty years; and that that friendship was never broken or interrupted till his death—twenty years after. Let us also add, his attachment to ourselves, which, though not of so very long a standing, could hardly have been of a kindlier nature. And so, in attempting this humble tribute of respectful regard for his memory, we have only fulfilled a grateful duty, which would have been a pleasant one but for the feeling of regret that the execution of the task did not fall to abler hands.

P. [George Petrie]