

WOMEN OF 'NINETY-EIGHT

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WOMEN OF 'NINETY-EIGHT



PAMELA

The Wife of Lord Edward Fitzgerald

In Memory
OF
All the Dead Women
AND
In Homage
TO
All the Living Women
WHO HAVE GIVEN
Their Dear Ones
TO
Ireland

INTRODUCTION

Alas! how sad by Shannon's flood,
The blush of morning sun appears!
To men who gave for us their blood,
Ah! what can women give but tears!
—DRENNAN: *Lament of the Women after the
Battle.*

“THEY tell a beautiful and poetical story about the croppies’ graves in Wexford. Many of them carried in their coat pockets wheat seed gathered in the fields to satisfy their hunger. When they were buried in their shallow graves the seed sprouted and pushed its way up to the light, and the peasants, seeing the patches of waving grain here and there by field or wayside, knew that there a poor croppy slumbered. Was not the waving grain an emblem that the blood they shed for Ireland would yet nurture the harvest of Freedom?”

Twenty years ago, when in the pages of the *Shan Van Vocht*, that moving and lovely tale was told to the faithful few whom the centenary of 'Ninety-Eight had rallied around the croppies’ graves, it needed a poet’s vision, a patriot’s heart, to see in

“The grain that was fed on the dust of the dead”

a promise of the mighty harvest of freedom. To-day, we look around us, and, lo!—even to the blindest and coldest of us—the fields are white.

Ere we go forth to the reaping, shall we not consider with ourselves what culture the buried seeds of freedom received to ensure a yield so rich? It is not alone the blood of the men who died for Ireland that has nurtured the harvest of her freedom. The seed has been abundantly watered by the tears of heartbroken women: mothers and wives, sweethearts and sisters, daughters and comrades. Some of these grieving women I have tried, in the following pages, to make better known to their country-women of to-day, whose joy has been purchased, in such large part, by their sorrow.

And not with their tears alone did our sisters of 'Ninety-Eight sprinkle the red furrows of that tragic seed-time. In many a forgotten grave, from Antrim to Wexford, lies the dust of the women who died victims of the brutality of the yeomanry and military, let loose on the country to goad its manhood into a rising. Beneath the unmarked site of many a vanished cabin lie the charred bones of countless women who were burnt to death when the drunken soldiery fired their homes. Among the outrages tabulated by Cloney as having been perpetrated by the military in the county of Wexford alone, we find record of seven young women violated and murdered near Ballaghkeene by the Homperg Dragoons, after the retreat from Vinegar Hill; of four women shot after the flight from Wexford; and of three women bayoneted in Enniscorthy; of nine women and six children slain by the yeomanry between Vinegar Hill and Gorey, on the high road; of three women shot by the yeomanry in the village of Aughrim; of four women murdered by "the supplementary yeomen" between Gorey and Arklow.

Anne Devlin was not the only woman of those times who bore to the day of her death on her tender skin the cicatrized marks of the wounds inflicted by the bayonets of the soldiers in the design of extorting from her information. Some of the atrocities suffered by women had not even the excuse of any purpose—save that of satisfying a monstrous lust of cruelty. A dreadful case is that of Mrs. O'Neill, whose son, a clerical student, had been taken up and confined in New Geneva barracks, preparatory to being shipped off to work in the salt-mines of the King of Prussia. The poor woman had come all the way from Antrim, a distance of one hundred and fifty miles, to take a last farewell of him. When she reached her destination she was refused access to him, and only succeeded in seeing him after she had bribed his guards. Unfortunately, she yielded to the violence of her grief when the time to leave him came, and the anguished cries of the poor mother betrayed her forbidden presence in her boy's cell. She was torn from his arms, hurried into the presence of the colonel, and by him delivered to the tender mercies of the soldiers, who dragged her into the courtyard, and proceeded to toss her in a blanket. When the savage pastime of the soldiers ceased, a few rags were thrown to the unfortunate woman; she crawled to a neighbouring cabin, and there she died.

Those who are best entitled to speak of the causes of the Rising of 'Ninety-Eight are singularly unanimous in their exposition of them. During Thomas Addis Emmet's examination before the Secret Committee of the House of Lords (August 10th, 1798) he stated in reply to Lord Clare's query as to what caused the late insurrection: "the free quarters, the house-burnings, the tortures, the military executions in the counties of Kildare,

Carlow and Wicklow.” Mary McCracken used to quote her brother, Henry Joy’s opinion that “if it had not been for the free quarters and the flogging, there would have been no rebellion after all, for it is not easy to get the people to turn out of their comfortable homes, if they *have* any comfort in them.” It was the sight of his burning chapel and the blazing homesteads of his flock which turned Father John Murphy from a man of peace into the intrepid leader of fighting men. When his people fled to him in the woods from the flames of their farmhouses and the outrages of the yeomanry, he told them that “they had better die courageously in the field than be butchered in their houses; that, for his own part, if he had any brave men to join him, he was resolved to sell his life dearly and prove to these cruel monsters that they should not continue their murders and devastations with impunity.”

The same motives which urged the priest to become the soldier animated many of the women. Better, it seemed to them, to die fighting side by side with their men in the field than to be violated and butchered in their houses. And so we find among the Women of 'Ninety-Eight more than one Irish Joan of Arc. There was Molly Weston who fought at Tara, Betsy Grey at Ballynahinch, Mary Doyle at New Ross and many a brave woman who died fighting on Vinegar Hill.

Another *rôle* filled by the Women of 'Ninety-Eight was that of inspiring their men to patriotic action, aiding them by their counsels, putting their women’s wit at the service of the patriots as messengers and intelligence officers. Charles H. Teeling informs us that “the enthusiasm of the females exceeded the ardour of the men; in many of the higher circles,

and in all the rustic festivities, *that* youth met a cold and forbidding reception from the partner of his choice, who, either from apathy or timidity, had not yet subscribed to the test of union." "A green velvet stock, or a silk robe with a shamrock device, were the emblems of national feeling; and the former was not unfrequently presented to the youthful patriot by the fair daughter of Erin, as the pledge of a more tender regard." We see Pamela and Lady Lucy Fitzgerald shedding the bright influence of their beauty over the circle of patriotic and romantic young Irishmen whom Lord Edward gathered around him in Kildare Lodge. Numerous women were so deep in the secrets of the United Irishmen that it was considered necessary for them to take the oath. Of these, the most notable, Miss Moore, will receive more extended notice in subsequent pages of this book. Among others we find mention of Mrs. Risk, whose husband having fallen a victim to his patriotic principles in 'Ninety-Eight, devoted herself and all she had in the world to the Cause for which he died. It was to her house in Sandymount that Lord Edward was to have been removed the night of the day on which he was arrested. We subsequently find her visiting the prisoners at Fort George and carrying back messages from them to their friends in Ireland. Rose McGladdery, wife of William McCracken, was "a sworn United man," and did good service to the cause for which her husband was imprisoned and for which her brother-in-law, Harry, died, as she passed out and in of Kilmainham jail to visit her captive husband. It is very probable that Mrs. Oliver Bond was also "a sworn United man." Her name lives in their records for a clever device by which she enabled the State prisoners of 1796 to

keep in touch with the outside world. The story is told by Charles Teeling, who was one of them:

“On that great festival, which is respected in every quarter of the Christian world, this excellent lady, having addressed a polite message to the first authority of the prison, requested through him to furnish a dish for the table of the prisoners of State.... This dish was accompanied by one of smaller dimensions, but of similar appearance, which was presented to the good lady, the governor’s spouse. Never did the governor or his gentle rib partake of a dish more agreeable to their palates. It was a pasty of exquisite flavour, and seasoned by no parsimonious hand. Dainties of this kind were novel to the captives, but still more novel the design; choice, indeed, were the materials of which our dish was composed, and most acceptable to those for whose entertainment it was prepared. With the full permission of the governor, the pie was placed on our table, the turnkey received his Christmas-box, smiled as he turned the money in his hand, and retired. Under cover of the encrustment, which was artfully, but with apparent simplicity, arranged, the dish was filled with writing materials, foreign and domestic newspapers, communications with friends.” Writing his recollections thirty years later, Charles Teeling recalls, in all their vivid freshness, the sensations to which this discovery gave birth, and the happiness which the poor prisoners felt when they were thus made acquainted with the true sentiments of their fellow-countrymen in their regard.

One more pious duty the Women of 'Ninety-Eight took upon themselves, and that was to guard the memory of the fallen, and to keep bright their names. Again and again, Dr. Madden

has found occasion to pay tribute to the faithful women to whom his researches owe so much. "With few exceptions," he writes, "the materials collected for the memoirs of the United Irishmen would in all probability have perished, had they not fallen into the hands of women, who clung to the memories of their departed friends with feelings of attachment commensurate with the calamities which had overtaken the objects of their affection or regard. It would seem that in man's adversity, when his fellow-men fall away from his sinking fortunes, or detach their thoughts from his maltreated memory, there is a steadfastness in the nature of woman's love, a fidelity in her friendship, which gives to the misfortunes of her kindred a new claim to her solicitude for everything that concerns their interests or their fame." Very touching instances are those of Mary McCracken, the daughters of Samuel Neilson, the daughter of Dr. MacNevin.

Finally, it is not to be forgotten that to a woman of 'Ninety-Eight we are indebted for the first and, when all is said, perhaps, the best—the most authentic, and vivid and enlightening—story of the Rising which takes its name from that year. Charles Hamilton Teeling's "Personal Narrative," published in 1828, three years before Moore's "Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald," was dedicated by the author in words, as touching as they are noble, to "My wife and my children at whose request solely, it has been undertaken.... Respected and beloved, they are entitled to this mark of my remembrance, the only inheritance which the enemies of my country have left me to bequeathe." We are allowed to catch, in the final page of the "Narrative," a fleeting whisper of the romance of Charles H. Teeling and Catherine Carolan. We know that when the

Insurrection was suppressed, young Charles Teeling, for true love's sake, preferred to take anew the outlaw's track on the mountain rather than to seek safety beyond the seas. We would fain know a little more of the girl who won her place side by side with "the Little Black Rose" in that most knightly and constant heart. We sense in her story one of the most tender, and sweet, and pure of the romances of 'Ninety-Eight.

I cannot but feel proud of the fact that, in writing this book, I have received the constant help of two of the grandsons of Charles Teeling, and Catherine Carolan: Charles T. Waters, Esq., B.L., and Charles H. Teeling, Esq., K.C. I wish I could acknowledge adequately, the obligations under which I have been put by their kindness in lending me the precious Teeling letters in their possession, and allowing me to use them as I desired. I have been privileged also to consult Mr. Waters constantly in many doubts and difficulties, to draw on his knowledge of the period, to use his library, and to call on his help in a thousand ways which it would be impossible to enumerate.

I am also under an obligation to F. J. Bigger, Esq., Belfast, and Denis Carolan Rushe, Monaghan (another kinsman of Catherine Carolan) for their patient answering of my many questions concerning a period on which they are among the greatest of living authorities.

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HELENA CONCANNON.

Lios na Mara,
Salthill, Galway,
September, 1918.

THE MOTHERS OF 'NINETY-EIGHT

THE MOTHERS OF 'NINETY-EIGHT

“Hush, O Mother, and be not sorrowful,
The women of My keening are yet unborn,
little Mother.”

—*The Keening of Mary.*

TRULY it was of the Mothers of Ireland that Mary's Son was thinking, when from the Tree of His Passion He comforted His own Mother with prophecy of the “keeners” yet unborn who, through the centuries, were to bear her company in her anguish, and weep with her for her sorrow and His most bitter death.

That knowledge—with so much else—we owe to the teaching of Padraic Mac Piarais. He gave us the first part of the lesson when he gathered us with him into the cottage of Mary Clancy, in Iar Chonnacht,^[1] and bade us listen to her “keening” with Mary for her dying, crucified Son, and shuddering at the instruments of His Passion, and shedding floods of tears at the thought of His gaping wounds. He made us realise what “a precious thing it is for the world that in the homes of Ireland there are still men and women who can shed tears for the sorrows of Mary and her Son.” But did the teacher, himself, know then at what a price had been won for the mothers of the Gael their “terrible and splendid trust”? Or was it only revealed to him in the blinding flash of the illumination which showed

him that his own mother's soul must be pierced by the same sword which transfixed Mary's? Certain it is that we had to wait for the completion of the lesson, begun in Mary Clancy's cottage, till that most holy and solemn night when, as he waited, like King Cellach in his prison cell, for "his love, the morning fair"—and the flame-like gift it was to bring him—he wrote for his mother the exquisite prayer, with which he would have her, on the morrow, lay his own broken body in Mary's outstretched arms. Then was it made plain to us that the mothers of Ireland have won the right to stand thus close to Mary, beneath the Cross, and to claim as their hereditary office, the task to minister to her in her desolation, because they, above all the other women of the world, have so often "seen their first-born sons go forth," even like Mary's, "to die amid the scorn of men—For whom they died."

Thus the Desolate Mother, even in a world which has so largely forgotten the sorrows of her and of her Son, has always found, and will find, in the homes of Ireland, her faithful company of keeners. And who shall say that their ministering is less grateful to her, because while they weep for her Son, they are weeping for their own, and the voice they raise in woe is that of Rachel, who will not be comforted?

These poor mothers of our Irish martyrs! These poor Rachels! There is something in their grief which makes it a thing apart. Wives, and sisters, and sweethearts, who have given their dear ones to Ireland have felt, even in their most anguished hour, something of that exaltation which makes "the hard service *they* take, who help the Poor Old Woman," a yoke more sweet and precious than any liberty. Like the men, of whose

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