IRELAND'S LITERARY RENAISSANCE

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CHAPTER XV
FICTION AND NARRATIVE PROSE

THE WEAK POINT OF THE REVIVAL. NOVELISTS: GEORGE MOORE. SHAN F. BULLOCK. OTHER PROSE WRITERS: LORD DUNSANY. JAMES STEPHENS. LADY GREGORY. CONCLUSION

A NGLO-IRISH literature has been rich in poetry and drama, but the absence of good prose fiction is noticeable, when it is remembered that the romances of O’Grady were the starting point of the Revival. Indeed, were it not for the essays of John Eglinton, the occasional prose pieces of A. E., and Yeats’s two volumes of stories, one might say that the art of prose has been comparatively neglected. For many years John Eglinton was the only writer of the Revival who wished to be known solely as a prosaist, but there is nowadays a perceptible tendency amongst the new writers to seek expression outside the limits of poetry and drama. They do not, however, seem interested in the novel as such, and prefer some even more amorphous form. Even those who write short stories, the most popular form of fiction in contemporary Anglo-Irish literature, rarely conform to the traditions of the conte or nouvelle. They either connect their narrative by some loose thread, or they reduce their stories to the dimensions of a sketch. Of novelists in the proper sense of the word we have very few, and they do not appear so intimately re-

lated to the Revival as the poets and dramatists. A vast quantity of purely “circulationist” fiction must be laid to the charge of Irish writers. Much of it is frankly added as a “side-line” to their literary activities; some of it is doubtless intended as a contribution to literature. For obvious reasons, only the more significant novelists call for such reference as is possible in dealing with a large field whose prevailing flatness is its most prominent characteristic.

EMILY LAWLESS AND JANE BARLOW

Emily Lawless was the first of the modern writers of fiction to obtain recognition, when Hurrieh was published in 1886. This story of Land League times was an early manifestation of that interest in peasant conditions which has become the special feature of the Revival. It must, however, be said that at this point the connection ceases, for Emily Lawless wrote her book entirely as an unsympathetic observer. The agrarian movement is seen in the darkness of anti-national prejudice, not in the light of understanding, and the caricatural rendering of Irish dialect stamps the book as intended for foreign consumption. More fortunate was the choice of the Elizabethan wars in With Essex in Ireland (1890), followed in 1892 by Grania, an interesting picture of life in the Aran Islands, unspoiled by any misconception of Irish politics or Irish speech. Maelcho (1894) is a second attempt at historical fiction hardly to be compared with the earlier story of Essex’s expedition, to which a certain charm is lent by the convention of a style contemporary with the events related. In her narrative of the Desmond rebellion there is something of that hostility to the “mere Irish” which was felt in Hurrieh, and which
contributed to the failure of Emily Lawless as an historical novelist. Compared with the glowing enthusiasm of O'Grady's Elizabethan stories her work appears colourless. She is most likely to be reread for the sake of Traits and Confidences (1898) and The Book of Gilly (1906), two delightful volumes of Western sketches and impressions. In these later works there is a modification of that attitude of aloof superiority, which seems to have sensibly weakened as a result of the changed conception of nationality effected by the Revival. In 1886 Hur- rish expressed the only possible point of view in respectable circles. But, as time went on, Emily Lawless found that she could permeate her work with the spirit and colour of the West, without prejudice to her political and social convictions. Instead of uncouth, almost non-human beings, living in a savage land, she shows us the wild and simple beauty of life on the shores of the Atlantic, whose fascination haunted her verse, and finally found expression in her prose.

More properly to be counted among the prose writers of the Revival is the author whose poems, Bogland Studies, have already been mentioned as preliminary to that part of her work which now calls for attention. Jane Barlow had just only begun to write for The Dublin University Review when Emily Lawless was known as a novelist of some standing. Her career coincides, therefore, with that of the poets so exclusively identified with the renaissance in Ireland. In 1892 Irish Idylls was published, the first of the long series of "bogland studies" which includes Kerrigan's Quality, Maureen's Fairing, Strangers at Lisconnell and many others. Sometimes, as in Kerrigan's Quality and The Founding of Fortunes, a slight plot gives an air of cohesion to these stories, but the author is always and essentially a short-story writer. She depends entirely upon the natural charm of the scenes and incidents depicted, and reduces construction to a minimum. She has a fine selective instinct which rarely betrays her into the trivial or absurd, and this, coupled with a remarkable knowledge of the simpler aspects of peasant life, enables the author to avoid the dangers with which the use of dialect is beset—dangers which threatened the success of Bogland Studies, as has been noted.

In most of Jane Barlow's work there is a suggestion of patronage, perhaps unavoidable in one who studies the peasant from outside, but the evident sympathy with which these idyls are written saves them from the reproach of offensiveness. Frequent passages testify to a complete comprehension of the precarious position of the dependent landholder, and the familiar figures of the countryside are sketched with considerable skill. There is, indeed, such intimacy with the life of the peasantry in its external aspects that one wonders how the necessary intercourse can have resulted in so scrupulous an absence of didacticism. Nobody would wish to see these pictures spoiled by the crude colours of the propagandist, but the unconscious propaganda of deep feeling might have stimulated the reader to supply the data excluded by the artist. It is precisely here that one feels that Jane Barlow lacks the requisite equipment for the study of rural Ireland. Everything she sees is softened in the glow of easy good humour or sentimental compassion, so that a rather superficial impression is all that remains when she has told her story. She almost never shows herself conscious of the spiritual entity concealed in these people whom she depicts in all manner of circumstances. Whether they are happy or sad, pros-
perous or ill-treated, they are portrayed solely as idyllic subjects whose problems are not stated in relation to any tangible reality. There is, in short, a decidedly unnatural detachment in Jane Barlow's conception of the Irish peasant. He is purely a creature of romance, whose existence is not to be measured by reference to unpleasant facts.

SEUMAS MACMANUS AND SHAN F. BULLOCK

Two Northern storytellers are Shan F. Bullock and Seumas MacManus, each of whom published his first book in 1893. The latter is known also as a poet and dramatist, but his popularity derives from the numerous tales of Donegal life and fairy lore which began in 1896 with The Leadin' Road to Donegal. This work came after Skuiers from Heathy Hills (1893), a collection of prose and verse, but it may be said to mark the beginning of the author's career. In spite of its flagrantly "stage Irishman" humour and exaggerated dialect, Seumas MacManus was not destined to follow in the tracks of Lover and Lever. 'Twas in Dhroll Donegal (1897) and The Humours of Donegal (1898) were still in the rollicking Lover manner, but Through the Turf Smoke (1899) showed more restraint and closer observation of actual peasant life. Three volumes of folk-tales, The Bewitched Fiddle, In Chimney Corners and Donegal Fairy Tales, followed in immediate succession, and afforded evidence of the author's increasing literary skill, which soon attained its fullest expression. A Lad of the O'Friels, which appeared in 1903, is superior to anything else Seumas MacManus has published, and may be counted as one of the best idealistic novels of the Irish peasantry we possess. Like most of its kind, the book inevitably tends to fall into a series of scenes, but the thread is sufficiently substantial to constitute a genuine story, instead of the more usual peg upon which to hang detached sketches. The community of Knocknagar is a living microcosm, studied with eyes which have seen from the inside the people and events described. Seumas MacManus succeeds in shaking off the obsession of broad comedy which has heretofore clung to him, and writes directly out of a life he knows so well, that one regrets his concessions to stereotype. The memorable picture of a Lough Derg pilgrimage is a perfect example of the fine material which lies at the disposal of the Irish novelist.

Shan F. Bullock is a writer of a very different calibre, and one who occupies an almost unique position in the literature produced under the influence of the Revival. He is that rare phenomenon amongst his contemporaries, a genuine novelist, who has eschewed both poetry and drama, and whose short stories are a very small part of his work. Ring O'Rushes (1896) and Irish Pastorals (1901) are the only volumes he has published in emulation of Seumas MacManus or Jane Barlow. But to these glimpses of rural manners in the County Fermanagh he has imparted a seriousness not characteristic of the more popular writers. By Thrasna River, his first important novel, appeared in 1895, and to this may be added The Barrys (1897), The Squireen (1903) and Dan the Dollar (1905). From a list of more than a dozen volumes these three will stand as representative of the author who has most consistently worked to obtain for Irish fiction something of the prestige reserved for poetry and drama. His novels deal almost exclusively with the people of Ulster, although in The Barrys half the action...
takes place in London, where the strange background throws into stronger relief the characteristics of the race from which the protagonists have sprung. Shan F. Bullock is not content to study Northern manners merely in their local manifestations. His two books of short sketches prove that he can write in the familiar, semi-idyllic manner as well as the chief exponents of the genre, but he is capable of more sustained effort. He alone has essayed to make the study of rural life simultaneously locally and universally human. He has analysed the Ulster temperament in conflict with fundamental problems, where deeper knowledge is demanded than is necessary to draw the picturesque outline of a peasant community. Consequently, one feels a gravity in his work utterly lacking in the romantic humour and pathos of Jane Barlow and Seumas MacManus. He does not see life as a sentimentalist, but as a realist, who cannot persuade himself that the smiles and tears of Hibernian romanticism are an adequate commentary upon the conditions he describes.

**GEORGE MOORE**

The three volumes of George Moore's *Hail and Farewell* might be included in the category of Irish fiction, were it not for their autobiographical form, coupled with the use of the names and attributes of living persons. Had the author chosen a more fictitious setting for this romance of literary Dublin, he would have spared us the pain of surrendering a remarkable work of imagination to the student of memoirs. Having previously drawn upon some of the people of his reminiscences for his novels, he might have continued the conventional disguise to the end. W. B. Yeats and A. E. were no less them-
They were ostensibly published, however, for the purpose of supplying Irish prose writers with models, both Gaelic and English, and several appeared in *The New Ireland Review* in parallel versions, after the manner of Douglas Hyde’s Connacht songs. Whether the translated volume, *An T-U’r-Gholt*, which was published the same year as the English edition, was an equally remarkable contribution to contemporary Gaelic literature, is doubtful. The author himself has recounted with much humour his failure to command the same attention from his Irish-speaking as from his English-speaking readers. It is not improbable that moral rather than literary considerations guided the Gaels in this, as in many other instances, with the result that Anglo-Ireland is the richer of the modern Gaelic disdain for aesthetic truth. *The Untitled Field* is the most perfect book of short stories in contemporary Irish literature and need not fear comparison with *A Sportsman Sketches*, —the model proposed by John Eglington. In the Tauchnitz preface Moore denies the hope of fulfilling the demands of his friend, but only with Turgenev’s analogous volume can his own be compared, for its exquisite sense of natural beauty.

Not content with his achievement in this characteristically Irish genre, he proceeded to meet our greatest need, by giving the literature of the Revival its first and only novel of distinction, *The Lake*. The personal and national metamorphosis which separated the author and his country from the distant period of *Parnell and his Island* was dramatically revealed in *The Untitled Field*. The former volume of impressions, dated 1887, showed the Ireland of Land League days in the distorted view of an absentee landowner, even more thoroughly denationalised than usual by his literary apprenticeship in Paris. Equally great is the distance separating *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) and *The Lake* (1905), both from a literary and chronological point of view, but the difference between the two novels is of another quality. Whatever objections may have been raised against *Muslin*,—to give the book its revised title of 1915,—it is unjust to assume, as has been the practise of Irish critics, that the author tried deliberately to calumny and misrepresent fashionable society in Dublin. Although contemporaneous with *Parnell and his Island*, the novel is a passionate study, in the realistic manner, of social conditions, not a personal criticism like the former work. After the magnificent portrayal of English manners in *A Mummer’s Wife*, nothing could have been more legitimately interesting than a similar analysis of Irish society, and *Muslin* deserves no other criticism than that which has been applied to all the earlier works of George Moore prior to his return to Ireland. To make of it an occasion for patriotic indignation is merely to claim that preferential treatment which no writer of genius has ever conceded to his own people. The Irish setting is of no immediate significance, for at that time the novelist was innocent of any suspicion of national bias, unless towards France, his intellectual motherland.

It is precisely this fortuitous setting which constitutes the point of contrast between the earlier novel and *The Lake*. The latter is Irish, the former is about Ireland, and might, so far as its spirit is concerned, have been written by a foreigner. As befits Irish fiction, *The Lake* is composed of the simplest elements, and thereby stands in complete contrast to all the author’s other novels. Here one does not find the amorous adventures, the rise and fall of fortunes, the amusing, discreditable and graphic inci-
dents of modern life,—the vast fabric of a complicated social organism unrolled with the patient, unwearied gesture of the realistic novelist. On the contrary, the vital action takes place within the four walls of the parish-priest’s house, in a remote Western village, where he receives the letters which are the occasion of an intensely interesting spiritual drama. Father Oliver Gogarty is the only one of the chief protagonists whom we meet face to face, after the first glimpse of Rose Leicester, as she flees from the parish under the shadow of sin. Her correspondence with her repentant accuser is all that we have, for it is his evolution, under the subtle influence of the woman he unconsciously loves, which is the interest of the story.

With delicate art Moore has outlined this drama of revolt against celibacy and belief, so that the banal theme is invested with a charm absent from the traditional rendering of the conflict. He avoids the querulous didacticism of the familiar novel of proselytism or agnosticism, just as he eliminates all suggestion of merely physical temptation. Oliver Gogarty’s relation towards Rose is a profound piece of psychological analysis, in which the material factor is diminished to such a point that the woman becomes, as it were, a symbol. Having carefully summarised the circumstances of Gogarty’s priesthood, having postulated his spiritual and temperamental disposition, he allows the interaction of ideas and emotions to divest the priest of the accidental and external accretions of his existence until, at last, the man emerges. The latter has stripped off the garments of convention, as well as the garb of his calling, before he plunges into the lake, on whose further shore the road to freedom lies open. The bundle he leaves on the bank behind him is the mere shell of a host of outworn ideals which have fallen away from him, and are abandoned on the threshold of his new life.

When one recalls the manner in which this subject has been treated by certain modern writers, and especially by George Moore’s compatriots, it is not easy to be moderate in his praise. Add to this the tender beauty of the pictures forming the background of the story, the exquisite shading of light and colour, and the sensitive feeling for the landscape which seems, indeed, un état d’âme, so perfectly does it respond to the mood of the priest. Whether so intended, or not, like its companion volume of short stories, The Lake is a model for the prose-writers of the Revival. It will be without an equal until the long-awaited Irish novelist appears who can continue the work which George Moore so excellently began. Neither hypersensitive patriotism, nor a too strenuous desire for “literature at nurse,” should obscure the fact that the author of that phrase has done most to restore the Anglo-Irish novel to literature. Those who have followed him cannot be regarded as having helped materially to raise the status of the novel. William Buckley’s Croppies Lie Down, whose publication coincided with that of The Untilled Field, has not been able to realise the promise of that powerful and well-written study of the Rebellion. George Birmingham’s The Seething Pot (1905) and Hyacinth (1906), although entertaining, have proved to be merely the first of a number of works which have since made the author widely known, but have added nothing permanent to our contemporary literature. Their vein of broad satire has so widened and grown that the resuscitation of the “stage Irishman” has inevitably followed. So, too, with many others; they can write “a good story,” and when this has been realised by the libraries, they
are content to furnish each year a volume or two of readable fiction for circulation.

Here and there a book of more than average merit appears, *The Old Knowledge* (1901) by Stephen Gwynn; *The Folk of Furry Farm* (1914) by K. F. Purdon; James Joyce’s curious studies of lower-class city life in *Dubliners* (1914)—but it is impossible to base any hope upon these isolated works, which are rarely the beginning of a continuous effort. *Mrs. Martin’s Man* (1914) was the occasion of much favourable comment, and it was believed that an Ulster novelist had been discovered in St. John G. Ervine. His second novel, however, dispelled the illusion, and one more name was added to the list of “circulationists.” The author of *The Folk of Furry Farm* was similarly well received, but that volume, original as it is in many respects, is a continuation of the *Irish Idylls* tradition. The novel, as such, continues to lack support, and our fiction still affects the form of the sketch and short story. Of the latter, Dermot O’Byrne’s *Children of the Hills* (1913) showed unusual qualities, and announced a new writer from whom good work may be reasonably expected. The author is steeped in Gaelic lore, and the old language and history are an essential part of his art. His realism is the realism of Synge, with whom he has many points in common. In such grim little sketches as *Hunger* and *The Call of the Road*, there is something of Synge’s manner. The angle of observation is the same as that from which *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* was seen, while a close study of the West has enabled the younger writer to achieve the same success as his predecessor. The rhythmic, highly coloured speech of the peasants has been caught by an ear no less sensitive than Synge’s, and the peculiar atmosphere of the still Celtic Ireland is reproduced. Yet Dermot O’Byrne has resisted the temptation to imitate. If he cared to do so, he could evidently parody Synge in such a fashion as to defy even the expert, but his stories rarely awaken familiar echoes. Even when a turn of phrase reminds us too much of *The Playboy*, it would be unfair to suggest more than that his original material was the same as Synge’s. His originality is evident, for the mystic imagination that revealed to him such visions as *The Lifting of the Veil* and *Through the Rain* is nowhere perceptible in Synge—the one writer with whom he may legitimately be compared.

A fine gift for narrative prose was revealed by Padraic Colum in his volume of impressions, *My Irish Year* (1912), where he evokes with sympathetic charm a series of pictures of peasant life in the Irish Midlands. The author’s power of creating atmosphere, that intangible something which differentiates his plays from those of his contemporaries, is nowhere more remarkable than in this work. Much of *My Irish Year* might be classified as fiction, so skilfully has Colum blended the material elements of his narrative with the imaginative qualities of intuition and instinct. No mere observer, on the outside of Irish life, could have reproduced so wonderfully the soul of rural Ireland. Similarly, in a later volume of prose, *A Boy in Eirinn* (1913), he contrives to invest a somewhat matter-of-fact presentation of Irish life and character with a delicate suggestion of the poetry and romance of childhood. Padraic Colum is obviously qualified to undertake the novel for which the Revival has been waiting.

The peculiar circumstances of Irish life,—the predominance of a rural civilisation, the absence of
highly developed urban communities retaining their racial characteristics to the same degree as the peasantry—tend to retard the evolution of the Irish novel. William Carleton, our greatest novelist, showed, in the first half of the nineteenth century, that peasant life was no less susceptible of being adapted to the purposes of his art than any other phase of human existence. Carleton, however, had the advantage of living in a period when the struggle for life in Ireland reached its maximum intensity, amongst precisely those communities which dwelt outside the range of urban influences. Famine, disease and the political and social disturbances of his century all combined to heighten the dramatic quality of the material at the novelist’s disposal. But even Carleton could not escape the fate which imposes the short story as the essential form of Irish fiction. His *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* (1830–33) is remembered by many who have forgotten *The Black Prophet* (1847), his finest novel.

**LORD DUNSFY AND JAMES STEPHENS**

In the apparent revival of the art of fiction during the last few years it is noteworthy how slight is the disposition amongst the more original writers to accept the novel proper as their medium. Of the new prose writers the two most important cannot be classed among the novelists, unless a much looser definition of the term be adopted. Neither Lord Dunsany nor James Stephens has carried on the tradition of William Carleton or George Moore, and it is impossible to associate them with any other writers of the Revival. They form a class in themselves, although the only trait uniting them is an exuberance of fancy, and their independence of the traditional forms of fiction. James Stephens began by making a slight concession to the accepted convention of the novel, but before *The Charwoman’s Daughter* had reached many chapters that convention was abandoned. Lord Dunsany, on the other hand, has conceded only so much in his short stories as to suggest their ancestry in the fairy tale.

In 1905 *The Gods of Pegana* passed almost unperceived amidst the more avowedly Celtic literature of the moment. Indeed, it is unlikely that many readers who then saw the name of Lord Dunsany for the first time would have associated the book with the Irish movement in which its author was so generously interested. Coming forward as the creator of a new mythology, he could not readily be identified with a literary tradition whose strength was rooted in the soil of Gaelic legend and antiquity. Lord Dunsany invented his own antiquity, whose history was found in *The Gods of Pegana*. With a strange power of imagination he set forth the hierarchy of Pegana’s gods, the greater and minor deities. Marvellous Beings, who play with worlds and suns, with life and death, their mere nomenclature is full of weird suggestion. There is not an event in the cosmic evolution known to us which Lord Dunsany has failed to elaborate into some beautiful legend. But, whereas the first volume was essentially the record of a new theogony, *Time and the Gods* (1908) is a collection of myths, which naturally attach themselves to the phenomena witnessed by the men whom the Pegana deities created for their amusement. In allowing his fancy to interpret the great elemental mysteries of nature, the rising of the winds or the coming of light, the author shows the same delicate poetic imagination as assisted him in the creation of the mighty figures who peopled his orig-
inal cosmos. Yet, with a true sense of the mythus, Lord Dunsany controls fantasy, so that he is never betrayed into any conflict with the natural laws, as understood by contemporary science. His fable of the South Wind, for example, is as accurate in its representation of the facts as it is charming in its tender poetry.

The Leitmotiv of his work, whether the narrative be of gods or men, is the mysterious warfare between the phenomenal world and the forces of Time and Change. Even the "gods of Pegana" live beneath the shadow of this conflict which must one day result in their overthrow. Lord Dunsany's later work, The Sword of Wellneran (1908), A Dreamer's Tales (1910) and The Book of Wonder (1912), is concerned more specifically with this aspect of existence. Here we learn of those wonderful cities, Perondaris and Babbulkund, whose fabulous beauties are obliterated in a moment of Time, when something swift and terrible swallows them up, leaving only the whispering sands above them. The most beautiful prose the author has written is in these stories, beginning with "In the Land of Time" from Time and the Gods, which tell of the passing away of human achievement at the assault of nature aided by her relentless accomplices. Yet he has demonstrated his mastery of the grotesque and horrible in tales which recall those of Poe or Ambrose Bierce. His latest collection, entitled Fifty-One Tales (1915), is wholly in this second manner, although the fragmentary nature of the sketches hardly gives the measure of his power, which is best seen in The Sword of Wellneran and A Dreamer's Tales.

There Lord Dunsany showed a wealth of bizarre and terrible fantasy of the same high quality as characterised his previous essays in mythological narrat

tive. The latter, however, are his enduring share in the reawakening of the Celtic imagination of which the Literary Revival is the manifestation.

While Lord Dunsany has been the most neglected of our prose-writers James Stephens has enjoyed a very different fate, being probably the best known of all the younger generation. It has rarely been given to an Irish genius so national to become famous in the short space of three years, which separated his first little book of verse, Insurrections, from The Crock of Gold, published in 1912. The same year saw the publication of his first prose work, The Charwoman's Daughter, and his second volume of poems, The Hill of Vision, but these were of necessity somewhat obscured by the remarkable success of The Crock of Gold. As was suggested in reference to his verse, the poet was the beneficiary of the prosaist. It may be said that everything he published at that time, or previously, came into consideration as a consequent and subsequent part of that success.

The immediate popularity of James Stephens must be attributed to the fact that he revealed at once his power to use prose as attractively as others used verse. The Celtic spirit which breathes through the poetry of the Revival is at last felt in a work of prose fiction, which, by contrast with the novels and stories of previous years, seemed a wonderful innovation. Yet The Crock of Gold could not have been a surp"
personified a side of their creator's mentality. Like them he has the faculty of rising above reality and transporting himself into a world of pure fantasy. The co-existence of the ugly material facts of life with the beauty of an imaginary state, as shown in the lives of Mary Makebelieve and her mother, is a symbol of Stephens's work. He is eternally hovering on the line which divides the sublime from the ridiculous. He crosses it with an insouciance which comes, not from a lack of perception, but from an innate sense of the relativeness of all values.

The title of his first book was the forecast of an attitude towards life which subsequent works have confirmed. The "insurrection" of James Stephens is the revolt of an unsophisticated mind against unnatural decorum. When the Philosopher in *The Crock of Gold* goes to interview Angus Óg, his frame of mind is not, perhaps, as reverential as might be expected from a man who desired the presence of such a Being. His familiar bonhomie springs from a conviction of the necessary humanity of one's relations with all creatures, heavenly and terrestrial. Thus Stephens will contrive the conversation of a fly, a cow, a god or a spider, upon the assumption of a common relationship between all phenomena. This is not a mere literary artifice, "sophisticated infantilism," as severe critics pronounce it. It is the reflection of the author's mind, which gambols in naïve irreverence about the gravest problems.

*The Crock of Gold* and *The Demi-Gods* (1914), his best works, are naturally most typical of his genius. At the same time, they are assertions of the claim of Irish prose to undertake some of the functions of poetry. Not that the author is prone to write "prose poems"; or to indulge in word-painting for its own sake. But his narratives are interwoven with the

mysticism which we have heretofore found in A. E., and with the symbolism which has induced so many people to consider Yeats as a mystic. Irish mythology and fairy lore are skilfully blended, and the general impression left upon the reader is one entirely different from that of any other Irish story or fairy tale. The author's *gaminerie*, which enables him to contemplate the Cosmos with charming familiarity, has served him well, for he is not at all disconcerted when his fancy takes him from the domestic quarrels of the Philosopher and the farcical proceedings of the Policemen, to the realms of Pan and Angus Óg. The discourses of the gods are as much a part of his imaginative life as were of his actual life the charwomen, policemen and vagrants whose peculiarities he has not forgotten.

The dangers of this attitude were exemplified in *Here are Ladies* (1913) where the commonplace and the unusual jostle one another, this time to the discomfort of the latter. In places one gets a glimpse of the author of *The Charwoman's Daughter* and *The Crock of Gold*, as in the grotesque fantasy of *The Threepenny Piece*, and in the delightful reverie of boyhood, *Three Happy Places*, where Stephens's peculiar power of visualising the outlook of a boy is exercised. Pessimists feared at one time that he was about to go the way of all Irish fiction writers, but *The Demi-Gods* has justified the optimists. Without breaking new ground the book marks an advance upon the earlier work to which it is closely akin. The author has firmer control of his material, and if there is a diminution of youthful exuberance, it is compensated by a note of deeper maturity. *The Demi-Gods* surpasses, where it does not equal, *The Crock of Gold*, which contains no character study to compare with Patsy MacCann. These two works
are sufficient to secure Stephens's place in Anglo-Irish prose literature.

Whether it be cause or effect, against the absence of the novel in contemporary Anglo-Irish fiction must be set a large collection of folk-tales and legends. The retelling of the old stories of bardic literature has absorbed the energies of many Irish prose writers in recent years, apart from those who have been engaged in the work of translating and editing the classic texts of Gaelic literature. With the latter we are not concerned, except to note that this increasing knowledge of the Heroic Age has widened the field of tradition, and increased the resources of our poetry and drama. Those, however, who have contributed to the process of popularisation stand in a more direct relationship to Anglo-Irish literature. Their work has a literary rather than a scientific interest, and attaches itself naturally to the achievement of Standish O'Grady and the initiators of the Revival.

Standish O'Grady had published his *History of Ireland: The Heroic Period* in 1878, but before the second volume was issued there appeared P. W. Joyce’s *Old Celtic Romances* (1879), “the first collection of the old Gaelic prose romances that has ever been published in fair English translation,” as the author described it in his preface. The book had none of the fire and poetic imagination of O'Grady’s epic history; it did not, therefore, appeal in the same way to the young poets of the Eighties, but it was the forerunner of the popular literature of heroic Ireland. Its many editions prove that it can still survive the competition of numerous successors, some, fragmentary and fanciful, like Nora Hopper's *Ballads in Prose*, others, serious rivals, such as *The High Deeds of Finn* (1910) by T. W. Rolleston, where

the value of a fine series of retellings is enhanced by the inclusion of material hitherto untranslated. Akin to O'Grady’s *Finn and his Companions* is the recent volume, *Heroes of the Dawn* (1913), by Violet Russell, in which the wife of the poet essays, in turn, to bring the bardic heroes within the vision of boyhood. This work may be coupled with the *Celtic Wonder-Tales* (1910) of Ella Young as the two most charming collections of children’s stories published in Ireland for many years.

Most of these versions have shown more regard for the literary and artistic quality of the stories than for the need of an ordered and accurate account of the bardic narratives. In this respect the best work is *The Cuchulain Saga in Irish Literature*, published by Eleanor Hull in 1898. A volume of fourteen stories embodying the history of Cuchulain, it was a valuable innovation in the manner of collating the Gaelic material. Its introduction and notes, and the careful selection of texts, made it at once a literary and scholarly contribution. But it was soon to make way for a similar volume outside the domain of scholarship, identical in content, but very different in form.

In 1902 Lady Gregory published her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, which was followed in 1904 by *Gods and Fighting Men*. The former is an ordered retelling of the Cuchulain legends, the latter treats of the gods and the Fianna, but, except in so far as it follows Eleanor Hull’s choice of texts, Lady Gregory’s work is very dissimilar. It is frankly a blend of scholarship and imaginative reconstruction. The author was no less desirous of clarifying the legendary material than was Eleanor Hull, but she did not allow considerations of fact to interfere with the success of her undertaking. Comparing all the
translations of the scholars, she has co-ordinated and compressed them into a homogeneous narrative, by the simple expedient of making suppressions and additions of her own, whenever the textual versions threaten to disrupt her plan. Literary success came immediately to justify her experiments, but competent Gaelic criticism has severely condemned a procedure which has had the effect of conveying a very false idea of the classic age and literature of Ireland. Even so enthusiastic a commentator and apostle of Celticism as Fiona MacLeod felt constrained to admit the superiority of The Cuchullin Saga in Irish Literature.

Lady Gregory’s “translations,” however, are not to be judged for what that term implies. They are not so much translations as folk-versions of the old saga, adapted to literature. Their success has been mainly amongst readers already familiar with the correct text, or with those whose interest was of a less exacting nature. Both could submit to the undeniable charm of a style whose archaic flavour seemed peculiarly fitted to these evocations of ancient times. For Lady Gregory is the first and only writer of the Revival to employ the peasant idiom in narrative prose. That Kiltartan speech with which her comedies have made us familiar was consecrated to literary use by its effective elaboration in Cuchulain of Muirthemne. With the previous example of The Love Songs of Connacht before her, Lady Gregory was encouraged to extend the scope of Gaelicised English by adopting peasant speech in her most serious contribution to Anglo-Irish literature. It was a fine literary instinct that guided her in making this innovation, for, stripped of their language, her stories of Cuchulain and the Fianna would have been lost in the almost anonymous mass of similar popularisation. As it is, she has been saluted by many as an Irish Malory, and her work has shared in the general admiration for the beauties of an idiom illustrated shortly afterwards by the genius of J. M. Synge. The young writers of a generation unfamiliar with the emotion aroused by O’Grady, in the distant days when his rehandling of the bardic material was a revelation, may derive from Lady Gregory’s pages that enthusiasm for heroic beauty which inspired the first movement of the Revival.

The literature of the Celtic Renaissance has been predominantly the creation of poets and dramatists, and in retrospect it presents a somewhat unequal appearance, owing to the absence of prose writers. The novel has fared badly, but criticism has fared worse, being unrepresented, except for the intermittent essays of John Eglinton, and that interesting, if isolated, work of collaboration, Literary Ideals in Ireland, of which some account has been given. The aesthetic reveries of W. B. Yeats, like the scattered articles of A. E. and others, do not bear witness to any deliberate critical effort on their part. Impartial criticism is a more than usually delicate task where a small country like Ireland is concerned. When the intellectual centre is confined within a restricted area, personal relations are unavoidable, and the critic finds discretion imperative, if he is to continue to dwell peaceably in the midst of his friends. Nevertheless, the Irish reviews have not shrunk from publishing the most candid criticism, and if little of this material has been collected, it is the fault of the critics. An interesting and hopeful innovation was the publication of Thomas MacDonagh’s Literature in Ireland. This thoughtful volume of “studies in Irish and Anglo-Irish” was published shortly after
the author's execution, and promised to be an introduction to further works of a similar character. MacDonagh was well equipped for the task he had set himself, and this book is an important contribution to the study of Anglo-Irish poetry.

The effect upon the literature of the smaller countries of this absence of critical judgment, publicly expressed, has been that honest criticism prefers to be silent where it cannot praise. Consequently, there is lack of intellectual discipline which allows the good and the mediocre to struggle on equal terms for recognition. In Ireland we have become accustomed to hearing Irish writers either enthusiastically advertised by the English press, or denounced as charlatans, usurping the fame reserved for the genuine heirs of England's literary glory. The phenomenon rarely calls for more than casual attention, so fortuitous does it seem. Yet, so far as it has any reasonable basis, it may be traced to our habit of allowing every writer who so desires to submit his work to outside criticism on the same terms as our most distinguished literary representatives. We cannot expect others to show more discrimination than ourselves, and when the storm of facile applause has broken over the head of the confiding poet or dramatist, we need not be surprised if some spirit more enquiring than the others leads an abusive reaction. So long as we continue to have our criticism written for us by journalists in England these disconcerting alternations of idolatry and contempt will follow Irish literature abroad.

However flattering the cult of Celticism may seem to us, it is unwise to attach any significance to it. Anglo-Irish literature, as a whole, has not grown up to meet the desires of the devotees of this cult, but to meet the need of Ireland for self-expression.

Should it incidentally produce a writer of such proportions as to entitle him to a place in comparative literary history, let us, by all means, encourage him to challenge the attention of the outside world. The main purpose, however, of the Literary Revival has not been to contribute to English literature, but to create a national literature for Ireland, in the language which has been imposed upon her—a circumstance which effectively disposes of the theory that Ireland is merely an intellectual province of England. The provincial Irishman is he who prefers to identify himself with the literary movement of another country but his own, and those writers who have addressed themselves to the English, rather than to the Irish, public are obviously in that category. They are always expatriates to their adopted countrymen.

The only question, therefore, which must be answered by such a survey as the present is: has the Literary Renaissance accomplished its purpose? Has it given us a body of work which may fairly be described as the nucleus of a national literature? In spite of various weaknesses, it seems as if Anglo-Irish literature had proved its title to be considered as an independent entity. It has not altogether escaped the literary traditions of the language in which it is written, but it has shown a more marked degree of originality, in respect of form and content, than Belgian or any other literature similarly dominated by a powerful neighbour. Possessing the advantage, denied to Switzerland and Belgium, of a great native literature, with all the traditions thereby implied, Ireland has been able to mould her second language according to the literary genius of the race.

It does not matter in the least whether the poetry of the Revival deserves, or does not deserve, the honours which enthusiasts have claimed for it. We
must, first of all, determine whether the literature of the Revival is really national, and then attempt to estimate the relative importance of those who created it. If this history has helped in any way to attain that object, it will have corresponded to the intention with which it was conceived. Comparative criticism will in due course decide that question which obsesses certain minds, namely: is W. B. Yeats a greater poet than Shelley? France did not assign his status to her supreme poetic genius, Racine, by reference to Dante and Shakespeare. National (or local) values invariably take precedence of international, however disappointing that fact may seem to lovers of the absolute.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following bibliography is intended primarily as a summary of the achievement of the Literary Renaissance in Ireland. In the case of the more important writers a complete list of their works has been given, although many of these do not fall within the scope of this book. Similarly, names will be found here which did not seem of sufficient importance to necessitate their inclusion in the text. Works of fiction having no relation either to literature in general, or to the history of the Revival in particular, have been omitted.

As detailed statements of the plays produced by the Irish Players are available elsewhere, only the more significant dramatists have been included.

In every instance the dates given are those of first publication in book form.

A few works announced for publication have been included.

A. E. (GEORGE W. RUSSELL)


WILLIAM ALLINGHAM (1824-1889)

Poems, 1850. Peace and War, 1854. Day and Night Songs, 1854. The Music Master, 1855. Laurence Bloomfield in Ireland,