

# THE WOMAN OF KNOCKALOE

*A Parable*

*“Love is strong as death; jealousy  
is cruel as the grave;... Many  
waters cannot quench love, neither  
can the floods drown it.”*

By  
**HALL CAINE**

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## EDITORIAL NOTE

“The Woman of Knockaloe” is first of all a love story. In our opinion it is a charming and natural love story, beautiful in its purity, and irresistible in its human appeal; so simple in its incidents that it might be a nursery tale, so stark in its telling that it might be a Saga, so inevitable in the march of its scenes, from its almost breathless beginning to its tremendous end, that it might be a Greek tragedy. In this character alone I think it calls for serious consideration.

But it is more than a love story. It is a Parable, carrying an unmistakable message, an ostensible argument. Readers all over the world will so interpret it. They will see that it has special application to the times, that it is directed against War as the first author of the racial hatred, the material ruin, the sorrow and suffering, the poverty and want, which are now threatening the world with destruction; that it is a plea for universal peace, for speedy and universal disarmament, as the only alternative to universal anarchy.

The story is laid in a little backwater of the war—a backwater which has never before, perhaps, been explored in literature—but nevertheless it is not in the ordinary sense a war story. The late Great War does not enter it at all, except as an evil wind which blows over a mile and a half by half a mile of land in a small island in the Irish Sea, an Internment Camp, wherein twenty-five thousand men and one woman, cut off from life, pass four and a half years within an enclosure of barbed wire.

This narrow space of blackened earth is intended to stand for the world in little, from 1914 to the present year, and the few incidents of the simple yet poignant tale are meant to illustrate the effect of the late war on the heart of humanity, to describe at very close quarters the consequences of what we call The Peace on the condition of the world and the soul of mankind, and to point to what the author believes to be the only hope of saving both from the spiritual and material suicide to which they are hurrying on. It is neither pro-British nor pro-German in sympathy, but purely pro-human. War itself is the only enemy the Parable is intended to attack.

The battlefield the author has chosen is dangerous ground, but the public will not question his sincerity. Hall Caine is seventy years of age, and down to 1914 he was a life-long and even an extreme pacifist. More than one of his best known books was intended to show not only the barbarity and immorality of warfare, but also its cowardice and futility. Yet when the Great War broke out no man of letters became more speedily or remained more consistently an advocate of the Allied cause. The paradox is not difficult of explanation. In the face of what he, in common with countless pre-war pacifists, believed to be a deliberate plot whereby liberty was to be violated, civilization was to be outraged, religion was to be degraded, the right was to be wronged, the weak were to be oppressed, the helpless were to be injured, and before the iron arm of a merciless military tyranny, justice and mercy and charity were to be wiped out of the world, he became one of the most passionate supporters of the war of resistance. The Great War stood to him, as to others, as a war to end war.

It cannot be necessary to describe in detail his war activities even at a moment when, by the publication of this challenging book, his

patriotism may possibly be questioned. They are matters of common knowledge not only in Great Britain and America, but also in many foreign countries in which his books have made his name known and his opinions respected. For his war services he was honoured by his own nation, and at least one of her Allies, being knighted in 1918, made an Officer of the Order of Leopold in 1920, and a Companion of Honour in 1922.

But the war-propagandist never wholly submerged the pacifist. His last war article was written on Armistice Day, 1918, and it was intended to show that while the price paid for the victory of the Allied cause had been a terribly bitter one it had been justified, inasmuch as it had killed warfare, and so banished from the earth for ever the greatest scourge of mankind.

Hall Caine has lived long enough since to see the falseness of that judgment. No one can have suffered more from the disappointments and disillusionment of the war, its political uselessness, its immeasurable cruelty, its limitless waste, its widespread wretchedness, and above all its inhuman demoralization. That the Great War has been in vain, that so much sacrifice, so much heroism, so many brave young lives have been thrown away, he would not for one moment say, being sure that in the long review of a mysterious Providence all these must have their place. But he is none the less sure that the late war has left the world worse than it found it; that the after-war, which we call The Peace, has been more productive of evil passions than the war itself was; that violence has never been more rampant or faith in the sanctity of life so low; that the poor have never been poorer, or the struggle to live so severe; and that Christian Europe has never before been such a chaos of separate and selfish interests or so full of threats of renewed and still deadlier warfare in the future—in a

word that the Great War has not only failed to kill war but has frightfully strengthened and inflamed the spirit of it.

And now he publishes his Parable, the little story called “The Woman of Knockaloe,” in the hope of showing that there can be “no peace under the soldier’s sword,” that the salvation of the world from the moral and material destruction which threatens to overwhelm it is not to be found in governments or parliaments or peace conferences, but only in a purging of the heart of individual man of the hatreds and jealousies and other corruptions which the war created—in a personal return of all men, regardless of nation or race, or politics or creed, or (as in the case of the American people) remoteness from the central scene of strife, to the spiritual and natural laws which alone can bring the human family back to true peace and real security—the laws of love and mutual sacrifice, above all the law of human brotherhood, which was at once the law and the first commandment of Christ.

That this is a great Evangel none can doubt, and that it will go far in the beautiful human form in which it is presented, that of a deeply moving story, few will question. But is the world prepared for it? Is this the hour for such a plea? Is the Great War too recent to permit any of the nations who engaged in it to forgive their enemies? In this new book Hall Caine touches upon wounds that are not yet healed and sometimes the touch hurts. If it is an all-healing touch the pain may be endured. But is it? What will the British people think? What will the Belgians, the French and the Americans, who are still suffering from their bereavements, say to a writer who asks them, in effect, to shake hands with the Germans who caused them? Will not the nations which have suffered most from the war say that, having beaten the Germans, it is their first duty to themselves and to humanity to keep them beaten? Will not

a residue of bitterness against an author who calls upon the peoples of the world to make an effort that is impossible to the human heart at such a time obscure the sublimity of his message?

On the other hand will it not be agreed that the Christian ideal of the forgiveness of injuries and the brotherhood of man is the only remaining hope of the redemption of the world from the lamentable condition into which the war, and the passions provoked by the war, have plunged it; that without this ideal, politics are a meaningless mockery, religion is an organized hypocrisy, and the churches are a snare, and that, however hard it may be to learn the lesson, and however cruel the pain of it, there never was a time when it was more needed than now?

Here lies the theme for many a sermon, and judging of "The Woman of Knockaloe" by its effect upon those who, besides myself, have read it, it is hardly possible to question its missionary value, apart from its human beauty and charm. At least it is certain that readers in many lands will think and continue to think of some of the greatest of human problems long after they have closed the book.

THE PUBLISHERS.

*Ere on my bed my limbs I lay,  
It hath not been my use to pray  
With moving lips or bended knees,  
But silently, by slow degrees,  
My spirit I to love compose,  
In humble trust mine eyelids close,  
With reverential resignation.  
No wish conceived, no thought exprest,  
Only a sense of supplication;  
A sense o'er all my soul imprest  
That I am weak, yet not unblest,  
Since in me, round me, everywhere  
Eternal Strength and Wisdom are.  
But yester-night I prayed aloud,  
In anguish and in agony,  
Upstarting from the fiendish crowd  
Of shapes and thoughts that tortured me:  
A lurid light, a trampling throng,  
Sense of intolerable wrong,  
And whom I scorned, those only strong:  
Thirst of revenge, the powerless will  
Still baffled, and yet burning still!  
Desire with loathing strangely mixed  
On wild and hateful objects fixed,  
Fantastic passions! maddening brawl!  
And shame and terror over all!*

COLERIDGE.

*"I cannot but regard with warm respect and admiration the conduct of one who, holding Hall Caine's position as an admired and accepted novelist, stakes himself on so bold a protestation on behalf of the things which are unseen, as against those which are seen and are so terribly effective in chaining us down to the level of our earthly existence."*

—W. E. GLADSTONE

# **THE WOMAN OF KNOCKALOE**

# INTRODUCTORY

I should like to say, for whatever it may be worth in excuse and explanation, that the following story, in all its essential features, came to me in a dream on a night of disturbed sleep early in December, 1922. Awakening in the grey dawning with the dream still clear in my mind, I wrote it out hastily, briefly, in the present tense, without any consciousness of effort, not as a smooth and continuous tale, but in broken scenes, now vague, now vivid, just as it seemed to pass before me.

Only then did I realize, first, that my dream contained incidents of actual occurrence which had quite faded from my conscious memory; next, that it could not claim to be otherwise true to the scene of it; and finally, that it was in the nature of a parable which expressed, through the medium of a simple domestic tale, the feelings which had long oppressed me on seeing that my cherished hope of a blessed Peace that should wipe out war by war and build up a glorious future for mankind, had fallen to a welter of wreck and ruin.

There were reasons why I should not put aside an urgent task and write out my dream into a story, and other reasons why I should not attempt to publish anything that was so much opposed to the temper of the time, but I had to write it for the relief of my own feelings, and here it is written. And now I publish it with many misgivings and only one expectation—that in the present troubled condition of the world, in the midst of the jealousy and hatred, the suffering and misery of the nations, which leave them groaning and travailing in pain, and heading on to an apparently inevitable

catastrophe, even so humble and so slight a thing as this may perhaps help the march of a moving Providence and the healing of the Almighty hand.

“It was a dream. Ah, what is not a dream?”

## *FIRST CHAPTER*

Knockaloe<sup>[1]</sup> is a large farm on the west of the Isle of Man, a little to the south of the fishing town of Peel. From the farmstead I can see the harbour and the breakwater, with the fishing boats moored within and the broad curve of the sea outside.

There is a ridge of hills that separates the farm from the coast, which is rocky and precipitous. On the crest of the hills there is a square tower that is commonly called “Corrin’s Folly,” and at the foot of the tower there is a small graveyard surrounded by a stone wall.

Too far inland to hear the roar of the sea except in winter, it is near enough to feel its salt breath in the summer. Not rich or leafy or luxuriant, but with a broad sunny bareness as of a place where a glacier has been and passed over, and with a deep peace, a glacial peace, always lying on it—such is Knockaloe.

The farm-house lies in the valley, close under the shelter of the hills. It is a substantial building with large outhouses, and it is approached from the road by a long, straight, narrow lane that is bordered by short trees.

The farmer is Robert Craine, a stalwart old man in a sleeve waistcoat. I seem to know him well. He has farmed Knockaloe all his life, following three or four generations of his family. But now he is a little past his best, and rarely goes far from home except on Sundays to one or other of the chapels round about, for he is a local preacher among the Wesleyans.

“I’m not too good at the farming now,” he says, “but, man, I love to preach.”

His wife is dead, and she is buried in the churchyard of Kirk Patrick, which lies near his gate at the turn of the road to the railway station. He has a son and a daughter. The son, another Robert, but commonly called Robbie, is a fine young fellow with clear flashing eyes, about six and twenty, as fresh as the heather on the mountains, and his father’s right-hand man. The daughter is named Mona, and she is a splendid girl of about twenty-three or four, distinctly good-looking, tall, full-bosomed, strong of limb, even muscular, with firm step and upright figure, big brown eyes and coal-black hair—a picture of grown-up health. Since her mother’s death she has become “the big woman” of the farm, managing everything and everybody, the farm-servants of both sexes, her brother and even her father.

Mona has no sweetheart, but she has many suitors. The most persistent is heir to the cold and “boney” farm which makes boundary with Knockaloe. They call him “long John Corlett,” and his love-making is as crude as his figure.

“Wouldn’t it be grand if we only had enough cattle between us to run milk into Douglas?”

Mona reads him like a book and sends him about his business.

Knockaloe has a few fields under cultivation (I see some acres of oats and wheat), but it is chiefly a grazing farm, supplying most of the milk for the people of Peel. At six in the morning the maids milk the cows, and at seven Mona drives the milk into town in a shandry that is full of tall milk-cans.

It is Sunday morning in the early part of August, nineteen hundred and fourteen. The sun has risen bright and clear, giving promise of another good day. Mona is driving out of the gate when she hears the crack of a rocket from the rocket-house connected with the lifeboat. She looks towards the sea. It lies as calm as a sleeping child, and there is not a ship in sight anywhere. What does it mean?

A cock is crowing in the barn-yard, Robbie's dog is barking among the sheep on the hill, the bees are humming in the hedges of yellow gorse and the larks are singing in the blue sky. There is no other sound except the rattle of the shandry in which the fine girl, as fresh as the morning, stands driving in the midst of her pails, and whistling to herself as she drives.

On reaching Peel she sees men in the blue costume of the naval reserve bursting out of their houses, shouting hurried adieux to their wives and children, and then flying off with cries and laughter in the direction of the railway station.

"What's going on?" asks Mona of one of the wives.

"Haven't you heard, woman? It's the war! Mobilization begins to-day, and four steamers are leaving Douglas"—the chief port of the island—"to take the men to their ships."

"And who are we going to war with?"

"The Germans, of course."

Germany has jumped on Belgium—the big brute on the little creature, and the men are going to show her how to mend her manners.

"They will, too," says Mona.

They will give the Germans a jolly good thrashing and then the war will soon be over. She has always hated the Germans—she hardly knows why. May they get what they deserve this time!

Back at Knockaloe she finds Robbie visibly excited.

“You’ve heard the news, then?”

“I have that.”

“They’ll be calling you boys off the land next.”

“Will they? Do you think they will, girl?”

Robbie’s black eyes were glistening. He looks round on the fields near the house. They are yellow and red; the harvest will soon be over, and then....

It is a fortnight later. There is high commotion in the island. Kitchener has put out his cry: “Your King and Country need you.” It is posted up on all the walls and printed in the insular newspapers. Young men from the remotest parts are hurrying off to the recruiting stations. Mona and Robbie are at work in the harvest fields. Mona cannot contain her excitement.

“Oh, why am I not a man?”

“Would you go yourself, girl?”

“Wouldn’t I just,” says Mona, throwing up her head.

The corn is cut and stooked; nothing remains but to stack it. Robbie has gone into town for the evening. Mona and her father are indoors. The old man is looking grave. He remembers the Crimean war and its consequences.

“Robbie is getting restless,” he says.

“What wonder?” says Mona.

Suddenly, like a whirlwind, Robbie dashes into the house.

“I’ve joined up, dad! I’ve joined up, Mona!”

Mona flings her arms about his neck and kisses him. The old man says little, and after a while he goes up to bed.

A few days pass. It is the evening of Robbie’s departure. The household (all except Robbie) are at tea in the kitchen—the old man at the top of the long table, the maids and men-servants at either side of it, and Mona serving, according to Manx custom. Robbie comes leaping downstairs in his khaki uniform. Mona has never before seen her brother look so fine.

“Good-bye all! Good-bye!”

Mona goes down to the gate with Robbie, linking arms with him, walking with long strides and talking excitedly. He is to kill more and more Germans. The dirties! The scoundrels! Oh, if she could only go with him!

There is a joyful noise of men tramping on the high road. A company of khaki-clad lads on their way to the station come down from a mining village on the mountain, with high step, singing their “Tipperary.”

Robbie falls in, and Mona watches him until he turns the corner by Kirk Patrick and the trees have hidden him. Then she goes slowly back to the house. Her father, with a heavy heart, has gone to bed. God’s way is on the sea, and His path is on the great deep.

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