

Ḇoλζ Δη τSoλΔηη

By The Society of United Irishmen, 1795.

Ḇoλζ Δη τSoλΔηη (*its literal meaning in English being “provision bag”*) was an Irish-language magazine established by the *Northern Star*, the Belfast-based organ of the Society of United Irishmen in 1795. Only one issue of the magazine was ever published, the consensus is that it was co-edited by prominent United Irishman Thomas Russell and the Gaelic scholar Patrick Lynch. The following is a preface to the magazine, which was most likely written by Russell.

When anything novel, or out of the common track, is offered to the public, it is commonly expected that some apology should be made, or something said, to shew that the subject matter is important or interesting; but when it is considered that the main design of the following work, is nothing else than to recommend the Irish language to the notice of Irishmen, any arguments laid down on that head, to persuade the natives that their own language is of some importance to them, would appear quite superfluous in the eyes of foreigners; - but seeing that the Gaelic has been not only banished from the court, the college and the bar, but that many tongues and pens have been employed to cry it down, and to persuade the ignorant that it was harsh and barbarous jargon, and that their ancestors, from whom they derived it, were an ignorant, uncultivated people – it becomes then necessary, to say something in reply.

The Irish will be found by the unprejudiced ear, to excel in the harmony of its cadence; nor was ever any language fitter to express the feelings of the heart; nor need it be wondered at, when we consider that their country was the feat of the muses, from times of the remotest antiquity, and that no nation ever encouraged poets and musicians, more than the ancient Irish; the office of a poet or musician, was held in the highest esteem among them; and to such a pitch of enthusiasm had their love of these sciences arrived, that in the sixth century, a

decree of the senate became necessary to check their increasing numbers.

It is also a rich and copious language, abounding with terms of art, and words to express every thought of the mind; and it has this advantage over all the modern dialects, that it compounds all its words within itself – so that the unlearned could never be at a loss for their meaning. What a degree of perfection must a language attain, that was spoken by the same race of people, and in the same place, without mixture, for more than 2000 years, and *that* under the inspection of learned men? This much, at least we can prove by foreign historians, that from the decline of the Roman empire, an inundation of Northern barbarians overwhelmed the European continent; and that letters and learned men, as affrighted, fled to Ireland for an asylum, which was deemed for some centuries, the greatest school of learning in Europe. The Irish language is acknowledged by very learned foreigners, to be the best preserved dialect of the Gauls and the Celtiberians. The learned and candid M. Lhuyd, writing to his own countrymen, the Welsh, gives entirely the preference to the Irish, before his own native language; not only for purity and perfection, but also for its utility in illustrating the remote antiquities of Great Britain. “You see” (says he) “how necessary the Irish language is to those who would undertake to write of the antiquities of the life of Britain.¹” And this same author, in the preface to his Irish Vocabulary, says to the Irish nation –

“Your language is better situated for being preserved, than any other language in Europe.”

His reason, without doubt, for this affection, was because languages are best preserved in islands and mountainous countries; and especially because the Roman arms never reached Ireland.

This learned antiquarian seems convinced, that the old Irish were possessors of Great Britain, before those Britons who were the ancestors of the Welsh. These are his words: -

“Whoever takes notice of a great many of the names of the rivers, mountains, &c. throughout the kingdom, will have no reason to doubt, but the

¹ Vid. *Archæologia Britannica*, p. 7.

Irish must have been the inhabitants when those names were imposed upon them.”

This author confesses that he fought in vain for the names of many places in England and Wales; that he examined the three British dialects, to wit: The Welsh, the Cornish, and the Armoric, but to no purpose – yet he found them with the greatest ease in the Irish language. He gives many examples; we shall mention a few: - *Uife*, the name of several rivers in England and Wales; *Ben*, a mountain; *Drim*, a back, or ridge; *Lechlia*, a grey stone, &c.

Dr O’Bryan, in his preface to his Irish Dictionary, shews, that the very name of the capital, is no other than pure Irish; that is, *London*, or *Londinum* – Irish, *Longdion*, a harbour for ships: as also, *Albion*, the most ancient name of the British isle, by which it was known,² to the Greeks, even as early as the time of Aristotle and Theophrastus; this name is plain Irish, in which *Al* or *Ail*, signifies a rocky cliff, and *ban*, white; whence the whole name *Albain*, or *Albion*, signifies the White Cliffs.

Thus we see, that an acquaintance with Gaelic, as being the mother tongue of all the languages in the West, is necessary to every antiquary who would study the affinity of languages, or trace the migrations of the ancient races of mankind; of late it has attracted the attention of the learned in different parts of Europe – SHALL IRISHMEN ALONE REMAIN INSENSIBLE? – Shall its beauties be lost to those who have had opportunities from their infancy, of understanding it?

Notwithstanding that Ireland has been subject to England from the time of Henry II and that English colonies had remained for centuries in this country, no attempt was made to change the national language, nor to force a foreign jargon on the natives. The Irish enjoyed their own laws and language, till the reigns of Elizabeth, and James I, when the English laws were universally established, and English schools were erected, with strict injunctions that the vernacular tongue should be no longer spoken in the seminaries; yet under all these difficulties, many valuable manuscripts have been

² Says the learned Usher, p. 378.

transcribed, and several books of morality printed in the Irish type in foreign countries; and even to this day, the Irish is spoken by a great majority of the inhabitants of this kingdom.

There are several Irish manuscripts now lying dormant and unheeded, in many obscure parts of this country, most of them transcribed above forty years ago. About that time they were read, and listened to with pleasure, even by the common people; there was scarce any neighbourhood wherein there was not some Irish scholar to be found, who could entertain his neighbours, by reading some ancient poems or stories of the achievements of their heroic ancestors.

At present, there are but few who can read, and fewer that can write the Irish characters; and it appears, that in a short time, there will be none found who will understand an Irish manuscript, so as to be able to transcribe or translate it.

It is chiefly with a view prevent in some measure the total neglect, and to diffuse the beauties of this ancient and once-admired language, that the following compilation is offered to the public; - hoping to afford a pleasing retrospect to every Irishman, who respects the traditions, or considers the language and compositions of our early ancestors, as a matter of curiosity or importance.

It was thought advisable to prefix an abridgement of Grammar to this first number, for the use of those who would study or improve in the language, and for the greater convenience of many who may not have an opportunity of perusing that large and more perfect Grammar of the learned Colonel VALANCY: - And we flatter ourselves, that even those who do not understand the originals, will find themselves highly gratified with translations; where they may behold with pleasing wonder, with what becoming dignity the ancient bard appears in modern dress, decked and ornamented with skill and taste, by the fair hand of Miss BROOKE.

Those who delight in Irish music, (which seems greatly to prevail at present) shall also be entertained with the choicest songs and airs.

In order to render the work more useful to the public, it shall be continued in numbers, at a low price, and as this first is partly taken

up with Grammar, in all future numbers, historical comments, and a greater variety of poems, songs, &c. shall be given.

Any communications suitable to the design, either in prose or verse, shall be received with gratitude by the compilers of the GAELIC MAGAZINE.

Belfast, September 1, 1795.