

The *History of Limerick* is not of course Lenihan's only claim to remembrance, though few will deny that it is a work of rare merit. In the course of this short sketch of Lenihan's life frequent reference has been made to the "Reminiscences". This work, whose complete title is "The Reminiscences of a Journalist", appeared in weekly instalments over a period of three years in the *Limerick Reporter*, 1866-1869. It is not a formal autobiography. Where we glean any information about himself and his family it is almost by chance. Thus memories of boyhood's days are apt to be found thrown in unexpectedly in any chapter. This does not mean that there is no order in the "Reminiscences". Lenihan begins with memories of outstanding people in Church and State and continues with a variety of topics – such as the Tithe War, the Great Famine, Young Ireland, Irish Painters, Poets, Musicians, Priests. An occasional glimpse is allowed us of some member of his family in a chapter whose title suggests little of what we are looking for. Thus in a chapter entitled "Painters of Carrick-on-Suir" we find tucked away in a long paragraph a reference to a painting by Ronayne of

his grandfather Thomas Burke who died in 1801. The "Reminiscences" cover an extensive canvas, in which Lenihan has managed to present a wealth of interesting information on personalities and events of his time. Limerick gets its share of recognition, but to a lesser extent than his native Waterford or Clonmel or Carrick-on-Suir. The "Reminiscences" were eagerly received by his readers, as the editorial correspondence shows. Much against the advice of some discerning contemporaries, he did not venture to give this work the more enduring format of a book. His *History of Limerick* was not a financial success; and so his "Reminiscences", a valuable work, is virtually inaccessible today, unless for those who have the opportunity and the patience to read through the few files now available in the country. If however Lenihan's "Reminiscences" ever find the format of a large volume or two, then students of local Irish history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries will be grateful to the publisher.

(*Maurice Lenihan: Historian of Limerick* by Francis Finegan, *Studies*, March, 1948.)

Alf MacLochlainn has selected and edited these extracts from 'Reminiscences of a journalist', by Maurice Lenihan, from the *Limerick Reporter* and *Tipperary Vindicator*. The series ran from late 1866 to late 1869

Reminiscences of a Journalist

August 23, 1867

... but who is it that has not drunk in with eager ear the jocund notes of the Irish pipe, and who is it that has not looked with more than interest and wonder on the Irish piper, as, intent on that work, he appears so thoroughly absorbed, so downright in earnest as to seem as if he heard and saw nothing but his pipes and knew nothing more than to run his rapid fingers over the bright and burnished keys or with the gentle appliance of the left arm to fill with air or extract it from the bag which gives its peculiar name to the instrument. There is no more ancient instrument than the pipes or one that has been sung and said of more largely in olden or in modern times. But it is not my intention to make a dissertation on the ancient instruments used by the Irish of which the bagpipes continue to be the most generally adopted at the present day. Of the sound of the instrument I shall say little more than that under the hands of a master it is really all that it ought to be, full, sonorous, perfectly harmonious, it fills the ear and soul with delight, whilst when played by an inferior bungling experimentalist it is really poor, squeaky, intolerable.

There were several first-class performers in the southern and midland counties within the present century with some of whom I was acquainted, others whom I have heard of from those who could appreciate the heart-stirring strains. They were uniformly countenanced and in

by Maurice Lenihan

some instances sustained and fostered by the gentry of the neighbourhood in which they lived. It is certain that not a few of them owed their easy but rather dissipated position to the support of some one great man who kept house in the old state of an age which is gone by and who could not rest without his piper.

One of the most celebrated of his time as well as one of the most accomplished of musicians was Jack Carroll of Birr. He was blind in his latter days and in his very best days he was well-nigh thoroughly so. He had been leader or bandmaster of the Roxborough Fencibles band in which he played the clarinet, which was his *forte*, with extraordinary good taste and a surprising execution. Personally he was rough, uncouth, pockmarked, strong featured, very unmusical looking indeed. In manner too he was stiff and extremely abrupt but under this somewhat unconciliatory and forbidding exterior he not only possessed a soul for music but he had a warm and generous heart which had broad sympathies with suffering humanity and which ever urged him to relieve distress no matter what form it assumed. Jack, who, it may be observed, had no small notion of his own potential, was at every dinner party, ball, rout, etc. in the vicinity of Birr, Roscrea, etc. There was no enjoyment at which he was not present with his pipes which were in constant

requisition. Those who heard him were anxious to hear him again and again. His masterly performance of national airs could not be excelled. Carolan's Planxties were played by him in their alternations of moving wistfulness and deep and suggestive melancholy just as Carolan himself, the bard of the eighteenth century, would have them played. Carroll's very soul was absorbed in his work. Everything about him partook of earnestness and vigour. When he played one would imagine that he alone was his own parallel. No doubt he was for all over Leinster and Munster he had no superior. He was always at the Droughts of Whigsboro, the Lloyds of Gloster, the Poes of Salsboro, the Cowper Crawfords of Rapla and I doubt not he played on several occasions at Birr and Portumna Castles. He wore a battered felt hat which he usually kept under his chair and on being remonstrated with as to its unfashionable shape and damaged appearance he used to say that if he had a new one it would be stolen. His coat was of grey frieze, his shorts corduroy, yarn stockings and strong shoes. He was a Protestant but strange to add a determined friend of the Irish tenant and he never yet permitted an opportunity to pass in which he did not do what lay in his power to promote the interests of the Irish landholder and to denounce his oppressors in the strongest possible shape and manner. On being complimented by a lady of fashion on his superior

performance on the occasion of a splendid ball at Rapla he replied shortly 'I know that very well my lady'. He hid not indeed his light under a bushel. He lived until the year 1832 and his death occurred at Mr. Evans's of Dungar near Roscrea where he was stopping at the time on a professional visit.

Denis or Denny Shelly, as he was familiarly called, was the immediate predecessor of Jack Carroll. Shelly was at the very top of the wheel seventy years ago. He resided at the Togher near Dromard, the residence of Major Lidwell. He was a delightful flute player as well as a complete piper. His range was through Borrisoleigh, Templemore, Cashel etc. Though stone blind he was accustomed to follow the Tipperary hounds on horseback. He used a watch too and by the application of his delicate fingers to the hands he was able to mark the hour and minute with precise exactness. He was a 'buck' too and so far very unlike Jack Carroll. Shelly was a favourite of the gentry and particularly of Iliogarty, Middlethird, Ikerrin, etc.

The contemporary of Denny Shelly was John Power of the Great Woods in Ikerrin. Power was really a magnificent performer on the pipes for such was his fame and the esteem in which he was held that when the Duke of Rutland was Viceroy of Ireland Power was frequently at the Castle where he delighted the guests of His Excellency with his wonderful notes. Power who ultimately took up his residence permanently in Dublin lived in Lacy's Lane, off Merrion Row. One of his sons became a first-rate violin player in that city. Others of his children, all of whom were grown before his death, were destitute. Power, in addition to his dexterity on the pipes, was a great ball-player. He was of middle size, dark complexion, smart and energetic-looking and he usually wore a blue frock coat. I need not add that he was not blind. Jack Power visited all the houses of the nobility and gentry of his county and of Dublin whilst his star was in the ascendant.

Kyran Fitzpatrick was another of the celebrated pipers of the day and is pretty well remembered in the south of Ireland by some of the oldest inhabitants. He was quite blind, large, heavy, gentleman-like in look and in manner, venerable rather, in appearance. Clonmel was his headquarters where he was accustomed to play to delighted audiences. He was the immediate predecessor of John Murphy, a native of Cahir, Co. Tipperary, who was a well-dressed respectable gentleman-like man. His coat was always of the best black cloth, and well-made. He was blind but his blindness was caused by *gutta serena* and his lustrous eyes did not look as if they were sightless. In height he was about five feet seven inches. He was moderate in his habits unlike nearly every one of his predecessors and contemporaries. He indulged but little in the way of drink. He was quite well able to tell the name of everyone in company by the voice no matter how low the whisper in which they



The base of the memorial to Maurice Lenihan at St. Laurence Cemetery.

spoke. His death occurred about forty years ago and was caused by a species of paralysis.

Griffin, another of the class of departed pipers, was not well known as a player but he was an admirable musician and an amiable and temperate man. He was a son of an old retired officer of the Excise who lived in Waterford about thirty-five or forty years ago and whom I knew very well. He possessed a costly set of pipes but he went to London and there placed himself under a master to learn the organ at which instrument I afterwards heard he became a proficient. He was blind. Griffin's father was a native of Kerry.

Hannigan appears to have been the last of the celebrated pipers of the present generation. He played admirably and the Marquis of Normandy countenanced him. I am certain he played before Her Majesty Queen Victoria in 1837. His after career was not prosperous and like so many others of his calling he drank rather much. Hannigan in the commencement of his career was encouraged greatly during his visits to Waterford where he gave performances in the Town Hall of that city. One of his most active patrons was Alderman James Delahunty of that city who took a decided interest in him and who introduced him to many persons who were in a position to befriend him. Of all these pipers Power was the foremost and

best. He was accustomed to call about him occasionally all the pipers of the country and set them playing for an hour or two. He would then begin himself and the others would observe a most respectful silence. His pipes which were furnished with a double chanter and were of the very best pitch and tone could not be excelled. He taught several and gave them his own method and superiority of style.

William Geary or Guiry of Hospital played in excellent style at the houses of the gentry on the union pipes and though blind from his infancy was one of the best card players in Munster, being only told the trump, so delicate was his touch that he knew the card in his hand as though he saw it. He could vault over a wall six feet high. Geary, who was a particularly handsome man, died of cholera in 1832.

Shanahan of Kilfinnan and Buckley of the same place, brothers-in-law, were first-class pipers. I should not forget to refer to O'Brien 'the Limerick Piper', whose portrait and that of his child squatting by his side by the late accomplished artist Mr. Haverty is so well known. O'Brien in his youth was a powerful finelooking Clareman; he got blind however. In old age his station was at the Crescent near Hartstonge Street where he was known for several years by everyone and where he played diligently until 8 or 9 o'clock each night. His favourite airs were



Portrait of the Limerick Piper, Padraig O'Brien, by Joseph Haverty, painted circa 1844.

Garryowen, the Fox chase, some of Carolan's Planxties, etc. He died about twelve years ago at the age of 86 years in a garret in Englishtown and in his last hours he was attended constantly by the truly pious and indefatigable administrations of the Sisters of Mercy. It is said that in his early days blindness did not afflict him or until he was about 25 years old and that he studied classics and was well informed.

There were indeed many pipers besides these here enumerated and scarcely a gentleman of the last century that had not his piper as an essential member of his establishment and that had not his fool besides. Garret Nagle of Ballinamona, Co. Cork, was one of those fine old gentlemen who was never without piper and fool. He inherited most of his great wealth from Sir Edward Nagle, a distinguished naval officer, who realised immense riches and who bequeathed them to Garret. There was no higher spirited, more nettlesome, determined and hot-blooded Irishman than Garret Nagle of Ballinamona. One of the old faith, he would resent an insult to it more vehemently than if given to himself and who dare insult Nagle in any part of the county of Cork? The piper was ever at his elbow and the grotesque mimicries of the fool were ever in requisition when the guests at Ballinamona were to be amused.

I was not informed of the names of Garret Nagle's piper and fool but referring to fools who is there that has not heard of Mick the Fool of Limerick whose portrait was painted by Gubbins, by Kidd and others? He was as well known by the officers of the garrison 30 or 40 years ago as by the men and by both as by the citizens at large with all of whom he was a favourite. He dressed in the faded remnants of regimentals of some friendly soldier. On field days or when relieving the guard no-one was so prominent stepping out and beating time to the music of the band as Mick and who was so adroit as he in collecting and keeping the halfpence when with old-fashioned caubeen fixed in a peculiar way under his arm he won by his Tim Bobbinish looks more money than all the jolly beggars of the city together.

Another fool was one who was never missed off the streets of Carrick-on-Suir in his time. He was called Billy the Fool. He possessed the most surprising facility for rapid calculation, no matter how abstruse the question or how difficult he mastered it at once and was always correct. He could tell how many farthings in a £100 in an instant and other and more difficult questions were replied to with equal rapidity. Another individual who stood in a higher position than either of these and

who often startled me in my boyish days was one who was known in Waterford by the name of Cracked Shaw or Cracked James Shaw. He certainly had a very mad look as mad a look as any man in Bedlam - Shaw's hat was thrown off his head and was prevented from falling by the collar of the coat which supported it. His hands were always adjusted under his armpits. His hair was nearly white, his teeth enormously large, his eyes grey and somewhat crooked. He flew off in a tangent no matter the subject he spoke on. He filled a situation in the then comparatively small post office of that city and I have frequently heard that as letter-sorter and clerk he was not to be surpassed in the amount of business he was equal to which he discharged with the very greatest correctness.

Of fiddlers, their name is legion. One of the oldest of the craft to whom I was introduced in childhood was a certain Ned Kelly who was accustomed to perform at all the parties, balls, etc., in and about Carrick-on-Suir, where, on an occasional visit there, I was accustomed to listen to his manipulations of the violin with something like the interest that I rejoiced in the wizard strains of Paganini and in the wondrous power of Ole Bull, Signor Viotti, Herr Ernst, Master Burke, etc. in later years. Kelly wore a queue [sic] dressed in the fashion of the last century. He played pretty well for his day and time but his performance of the Fox chase, the Foxhunter's jig, etc., I considered in my childish estimation unsurpassed and unsurpassable by any player of older or modern times. He was under the middle size, spare in frame, of florid complexion and I remember he never refused to play the Fox chase when I asked him for which he was usually well rewarded with an extra measure of his favourite beverage.

Country fiddlers are frequent nowadays but I fear they have lost many of their former charms in the public mind. John O'Brien who played in Scott's great public house in the Irishtown of Limerick and who paid a guinea to hear Paganini is remembered by those who frequented Scott's forty years ago as is also Gerry O'Brien another good player whose Fox chase was a universal favourite. He was a great card player. He and the former John O'Brien were contemporaries but not relatives.

November 8, 1867

... Our business however is with the Irish dances and dancers and it must be confessed indeed in reference to both that there has been a manifest decline in latter years owing in the main to the wholesale decimation of the population during the famine years and afterwards to the clearance system which as well as the famine broke the heart of the people.

In my youthful days the elder Garbois was the leading man in the south of Ireland as a teacher and some used to say that he Gallicised his name to appear fashionable and that his real patronymic was the old Irish one of Garvey. Be that as

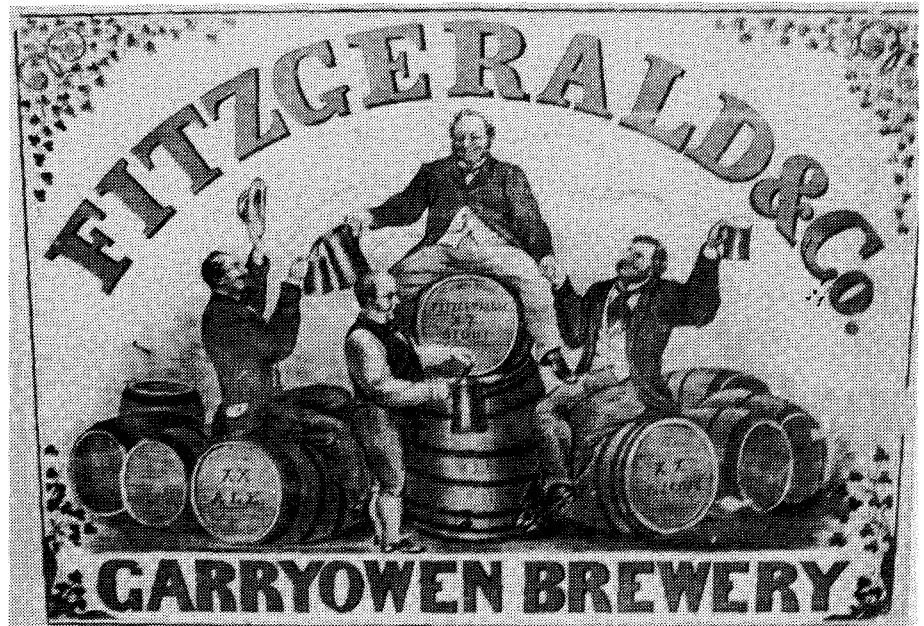
it may he was an exceedingly well-dressed, well-mannered, gay and pleasant gentleman somewhat below the middle size. He never appeared at school hours except with full dress. His hair which he wore in dark profusion was oiled and curled and parted in the style of the Prince Regent. He taught in Waterford, Wexford, Carlow, etc., and in the College of Carlow he was a prime favourite and his blind fiddler in the drab livery was a real picture.

Holden, one of the men of the eighteenth century, preceded Garbois and taught in private families. He performed on the violin himself dispensing so far with an attendant that the 'kit' or small fiddle was usually carried in a large pocket behind his swallow-tail coat or sometimes in the breast pocket of his surtout whenever he wore one, which indeed was very seldom. He resembled Harry Brougham in a rather prominent feature but which only happened to be the nose. Holden was in rather slender circumstances whilst Garbois who was succeeded by his son who is I believe at present at the head of his art in Dublin, was always said to be in easy circumstances.

Goodman was another teacher. He too enjoyed a first-class business. He was a pompous, well-fed-looking man about the middle height but having got paralysis of the lower limbs in consequence of running after the mailcoach for which he was late through the streets of Dublin he was unable in after years to reap the fruits of his industry.

These however were dancers of the highest grade and did not come perhaps within the circle of Irish dancers. It is likely that most, if not all, of them had heard of and practised in early life the *rinka dhas*, the Moneen jig, the double and single hornpipe and those other saltatory movements in which the natives have been in the habit of indulging time out of mind. Whether they did or not know these dances is not however the question. If they did they ignored them as well as the names which they received from their fathers. For instance Mr. Doolan of Dublin called himself Dulang a name which is neither French nor Irish, English nor German, but which might be French if spelled Dulin accentuating the last syllable and pronouncing it *la francaise*.

The old dancing-master whom I especially propose to the reader's attention as a type of his class and as a representative man occupies a middle place between the fashionable Terpsichorean professor of the present day and the village 'hop merchant' or tripudiator who practised the heel and toe step and cut and shuffled *à la Donnybrook* while preparing young girls and boys for the Sunday dance at 'cakes' or fairs and has been admirably described by William Carleton as performing 'on an unhinged door' or 'welting the flure' in the village ale-house. There was another specimen of the same lively genius who might be seen performing on a plank at Donnybrook



Advertisement for Fitzgerald's Garryowen Brewery, circa 1880.

where I have frequently observed him in his glory while realising the fanciful etymology of the word 'tripudiate', given by the commentators upon that passage in the Odes of Horace in which the labourer is represented as thrice beating the earth with his energetic light fantastic 'ter pede terram'.

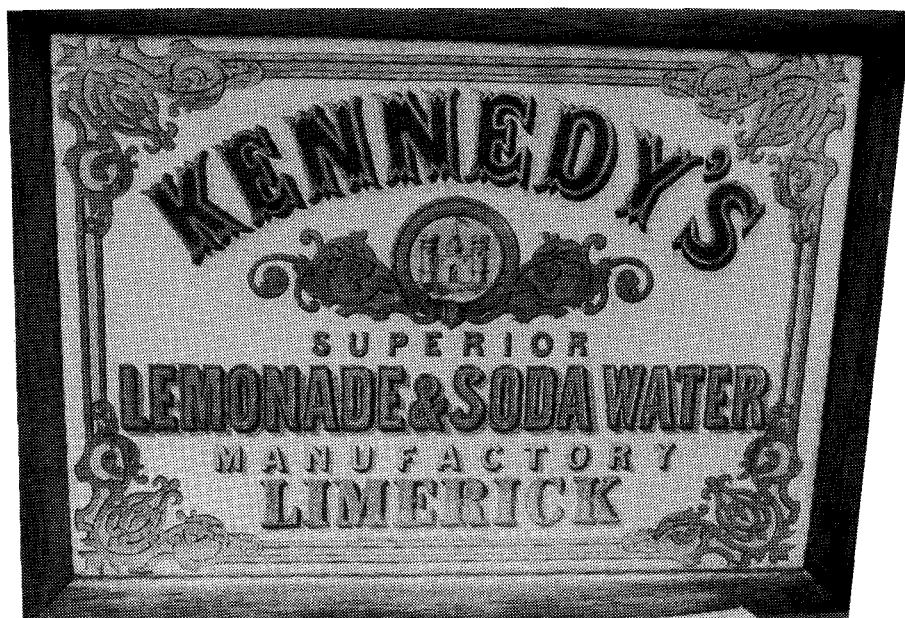
The dancing-master proper, his archetypal idea as Plato would say, who occupies the mind at the present moment, generally used to go from one gentleman's house to another and sometimes attended schools when the season for dancing had set in with increasing coolness of the weather. His arrival, whenever and wherever he existed, was the signal for universal fun and relaxation. The moment the first scrape of his 'kit' or little fiddle was heard all the cankering cares and blue devils including school studies and task work of all kinds were supposed to vanish as instantaneously as the toads and serpents at the voice of St. Patrick. The hop-merchant in ordinary generally sat long at table for if not a gourmand or epicure he had as it were a weakness for post-prandial indulgences and generally imbibed pretty freely after opening the door to let the ladies pass to the drawing-room, a piece of politeness which he invariably challenged as a peculiar privilege of his profession and performed with a special pleasure as it was the signal for free conversation and too free indeed it used to be in those days and for setting in for serious drinking.

The dancing-master having the modelling of the physical education of the young hopefuls of the family was always treated with the greatest of hospitality and though generally enjoying the reputation of being a free liver was invariably received with good-humoured familiarity and attention by the ladies who however made themselves compensation behind his back by laughing at his vulgarity.

I remember a dear old dancing-master

on the Connaught circuit originally named Curley and subsequently well-known as Coreille and Von Coreille whose advent used to be hailed as a public blessing by all the young people and not a few of the old among whom he made his periodical appearances. He used to indoctrinate us how to come into a room, bowing right and left to the imaginary occupants, nodding familiarly to the piano, shaking hands affectionately with the great arm-chair. I remember part of the drill was that you were to stand in the third position when saluting and always raise the head after bowing. It was very amusing to see how seriously Coreille used to resent any deviation from his rules but more especially the solecism of beginning to dance a quadrille before the playing of the first part was quite finished. He had a sort of programme of the performance which he used to repeat very fast before commencing, suppose one of Payne's or the Lancers' Quadrilles then in fashion and which he expected that everyone who joined in the set should observe as rigidly as the Medes and Persians were supposed to obey their laws. It ran somewhat in this way: 'Chassez - half right and left - balancez promenade - ladies chain - advance and retire', all of which he used to utter with great volubility and with the gravity of a general giving the word of command to his soldiers.

The sons of the family were generally taught most, if not best, for they had to learn jigs as well as quadrilles, and hornpipes as well as country dances. I must, however, observe, that I have never seen these young gentlemen perform these extras on emerging from the chrysalis state into the full-blown butterfly of modern society. As my own dancing days are over and I never expect to tread a measure again I hope I shall be excused for returning with something like respectful regret, participating in imagination in those scenes with which



Advertisement for Kennedy's mineral waters in the late nineteenth century.

most of my middle-aged readers must still be familiar.

As a rule the forte of the old 'hop-merchant' was not morality but then if he was not exactly rigorous in this way did he not form the manners of the rising generation exteriorly while the last finish was supposed to be given by some schoolmaster's wife who had enjoyed unheard of advantages by way of genteel society in her pre-conubial epoch?

As I have said it is not with the Frenchified or Terpsichorean professors that I have to do but with the old Irish dancers or yet with that inferior class of them who in the absence of proper nomenclature were accustomed to impart their knowledge by affixing gads and hayropes to their pupils telling them to 'rise upon sugawn and sink upon gad'. These were the very humblest of the profession but they too had their followers. On a late occasion I happened to meet a rather curious member of the more respectable but not altogether fashionable grade of dancers and having asked him his experience of men and manners in his work he gave me the following particulars which I give in his own words.

The first dancer I ever met, he was the first in Munster, Leinster or Ulster, an inventor, sir, of dancing himself, his name was Edward Ellard, he was a Kerryman, sir, he danced Irish dancing with any man that ever laid foot to flure (floor). He was unequalled at the Moneen jig. Oh to see him dance it you would go any distance or spend any time, it was delightful, sir, ay I say delightful. The Moneen jig you know or ought to know is the best dance that ever was known, a true real undoubted Irish dance. It would dazzle your eyes to see it danced, sir. Well. Ellard was transported for life. He got available a great number of rebels and he attacked the horse [recte house?] of a gentleman where he was teaching and was informed against by one of his own party and sent over the seas for life. Oh he was a great

teacher, he taught myself,' – continued my narrator whose name was Hennessy – 'he was a native of Listowel in the county of Kerry, a great man entirely'.

'Well the next dancer met in my time was John Gunaine, a native of Templemore in the county of Tipperary. Gunaine had but one eye but he had the execution of any man. He was tip top and invented hornpipes and reels and all sorts of dances. He was a celebrated man, sir, a stout, hale, but portly man, not very tall'.

'Mr. George O'Kelly was the next I met in my time, he was a general teacher, sir, he taught in gentlemen's houses, was a good fiddler, and was one of the very first elegant teachers of his day. O'Kelly knew the French style as well as the Irish. He



Street ballad singers.

learned the French style in Paris at one time where he went with the family of a gentleman he taught. He was an inventor also'.

'The next man was Mr. Nicholas Lysaght. He was a general teacher. He was a Kerryman. There were no bounds to these Kerry men for dancing all sorts of fun. They'd beat the world hollow, sir, so they would, these Kerry men. Their heels were as light as bits of cork. Why, sir, there was no equalling them at the dancing line. Mr. Dominick Meany was another Kerry man, all for style, he was a stout lump of a man, slightly pock-marked, and he was one of the best teachers. Mr. William Gamble was a general teacher and he taught in gentlemen's houses. He was a Cork man and very able. The Moneen jig, the Irish jig, the Moneen jig, sir, was the first that ever came out. Mr. Michael Leddin, a county Limerick man was celebrated in his day, he kept a dancing school and taught and played in gentlemen's houses. Mr. George Hickey of Cork was a tip top man, he kept in the city and county of Cork always and was first-rate. He made a fortune by his dancing. He was a real teacher. Then there was John and William Power who taught between Bruff and Charleville. Who has not heard of them sir, they were known everywhere, all over Munster, capital dancers, tip top. John was a dissipated man, a first class teacher, however, as was William also. They will be remembered always'.

'Arthur Spearing also taught in the county Limerick. Spearing was hung for United business. His was a sad fate. He as well as some of the others were notorious toppers, very fond of the bottle. Thomas Flanagan of Newcastle West in the county of Limerick should not be forgotten. He was one of the most successful teachers in Munster. His pupils were many and some of them moved in high circles. One gentleman became the most celebrated Moneen jig dancer in Munster, while several who emigrated to Australia, America, etc. were famous for their execution of Irish dances'.

'As for myself', continued my informant, 'I have taught up and down, everywhere, I was first-rate in my day. Even now my limbs have not lost the suppleness. I would have the Moneen jig with the best of them and the hornpipe with any man that ever put foot to floor. But I lost my sight in a measure and I can't see the man forenenst me. Only for that I would go through my work as well as ever'.

So far my aged informant. I may add that in addition to Garbois, Goodman and several others who graced their profession in my younger days the name of Mr. Wall should not be omitted. He was not only a celebrated teacher but he was one of the most exemplary of men and gave nearly all his savings to buy lamps for Catholic altars, an instance of religious devotion in one of the art which I believe to have been unprecedented. But Wall was a truly excellent man in every particular.