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RAFTERY'S "SONG OF THE WHITEBOYS

By SEAN MAC GIOLLANATHA

THE "Song of the Whiteboys," two imperfect versions of which have been published by Dr. Hyde, is found in more complete form in "Amhrain Chlainne Gaedheal." It would be more correct to call it "The Song of the Ribbonmen," for the Whiteboys had been succeeded by *Lucht Ribini* at the time of its composition. The Ribbonmen are frequently referred to by name in the song, while the word "Whiteboys" occurs only in the title.

Raftery died in the late thirties of the last century. The descendants of the people among whom he lived and wandered in east and south Galway have vivid memories of Raftery himself, and of the troubles and evils that made the existence of Ribbonmen an absolute necessity. There still exist houses in which Raftery slept, in which he drank with someone's father or grandfather, or in which he played the fiddle. The people point to such places with pride. They remember also that whole villages once stood where the "white fields," as they are called in Irish, now meet the eye. They will tell of Garrymore, which was destroyed in a single day. It contained sixty houses, and the same number of families. The landlord's house still stands. It was besieged at night by the dispossessed. They had no firearms, but a strong man burst in the hall door. Then slaughter commenced, for Captain Davis, the landlord, was well armed and he did not hesitate to shoot. Writers too often tell us only of the unpleasant methods of the Ribbonmen, but Raftery's verses show that the people's hopes were centred in the secret organisation, and that it seemed then to be their only means of succour. This war song which he made for the Ribbonmen does not approach his best efforts, but it possesses fine vigour, and it betrays a national aim or ideal not frequently found in late vagrant poetry. There is a lashing together of all the passions of the time—passions that had their cause in evils such as tithes, eviction, religious persecution—and a linking up of these passions with the national ambition to clear Ireland of the Gaill. He urges a timely and bold uprising. There must be no cowardice or shirking, for fame and freedom are at stake. The appeal is made to the Ribbonmen in the most familiar word and phrase of their own tongue. It is no selfish appeal, although the lines in which the fate decreed for local tyrants is indicated, have the very savagery of war. The line—

A gceann i mbarr spile in airde

is more graphic than any line I can remember either in English or Irish. Taxes and tithes must cease. Land must be let at its value. The Gael will raise his head and the Orangemen will growl beneath the new regime. In the midst of this passionate appeal to the Ribbonmen to be men, to face the multiplicity of terrors and tortures that threaten to destroy them, Raftery pauses and reflects for an instant. Through the smoke of the burning cabins, as it were, he sees Ireland. He, too, is a Gael with as good a right to bear arms for Ireland as any. He is not the poet of a creed or of a faction by choice. He wants also to sing for that woman whose face peers through the smoke of the clearings. She is not forgotten. If ever equality come and he be enfranchised and given the right to bear arms, then

Beidh mo shleagh ar mo thaobh is mo chlaidheamh liom síos
Is me ag ruagadh na nGall as Éirinn.

AMHRÁN NA MBUAICÉILÍ BÁN.

I.

Eirigh riar ip na failligh an uair
Tá ceachtain anoir iní an láthair,
So ríaoileam na buail atá físte go cruair
Ip go laram an coinneall do mártan;
Seairt le clú ip ná téigh ar gcúl
So scríbeamúro fúinn gac gáir,
Díreac ip buail go bprádamúro go luac
Ip go leagair Mac Duac ar námaro.

II.

Cuirim imríde ar an mnaoi náir péacúis ina ríogal,
Ip m'acúingé as Rí geal na ngráir
So bpríomúro pílirí las marb rinte,
Sgarad asur ríaoilead ar gáir,
Liberty tree coir balla ran oróc'
As luét ríbiní, ip teinteada cnáma;
Daly asur Deely a bí as mionnú ar an tír,
A gceann i mbarr rípte i n-díroé.

III.

Tá ríogad an ríogal nac mbead ann éan-rí
Acc rínn a beic tír n-a céile,
Dead mo ríeas ar mo taob ip mo claidheamh liom ríor
Ip mé as ríogad na nGall ar Éirinn.
Tá Ruairc na nGall leac san ríogal san ríogal,
Asur Frank Kelly as íarair na déirce,
Parliament tairt ip na gceoil ar a gceairt,
Luét ríbiní i n-arm ip i n-éiríe.

IV.

Racair mé faoi do'n té a b'ear beo air
 Go bfuigir Rebelmen luac a pláinse
 Ir a liactairde rin oróce a caiteamair i n-ar fuirde
 Faoi fneacta faoi fioc ir faoi báirtig.
 Cior an ríog ní iocfamaro coróe',
 Ir veacmair ní beir don tráct air,
 Aet beir talam air a luac asur Clainne Gaedhal ruar
 Asur Orangemen buadarca cpháirce.

V.

Nár fagair mé b'ar coróce, mara mbeinn beo aet mí,
 Go b'fuir mé rior urong Seoirre,
 Luat an dá cphoirde nac gheirdeann na naoim
 Ir nac ngéillir do pápa na Róime.
 Leasfarr an coróim ir eirdeair an ceo
 Aet tuitte le ruim acair bliadanta;
 Beir liutar ir a comair dá muasair ra móim
 Ir Sarrana rpháirce rciailta.

VI.

Dubairt Kelly na mbuairte go gcaillfead re a d'áirce
 Nó cuirfead re cúl ar an r'géal rin,
 Ir gur i gCill Conaill a biom 'nar fuirdean ran oróce
 Asur iocfarr go fóill an réarac;
 Tiocfarr an raogal a gcuirfeair air caoi;
 Le haitinn a véanfair é a léarac;
 Beir Lewis ir a pluas ar taob Chuaic an Dáin,
 Ir an Trinnreac as eir ma léine.