

A chapter of autobiography

Lady Gregory

(1913)

To Richard Gregory. — Little Grandson: When I go into the garden in the morning to find you a nectarine or tell you the names of flowers, Catalpa, Love-lies-bleeding, Balsam, Phlox, you ask me why I cannot stay but must go back to the house, and when I say it is to write letters, you ask, "What for?" And when winter comes, you will ask me why I must go away over the sea instead of waiting for your Christmas stocking and your tree.

The other day I was sitting outside the door, where the sweet-peas grow, with an old man, and when you came and called me he got up to go away, and as he wished me good-bye, he said: "They were telling me you are going to America, and says I, 'Whatever the Lady does, I am certain she is doing nothing but what she thinks to be right.' And that the Lord may keep you safe and protect you from the power of your enemy."

Some day when I am not here to answer, you will maybe ask, "What were they for, the writing, the journeys, and why did she have an enemy?" So I will put down the story now, that you may know all about it bye and bye.

Fourteen or fifteen years ago I still wrote from time to time in a diary I used to keep till the sand in the hour-glass on my table began to run so fast that I had to lay by the book as well as embroidery, and archaeology, and drying lavender, and visits to the houses of friends.

I was in London in the beginning of 1898, and I find written, "Yeats and Sir Alfred Lyall to tea, Yeats stayed on. He is very full of playwriting, ... He with the aid of Miss Florence Farr, an actress who thinks more of a romantic than of a paying play, is very keen about taking or building a little theatre somewhere in the suburbs to produce romantic drama, his own plays, Edward Martyn's, one of Bridges', and he is trying to stir up Standish O'Grady and Fiona Macleod to write some. He believes there will be a reaction after the realism of Ibsen, and romance will have its turn. He has put a 'great deal of himself' into his own play *The Shadowy Waters* and rather startled me by saying about half his characters have eagles' faces."

Later in the year I was staying for a few days with old Count de Basterot, at Duras, that is beyond Kinvara and beside the sea. He had been my husband's warm friend, and always in the summer time we used to go and spend at least one long day with him, — we two at first, and then later I went with my son and the boy and girl friends of his childhood. They liked to go out in a hooker and see the seals showing their heads, or to paddle delicately among the jellyfish on the beach. It was a pleasant place to pass an idle day. The garden was full of flowers. Lavender and carnations grew best, and there were roses also and apple trees, and many plums ripened on the walls. This seemed strange, because outside the sheltered garden there were only stone-strewn fields and rocks and bare rock-built hills in sight, and the bay of Galway, over which fierce storms blow from the Atlantic. The Count remembered when on Garlic Sunday men used to ride races, naked, on unsaddled horses out into the sea; but that wild custom had long been done away with by decree of the priests. Later still, when Harrow and Oxford took my son away and I had long spaces of time alone, I would sometimes go to Duras to spend a few days.

I always liked to talk and to listen to the Count. He could tell me about French books and French and Italian history and politics, for he lived but for the summer months in Ireland and for the rest of the year in Paris or in Rome. Mr. Arthur Symons has written of him and his talks of race,—to which he attributed all good or bad habits and politics—as they took long drives on the Campagna. M. Paul Bourget came more than once to stay in this Burren district, upon which he bestowed a witty name, “Le Royaume de Pierre.” It was to M. Bourget that on his way to the modest little house and small estate, the Count’s old steward and servant introduced the Atlantic, when on the road from the railway station at Gort its waters first come in sight: *Voilà la mer qui baigne l’amirigué et less terres de Monsieur le Comte*. For he—the steward—had been taken by his master on visits to kinsmen in France and Italy—their names are recorded in that sad, pompous, black-bordered document I received one day signed by those who have *l’honneur de vous faire part de la perte douloureuse qu’ils viennent d’éprouver en la personne de Florimond Alfred Jacques, Comte de Basterot, Chevalier de l’ordre du Saint Sépulcre, leur cousin germain et cousin* [who died at Duras (Ireland) September 15, 1904]; *la Marquise de la Tour Maubourg, le Vicomte et la Vicomtesse de Bussy, la Baronne d’Acker de Montgaston, le Marquis et la Marquise de Courcival, le Comte et la Comtesse Gromis de Trana, la Comtesse Irinè d’Entreves*, and so on, and so on. I do not know whether the bearers of these high-sounding names keep him in their memory—it may well be that they do, for he was a friend not easily forgotten—but I know there is many a prayer still said on the roads between Kinvara and Burren and Curranroe and Ballinderreen for him who “never was without a bag of money to give in charity, and always had a heart for the poor.”

On one of those days at Duras in 1898, Mr. Edward Martyn, my neighbour, came to see the Count, bringing with him Mr. Yeats, whom I did not then know very well, though I cared for his work very much and had already, through his directions, been gathering folk-lore. They had lunch with us, but it was a wet day, and we could not go out. After a while I thought the Count wanted to talk to Mr. Martyn alone; so I took Mr. Yeats to the office where the steward used to come to talk,—less about business I think than of the Land War or the state of the country, or the last year’s deaths and marriages from Kinvara to the headland of Aughanish. We sat there through that wet afternoon, and though I had never been at all interested in theatres, our talk turned on plays. Mr. Martyn had written two, *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*. They had been offered to London managers, and now he thought of trying to have them produced in Germany where there seemed to be more room for new drama than in England. I said it was a pity we had no Irish theatre where such plays could be given. Mr. Yeats said that had always been a dream of his, but he had of late thought it an impossible one, for it could not at first pay its way, and there was no money to be found for such a thing in Ireland.

We went on talking about it, and things seemed to grow possible as we talked, and before the end of the afternoon we had made our plan. We said we would collect money, or rather ask to have a certain sum of money guaranteed. We would then take a Dublin theatre and give a performance of Mr. Martyn’s *Heather Field* and one of Mr. Yeats’s own plays, *The Countess Cathleen*. I offered the first guarantee of £25.

A few days after that I was back at Coole, and Mr. Yeats came over from Mr. Martyn’s home, Tillyra, and we wrote a formal letter to send out. We neither of us write a very clear hand, but a friend had just given me a Remington typewriter and I was learning to use it, and I wrote out the letter with its help. That typewriter has done a great deal of work since that day, making it easy for the printers to read my plays and translations, and Mr. Yeats’s plays and essays, and sometimes his poems. I have used it also for the many, many hundreds of letters that have had to be written about theatre business in each of these last fifteen years. It

has gone with me very often up and down to Dublin and back again, and it went with me even to America last year that I might write my letters home. And while I am writing the leaves are falling, and since I have written those last words on its keys, she who had given it to me has gone. She gave me also the great gift of her friendship through more than half my lifetime, Enid, Lady Layard, Ambassador at Constantinople and Madrid, helper of the miserable and the wounded in the Turkish-Russian war; helper of the sick in the hospital she founded at Venice, friend and hostess and guest of queens in England and Germany and Rome. She was her husband's good helpmate while he lived—is not the Cyprus treaty set down in that clear handwriting I shall never see coming here again? And widowed, she kept his name in honour, living after him for fifteen years, and herself leaving a noble memory in all places where she had stayed, and in Venice where her home was and where she died.

Our statement—it seems now a little pompous—began:

“ We propose to have performed in Dublin, in the spring of every year certain Celtic and Irish plays, which whatever be their degree of excellence will be written with a high ambition, and so to build up a Celtic and Irish school of dramatic literature. We hope to find in Ireland an uncorrupted and imaginative audience trained to listen by its passion for oratory, and believe that our desire to bring upon the stage the deeper thoughts and emotions of Ireland will ensure for us a tolerant welcome, and that freedom to experiment which is not found in theatres of England, and without which no new movement in art or literature can succeed. We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation, in carrying out a work that is outside all the political questions that divide us.” I think the word “ Celtic” was put in for the sake of Fiona Macleod whose plays however we never acted, though we used to amuse ourselves by thinking of the call for “ author” that might follow one, and the possible appearance of William Sharp in place of the beautiful woman he had given her out to be, for even then we had little doubt they were one and the same person. I myself never quite understood the meaning of the “ Celtic Movement,” which we were said to belong to.

When I was asked about it, I used to say it was a movement meant to persuade the Scotch to begin buying our books, while we continued not to buy theirs.

We asked for a guarantee fund of £300 to make the experiment, which we hoped to carry on during three years. The first person I wrote to was the old poet, Aubrey de Vere. He answered very kindly, saying, “ Whatever develops the genius of Ireland, must in the most effectual way benefit her; and in Ireland's genius I have long been a strong believer. Circumstances of very various sorts have hitherto tended much to retard the development of that genius; but it cannot fail to make itself recognised before very long, and Ireland will have cause for gratitude to all those who have hastened the coming of that day.”

I am glad we had this letter, carrying as it were the blessing of the generation passing away to that which was taking its place. He was the first poet I had ever met and spoken with ; he had come in my girlhood to a neighbour's house. He was so gentle, so fragile, he seemed to have been wafted in by that “ wind from the plains of Athenry” of which he wrote in one of his most charming little poems. He was of the Lake School, and talked of Wordsworth, and I think it was as a sort of courtesy or deference to him that I determined to finish reading *The Excursion*, which though a reader of poetry it had failed me, as we say, to get through. At last one morning I climbed up to a wide wood, Grobawn, on one of the hillsides of Slieve Echtge, determined not to come down again until I had honestly read every line. I think I saw the sun set behind the far-off Connemara hills before I came home, exhausted but triumphant ! I have

a charming picture of Aubrey de Vere in my mind as I last saw him, at a garden party in London. He was walking about, having on his arm, in the old-world style, the beautiful Lady Somers, lovely to the last as in Thackeray's day, and as I had heard of her from many of that time, and as she had been painted by Watts.

Some gave us their promise with enthusiasm but some from good will only, without much faith that an Irish Theatre would ever come to success. One friend, a writer of historical romance, wrote:

“ October 15th. I enclose a cheque for £1, but confess it is more as a proof of regard for you than of belief in the drama, for I cannot with the best wish in the world to do so, feel hopeful on that subject. My experience has been that any attempt at treating Irish history is a fatal handicap, not to say absolute *bar*, to anything in the shape of popularity, and I cannot see how any drama can flourish which is not to some degree supported by the public, as it is even more dependent on it than literature is. There are popular Irish dramatists, of course, and very popular ones, but then unhappily they did not treat of Irish subjects, and *The School for Scandal* and *She Stoops to Conquer* would hardly come under your category. You will think me very discouraging, but I cannot help it, and I am also afraid that putting plays experimentally on the boards is a very costly entertainment. Where will they be acted in the first instance? And has any stage manager undertaken to produce them? Forgive my tiresomeness ; it does not come from want of sympathy , only from a little want of hope, the result of experience.”

“ October 19th. I seize the opportunity of writing again as I am afraid you will have thought I wrote such an unsympathetic letter. It is not, believe me, that I would not give anything to see Irish literature and Irish drama taking a good place, as it ought to do, and several of the authors you name I admire extremely. It is only from the practical and *paying* point of view that I feel it to be rather rash. Plays cost more, I take it, to produce than novels, and one would feel rather rash if one brought out a novel at one's own risk.”

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On the walls of the landing outside your nursery door there are pictures hangings painted as you paint your own with water-colours, but without any blot or blur. Some are of blue hills and of streams running through brown bogs, but many of them are of young girls and of women, barefooted and wearing home-dyed clothes, knitting or carrying sheaves; or of fishermen dressed in white. All, girls and women and men alike, have gentle faces. There is no sign of the turf-smoke that dries the skin to leather. There are no lines or wrinkles to be seen. It may be faces were like that before the great famine came that changed soft bodies to skin and bone and turned villages to grazing for goats. Your great-grandfather fed his people at that time and took their sickness and died. But perhaps if that painter were living now, he would draw likenesses in the same way, with the furrows and ridges left out. For he could only see gentleness like his own in whatever he had a mind to paint.

A little lower on the staircase there are pictures you do not look at now, likenesses of men not very young, who had done something that made others like to meet them and who dined together at the Grillon Club. Your grandfather is there with many of his friends; some of them became friends of mine. Here is one that wrote books, you will maybe read them bye and bye, about good men that once lived in Ireland, and how Europe learned manners, and about witches that were thrown into ponds.

Near the library door there is a drawing of an old man. He looks very tired and sad. He was shut up in prison for more years than you have lived. He could not see the lime trees blooming out or the chestnuts breaking from their husks.

That is a younger man on the other wall. There is something like a laugh in his eyes. He will live and work a long time, I hope, for the work he has done is very good. He gave you a blessing in Irish one time when I brought him to see you in your cot.

Among the names on my first list of guarantors is that of Sir Frederic Burton, painter, and for many years Director of the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square. And this name, like that of Aubrey de Vere, brings together movements divided by half a century; for Frederic Burton had, through personal friendship with Thomas Davis, come so near to that side of the National movement of 1848 which expressed itself in writing, that he had drawn the design for the title-page of the *Spirit of the Nation*, that book of rebel songs and ballads. And he had known others of that time whose names have been remembered, Ferguson and Stokes and O'Curry. It would make my heart give a quicker beat to hear him say: "When I was in Aran with Petrie," or "my model for the Blind Girl at the Holy Well was Doctor Petrie's daughter," or "Davis was such a dear fellow I could refuse him nothing," or, as an apology for not having read Mitchell's wonderful *Gaol Journal*, "I did not like his appearance when I saw him. Davis took me to see him somewhere. He was a regular Northern and did not make a good impression on me. His skin was blotched and he had ginger-coloured hair." Though he resented the rising fame of Clarence Mangan, because, as he thought, it was at the expense of Thomas Moore, "who had—though no one would class him among the great poets—mellifluous versification, exquisite choice of language, and was endowed at least with a delicate fancy approaching to imagination," the only authentic portrait of Mangan, not taken indeed from life, but after death in an hospital, was drawn by him.

He had wandered and painted in Germany and in the west of Ireland, in Connemara and in his own county of Clare, till his work at the National Gallery forced him to give up his art. But in his last days he would often speak of his early days in the West, and of country people he remembered, a girl near Maam who was a great singer, and a piper, Paddy Conneely, who was the best judge of sheep and cattle in the whole country.

He was during the Land War when I first knew him, a very strong Unionist, for his sensitive nature shrank from its harsh and violent methods, and for a while he felt that he had no longer a country to take pride in. In 1899 he wrote: "... I look forward with some ineasiness to the advent of *Patriots* from beyond sea, now American citizens under the Stars and Stripes. With this outlook before it, the Government is reducing the Irish Constabulary, a most extraordinary proceeding and a quite unaccountable one except indeed on the theory that every administration is doomed to fatuity where Irish affairs have to be dealt with. For the police are the appointed guardians of civil order, and however abused or resisted, are recognised as such. But if the military have to be called out, what a handle is given to vapourers on both sides of the Irish sea! And what about the dismissed Constables? Will they not be thrown into the ranks of the Patriots?"

And in 1895 he had written, refusing an invitation to dine with me—I cannot remember who I said was coming, but he expressed this regret: "Especially as I enjoy meeting Sir A. and Lady Clay, and should have liked to see a bird so rare as an *honest* Nationalist." Yet he kept a spirit of independence that was akin to rebellion, even through those years of official position and pleasant London dinners, and friendships, and the Athenæum Club.

During the years after the death in 1892 of my husband, who had been a trustee of the National Gallery, and Sir Frederic's death in 1900, our friendship became a close one. Our talk turned very often from pictures and Italy to Ireland. In 1897 I published *Mr. Gregory's Letter-box*, a political history of the years between 1812 and 1830, taken from letters to and by my husband's grandfather, then Under-Secretary for Ireland. Sir Frederic was much

pleased with the book. He came to see me when he had read it and said: "I am glad you have come down on the real culprit, George III.," and quoted one or two people who had said his obstinacy was the cause of so many of Ireland's troubles. But after a little he said very gravely: "I see a tendency to Home Rule on your own part." I said, "I defy any one to study Irish History without getting a dislike and distrust of England." He was silent for a time and then said, "That is my feeling," and told me how patriotic he had been as a boy though disliking "O'Connell and his gang." Later he accused me of having become "A red hot Nationalist," and said I had no Irish blood, but I convinced him I had, both Irish and French.

He was as angry at the time of the Boer War as any Mayo ballad-singer or Connacht Ranger's wife. "According to the doctor I am better, but really this war is killing me. It is the worst affair I recollect. It is utterly inglorious. . . . I grieve particularly for our brave Irishmen whose lives have been squandered to no purpose." He was to the end a Unionist, so far as his political doctrine went, but I think his rooted passion for Ireland increased, and made, as such strong passions are used to do, all politics seem but accidental, transitory, a business that is outside the heart of life.

The language movement, of which I was able to bring him news, began to excite him. One day I found him "excited and incredulous at Atkinson's evidence against the Irish language, in which he says all Irish books are filthy and all folklore is at bottom abominable." And then he got, "on your recommendation and Doctor Hyde's reputation as a scholar" the History of Irish Literature and wrote: "I am reading Dr. Hyde's Literary History with the greatest interest. It is a high pleasure to find the matter he deals with treated by a true scholar and in a reasonable and philosophic spirit. But indeed the advance in this respect since my earlier days is marvellous. At that time the comparative method was hardly, if at all, thought of. Rabid Irishmen, who often didn't know their own language but at second hand, and knew no other tongue at all, spouted the rankest absurdities. Now true light has been let in and Irish history, archaeology, literature, and poetry are the gainers. Let us not grudge to the Germans their need of honour in having led the way." And again: "I should be exceedingly sorry if the Irish language died out of men's mouths altogether. I look upon the loss of a language or even a dialect as equivalent to the extirpation of a species in natural history. ..." Then, in 1899: "Those addresses of Dr. Hyde and Mr. Yeats are very interesting and, I would fain hope, may find a response in the hearts of the people who heard them. The subject is one full of sadness. Self-respect, a decaying language, a dying music, how shall they be resuscitated! I could weep when I recollect how full Munster, Connacht, and even Ulster were in my earlier days of exquisite native music—when in fact among the peasantry and the Irish of the towns you heard no other; when the man at the ploughtail had his peculiar 'whistle,' strange, wild, and full of melody and rhythm. All this must now have passed away irrevocably. May the language have a better chance! I cannot tell you how much Doctor Hyde's book has moved me. Principally it is a manful effort."

When I was again in London, he showed me the Literary History close at hand and asked me a little nervously what was Douglas Hyde's age. My answer, or surmise, pleased him, and he said: "Then he will be able to work for a long time." Once or twice, when we went on to talk of other things, he came back to this and said, "I am so glad he is a young man."

He was jealous for the honour of Ireland even in lesser things. He was very much interested in the beginning of our theatre. In 1899 he writes: "I am happy to sign the guarantee form for the coming year, and enclose it. You are a dreamy lot in Erin. As you say, I think the quality comes from the atmosphere. Here there is more of the opposite than suits me, but I dream still, as I have done all my lifetime. I trust there will be no shindy at the performance

of *Countess Cathleen*. But if not, our compatriots will have been for once untrue to themselves!”

My first meeting with Douglas Hyde had been when he came in one day with a broken bicycle during lunch at my neighbour Mr. Martyn’s house where I was staying. He had been coming by train, but had got out at a village, Craughwell (as I myself did a good while afterwards on the same errand), in search of memories of Raftery, the Connacht poet. I had my own pony carriage with me, and that afternoon I drove to the Round Tower and the seven churches of Kilmacduagh, taking with me Douglas Hyde and Mr. William Sharp, whom I even then suspected of being “Fiona Macleod.” Mr. Sharp—not by my invitation—took the place beside me, and left the back seat for the poet-dramatist, the founder of the Gaelic League of Ireland.

He often came to stay with me and my son at Coole after that. The first time was in winter, for a shooting party. Some old ladies—our neighbours—asked our keeper who our party was, and on hearing that one was a gentleman who spoke to the beaters in Irish, they said, “he can not be a gentleman if he speaks Irish.” With all his culture and learning, his delight was in talking with the people and hearing their poems and fragments of the legends. I remember one day, he went into a thatched cottage to change his boots after shooting snipe on Kilmacduagh bog, and talked with an old woman who had not much English and who welcomed him when he spoke in her own tongue. But when she heard he was from Mayo, looked down on by dwellers in Galway, she laughed very much and repeated a line of a song in Irish which runs:

“There’ll be boots on me yet, says the man from the county Mayo!”

Near Kilmacduagh also he was told a long story, having Aristotle for its hero. Sometimes he was less lucky. I brought an old man to see him, I was sure could give him stories. But he only told one of a beggar who went to Castle, a neighbouring house, the master of which had given him a half-penny, saying, “that is for my father’s and mother’s soul.” “And the beggar added another half-penny to it, and laid it down on the step, and, ‘There’s a half-penny for my father’s soul and a half-penny for my mother’s, and I wouldn’t go to the meanness of putting them both in one.’”

He has done his work by methods of peace, by keeping quarrels out of his life, with all but entire success. I find in a letter to Mr. Yeats: “I will send you *Claideam* that you may see some of the attacks by recalcitrant Gaelic Leaguers on the *Craoibhin*. Well, I am sorry, but if he can’t keep from making enemies, what chance is there for the like of us?”

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He was one of the vice-presidents of our Society for a while and we are always grateful to him for that *Twisting of the Rope* in which he played with so much gaiety, ease, and charm. But in founding the Gaelic League, he had done far more than that for our work. It was a movement for keeping the Irish language a spoken one, with, as a chief end, the preserving of our own nationality. That does not sound like the beginning of a revolution, yet it was one. It was the discovery, the disclosure of the folk-learning, the folk-poetry, the folk-tradition. Our Theatre was caught into that current, and it is that current, as I believe, that has brought it on its triumphant way. It is chiefly known now as a folk-theatre. It has not only the great mass of primitive material and legend to draw on, but it has been made a living thing by the excitement of that discovery. All our writers, Mr. Yeats himself, were influenced by it. Mr. Synge found what he had lacked before — fable, emotion, style. Writing of him I have said “He tells what he owes to that collaboration with the people, and for all the attacks, he has given

back to them what they will one day thank him for. . . . The return to the people, the reunion after separation, the taking and giving, is it not the perfect circle, the way of nature, the eternal wedding-ring?"

We thought at our first start it would make the whole movement more living and bring it closer to the people if the Gaelic League would put on some plays written in Irish. Dr. Hyde thought well of the idea, and while staying here at Coole, as he did from time to time, he wrote *The Twisting of the Rope*, based on one of Mr. Yeats's Hanrahan stories ; *The Lost Saint* on a legend given its shape by Mr. Yeats, and *The Nativity* on a scenario we wrote together for him. Afterwards he wrote *The Marriage* and *The Poorhouse*, upon in each case a scenario written by me. I betray no secret in telling this, for Dr. Hyde has made none of the collaboration, giving perhaps too generous acknowledgment, as in Galway, where he said, when called before the curtain after *The Marriage*, that the play was not his but that Lady Gregory had written it and brought it to him, saying " *Cur Gaedilge air*" " Put Irish on it." I find in a letter of mine to Mr. Yeats: " Thanks for sending back Raftery. I haven't sent it to Hyde yet. The real story was that Raftery by chance went into a house where such a wedding was taking place ' that was only a marriage and not a wedding' and where there was ' nothing but a herring for the dinner,' and he made a song about it and about all the imaginary grand doings at it that has been remembered ever since. But it didn't bring any practical good to the young people, for Raftery himself ' had to go to bed in the end without as much as a drop to drink, but he didn't mind that, where they hadn't it to give.' "

But it went through some changes after that: " I have a letter from the Craoibhin. He has lost his Trinity College play and must re-write it from my translation. He is not quite satisfied with Raftery (*The Marriage*). ' I don't think Maire's uncertainty if it be a ghost or not is effective on the stage. I would rather have the ghost " out and out" as early as possible, and make it clear to the audience.' I rather agree with him. I think I will restore the voice at the door in my published version."

And again I wrote from Galway : " I came here yesterday for a few days' change, but the journey, or the little extra trouble at leaving, set my head aching, and I had to spend all yesterday in a dark room. In the evening, when the pain began to go, I began to think of the Raftery play, and I want to know if this end would do. After the miser goes out, Raftery stands up and says, ' I won't be the only one in the house to give no present to the woman of the house,' and hands her the plate of money, telling them to count it. While they are all gathered round counting it, he slips quietly from the door. As he goes out, wheels or horse steps are heard, and a farmer comes in and says, ' What is going on? All the carts of the country gathered at the door, and Seaghan, the Miser, going swearing down the road?' They say it is a wedding party called in by Raftery. But where is Raftery? Is he gone? They ask the farmer if he met him outside—the poet Raftery—and he says, ' I did not, but I stood by his grave at Killeenin yesterday.' Do you think that better? It gets rid of the good-byes and the storm, and I don't think any amount of hints convey the ghostly idea strongly enough. Let me know at once; just a word will do."

As to *The Poorhouse*, the idea came from a visit to Gort Workhouse one day when I heard that the wife of an old man, who had been long there, maimed by something, a knife I think, that she had thrown at him in a quarrel, had herself now been brought in to the hospital. I wondered how they would meet, as enemies or as friends, and I thought it likely they would be glad to end their days together for old sake's sake. This is how I wrote down my fable : " Scene, ward of a workhouse; two beds containing the old men; they are quarrelling. Occupants of other invisible beds are heard saying, ' There they are at it again; they are always

quarrelling.' They say the matron will be coming to call for order, but another says the matron has been sent for to see somebody who wants to remove one of the paupers.

Both old men wish they could be removed from each other and have the whole ridge of the world between them. The fight goes on. One old man tells the other that he remembers the time he used to be stealing ducks, and he a boy at school. The other old man remembers the time his neighbour was suspected of going to Souper's school, etc., etc. They remember the crimes of each other's lives. They fight like two young whelps that go on fighting till they are two old dogs. At last they take their pillows and throw them at each other. Other paupers (invisible) cheer and applaud. Then they take their porringers, pipes, prayer-books, or whatever is in reach, to hurl at each other. They lament the hard fate that has put them in the same ward for five years and in beds next each other for the last three months, and they after being enemies the whole of their lives. Suddenly a cry that the matron is coming. They settle themselves hurriedly. Each puts his enemy's pillow under his head and lies down. The matron comes in with a countrywoman comfortably dressed. She embraces one old man. She is his sister. Her husband died from her lately and she is lonesome and doesn't like to think of her brother being in the workhouse. If he is bedridden itself, he would be company for her. He is delighted, asks what sort of house she has. She says, a good one, a nice kitchen, and he can be doing little jobs for her. He can be sitting in a chair beside the fire and stirring the stir-about for her and throwing a bit of food to the chickens when she is out in the field. He asks when he can go. She says she has the chance of a lift for him on a neighbour's cart. He can come at once. He says he will make no delay. A loud sob from the old man in the other bed. He says, 'Is it going away you are, you that I knew through all my lifetime, and leaving me among strangers?' The first old man asks his sister if she will bring him too. She is indignant, says she won't. First old man says maybe he'd be foolish to go at all. How does he know if he'd like it. She says, he is to please himself; if he doesn't come, she can easily get a husband, having, as she has, a nice way of living, and three lambs going to the next market. The first man says, well, he won't go; if she would bring the other old man, he would go. She turns her back angrily. Paupers in other beds call out she'll find a good husband amongst them. She pulls on her shawl scornfully to go away. She gives her brother one more chance; he says he won't go. She says good-bye and bad luck to him. She leaves. He says that man beyond would be lonesome with no one to contradict him. The other man says he would not. The first man says, 'You want some one to be arguing with you always.' The second man, 'I do not.' The first man says, 'You are at your lies again.' The second takes up his pillow to heave at him again. Curtain falls on two men arming themselves with pillows."

Our Irish theatre; a chapter of autobiography (1913)

Author : Gregory, Lady, 1852-1932

Subject : Theater

Publisher : New York, London, G.P. Putnam's Sons

Year : 1913

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : Harvard University

Collection: americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/ouririshtheatre00greggoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

June 9 2010

Source: Johnson, J.W. (1912) *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* Boston, Massachusetts: Sherman, French, and Co.

Readability: Flesch-Kincaid Level: 9.0. In a previous chapter I spoke of social life among colored people; so there is no need to take it up again here. But there is one thing I did not mention: among Negroes themselves there is the peculiar inconsistency of a color question. Its existence is rarely admitted and hardly ever mentioned; it may not be too strong a statement to say that the greater portion of the race is unconscious of its influence; yet this influence, though silent, is constant. *The Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* Community Note includes chapter-by-chapter summary and analysis, character list, theme list, historical context, author biography and quizzes written by community members like you. Written by British author Matt Ridley and published in 1999, *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters*, or, *Genome* for short, is a popular science publication. The book has 23 chapters because of the 22 human chromosomes as well as an additional chapter for extra explanation. Each chapter of the book focuses on a particular part of human nature, such as life, death, and free will.