

Preface to *Amráin Sheagháin Chláraigh* *Mhic Dhomhnaill.*

By Pádraig Ua Duinnin.

JOHN CLARACH MacDONNELL, now lying in an humble grave at Charleville, was a prominent man in the Ireland of his day. He was chief ollamh of Munster during several years of his life. He presided at periodical assemblies of the Munster poets. He sang the afflictions of his country in tender verse. He lashed with fierce satire the tyrants and bigots, who lived on Irish blood in the early part of the eighteenth century. His hope-inspiring lays planted courage in the breast of a wounded and bleeding land. He was a lamp of learning in an age when school-teaching was a 'heavy crime.' A unanimous chorus of approval from contemporary witnesses stamps his character as high and noble. He suffered persecution and exile for his unflinching devotion to his motherland. Yet, it is only now, 150 years after his death, that for the first time an attempt has been made to place before the public a collection of his poetical works. The loss to the National character of having such a sterling Irishman and eminent writer as MacDonnell buried so long in oblivion, while authors such as Crabbe and Rogers and Gray supply so much of the school-fodder of our rising youth, is incalculable. It is impossible to cultivate and foster genuine Irish ideals in art and literature as long as the true exponents of the historical Irish mind are refused a fair hearing.

Historians of the Penal Laws too often forget one baneful result of that nefarious code. It has blighted the growth and dimmed the glory of many a great and good Irishman, and it has moreover created an atmosphere of public opinion in art, in literature and even in the domain of morals in which the memory of such genuinely Irish spirits as MacDonnell could not live and thrive. The events of recent years have done something to dissipate that foul atmosphere which young and old, learned and unlearned have so long been breathing, and we are gradually getting a clearer vision of the great figures that adorned the past and whose spirit of song nerved every fibre of the nation in

its hour of supreme struggle. Viewed through a clearer air the eighteenth century is a glorious epoch in Irish history. Every element that goes to constitute a great nation is there, crushed and choked as some of them appear under the pressure of an untoward despotism. The unquenchable spirit of song is represented by the great names of Egan O'Rahilly and Eoghan Ruadh O'Sullivan, whose sweet melodies have already gladdened the hearts of the Irish race throughout the world. Beside these, it is the privilege of the present writer to place the honoured name of John Claragh MacDonell, on the enduring roll of fame. Whatever figures fade from Irish History, these names—identified with the keenest and most glorious struggle of our motherland—'these must not sleep in darkness and in death.'