

What it Means to be Irish

August 2017

The Minstrel Boy-

Actually written by Thomas Moore, an Irish poet, singer, songwriter from Dublin in the early 1800's about the 1798 Irish rebellion, it was thought to be an American Civil War song. While popularized in the Civil War, it appeared again in World War I and in the movie *Black Hawk Down* about American special-forces in Mogadishu, Somalia.

The original lyrics are as follows:

The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
In the ranks of death you'll find him;
His father's sword he has girded on,
And his wild harp slung behind him;
"Land of Song!" said the warrior bard,
"Though all the world betrays thee,
One sword, at least, thy rights shall guard,
One faithful harp shall praise thee!"

The Minstrel fell! But the foeman's chain
Could not bring that proud soul under;
The harp he loved ne'er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder;
And said "No chains shall sully thee,
Thou soul of love and bravery!
Thy songs were made for the pure and free
They shall never sound in slavery!"

A concentrated, single verse version exists:

The minstrel boy to the war is gone,
In the ranks of death ye may find him;
His father's sword he hath girded on,
With his wild harp slung along behind him;
Land of Song, the lays of the warrior bard,
May some day sound for thee,
But his harp belongs to the brave and free
And shall never sound in slavery!"

During the American Civil War a third verse was written by an unknown author, and is sometimes included in renditions of the song:

The Minstrel Boy will return we pray
When we hear the news we all will cheer it,

The minstrel boy will return one day,
Torn perhaps in body, not in spirit.
Then may he play on his harp in peace,
In a world such as heaven intended,
For all the bitterness of man must cease,
And ev'ry battle must be ended.

Geraldine and Danny Doyle performed it on their album, *Emigrant Eyes*. First she sang part of it and then Danny did a spoken interlude with it as background melody. Finally he sang the rest of it.

His interlude is as follows:

I am come of the seed of the people.
The people (lack sorrow) that have no treasure but hope,
no riches laid up for the memory of an ancient glory.

My mother bore me in bondage; in bondage my mother was born.
I am of the blood of serfs.

The children with whom I have played,
The men and women with whom I have eaten,
Have had masters over them, have been under the lash of masters,
And, though gentle, have served as churls.

And now I speak being full of vision.
I speak to my people and I speak in my peoples named to the masters of my people.
I say to my people that they are holy, that they are august despite their chains,
That they are greater than those that hold them, and stronger and purer.

And I say to my peoples' masters, beware; beware of the thing that is coming;
Beware of the risen people who shall take what ye would not give.

Did ye think to conquer the people or that law is stronger than life and then mens'
desire to be free?

We will try it out with you, ye that have harried and held
Ye that have bullied and bribed; tyrants; hypocrites; liars.

That is what it means to be Irish. That is the nature of those that came to America in waves as Ulster-Scots and as potato famine Irish over the centuries; emigrant warrior poets who rose from the bottom to become politicians, police men, writers, poets, musical artists, generals and presidents.