POETRY BOOKLETS: NUMBER FOUR

THE COMING OF THE EARLS

009513084

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Three candles that light up every darkness: Truth, Nature, Knowledge.

THE TRIADS OF IRELAND.
TO NIALL.

Since all my love is yours, take this book too,  
And when you have read its pages through,  
Turn for a while from your dread battle-place  
To these still Ulster woods—to one old wood,  
Where blue-bells bloom in May: and where we stood  
Together, listening to the cuckoo call,  
By the dark lake, beyond the pine-trees tall;  
Before the lips of war had seared your face.

Again the cuckoo calls and blue-bells grow  
Under the beeches out in Portavoe:  
And through the happy fields the children play;  
Hush! Dim, against the sun, you stand : you come.  
O lonely Shadow, seeking Peace and Home—  
Instead of Ireland and her singing trees,  
Beloved, I can only give you these  
Songs, heard by you, on some glad yesterday.

An Íspáín,  
Bangor,  
Co. Down.

THE COMING OF THE EARLS

THERE'S word they're comin' back again;  
Back to Ireland!  
Every man o' them again,  
To go ridin' bold an' gran'.  
For a Woman down at Fahan,  
Whispered it behind her han':  
Says she, "Boy, leave the herdin', to other boys and  
girls,  
An' you go watch by Suile, for the Comin' o' the  
Earls."

Now her hair was wet an' blown,  
She'd a shawl about her face,  
An' her name might not be known,  
Did I tell it in this place.  
Since she put her wish upon me,  
I cannot rest in peace!  
For, says she: "Boy, quit the hurlin'! Never min'  
who hurls!  
There'll be better stir round Suile at the Comin' o' the  
Earls."

I've laid the Clochan-stones in order then,  
To keep their fine feet dry;  
I've redd up thon House on Aileach,  
Where the ben-weed grows man-high;  
An' I'll house no farmers' cattle  
While they lie foment the sky.  
Says she: "Build up the hill-fires, when the red blaze  
lepps an' swirls,  
'I'll light their ways afore them, the proudly steppin'  
Earls!"
Oh, should they come at moonrise,
   Or through the hush o' dawn,
I'll be there with ould Caitlin
   By dusk or dayli' gone:
She'll have a prayer to pray then,
   And swords to buckle on!
But she'll say: "This buachail wandered from the other
   boys and girls,
An' went his lone by Suile, to watch for the Earls."

Then O'Neill will set Her up afore us all,
   On a war-horse from Spain,
An' my people may lament an' call,
   But I'll grip Her bridle-rein
An' not for fear nor favour
   Herd the strangers' kine again.
An' She! Oh, She will ride in front wi' gold upon Her
   curls!
Like a Queen She'll go in grandeur at the Comin' of
   the Earls.

THE MAN FROM GOD-KNOWS-WHERE

A County Down telling of the winter time of 1795 and
   the autumn of 1803

INTO our townlan', on a night of snow,
   Rode a man from God-knows-where;
None of us bade him stay or go,
   Nor deemed him friend, nor damned him foe,
But we stabled his big roan mare:
   For in our townlan' we're a decent folk,
And if he didn't speak, why none of us spoke,
   And we sat till the fire burned low.

We're a civil sort in our wee place,
   So we made the circle wide
Round Andy Lemon's cheerful blaze,
   And wished the man his length o' days,
   And a good end to his ride.
He smiled in under his slouchy hat—
   Says he, "There's a bit of a joke in that,
   For we ride different ways."

The whiles we smoked we watched him stare,
   From his seat fornenst the glow.
I nudged Joe Moore, "You wouldn't dare
   To ask him, who he's for meetin' there,
   And how far he has got to go."
But Joe wouldn't dare, nor Wully Scott,
   And he took no drink—neither cold nor hot—
   This man from God-knows-where.
It was closin' time, an' late forbye,
When us ones braved the air—
I never saw worse (may I live or die)
Than the sleet that night, an' I says, says I,
"You'll find he's for stoppin' there."
But at screek o' day, through the gable pane,
I watched him spur in the peltin' rain,
And I juked from his rovin' eye.

Two winters more, then the Trouble Year
When the best that a man could feel
Was the pike he kept in hidlin's near,
Till the blood o' hate an' the blood o' fear
Would be redder nor rust on the steel.
Us ones quet from mindin' the farms,
Let them take what we gave wi' the weight o' our arms,
From Saintfield to Kilkeel.

In the time o' the Hurry we had no lead—
We all of us fought with the rest—
An' if e'er a one shook like a tremblin' reed,
None of us gave neither hint nor heed,
Nor ever even'd we guessed.
We men of the North had a word to say,
An' we said it then, in our own dour way,
An' we spoke as we thought was best.

All Ulster over, the weemen cried
For the stan'ing crops on the lan'—
Many's the sweetheart an' many's the bride
Would liefer ha' gone till where he died,
And ha' mourned her lone by her man.
But us ones weathered the thick of it,
And we used to dander along, and sit
In Andy's side by side.

What with discore goin' to and fro,
The night would be wearin' thin,
Yet never so late when we rose to go
But someone would say: "Do ye min' thon snow,
An' the man what came wanderin' in?"
And we be to fall to the talk again,
If by any chance he was one o' them—
The man who went like the win'.

Well 'twas gettin' on past the heat o' the year
When I rode to Newtown fair:
I sold as I could (the dealers were near—
Only three-pound-eight for the Innish steer,
An' nothin' at all for the mare!)
I met M'Kee in the throng o' the street,
Says he, "The grass has grown under our feet
Since they hanged young Warwick here."

And he told that Boney had promised help
To a man in Dublin town.
Says he, "If ye've laid the pike on the shelf,
Ye'd better go home hot-fut by yerself,
An' polish the old girl down."
So by Comber road I trotted the gray,
And never cut corn until Killyleagh
Stood plain oh the risin' groun'.

For a wheen o' days we sat waitin' the word
To rise and go at it like men.
But no French ships sailed into Cloughey Bay,
And we heard the black news on a harvest day
That the cause was lost again;
And Joey and me, and Wully Boy Scott,
We agreed to ourselves we'd as lief as not
Ha' been found in the thick o' the slain.
By Downpatrick gaol I was bound to fare
On a day I'll remember, feth;
For when I came to the prison square
The people were waitin' in hundreds there,
An' you wouldn't hear stir nor breath!
For the sodgers were standing, grim an' tall,
Round a scaffold built there for anent the wall,
An' a man stepped out for death!

I was brave an' near to the edge of the throng,
Yet I knowed the face again,
An' I knowed the set, an' I knowed the walk,
An' the sound of his strange up-country talk,
For he spoke out right an' plain.
Then he bowed his head to the swinging rope,
While I said, "Please God." to his dying hope,
And "Amen." to his dying prayer,
That the Wrong would cease, and the Right prevail,
For the man that they hanged at Downpatrick gaol
Was the MAN FROM GOD-KNOWS-WHERE!

NOTE.—The "man" of this ballad was Thomas Russell, who organised Co. Down, but was in prison and unable to lead in '98. He returned in 1803 to try and rally the North simultaneously with Emmet's Dublin rising, failed in his effort, and died on the scaffold at Downpatrick. At the opening of the poem, where he visits the inn, in the depth of winter, '95, we will suppose he does not make his name or mission known in mixed company, or maybe he does not suspect the possibilities underlying the dour reticence of the group of countrymen, though they afterwards gave a good account of themselves. *Warwick,* alluded to by M'Kee, was a young Presbyterian minister hanged at Newtownards, as was Rev. James Porter at Grey Abbey, some miles away.

THE SEA-FOLK

I SAW the sea-folk ride
Roun' Rachra in the Dawn;
On their white leppin' horses
Thunderin' on.
I wisht they hadn't looked my way,
So be I might forget,
For they tried to stove the boat on me,
An' they tore my trawlin'-net.
Each wan wi' a whippin'-weed
Lashed at his foamin' horse;
An' him who drove the hardest
Carried a drowned corse.
I closed my eyes as it went by,
Swingin' through the brine,
But off the swirl o' old Ceann Ban
I saw its wet hair shine.
I heard their piper play
*The Black North Win'*
An' when you hear thon skirlin' Quare dreams come to your min'.
There's not a tune in Ulster,
I'd put before the wan
That led the sea-folk leppin',
Round Rachra in the dawn.

Now I've seen them ridin',
The sea must be my bed;
I'd lief have the green sods
An' roses sweet an' red;
But wanst there'll be a callin',
When I be to rise an' stir—
Nor all the sea-folk in the sea
Will keep me back from her!
As I walked by the salmon stream in the sea-sounding valley of Glenshesc, on a day of soft rain, with the Blue Hills of Antrim around me, and I sad and lonely, there came a strange happening. The Buachalan Bwee stirred at a sudden calling, and I saw very plainly they were not flowers at all, but soldiers, each in his saffron leine, waiting silently.

"THOUGH all along the valley
The Golden Soldiers stand,
There is no sound of marching
Through Mac Easmund’s land.

No flashing of the claymore
From Glenshesc to the sea;
In their hosts of green and amber
They keep watch silently.

Do the sorrow Sons of Usnach
Thrall them beyond the seas,
Till Naoisi comes a-sailing
Past the lonely Hebrides?

Will Cuchulainn, dark and star-like,
Flame in splendour north and south,
And woo their souls from slumber
By the thunder of his mouth?

They guard the Peace of Enan
Round Drumeenie’s place of prayer,
Yet not for him or Colum
Do they toss their yellow hair.

If they made no tryst with Patraic,
They kissed him, brow and chin;
When down the flock-filled valley
His feet came wanderin’.

Once in the days of Lammas,
I heard him wake again;
Sorley Boy Mac Donaill
Calling through the rain!

As sighs the purple heather,
From Trostan to Cnoclaid;
Each in his tent of hill-mist,
Stirred at the caoine he made.

As sweeps the long sun-shadows
On Rachra’s jewelled rim,
By Mairge and by Carey,
They turned and followed him.

Now all along the valley,
They lift their gilded shields;
In countrysides and townland,
Lords of the pasture fields.

But oh! that I had followed,
When his cry rang up the glen,
Sorley Boy MacDonaill
And his Golden Soldier-men!
THE GREEN HUNTERS

The Green Hunters went ridin';
They swept down the night
Through hollows of shadow
An' pools of moonlight;
Their steeds' shoes of soft silver,
They blew ne'er a horn,
But trampled a highway
Among the ripe corn.

I looked from the half-door,
They never saw me,
For each one kep' wavin'
A slip of a tree;
'Twas black as the yewan,
An' whiter than may,
An' red as the sally
That goes the wind's way.

The Green Hunters came ridin'
Back to Gore Wood;
Though they heard my lips movin',
I stood where I stood.
Oh, what do they call him
The one rode behind?
For my heart's in his holdin',
My mind in his mind.

KILNAMONA

KILNAMONA'S ground was fair,
Before Kate Dwyer wandered there
To change the passionless days and hours
Into holy, folded flowers:

But when she dreamed awhile in grass,
After prayers, after Mass,
Kilnamona grew astir
With beauty—because of her.

Spring came earlier there and stayed
Linger ing where she was laid;
Summer trailed her golden dress
Softlier for lost loveliness.

No storm shivered sedge and rush;
Gently from the briar-rose bush,
And ancient thorn, light winds blew
Rose and snow-leaves, balm and dew.

There seems nothing left to do,
Kate Dwyer, but go following you,
And sink through the tideless waves of grass,
After penance, after Mass:

And drench the desolate weeks and years
With my holy, hidden tears;
And watch, under the quiet sky,
For the dawn of some Eternity.
Maybe then, I shall forget
Your face, Kate Dwyer, maybe yet,
Find in old Kilnamona's clay,
Rest, and rest, and rest—for aye.

DOCHARTY'S DANCE

THE night the black news reached us across the sea
from France,
I was beyant at Docharty's leadin' in the dance;
I wore a gold brooch in my breast, an' my white dress
Set off, just like a charm, they said, my purtiness.

There come a rappin' to the door an' some wan be to say:
"'Twill be the fiddler from Glenhoy, ould blind Pat Rea."
But my mother stepped inside with her shawl about her head
An' says she "'Tis time, alannah, that you were in your bed."

Says I: "The night is young yet an' the stir will soon be done,
An' the morra I'll rise the fresher for this heartsome bit of fun."
I spoke as any girl might speak an' her not old nor plain,
But I'll not dance at Docharty's, nor at e'er a house again!

She might have told me then an' there, not kep' it hid from sight.
'Twas like I danced beside his bed on the wake-feast night!
'Twas like I laughed to see him fall in the red fields of France!
Och! me arrayed in gold an' white leppin' at Docharty's Dance!
ALL SOULS' EVE

I have decked my fireside with the haws glinting red,
Left the half-door open, set the table spread
With brown bread of my baking, and cups of gold and blue;
We two will sit together as once we used to do.

I have said three prayers for you since dayli' gone;
That the moon be your lantern, and the stars glimmer on
The dark ways you wander, and no cold mists there
Draw their clinging fingers through your yellow hair.

I will hear your footsteps seven miles away,
Feet the mould has fettered in a house of clay;
I would walk on your road, but you'll travel mine,
To see the red haws gleaming and the candles shine.

I have made the place gay with brown leaves and red,
Here the turf is flaring; here the board is spread.
God, Who took you from me, show you to my sight!
Lest I turn away from you, you who walk to-night.

WHINS

The whin is out afore the short day's turnin';
Och, but the whin is brave!
It sets a ring o' fairy candles burnin'
Roun' dour Winter's grave.

The whin is out when nothin' else is showin',
Along the dreepin' ditch;
But, God above, He better loves its growin'
Than the red roses o' the rich.

The whin is out when ne'er a bird is singin'
The bare, wet fields across,
And in the grey mists that the winds be bringin' Its golden torches toss.

The whin is out, upon bare lonesome places
You'll see its splendour flung.
Then, thank God, for the whin, an' the wee childers' faces, That keep this ould land young.
A BOY'S SONG

My father's house in Connacht
Is lime-washed at Easter-tide,
And a ramblin' rose grows on it,
That is my mother's pride.
But what to me is a coverin' rose,
That hangs its blossoms South,
When the King of France on his bugle blows,
And calls with its silver mouth?

There are fields of wheat, ripe-headed,
On my father's farm o' land,
But my steps seem heavy-leaded,
And the scythe grips not my hand.
Though poppy blooms are brave to see,
When the West wind makes them dance,
With the Lily-flower I'd rather be
'Mid the waving flags of France.

Lough Rea has teeming waters,
Streaked pearly-grey with fish,
And its swans, like Connacht's daughters,
Are as fair as I could wish:
But not for me the harvest sheaves,
And not the fisher's joy,
Since the King of France's bugles rang
The charge at Fontenoy.

THE MUSIC-MAKER

If the fiddlers are gone from Ulster,
I met one the night,
Travellin' over the whinny knowes,
In the blue moonlight;
An' feth, he waked the farmer's cows,
An' the birds to left an' right.

He played by the braes o' Comber,
A quare wee lift o' an air;
It stirred the childer from slumber
With its notes so sweet an' rare,
An' made me dream of a girl—long dead,
An' the shine o' her soft hair.

I convoyed him through the town-lan's
Just for the sake o' thon—
The ripplin' river o' music,
An' he led me on an' on
Till the little, grey waves of Strangford
Came callin' up the dawn.

If the fiddlers be gone from Ulster,
'Tis I met one the night
Who spins with his limber fingers,
Songs out o' blue moonlight:
But the callin' waves o' Strangford
Beguiled him from my sight.
THE NORTHERN DEAD

IN Ulster of the Churches a wheen o' Saints rest
With a thorn-bush for shelter, twisted and bowed,
Or a shrine of sagan's edges, sighing East and West,
Or the red hill-clay for a shroud.

Many's the King of Ulster, the mould in his eyes,
Under rushy furrows in the farm-lands forlorn,
Forgotten bides in sleep, but the plover knows and cries,
And the wind sings his name through the corn.

Carve no Cross for Comgal! To Nial heap no stone!
For the lusmor and the hare-bells keep their peace
unstirred;
And Bresil of the Songs may dream beside dark Owen,
Nor fret at the slow cropping herd.

For these shall wake again, handling Book and Sword,
From whinny knowe, and market-place, and grassy
country-way;
Not for Ulster's need they'll rise, but for Eirinn's Lord,
And the North will be grand on that Day!
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