

NOTES

William Rooney

When only a lad of fourteen, already perched on a high stool in a dingy Dublin lawyer's office, William Rooney was dreaming the dreams that are now coming true in Eirinn. Rose Kavanagh's Irish Fireside Club attracted the boy, and even in his sixteenth year he was at its meetings reading papers that aroused attention. Imagine a mere child, in the Ireland that was just emerging victorious from the land-wars of the eighties, pleading with the sincerity and ardor of youth that Ireland and everything Irish should be made first in the lives of the boys and girls of the country. He was often seen prowling about the second-hand bookshops on the Dublin quays, and he spent long hours reading in the National Library. His first poem was published in *United Ireland*, in June, 1891, his eighteenth year. Later he wrote a good deal for the *Northern Patriot*, contributing both prose and verse to its columns. Still a youth, he was preaching that the essentials to the growth of real nationality were the language, education in the history of the past, a knowledge of the possibilities of the country, a national press, and an enlightened and patriotic womanhood. That happened thirty years ago now, and current history is proving how right William Rooney was. "The child," he said, "is undoubtedly father to the man, but the real arbiter of a nation's destiny is its womanhood. The influence and the position with which Nature has endowed woman render her the greatest aid or enemy a cause can have." We next find him working side by side with two great Irish girls who had the vision even as he had it himself. Ethna Carbery and Alice Milligan started the *Shan Van Vocht* in 1896, and in it soon appeared some of the finest poems Rooney wrote. *Ceann Dubh Dilis*, *Tir na n'Og*, *The Men of the West*, and *Bearna Baoghail* appeared in its pages. Reading them to-day, we see how far into the future his vision reached. Ethna Carbery and himself did not live to see the sunshine of the Promised Land but they pointed out the road that is leading straight to it—the royal road of unity, determination, and sacrifice. This very week men and women are repeating these lines by William Rooney:

*Then to the staff-head let our flag ascending,
Our fires on every hill,
Tell to the nations of the world attending,
We wage the battle still.*

*And by their graves we swear this year of story,
To battle side by side,
Till we have crowned with immemorial glory
The cause for which they died.*

He was a pioneer Sinn Feiner in those days. When others were bartering for a mess of potage Rooney was upholding the ideals that have become those of the whole Irish race to-day. No Crown Colony for him; no West Britain; no London kitchen-garden, but an Irish Nation, governed and controlled for the Irish people and by the Irish people. He and Ethna Carbery did work for Ireland that can never be too highly appreciated. The shamrocks are growing above them now but their memories are as green as the hills of Eireann Og. Boy and girl they were, and regarded as dreamers by the wiseacres of their time. But who among us all can now say with more reason, looking back on the pre-Sinn Fein years:

pugnativimus etiam, et non sine gloria?

The Patriot

It will be evident that Rooney was a patriot as well as a poet. His great friend was Arthur Griffith, and that distinguished Irishman's appreciation of Rooney was so high that before reading it it is well to re-

member that Griffith is not a man who uses words lightly:

"Rooney was the greatest Irishman whom I have known or whom I can ever expect to know. I do not claim him as the greatest of Ireland's men of genius. Such a claim would be absurd. He was a man of genius, deep learning, and ardent patriotism. But there have been many Irishmen of genius as great or greater, of learning as deep or deeper, and some few of patriotism as ardent; but he was dissimilar to other men in this, that he had established between his soul and the soul of Ireland a perfect communion, and all his genius, all his knowledge, all his thought, all his energies were united and devoted to revealing Ireland's soul to Ireland's people. No man for generations knew Ireland so well as he did, and no man could have led her so truly as Rooney had his passion not burned out his life."

It was worth dying to have Arthur Griffith write such an epitaph. Rooney's favorite among his poems was the well-known song *Ceann Dubh Dilis*. Maire Hastings writing of him says:

"I was sitting at a table looking into the pictured faces of Ethna Carbery and William Rooney that fronted me from the wall. Suddenly the crash of the pipes dominated the room. All other sounds ceased. The blind piper, Dinny Delaney, was playing *Brian Boru's March*. Tramp, tramp, tramp—I closed my eyes and listened—tramp, tramp, tramp—on they came up O'Connell Street—tramp, tramp, tramp. O blessed sound! the tramp of Ireland's marching men! I never in my life heard anything more distinctly and instantly *Ceann Dubh Dilis* flashed into my mind:

*O Dear, Dark Head, though but the curlews' screaming
Wakens the echoes of the hill and glen;
Yet shalt thou see once more the bright steel gleaming,
Yet thou shalt hear again the tramp of men;
And though their fathers' fate be theirs, shall others
With hearts as faithful still the pathway tread,
Till we have set, O Mother, dear of Mothers!
A Nation's crown upon thy Dear Dark Head.*

It was men like William Rooney that passed the torch along the centuries and kept the sacred flame alive. When England was busy tricking our politicians and passing her laws for the enslavement of the people she never thought of the obscure workers and of the sweet singers whom God chose to be the real builders of the Nation. But it was the poets of Ireland, and the old schoolmasters, and the old grandfathers telling old tales around the cabin fires in the long nights, who were supplying the food that kept alive the soul of Eireann, who were passing along the light that never was entirely spent. Not alone to Emmet and Mitchel be the glory. Rafferty, even Moore, Davis, Mangan, Ethna Carbery, and William Rooney were makers of a Nation as well as makers of song.

DIocese OF DUNEDIN

Masses will be celebrated on Christmas Day at St. Joseph's Cathedral at 6, 7, 8, 9, and Pontifical High Mass at 11 o'clock. At the other churches of the Cathedral parish Mass will be celebrated as follows:—At the North-east Valley at 7, 8, and 9.30 a.m.; Kaikorai, at 7.30, and Mornington at 9 o'clock. In the evening at St. Joseph's Cathedral a recital of sacred music will be given by the choir, commencing at 7 o'clock, after which there will be Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The annual spiritual Retreat of the Dominican Nuns, which is being conducted by Rev. Father Mitchell, C.S.S.R., was opened on last Friday evening, and is to conclude on Christmas morning.

The annual spiritual Retreat of the diocesan clergy is to commence at Holy Cross College, Mosgiel, on January 16. The Retreat will be conducted by Rev. Father Slattery, C.M., of Ashfield, Sydney.

At the quarterly meeting of St. Joseph's branch of the Hibernian Society, held last week, feeling reference was made to the death of the Hon. Bro. Nerheny, M.L.C., and a resolution of condolence with the relatives of the deceased brother was passed and ordered to be conveyed to them. As a mark of respect to the memory of the late Bro. Nerheny the constitution was draped.

Rev. Father Mitchell, C.S.S.R., occupied the pulpit at St. Joseph's Cathedral at Vespers on last Sunday evening.

W. Hayles

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