

PATRICK O'BRIEN *(Limerick Piper)*

Patrick O'Brien, or Padraig O Briain as he was more commonly called, was born at Labasheeda, County Clare, about the year 1773. His parents were comparatively well-off farmers and Patrick, who was a native speaker, received a good education at the hedge schools. He was an excellent Latin scholar and great hopes were held out for his possibilities in life, but unfortunately, his eyes were bad and, before the age of twenty-six he became totally blind.

Like so many blind people, Patrick turned to music for a livelihood and learned to play the Union bagpipes. Having thoroughly learned this instrument he went to Limerick City, and, not finding the encouragement he expected, eventually became a street musician. His favourite stand was at the corner of Hartstonge Street and the Crescent, where he became one of the sights of Limerick. Few visited the city without going specially to hear him play his melodious Irish tunes.

Here he was one day discovered by Joseph Patrick Haverty, the famous Galway artist, who, struck by the fine figure and noble features of the piper, made him the immortal subject of his painting "The Limerick Piper." In it, O'Brien is depicted as old and grey, but still possessing all the nobility of countenance of his youth, bent over his beloved pipes, playing, while his young and beautiful daughter sits pensively beside him. The background to the picture is a woodland scene. The picture is painted in the romantic style and we cannot help thinking how much better it might have been, good though it is, if Haverty had given O'Brien his proper background, the hard wet pavement and walls of O'Connell Street.

The original picture was painted for Sir Robert Gore-Booth,^{in 1844} of Lissadel, County Sligo, but it became so popular that a copy was made for William Smith O'Brien, who presented it to the National Gallery. From this an engraving was made by J. S. Templeton for the Royal Irish Art Union, and copies of the work may still be found in many Irish houses. There is one in the Limerick City Museum ~~Museum~~ Art Gallery.

[Haverty, the Artist born in Galway 1794. Died 1864.]