

## Writings of Padraic Pearse

(By L. Ua GALLCHOBHUAIR, O.I., in the *Irish Monthly*.)

It is one thing to write for children, quite another to write of them. Profound learning and special aptitudes are in no wise necessary to the writing of stories to amuse little ones, but genius begotten of love is necessary to portray faithfully and graphically the sayings and doings of children. It is of this genius Patrick Pearse—the genius for the sympathetic portrayal of child life—that I wish to treat in this article.

I have said that the genius for reproducing faithfully the actions of children is the outcome of a love for them, consequently I must prove that Pearse loved children before I proceed to illustrate his method of picturing for his readers the various trials, sorrows, and joys of childhood, the miniature dramas enacted before the curtain of life is rung up.

A poet's works are, as it were, a mirror which reflects his thoughts, his emotions, his affections. His inner self stands before us as we read in a far truer and clearer light than that inner self was known to even his most intimate associates. We see the man in his works and the sight changes our whole estimate of his character. Never, perhaps, were these remarks more true than in regard to the author we are considering, and in no portion of his works are these remarks better exemplified than in the works he has devoted to his relations with children. Here he gives us an insight into his very soul, even that we may see the emotions and thoughts and reflections aroused within him when he comes in contact with them:

"Raise your comely head  
Till I kiss your mouth;  
If either of us is the better for that  
I am the better for it.

"He who has my secrets  
Is not fit to touch you,  
Is not that a pitiful thing,  
Little lad of the tricks?"

In these two stanzas we may read the principle underlying his affection for children. Children are pure; children are holy; and "He who has my secrets is not fit to touch you." The child's soul is unsullied, and untainted does it carry its treasure of grace, so Pearse stoops with reverence to kiss that ark and murmurs: "If either of us is the better for that I am the better for it."

This thought of the spiritual beauty of children changes his whole outlook in life. Riches, fame, honors all are found wanting under this new measure:

"I have not garnered gold.  
The fame that I found that perished:  
In love I got but grief  
That withered my life.

"Of riches or of store  
I shall not leave behind me;  
(Yet I deem it, O Lord, sufficient)  
But my name in the heart of a child."

Just one more illustration of his relations with children before we proceed to examine his treatment of child-life. The picture is a beautiful one. He is playing with a little child—perhaps hide-and-seek—the little one is hiding and according to correct procedure he searches everywhere save where he knows her to be. He gives up in despair and calls out that he cannot find her, and then—oh! we all know the sequel—sudden jump from the hiding place, head thrown back, hair flying loose, cheeks flushed with victory and then the clear, thrilling, joyous laugh. We knew it all. Pearse knew it. He was rewarded with the laugh. He saw the intense and real joy on the child's face.

He is happy; and then, very poet-like, he asks himself: "Oh! why cannot this little one's happiness last forever?" He looks into the future. He sees the happy life clouded with sorrow; he sees the laughing mouth twitching in pain; he sees the sparkling eyes welling up in tears; and he breaks out into the lamentation which is perhaps the most beautiful of his works:

"Laughing mouth, what tortures me is  
That thou shalt be weeping;  
Lovely face, it is my pity  
That thy brightness shall grow grey.  
Noble head, thou art proud,  
But thou shalt bow in sorrow;  
And it is a pitiful thing I forbode for thee  
Whenever I kiss thee."

If genius for the portrayal of child-life is the outcome of love for children we must expect that Patrick Pearse is possessed of that genius in an eminent degree. Our expectations will not prove false.

The aspects of child-life of which he treats are many and various, and from each picture shines forth the peculiarly characteristic feature of the subject he is endeavoring to portray. Whether we wander in the woods with Iollann Beag, or wait with Brideen the mother's home-

coming with the mysterious present, or endeavor to say Mass out of a Second Reader with Patrick, or listen to the twittering of the swallows whispering their wonderful message to that strange little mystic Eoghneen na n-Ean, we find everywhere the correct atmosphere, while word and gesture chosen with exquisite skill transport us in thought from beside the fire and place us among the children and their playthings. We are taken out of ourselves. We go back to the days of our own happy childhood. We experience again for a little while the joys, the simple joys, of children, and we thank God that a Pearse lived.

The first character I would take up for examination is that of Iollann Beag in "The Master." Ciaran, "The Master," has been abroad, and has been converted to Christianity. He returns to Ireland and, hiding himself in the woods, opens a school for boys. Iollann Beag is the youngest of his pupils and his pet. The introduction of Iollann is characteristic of the child. He is heard coming down the woodland path singing, as it turns out later, a little rann which he has composed himself. He is late, and Ciaran asks him the reason. Of course he has been tree-climbing. He has been up to the top of an oak he has not climbed before and (this with a touch of pride) has swung himself from one tree to another.

We begin to suspect here that Iollann has not over-much respect for Ciaran, neither does he seem to be imbued with that wholesome fear which is a usual characteristic of pupils towards their masters. We begin, in short, to rash-judge Iollann who replies by promptly cutting the ground from under our feet and leaving us blushing shamefacedly by saying with child-like earnestness, fearing that he has hurt Ciaran: "I'm sorry, Master." He is a lovable little fellow is Iollann, and stands up for his friends and for his friends' rights even when such friends happen to be in the enviable condition of sainthood.

Ciaran, "The Master," has asked the boys to name for him Jesus' friends. All goes well until—

Art: "There was Peter who—"

Iollann: "Aye! Good Peter of the sword!"

Ciaran: "Nay, Iollann! It is Paul has a sword."

Iollann: "Peter should have his sword, too. I will not have him cheated of his sword. It was a good blow he struck."

Brendan: "Yet the Lord rebuked him for it."

Iollann: "The Lord did wrong to rebuke him. He was always down on Peter."

Ciaran: "Peter was fiery and the Lord was very gentle."

Iollann: "But when He wanted a rock to build His Church He had to go to Peter. No John of the Bosom then, but the good old swordsman. Paul must yield his sword to Peter. I do not like that Paul."

Surely a formidable champion, and yet we can trace distinctly the workings of the childish mind running through the speech, especially if we notice that Iollann pays no heed to Ciaran's last remark, and continues his line of thought unbroken.

Iollann's little song illustrates how Pearse was able to give expression to a child's thought in a child's language. The adaptation of the subject to Iollann's own environment is a peculiarly true and happy touch. The poem is called the "Rann of the Little Playmate," and Iollann puts the words into the mouth of John the Baptist:

"Young Iosa plays with me every day

(With an oro and an iaro);

Tig and Pookeen and Hide in the Hay

(With an oro and an iaro).

We race in the river with otters grey;

We climb the tall trees where red squirrels play;

We watch the wee lady-bird fly far away

(With an oro and an iaro and an umbo ero)."

The four stories, "Bairbre," "The Priest," "The Thief" and "Eoghneen of the Birds," treat simply of the adventures and the every day doings of children. For this reason the child characters which appear in them are given a wider and more minute development than was possible in the case of Iollann Beag. In these stories, too, does Pearse show his genius to more advantage. Here is no artificial setting. The homes, the cabins, the wilds of Connacht form the naturally beautiful background against which his characters stand out clearly, and in such settings is the portrayal of his children truly life-like.

The adventures are in no wise strange. They happen in the lives of most children, and always with much the same effect—and yet there is a strange fascinating power lurking in these sketches as if an unseen hand had drawn aside the veil and had enabled memory to return to gather sweets and treasures too long looked upon as lumber, as if some power allowed us to retrace our steps in life and pluck, even in manhood, the lost flowers of childhood's joys.

I have never had a doll, but I have sisters, and can appreciate the minute perfection of Pearse's Brideen on the occasion of being presented with that much-coveted and much-loved companion of our sisters' childhood. Pearse must have witnessed a scene kindred to that in which Brideen's mother presents her with the doll, for I defy any "grown-up" to invent such a heartfelt outburst of joy as comes from the little girl when she receives the gift.

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