

**THE KILTARTAN POETRY
BOOK:
PROSE TRANSLATIONS
FROM THE IRISH**

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The Kiltartan Poetry Book: Prose Translations from the Irish by Lady Gregory

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LADY GREGORY

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THE
KILTARTAN POETRY BOOK

PROSE TRANSLATIONS FROM
THE IRISH

By LADY GREGORY



G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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Introduction

I

If in my childhood I had been asked to give the name of an Irish poem, I should certainly have said "Let Erin remember the days of old," or "Rich and rare were the gems she wore"; for although among the ornamental books that lay on the round drawingroom table, the only one of Moore's was *Lalla Rookh*, some guest would now and then sing one of his melodies at the piano; and I can remember vexing or trying to vex my governess by triumphant mention of Malachi's collar of gold, she no doubt as well as I believing the "proud invader" it was torn from to have been, like herself, an English one. A little later I came to know other verses, ballads nearer to the tradition of the country than Moore's faint sentiment. For a romantic love of

country had awakened in me, perhaps through the wide beauty of my home, from whose hillsides I could see the mountain of Burren and Iar Connacht, and at sunset the silver western sea; or it maybe through the half revealed sympathy of my old nurse for the rebels whose cheering she remembered when the French landed at Killala in '98; or perhaps but through the natural breaking of a younger child of the house from the conservatism of her elders. So when we were taken sometimes as a treat the five mile drive to our market town, Loughrea, I would, on tiptoe at the counter, hold up the six pence earned by saying without a mistake my Bible lesson on the Sunday, and the old stationer, looking down through his spectacles would give me what I wanted saying that I was his best customer for Fenian books; and one of my sisters, rather doubtfully consenting to my choice of *The Spirit of the Nation* for a birthday present, qualified the gift by copying into it "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel."

Introduction

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I have some of them by me yet, the little books
in gay paper or in green cloth, and some verses
in them seem to me no less moving than in those
early days, such as Davis's lament:

We thought you would not die, we were sure you
would not go
And leave us in our utmost need to Cromwell's
cruel blow;
Sheep without a shepherd when the snow shuts out
the sky,
O why did you leave us Owen? Why did you die?
And if some others are little more than a
catalogue, unmusical, as:—

Now to begin to name them I'll continue in a direct
line,
There's John Mitchell, Thomas Francis Meagher
and also William Smith O'Brien;
John Martin and O'Donoghue, Erin sorely feels
their loss,
And to complete their number I will include
O'Donovan Ross—

yet there is in them a certain dignity, an in-
tensity born of continuity of purpose; they are

roughly hammered links in a chain of unequal workmanship, but stretching back through the centuries to the Munster poets of the days of Elizabeth, advised by Spenser to harry them out of Ireland. The names change from age to age, that is all. The verses of the seventeenth century hallow those of Mac Carthys and Fitzgeralds who fought for the Stuarts or "knocked obedience out of the Gall"; the eighteenth ended with the rebels of '98; the nineteenth had Emmet and Mitchell and its Manchester martyrs. Already in these early days of the twentieth the street singers cry out:

Mac Dermott, Mallin, Hanrahan, Daly, Colbert
and Mac Bride
All men who for our country's cause have nobly
bled and died.

Even Yeats, falling into the tradition, has put in a lyric the names of some of those who died in Easter week, and through whose death "a terrible beauty is born."

II

I am glad to remember that through the twelve years of our married life, 1880-92, my husband and his people were able to keep their liking and respect for each other. For those were the years of the land war, tenant struggling to gain a lasting possession for his children, landlord to keep that which had been given in trust to him for his; each ready in his anger to turn the heritage of the other to desolation; while the vision of some went yet farther, through breaking to the rebuilding of a nation. The passion, the imagination of Ireland were thrown into the fight. I often thought to find some poem putting such passion into fiery or memorable lines. But the first I thought worth the keeping,—I have it yet, was Katherine Tynan's lament for Parnell, written two years after his death. In tearing it from the corner of some newspaper I had unwittingly taken note of almost the moment of a new impulse in lit-