

Portrait of An Old Woman

by Frances Condell

Old Mayneen's back is double bent;
 She's stooped, as if the days she spent
 In picking praties, held her there;
 Or sweeping earthen cabins where
 Her children played, or hens picked up
 The scattered crumbs, and the spilt sup
 Of milky gruel, or praiseach husk,
 As gathered by the turf-fire dusk,
 She gropes and lights the candle-wick
 And Time stands still tho' seconds tick ...
 I wonder what her life has been,
 What worldly things those eyes have seen ...
 Her hands are gnarled as a bough,
 That saw the new, now rusted plough
 With stiffened limbs attend the sod,
 To mould those gifts sent us by God.

Her wrinkled skin is creased with care,
 While laughter adds its jovial share,
 Her eyes, alive and keenly true,
 Were they grey, once, or deeper blue?
 Her 'Yankee' head-scarf hides her hair,
 I wonder was she dark or fair?
 Her calloused feet hug the green earth
 Or nimbly thread the sodded hearth,
 Her clothes are tattered, old as Time,
 Her dudeen rank with handled grime.
 She speaks with music in her voice,
 And Gaelic is her envied choice.
 I look at Mayneen, nodding low,
 And feel a radiating glow
 Of peace, contentment, love and God,
 And truth, affirmed in every nod.

