

Classic Poetry Series

Douglas Hyde
- poems -

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Douglas Hyde(17 January 1860 - 12 July 1949)

Douglas Hyde (Dubhghlas de hÍde) known as An Craoibhín Aoibhinn ("The Pleasant Little Branch"), was an Irish scholar of the Irish language who served as the first President of Ireland from 1938 to 1945. He founded the Gaelic League, one of the most influential cultural organisations in Ireland at the time.

Biography

Hyde was born at Longford House in Castlerea in County Roscommon, while his mother, Elizabeth née Oldfield (1834–1886) was on a short visit there. His father, Arthur Hyde, whose family were originally from Castlehyde, Fermoy, County Cork, was Church of Ireland rector of Kilmactranny, County Sligo from 1852 to 1867, and it was here that Hyde spent his early years. Arthur Hyde and Elizabeth Oldfield married in County Roscommon in 1852 and had three other children, Arthur (1853–79 in County Leitrim), John Oldfield (1854–96 in County Dublin), and Hugh (1856) Hyde. In 1867, his father was appointed prebendary and rector of Tibohine, and the family moved to neighbouring Frenchpark, in County Roscommon. He was home schooled by his father and his aunt due to a childhood illness.

While a young man he became fascinated with hearing the old people in the locality speak the Irish language. He was influenced in particular by the gamekeeper Seamus Hart and the wife of his friend, Mrs. Connolly. He was crushed when Hart died (Douglas was 14) and his interest in the Irish language, which was the first language he began to study in any detail, and which was his own undertaking, flagged for a while. However, he visited Dublin a number of times and realised that there were groups of people, just like him, interested in Irish, a language looked down on at the time by many and seen as backward and old-fashioned.

Rejecting family pressure, that like past generations of Hydés he would follow a career in the Church, Hyde instead became an academic. He entered Trinity College, Dublin where he became fluent in French, Latin, German, Greek and Hebrew. A medallist of The College Historical Society, he was elected its President in 1931. His passion for Irish, already a language in severe decline, led him to found the Gaelic League, or in Irish, Conradh na Gaedhilge, in the hope of saving it from extinction.

Hyde married Lucy Cometina Kurtz, a German, in 1893 and had two daughters, Nuala and Úna.

Conradh na Gaedhilge

Hyde joined the Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language around 1880, and between 1879 and 1884 he published more than a hundred pieces of Irish verse under the pen name "An Craibhín Aoibhinn". The Irish language movement, initially seen as eccentric, gained a mass following throughout the island. Hyde helped establish the Gaelic Journal in 1892, and in November of the same year wrote a manifesto called The necessity for the de-anglicising the Irish nation, arguing that Ireland should follow her own traditions in language, literature and even in dress.

In 1893 he helped found the Gaelic League. It was set up to encourage the preservation Irish culture, its music, dances, and language. Many of the new generation of Irish leaders who played a central role in the fight for Irish independence in the early twentieth century, including Patrick Pearse, Éamon de Valera (who married his Irish teacher Sinéad Ní Fhlannagáin), Michael Collins, and Ernest Blythe first became politicised and passionate about Irish independence through their involvement in Conradh na Gaedhilge or (Gaelic League).

Hyde himself, however, felt uncomfortable at the growing politicisation of his movement (which had been infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood, just like the Irish Volunteers and the Gaelic Athletic Association) and resigned the presidency in 1915; he was replaced reluctantly by co-Founder Eoin MacNeill.

Senator

Hyde had no association with Sinn Féin and the Independence movement. He did, however, accept appointment to Seanad Éireann, the upper house of the Irish Free State's Oireachtas (parliament) from his friend, the President of the Executive Council W. T. Cosgrave, after the creation of the new state.

However, his tenure was short-lived. In November 1925, the house moved from being an appointed to an elected body. Hyde contested the election, which was based on one state-wide constituency, but a smear by a religious organisation, the Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, based on his supposed support for divorce (in fact he was anti-divorce) and his Protestantism, and promoted by the CTS secretary in the letters column of the Irish Independent, fatally damaged his chances and he lost his seat.

He returned to academia, as Professor of Irish at University College Dublin,

where one of his students was future Attorney-General and President of Ireland, Cearbhall Ó Dálaigh.

President of Ireland

Despite being placed in a position to shape the office of the presidency via precedent, Hyde by and large opted for a quiet, conservative interpretation of the office. His age and (after a paralysing stroke in April 1940) deteriorating health obligated him to schedule periods of rest throughout his days, and his lack of political experience caused him to defer to his advisers on questions of policy and discretionary powers, especially to his Secretary, Michael McDunphy.

Hyde, with his handlebar mustache and warm personality, was a popular president. United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt called President Hyde a "fine and scholarly old gentleman", while President Hyde and King George V corresponded about stamp collecting.

However in April 1940 he suffered a massive stroke. Plans were made for his lying-in-state and state funeral, but to the surprise of everyone he survived, albeit paralysed and having to use a wheelchair.

Although the role of President of Ireland was, and is, largely ceremonial, Hyde did have a small number of important decisions to make during his presidency. He was confronted with a crisis in 1944 when de Valera's government unexpectedly collapsed in a vote on the Transport Bill and the President had to decide whether or not to grant an election to de Valera. He granted the election.

Retirement and Death

Hyde left office on 25 June 1945, opting not to nominate himself for a second term. Due to his ill-health he did not return to his Roscommon home Ratra, which had lain empty since the death of his wife early in his term. Instead he was moved into the former Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant's residence in the grounds of Áras an Uachtaráin, which he renamed Little Ratra and where he lived out the remaining four years of his life. He died quietly at 10pm on 12 July 1949, aged 89.

A Poem To Be Said On Hearing The Birds Sing

A fragrant prayer upon the air
My child taught me,
Awaken there, the morn is fair,
The birds sing free;
Now dawns the day, awake and pray,
And bend the knee;
The Lamb who lay beneath the clay
Was slain for thee.

Douglas Hyde

Bruadar And Smith And Glinn

Bruadar and Smith and Glinn,
Amen, dear God, I pray,
May they lie low in waves of woe,
And tortures slow each day!
Amen!

Bruadar and Smith and Glinn
Helpless and cold, I pray,
Amen! I pray, O king,
To see them pine away.
Amen!

Bruadar and Smith and Glinn
May flails of sorrow flay!
Cause for lamenting, snares and cares
Be theirs by night and day!
Amen!

Blindness come down on Smith,
Palsy on Bruadar come,
Amen, O King of Brightness! Smite
Glinn in his members numb,
Amen!

Smith in the pangs of pain,
Stumbling on Bruadar's path,
King of the Elements, Oh, Amen!
Let loose on Glinn Thy Wrath.
Amen!

For Bruadar gape the grave,
Up-shovel for Smith the mould,
Amen, O King of the Sunday! Leave
Glinn in the devil's hold.
Amen!

Terrors on Bruadar rain,
And pain upon pain on Glinn,
Amen, O King of the Stars! And Smith

May the devil be linking him.
Amen!

Glinn in a shaking ague,
Cancer on Bruadar's tongue,
Amen, O King of the Heavens! and Smith
Forever stricken dumb.
Amen!

Thirst but no drink for Glinn,
Smith in a cloud of grief,
Amen! O King of the Saints; and rout
Bruadar without relief.
Amen!

Smith without child or heir,
And Bruadar bare of store,
Amen, O King of the Friday! Tear
For Glinn his black heart's core.
Amen!

Bruadar with nerveless limbs,
Hemp strangling Glinn's last breath,
Amen, O King of the World's Light!
And Smith in grips with death.
Amen!

Glinn stiffening for the tomb,
Smith wasting to decay,
Amen, O King of the Thunder's gloom,
And Bruadar sick away.
Amen!

Smith like a sieve of holes,
Bruadar with throat decay,
Amen, O king of the Orders! Glinn
A buck-show every day.
Amen!

Hell-hounds to hunt for Smith,
Glinn led to hang on high,
Amen, O King of the Judgment Day!

And Bruadar rotting by.
Amen!

Curses on Glinn, I cry,
My curse on Bruadar be,
Amen, O king of the Heavens high!
Let Smith in bondage be.
Amen!

Showers of want and blame,
Reproach, and shame of face,
Smite them all three, and smite again,
Amen, O King of Grace!
Amen!

Melt, may the three, away,
Bruadar and Smith and Glinn,
Fall in a swift and sure decay
And lose, but never win.
Amen!

May pangs pass through thee, Smith,
(Let the wind not take my prayer),
May I see before the year is out
Thy heart's blood flowing there.
Amen!

Leave Smith no place nor land,
Let Bruadar wander wide,
May the Devil stand at Glinn's right hand,
And Glinn to him be tied.
Amen!

All ill from every airt
Come down upon the three,
And blast them ere the year be out
In rout and misery.
Amen!

Glenn let misfortune bruise,
Bruadar lose blood and brains,
Amen, O Jesus! hear my voice,

Let Smith be bent in chains.
Amen!

I accuse both Glinn and Bruadar,
And Smith I accuse to God,
May a breach and a gap be upon the three,
And the Lord's avenging rod.
Amen!

Each one of the wicked three
Who raised against me their hand,
May fire from heaven come down and slay
This day their perjured band,
Amen!

May none of their race survive,
May God destroy them all,
Each curse of the psalms in the holy books
Of the prophets upon them fall.
Amen!

Blight skull, and ear, and skin,
And hearing, and voice, and sight,
Amen! before the year be out,
Blight, Son of the Virgin, blight.
Amen!

May my curses hot and red
And all I have said this day,
Strike the Black Peeler, too,
Amen, dear God, I pray!
Amen!

Douglas Hyde

Colum-Cille's Farewell To Ireland

ALAS for the voyage, O High King of Heaven,
Enjoined upon me,
For that I on the red plain of bloody Cooldrevin
Was present to see.

How happy the son is of Dima; no sorrow
For him is designed,
He is having, this hour, round his own hill in Durrow,
The wish of his mind.

The sounds of the winds in the elms, like strings of
A harp being played,
The note of a blackbird that claps with the wings of
Delight in the shade.

With him in Ros-Grencha the cattle are lowing
At earliest dawn,
On the brink of the summer the pigeons are cooing
And doves in the lawn.

Three things am I leaving behind me, the very
Most dear that I know,
Tir-Leedach I'm leaving, and Durrow and Derry;
Alas, I must go!

Yet my visit and feasting with Comgall have eased me
At Cainneach's right hand,
And all but thy government, Eiré, have pleased me,
Thou waterful land.

Douglas Hyde

I Am Raferty

I am Raferty the Poet
Full of hope and love,
With eyes that have no light,
With gentleness that has no misery.

Going west upon my pilgrimage
By the light of my heart,
Feeble and tired
To the end of my road.

Behold me now,
And my face to the wall,
A-playing music
Unto empty pockets.

Douglas Hyde

I Shall Not Die For Thee

FOR thee, I shall not die,
Woman of high fame and name;
Foolish men thou mayest slay
I and they are not the same.

Why should I expire
For the fire of an eye,
Slender waist or swan-like limb,
Is't for them that I should die?

The round breasts, the fresh skin,
Cheeks crimson, hair so long and rich;
Indeed, indeed, I shall not die,
Please God, not I, for any such.

The golden hair, the forehead thin,
The chaste mien, the gracious ease,
The rounded heel, the languid tone,—
Fools alone find death from these.

Thy sharp wit, thy perfect calm,
Thy thin palm like foam o' the sea;
Thy white neck, thy blue eye,
I shall not die for thee.

Woman, graceful as the swan,
A wise man did nurture me.
Little palm, white neck, bright eye,
I shall not die for ye.

Douglas Hyde

My Grief On The Sea

MY grief on the sea,
How the waves of it roll!
For they heave between me
And the love of my soul!

Abandon'd, forsaken,
To grief and to care,
Will the sea ever waken
Relief from despair?

My grief and my trouble!
Would he and I were,
In the province of Leinster,
Or County of Clare!

Were I and my darling--
O heart-bitter wound!--
On board of the ship
For America bound.

On a green bed of rushes
All last night I lay,
And I flung it abroad
With the heat of the day.

And my Love came behind me,
He came from the South;
His breast to my bosom,
His mouth to my mouth.

Douglas Hyde

My Love, Oh, She Is My Love

SHE casts a spell, oh, casts a spell!
Which haunts me more than I can tell.
Dearer, because she makes me ill
Than who would will to make me well.

She is my store! oh, she my store!
Whose grey eye wounded me so sore,
Who will not place in mine her palm,
Nor love, nor calm me any more.

She is my pet, oh, she my pet!
Whom I can never more forget;
Who would not lose by me one moan,
Nor stone upon my cairn would set.

She is my roon, oh, she my roon!
Who tells me nothing, leaves me soon;
Who would not lose by me one sigh,
Were death and I within one room.

She is my dear, oh, she my dear!
Who cares not whether I be here.
Who will not weep when I am dead,
But makes me shed the silent tear.

Hard my case, oh, hard my case!
For in her eye no hope I trace,
She will not hear me any more,
But I adore her silent face.

She is my choice, oh, she my choice!
Who never made me to rejoice;
Who caused my heart to ache so oft,
Who put no softness in her voice.

Great my grief, oh, great my grief!
Neglected, scorned beyond belief,
By her who looks at me askance,
By her who grants me no relief.

She's my desier, oh, my desire!
More glorious than the bright sun's fire;
Who were than wild-blown ice more cold
Were I so bold as to sit by her.

She it is who stole my heart,
And left a void and aching smart;
But if she soften not her eye,
I know that life and I must part.

Douglas Hyde

Ringleted Youth Of My Love

RINGLETED youth of my love,
With thy locks bound loosely behind thee,
You passed by the road above,
But you never came in to find me;
Where were the harm for you
If you came for a little to see me,
Your kiss is a wakening dew
Were I ever so ill or so dreamy.

If I had golden store
I would make a nice little boreen,
To lead straight up to his door,
The door of the house of my stóreen;
Hoping to God not to miss
The sound of his footfall in it,
I have waited so long for his kiss
That for days I have not slept a minute.

I thought, oh my love! you were so—
As the moon is, or the sun on a fountain,
And I thought after that you were snow,
The cold snow on the top of the mountain;
And I thought after that you were more
Like God's lamp shining to find me,
Or the bright star of knowledge before,
And the star of knowledge behind me.

You promised me high-heeled shoes,
And satin and silk, my stóreen,
And to follow me, never to lose,
Though the ocean were round us roaring;
Like a bush in a gap in a wall
I am now left lonely without thee,
And this house I grow dead of, is all
That I see around or about me.

Douglas Hyde