

BYRNE THE IRISH HARPER.

For a number of years, Mr. Patrick Byrne, a blind Irish harper, has visited Scotland, with a view to giving public and private entertainments with his instrument. In 1840, attention was drawn to the harp music of Ireland and to Byrne's performances, in an article in *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, in which occurred the following observations:—"The harp, as is well known, has been the national musical instrument of Ireland beyond the range of authentic history. It continued from the days of antiquity down to the end of the eighteenth century, to be practised by a body of men generally blind, often of good families and respectable acquirements, who travelled about the country, receiving and giving entertainment in the houses of persons of condition. The last of these ancient minstrels was the celebrated Hempson, who had played at the court of Prince Charles, at Holyrood, in 1745, and who, surviving till 1807, died at the age of 112. The use of the harp having declined, it was revived in 1807, by the Belfast Irish Harp Society, which educated several blind youths of musical talent. Of these, few now survive, one of them being Mr. Patrick Byrne, a well-informed, modest, and agreeable man, of perfectly virtuous habits, and a delightful performer on his instrument. He makes a livelihood by playing to parties at Leamington and other places of fashionable resort. We had the pleasure of hearing him about three years ago, in Edinburgh, where he attended private parties for a moderate fee, and was generally esteemed."

Since the period above referred to, Mr. Byrne has had the distinguished honour of playing before her Majesty and Royal Family at Windsor Castle and Balmoral; he has likewise, on different occasions, professionally visited the Duke of Buccleuch and Lord John Scott, and been the guest of other noblemen and gentlemen in Scotland. To many gentlemen's seats in England he likewise pays periodical visits; with one kind patron in Warwickshire he sometimes stays as long as three months, delighting the numerous visitors with his performances.

Having arrived in Edinburgh, in the course of his rambles through Scotland this season, he was invited to stay a day or two with Mr. Chambers, at Glenormiston. This proved a luckless journey. In the railway train to Peebles, he became the victim of one of those heartless pickpockets who have for some time been the pest of Edinburgh. In some way, unknown to him, his pocket was picked of a purse containing £14 10s—the savings of a whole summer—which, with the characteristic heedlessness of an Irishman, he had had the imprudence to carry about with him. At Glenormiston he played with his wonted vivacity—losses and everything being forgotten—charming every one who heard him (including a large number of rural labourers and servants, called in for the occasion). It was here suggested that he might possibly make up for his recent loss by giving a public entertainment in Peebles. Some gentlemen present having offered to facilitate this benevolent object, Byrne accordingly announced a musical entertainment in the ball-room of the Tontine Hotel, on the evening of the 16th ult. The inhabitants of Peebles have so few opportunities of attending musical entertainments that there could be little fear for the result. The room was crowded with a highly-respectable audience, and the harper gave unqualified satisfaction. "Coolun," "The Harp that once through Tara's Hall," "The Meeting of the Waters," "Erin Go Brah," and "Brian Boru's March to the Battle of Clontarf," in particular, commanded loud applause.

That a poor blind man, with a single instrument, should have sustained close attention and interest for nearly two hours, is indeed something remarkable. At the conclusion of the performance, Mr. Byrne offered thanks to the ladies and gentlemen present for their kindness; and on the part of the company, Provost Stirling, in a few appropriate remarks, expressed the general gratification which had been experienced, and ventured to hope that Mr. Byrne would again, next season, visit Peebles, and renew the pleasure of the evening. The Provost's observations were followed up by Mr. Chambers, who mentioned a few interesting particulars respecting Mr. Byrne. He stated that the harper was a native of Monaghan, in the North of Ireland; that he lost his sight from small-pox, while he was an infant of two years of age; that he spoke his native language till he was seventeen years of age, until which time he had no knowledge of English. Finally, that Mr. Byrne was an exceedingly estimable person, as might be seen—of gentlemanly manners, and therefore every way worthy of public and private encouragement.

We have only to add that, after paying all expenses, Mr. Byrne cleared five guineas by his entertainment, with which he was more than satisfied. On the 17th he left for an engagement at a gentleman's seat in Fife.—*Pebbleshire Advertiser*.