

Songs, Poems, & Verses

By

Helen, Lady Dufferin

(COUNTESS OF GIFFORD)

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THE IRISH EMIGRANT

I'M sitting on the stile, Mary,
Where we sat, side by side,
That bright May morning long ago
When first you were my bride.
The corn was springing fresh and green,
The lark sang loud and high,
The red was on your lip, Mary,
The love-light in your eye.

The place is little changed, Mary,
The day is bright as then,
The lark's loud song is in my ear,
The corn is green again ;
But I miss the soft clasp of your hand,
Your breath warm on my cheek,
And I still keep list'ning for the words
You never more may speak.

'Tis but a step down yonder lane,
The little Church stands near
The Church where we were wed, Mary-
I see the spire from here ;
But the graveyard lies between, Mary,
My step might break your rest,
Where you, my darling, lie asleep
With your baby on your breast.

I'm very lonely now, Mary,
The poor make no new friends ;
But, oh ! they love the better still
The few our Father sends.
And you were all I had, Mary,
My blessing and my pride ;
There's nothing left to care for now
Since my poor Mary died.

Yours was the good brave heart, Mary,
That still kept hoping on,
When trust in God had left my soul,
And half my strength was gone.
There was comfort ever on your lip,
And the kind look on your brow.

I bless you, Mary, for that same,
Though you can't hear me now.

I thank you for the patient smile
When your heart was fit to break ;
When the hunger pain was gnawing there
You hid it for my sake.

I bless you for the pleasant word
When your heart was sad and sore.
Oh ! I'm thankful you are gone, Mary,
Where grief can't reach you more !

I'm bidding you a long farewell,
My Mary kind and true !
But I'll not forget you, darling,
In the land I'm going to.
They say there's bread and work for all,
And the sun shines always there ;
But I'll not forget old Ireland,
Were it fifty times as fair.

And when amid those grand old woods
I sit and shut my eyes,
My heart will travel back again
To where my Mary lies j
I'll think I see the little stile
Where we sat, side by side,
And the springing corn and bright May morn,
When first you were my bride.

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THE EMIGRANT SHIP

“ Cead Mille Phailte !” [1]

“ A flight of Swallows passed us to-day. Some one said, ‘ If those birds had but sense to take news of us home, they'd be the welcome birds in Connaught this day !’ I stood and watched them out of sight, and God knows my heart went with them.”

—*Extract from the letter of an Irish Emigrant.*

OH, happy, happy Swallows ! the Spring is come
again ;
And ye are bound for Summer homes beyond this
weary main !
Fly on ! fly on ! your Summer nests our roofs may
shelter still ;
But the poor turf-fire is out at last, and our hearths
are black and chill ;
There is no life ; there is no sound ; the old man sits
no more
Within the shadow of the thatch, beside the cottage
door ;

The child has ceased its playing in the shallow brook
close by ;
No kindly smoke is climbing up the grey and empty
sky ;
Few eyes shall watch your coming ; few and sad our
friends remain ;
But the “ hundred thousand welcomes” shall be said
to you again !

For us alone (poor exiles !) those words of kindly
cheer
Shall fall no more, in Irish tongue, upon the longing
ear !
None wait for us, none welcome us, beyond the
moaning wave ;
Small space—to labour in and die—is all the exiles
crave !
But tell our friends in Ireland that we talk of them by
day,
And dream of them the livelong night, and waken
up to pray,
In sleep we feel the pressure of the eager, trembling
hand,
And hear the fervent accents of that cordial-spoken
land ;
And we’ll teach them to our children, even on that
alien shore,
Where the “ hundred thousand welcomes” shall be
said to us no more !

O blessed words ! the very sound takes back the
heart again,
Like a glad bird, a thousand miles across this dreary
main !
We hear no more the plashing wave beneath our
vessel’s prow ;
The dear green fields lie round us (which another
labours now !)—
The sunny slopes, the little paths that wound from
door to door,
So worn by friendly steps which ne’er shall tread those
pathways more !
Dear faces, gathered round the hearths ; dear voices
in our ear ;
And neighbour-hands that press our own, and spread
their simple cheer ;
The scanty meal so hardly earned, yet shared with
such good-will ;
And the “ hundred thousand welcomes” that made it
sweeter still !

Is the cabin still left standing ? Had the rich man
 need of all ?
Is the children's birthplace taken now within the new
 park wall ?
The little field, that was to us such source of hopes
 and fears,
An unregarded harvest to the rich man's barn it
 bears !
Oh, could he know how much to us that little field
 has been ;
What heart-warm prayers have hallowed it, what
 dismal fears between ;
What hopeless toil hath groan'd to God from that
 poor plot of ground,
Which held our all of painful life within its narrow
 bound ;
'Twould seem no common earth to him,—he'd
 grieve amidst his store
That the “ hundred thousand welcomes” can be said
 to us no more !

But tell our friends in Ireland that, in our far-distant
 home.
We'll think of them at that glad time, when back the
 Swallows come ;—
The time for hopeful labour, when the dreary winter's
 past,
And you see the long brown furrows are growing
 green at last !
And tell our friends we pray them to be patient in
 their pain,
The dear God knows our sorrows, and His promise
 is not vain !
A little toil,—a little care,—and in a world of bliss
We shall forget the poverty that parted us in this.
How small a thing 'twill seem to us upon that blessed
 shore,
Where the “ hundred thousand welcomes” shall be
 ours for evermore !

[1] “ A hundred thousand welcomes.” Erse.

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THE BAY OF DUBLIN

OH, Bay of Dublin ! how my heart you're troubling
Your beauty haunts me like a fever dream ;
Like frozen fountains, that the sun sets bubblin'
My heart's blood warms when I but hear your name ;
And never till this life's pulsation ceases,
My early, latest thought you'll fail to be,—
Oh ! none here knows how very fair that place is,
And no one cares how dear it is to me.

Sweet Wicklow mountains ! the soft sun-light sleepin'
On your green uplands is a picture rare ;
You crowd around me, like young maidens peepin'
And puzzlin' me to say which is most fair,
As tho' you longed to see your own sweet faces
Reflected in that smooth and silver sea.
My fondest blessin' on those lovely places,
Tho' no one cares how dear they are to me.
How often when alone at work I'm sittin'
And musing sadly on the days of yore,
I think I see my pretty Katie knittin',
The childer playin' round the cabin door,
I think I see the neighbours' kindly faces
All gathered round, their long-lost friend to see ;
Though none here knows how very fair that place is,
Heav'n knows how dear my poor home was to me.

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TERENCE'S FAREWELL TO KATHLEEN

So, my Kathleen ! you're goin' to lave me
All alone by myself in this place !
But I'm sure that you'll never decaive me.
Oh no ! if there's truth in that face !

Tho' England's a beautiful country,
Full of illigant boys, och ! what then ?
You wouldn't forget your poor Terence,
You'll come back to ould Ireland again.

Och ! them English, decaivers by nature !
Tho' may be you'd think them sincere,
They'll say you're a sweet charmin' creature,
But don't you belave them, my dear !

No, Kathleen agrah ! don't be mindin'
The flatterin' speeches they'll make ;
Just tell them a poor boy in Ireland
Is breakin' his heart for your sake !

It's a folly to keep you from goin',
Tho' faith ! it's a mighty hard case,
For, Kathleen, you know there's no knowin'
When next I may see your sweet face !

And when you come back to me, Kathleen !
None the better shall I be off then ;
You'll be spakin' sich beautiful English,
Sure I won't know my Kathleen agen !

Eh now ! where's the need of this hurry !
Don't fluster me so in this way !
I've forgot, 'twixt the grief and the flurry,
Every word I was manin' to say !

Now just wait a minute, I bid ye !
Can I talk if you bother me so ?
Och, Kathleen ! my blessin' go wid ye,
Every inch of the way that you go !

•

KATEY'S LETTER

OCH, girls, did you ever hear,
I wrote my love a letter,
And altho' he cannot read,
I thought 'twas all the better.
For why should he be puzzled
With spellin' in the matter,
When the manin' was so plain
I loved him faithfully,
And he knows it—oh, he knows it—
Without one word from me.

I wrote it, and I folded it,
And put a seal upon it,
It was a seal almost as big
As the crown of my best bonnet ;
For I wouldn't have the postman
Make his remarks upon it,
As I'd said inside the letter
I loved him faithfully.
And he knows it—oh, he knows it—
Without one word from me.

My heart was full, but when I wrote
I dared not put the half in,
For the neighbours know I love him,
And they're mighty fond of chaffin',
So I dare not write his name outside,
For fear they would be laughin',
But wrote, " From little Kate to one
Whom she loves faithfully,"
And he knows it—oh, he knows it—
Without one word from me.

Now, girls, would you believe it
That postman so concaited,
No answer will he bring me,
So long as I have waited ?
But maybe—there mayn't be one,
Because—as I have stated—
My love can neither read nor write,
But he loves me faithfully,
And I know, where'er my love is,
That he is true to me.

•

SWEET KILKENNY TOWN

I WAS workin' in the fields near fair Boston city,
Thinkin' sadly of Kilkenny—and a girl that's there,
When a friend came and tould me—late enough—
and more's the pity !
“ There's a letter waitin' for ye, in the postman's
care !”
Oh ! my heart was in my mouth all the while that he
was spakin',
For I knew it was from Katey ! she's the girl
that can spell !
And I couldn't speak for cryin', for my heart had
nigh been breakin',
With longin' for a word from the girl I love so well.
Oh ! I knew it was from Katey. Who could it be
but Katey ?
The poor girl that loves me well, in sweet Kilkenny
Town.

Oh ! 'twas soon I reached the place, and I thanked
them for the trouble
They wor takin' with my letter, a-sortin' with
such care ;
And they asked “ Was it a single ?” and I tould them
'twas a double !
For wasn't it worth twice as much as any letter
there ?
Then they sorted and they searched, but somethin'
seemed the matter,
And my heart it stopped beatin' when I thought
what it might be :
Och ! boys, would you belave it ? they had gone and
lost my letter,
My poor Katey's letter that had come so far to
me.
For I knew it was from Katey. Who could it be
but Katey ?
The poor girl that loves me well, in sweet Kilkenny
Town.

I trimbled like an aspen, but I said, “ 'Tis fun you're
makin'
Of the poor foolish Paddy that's so aisy to craze ;
Och, gintlemen, then look again, maybe you wor
mistaken,
For letters, as you know, boys, are as like as
pase !”
Then they bade me search myself when they saw my
deep dejection,
But, och ! who could be searching when the tears
blind the sight ?
Moreover (as I tould them) I'd another strong
objection,
In regard to never learnin' to read nor to write.

For I wasn't cute like Katey, my own darling Katey,
 The poor girl that loves me well, in sweet Kilkenny
 Town.

Then they laughed in my face, and they asked me
 (tho' in kindness),
 What good would letters do me that I couldn't
 understand ?
 And I answered, " Were they cursed with deafness
 and with blindness,
 Would they care less for the clasp of a dear loved
 hand ?"

Oh ! the folks that read and write (though they're so
 mighty clever).
 See nothin' but the words, and they're soon read
 through ;
 But Katey's unread letter would be spakin' to me
 ever
 Of the dear love that she bears me, for it shows she
 is true !
 Oh ! well I know my Katey, my own darling Katey,
 The poor girl that loves me well, in sweet Kilkenny
 Town.

Songs, poems, & verses (1894)

Author : Dufferin and Clandeboye, Helen Selina Blackwood, Baroness, 1807-1867 ; Dufferin and
 Ava, Frederick Temple Blackwood, Marquis of, 1826-1902

Subject : Sheridan family

Publisher : London J. Murray

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts; toronto

<http://www.archive.org/details/songspoemsverses00duffuoft>

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Yet with all the glamor of romance that Synge and others have cast over these islands, the people who have come to America express no desire to return permanently to their fatherland. " I'd like to be going back and seeing the old lady, and the islands, too, especially after reading this book. But I'm thinking two or three weeks would be enough, unless I was a rich man, and then maybe I'd like to stay for a year."

The Aran Islands (1911)

Author : Synge, J. M. (John Millington), 1871-1909

Subject : Synge, J. M. (John Millington), 1871-1909

Publisher : Boston, J. W. Luce & compnay

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Sloan Foundation

Book contributor : The Library of Congress

Collection : library_of_congress; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/aranislands00syng>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

January 3 2012

