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AN INNISKILLING FUSILIER AT GALLIPOLI

Mustafa GÜLLÜBAĞ*

Öz

Birinci Dünya Savaşı çok geniş bir coğrafyada cereyan etmiştir ve bunlardan birisi de Gelibolu'dur. Çok ileri bir miktarda savaş malzemesi ve insan gücü gerektiren bu savaşta İngiliz birliklerinde sömürgelerden ve diğer İngiliz Devletler topluluğundan gelen askerler bulunmuştur. Bu çalışma, İngiliz ordusunda İrlandalı asker olarak Gelibolu'da bulunmuş olan Francis Ledwidge'in yaşam hikayesini, şair olarak olgunlaşması bağlamında ele alırken dönemin sosyo-ekonomik şartlarının Ledwidge'in duygusal yapısına ve onun savaşa gitme kararı üzerine olan etkisini incelemektedir. Şairin şahsına özel imgeler ve bu imgelerin görüldüğü şiirler, şiirlerin arka planları ve bazı önemli imgelerin neden belli şiirlerde görüldüğü bu çalışmada sunulmuştur. Yine imgelem olarak o dönemde yükselişte olan Georgian akımı çerçevesine doğal olarak giren Ledwidge'in şiirleri, şairin bulunduğu konum ve edindiği yer incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İrlandalı askerler, Georgian Akımı, Savaş Şiiri, İrlanda Şiiri, Francis Ledwidge.

Abstract

World War I took place on vast geographical theatres and one of those is Gallipoli. In this enormously man- and supply-demanding war, the troops under the English flag were comprised of soldiers from British colonies and commonwealth. One of these soldiers was Francis Edward Ledwidge. This study examines the life of Francis Edward Ledwidge, who was in Gallipoli as an Irish soldier in the English army, and his maturation as a poet, in terms of socio-political conditions of the period on Ledwidge's sentimental world and on his taking the decision to join the war. This study also presents the images peculiar to the poet and the poems where such images emerge and the background for these images to appear in particular poems.

Keywords: Irish soldiers, Georgian Movement, War Poetry, Irish Poetry, Francis Ledwidge.

Place and conditions into which young Francis was born and his early poems

Francis Edward Ledwidge, who is the subject matter of this article, was born, by his own words, into a family "who were ever soldiers and poets" on 19 August 1887 in the village of Slane, County of Meath, Ireland (Curtayne, 1998:15). The genealogy of the family of German origin dates as far back as the beginning of the 13th century when the ancestors had land and wealth in Meath and Westmeath until Cromwell relegated the family to the west of Shannon. The downfall of the family hit the bottom in 1872, the year his parents got married in Slane. The time when Francis was born, the family was in moderate conditions with seven children to be reared. Despite all drawbacks, the family had managed to get a cottage upon an elevated plot of ground with a delightful view built by the Rural District Council for the labourers. Francis's father Patrick was determined to have his children educated. As they were living in their happy little home, the father suddenly died at the age of fifty two when little Francis was only four. The eldest brother's career was first to be sacrificed. Then the mother toiled hard to keep the home fires burning. Despite the penury they had fallen in, the family had a long standing and they were to live up to it. Francis's sentimental attachment developed an unbreakable bond with the salient where his ancestors lived and died. When Francis grew up to manhood, he recalled those rare leisure days as quoted in Curtayne thus:

I often asked her [his mother] of my father (who died when I was four), but was always reproved by her eyes and so I learned to leave that side of her life severely alone. There were four brothers of us and three sisters. I am the second youngest. For these my mother laboured night and day as none of them were strong enough to provide for our own wants. She never complained and even when my eldest brother [Patrick] advanced in strength she persisted in her regular attendance at school until he qualified at book-keeping and left home for Dublin. His position carried a respectable salary (1998: 17-18).

Patrick's contribution enabled his mother to stay at home and give better care to the younger children. However this reprieve would not last long. One day Patrick, diagnosed tuberculosis, came home unwell. On those days the disease was endemic in Ireland and a radical cure for it had not yet been found. His brother died within four years, which Francis later recalled "[i]t was as though God forgot us" (Curtayne,

* Yrd. Doç. Dr., Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi, Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi, İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü

1998: 18). Under such appalling conditions the family strived to exist. Alice Curtayne quotes from Francis's recollections:

I was seven years of age when my eldest brother died, and though I had only been to school on occasional days I was able to read the tombstones in a neighbouring graveyard and had written in secret several poems which still survive. About this time I was punished in school for crying and punishment ever afterwards haunted the master like an evil dream, for I was only crying over Goldsmith's *Deserted Village* (1998: 18).

Slane where Francis was growing up was a land of myths and legends since prehistoric times. Nature in every sense was the chief of inspiration for him. His joy erupted from the salient, the trees, the leaves, the lea, the flowers, the birds, the cattle, the sheep. Every single thing was important for him, and they were source of inspiration in times of trouble and even during the war. Francis wrote of his sentimental side as follows:

I have always been very quiet and bashful and a great mystery in my own place. I avoided the evening play of neighbouring children to find some secret place in a wood by the Boyne and there imagine fairy dances and hunts, fires and feasts. I saw curious shapes in shadows and clouds and loved to watch the change of the leaves and flowers. I heard voices in the rain and the wind and strange whisperings in water. I loved all wandering people and thing and several times tried to become part of a gypsy caravan. I read Troy and Nineveh and the Nomads of the Sahara. I wrote wander songs for cuckoos and winter songs for the robin. I hated gardens where gaudy flowers were trained in rows but loved the wild things of change and circumstance (Dunn, 2006: 2).

To Francis, every object, animate or inanimate, in nature and season was sweet. Seasons have special place, power and magic in his imaginings. His fascination for renewing power of spring echoes from his poem titled "Spring" as follows:

The dews drip roses on the meadows
Where the meek daisies dot the sward.
And Æolus whispers through the shadows,
"Behold the handmaid of the Lord!"
The golden news the skylark waketh
And 'thwart the heavens his flight is curled;
Attend ye as the first note breaketh
And chrisms droppeth on the world.

In another poem the subject matter is 'spring', and its inhabitants birds and flowers. His metaphors and images are fresh and enlivening like the spring. The first stanza of the poem "Desire in Spring" reads thus:

I love the cradle songs the mothers sing
In lonely places when the twilight drops,
The slow endearing melodies that bring
Sleep to the weeping lids; and, when she stops,
I love the roadside birds upon the tops
Of dusty hedges in a world of spring.

The mothers' singing of 'cradle songs' (1) is as much a source of joy as the coming of the spring. And singing must have a significant place in his inner world that the dedication of the first edition of *Songs of the Fields*¹ were to be to his mother as he terms her "The First Singer I Knew" (Ledwidge, 1918a: 5). The ever changing nature is not only a source of inspiration for Francis; it is a living person to whom he ascribes human epithets. The first stanza of "August" runs thus:

She'll come at dusky first of day,
White over yellow harvest's song.
Upon her dewy rainbow way
She shall be beautiful and strong.
The lidless eye of noon shall spray
Tan on her ankles in the hay,
Shall kiss her brown the whole day long.

"The Hills" has also been included in *Songs of the Fields*. "It is indicative of the universal influence which nature had on Francis Ledwidge. The hills around Slane were alive and speaking to him. The river voices were the music of Boyne, a significantly broad and strong river flowing past Slane" (Dunn, 2006: 8). The last stanza of "the Hills" depicts the natural scenery through the eyes of as yet too young Francis

¹ "The introduction to this edition was written by Lord Dunsany and dated June 1914" (Dunn, 2006: 5).

Ledwidge. The last stanza includes mystic atmosphere of the river bank, visual and auditory images of personified nature:

And moonbeams drooping thro' the coloured wood
Are full of little people wingéd white.
I'll wander thro' the moon-pale solitude
That calls across the intervening night
With river voices at their utmost height,
Sweet as rain-water in the blackbird's flute
That strikes the world in admiration mute.

His sentimental attachment to Slane and hard toiling mother grew up as he was slowly developing into a man. "Thanks to Anne Ledwidge's [his mother] heroism, the family had survived the critical years. No one but herself knew how she had kept the children fed and clothed and paid the rent for the house. But she never wavered in her determination to lift her sons out of the rut of farm labouring, then rightly considered the most depressed all occupations" (Curtayne, 1998: 25). It must be this heroic and sacrificial devotion of the beloved mother that years later soldier Francis wrote a poem dedicated to his mother, where the imagery delineates the immenseness of his mother's sacrificial devotion to make her sons have better life. When he wrote the poem, he was convalescing in a hospital in Egypt. "My Mother" reveals "the first singer he knew," and the endless toil she endured, and the place where they lived:

God made my mother on an April day,
From sorrow and the mist along the sea,
Lost birds' and wanderers' songs and ocean spray,
And the moon loved her wandering jealously.

Beside the ocean's din she combed her hair,
Singing the nocturne of the passing ships,
Before her earthly lover found her there
And kissed away the music from her lips.

She came unto the hills and saw the change
That brings the swallow and the geese in turns.
But there was not a grief she deemed strange,
For there is that in her which always mourns.

Kind heart she has for all on hill or wave
Whose hopes grew wings like ants to fly away.
I bless the God Who such a mother gave
This poor bird-hearted singer of a day.

This sentimentality and sentimental attachment to the mother should be that which made young Francis run home when he was apprenticed to a grocer's shop in Dublin in 1902. Alice Curtayne narrates the boy's severance from the place he lives and the ones he loved thus:

It was first break from home for the fifteen-year-old boy and he was homesick. Shop assistants at that period worked long hours, the shops remaining open 11 p.m. or 12 midnight. It was not until 1906 that grocers' assistants succeeded in having shops closed at 10 p.m. on the first five nights of the week. 'The members declared themselves delighted with the shorter hours.' Apprentices had to work four years for food and lodgings only, without pay. As a concession to the widow's son, however, Larry Carpenter allowed Frank home every Saturday afternoon until Sunday evening. This weekly break enabled the lad get through the first few difficult months (1998: 27).

Yet that was not enough to soothe his yearning for home:

At night when he went to bed, Slane rose up before his mind's eye with such clarity and poignancy that he could not sleep. 'I could not bear brick horizons,' he said afterwards, 'and all my dreams were calling me home.' He thought of the friendly faces and the lighthearted people round the firesides he knew, the games he played every Sunday with Joe and his chums. This parting, he felt, had been a great mistake. As always when he was moved, the lines of a poem tormented him. One night he sat up in bed and began to write a description of his birthplace as he saw it in his mind's eye (Curtayne, 1998: 28).

He had not yet reached his sixteenth birthday that Francis wrote this seven-stanza twenty-eight-line poem "Behind the Closed Eye"². "Then he got out of bed and walked the thirty miles home from Dublin to Slane" (Dunn, 2006: 9). "Behind the Closed Eye" is the second poem in *Songs of the Field*:

I walk the old frequented ways
That wind around the tangled braes,
I live again the sunny days
Ere I the city knew,

And scenes of old again are born,
The woodbine lassoing the thorn,
And drooping Ruth-like in the corn
The poppies weep the dew.

Above me in their hundred schools
The magpies bend their young to rules,
And like an apron full of jewels
The dewy cobweb swings.

And frisking in the stream below
The troutlets make the circles flow,
And the hungry crane doth watch them grow
As a smoker does his rings.

Above me smokes the little town,
With its whitewashed walls and roofs of brown
And its octagon spire toned smoothly down
As the holy minds within.

And wondrous impudently sweet,
Half of him passion, half conceit,
The *blackbird*³ calls adown the street
Like the piper of Hamelin.

I hear him, and I feel the lure
Drawing me back to the homely moor,
I'll go and close the mountains' door
On the city's strife and din.

The poem explicitly reveals his dissatisfaction with the city life and yearning for the rural. But it also introduces one of his most prominent loves, the *blackbird* which was going to be the central image of his grief over the loss of Ellie and the execution of the friends who took part in the Easter Rising.

A full-time job and a love of his own

So his Rathfarnham job lasted only few weeks. After several different jobs Francis found employment in road work. In those days "[t]here was strong competition for road work because the wages were higher than those paid by farmers, 17s. 6d. a week as against 12s. 6d." His younger brother, Joe, had left school. Their mother had no longer "to take to fields" (Curtayne, 1998: 32). As the years pass by, the popularity of Frank increased both as a poet and spokesman for his fellow friends in road work. He became a public figure in Slane.

He grew into a handsome and popular young man, muscular from navvying on the roads and in the copper mines of Beaupark, a job from which he was dismissed for organising a strike against bad working conditions. An independent, combative streak led him into fights at football matches and, later, into local prominence as a trade unionist, a member of Navan Rural Council, and, in 1914, as a secretary of the Slane Corps of Irish Volunteers (Stallworthy, 2005: 46).

² Years later this poem was published in *The Saturday Review* and added the information: "Remuneration received by the author was 6s a line. ... Ledwidge must have overjoyed when his first literary earnings amounted to eight guineas. According to contemporary values it was a large sum of money; seven weeks' wages as a road ganger for a poem he had scribbled out when he was sixteen!" (Curtayne, 1998: 45).

³ Emphasis mine.

His poems, in the meantime, were appearing in *Weekly Irish Independent* and *Drogheda Independent*, and in June 1912 he sent some of his poems to Lord Dunsany, local landlord, a poet and member of Irish literary circle. Lord Dunsany wrote him a friendly and encouraging letter that greeted him as a true poet. It is about this period that Lord Dunsany had castle balls where important artistic figures were invited among whom were Oliver St John Gogharty and AE (George Russell). On an invitation at Dunsany castle "he had met Oliver St John Gogharty and Thomas MacDonagh. From subsequent letters we know that he attended a few AE's famous Sunday evenings, where he met George Roberts, managing director of Munsel & Co. the Dublin publishers" (Curtayne, 1998: 48). Another person who was to take up a significant place in his life was Katherine Tynan whom he met at a private view of AE's exhibition of paintings.

It was during those times when his poems were appearing in local newspapers that a girl from the neighbourhood, Ellie, sister to three brothers with whom Ledwidge was friends had interest in Francis's poems. She would report him snippets of news of the editor and the comments made by the people in the milliner's shop where she worked. "Before Ledwidge met [Lord] Dunsany, Ellie was the poet's only link with his public" (Curtayne, 1998: 50). In some evenings they took walk together, and this courtship was a thrill. The expectation of welcome sight of the beloved has been commemorated in "Thoughts at the Trysting Stile" as follows:

Inly I feel that she will come in blue,
 With yellow on her hair, and two curls strayed
 Out of her comb's loose stocks, and I shall steal
 Behind and lay my hands upon her eyes,
 "Look not, but be my Psyche!"
 And her peal
 Of laughter will ring far, and as she tries
 For freedom I will call her names of flowers
 That climb up walls; then thro' the twilight hours...

Words were not enough to take her heart away. "With some difficulty, she [Ellie] told him their meetings would have to cease." Being a friend with the Vaugheys was alright, yet "'a wedding is a different matter' as the local people put it" (Curtayne, 1998: 54).

The young lovers knew that Ledwidge would never be acceptable to her family as a prospective husband. The great barrier to Irish rural marriages was –and still largely is– class consciousness [*sic*] based on property and land values. Sixty years ago, these were the only recognised status symbols. The Vaugheys owned half of the Hill of Slane; Ledwidge was a road-ganger with no assets and little prospects. In practical assessment of this kind, poetry could not even be mentioned (Curtayne, 1998: 54).

"Before the Tears" voices Ellie's slipping away:

You looked as sad as an eclipsed moon
 Above the sheaves of harvest, and there lay
 A light lisp⁴ on your tongue, and very soon
 The petals of your deep blush fell away;
 White smiles that come with an uneasy grace
 From inner sorrow crossed your forehead fair,
 When the wind passing took your scattered hair
 And flung it like a brown shower in my face.
 Tear-fringe'd winds that fill the heart's low sighs
 And never break upon the bosom's pain,
 But blow unto the windows of the eyes
 Their misty promises of silver rain,
 Around your loud heart ever rose and fell.
 I thought 'twere better that the tears should come
 And strike your every feeling wholly numb,
 So thrust my hand in yours and shook fare-well.

Compared to his earlier poems this one is very much advanced in diction and imagery, fresh and touching. She is an 'eclipsed moon'(1), eclipsed by the grief of the break-up; and 'the blush'(4) sign of passion now 'fell away'(4); and words of love come with 'uneasy grace'(5) because of 'the inner sorrow'(6). All metaphors employed to indicate Ellie's sorrow suggest that the persona of the poem is aware of the fact

⁴ "Ellie was slender with delicate colouring and brown hair. She had prominent upper teeth, counted an additional charm because it gave her an attractive lisp" (Curtayne, 1998: 50).

that this break-up is not a result of Ellie's choosing. She, too, is troubled by this severance. Second part of the poem is about the pain the persona feels, and 'tear-fringed winds' (9) that blow against grieved lover's bosom is not powerful enough to 'break upon' (10) the pain inside; contrarily they blow 'unto the windows of the eyes' (11) reminding the pledges once made are now 'misty promises of silver rain' (12) with a suggestion of 'tears and pain'. And the final lines, as expected, transform "mist" and "rain" into 'the tears'(14) that numb 'every feeling'(15) making the persona gather enough courage to shake 'fare-well'(16).

The sonnet "The Death of Love" describes a farewell in the moonlight. 'The storm' that devastated the heart will leave its place to 'the calm' that will 'empty out the sorrows of her eyes':

We stood and watched the full-blown moon arise,
And then I felt her pulse strong in her palm.
I knew the storm was over and the calm
Would empty out the sorrow of her eyes.

The courtship had ended, yet he could not tear himself away from the memories of Ellie. He puts the blame on his meagre means. He would stand up in front of her when he had something to offer, when he contrived a better job or when he gathered some money together. Yet his spirit at present is so low 'below the depth of words' (8). "A Song" delineates his mood in despondency and financial position:

...I am sad below the depth of words
That nevermore we two shall draw anear.

Had I but wealth of land and bleating flocks
And barnfuls of the yellow harvest yield,
And a large house with climbing hollyhocks
And servant maidens singing in the field,
You'd love me; but I own no roaming herds,
My only wealth is songs of love for you,
And now that you are lost I may pursue
A sad life deep below the depth of words.

An impassioned spokesperson for the underprivileged and a soldier

Ledwidge was a good talker and spokesman for road and copper mine workers, an advocate of Labour. He was leading the rural labour in the historic Dublin lock-out of 1907.

When the State Insurance Act became law 1912, a new type of work had to be undertaken by the County Labour Unions. Their members had to be advised about joining a society approved under the Act and instructed how to fill up the forms so as to get the benefits. The unions welcomed the Act because it alleviated the hardships of unemployment even if it did not prevent it. Ledwidge had been elected to the Committee of Management in 1912 (Curtayne, 1998: 57).

office job was fine, if only it was permanent. Then he would approach Ellie with a new plan. Yet he was too new at the position and needed one year to use the position as a stepping-stone for higher grade employment. 1913-14 winter was a period of strikes and political turmoil in Ireland.

Francis Ledwidge was a committed Nationalist. He was a founder member of the Slane Corps of the Irish Volunteers formed in 1913. He was their first secretary. He went to Manchester where his brother and sister were living to help start a branch of the Irish Volunteers in Manchester and to raise funds. He delivered a lecture at the John Redmond Club (Dunn, 2006: 58).

On 4 August England declared war on Germany. The heated political debate about the independence of Ireland was surging among the Sinn Feiners, the National Volunteers, the Redmond and his supporters, and others.

In an epoch-making speech that day at Woodenbridge, County Wicklow, John Redmond pledged the Irish Volunteers to support the British war effort 'wherever needed'. This split the movement: the majority possibly 150,000 men (naming themselves 'National Volunteers') followed Redmond; the minority of 3,000-10,000 held to the original Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB)-influenced Irish Volunteer position. Ledwidge, a nationalist, but not a Sinn Fein, initially sided with the hard-line minority. (Stallworthy, 2005: 48).

Several days after the acrimonious debates he had in the Navan Rural Council, Ledwidge joined the Royal Inniskilling Fusilliers, on 24 October 1914. Lord Dunsany had already joined the army right after England's declaration of war on Germany on 4 August 1914, and wanted him to continue writing:

He [Lord Dunsany] settled an allowance on Francis Ledwidge to be paid during his absence at the war; an arrangement not in any way requested by Francis Ledwidge and which he was reluctant to accept. Lord Dunsany insisted. He wished him to be able to continue to write whatever financial turmoil might follow the outbreak of war (Dunn, 2006: 132).

Ledwidge was a nationalistic man and this was one of the motives to take such a decision, yet, may have been influenced by the hurtful gossip that Ellie was keeping company with somebody else, which made him so despondent that the serene beauty of river and woodland was no more solace to his pain. Some certain lines in "After My Last Song" may be taken as direct reference to the reason why he joined the army⁵:

I'm wild for wandering to the far-off places
Since one forsook me whom I held most dear.
I want to see new wonders and new faces
Beyond East seas ...

war might serve him as means of escape from the place troubles had surrounded him. Yet there were other factors. His term of office in Navan came to an end, and livelihood turned to be a problem again. He was considering his mother's position as well. Despite Lord Dunsany's allowance in readiness, he was reluctant to accept it. Curtayne explains the motives behind as follows:

A private's pay in the army in 1914 was seven shillings a week; also he was fed, housed, clothed and provided with transport. Higher pay was given for clerical work, meaning an increase to ten or twelve shillings a week at most. Ledwidge, on enlisting, declared his mother a dependant so that she would receive half his monthly pay. At the same time he insisted on terminating the allowance from Dunsany (1998: 86).

Francis Ledwidge did not abandon writing poetry during the training period from 24 October 1914 to 27 April 1915 when he was despatched for war. One of his finest poems "A Little Boy in the Morning" takes a neighbour's son who had died as he was at Richmond Barracks. Home and friends are the inspiration for this poem as well. On his leave he learns the poor boy's demise. Alice Curtayne provides the background of this poem as follows:

It was during this brief visit home that Ledwidge wrote one of his best poems, inspired by sudden death of a little boy, Jack Tiernan, a neighbour's son who lived near by. The lad used to work for farmers in his free time and was familiar figure driving in Mr Johnston's cows early in the morning. As Frank wheeled out his bicycle to go to Navan, he usually met Jack passing the gate and they would have some hilarious exchanges. The boy was always ready for a joke and riposted with wit and spirit. This lyric conveys a depth of sorrow in lines of a delicate airy lightness (1998: 92).

The poem reads as follows:

He will not come, and still I wait.
He whistles at another gate
Where angels listen. Ah, I know
He will not come, yet if I go
How shall I know he did not pass
Barefooted in the flowery grass?

The moon leans on one silver horn
Above the silhouettes of morn,
And from their nest sills finches whistle
Or stooping pluck the downy thistle.
How is the morn so gay and fair
Without his whistling in its air?
The world is calling, I must go.
How shall I know he did not pass
Barefooted in the shining grass?

Other poems written during his military training are gathered under the title *In Barracks* under which appeared four poems: "To A Distant One", "The Place", "May" and "To Eilish of the Fair Hair". Of these only "May" concentrates on nature, beings in nature and changes in season. Other three seem to be addressed to his girlfriend Lizzie Healey. Despite the fact that he was in courtship with Lizzie Healey, part of his heart was still yearning for Ellie. Then the news of her death reached him. "Ellie married to someone else was state of affairs to which he had been painfully adjusting his mind since last November [1914]. He had been telling himself that, provided she was happy, he might learn to live with the idea. But Ellie dead meant a finality of separation that shattered him" (Curtayne, 1998: 116). He wrote the following threnody titled "To One Dead":

A blackbird singing
On a moss upholstered stone,

⁵ "Note that the manuscript of these verses is dated June 1914" (Curtayne, 1998: 84).

Bluebells swinging,
Shadows wildly blown,
A song in the wood,
A ship on the sea.
The song was for you
And the ship was for me.

A blackbird singing
I hear in my troubled mind.
Bluebells swinging
I see in a distant wind.
But sorrow and silence
Are the wood's threnody,
The silence for you
And the sorrow for me.

He was about to leave for Gallipoli when he wrote this first elegy of the many. Again the consolatory objects in the poem are 'nature' and '*blackbird*'. The 'ship' (6) suggests his impending journey and 'the song' (7) suggests the dolour over the dead one. Final two lines are deeply touching 'silence' (15) of the dead, and 'sorrow' (16) of the grieved. Though the timespan between this poem and his despatch to Gallipoli is not known, Ledwidge possibly knew he was going to travel by sea. On 10 July he embarked on *Novian*.

En route to Gallipoli: War and Death

The battles at Gallipoli were surging with all their might. The absence of reliable intelligence about the Turkish defences was troubling Aubrey Herbert. Yet "on board ship, not everyone as deeply troubled as Herbert." Nowell Oxland and Francis Ledwidge were on board and writing poems expressing the joy of being on a steamer. Nowell Oxland's poem "Outward Bound" "contrasts the pre-war joys in England and wonders if they will ever be restored" (Hamilton, 2003: 61). Ledwidge's poem seems to be an attempt to adjust and enjoy the present moment. This is one of the rare occasions ever he has torn himself away from images and reminiscences of Ireland. "In the Mediterranean - Going to War" reads as follows:

Lovely wings of gold and green
Flit about the sounds I hear,
On my window when I lean
To the shadows cool and clear.

Roaming, I am listening still,
Bending, listening overlong,
In my soul a steadier will,
In my heart a newer song.

It was the end of July that *Novian* dropped anchor at Mitylene. On the afternoon of 6 August, *Heroic*, with Ledwidge on board, dropped anchor fifteen miles off coast of Suvla Bay. Ledwidge landed on Suvla Bay two or three days later as a soldier of D Company of the 5th Battalion. They were repeating the attempts of April to get a hold on the shore. "The light sandy soil, alternating with rock, made the construction of proper trenches an impossibility. 'Scoopout' would perhaps better describe the sort of shallow hole in which the men took cover. This (in Compton MacKenzie's words) 'slug-coloured grave' was to be Ledwidge's home for two months" (Curtayne, 1998: 123-4). His wartime poems do not reflect the difficulties or suffering he experienced on battlefields, he reflects either philosophical thoughts he formed or natural aspects around him. "Summer was over. The first winds of autumn began to whistle keenly around the corners and the hilly streets. The poet fell into a dark, fatalistic mood" (Curtayne, 1998: 166). "War", composed in 1916, is one of those poems reads as follows:

Darkness and I are one, and wind
And nagging thunder, bothers all.
My mother was a storm. I call
And shorten your way with speed to me.
I am love and Hate and the terrible mind
Of vicious gods, but more am I,
I am the pride in the lover's eye,
I am the epic of the sea.

On 15 October the battalion boarded on *Aenas* bound for Salonika where they landed next day. The fascinating beauty of the country is the first thing Ledwidge noticed. Curtayne draws the scenery thus:

Here the poet found himself in a dream country of almost unreal beauty: mountains rising to the sky, capped by streamers of white cloud; dark green cypresses emphasizing the vivid white houses and the grace of tall minarets. He saw there for the first time Greek mountain troops in white uniforms, long shoes decorated with pompons and picturesque head-dress (1998: 134).

After a training of two weeks the unit was transferred fifty miles by train to the Greco-Serbian front, where they set up camp near the Lake Dorian-Strumnitza road. Yearning for the welfare of Ireland, he compares the beauty and war's destruction in the poem titled "Serbia":

Beside the lake Dorian
I watched the night fade, star by star,
And sudden glories of the dawn
Shine on the muddy ranks of war.

All night my dreams of that fair band
Were full of Ireland's regret,
And when the morning filled the sky
I wondered could we save her yet.

Far up the cloudy hills, the roads
Wound wearily into the morn.
I only saw with inner eye
A poor old woman all forlorn.

As Ledwidge and his regiment "dug into freezing mountain ridge and subsisting on starvation rations, he heard that his book of poems, *Songs of the Field*, assembled with Dunsany's help in the peaceful summer of 1914, had been published" (Stallworthy, 2005: 50). Lord Dunsany had some reservations about the success of the book due to some archaic expressions and images. Yet he expresses his trust in this young man quoting from his very early poem "Behind the Closed Eye" calling him Burns of Ireland. Following is how Dunsany comments on his technique and imagery:

Of pure poetry there are two kinds, that which mirrors the beauty of the world in which our bodies are, and that which builds the more mysterious kingdoms where geography ends and fairyland begins, with gods and heroes at war, and the sirens singing still, and Alph going down to the darkness from Xanadu. Mr. Ledwidge gives us the first kind. When they have read through the profounder poets, and seen the problem plays, and studied all the perplexities that puzzle man in the cities, the small circle of readers that I predict for him will turn to Ledwidge as to a mirror reflecting beautiful fields, as to a very still lake rather on a very cloudless evening. There is scarcely a smile of Spring or a sigh of Autumn that is not reflected here, scarcely a phase of the large benedictions of Summer; even of Winter he gives us clear glimpses sometimes, albeit mournfully, remembering Spring (1918a: 9).

What Lord Dunsany describes in the quotation corresponds partly to Georgian Poetry which was in the vogue since 1910. In 1910s, Georgian Movement had a reputable place in English literature. As an extension of Romantic Movement, it dealt with rural England and beauty of English pasture with its thatched roofs, moss covered stone walls, hills and valleys. Another thing that made it popular among the audience, as Reeves puts it, was "unspecialized and easy to understand. A public that had no leisure or zeal to choose its own poetry, but liked it in anthologies, had no time for complicated and obscure themes" (1968: xv). And the poetry of Francis Ledwidge with many facets fell within the scope of Georgian Poetry. So it was Lord Dunsany who recommended Francis Ledwidge to Edward Marsh who was, at the time, the patron of the artists, editor of *Georgian Poetry*, secretary to Winston Churchill. As he had no idea about Francis Ledwidge, "Marsh naturally consulted James Stephens, who answered by return":

He is only a beginner and must digest his ancestors before we know what he really is like. Meanwhile he has a true singing faculty, and his promise is, I think, greater than that of any young poet now writing. I do not believe, however, that he will ratify this promise by any almighty performance. I do not believe that his thought will equal his faculty of utterance. ... A man is a mind, and so is a poet, and they are man and poet only to the extent of that. This is the croaking of the crow. ...I do not know Ledwidge at all well. ... He is what we call here 'a lump of a lad' and he was panoplied in all those devices, or disguises, which a countryman puts on when he meets the men of town. Country people and children are all play actors (Hassall, 1959: 361).

Another editor John Adcock commented disapprovingly on his poetry in *For Remembrance* stating that:

He fought on the Serbian Retreat, and in Gallipoli; then was sent to Flanders, where he fell in action in July 1917. 'I have taken up arms,' he wrote to Lord Dunsany, 'for the fields along the Boyne, and the birds and the blue sky over them'; and in that second book of his you see him moving through scenes of conflict in strange lands, but still dreaming and singing of home and the peace of home. Though his poems are divided into those written in barracks, in camp, at sea, in Serbia, in Greece, in hospital in Egypt, and again in barracks, there is not a war song among them (1918: 55-6).

When such a correspondence between Edward Marsh and James Stephens took place has not been indicated in the book, yet three poems titled "The Wife of Llew", "A Rainy Day in April" and "The Lost Ones" from *Songs of the Fields* found place in the 1916 edition of *Georgian Poetry 1913-1915*, to which Edward Marsh wrote a Prefatory Note dated Oct.1915.

As all these developments were going on the literary scene, in Ireland "the Irish Volunteers, combining with units of Citizen Army, launched the Dublin Easter Rising" on 24 April 1916 (Stallworthy, 2005: 50). The rising was violently suppressed and the leaders got arrested. "In early May, the fifteen ring-leaders faced the firing squad wearing the uniform he [Ledwidge] had himself elected to wear as an act of Irish patriotism" (Stallworthy, 2005: 50). "Ledwidge had been friends with Patrick Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh from Co. Meath, a former union organiser" (Walker, 2007: 70). What Ledwidge felt over the executions of dear friends must not be difficult to guess. He joined the British army merely "because she stood between Ireland and an enemy common to our civilisation and I would not have her say that she defended us while we did nothing at home but pass resolutions. ... On the day first executions took place Ledwidge wrote Bob Christie, a Protestant Friend from Ulster":

Yes, Poor Ireland is always in Trouble. Though I am not a Sinn Feiner and you are a Carsonite, do our sympathies go to *Cathleen ni Houlihan*? Poor MacDonagh and Pearse were two of my best friends. Now they are dead, shot by England (Walker, 2007: 70).

The Easter Rising was to "hurt him into poetry" more than the Great War" (Stallworthy, 2005: 50). The lament for "Thomas MacDonagh" reads as follows:

He shall not hear the bittern cry
In the wild sky, where he is lain,
Nor voices of the sweeter birds
Above the wailing of the rain.

Nor shall he know when loud March blows
Thro' slanting snows her fanfare shrill,
Blowing to flame the golden cup
Of many an upset daffodil.

But when the Dark Cow leaves the moor,
And pastures poor with greedy weeds,
Perhaps he'll hear her low at morn
Lifting her horn in pleasant meads.

Alice Curtayne comments on the style and metre of the poem thus:

Ledwidge had begun to model his verse on Irish poetry, using the metre with the *aicill*-rhyme, from the end of one line to the middle of the next. He probably learnt this from Douglas Hyde's *Love Songs of Connacht*, and *The Literary History of Ireland*. The poem is also a moving recall to the executed leader's translation from the Irish of the poem *the Yellow Bittern*. John Drinkwater described it as "Ledwidge's first encompassing of profound lyric mastery a poem of that limpid austerity that comes only from minds slowly but irresistibly disciplined to truth." As in the case of all artists, Ledwidge's craft is seen here in the process of being perfected by suffering (1998: 156).

In April 1917 we find him on the battlefield again, this time in France, and acquainted, probably by correspondence, with the patron of artists Edward Marsh who had published three of his poems in *Georgian Poetry 1913-1915* volume. On 1 July 1917 Ledwidge wrote to Edward Marsh. The poet excitedly addresses Marsh: "If you visit the front, don't forget to come up the line at night to watch the German rockets. They have big crests which throw a pale flame across no-man's-land and white bursting into green and green changing into blue and blue bursting and dropping down in purple torrents. It is like the end of a beautiful world" (Curtayne, 1998: 184). However, Marsh's visit delayed until the following September. On 31 July, while he was building road, as he had done years ago in Meath, he received a direct hit blowing him into bits. The rest is told by Curtayne as follows:

Father Devas was among the first to arrive on the scene. He rubbed the mud off identification disc and stood stricken at the message it conveyed. That night he wrote in his diary:

July 31st 1917

Forest Area. Mass in Forest

Crowds at Holy Communion. Arrange for service but washed out by rain and fatigues. Walk in rain with dogs. Ledwidge killed, blown to bits; at Confession yesterday and Mass and Holy Communion this morning. R.I.P.

Three months later his second book *Songs of Peace* appeared to be followed by his last *Last Songs*, which ends in "A Soldier's Grave" "possibly a memory of the shell-swept slopes of the Gallipoli peninsula" (Stallworthy, 2005: 51).

Then in the lull of the midnight, gentle arms
Lifted him slowly down the slopes of death,
Lest he should hear again the mad alarms
Of battle, dying moans, and painful breath.

And where the earth was soft for flowers we made
A grave for him that he might better rest.
So, Spring shall come and leave it sweet arrayed,
And there the lark shall return her dewy nest.

Conclusion

Francis Ledwidge, one of the three prominent Irish poets of the World War I⁶, is the only Irish poet who fought on Turkish soil, Gallipoli. The circumstances and his sentimentality are the two factors that made him choose between. He was going either to stay home and watch how happily his beloved Ellie lead a married life with another man or to go to war saving his mother from poverty by separation allowance; and/or he was going either to stay home and at the end of the war have England say that she saved them and they did nothing or to go to war then settle up the independence issue. For both cases he did the latter. With all the beautiful imagery of his dear country Ireland and with all his sensitivity and sentimentality he walked into the horrors of the war, lost friends both on battlefields and at home. He strived to find consolation in the birds and nature of his native country which frequently appeared in his poems. In the letter of 20 April 1916 he wrote to Lord Dunsany expressing his liking for anything that is English thus: "I remember you once said of Manchester that God only sends fogs to it. You are quite right, but even the English fog is dear to me now and prized by me above Turkish sunshine, or Serbia's beautiful autumn" (Curtayne, 1998: 148). Yet years later he was to write a poem about Gallipoli which he had once criticised. He seems to have reached the decision that Gallipoli was an important piece of land and by the sacrifice of sons of Ireland it was 'sanctified' (16) yet not annexed. It is the reason why 'Christ arisen, and angels' (17) will come back there 'like exile birds' (18) not to bless the souls but 'to watch their sleep' (18). An Irishman's yearning "An Irishman in Gallipoli" composed on 27 February 1917 is at the beginning of the book *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli*, standing as a memorial of a great defeat reads as follows:

Where Aegean cliffs with bristling menace front
The treacherous splendour of that isley sea,
Lighted by Troy's last shadow; where the first
Hero kept watch and the last Mystery
Shook with dark thunder. Hark! the battle brunt!
A nation speaks, old Silences are burst.

'Tis not for lust of glory, no new throne
This thunder and this lightning of our power
Wakens up frantic echoes, not for these
Our Cross with England's mingle, to be blown
At Mammon's threshold. We but war when war
Serves Liberty and Keeps a world at peace.

Who said that such an emprise could be vain?
Were they not one with Christ, who fought and died?
Let Ireland weep: but not for sorrow, weep

⁶ The other two are Thomas Kettle and Patrick MacGill.

That by her sons a land is sanctified.
For Christ arisen, and angels once again
Come back, like exile birds, and watch their sleep.

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