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MR. EDWARD BUNTING, AND THE BELFAST HARP SOCIETY.

This Society was established here some years since, for the purposes of reviving and preserving the ancient Music of Ireland, and in particular the Music of the Irish Harp, an instrument which in the days of our forefathers resounded in the halls of our nobles. Its exhilarating strains are calculated to awaken the soul to deeds of valour, and its milder melodies to fan the flame of love, or kindle soft desire. — “Strike the Harp in my hall,” said the great Fingal, “and let Fingal hear the song.” Whilst the Members of this Society were prosecuting the design of the Institution, they found in one of their Members, Mr. EDWARD BUNTING, a powerful auxiliary, one indeed who had long preceded them in the pursuit, and who had followed it with perseverance, with ardour, and with success. To attain his favourite object, this gentleman has carried his researches into all the ancient volumes of music that he could discover, and, in order to make still greater acquirements, travelled over the greatest part Ireland, and in the wilds of the mountains, and in the recesses of the glens, culled from the simple songs of the peasantry, many of the finest airs of our ancient Bards.’ These national airs, thus rescued from oblivion, we are happy to know, are now published, and of course beyond all danger of being lost. — To this gentleman, therefore, the country is indebted for restoring and preserving such valuable relics of ancient genius.

Sensible of the importance of his labours, and the ability with which he has accomplished the object of his pursuit, the Members of the Belfast Harp Society determined, as a mark of individual respect and public esteem, to invite him to a splendid entertainment on Wednesday last, at O’Neill’s Hotel. In the afternoon about 50 gentlemen received him with every mark of respect; and at five o’clock they sat down to a sumptuous dinner, elegantly served up, with excellent wines, &c.

GILBERT McILVEEN, Esq. in the Chair.

WILLIAM STEVENSON, Esq. Vice-President.

After the cloth was removed, the following toasts were given: —

The King.

The Army and Navy.

The Memory of St. Patrick — *Song*, “The sweet little, dear little Shamrock of Ireland.”

The Memory Carolan and other departed Bards — *Song*, “Bards Legacy.”

The Memory of Miss Brook, to whom our country is so much indebted for her elegant translations of ancient Irish Poetry.

The Memory of Charles O’Connor, the Irish antiquary, and friend of Dr. Johnson.

The Memory of O’Halleron, the historian.

The Memory of O’Flaherty, author of the *Ogygia*.

The Irish Harp, and may its strains be once more heard in the Halls of our Nobles — *Duet*, “The Last Minstrel of Erin.”

The Dublin Harp Society.

After this toast, the Chairman rose and addressed the company to the following effect: —

“GENTLEMEN — Previous to the toast I am about to propose, permit me to take the opportunity of expressing the sentiments which actuate myself, and I doubt not, all those present.

“In proposing the health of the Gentleman, to commemorate whose services we have now met, I cannot avoid publicly expressing, in my own name, and that of the Society which I have the honour of presiding, the sense of the obligations we owe to him.

“For seventeen years actively engaged in rescuing from oblivion the few relics of our national music which have escaped the devastation of time, he has at length achieved, what had often before been unsuccessfully attempted. *

“From former failures, we may appreciate the difficulty of the undertaking. From our own regrets for those strains which are now lost for ever, we may judge what is due to him who has preserved a part.

“By the publication of the ancient melodies of Ireland, he has fixed an æra [=era] in the history of its national music, and lest writing should fail, he has also been the happy means of restoring the ancient mode of preserving it, by a succession of Irish Bards.

“Of this valuable trust we are the guardians and depositories — this is the origin of our society, and lest it should droop, it is invigorated by a principle that must ever endear it to the hearts of Irishmen.

“If the love of our country be the end, the love of our fellow-creatures is the means by which we attain it — for be it remembered, and to the honour of the man from whom this Society derives its origin be it spoken, that our existence is secured by being cemented by the sacred bond of charity. †

“I could say much more, did not the expression of my own feelings restrain you from giving vent to yours.

“Permit me therefore to propose the health of Mr. Edward Bunting — the reviver of the ancient music of our country — and may his exertions be crowned with the success they merit.”

The health of Mr. Bunting was drank [sic] with three times three. — Mr. Bunting then rose and said,

“*Mr. President and Gentlemen* — This testimony of your approbation, and the highly flattering attention bestowed on me this day, amply repays my exertions in endeavouring to rescue from oblivion the relics of the national music of our country. Allow me to assure you they will not fail to make a lively and lasting impression on my heart.”

This speech was received with great applause. Mr. Bunting then begged leave to give as a toast,

The Harp Society of Belfast.

This was drank [sic] with three times three.

The President then proceeded with the toasts:

The Town and Trade of Belfast. — *Duet* — “All’s Well”.

The Marquis of Donegall.

The Earl of O’Neil, and the House of O’Neil.

The Earl of Westmeath, and the Garrison of Belfast.

Lord Bishop of Dromore. — *Song* — O! Nanny wil’t thou go with me”.

General Valancy.

The Benevolent Society of St. Patrick in London.

The Marchioness of Donegall. — *Song* — “O give me the heart which united can feel.”

[Continued overleaf]

* Alluding to the first [sic] volume of Mr. Bunting’s the Ancient Melodies of Ireland, just published, in *the most splendid* style of any similar work that has ever appeared in the United Kingdom.

† [*The Irish Magazine* prints an additional footnote here: The Society supports a school, where young Blind Pupils are instructed to play the Harp.]

A number of other toasts and songs followed.

O'Neil, the oldest Harper in Ireland, was not excluded from the festive board. In the midst of his countrymen he seemed to have renewed his youth, presenting an interesting picture of "a Bard of other times" surrounded by his Milesian brethren. After dinner he led into the room his twelve blind pupils, one of whom is a female, Miss O'Reilly. — Their entrance exhibited a scene peculiarly impressive; but when Miss O'Reilly, and two of the youths, strung their harps, and played some trios, duets, &c. they were followed by most enthusiastic applause. Among other admired airs were the following: Patrick's Day — The Green Wood Tringha [Trugha?] — Ulligan dulh O! or the Song of Sorrow — Bumper Squire Jones — Planxty Plunket — Planxty Reilly, &c. &c. Their performances gave much satisfaction, and it was very gratifying to behold this youthful groupe [sic], the objects of the Society's care, thus surrounded by their patrons, delighting their ears with the music of ancient times.

It would be injustice to the merits of our Townsmen not to mention, that two of the most approved songs were composed and sung with great effect, by one of the Gentlemen present. The song of "Ballyporeen" [a popular comic song, *The Wedding of Ballyporeen*], in particular, drew forth thunders of applause. The company did not separate till a late hour, every one seeming delighted with the social and harmonious spirit which pervaded this patriotic meeting.

The President having left the chair, which he had filled with distinguished propriety, his health was drunk with loud applause. Before the meeting broke up, *Rule Britannia* was sung in excellent style, the whole company joining in chorus. They afterwards retired, much gratified with the evening's entertainment, which had been most judiciously arranged by the Gentlemen appointed as Stewards for the occasion.

Transcribed by David Byers, February 2018