

*Ireland is waking, hands grasp the sword.
Who fights for Ireland, God guide his blows home;
Who dies for Ireland, God give him peace;
Knowing our cause just, march we victorious,
Giving our heart's blood Ireland to free!*

"It may not be great poetry," she cried, as she recited it at a Republican gathering not long before her death, "but it is good propaganda!"

She did not take herself or her work too solemnly, but she lived in the letter and spirit of the verse she wrote. Not only the shining spirit of the 1916 Rebellion, but the spirit of all the rebellions that ever were or ever will be against oppression and tyranny, was embodied in this slight, eager woman, who throughout her life faced danger and imprisonment, treachery and meanness with a smile. She never turned her feet from the path she had chosen. When that spirit rises up, kings and capitalists, oppressive governments and lying politicians sink back into the mud, where they belong, while humanity reaches up to the stars. In an early play, as Joan of Arc, she is shown as handing the sword to a submissive slave. She was a sword of light. That was her mission, and nobly she carried it out. At certain times humanity—to its credit—is responsive to its prophets. Then such a one has only to stamp on the earth and it rises; the dumb, obscure millions come up; the very stones will rise. These are the retributive moments of mankind before which tyranny trembles. It is in vain that the enemies of the people seek to stay that sword of justice. *An Claidream Soluis* still flashes through the world with its sharp ultimatum to the tyrants and its message of promise to men.

Constance de Markievicz still marches with the hosts of Liberty, her face towards the dawn. As her sister has written:

*What has time to do with thee,
Who has found the victor's way
To be rich in poverty,
Without sunshine to be gay,
To be free in a prison cell.*

*Nay, on that undreamed Judgment Day,
When on the old world's scrap-heap flung,
Powers and empires pass away,
Radiant and unconquerable,
Thou shalt be young.*

EVA GORE-BOOTH

*And ever, through sunshine and cloud,
She guards the ancient holy flame,
And shares with all things fair and proud
Her radiant secret whence she came.*

In these lines from her poem, *The Immortal Soul*, Eva Gore-Booth, the gifted Irish poet—daughter of Sir Henry Gore-Booth, a Sligo baronet—has said with fitting beauty what those who knew her work feel about herself. She died on June 30, 1926. Yet it is no epitaph she has written. What has Eva Gore-Booth to do with epitaphs? In life she never desired to dominate; in death she dominates no less by the strength of her belief and the loveliness of her poems. None who knew her could fail to feel sorrow when they heard of her death, for the passing of her quick, bright, gracious presence left the world poorer. Yet her beautiful spirit shines through a golden net of words. If we can conceive a time in the future when Eva Gore-Booth's name will be forgotten, then be sure in that far-off generation, in the sweetest note and the clearest light, her spirit will live.

Of Eva Gore-Booth, the poet—who drew her chief inspiration from Irish legends and the Ireland of the West—many will write. But first I want to speak of the woman and the lover of humanity. I met her in the early days of the first world War, when even to whisper of peace in England was to blaspheme the great god Mars. It was the queerest tangle of tribunals, courts-martial and prison that opponents of the War had to face then; and so it happened that the meeting of the little group of anti-militarists, at which Eva Gore-Booth was to speak, began an hour late. But she did not complain.

She read her speech. This master of sensitive English—as delicate and clear-cut as her features—did not disdain to prepare exactly what she was going to say. The impression is somewhat blurred now—I remember only that she was quietly humorous and quietly implacable.

"I am," she announced, "one of those quite hopeless people who do not believe in fighting in any circumstances."

This jerked her audience into the realisation that they had to deal with someone who had a clear, honest, definite point of view, and meant to stand by it. When I came to know her better, I realised how fundamental her peace opinions were, how much they were a part of herself, and how they were the result of thought and feeling applied courageously to the difficulties and problems of life.

She was extremely sensitive to suffering, especially of children, the old and the helpless. She was not one of those who can quite calmly contemplate the death of thousands far off, but are reduced to a state of hysteria when they meet death close at hand. Yet she felt, I think, that killing was even more horrible than suffering, because it degraded the men who killed, and, in its influence, debased society, brutalising those who condoned it.

Those who imagine that Eva Gore-Booth's pacifism means submission to wrong were never more mistaken. People, in her opinion, must gain justice by steadfastly refusing to accept less. She believed in courage as well as peace. In her view, God always fights on the side of the small battalions—especially when they refuse to fight and also refuse to give way. She would have been with Gandhi in the Indian struggle. We know so little of the working of the Universe, of the hidden powers of life, that her mystic faith in the sword of the spirit has much to commend it, for, as a character says in her play, *The Sword of Justice*, "A sword alone is an uncertain weapon." The hardest part of her philosophy she stated truly in these words: "It is easy to forgive our enemies: what we must do is to forgive the enemies of those we love."

She was no pacifist in the sense that a suet dumpling is passive. She became a pacifist because of that fine, keen sensitiveness to human wrongs which made her sister, Countess Markievicz, become a leader in the 1916 Irish Rebellion and face a death sentence for her part in that struggle. The gap dividing the sisters is much smaller than many realise, though they seem at opposite poles. Both were rebels against all that they regarded as mean and unworthy. Their passionate selfless sincerity drove them in different directions. One came out of the smoke and flame and handed her revolver to the commanding officer when the rebels surrendered; the other was a militant pacifist. Paradoxical as it may seem, somewhere behind this diversity of conduct was a unity—a devotion to truth.

One of Eva Gore-Booth's finest books, *Broken Glory*, published in

Photo: Keogh Bros.



Maud Gonne MacBride



Ireland in 1918, and marked "Passed by Censor," contains poems to her sister, who was then imprisoned. Here are two:—

*Do not be lonely, dear, nor grieve
This Christmas Eve.
Is it so vain a thing
That your heart's harper, Dark Roseen,
A wandering singer, yet a queen,
Crowned with all her seventeen stars,
Outside your prison bars
Stands carolling?*

She caught the finest spirit of rebellion in *Comrades*:—

*The wind is our confederate,
The night has left her doors ajar;
We meet beyond earth's barred gate,
Where all the world's wild Rebels are.*

The Death of Fionavar, a poetic play based on the old Irish legend, is decorated by Countess Markievicz, who was an artist of distinction, and has caught the poet's mood. And these wild, proud horses, with streaming manes and tossing heads, express the artist's mood, too. Just after Eva Gore-Booth's death, Countess Markievicz told me how she had idly drawn the figures on the border while reading the manuscript of the play. And nothing would please her sister except that they should be published with it. The book is dedicated to "the Many who died for freedom and the One (Francis Sheehy-Skeffington) who died for peace."

The eager sympathy of Eva Gore-Booth was with all who strive for social justice. But she was not content with sympathy alone. Her poems—for she was careless of fame and money—were often given to obscure little journals standing for causes in which she believed. Her voice and pen were used to the fullest extent of her strength to forward human aims. When she left Ireland for Manchester, at the age of twenty-two, she began at once to help in the trade union organisation of women. Many of her efforts were on decidedly unconventional lines. When it was proposed to safeguard the morals of barmaids by throwing them out of work, she headed a campaign to defeat the plan, and addressed many meetings. She opposed a similar attempt to interfere with the livelihood of women gymnasts and circus



Photo: J. Cashman.

Grace Plunkett



Nora Connolly-O'Brien

performers. When, in their unrelenting pursuit of ugliness, the authorities tried to drive the London flower sellers away from Oxford Circus, it was chiefly due to her efforts that they were allowed to remain. She and Miss Esther Roper—who had lived with her for years, and was her closest friend—were in at the beginning of the great Suffrage campaign that was initiated at Manchester by Mrs. Pankhurst, and, owing to the devotion of the militants, carried to triumph. Mingling her poetry with her public work, she wrote in *The Street Orator*:—

At Clitheroe from the Market Square
I saw rose-lit the mountain's gleam,
I stood before the people there
And spake as in a dream.

In 1910 she went to London, and throughout the war she gave her generous help to war victims, English and German wives of interned prisoners, who were in a pitiable plight. She and Miss Esther Roper helped them directly, not through any organisation. I have been told how they spent one Christmas taking huge bundles of good things to these unfortunate victims of national strife. I know, too, how she presented an East London club for little girls, in an exceptionally poor district, with three hundred oranges at Christmas, much to the joy of the children. Children always liked her. She helped many in distress through poverty and unemployment. She was not a rich woman, and much of her income went this way. She would not want this stressed, and I mention it here simply to give a true idea of her personality.

But for all her help given freely to various causes, it remains true, I think, that she was too finely-tempered to take much part in the rough-and-tumble of political life. Her gifts were of quite another order. It was hers to guard the flame of art, to shelter this from every wind and keep it burning in all its pure beauty, so that the world might rise in time to the level of her splendid vision. Not to sink to the commonplace, but to raise humanity to the heights, was her mission. In the division of function imposed on us, it was her place to hold aloft the lamp of the ideal, so that those in the thick of the struggle might follow the gleam. I find it difficult to accept her view that fighting is never justified. But, in the larger view, I think we may see that the pioneers of humanity, whatever methods they have found necessary to their circumstances and time, have their place in the scroll of human achievement, just as Eva Gore-Booth has. Of one thing I am sure: Eva Gore-Booth is a great human influence who will always strengthen

right and justice in the battle with wrong. She was a determined opponent of the death penalty, and, not long before her death, she refused to sit on juries, because of her convictions about punishment.

I have spoken of her social ideas and work, but not with any desire to thrust her poetry into the background. As a poet, she has now an assured place. More and more her work is included in modern anthologies. Since her death a complete edition of her poems has been issued. Her poetry expresses her personality and her relation to life. In her poems, truth, beauty and form are fused into one harmonious whole, for Eva Gore-Booth held that to deny truth, to abandon sincerity, is to deface beauty. Her passion for truth finds expression in these lines:—

Thou Who hast filled the blue bowl of the sea
With beauty, and the grey bowl of the shore,
Who with the living ecstasy
Thus filled all things golden to the brim,
Giving to all men what they labour for!
My little cup of metal dim
Can yet hold a burning coal:
Cast truth into my soul.

The discerning reader will find her passion for beauty here, too.

Critics have long awarded her the laurel of distinction. Francis Thompson, whose haunting mystical poem, *The Hound of Heaven*, enriched English thought and language, early recognised a kindred spirit in her. He wrote: "She displays, indeed, a true imagination, a poetic gift of her own. Her style and diction are choice and finished, while she has considerable power of imagery, and that imagery is really imaginative."

Of *The Little Waves of Breffny*, a distinguished *Manchester Guardian* critic said it was "one of the most beautiful things that any writer, bar one, in the new Irish movement has produced." Everyone who knows the lyric must feel its power and charm:

The great waves of the Atlantic sweep storming on their way,
Shining green and silver with the hidden herring shoal;
But the little waves of Breffny have drenched the heart in spray,
And the little waves of Breffny go stumbling through my soul.

Here we have the freshness, the abandon, the impetuosity, and

the sweetness of the poet. Often her lines go tumbling through our hearts like the waves of Breffny, with little leaps that express her eager spirit. Some critics would have had her chasten that spirit and exercise a greater restraint. But a cold perfection could not fuse with her living, flower-like grace. It would not be Eva Gore-Booth if she had not poured out her exquisite verses like the cascade of roses at our feet, with all the impetuous generosity of her nature. Among Irish poets she has been ranked next to W. B. Yeats, and critics have written of the magic, glamour, distinction, melody, classic quality and dramatic intensity of her poetry. But what I find most attractive is the way in which her muse is responsive to her lightest touch.

She has a bright, eager, fragile quality, as though her spirit were too strong for her delicate frame; but that spirit is now part of the imperishable loveliness of the world. She must have written poetry as soon as she could read, as a girl in Connacht—she came from the West—and the scenes of her childhood inspired her best work. She writes, in *Broken Glory*, of the place:—

*Where waves break dawn-enchanted on the haunted Roses shore,
And clouds above Ben Bulbin fling their coloured shadows down,
Whilst little rivers shine and sink in wet sands at Crushmorr.*

And in *The Death of Fionavar*:—

*The foamless waves are falling soft on the sands of Lissadil,
And the world is wrapped in quiet and a floating dream of gray,
But the wild winds of the twilight blow straight from the haunted
hill*

And the stars come out of the darkness and shine over Knocknaree.

I saw Eva Gore-Booth for the last time a few months before her death at her house in Hampstead. She had been very ill, and her face was paler than usual: her pale gold hair loosely coiled, her blue eyes eager and full of interest as ever. She was wearing a long, straight blue silk dress, with a loose blue velvet jacket, and a brown rug over her knees that kept slipping down as she talked. A little table piled with books and a reading lamp were at her elbow. Her tall figure looked fragile as an arum lily, but she talked with animation.

She spoke of Susan Glaspell's play, *The Inheritors*, and Sean O'Casey. Susan Glaspell, she said, faced tragedies, failures and difficulties in her writing, but she left you with hope because her characters

struggle against what is thwarting them, but O'Casey's characters always accept defeat, so they leave us with a feeling of despair. She spoke of Italy, where she had been staying when the Fascists gained control. In Naples, she said, the Italian people were establishing a new order when the Fascist reaction came. With the Fascists had come intimidation and autocracy; the cheerful solidarity of the people disappeared.

"Shouldn't they have defended by force what they had gained?" I asked.

But it seemed to her that nothing in the world was worth fighting for, because the fighting marred everything.

We talked of the unemployment and distress in England. Never had she appeared keener or with wider sympathy for humanity. All that she refused to discuss was her illness.

Now she has gone. But her work and her spirit remain our possession, as real as that great shoulder of Ben Bulbin standing out of the Irish mists, and those who know her work know that she belongs to eternity, for she grasped and made her own some part of eternal truth.