

EXTRACTS FROM THE MARY HAYDEN DIARIES

Written in dozens of small notebooks, the diaries span the years 1878 until 1903. Many of the notebooks were lodged by relatives and largely forgotten in the National Library of Ireland, others have only recently been discovered and the contents never before revealed until their recent publication. The diaries first reveal Mary, a sixteen year old girl of literary interests, living in Dublin's Merrion Square, her neighbours are the Wilde family.

After dinner Papa showed the Oxford prize poem for this year, it is by Mr Wilde, 2nd son of Sir W. Wilde, it is called "Ravenna" and it is not very brilliant. Some parts are good enough, however, particularly one about Byron whom he styles "perfect" which of course is'nt by any means true. (Aug 7th 1878)

By the age of nineteen she is commenting on the events of the days.

Politics are no doubt very fine in their way, but I cannot understand how any man can spend the best part of his life building up a castle that may tumble at any minute or studying the relations of parties which must change in a few years. (March 27 1881)

And later in that same year she takes her first trip to the Continent. Always honest, she tells it as she sees it!

Crowds of sailors, of various nations were moving bales and boxes or lounging about, and among them the Flemings were rendered conspicuous by their light hair and their ugliness. (7th September 1881)

Life continues in Dublin, with occurrences that sometimes seem rather odd to our modern minds.

When I came home the first news I received was that poor Minnie, the cat, was dead. She had been ill but I never supposed that she was dying: we have had her for nearly nine years. She has accompanied us every year to the country and was certainly the tamest and gentlest cat I ever saw. I felt very sorry for her. John says he will get her stuffed. (May 3rd 1882)

And so he did, the stuffed cat sitting in their house as an ornament! But more important events impinge.

About 2 o'clock John returned from his walk bringing a paper with the astounding news that the new chief Secretary Lord Frederick Cavendish and the Under Secretary Mr Burke had been assassinated last evening in the Phoenix Park about 7 o'clock, by four men, who are not yet taken. They stabbed them in the very presence of the number of people; who saw the struggle and imagined it to be a wrestling match. It certainly was the most horrible murder I ever remember having heard of. Poor Lord Frederick has only been 6 hours in Ireland. (May 7th 1882)

She goes about her life, which includes charitable endeavours common to her class. But, in Mary's case, expressing ideas not at all commonly expressed.

After breakfast I went to the bank and then home, after arranging some matters there I returned to Morrisons and went with Mrs Crean, Nelly and Alice on an outside to Drumcondra Magdalen Asylum, as this is St Magdalen's day, they feast great there, on the way we passed Mr Frank Kelly in his father's brougham. When we went into the great room where the penitents were assembled the sight was certainly impressive. There were about 100 women ranging in age from 16 to 70, a great many of the younger ones very pretty, what a sad waste of human life it was; a sin is committed and man condemns the weaker and (generally) the more ignorant of the two shares in it to shame and to a bitter (and for this world, vain) expiation while he applauds it in the

other under the euphemistic name of gallantry or at most condemns it as a "peccadillo"; it is well that there is another world to amend the judgements of this.
(Saturday July 22 1882)

She reminds us how little life has changed in a hundred and thirty years! Apart from the names of fashionable Dublin shops.

We did town all the afternoon. Saurys', Camerons', Poretts etc. If you try, it is really astonishing how much time you can waste in shopping. (April 7th 1883)

At twenty one she is already well aware of the position of women in society, and not approvingly!

How is it I wonder that most women ambition all the worries and annoyances of marriage, as if they were blessings. I'd see a man hanged before I let him get in my way, and rule me and use me like a doll to be petted when he was pleased and abused when he wasn't. (April 10th 1883)

And is expressing dangerously 'advanced' ideas!

The only kind of marriage that would be tolerable I think would be where the husband and wife both worked. (Nov 17th 1883)

Her charitable endeavours continue. (As indeed do much of the conditions in Ireland's hospitals.)

I went over to Josie and had lunch and then we went to visit the Hospital for Incurables. The matron showed us through the wards, which are divided by wooden partitions some eight or nine feet high into a number of little rooms, most of which contain two, (though a few only one) beds. They are very comfortable, provided with little tables, chairs and book shelves and hung round with pictures from news papers, mass cards etc. A few of the patients had birds and some ferns and flowers in pots. (Dec 29th 1883)

Her wealthy circumstances change, financial worries occupy much of her time.

A letter from Mr Crean putting me off as usual on the subject of the transfer with generalities and saying the dividends would not be paid till the 18th. The two things together were too much for my temper. I wrote to Uncle John and to Mr Ryan and mean to write a letter as sharp as is consistent with avoiding a quarrel to Mr C.
(Jan 7th 1884)

Lack of money, and the position of women in such circumstances, concern her.

"What shall we eat?" "What shall we drink?" "Wherin shall we be clothed?" "Whom shall we marry?" These are the four grand whats of a properly constituted feminine mind. (Jan 13th 1884)

But she struggles on. And goes to rugby matches in Dublin's Lansdowne Road.

The match was very exciting, it was my first, the men were splendidly athletic looking fellows. I recognized on the English team the youth who sang such choice songs the night of the supper at Morrisons two years ago. Towards the middle of the game an accident happened, one of the Irish men broke his leg. Immediately a crowd formed round him, splints were improvised and three doors unhinged (in different parts of the field) on one of which he was placed and carried off the ground by eight men, the door raised on their shoulders, he lying on it on his back and the crowd following gave the whole thing a resemblance to a funeral procession. (Feb 4th 1884)

She experiments with diets.

On the way Effie and I discussed on how to get thin, the only method seems to be to give up eating everything you particularly like, and to sleep very little: remedies if not as bad, very little better than the disease. (Feb 8th 1884)

Her friends get married.

The bridesmaid groups had arrived. I thought we all came out well except the two Murphies. John said that Mary looked drunk. (July 26th 1886)

She attends great Dublin parades, and is none too pleased with her fellow citizens.

I don't think that such dirty people are to be met with any where as in Ireland. An old man next me seemed as if he never had washed himself since his childhood. The trades took a long time to pass. Some of the devices on the banners looked very odd. Erin was portrayed on nearly ever one, generally as a red-faced woman with untidily draped garment and dishevelled hair (either straw-coloured or inky black) attended by a dog of uncertain breed. (Aug 3rd 1886)

Always observant, understanding, thoughtful, she watches how people live.

It was quite dark as I crossed town, it seemed as if everyone, their day's work ended, was hastening to rest and feed, that is to say the male population, for most women have no settled time for work or rest. In at the gate at T.C. young men were hurrying to Commons, through the windows of the "Phil" room I could see members folding up their news-papers preparatory to a start. Clerks, cigar in mouth, walked along arm in arm, elderly business men processed at a slower pace, they were all going to rest, amuse themselves, tomorrow the tide would set in the other direction. They would all be going to work again, and so on and on and on, from youth to age, from generation to generation, each morning the workers going out and each evening returning, working to support themselves and their successors, those who in due time will take their place – till these latter are ready to join in the battle – well surely life is "a rum go". (Oct 26th 1886)

Day after day, week after week, month after month she records her life in Dublin, her thoughts, experiences, and simple outings such as this.

The tug "Cambria" took us to the Great Eastern. I realized when I saw her in truth of what Fred Fogarty said, she does'nt so much look big herself as make every vessel look small.

She rises exceedingly high out of the water, which is due in part to her bring so empty. Within there were various amusements, rather low mostly; sand feats, a "lady boxer" who pummelled her opponents head to the huge delight of the onlookers, a lady's head without a body, not half also well done as the one I saw in Bonn, and a concert. The songs at the latter suggested Dan Lowry's, they were both vulgar and stupid, interspersed with dialogue full of venerable jokes; Bessie's face during the performance was a picture.

We returned to the Custom House Quay in the "Integrity", the dirt of which is simply disgraceful. I was home at 5o'clock for dinner and spent all the evening mending my under garments, by 12o'clock I was quite tired out and glad to go to bed.

(Oct 30th 1886)

She lives in Germany for a year or so, and has interesting experiences, and always brings her powers of analysis and observation to bear on events about her.

At tea Gustav rather surprised me by a description of the sunrise he had seen this morning at 4.30. I had not given him credit for so much poetry, but that is just the strange thing about many Germans, they are intensely practical yet very poetical. Had neuralgia and went to sleep on the sofa during the singing, was dreaming of Peter the Great, when Isabella woke me by catching me by the nose. (May 16th 1887)

Her friends are staring to have babies. She is not completely impressed.

It's all trash to talk of been "proud", what in fortune's name is there to be proud of in have been called on to bear the curse imposed on Eve? (July 14th 1887)

Her travels about Ireland take her to Limerick.

There are some fine shops and fine private houses, still provincial is stamped on everything. (Oct 14th 1887)

Conscious of the passing of time, and growing older, she is calmly accepting about the way things are.

Soon after going to my room I heard the bells proclaiming the death of 1888 and the birth of 1889. I wonder what sort of year it will be – last year was not bad. At all events none of us will live to see the same three figures in a row again: when 1999 comes we, all of us, will be "under the green, green sod". (Dec 31st 1888)

Nonetheless she notes the ways of the world. In Greece in turbulent times she comments on political assassinations.

But they think nothing of these things in Greece, no more than we do in Ireland, where we put up a grand marble monument in a Christian cemetery to a murderer. (May 20th 1890)

Few details escape her, she wryly notes the day-to-day.

I saw Mr Maguire on my way to Mass. He was walking with his mother, wore a high hat and looked most unhappy, whether any connection of cause and effect existed amongst these three facts I cant say. (April 26th 1891)

She travels about Ireland, observing, reporting.

Today we drove to Killaloo and lunched there, it is a pretty little village in the midst of the hills and just on the bank of the Shannon; a quiet, out of the world place, just the place for any one who was writing a great book or had suffered a great sorrow. (July 9th 1891)

If the term 'politically correct' had been invented in her time, it wouldn't have applied to Mary.

I don't believe in persons of different nationalities marrying, as a rule, any more than persons of different religions, certain ideas belong to certain climates and races and when there is much diversity of ideas it is apt to give an opening for quarrels. (Sept 4th 1891)

She reminds us that some aspects of life just do not change. A onetime Professor of Trinity College Dublin behaving much like his academic successors.

Stayed till 10c. I met Lilian in the Green and she told me of a very unpleasant affair: two of the girls, who had private grinds with Mr George Wilkins, had found his conduct most extraordinary, he had put his arm round their waist and tried to kiss them: they had complained to Miss White but without result. They wanted Lilian to tell Mr Beare. On my suggestion Lilian went to consult the Chief, who said that she should put the matter *strongly* before Miss White: she confirmed my own idea that the man "wasn't all there". He had also written remarks on their personal appearance in the exercise books of many of his class – it is really disgraceful especially for a man about 25 years of age and a cleric. (Feb 3^d 1892)

Snobbish? Perhaps, but honestly so.

In the evening we went to a popular concert at the Leinster Hall. It wasn't nice in any way and the only feminines present seemed to be shop-girls. I suppose it's prejudice, but I dislike shop-girls and their giggling ways so that I felt uncomfortable.

(March 26th 1892)

She knew the elderly Fenian O'Leary, and his young admirer William Butler Yeats.

Dined at the Sigersons. Mr O'Leary, Mr Yeates and a Mr Taylor dined and Mr Murray and Willie Sullivan came in the evening. The conversation was nearly all either political or literary. Mr Yeates explained to me some theosophical notions, he seems desperately in earnest, Mr. O'Leary saw me home, as he lives in Mountjoy Square. I finished the Rudyard Kipling in bed.

(May 22 1892)

Yeats began to impress her.

In the evening I went to a meeting at the Wicklow Hotel relative to the founding of an Irish Literary Society; it was rather dull and some of the speakers struck one as having nothing whatever to say. Mr Yeates improves on acquaintance; he has a nice manner, perfectly gentlemanly and courteous. *(May 24th 1892)*

But perhaps he didn't impress her over much.

Mr Yeates walked home with me: he is interesting to talk to though over fond of big words. *(Aug 4th 1892)*

Nonetheless, the relationship continued.

Spent evening at Miss Fitzpatrick's. I had been specially asked to meet Mr Willie Yeates and to see some of his mystic performances of "looking through the crystal" etc, etc and I expected some fun, but soon made the discovery that the said Mr Yeates on his hobby was not nearly so pleasant as at other times: he seemed to become cross, snappish and painfully absurd. *(Aug 10th 1892)*

Yeats tells her his troubles.

On my way to Mass I met Mr Yeates – he told me that Miss Gonne was ill. I was sorry for the poor fellow. Day in the house. In the evening J. and I paid a short visit to 69. *(Sept 18th 1892)*

We learn that the Irish literary revival did not go entirely smoothly.

Gave Miss Murphy a lesson. Had an absurd contretemps about the Library Com. Of the Library Society. Mr Willie Yeates gave me a wrong address, "11 Upper Harcourt St" and I found him and Mr John O'Leary walking up and down the street not knowing what to do. The real place was 11 Gardiner St. Mr O'Leary walked off but Mr Yeates and I took a car over to Gardiner St, there we found Dr Coffee, but no one else. We remained chatting for a while, then departed our several ways. *(Sept 27th 1892)*

Her ideas appear sometimes extreme, despite being shared by modern day northern Italians.

Lilian says that she is sure Naples will be horrid and I think so too, as Arthur says "the southern Italians are scum" and the Neopolitans seem by all accounts the worst of the lot. *(Nov 23rd 1892)*

A complex personality, she admired both pretty girls and handsome men.

Being more awake than yesterday I took in the girls more, one particularly attracted me, she had a plait of fair silky hair falling below her waist – the hair when loose must certainly touch the ground and a sweet face with pleading blue eyes; she seemed about 16 or 17. I looked at the

name on her card, it was "Ellen Mullen" a common sort of name for such a pretty girl. (June 28th 1893)

Aware of living in a city awash with drink, she comments variously.

I was leaving, bound for Agnes Conan's when in the hall I met Mr Willie Yeates, more oddly got up than ever. He asked me to come and have coffee and we discoursed – they are starting a new literary journal in Dublin – a new "pub" would pay better! (July 15th 1893)

I had a headache caused I greatly fear by the two glasses of champagne of which I partook at dinner yesterday. I who write for Temperance Journals!! (Aug 29th 1894)

I went to Westland Row intending to take the 1.15 train to Sandymount but the crowd of those returning from the Parnell Celebration was so large and so drunken that I gave up the idea and went to meet a tram. (Oct 7th 1894)

Like we ourselves she is nostalgic for a past she never inhabited, the good old days.

It would be pleasant if one could go back for half a year or so to those days of Chippendale furniture and short waisted dresses and knee breeches and early dining and home cured bacon. Before telegrams or bicycles or railways were, it would be a great rest. They seem awfully far away these days though. (March 4th 1896)

Widely travelled, she wasn't always impressed.

Certainly a drearier hole than Varna I never was in. (May 20th 1896)

But sometimes compares her native Ireland unfavourably with other countries way of doing things.

When I looked at the pictures and considered their number and their subjects and heard all round the old national tongue, the strange un-European speech which the Hungarians have preserved through centuries of foreign domination, and turned then to think of Ireland, our lost language, our poor little set always copying England, our national dress despised even by the peasants, I was ashamed. In the Hibernian Academy or the National Gallery how many pictures deal with Irish history, Irish scenery or Irish life! (May 27th 1896)

In Art, though she knew a lot about Art, she knew what she liked.

I cant like Rubens, his people have such an over-fed look and his women are so terribly stout and so suggestive of their being suitable for wet nurses. (May 28th 1896)

She traveled the British Empire and, while sympathetic to the plight of the colonized, she was prophetic about the results of independence.

They made out a formidable list of grievances, but though some of them are seemingly very outrageous this much must be said on the other side that, according to everyone who knows them, natives cant be trusted, and to get a body of corruptible officials and venal judges would be ruinous. (June 3rd 1897)

The Irish literary revival continues!

In the evening went to the Contemporary Club. Mr Yeates was there and Miss Maude Gonne. She told me that the alligator was dead. She is a lovely woman certainly and a most fascinating one. Things were not as harmonious as they might have been: several of the men – Mr Walker, Mr Oldham, Dr Sigerson seemed to have "got out of their beds at the wrong side" and were inclined to snap at each other. A discussion of the Pan Celtic Congress threatened to become so

warm that it was abandoned and Irish drama taken up. This gave old Mr Walker many chances of girding at Mr Yeates, who took thing really very well. I was rather amused, but nearly everyone else voiced at the end of the evening that they were bored to death. (Dec 3rd 1898)

The 19th century passes, and Mary well realizes what years she has lived through.

I could not realize that we were at the death-bed of the wonderful 19th century, whose birth Schiller and Goethe watched as the “Buefwechsel” relates – The idea was too vast. What changes in life, ideas, knowledge it has seen – the century of Science. (Dec 31st 1899)

The 20th century brings Mary much travel, several difficult love affairs and liaisons, and she writes about them, both on the pages and between the lines.

In the house all day reading. Dined at the Sigersons. Kept up my spirits by drinking too much wine. This did not seem like Patrick’s Day. (March 17th 1901)

Never quite cynical, she is wisely wry, sardonic, about herself and about the world.

It’s a relief to meet a Dublin Catholic young man who has any thought beyond whiskey, cards, horse-racing and football. (April 17th 1902)

She travels around with Patrick Pearse, learning about the old Ireland, planning for the new.

We had a very long walk to day by a round to Recess. On the way we turned into numerous cabins. Mr Pearse talked to the people and I listened, putting in a word now and then. They are very nice people, polite and courteous, though the pig does sleep in the living room. (Jan 3rd 1903)

END OF EXTRACTS

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