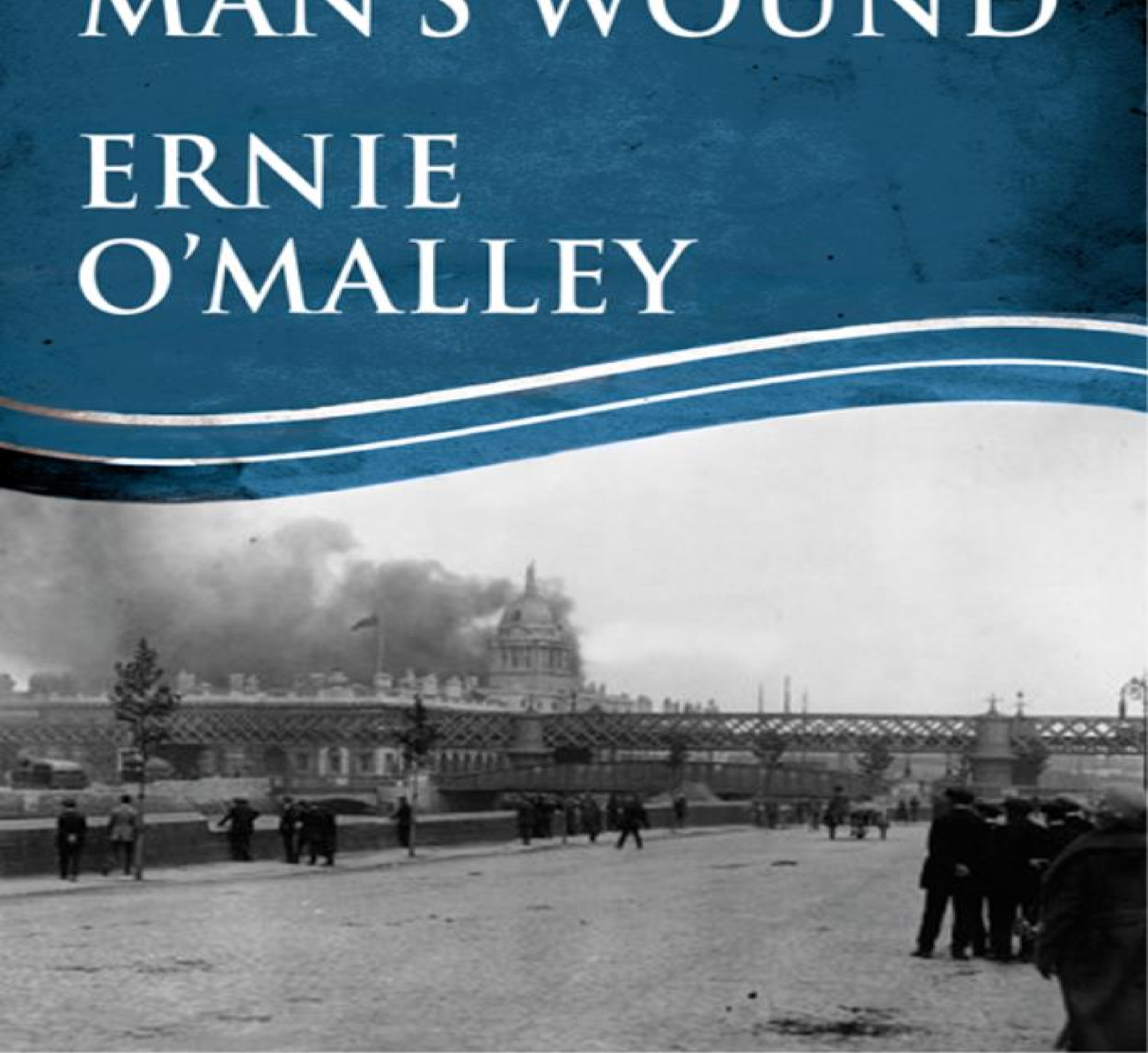
ON ANOTHER MAN'S WOUND

ERNIE O'MALLEY



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PREFACE

MY FATHER ERNIE O'Malley (1887–1957) was a medical student in Dublin when the Easter Rising of 1916 broke out. The country and O'Malley were initially indifferent, but as he watched the progress of the uprising, O'Malley's feelings changed. He soon joined the Irish Volunteers (later to become the Irish Republican Army) and organised or reorganised companies, battalions, brigades and flying columns around Ireland, reporting directly to Michael Collins, Director of Organisation, and to Richard Mulcahy, the Assistant Chief of Staff. His organising ability and outstanding personal courage led to his appointment as officer commanding the Second Southern Division, the second largest division of the IRA.

At the end of the war against the British, O'Malley was twenty-four. In appearance he was remembered as a long-striding young man, tall and thin, with lean features and a steady unflinching gaze, very noticeable red hair and a pale complexion.

The Treaty with Britain was signed on 6 December 1921. Diehard Republicans like O'Malley would not accept it. It was his own Second Southern which first broke away from the authority of both GHQ and Dáil Éireann. In April 1922 came the occupation of the Four Courts as IRA headquarters in Dublin and in June the start of the Civil War, a fight even more savage than that against the British. O'Malley became the IRA Assistant Chief of Staff and also the officer commanding Ulster and Leinster. In November 1922, riddled with bullets in a raid, he was captured and imprisoned until July 1924, the last Republican leader to be released.

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This current volume is the first Mercier Press edition of *On Another Man's Wound* and in my revision I have for the first time been able to examine my father's original notebooks, manuscripts and typescripts, and accordingly I have made some minor adjustments to the text and added some explanations in my footnotes. I must thank Dr Spurgeon Thompson for his assistance in reviewing this edition with me.

The story of how the 2002 revised edition came about is a tale worth telling. The background lies in the original writings and publications of my father. He was released from the Curragh, an Irish Free State military prison camp, in July 1924. During his travels in New York, New Mexico, Mexico and Peru in the years 1928–1934, he wrote an account of his War of Independence and Civil War, an initial draft of thirty-nine chapters. He returned to Ireland in 1935 and the following year Rich & Cowan of London published the first twenty-two chapters under the title *On Another Man's Wound.* The remaining chapters, covering the Truce, Treaty and Civil War, lay undiscovered until 1972 – these were published by Anvil Books as *The Singing Flame in 1978.*

An American edition of *On Another Man's Wound* was published by Houghton Mifflin of Boston in 1937, but for marketing reasons the title was changed to *Army without Banners: Adventures of an Irish Volunteer.* It received impressive reviews. The *New York Times* called it 'a stirring and beautiful account of a deeply felt experience'; the *New York Herald Tribune* hailed it as 'a tale of heroic adventure told without rancour or rhetoric'. The American edition included seven pages which had been deleted by Rich & Cowan as they recounted the torture of my father in Dublin Castle, when Auxiliary officers had used their persuasive tactics, including fists, a red-hot poker and a revolver with blanks, to try to make him disclose information.

The next chapter in the story occurred when Mary O'Donnell, the Irish dress designer, gave me an unforgettable present. She had asked Hanna's Bookshop in Dublin to locate a copy of *On Another Man's Wound*. It had been republished by Anvil Books in 1979, but was temporarily out of print. Shortly afterwards an assistant from Hanna's called her to ask if a copy of the American edition, *Army without Banners*, would do. She bought it and discovered inside an inscription written by my father – 'With love to my Cormac'. She immediately sent me a telegram to New York.

What a thrill it was for me to receive this inscribed book, which had probably been unintentionally included in a book auction by my father. The fascinating thing about this particular copy was not the dedication, but the annotations made throughout. Father had used the American edition because he wanted to make an important addition to the section that had been deleted by Rich & Cowan: the names of the Auxiliary officers involved in his 1920 Dublin Castle interrogation. He also corrected certain facts, added names and expanded descriptions. One of the additions was a comment about Michael Collins: 'We who had given up drink had always a soft spot for Michael’s use of drink.’ Another note disclosed that in January 1921 a Dublin Castle official had tried to track down his older brother, Lt Frank Malley, then serving in the King’s African Rifles in Nyasaland, East Africa; the official thought that Frank ‘could tell us something about Ernest’; in fact, unbeknownst to the writer of that letter, the ‘notorious rebel and officer of the IRA, who has been concerned in many attacks’ was actually incarcerated in Dublin Castle at that very moment under the alias Bernard Stewart.

All his corrections and additions have been included in this new edition of *On Another Man’s Wound*. Though my father expressly stated in his foreword that he was not interested in dates, I have included a brief chronology for those not familiar with the period.

I should also note that the Nannie to whom my father refers, was Mary Anne Jordan, who lived with his parents, Luke and Marion. His family name was Malley, not O’Malley. The Malley family lived on Ellison Street, the main street of Castlebar, County Mayo. Their four older children were Francis (Frank), Ernest (Ernie), Marion (Sweetie) and Albert (Bertie). The next four children were Cecil, Charlie, Paddy and Kevin; these four followed Ernie’s inclinations and joined Na Fianna, and later became involved in IRA activities to different degrees.

***

I want to offer particular thanks to five people who over the years have helped to preserve the records of Father’s life, each in their different way: Frances Mary Blake in the early

1970s; Padraic O'Farrell and his short The Ernie O'Malley Story (1983); Dan Nolan and Rena Dardis of Anvil Books, who kept O'Malley's name alive with the first publication of The Singing Flame and the republication of On Another Man's Wound; and Dr Richard English for his Ernie O'Malley: IRA Intellectual (OUP 1998). Without them, and particularly Richard, who spent the best part of ten years wrestling with the O'Malley enigma, we would not now have as clear a picture of my father, who was, as he said himself, 'a sheltered individual drawn from the secure seclusion of Irish life to the responsibility of action'.

Cormac K. H. O'Malley

New York, July 2012

ABBREVIATIONS

CS Chief of Staff
DI Director of Intelligence, IRA
GPO General Post Office
IRA Irish Republican Army
IRB Irish Republican Brotherhood
NCO Noncommissioned Officer
OTC Officers’ Training Corps
RIC Royal Irish Constabulary

An outline of reasons for the use of certain capital letters may be useful. Please note that when East Tipperary, for instance, is capitalised, this refers to the East Tipperary Brigade (IRA) and not to the geographical location, which would be given as east Tipperary. The same applies for the other brigades and areas.

When specified, the higher IRA military ranks and formations are given capital letters, such as the Brigadier, the Divisional Adjutant/Quartermaster and the First Southern Division, but battalions, companies, sections and garrisons, together with their officers, have not usually been capitalised.

A distinction has been made between Headquarters and headquarters, between Staff and staff. While headquarters refers to any localised site, Headquarters always means the GHQ centre of operations. Thus, whereas there is a garrison staff, or staff officers, meaning officers in general attached to those positions, the term Headquarters Staff, or Staff, is used only for the top-ranking members of GHQ.

INTRODUCTION

THIS BOOK IS an attempt to show the background of the struggle from 1916 to 1921 between an empire and an unarmed people. The Irish situation is complicated by reason of conquest beginning at the close of the twelfth century, and by successive reconquests never fully completed. The outcome of these successive attempts was the wearing down of a people who refused to surrender or submit, a withdrawal of their life apart from that of the conquerors and the gradual destruction of their civilisation. The tradition of nationality, which meant not only the urge of the people to possess the soil and its products, but the free development of spiritual, cultural and imaginative qualities of the race, had been maintained towards the end of our struggle not by the intellectuals but by the people, who were themselves the guardians of the remnants of culture.

To show the complicated situations and race memories, I have touched on childhood and boyhood as seen twenty or more years later, then necessarily vague, ill-defined and romantic. A certain amount of our background seems necessary to explain our disturbance by certain flaring of outside events.

My attitude towards the fight is that of a sheltered individual drawn from the secure seclusion of Irish life to the responsibility of action. It is essentially a narrative set against the background of the lives of the people. The tempo of the struggle was intermittent, life went on as usual in the middle of tragedy, and we were intimately related to this life of our people. The people’s effort can be seen only by knowing something of their lives and their relationship to our underground government and armed resistance. We who fought effected a small part of the total energy induced and our individual effort as personalities was subordinated to the impersonality of the movement, and not inspired by it.

The relationship of events is traced as the situation developed. I have endeavoured to explain action as I then saw it and, as far as was possible, to avoid all retrospective realisation of the implications of events. As the survey is seen through my eyes I had to show my own progression in development. Each of the three divisions of the book – Flamboyant, Gothic, Romanesque – deals with a certain phase of events and with my changing relation to them.

This is not a history. Dates I considered unimportant. Our people seized imaginatively on certain events, exalted them through their own folk quality of expression in song and story. Anonymous songs of the period, at the end of some chapters, express what the people thought, and amplify, in so far as they are concerned, the situations described. From time to time a summarisation of events is used to relate the general development of the situation to the particular.

E. O’M.
1931–34
New Mexico, Mexico, Peru

FLAMBOYANT

Luke Malley, Ernie O'Malley's father, 1936.

Marion Malley, Ernie O'Malley's mother, 1896.

Frank Malley, Ernie O'Malley's brother, 1920.

1.

1897–1906

MAYO

OUR NURSE, NANNIE, told my eldest brother and me stories and legends. Her stories began: ‘Once upon a time and a very good time it was,’ and ended with, ‘They put on the kettle and made tay, and if they weren’t happy that you may.’ Tales of the king of Ireland’s son, his strange adventures and exploits; fairy tales about the ‘good people’; the story of the heavy-handed, mighty Fionn and his giant strength; the epic of Cúchulainn, the boy hero, the Hound of Ulster – Cúchulainn of the grey sword that broke every gap; of Ferdia of Connacht whose loss was our loss, for was he not from Erris in our County Mayo. That was the best of all her stories.

She sang us songs and ballads of the people and of the land:

’Tis often I sat on my true love’s knee
And many a fond story he told me.
He told me things that ne’er should be,
Go dtéigh tú, a mhúirnín slán.

I’ll sell my rock, I’ll sell my reel,
When flax is spun I’ll sell my wheel,

To buy my love a sword of steel,
Go dtéigh tú, a mhúirnín slán.

Oh the French are on the say,
Says the Shan Van Vocht,
The French are on the say,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

Oh the French are in the bay
They'll be here without delay
And the Orange will decay,
Says the Shan Van Vocht.

I know where I'm going
I know who's going with me,
I know who I'll love
But the dear knows who I'll marry.

A Bansha Peeler went one night
On duty an' patrollin' O,
An' met a goat upon the road
An' took her for a stroller O.
With bay'net fixed he sallied forth,
An' caught her by the wizzen O,
An' then he swore a mighty oath,
'I'll send ye off to prison O'.

But this last, 'The Peeler and the Goat', in a quieter tone and when we were alone.

In low and often stilly tones she told and retold ghost stories that afterwards made us keep our heads under the blankets. In the demesne, which belonged to Lord Lucan, we looked for green-coated leprechauns under the trees, listened for the ting-ting of their silver hammers, and watched for the fairy dancing rings in the glades. Often on the path close to the chestnut trees we met old Lord Lucan on his tricycle. Although we felt inclined to laugh at his machine, which we thought of as a child’s toy, and his straight-backed, slow, crab-like approach, we answered his few remarks with serious faces. Nannie took our part against our parents, defended us and often accepted the blame for our small faults, which in a home atmosphere could grow to gigantic proportions.

Life at first seemed to be a mixture of admonitions, curly hair and velvet suits, probably due to a wave of little Lord Fauntleroys. Governesses replaced each other rapidly; we had not much sympathy with that anaemic form of spinsterhood. With the servants we spent many happy hours talking or listening; from them we confirmed or changed our ideas of people. By exchanging gossip with the girls in other houses they could view family life in unexpected and unwished for ways. They knew our visitors and guests well, especially if they had been a long time in the family. Then they could advise, quarrel, threaten to leave and often domineer; but, except Nannie, they were in a rank of servitude and looked upon as a third sex. We listened to the stories of the butter-woman, watched her unroll her ridged pats and bulky ovoids from a muslin wrap, and gathered near her when she drank her big mugs of tea.

We were not allowed to go with other children; few were ‘good enough’ for us. We could not accept the distinctions of our elders. We divided people into those who were courteous and those who were distinguished according to our views. Many with whom we were not supposed to mix passed our tests, others whom we met in the house or in the streets did not. Our chief admiration was for a boy who could use stilts and a tomboy who could walk on her hands. The most interesting of all our illicit acquaintances was a beggar woman, who was double-jointed, and the town crier, who gave extra dongs of his bell when he stopped to speak. With envy we watched boys and tomboy girls at horseplay, listened to their shouts; watched the men who cemented the outside of the house as they slithered with spades at delicious puddles.

The Royal Irish Constabulary had a barracks opposite us. They touched their caps to Father. We often climbed the steps and were shown spruce weapons: carbines clipped in arms racks, blue-black revolvers, the steel of bayonets, and heavy-padded helmets. The head constable would talk to us in a chesty voice, a sergeant with thick gold Vs brought us through the rooms. Once we saw police, no longer in bottle-green, stiff-collared tunics, but like ordinary people, wearing soft caps and cloth suits. They were going to the north on special duty to keep the peace at the Twelfth of July celebrations, when the Orangemen with song, bands, banners, and fists blooded from thudding their drums, remembered the victory of William of the Boyne. Mary Anne, our Nannie, did not like to see us talking to the police – they were peelers, she said.

Ours was a shoneen town, as I knew it. A shoneen, little John Bull, was anyone who aped the manners and fashions of the English as interpreted through the Anglicised Irish; who adapted his mentality, or lack of it, to theirs; who despised and, actively or passively, ignored the remnant of the older Gaelic civilisation of the people. Father and Mother never spoke of Ireland to us. If one minded one’s business there was time for little else. Nationality did not exist to disturb or worry normal life. We heard long discussions at table about names – Parnell, Redmond, Tim Healy – and the words Home Rule. There was a general parliamentary election which was of interest to us; every day we could look at the opposing parties, who were presented in the newspapers as men climbing long ladders. Englishmen thought of nothing but their bellies; that seemed generally agreed on. But when I was called Ó Máille, our name in Irish, I was insulted. That was not my name; only the poor used it. I would have none of it.

At the concerts in the Mall, given by a band from the garrison, most of the onlookers took off their hats when ‘God Save the King’ was played. We saw the militia stamping by on the way to a summer camp and heard the ring of their nailed boots. Aided by the delightful remarks of shawled neighbours – ‘Whisha, look at the boyo, Kateen, Glory be to God, will ye look at Tinker Durcan.’ – we picked out some of the town drunks noising past, clean-shaven, in khaki. The minister invited us to cinematograph shows in his house; all Protestants were respectable and rich. Priests came to us for dinner. They were hearty men who drank their whiskeys and sodas with Father or sat at the fire sipping at sweet-smelling punch; but why did they screw up their faces after a long drink if it was not pleasant? One of them always called the ‘pope’s nose’ on a bird ‘the ecclesiastical part’; that meant a laugh at table. At Westport, where we had driven to Mass from the sea, a temperance preacher asked us all to stand up to take the pledge against drink for a year. We were in the gallery. Father alone kept his seat, though Mother whispered, ‘Stand up, dear; don’t make a show of yourself.’ Later he lashed the cowards who, next day, would drink as usual.

The priest would read out the dues from the altar. He blew his nose like a cracked trumpet. I often tried it and I knew how it hurt. It would be fine to make a noise like that. He would pause for a long time after some names, or cough in a threatening way. He would repeat a name, as if by accident: ‘Patrick Joe Grimes, two shillings … Patrick Joe Grimes.’ Nannie said priests would stick you to the ground if you went against them, or put horns on you, God save the mark.

At Mass on Sundays, from the centre of the chapel we could look across the partition to the right and left, to the penny and tuppenny places where there were low stool seats or bare ground to kneel on. We sat on high-backed, varnished pews; country women knelt on bare knees. One man, at the Elevation, always hit his stomach three resounding smacks. I heard father say to a friend that he was ‘a regular craw-thumper’. At funerals I heard women wailing and saw them beating their long, wild-strewn hair as they climbed the hill in the foot-gatherings. People lifted their hats, blinds were drawn, shops would put up a shutter. It was a good thing, when the procession passed, to turn and walk three steps after the corpse. In the town a box of clay pipes and tobacco or snuff might be left outside the chapel door whilst the corpse was lying inside.

On market days we could sense the roughness of country people. Awkward men drinking pints of frothy porter, using wiry ash plants on each other in daylight, or being dragged and sometimes carried to the barracks by police. Bullocks beaten through the streets, the shrill complaining of pigs, a steady waft of speech and smells of cow-dung and fresh horse droppings. Shawled, barefooted women selling eggs and yellow, strong, salty butter in plaited osier baskets, salty dilisk in trays, or minding bonnovs with a *súgán*. A ballad singer with an old song or one of a recent happening, stressing his syllables, rushing a long line into a short singing space whilst the people gathered in a circle, following the words eagerly. They bought his broadsheets and hummed the notes as they walked around. Old women with pleated frills to their white caps, the more wealthy with black bonnets shaking from a spangle of flat beads; boys in corduroy trousers and bare feet; rosy girls in tight-laced boots, which some had put on at the entrance to the town. Through all, talk, laughter, hot-blooded sudden blows, a sense of the bare breath of Mayo, backed by rounded mountains and sea, frayed lake-edges and the straight reach of Nephin mountain.

Nannie could tell fortunes with tea-leaves: ‘In the space of three you’ll get a letter you won’t expect … there’s a red-haired man has a great wish for you.’ She looked at the sky last thing at night to find out the direction of the wind and the chances of rain. The sun-wise turn was important; we should pass the salt that way, or whatever was wanted at table. A Connachtman had leave to speak twice and to poke the fire, she said. Thunder was God’s voice in anger, lightning, earthquake or tidal wave punishments visited on the evil. We were afraid of the dark through stories of walking death, black dogs whose eyes were yellow fistfuls of fire, and the *cóiste bodhar*, the terrible death coach. A ringing noise in the ear meant a friend dead and shooting stars were souls released from purgatory.

The gentleness and kindness of the people were all around us as children, shielding and expanding, offset by steady supervision of parents, nuns, priests and teachers. One had to be courteous to understand or feel with the people; on the surface they were pleasant to each other, though I thought their deference to those who were wealthier and had more social standing to be put on. We would see their smouldering wild fierceness also. Nannie would speak of mountainy men and show them to us at a fair; somehow they were different. Whether she came from the hills I do not know, but ever since a mountainy man, or the name itself, heightens something in me.

At school, where soldiers’ sons from the garrison attended, we pronounced ‘a’ as ‘ah’ and not as ‘ae’, as they did. Somehow for us ‘ah’ represented the difference between the two nationalities. We were taught a little Irish, the Our Father, the Hail Mary and a few salutations. The few words of Irish in common use were vulgar: gob, pus; but endearing terms *a ghrádh, a chuisle, a mhic, a stóir*, and pulse of my heart were used naturally as well as the diminutive ‘een’: Noreen, calfeen. The speech of the country people and of some of the townsfolk was rude: tay, mate, afeard, decave, faut, twiced; Tudor words once respectable. Adjectival richness, Irish construction in English, use of Irish in an English sentence, the marked rhythm of voice, were fit only for the uneducated. We saw donkeys and jennets carrying creels of turf to sell from house to house and watched asses and carts loaded with bog-dale.

The history of our town became loosely threaded together in our minds: Dudley Costello of the early seventeenth century lingered on. As a rapparee he had fought the Planters from Mayo to Tyrone until his head rounded a spike on the gateway of Dublin Castle … Outside a hotel on the Mall was the tree from which Father Conroy had been hanged in 1798. He had taken a dispatch from a messenger riding hard to the redcoats, roused his parish to gather supplies for the French, but he had not fought … Sheriff Brown in that Year of the French had made many a boy and man dangle from the trees on the edge of the Mall … Stoball, a hill in the town said to be connected with an order ‘Stab all’ … French Hill, where the Frenchmen who had landed at Killala fought and died chasing the English who had bolted to Athlone on the Shannon … Fighting FitzGerald, whose house we often passed, had been hanged on a cart; the rope had broken. ‘The British Government can’t even buy a decent rope to hang me with,’ he had said. We watched the judge at the Assizes clothed in scarlet and ermine. He sat erect in his carriage, guarded by cavalry with drawn swords. The escort was a result of the land war; their white spotless bridles had a metal core in memory of the slashing pikes of the ’98 rebels.

We hurried home once to tell our tense rage. We had heard the story of Deirdre and the sons of Usnagh; we were angry against Conchubar, the king who had killed the three brothers and had broken his word.

On Clew Bay, where we went each summer, we learned to row punts and boats, to blister our hands sitting side by side tugging at the one long sweep with the fishermen. They carved small boats for us, models of schooners, frigates, ships, full-rigged boats in glass bottles. We learned to work a lugsail and to manage centre keels; we knew the names of sails and shipping terms, to the delight of our sailor-teachers. We sailed on the stout-nosed fishing smacks of the bay, where there are few traditions. Further out, beyond the bar, was rough sea, and the storytellers of Achill and Clare Island. Near the steep swarthy cliffs of Achill, men shot the seals that gluttoned on fish; fishing in a chopping sea we helped to pull in leaping lines and watched gleaming blue-green mackerel and scaly silvery herrings fighting death with curved bodies. We took lobsters from floating lobster pots and watched shells being gathered in oysterbeds. Clare Island was an adventure even on what would be called a calm day; the open sea lashed the cliffs that faced towards Dooega Head and the rising slate blue of Croaghaun of Achill. It lashed the people who lived there. To us the island meant stories of Gráinne Ní Mháille, who had refused a title from Queen Elizabeth – ‘Were they not both princesses?’ – a strong-minded Connacht woman who worried her husbands, flaunted Elizabeth’s governors and, as a pirate, robbed Spanish and English ships. A cable led from her bedroom in one of her castles to a galley below; she did not leave much

April 1918 - Conscription for Ireland proposed.

11 Nov. 1918 - The Great War ends.

Dec.1918 - General election. Sinn Féin wins 73 of Ireland’s 105 seats.

21 Jan. 1919 - Dáil Éireann meets for the first time.

Soloheadbeg ambush, considered to be the first action in the War of Independence.

Jan. 1920 - First Black and Tans arrive in Ireland.

July 1920 - First Auxiliaries arrive in Ireland.

Dec. 1920 - The Act for the Better Government of Ireland creates the state of Northern Ireland.

11 July 1921 - Truce in the War of Independence declared.

6 Dec. 1921 - Anglo-Irish Treaty signed in London.

7 Jan. 1922 - Anglo-Irish Treaty ratified by Dáil Éireann.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ernie O'Malley was born in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, in 1897 and was prominent in the Irish War of Independence and the Irish Civil War. He was for a time editor of The Bell, and was a close friend and supporter of Jack B. Yeats. Ernie O'Malley was given a State funeral with full military honors when he died in Dublin in March 1957.

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ABOUT THE PUBLISHER

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