

LEGENDS OF THE LAKES, OR SAYINGS AND
DOINGS AT KILLARNEY

by *Thomas Croker*

I was about to return to the inn, when he interposed with " Sure, it wouldn't be going back your honour would be, widout seeing the West Demesne, and it's only a bit of a step to the hill of Knockrear, where there's the finest prospect in all the wide world. And is'nt there Clough na Cuddy on that same hill where the ould friar from Innisfallen slept for a hundred years and a day, and it's myself will show you the very spot, and the hole that was made in the stone by his two knees, for he was a blessed man, and 'twas praying he was when he was overtaken by the sleep."

Unable to resist Mahony's importunities, and seeing there was yet sufficient light to enjoy " the finest prospect in all the wide world," I consented to visit Clough na Cuddy and Knockrear. We therefore entered the Demesne, by an iron gate, a few yards from the bridge. Passing the lodge, we turned to the right, and proceeded along a path cut on the side of the hill, for which, and many other pleasing improvements, the Demesne is indebted to the taste of Lady Kenmare.

Having ascended the hill, the lower lake lay spread before me in all its beauty, dotted and gemmed with islands, its southern shore bounded by noble mountains, the western sky illumined by the bright tints of a setting sun, which threw over the dark breast of Toomies a glow of the most transparent purple, and, to complete the scene, a returning barge swept over the calm bosom of the lake, to the measured tones of a keyed bugle:

Killarney ! all hail to thee,
land of the mountain.
Where roves the red deer
o'er a hundred hill-tops,

Or silently views,
from the depth of the fountain,
His image reflected at eve when he stops.

Where the monarch of birds,
from his throne on the rock,
Ere he soars, 'mid the storm,
sends his wild scream afar ;

Where the waterfall rushes
with fierce foamy shock,
And echo redoubles
the sound of its war.

O, who has not heard of thee,
land of the lake ?

And who that has seen,
but enshrines in his heart
The glow of thy charms,
and those feelings which wake

At a scene such as this,
with a magical start.

The rush of thy torrents
are sweet to my ear,

Thy lakes and their wooded isles
dear to my sight,

Thy mountains majestic,
thy rivulets clear,
Alternately flowing
'mid shadows and light.

Thy wide-spreading woods
yonder mountain's green pall,
The mellow-toned bugle,
the dip of the oar,

Sweet sights and sweet sounds,
on my spirits ye fall,
And wake me to gladness
and music once more.

Advancing through a pretty plantation, we soon reached Clough na Cuddy, a large stone with two capsular hollows in it, which were half filled with water, A few stunted trees and bushes grew around it, upon one of which several rags were aung, as is usual in Ireland, near places that are considered holy. Whilst I was occupied in looking at the stone, an old woman, who stood near it, exclaimed

"Oh, then, isn't it the blessed stone itself?

and there are the two holes down in it, to be sure, where the holy friar knelt in his devotions." And she began to scatter some crumbs upon the ground, to which the little birds, from the neighbouring bushes, immediately flew with all the fearlessness of conscious security."

"Ah, then'," said their feeder, "ye're a blessed race, and 'tis good right ye have to know this place, and it would be a mortal sin to hurt or to harm ye but what are ye to the little bird that sang to the holy friar for as good as two hundred years ?"

" That, indeed, was a wonderful bird," said I," and, my good woman, if you have no objection, I should like very much to know all about it."

" No objection in life, your honour. Well, then, many years ago, there was a very religious and holy man, one of the monks of a convent hereabouts, and he was one day kneeling at his prayers in the garden of his

monastery, when he heard a little bird singing in one of the rose-trees of the garden, and there never was any thing that he had heard in the world so sweet as the song of that little bird.

" And the holy man rose up from his knees, where he had been kneeling at his prayers, to listen to its song, for he thought he never in all his life heard any thing so heavenly.

" And the little bird, after singing for some time longer in the rose-tree, flew away to a grove at some distance from the monastery; and the holy man followed it, to listen to its singing ; for he felt as if he never could be tired of listening to the sweet song which it was singing out of its little throat.

" And the little bird, after that, went away to another distant tree, and sung there for a while, and then again to another tree, and so on in the same manner, but ever farther and farther away from the monastery, and the holy man still following it farther, and farther, and farther, still listening delighted to its enchanting song.

" But at last he was obliged to give up, as it was growing late in the day, and he returned to the convent ; and as he approached it in the evening, the sun was setting in the west with all the most heavenly colours that were ever seen in all this world, and when he came into the convent it was nightfall.

" And he was quite surprised at every thing he saw ; for they were all strange faces about him in the monastery, that he had never seen before, and the very place itself, and every thing about it, seemed entirely different from what it was when he left in the morning ; and the garden was not like the garden where he had been kneeling at his devotions, when he first heard the singing of the little bird.

" And while he was wondering at all that he saw, one of the monks of the convent came up to him, and the holy man questioned him 'Brother, what is the cause of all these strange changes that have taken place here since the morning ?'

" And the monk that he spoke to seemed to wonder greatly at his question, and asked him what he meant by the changes since morning ; for sure there was no change, that all was just as before ; and then he said, * Brother, why do you ask these strange questions, and what is your name ? for you wear the habit of our order, though we have never seen you before?'

" So, upon this, the holy man told his name, and that he had been at mass in the chapel in the morning, before he had wandered away from the garden, listening to the song of a little bird, that was singing among the rose-trees, near where he was kneeling at his prayers.

" And the brother, while he was speaking, gazed at him very earnestly, and then told him that there was in the convent a tradition of a brother of his name, who had left it two hundred years before, but that what had become of him was never known.

" And while he was speaking, the holy man said, ' My hour of death is come ; blessed be the name of the Lord, for all his mercies to me, through the merits of his only begotten Son.'

" And he kneeled down that very moment, and said, ' Brother, take my confession, and give me absolution, for my soul is departing/

" And he made his confession, and received his absolution, and was anointed, and before midnight he died.

" The little bird, you see, was an angel, one of the cherubim or seraphim ; and that was the way the Almighty was pleased in his mercy to take to himself the soul of that holy man.

" And there before you is the stone where he knelt all the time of his sleep, or his enchantment, or whatever it was ; and there are the prints of that holy man's knees in the stone.'

It was almost dark when I reached Gorham's Hotel.