

An Icon of Sacrifice: 'The Last General Absolution of the Munsters' – the Picture and its People

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This paper is an exercise in micro-history as explained by the historian of history, John Barrow.¹ The author of this article, a philosopher, found professional permit for his project in a remark by R.G. Collingwood, also a philosopher, that 'the chief business of twentieth century philosophy is to reckon with twentieth-century history'.² This statement was first used to the same purpose (but on a macro scale) by yet another philosopher, Jonathan Glover.³ I share a hometown, Mitchelstown, Co. Cork, with the family at the centre of this study and found a further endorsement of my approach in a remark made by the most famous writer born in the town, William Trevor, regarding his own work. He once told a newspaper interviewer that while fiction 'insists on universality' (the philosopher's propensity,⁴ decried by Collingwood) it 'equally insists that a degree of parochialism can often best achieve this' – a nuanced thesis that can also, as the reader can judge from the attempt below, apply to the writing of history.

Prologue

'The Last General Absolution of the Munsters at Rue-du-Bois' by the Italian illustrator, Fortunino Matania, is one of the most enduring images of the First World War and certainly so in Ireland. It is a moving representation of what proved to be a doomed battalion being assured of the mercy of God before going into battle by their Roman Catholic chaplain, Fr Francis Gleeson.⁵ Pointedly, the predominantly Catholic ranks and

¹ In *A History of Histories* (London, 2007). Its characteristic study is 'a small area, a narrow time band, perhaps a protagonist, though one with varying degrees of dominance, and a small community', p. 477. Pertinent to the Thomond Archaeological and Historical Society, Barrow suggests that what he describes as the cutting edge sub-discipline of 'micro history' can trace its origins to the 19th-century antiquarians, one of whom is featured in this article. This approach first appeared in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1975); a more recent example is Eamonn Duffy's *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (London, 2001). There is, of course, no claim to parity of quality in what follows.

² *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1978) p. 79.

³ See: *Humanity: A Moral History of the Twentieth Century* (London, 1999) p. 411. Glover admitted that despite his statement's obvious meaning Collingwood had something else in mind viz. urging philosophers to take developments in historical method seriously and, more controversially, to adopt a radically historicist approach.

⁴ See, for example, David Hume's view in *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals* (Oxford, 1975) S.8, P.I, that the chief use of history 'is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature' although, admittedly, 'by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations', p. 65. Besides his central importance in the development of British philosophy, Hume wrote the 6-Volume, *History of England* (1754-61), at first regarded as revisionist, then standard; his focus, however was on the grand play of kings, princes and potentates.

⁵ A native of Templemore, Co Tipperary, Gleeson was born 28 May, 1884. He was educated for the priesthood at Holy Cross College, Clonliffe Rd., Dublin and St. Patrick's College, Maynooth. Ordained in 1910, he served two terms as chaplain in the First World War (1914-15; 1917-19), first joining the Royal Munster Fusiliers [RMF] on 16 November, 1914 in response to an appeal by Cardinal Logue to Irish priests to join the chaplaincy service of the British army. He was widely esteemed by his army comrades [See tributes to Gleeson quoted in Tom Dooley 'The Royal Munster Fusiliers', *History Ireland*, VI (Spring 1998)]. However, by the time his second contract as chaplain expired, he was considered but not deemed suitable for deployment by the Army recruiting agency. This was on account of his perceived personality traits and his Nationalist political opinions. These latter may well have intensified as moves were made towards the end of the war to introduce conscription in Ireland—moves that are often now regarded by historians as influencing Irish public opinion

the mostly Protestant officers participated in the same ritual.⁶ This symbolised a *de facto* alliance of the two dominant political forces that favoured the involvement by Irishmen in the war, led respectively by John Redmond and Edward Carson. Even though their political objectives were at odds, each leader urged his followers to enlist in the British armed forces. For his part, Redmond advocated volunteering for army service (at a time when conscription was not applied in Ireland) as consolidating the very limited step towards independence made with the passing of the Irish Home Rule bill in 1914. Yet, even the local parliament with constrained powers that had been conceded was rejected by persons both of Carson's own Southern Protestant background and those of similar religious affiliation, particularly of the Presbyterian persuasion, in the North. For the time being, however, unionist conviction demanded loyalty to the British cause in time of war.

There was, of course, another view at work in Catholic nationalist Ireland. Just as Carson's followers had resisted the move to Home Rule by threat of force, there was a minority in the Catholic community who thought that what had been passed in the Westminster Parliament in 1914, already prorogued for the duration of the war, did not have the potential Redmond saw in it. For the 'Irish-Irelanders', England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity.⁷ This small and, to begin with, far from representative force was within two years to erupt in armed rebellion. Although caught in an intensifying political maelstrom, the common Irish soldier had likely placed himself at the front in Northern France for the more pragmatic reason that in the British army he had found a job.⁸ The officers, especially the Anglo-Irish gentry members of the Anglican Church of Ireland, generally felt bound to do their duty by an Empire, in which many of their class had found a meaningful role, most especially in the military.⁹

even more than the execution of the 1916 rebels had done. In the early 1920s Gleeson served briefly as Command Chaplain with the Dublin Army Command of the Irish Free State army and thereafter in various parishes of the Dublin Archdiocese, where he was noted for his care of the poor and of veterans, his promotion of temperance, his interest in the Irish language and lobbying for the censorship of films. In 1956, he was elected Canon to the Metropolitan Chapter. He died on 26 June, 1959 and is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery.

⁶ In his *Journal* entry for St. Patrick's Day, 1915, Fr Gleeson, records that: 'the Commanding Officer and all the Officers of the Battalion marched with their companies and took their places in the Sanctuary. One of the most beautiful things was the presence of an officer who, 'til he joined up, was a Carson volunteer in Ireland. He was today as Irish and as "proud of it too" as any of us'. Fr Gleeson kept two records of the first four months of 1915. One is a Lett's No. 12 Diary, in which he made brief annotations of those killed in action and of burials performed. The second took a journal form. In it, he wrote substantive accounts of events in his life from 7 February-3 May 1915. I will refer to such entries as 'Journal'. By 3 May, he had run out of space in that volume. From then on more lengthy entries commence in the Lett's Diary. The archive also includes typewritten transcriptions of this material. The 'Fr Francis A. Gleeson Papers' can be accessed on line at <<http://digital.ucd.ie/view//view/ucdlib:36570>>.

⁷ Gearóid O'Sullivan later wrote in an unpublished MS that while walking in Dublin with Seán MacDermott, signatory of the Declaration of Irish Independence, a newsboy announced the death of Archduke Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a teenage assassin, whose associates considered the choice of date (28 June, 1914) unsuitable for a parade by a member of the Austrian imperial family as it was a cherished day in Serbian memory. MacDermott remarked to his companion: 'Austria [-Hungary] will move against these fellows. Russia will back these fellows up, Germany and Italy will back Austria, France will take on Germany. You'll have a European war, England will join—and that will be our time to strike.' [Quoted in R.F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890-1923* (London, 2015) p. 177]. It is possible to read this remark as either prescient or, on the other hand, improbable but it is accurate so far as it goes. What it does not catch are the traps emanating from what Hume (above) called 'the regular springs of human action and behaviour' that caused 'the statesmen collectively to bring about a disaster' in the 36 days between the assassination and the invasion of Belgium by Germany on 3 August. These traps, diplomatic, psychological etc, were at the time configured by a nationalistic sentiment and shared by all sides. This sentiment powered an acceptable commitment to the survival of the nation but more ominously a 'refusal to accept an insult to the nation, the avoidance of the nation being humiliated or dishonoured' [Glover, *Humanity*, p. 199].

⁸ Tom Dooley (above) describes a large number of Irish men at the time as 'unemployed, impoverished or educationally disadvantaged'. Nevertheless, valour and solidarity such as that shown by Private Christy Barry of the 2nd Battalion, who rescued a Capt. Hawkes from 'No Man's Land' and carried him to safety, at the cost of his own life were not uncommon.

⁹ In *Historical Essays 1938-2001* (Dublin, 2003), R.B. McDowell gives what he calls a 'Homeric' list (p. 141) of leading Anglo-Irish officers of the British army. The most prominent of these in the First World War were H.H. Kitchener, John French and Henry Wilson.

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The focus of this article is on a member of that class and her family. Mrs Victor Rickard was wife of the Commanding Officer of the battalion depicted by Matania. Although her marriage to Rickard was to be the second of three to British army officers, she retained his name as a *nom de plume* for the rest of her life. Louie, as she was familiarly known is widely held to have influenced – some say commissioned¹⁰ – Matania to paint the Last General Absolution scene. In any case, the artist is likely to have relied to a considerable degree on details to be found in the third of four articles about the war experience of the Munster Fusiliers, written by Mrs Rickard. This first appeared in *New Ireland*, a weekly review edited by Denis Gwynn in Dublin, on 10 July, 1915 [Vol. I, no. 9] under the title ‘The Munsters at Rue du Bois’ [pp 131-2]. Her articles¹¹ were re-printed in the London magazine, the *Sphere*, in 1916. This magazine published a colour version of what was to become a famous illustration in its edition for 27 November, 1916.¹² A similar version was given *gratis* with a Christmas edition of the Dublin *Weekly Freeman*, and inscribed ‘from a painting by F. Matania by kind permission of the *Sphere*’. Meanwhile, Mrs Rickard’s text was published in a 55 page booklet by *New Ireland* in September, 1915 and later reprinted along with new material in her book: *The Story of the Munsters at Etreux, Festubert, Rue du Bois and Hulloch* (London, 1918). [Henceforth ‘Story’].

However, the information she provided raises questions pertinent to a long lasting search for the exact site of the ‘Absolution’, and more generally, about the value of her account for the historian. A further question addressed in this article is whether or not she is key to the unresolved issue of the ultimate fate of the original painting. What cannot be denied, however, is that she and the artist succeeded in establishing the ‘forgotten front’¹³ between Ypres and the Somme in public consciousness through the much re-produced image of the ritual – a success capped in 2015 by the unveiling of a centenary plaque on which is a copy of the painting. More broadly, the trajectory of her life against her family background, explored below, is an example of the tectonic historical pressures bearing on her class in Ireland. These were poignantly depicted by her friend and fellow-novelist, Elizabeth Bowen – who pointed to an ideology of sacrifice to national interests as key – an ideology that paradoxically was shared with the opponents of that class’s power and indeed broadly throughout Europe. Finally, it is intriguing to see how a study focussed on one family can reveal so much about the historical forces at work on the more westerly of these ‘Atlantic islands’ during the First World War – forces that continued to shape it through the 20th century.

¹⁰ Michael Parsons, for example, in the *Irish Times*, 23 August, 2014.

¹¹ The others were ‘The Stand of the Munsters at Etreux’, 26 June 1915 [pp 99-101]; ‘The Royal Munster Fusiliers at Festubert’, 3 July 1915 [pp 115-17]; ‘The Munsters at the Dardanelles’, 31 July, 1915 [pp 179-80]. I wish to thank Dr Tadhg Moloney for advising me on where I could access this material.

¹² See: Lucinda Gosling, *Goodbye Old Man—Matania’s Vision of the First World War* (Gloucestershire, 2014) p. 83. A folio of 12 signed monochrome proofs by Matania, entitled ‘With the British army on the western front’ was published by the *Tatler* and *Sphere* in 1916. According to Peter Harington, curator of the Anne S.K. Brown Collection at Providence, R.I. these proofs were ‘photogravure...taken from water-colours or wash drawings rather than oil paintings’ [mail to writer]. The reproduction entitled ‘The Last Absolution of the Munsters at Rue du Bois, May 8th, 1915’, opposite p. 34 of the *The Story of the Munsters* seems to share a similar technical process. I wish to thank Samuel Walsh for his comments on Matania’s painting technique.

¹³ I gleaned this phrase from Prof. Hedley Malloch of *Lille*, English son of a Mitchelstown mother (née Corbett), who is regarded, as he has described himself, as the ‘boots on the ground’ by persons interested in the Royal Munster Fusiliers. In 2011, he saw to the erection of a monument to eleven (six Irish) British prisoners of war who were executed at *Iron* in this area of France on 25 February, 1915 by German troops. See: Ronan McGreevy, ‘An Irishman’s Diary’, *Irish Times*, 23 February, 2015.

The Moore Connection

In 1911, Canon Courtenay Moore¹⁴, incumbent of the ancient parish of Brigown (Mitchelstown, Co Cork) filed a census return of the ten residents of his Rectory on the night of Sunday, 2 April. Included in the return were the Canon and his wife, 'Jessie Mona'¹⁵, two female grandchildren – one an infant born that year and the other aged eight¹⁶ – and the Rector's daughter (one of four surviving children), Jessie Louisa (wrongly copied in the census as 'Jessie Laura') and her husband. Four years later, on Saturday evening, 8 May, 1915 – coincidentally one day after the sinking of the RMS Lusitania, with the loss of 1,198 lives eleven miles off Kinsale, Co. Cork – the troops of the Second Battalion of the Royal Munster Fusiliers (RMF) assembled for a General Absolution from their chaplain, the scene later painted by Matania. Fr Francis Gleeson is mounted on a horse which stands on a wet and pitted roadway. There is a stole round his neck and his right hand is stretched out in blessing. Behind him, to his left, is a side-view of a way-side shrine. The battalion had halted for a rest after which they were called to order by Regimental Sergeant Major, John Ring (from Bandon),¹⁷ and formed three sides of a square (only one of which is wholly visible in the picture) with a clear space in between, facing the priest. While receiving their chaplain's ministrations their standards were held in front of the battalion's companies – dark green flags, a harp embroidered in gold thread in the centre and the word 'Munster' underneath.¹⁸ In the distance at near centre right is a windmill in an otherwise featureless and flat landscape.

Lt. Col. Victor Rickard

On the other side of the shrine, also facing the troops, is the only other mounted figure. He was the battalion commander, Victor George Howard Rickard. The scene has always

¹⁴ Moore, sixth son of a physician, Alexander Moore, of Rosnashane, Ballymoney, Co. Antrim, was born c.1840. His family was a distinguished one. His brother William was Queen Victoria's honorary physician in Ireland and his nephew, William's son, Sir William Moore (1864-1944), *quondam* Unionist M.P., was Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland (1925-37).

¹⁵ Born in 1843 and daughter of Capt. Benjamin Duff, Gordon Highlanders, *de jure* 5th Baronet Dunbar of Hempriggs, Jessie was a niece of Field Marshal, Sir Frederick Paul Haines, who commanded the British army in India. Earlier in his Indian career, Haines commanded the 104th Foot, Bengal Fusiliers which later became the 2nd Battalion of the RMF. She was also a relative by marriage of Field Marshal, Sir Hugh Gough. Jessie Mona Duff married Courtenay Moore at Bakewell, Derbyshire on 14 April, 1867. She died the last evening of 1936 and was buried at Datchet, Berks. The chief mourners were given as Mrs Rickard and Dr D.R. Gwynn; Jessie Moore's three other living children 'sent flowers'. *Cork Examiner*, 5 Jan. 1937.

¹⁶ These grandchildren, to whom we shall return, were tended to by a Governess, Thomelta Koessler, and a Nurse, Marcella Tombe, whose religious affiliation in each case was given as 'Lutheran'. There were also two Roman Catholics entered in Moore's census return—a Cook, Mary Slattery and a Parlour Maid, Bridget Lee.

¹⁷ According to his headstone, Ring died 17 April 1960, and is buried in grave number Oc5 (Section O, Row C), Mount St. Lawrence Cemetery, Limerick, with his wife Esther, who predeceased him. The burial register records that he died in the Limerick City Home and was buried at longitude/latitude QA 235, aged 82. [Source: Dr Helene Bradley-Davies, Geography Dept. Mary Immaculate College, who along with her colleague, Dr Maura Cronin and students of her own and of the History Dept. have, in cooperation with Limerick City and County Council, created a searchable on-line database that gives the whereabouts of graves and what appears on gravestones pertaining to the c.70,000 persons buried in the cemetery. A companion project was the publication by the Council of *City and Cemetery—A History of Mount Saint Lawrence*, edited by Jacqui Hayes and compiled by Dr Matthew Potter].

¹⁸ Tom Johnstone, *Orange, Green & Khaki*, (Dublin, 1992) notes that after the first battle of Ypres [19 October-22 November, 1914] 'the company standards presented by Lady [Aberdeen] Ishbel Gordon, Freeman of Limerick and wife of the recent Lord Lieutenant of Ireland' [p. 81] were hung by the Munsters in the choir of the village church of *Labeuvière*. In his *Journal*, Fr Gleeson notes that this church had been built in the 17th century by the Benedictines of *St Vassé* Abbey, to preserve the relics of St. Christine. [Wednesday 10 February, 1915]. In his journal entry for the previous Sunday, Fr Gleeson recalls a similar placement by 'the "Wild Geese" after the battle of Fontenoy (1745) "The flag we conquered in the fray/Looks down in Ypres Choir they say"' ['Clare's Dragoons']. He explained to his men that 'just as the Irish Brigade deposited their conquered flag in Ypres after the battle of Ramilles, so have the Munsters deposited their Irish flags in Labeuvière Church after [the battle of Festubert]' [9 February, 1915]. These colours are now held in St. George's Hall, Windsor.

been associated with *La Rue du Bois* (in the village of *Richbourg-L'Avoué*) which at the time formed part of the road (now the D171) from the rail-head at *Béthune* northwards towards *Armentières*.¹⁹ Approximately 550 metres parallel to the *Rue du Bois* were the forward British trenches and c.350 metres beyond them the German lines. That evening, Rickard's battalion was on its way to relieve the 1st Coldstream Guards who had been holding the British position with a number of other battalions.

Rickard, a Boer War veteran,²⁰ had taken over the battalion command on 6 February, 1915²¹ and had been promoted Lt. Col. (Temporary) on 8 March, 1915. Soon after, Fr Gleeson wrote of Rickard in his *Journal* that he was 'the very essence of kindness and courtesy – he shows the greatest interest in my spiritual work ... gives my recommendations, ideas and wishes every respect and consideration'. By Holy Week, the battalion was in the trenches and on the evening of Holy Thursday [1 April] Rickard brought Gleeson from headquarters through various obstacles and a communication trench to the front line where the chaplain stayed with his men until Easter Day, when he said Mass in a trench, with the discharge of a gun replacing the customary bell at the consecration and also to mark the '*Introibo*' and the '*Ite, missa est*',²² the beginning and the end. In his *Journal* entry for Friday, April 9, Gleeson records his admiration of his CO's expertise in leading him safely on this short but perilous journey. Major Rickard (as he was ranked in 1911) was the son-in-law recorded by Canon Moore as staying in the Brigown Rectory in Mitchelstown on the evening of the 1911 census return.

Lt. Col. Rickard died²³ leading his men into battle early on the morning following Fr Gleeson's General Absolution. The immediate casualty list that day was 46 killed, 205 wounded and 128 missing (379 in all of the somewhat more than 600 men under Rickard's command – although Fr Gleeson mentions a total of 900).²⁴ Of the remainder,

¹⁹ *Lille*, the largest city in the region of *Nord-Pas-de Calais*, was by that time occupied by the Central Powers.

²⁰ According to his widow, he was an adjutant with the R.M.F., operating variously in the Orange River Colony and Transvaal from February to May, 1902. For this service, he received the Queen's Medal with three clasps. Thereafter, he served in Ballymullen Barracks, Tralee, Co. Kerry, the Munster Fusiliers recruitment and training centre, and married 'Louie' Rickard there in 1908. He next spent some time in imperial service with the Munsters, who had been assigned to India and Burma.

²¹ Fr Gleeson mentions meeting him for the first time in his *Journal* (Wednesday 10 February, 1915): 'The new C.O. (Maj Rickards [sic.] met us and addressed us in an interesting speech—exhorting the men to uphold the honour of the Munsters. He seems a fine man and I am sure he will do his best to see the men well looked after.' Immediately on taking over the second battalion Rickard introduced a felt shamrock behind the cap badge 'with the object of giving a distinctively Irish emblem to all ranks'. [Preface, *The Story of the Munsters*]. Jean Prendergast writes that this had been already been done by the 1st Battalion in India. [*Last Absolution: The 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers 1914-15* (Location 2294)]. Prendergast has assembled many interesting letters and press extracts pertinent to the RMF – not only for the period indicated in the title of her comprehensive e-book but also both prior to and post 1915 and also after the war.

²² See Prendergast, [Location: 2395].

²³ He is interred now at Cabernet- Rouge British Cemetery, *Souchez*. (Grave reference XXVII A 14) – but originally was buried in 'a garden near a place called Windy Corner...at the head of a line of graves' as described by his widow, Louie. She goes on to quote Fr Gleeson: 'The Munsters who gave their lives so heroically and cheerfully, have, even in death, at their head, their kindly and loving leader, who so much inspired them and cheered us all.' [*Story of the Munsters*, p. 43].

²⁴ The *Irish Times* (Monday, August 4, 2014) states that 'of the 800 Munster Fusiliers who went into battle in France, 600 died that day'. While the first number approaches that given by Gleeson – who had originally landed in France with c.1,000 fellow officers and men – the second figure is grossly over-stated. A different figure for those killed was given in the *Irish Times* of Friday, 8 May, 2015: Ronan McGreevy writes: 'A total of 151 Munsters died at the Battle of Aubers Ridge according to the author Jean Prendergast, who has written the definitive history of Rue du Bois. One in six of those who had lined up for general absolution the previous evening died in the battle, and 220 were injured'. The proportion of one sixth seems to assume Gleeson's total of 900 men as correct but this is almost certainly overstated. In trying to explain Gleeson's figure, we might cite a letter from Sgt Major Ring to Col. A.M Bent, CMG to be found in the appendix to the 1918 edition of the *Story of the Munsters*. This states that Rickard was accompanied for what was probably just part of the journey by the Brigadier General of the 3rd Munster Fusiliers (presumably H.R. Davies). Thus, there may have been more men taking part on that evening's trek than the battalion alone.

not much more than 200 men and four officers (out of 22) were in a fit state to withdraw having conducted a second attack in the afternoon. Although they had the rather empty consolation of knowing that a small party of their battalion were the only British troops to reach and hold (if only for a brief time) a German position, it had been apparent to the frontline soldiers as early as 10.30 a.m. that the attack had been an unmitigated failure.²⁵ British losses in what became known as the battle for Aubers Ridge, amounted to 11,000 soldiers and were proportionately among the highest of the entire war. There were no perceptible gains.²⁶ The remnant of the 2nd Battalion, RMF, made its way back at dusk to their billeting area arriving at 10.30 p.m. *En route*, the men passed the place where they had received Fr Gleeson's blessing the previous evening. As they did so, one voice began to sing Jack Judge's 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary' and was soon joined in song by his fellows. Meanwhile, a normally 'jovial'²⁷ Fr Gleeson spent all night, as he put it in his *Diary*: 'trying to console, aid & remove the wounded. It was ghastly to see them lying there in cold, cheerless outhouses, on bare stretchers, with no blanket to cover their freezing limbs...No ambulances coming. They came at last – at daylight'.²⁸

The attack that day on the *Rue du Bois* was part of a grand strategy by the French Commander-in-Chief, *Joffre*, to take advantage of the Central Powers decision to concentrate their resources on defeating Russia in the winter of 1914/15. The French High Command resolved to launch an offensive from three separate points. The first of these was from Arras, which had been successfully defended in late 1914 in face of a German advance across the *Artois* plateau and the valleys beneath it. On 24 March, 1915, *Joffre* requested Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Expeditionary Force, to assist in executing this plan. French agreed and entrusted the detailed planning to Sir Douglas Haig, Commander of the First Army, BEF. Accordingly, the British (including Rickard's battalion, 3rd Infantry Brigade, 1st Division) were assigned to mount an assault on the relatively elevated ground of Aubers Ridge, which was being used for surveillance of the surrounding countryside by German forces.

The assault, which had been postponed from the previous day because of adverse weather conditions, commenced at 5.37 a.m. on what was 'a beautiful morning, the sun shining brightly'²⁹ with an artillery bombardment by 636 guns lasting forty minutes, ending approximately at sunrise.³⁰ Even fire-power of that magnitude proved insufficient; the goal of thereby seriously breaching the barbed wire entanglements and other defences of

²⁵ See letter quoted by Sean Healy in *Cork Holly Bough*, Christmas 2008, p. 15.

²⁶ Major-General Flaking of the 1st Division Headquarters essayed that 'from a military point of view the attack was of the great value, because it drew away hostile reinforcements urgently required to repel the successful French attacks to the South'. See Appendix, *The Story of the Munsters*. Alan Clark cited Aubers Ridge as a prime example in support of his controversial thesis in the *The Donkeys: A History of the British Expeditionary Force in 1915* (London, 1991) that the military leadership in 1915 were donkeys leading lions.

²⁷ This is how Robert Graves in his 1929 account of the war on the Western Front, *Goodbye to all that* (London, 1960) describes Gleeson. Graves, grandson of an Anglican bishop of Limerick, contrasts the attitude of the Anglican chaplains he observed who did not seem 'sorry to obey orders to avoid getting mixed up with the fighting and to stay behind with the transport' with their Roman Catholic counterparts, giving Gleeson as an example. However Graves's illustrative story that 'when all the officers were killed or wounded at the first battle of Ypres' Gleeson had stripped off his black badges and, taking command of the survivors, held the line' [p. 198] cannot be correct since Gleeson was not at Ypres, the first battle of which ended on 2 November, 1914, less than a week after he joined the army in England.

²⁸ An extract from this *Diary* entry is now carved on a memorial tablet at the Island of Ireland Peace Park, Messines, Belgium.

²⁹ See account of Sergeant Major James T. Leahy of Monkstown, Co. Cork, quoted by Sean Healy, *Cork Holly Bough* above. Sunrise was at 6.11 a.m.

³⁰ One participant, Sgt (later Lt) James Meehan, recalled in the *Cork Examiner* the following year: 'I shall never forget that day: The terrific din, the incessant witch-like shrieking and the violent destructive explosions of shells in our immediate vicinity'. [Quoted by Michael Kenefick in *The Cork Holly Bough*, Christmas 2009, p. 64].

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the German trenches was not achieved.³¹ The Germans, alerted to their own weaknesses by a British success in taking the nearby village of *Neuve Chapelle* in 10-12 March, 1915, had meanwhile greatly strengthened these defences. Lt. Col. Rickard³² was killed by a single bullet that struck his spinal cord having entered at the neck. This was not more than fifteen yards from where he had given the signal to charge to his men, who had lain all night 'on the road a short way from the trenches'.³³ According to Sgt Major Ring, Rickard was so delighted at the way the men had gone about their work that he decided to join the first attack rather than await, as planned, the second one. The men, whose military prowess so pleased him, were later described as 'lads from Kerry and Cork' [*Story*, p. 36] by the Rector's daughter, Rickard's wife.

Mrs Jessie Louisa Rickard

Whether or not Mrs Rickard commissioned the Matania painting, it is likely that her written portrayal of the Last Absolution incident was used by the artist. This is the view of Tom Johnstone and later Jean Prendergast.³⁴ She was a published novelist and deployed all her writing skills,³⁵ as we have noted, to memorialise the actions of the Munster Fusiliers in the war. Although Matania was to visit the Western Front, as well as other theatres of the First World War regularly,³⁶ it is very unlikely he was physically present when Fr Gleeson administered the General Absolution on the May evening in 1915. Despite the photo-realism of his prolific war-time images many of them relied on eye-witness accounts later given him. However, this kind of source was unlikely to have been available to him in respect of the 'Last General Absolution'; Prendergast is probably correct to state that he had not 'met the men whom he depicted'. However, she is on more shaky ground in stating that 'Matania never visited the Rue du Bois' [Location 2543] for

³¹ About this time in an interview given to *The Times*, General French blamed the lack of progress on the Western Front on the shortage of shells – a deficiency soon to be addressed by the appointment of David Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions.

³² Rickard was born at 8 Alton Tce, Gosport, Hampshire, at an uncertain date (given in the 1881 English Census as 'abt 1873') to Caroline Susan Matilda and George Pearn Rickard. He was baptised at St Nicholas (Anglican) Church, Rochester, Kent on 17 August 1872. In the 1891 English Census his father's place of birth was given as Ireland and his father's occupation as an Admiralty official – presumably in Plymouth. Rickard was returned as a 'Cadet' at Sandhurst Military College. Probate was granted to his widow, Jessie Louisa Rickard, on the 23 August 1916. The total value of his effects was given as £225 5s 2d. For administration purposes his address was given as Kingsmead, Kingsgate, Winchester. For the details of his actions and those of the men he led on the day of his death see Edward Hancock, *Aubers Ridge* (Barnsley, 2005), pp 60-2.

³³ Letter of James Leahy to his brother quoted in Prendergast [Location 2565]. Fr Gleeson also ministered that evening to the Roman Catholic members of the South Wales Borderers [Location 2576].

³⁴ Johnstone states that 'the scene was well captured on canvas by Fortunino Matania from a description obtained by Mrs Rickard' [Note 23, Chap. 8 '1915: The Spring Battles' in *Orange* etc. above] and Jean Prendergast states in the *Last Absolution The 2nd Royal Munster Fusiliers 1914-15* that 'Louie Rickard provided the artist with the details of the occasion which she had been given by the survivors' [Location 2543].

³⁵ She was by then an established writer. As an 18 year old she had stories about hunting, her passion, placed in the *Cork Examiner* and, under the description 'Munster Girl' had a story 'The Price of a Friend' serialised in the *Weekly Irish Times*, beginning 21 May, 1904, p. 9]. She had also published two novels: a humorous work, *Young Mr. Gibbs* (1912) and *Dregs* (1914)—a psychological study of the descent into degradation of a well-to-do young man and his subsequent redemption.

³⁶ A recognised 'war artist', he provided an image almost every week to the *Sphere*. For example, in the second half of 1915 he depicted scenes from France and the Italian Alps, showing incidents on land, sea and air (e.g. the view from the gondola of a Zeppelin). Apart from scenes witnessed, of which he had a photographic memory, many of these illustrations were based on interviews of participants and some from 'photographic material supplied', as stated under the relevant images. Fortunino shared his artistic gifts with his father Eduardo and his cousin Ugo. Matania was not quite thirteen when he began to publish his work and by the end of the war, still only 33, had built up an astonishingly large portfolio. Matania was admired by John Singer Sargent, who purchased one of his paintings. This was a signal honour for a commercial illustrator, whose work was generally regarded as inferior by the artistic community.

we know that he was in nearby *Neuve Chapelle*, just after it was taken by the British in March, 1915.³⁷ Hence, Matania's image of the Fusiliers would, at minimum, have been augmented by his familiarity with the terrain (supplemented perhaps by contemporaneous sketches from his time in *Neuve Chapelle*), informed by Mrs Rickard's written account, which was in turn informed by letters from participants. As for Louie Rickard, it is likely that she visited the site and her husband's grave nearby shortly afterwards as she wrote about the *Rue du Bois* in familiar terms – for example, that it was 'now a sad place, for the chimney-stacks have fallen, and the roofs and walls gape desolately' [*Story*, p. 33]. She certainly had an address in France in the following year.³⁸ Personally acquainted at that time or not, she was modest about the academic value of her work stating in the Preface: 'I do not wish in any sense to appear as a historian; that task awaits far abler and more qualified hands'.

Where did Fr Gleeson give the Last General Absolution?

What has been written so far would suggest that Matania relied on Mrs Rickard. Yet, when we turn to her text and the picture itself for specifics pertinent to locating the incident exactly, difficulties arise. For example, Mrs Rickard placed the event in front of a shrine and so did Matania. However, she referred to it as 'a broken shrine, and within the shrine a crucifix' [*Story*, p. 34]. However, this description does not seem consistent with what can be seen of the shrine from the admittedly side-view given by Matania. This and some other difficulties that will appear as we proceed, suggest that a chronological review of the available evidence is called for.

It seems reasonable to give not only a chronological priority but also a weighting for accuracy to the diary of Fr Gleeson. His autograph entry for 8 May, 1915 reads:

We march out from Tombe Willot (Locon) about 900 strong, our Commanding Officer being Major (sic.) Rickard & the Adjutant – Capt. Filgate – two of the kindest men I have come across. We leave about 7.00 o.c. The scenes of enthusiasm are outstanding. I ride my horse. Give [?] Absolution to Batt. during rest on road. Opposite La Couture Church between shrines [sic] of "*N.D. de la Bonne Mort*" and another shrine we have another rest. The men all sing hymns "Hail Great St. Patrick" [sic.³⁹]. I go further up – near the trenches to bid goodbye to all. So sad!!

As given here, the journey that evening had begun from the regiment's billeting area in various farm holdings⁴⁰ on *Rue de la Tombe Willot*.⁴¹ It is important to note that water-

³⁷ In a study of Matania's work in the series *The Art of the Illustrator* (London, 1918), Peter V. Bradshaw wrote: 'I met him just after he had returned from the Front in Flanders, to which he had gone on a tour of inspection for a few days. He had arrived during the battle of Neuve Chapelle...He brought back a few pencil outline notes, in a small sketch-book—details of background, or brief reminders of incidents and details which he wished to record. These brief notes and his magical memory provided double-page pictures for the *Sphere* for months afterwards – pictures which were scrupulously accurate to the smallest detail of local colour, and almost incomprehensible to his brother artists in their photographic exactness and sureness of touch' [p. 9]. Matania's painting, 'Neuve Chapelle, 1915' was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1918 and is now held in the museum of the Royal Worcestershire Regiment. Members of its 1st Battalion are depicted in it. See: Gosling, *Matania's Vision of the First World War*, p. 80.

³⁸ *Pré aux Clercs* [in] *Parame* [St Malo] *Bretagne*. [Source: British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards VGJ Rickard.] I am grateful to Áine Finucane, Librarian, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, for sourcing this and many other references.

³⁹ More correctly 'Hail Glorious St. Patrick'. Johnstone noted 'the religious ethos fostered by the battalion chaplain, Father Gleeson, and encouraged by the officers and NCOs' [above, p. 82].

⁴⁰ It seems from various comments in Fr Gleeson's *Journal* that while earlier in the year the Fusiliers were billeted in farm buildings in a mining area, now, nearer the trenches, they preferred to live in dug-outs as buildings attracted artillery fire.

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⁴¹ Fr Gleeson remarked that the French village it was named after was named after the wars of Louie Rickard's soldiers who were bringing in the council's call.

⁴² Sgrt Major R

This statement places the Absolution at a halt 'just before reaching the trenches', which most plausibly would be on or very near the *Rue du Bois*. Mrs Rickard's account is consistent with this: she wrote that the Fusiliers 'were on their way to take their place in the trenches in front of the Rue du Bois', at the entrance to which (as noted above), 'there stands a broken shrine, and within the shrine a crucifix'. She continues: 'when the Munsters came up the road, Colonel Rickard halted the Battalion' and 'in that wonderful twilight Father Gleeson gave a General Absolution'. She had previously identified the *Rue du Bois* as a 'street', which was 'about a mile from market-place of Neuve Chapelle, and above Festubert and Givenchy' [*Story*, p. 31]. Dr Jerome van de Wiel⁴³ kindly tested this information for me with reference to extant photographic evidence. He discovered an early 20th century photograph of *Richbourg-L'Avoué* that is labelled precisely '*L'Entrée de la Rue du Bois en arrivant par la Bombe*'.⁴⁴ This intersection was not significantly less than a mile from the centre of *Neuve Chapelle*. However, against this identification, no shrine (as mentioned by Mrs Rickard) is visible in the photograph but this could be a function of the angle from which it was taken; it was customary at that time in that part of France that an image of a crucified Christ (*a calvaire*) was placed at most crossroads.

While, as noted already, this site, or any other on or near the *Rue du Bois*, seems to be at variance with Fr Gleeson's record for 8 May, 1915, there is further independent evidence confirming the accuracy of her account on another point. This involves her statement that the Absolution was given in twilight. The line of reasoning is as follows: we have evidence from Capt Filgate that the march commenced at 7.15 p.m. Time to traverse the 8 miles recorded by R.S.M. Ring to the regiment's assigned position on the *Rue du Bois* must then be factored in. Army planning calculations to be found in the Field Service Regulations applying during the First World War assumed that infantry units travelled at 3 miles per hour (including short halts). On that assumption the march that evening would have taken 2 hours and 40 minutes, the battalion arrived at their destination on the *Rue du Bois* at 9.35 p.m. We also know that on that date in May sunset in nearby Lille occurs at c.9.18 p.m. The distance from '*la Bombe*', pictured in the post card,⁴⁵ to the trench position to be taken over from the Coldstream guards by the Munsters, between, on the left what was known as the Orchard Redoubt (beyond which were the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers) and on the right a cinder track (*la ruelle Noirette*) – was less than 1,000 yards (i.e. 10 minutes marching time). This means that if the Last Absolution took place at or near the '*la Bombe*' site it would certainly have been in the 'twilight' she mentions. The final take-over was effected by midnight; the intervening time in advancing darkness would have been taken up by the perilous task of the Coldstream guards extracting themselves from their section of trenches and the Munsters preparing to take up the vacated positions.⁴⁶

The difficulties connected with reconciling the contemporary or near-contemporary evidence as between Fr Gleeson and Mrs Rickard, cited so far, and arriving at greater accuracy on what may in the end prove to be an unverifiable site – and in any case, a site

⁴³ Author of *The Catholic Church in Ireland: War & Politics* (Dublin, 2003).

⁴⁴ Now site of a memorial to Indian soldiers lost in the war. Coincidentally, the Munster Fusiliers had been brought into being to serve in India.

⁴⁵ Web-site: on application.

⁴⁶ Fr Gleeson described what he had experienced in effecting the last part of the crossing into the trenches 'through the communication trench, through the well-sniped broken houses, across the open bit of road, across slippery bridges—lying flat when the German lights went up. And hearing the bullets crack, whine, and ping all over the place – bounding and glancing sharply from wall to wall ... only about 200 yards, but a 200 yards laden with death and danger.' [*Journal*, Friday, 9 April, 1915].

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⁵⁰ Ibid., 2556

whose identification one may be tempted to say may be of no significance now⁴⁷ – are intensified by the fact that in 1935 Mrs Rickard and Fr Gleeson⁴⁸ visited the area ‘near Aubers’ with a group of former Munster Fusiliers on the twentieth anniversary of the battle there (8 May). The plan, enclosed with a letter Fr Gleeson sent to the *Cork Examiner*, was that a memorial plaque was to be ‘erected on the spot where the Last Absolution was given by their Chaplain’. According to the enclosure, this plaque was to be placed ‘on the façade of the Chaple [sic] de Notre Dame de Siez [sic.] beside which Fr Gleeson gave the Last Absolution’.⁴⁹ In the course of this visit, according to a booklet that mentions the event, ‘madame le colonelle Richard [sic]’ presented a ‘tableau’ of Matania’s image. The same source contained a photograph of the altar of a small chapel, *Notre Dame de Seez* just west of the junction of *Rue du Bois* and *Rue de l’Epinette*, which included Mrs Richard’s ‘tableau’. The junction, according to Jean Prendergast is ‘just before the turn-off to Festubert’.⁵⁰ The chapel had been destroyed during the first war but was restored in 1929. However it was again demolished in connection with roadworks in the early 1970s. The placing of a plaque on the chapel during this 1935 visit might be taken to signal Fr Gleeson’s agreement that this chapel (not a shrine, as stated by Mrs Rickard and drawn by Matania) was the site of the Last General Absolution – but not conclusively.

In any case, in recent times, general opinion has veered towards the position stated in a post on the RMF association website [RMFA] on 18 August, 2011 that while the ‘Absolution site was somewhere on Rue du Bois’, Mrs Rickard was ‘incorrect’ in stating, as she did in the *Story of the Munsters* [p. 31] that it was ‘about a mile from the market-place of Neuve Chapelle’ and that the distance was more like 3.6 miles (5.8 km)’. In recent years, the leading investigator regarding the Absolution site has been a *La Couture* local, *Michel Knockaert*. It was he who unearthed the booklet mentioned above and recalled that there was a ‘tableau’ – in fact, a reproduction of Matania’s painting – located in the conference room of the town hall of *Richebourg* (now amalgamated with the village of *Richebourg d’Avouve*, which was obliterated during the war). *Knockaert* reasonably surmised that this ‘tableau’ was the one given by Mrs. Rickard in 1935 and captured in a photograph of the chapel of *Notre Dame de Seez* in the booklet. This led to *Knockaert* championing this site as that of the Last General Absolution and the subsequent placing of the centenary plaque there.

Reactions to the unfolding story of *Knockaert*’s investigations, later designated a ‘Classic Thread’ on the Great War Forum, have been very numerous, bearing out the significance of this icon for many people – not least the members of the RMFA. There is, however, the persistent burden of Fr Gleeson’s near contemporary evidence whether it is to be taken as attested firstly (a halt somewhere between *Tombe Wilmot* and *La Couture*) or later by interpolation in his diary (in the environs of *La Couture*). Neither of these is on

⁴⁷ Still in the *Irish Times* (8 May, 2015) p. 13 there is a sub-heading ‘To-night a memorial will be placed on the exact site in France where an Irish chaplain gave last absolution’. In the article underneath this statement, Ronan McGreevy writes, without giving a source: ‘as they marched down the Rue du Bois towards the British trenches, Fr Gleeson spotted an exposed altar at a lay-by’.

⁴⁸ They had previously done so in 1922 when a British Army memorial was unveiled.

⁴⁹ ‘To the Munsters: Memorial to Be Unveiled in France’ [*Cork Examiner*, Thursday, 25 April, 1935]. According to this report, the inscription to be put on the plaque was ‘A cet endroit le samedi soir 8 Mai, 1915, le 2e Royal Munster Fusiliers, commande par le Lieutenant-Colonel Victor Rickard, necut [sic] de son aumonier le Rev. Pere Gleeson, une derniere Absolution avant d’enterer dans le Bataille de la Cote d’Aubers, on le Colonel Rickard devait trouver la mort avec un grand nombre de ses hommes. Souvenos nous de’eux dans no? prieres’. I acknowledge with thanks the library skills of Elizabeth Brosnahan who sourced this reference in the Mary Immaculate College microfilm collection.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 2556.

or immediately proximate to the *Rue du Bois*. Of lesser significance, because it is a secondary source, is the fact that Matania's shrine is not a chapel and cannot be construed as such. Such a conclusion however, is challenged by Lucinda Gosling's widely supported view that 'for Fortunino Matania his work was built upon two watchwords: accuracy and authenticity'⁵¹

Undoubtedly, Louie Rickard's own priority was to memorialise the 'Munsters'. To cite again her self-assessment, Mrs Rickard's *forte* was not history writing, much less topography. Where she was eminently successful was in using her literary skills to etch on popular consciousness the sacrifice of her husband and his men. She quoted A.C. Swinburne to this effect: 'Armies that famish and bleed/ Giving their lives for her seed/ That their dust may re-build her a Nation/ That their souls may re-light her a star'. In providing Matania with an account on which he could base his illustration of the 'Last Absolution of the Munsters' on the evening of 8 May, she succeeded in generating one of the most powerful and enduring images of the First World War. The picture was nowhere more appealing than in Ireland where a vivid depiction of a Catholic priest absolving men who had answered John Redmond's call to fight in the British army was a potent symbol (and probably deployed as such) at a time when contrary political forces were gaining strength. An especially relevant war aim was the defence of the rights of small nations (Catholic Belgium, in this case). It was widely proclaimed in Ireland, as it was reckoned to appeal to Catholics.

Mrs Rickard's obituary in the *Irish Times* (30 January, 1963) refers to 'a vivid personality' who wrote 'many romantic and sometimes sensational tales marked by great vitality'.⁵² Some of this quality comes through in *The Story of the Munsters*. Matania's dramatic picture echoes the *brio* of her writing style. Over and above that, however, her writing and his painting provide a premonitory sombre background to what was to take place the following day.⁵³

The Subsequent History of Matania's Image⁵⁴

Matania (1881-1963), an illustrator born in Naples,⁵⁵ came to London in 1902 and in 1904 formed what proved to be a 'long and fruitful' relationship with the *Sphere* (published weekly from 1900 to 1964) as a 'special artist'.⁵⁶ There has long been an

⁵¹ See 'Introduction' to Gosling, *Matania's Vision of the First World War*.

⁵² Apart from those cited already, these included her most successful novel, which went through many editions in America, *The Light above the Cross Roads* (1918) and c. forty others, many according to her *Irish Times* obituarist (30 January 1963) 'romantic and sometimes sensational tales marked by great vitality' and all 'powerful' with 'evocative titles' e.g. *Old Sins Have Long Shadows*, *Sensation at Blue Harbour* or *The Pointing Man*.

⁵³ Fr Gleeson had shared his theological understanding of the catastrophe of war with his congregation at the 11.00a.m. Mass on Sunday, 14 February, 1915 in the following terms: 'it was God who was punishing the whole world for its crime and its forgetfulness of Him. As He sent a deluge of water to destroy the wicked in O.T. times he now sends a deluge of blood to punish the world and bring it to its senses'. [*Journal*]. As regards pastoral practice, he had had concern whether he might distribute Holy Communion to troops who had received only a General [communal] Absolution and was assured that it was permissible to do so when a local priest informed him that Pope Benedict XV had decreed that the rules governing the administration of *Viaticum* to terminally ill communicants applied also to soldiers on active duty [*Journal*, March, 1915].

⁵⁴ I wish to record my gratitude to H.H. Judge Seán Enright of Peterborough Crown Court and author of *Easter Rising 1916: The Trials* (Dublin, 2014) for reading this article, raising questions about this particular section that had not occurred to me and offering words of encouragement about the work as whole. This should not be interpreted as an endorsement by him of any particular conclusion.

⁵⁵ Among his better known illustrations are of the sinking of the Titanic and Lusitania but most famous of all, a wartime painting entitled 'Goodbye, Old Man' of a soldier tenderly bidding farewell to his dying horse. One of his most outstanding successes post war was the first image of the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb by Howard Carter in 1922. In the following decades he illustrated women's magazines and he is also credited with images upon which the sets of the film 'The Ten Commandments' by Cecil B. de Mille were based.

⁵⁶ Gosling, *Matania's Vision of the First World War*, p. 8.

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interest in locating the original painting and according to Michael Parsons ‘the search goes on’. He observes, however, that ‘the mystery of what happened to [it] seems to have gone with her [Louie] to the grave’.⁵⁷

There have been several suggestions over the years as to where it might have found a home. The most commonly accepted of these over many of those years was that it ‘was one of a number of Matania’s First World War works that were in the hands of the Illustrated London News and other publications that were destroyed in an air-raid during the Second World War.’ This statement was made by the documentation officer of the Department of Art of the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth, on the basis of the records of the museum.⁵⁸ Nevertheless it is a view ‘very much’ doubted by Lucinda Gosling, whose book on Matania is noted above. She is quoted in the *Irish Times* by Parsons as saying that ‘there was no definitive proof to confirm this theory’ [of destruction by an air-raid induced fire]. Tom Johnstone in *Orange Green & Khaki* [above]⁵⁹ gives another locale for the painting’s deposition. Based on information provided by Msgr John Moran, former Principal Roman Catholic Chaplain (Army), Johnstone states: ‘The original painting was presented to the Royal Army Chaplains’ Dept (RC) by Maj. Henry Harris, author of *The Irish Regiments in the First World War*’. I have no information on this lead but have been informed that in 1980 the R.C. Chaplaincy of the British army purchased a painting of the ‘Last Absolution’. Apparently, it is not the original. I have also been told that it is intended to present it to the Dublin Archdiocese in the Autumn of 2015.

A third lead is that if Mrs Victor Rickard was indeed in possession of the original painting, she may have divested herself of it. This may be inferred from a report appearing in the London *Times* (15 January, 1921) of Mrs Rickard presenting a ‘memorial painting’ of the ‘last General Absolution of the Munster Fusiliers’ to ‘St. Luke’s R.C. Church, Pinner, Middlesex, which represents an incident which occurred before the engagement in which her husband, Colonel Rickard, was killed’.⁶⁰ The relevance of this lead depends largely on what meaning should be given to the word ‘painting’ [original, copy or reproduction] but given its provenance in the English ‘paper of record’ it is worthy of consideration.

St. Luke’s Pinner

In 1921, St Luke’s was a relatively new parish, having been formed in 1914. A section of the first post-Reformation Roman Church in the area was opened by Cardinal Bourne in 1915 with the intention of adding to it as the congregation grew. During the first years of its existence there were many Belgian expatriate parishioners taking refuge in England from the war. The 1915 church (where presumably Mrs Rickard’s donation was housed), was turned into a parish centre when a large new church was consecrated in 1958.⁶¹ It is understandable that in the course of all these changes it was mislaid, dumped, given away, perhaps sold or even stolen. In any case, apparently, enquiry some years ago about whether the picture was extant there proved fruitless.⁶²

⁵⁷ *Irish Times*, 23 August 2014.

⁵⁸ A posting on the Web site of the RMFA on 18 August, 2011 reproduces this statement. By the late 1920s the *Sphere* and *Illustrated London News* were affiliated as publications of Illustrated Newspapers Ltd.

⁵⁹ Footnote 23 to Chapter 8 ‘The Spring Battles’, p. 436.

⁶⁰ *Times*, 15 January 1921.

⁶¹ In the inter-war period, the fund-raising endeavours of the St Luke’s parishioners caught the attention of the national press. Prime among these initiatives were Donkey Derbys with leading jockeys (including Steve Donoghue and Gordon Richards) participating.

⁶² See website of the RMFA, as above.

As already stated, what we cannot ascertain for now is that the 'painting' – if it was not simply a printed reproduction, of which there were a great many – of the scene of the Absolution at the way-side shrine given to St Luke's was the original; it may have been a copy made by Matania, or another artist. What we can be reasonably sure of is that it was not the 'oil on canvas' copy (30.5 x 50.8 cm) now in the National Army Museum. This copy was signed 'A. Thomas' and, more significant, dated c.1925,⁶³ four years after Mrs Rickard's donation to the Pinner church.

On the face of it, it may seem remarkable that Mrs Rickard would have given away the original of a painting that touched so deeply on her own life. Given her Anglican background and that of Rickard himself, it may at first blush also seem odd that she would have given it to a Roman Catholic church – and further, bearing in mind its subject (an Irish regiment) – have donated it in England rather than Ireland. Perhaps she might even have thought of presenting it to her father's former parish-church, which has two memorials to family members.⁶⁴

Louie Rickard & her Father

Mention of her father's former parish church in North Cork, introduces a further dimension of the story behind the painting. There is a suggestion by a historian of her father's parish, Bill Power, that there was 'a rift'⁶⁵ between father and daughter on account of her 1908 marriage to Rickard – a rift that persisted until the end of his life. In support of this, Power correctly notes that Louie was not a beneficiary of her father's will⁶⁶ while her three live siblings benefited from it. However, the primary beneficiary of his last will and testament made on 30 November, 1910 was his wife Jessie Mona and thus the size of the provision for the children would be a division of any remainder after his spouse's needs during her lifetime had been met. The Canon specifically acknowledged that he had not 'given any legacy' to his 'daughter Mrs Rickard' but made clear that this was not because he had 'less affection toward her' than for his other children but because she was 'already better provided for' than they were.

It seems clear that given the presence of both Louie and Rickard in the Rectory on the night of the 1911 Census, that whatever rift there may have been did not last until the end of Canon Moore's life. Nevertheless, the Census return does suggest a plausible source of inter-personal difficulty in the first decade of the new century that was connected with – but reached beyond – Louie's marriage to Rickard. As already noted, the Rector returned two grandchildren on the census form. One of these⁶⁷ is listed as Patricia J.M. Ackland,

⁶³ It was purchased from the Parker Gallery in 2003.

⁶⁴ Visitors to St George's church in Mitchelstown can see a memorial to her father which reads: 'In Loving Memory of the Revd. Courtenay Moore, MA, Precentor of Cloyne Cathedral, Curate of this Parish 1865-1871, Rector 1882-1916' followed by the verse "The Souls of the Righteous are in the Hand of God". They can also view a stained glass window on the theme of the Good Shepherd, dedicated in 1904 and commemorating his daughter, Mona, who died in infancy. See: Bill Power, *Evensong: The Story of a Church of Ireland Country Parish* (Mitchelstown, 2004). Whatever about gifting 'The Last General Absolution' to her father's home parish in 1921, by 1944 with the publication of *Ascendancy House* (London, 1944), obviously based on Mitchelstown Castle, she had greatly annoyed some of her father's former parishioners. They believed that some of her characters were identifiable e.g. the *châtelaine* was portrayed as alcoholic. Reputedly, pressure was put on the publishers to have the book withdrawn.

⁶⁵ See: Power, *Evensong*, p. 82. Power has made a very considerable contribution to the local history of his town.

⁶⁶ Probate Granted: 20 October, 1922. His address is given as Argyle Terrace, Longford Terrace, Kingstown, Co. Dublin. Power (above) gives his address in Kingstown after retirement as 7 Royal Terrace East; his eldest son, Courtenay Edward Moore [see Epilogue] lived at that time at 8 Windsor Terrace, Kingstown.

⁶⁷ The other child named was Eudo (wrongly transcribed as 'Euds') John Tonson Rye (wrongly given as 'Ryne'). He was a son of Louie Moore's sister, Harriet Emma (1874-1957), who in 1909 married Lt Col Hubert Bernard Tonson-Rye. Remarkably, Col. Tonson-Rye took up Rickard's old command, the 2nd Munsters, in 1918. He was awarded the DSO with Bar for his war service. His family seat was Ryecourt, Crookstown, Co. Cork in the parish of Moviddy, 16 miles west of

aged eight years of age and child of a marriage (in 1901)⁶⁸ of Jessie L[ouise] Moore to Robert Dudley Innes Ackland,⁶⁹ an army officer. The child is recorded as born in France. On 11 January, 1907 Jessie L. Ackland filed a Petition for Divorce in Tralee, Co. Kerry. A Decree *Nisi* was issued on 30 July and a Final Decree granted on 10 February, 1908. An announcement that her marriage to Capt. Victor Rickard, 1st Battalion the Royal Munster Fusilier would 'take place quietly at Tralee this month' appeared in the *Irish Times*, 10 March, 1908⁷⁰ and the marriage was recorded in the January-March register for the Tralee registration district. Subsequently, the Rickards went to India where the Munsters were based. In 1913, their son, Victor Justin Rodney Rickard was born.⁷¹

It is plausible that these events – marriage to Ackland, (apparently after an elopement),⁷² bearing a daughter by him followed by divorce (especially) and shortly after a subsequent re-marriage – would have caused anxiety and pain for Jessie's parents as well as embarrassment for a Rector who was prominent not only locally but at diocesan and national level.⁷³ In Louie, her parents had had a child who bore some resemblance to a character in her 1918 novel, *The Fire of the Green Bough* – a rebel against conventions.

If we might have expected a change in Canon Moore's Will, following on Louie Rickard's widowhood, Moore may have judged that unnecessary on the basis of what would, in any case have been a hypothetical benefit. This was because just a year after Rickard's death, she married for the third time.⁷⁴ On 17 May, 1916, she wed Lt. Col. Tudor

Cork City on the road between Macroom and Bandon. Their home was burnt down during the War of Independence and replaced by a smaller house where the Colonel lived until his death 22 November, 1950. Harriet and Louie were confirmed together in August 1886 and remained close throughout their lives. Eudo became a Major in the British army.

⁶⁸ Burke's *The Peerage*, Person Page 18053. I have found little information about her. She is mentioned (as is her mother, 'Mrs. Victor Rickard' [sic.]) among the 'Ladies Present' in a report carried in the *Freeman's Journal* (27 January, 1922). This report concerned a reception held on the evening of Tuesday, 24 January in connection with the Irish Race Congress in Paris in 1922—organised by Seán T. O'Kelly, then Irish envoy to France. Among others present were 'Mr de Valera, Countess Markievicz, Dr. Douglas Hyde, Jack Yeats, W. B. Yeats ... Harry Boland' and various representatives from the Irish Delegations on the Continent as well as delegates from Irish diaspora communities on all continents. Apart from Mrs Rickard and Miss Ackland, other ladies listed were Mrs Maud Gonne Mac Bride and Mrs. Paul [Grace] Henry. Emerging Civil War divisions undermined this effort to showcase a nation (excluded from the Versailles deliberations shortly beforehand) in all its aspects (political, economic and cultural) by mobilising Irish communities world-wide (led by the Hon. President, *Don Juan O'Donnell y Vargas, Duque de Tetuán*), further to the goal of international recognition of the new Irish Free State [See: Paul Murray, 'The Irish Race Congress 21-28 January 1922', *History Ireland*, 9 (Winter, 2001) No. 4.].

⁶⁹ Ackland (born in Pembrokeshire in 1878 of a wealthy family) appears in the *London Gazetteer* of Sept. 1914 as a Lieutenant in the King's (Liverpool) Regiment. However, he was dismissed from the army in the following month. Remarkably, he re-joined the Royal Welsh Fusiliers as a private soldier and was one of the last casualties of the Gallipoli campaign dying on 6 January 1916. He is buried in Twelve Tree Copse Cemetery (Plot XL.A.10), Gallipoli, Canakkale, Turkey). His effects amounted to £247 0s 1d. He had a widow, Lily (*née* Jones), who was his beneficiary. There is a possibility that this dismissal from the army and his re-enlistment in the ranks was contrived. When researching his father's life, the actor John Cleese discovered that his father, Reginald Francis, was wounded as a second lieutenant in 1915 and on his recovery enlisted again, as a private soldier. His son remarks: 'I always thought this was a lovably eccentric act on Dad's part, typical of his lack of interest in career advancement...but I found out years later that the life expectancy of a junior officer on the Western Front was six weeks. Because when an officer led his men over the top, the Germans looked for the man with a revolver and a whistle and shot him first' in *So Anyway* (London, 2014) p. 27.

⁷⁰ Bill Power kindly gave me this reference.

⁷¹ According to Prendergast, above, [location 1952], Louie gave birth to her son on the Adaman Islands.

⁷² Victoria Glendinning in *Elizabeth Bowen, Portrait of a Writer* (London, 1977) quotes the historian C.V. Wedgwood who wrote that Louie 'eloped from church during Matins in about 1897' [p. 186].

⁷³ He was Rural Dean of the diocese of Cloyne and well known at a national level in the Church of Ireland as he had edited its weekly newspaper, *The Irish Ecclesiastical Gazette*, from 1893-97.

⁷⁴ It may have been this event that gave rise to the painting of her portrait by Matthew Webb in 1916. He was first a pupil and then long-time assistant of Edward Burne-Jones. The portrait is now held in the Dublin City (Hugh Lane) Gallery [Object No: 1205]. On the evidence of this portrait (despite its poor state when I viewed it in 2009 courtesy of Ms. Jessica O'Donnell, in the archive store of the Gallery), Louie was remarkably handsome. Dr. Susan Owens, Curator, Paintings Word & Image Dept., Victoria and Albert Museum gave me some additional information about Matthew Webb, an artist about whom very little is known. She quoted from a note by an acquaintance of Webb on file in the museum. It reads: 'After [Burne Jones's] death [Webb] was in charge of the Art Classes at the Crystal Palace where there was, at the time, a School of Art & of Dramatic Art'.

Fitzjohn, at Headington, Oxfordshire, England. A career officer in the Worcestershire Regiment, he was, like Rickard, a Boer War veteran and wounded at the battle of *Neuve Chapelle* in March, 1915. By 1916 he was back in service with the Royal Lancashire regiment and awarded a Distinguished Service Order. Presumably his new wife had meanwhile taken over independently the care of the daughter she had had by Ackland, who at the time of the 1911 census was attended to by a governess in her father's Mitchelstown residence, vacated in 1916.⁷⁵ She also had to see to the care of the son she had had by Rickard. Regrettably, her marriage to Tudor Fitzjohn did not last and is not mentioned in her obituaries.⁷⁶

One matter about which we can be almost certain is that her father would not have been disapproving of a gift of the Matania painting (original or copy) to the Pinner church on the grounds of its being Catholic for he had long had sympathies with the Church of Rome. He describes in his 1908 memoir⁷⁷ that as a young man in Co. Antrim, he had rejected the prevailing Calvinist influence⁷⁸ on his local Anglican communion after (tellingly) he heard a Roman Catholic priest preach on the mercy of God. On the basis of this and other experiences, he concluded that whereas there was a 'stone wall' between the Presbyterian Church and Rome there was only 'a paper wall between mine and Rome'⁷⁹ – a view reinforced later when as a student of the Divinity School of Trinity College, Dublin he attended the lectures of the Regius Professor of Divinity, Dr Samuel Butcher.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ That the presence of a Governess for the child was not likely to be a happenstance of residency on the night of the Census is borne out by the fact that another governess at the Rectory, Ema Gail, acted as witness to the Rector's will in 1910.

⁷⁶ It is not clear when the break came; he had retired from the army in 1922. A divorce was finalised in 1935 but by that time Fitzjohn had had a son by another woman and was living in Rhodesia. This couple spent the Second World War years in Cheltenham and moved afterwards to Greystones, Co. Wicklow, where Fitzjohn died, 30 March, 1964. His son Hugh Ralph Tudor Fitzjohn was Stud/Farm Manager to Lord Harrington at Patrickswell, Co. Limerick and lived in Croom House from 'around 1979 and sold it circa 1985' to move to Fermoy Lodge, Costelloe, Connemara. [Source: communication from Ralph's son, Geoffrey].

⁷⁷ *A Chapter of Irish Church History: Being Some Personal Recollections of Life and Service in the Church of Ireland* (Dublin, 1907), [Henceforth: 'A Chapter']. The close association of the family with the Church of Ireland continued into the next generation. The Canon's second son, Alexander Duff Moore (1872-1938) was Rector of Ballycommon, Co. Kildare and Archdeacon of Glendalough.

⁷⁸ This was despite the fact that Russell Philott, his local rector, was Puseyite 'High Church' in his theological leanings. Moore found Philott not only 'high' but 'dry'. In similar vein he wrote of one of the annual Donellan lecturers in TCD, Dr. Magee, that 'to be neither brief nor brilliant nor heterodox is a terrible triad of defects' [*A Chapter*, p. 15].

⁷⁹ His daughter, Louie, wrote 'I was born an Irish Protestant, my father being one of broadest-minded and most liberal-spirited of a small but brilliant group of clergymen who were and are intrinsically Irish, and who have given so generously to the Church to which they belong. It was my father who first taught me to understand dimly the history of the Catholic Church, in which he had so many loyal friends, and towards which his own feelings were always sympathetic.' ['Why I am a Catholic', *Catholic Times*, 1926. This article was reproduced in the *Ulster Herald* (14 August, 1926) and also in the *Donegal News* that year. I am (again) in debt to Bill Power for a copy].

⁸⁰ Moore thought it 'sad' as well as 'painful and regrettable', that in the years (1854-58) John Henry Newman, was Rector of the Catholic University of Ireland, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, he never met his erstwhile colleague, the brilliant if eccentric Richard Whately, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin, who resided on the opposite side of the Green. Moore, on the basis of an account by Henri Bremond, believed that 'the fault for this unhappy estrangement lay with Newman' [p. 51]. Whately had been an educational reformer when Principal of St Alban's Hall (incorporated into Merton College in 1881) at Oxford, where Newman was his deputy. However, Newman, not yet embarked on the road to Rome, broke with Whately over his support for Robert Peel and his policy of Catholic Emancipation, *inter alia*. Their fruitful relationship ended when a notoriously socially gauche, if not outright offensive Whately, placed Newman at the dining table alongside some of 'the least intellectual men at Oxford,' asking him later whether 'he was proud of his friends'. When he came to delineate his vision of a university institution (partly drafted in Tervoe House, Clarina, Co. Limerick), Newman opposed the reforms that Whately had espoused. Consistent with these reforms when appointed Archbishop of Dublin, Whately had attempted to steer his none too enthusiastic community on a co-operative course with the politically emergent Roman Catholic majority, particularly in the area of primary education. To this end he formed a close alliance with the Catholic Archbishop, Daniel Murray. To Whately's chagrin, Archbishop Paul Cullen put paid to any attempt to introduce a mixed rather than a denominationally based national education system when he succeeded Murray in 1852. [See: Bryan Fanning: *Histories of the Irish Future* (London, 2015) pp 75-93].

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Accordingly it was with some frustration he found as a junior clergyman in the Cloyne diocese⁸¹ in which he began to serve in 1865 that 'nearly all' of the approximately twenty fellow members of the Fermoy Clerical Meeting had "'Rome on the brain" in a form not only chronic but acute'⁸². He himself held the distinctly minority view that with the passing of the Irish Church Act (1869),⁸³ which relieved the Roman Catholic population of contributing to the sustenance of the Church of Ireland by way of Tithes, the tensions between Catholics and Anglicans on the island would diminish over time. Although he attended the General Synod which was put in place by the Act from 1875 to 1906 he never took advantage of that platform to express his views. In his memoir he made what he described as 'an ignominious confession' that he had never made a speech at the Synod in those 31 years. He consoled himself with 'the satisfaction of feeling that by holding his tongue he so far facilitated the progress of business' [*Chapter*, p. 79]. This hints at a wit⁸⁴ that by all accounts his daughter shared.⁸⁵ Throughout the vicissitudes of her life Louie maintained a deep love of her father. When some years after his death she converted to Roman Catholicism, she declared 'even the transition from the Church of my youth has left no scars and has drawn me closer to the living memory of my father,'⁸⁶ who had, as she recalled [see footnote 79], first introduced her to the Catholic Church. Explaining this, she quoted Sidney Royse Lysaght in the terms that 'every pathway to the Infinite' begins in the 'shelter' of the 'boundaries' of one's own 'haggard.'

Courtney Moore retired to then Kingstown, Co. Dublin in 1916 following an accidental fire at the rectory. His departure from a parish in which he had been Rector since 1882 was marked by a presentation by the Roman Catholic people of Mitchelstown of a 'handsome illuminated Address'. They recalled with gratitude his investigations of local archaeological sites recorded in the journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society (of which he was a founding member in 1891) and wherein there are 50 entries by him.⁸⁷ He was a director of the Fermoy and Mitchelstown Light Railway Co. which began to run in 1891. It stopped *en route* at the military encampment at Kilworth, whose personnel enlarged his congregation and from where, during the first war, very large numbers of troops commenced their journey to the fronts of Northern France. He was a member of the local technical education committee.⁸⁸ He played a key role in founding a golf club in 1910 and features prominently in its centenary commemorative

⁸¹ His first appointment was to a curacy in the Brigown parish (1865), next as incumbent of Farahy (1871), then Rector of Castletownroche before returning to Mitchelstown as Rector in 1882.

⁸² [*Chapter*, p. 25]. This affliction was also found among the laity. Elizabeth Bowen wrote of the wife of a Rector who preceded Moore at her home parish of Farahy that 'her Protestantism was of the blackest. What she said and read about Rome I should not like to repeat' [*Bowen's Court* (reprint, Cork, 1998) p. 343].

⁸³ The Mitchelstown grandee, James, 5th Earl of Kingston, indirectly lost his life on account of his opposition to this Act. After a late night sitting of the House of Lords in June 1869 to debate it, 'he could not get a cab' and 'he had to walk back to his hotel in heavy rain. He caught a cold from which he never recovered' and died in September of that year. [See Power, *Evensong*, p. 53].

⁸⁴ He enjoyed, for example, the now 'query PC' stanza written by Dean Disney of Armagh at the time of the discarding of the black gown for preaching, which took place during his period of active ministry: 'I know not, and I do not care,/ Whether a parson ought to wear/ A black dress or a white dress;/ I have a sorrow of my own,/ A wife who preaches in her gown, /And lectures in her night-dress'.

⁸⁵ Her obituary in the *Irish Times*, Tuesday 29 January, 1963 recalls 'a woman of swift and incisive wit'.

⁸⁶ 'Why I am a Catholic'.

⁸⁷ An occupation regarded with disdain by an eminent Victorian historian [unnamed] as suitable for 'country parsons and old maids' whose chief interest was 'ecclesiastical architecture slightly tempered by an enthusiasm for Roman camps and old helmets'. See: Barrow, *A History of Histories*, p. 470.

⁸⁸ These committees were set up to address deficits in technical education in Ireland. Their work was given coherence and direction following the formation (uniquely) of an Irish-based government Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction in 1900. The *ex officio* President of this department was the Chief Secretary of Ireland with Horace Plunkett, Unionist MP for South Dublin as executive vice-president.

volume. He had advocated in public lectures and published articles changes in land tenure – a national campaign marked by much local agitation, Home Rule and the use of the Gaelic language. A positive appreciation of the way of life common to the majority religious community in the town was manifest in two novels.⁸⁹ He died 10 June, 1922,⁹⁰ late enough to know the fate of the castle which had been described in the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* as the ‘largest and the best modern castellated residence in Ireland’⁹¹. During the Irish Civil War, it was occupied by anti-treaty forces, upon which occupation persons of the town and district looted the contents. On their retreat, the Republicans forces burnt it to the ground.⁹² In the twenties the remaining ashlar was transported to Mount Melleray near Cappoquin, Co. Waterford to provide a stone face for the Abbey Church built in the 1930s.

Mrs Rickard in Later Life

As noted, Mrs Rickard, now living in Chelsea in London, converted to Catholicism in 1925.⁹³ This was under the guidance of the Vincentian, Fr Joseph Leonard,⁹⁴ then based at Brook Green, Hammersmith, where his order ran St Mary’s Training College; 1925 was the year when this College transferred to the Strawberry Hill House estate in Twickenham. *The Cork Examiner* (2 July, 1925) reported her reception into the Roman Catholic Church at the College on the previous Tuesday (30 June, 1925). She had postponed seeking instruction being persuaded, as she wrote, that ‘it did not matter what one was’. However, she continues, ‘without a shadow of warning, something happened in my life which shattered that theory to fragments and caused me to turn for help where help alone was to be found. There is very little more to say.’⁹⁵ A comment that arouses curiosity but does not assuage it.

Her closest friend was Hazel Lavery, American wife of the society painter, Sir John Lavery,⁹⁶ in whose home the Irish emissaries to the Anglo-Irish treaty negotiations,

⁸⁹ *Con Hegarty: A Story of Irish Life* (Dublin, 1897) and *Jeremiah Shankey*.

⁹⁰ His passing was marked by an entry under ‘Necrology’ in the journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, Vol. XXVIII (2nd Series) 1922, pp 42-3. The writer, Philip G. Lee, remarks: ‘Trained minds with contemplative intelligence are hard to procure’.

⁹¹ So quoted by Frederick O’Dwyer ‘“A Noble Pile in the late Tudor Style” Mitchelstown Castle’, *Irish Arts Review* (18, Yearbook 2002), p. 31. George, 3rd Earl of Kingston (1770-1839) built the Castle in anticipation of a visit by the companion of his young manhood, the Prince Regent, later King George IV. Sadly, the King who had already come to Ireland in 1820, never came again. The project encumbered the Kingston estate (and indirectly its tenants) with unmanageable debts. The author of the grandiose gesture toward majesty was later declared bankrupt and then insane.

⁹² See the history of such episodes by Gemma Clark, *Everyday Violence in the Irish Civil War* (Cambridge, 2014).

⁹³ In ‘Why I am a Catholic’, she claimed to have been ‘always instinctively Catholic’. A conviction that ‘this was the Church which Christ Himself had founded’ was based on her experience of the service provided for the poor in her home town of Mitchelstown and later, knowledge of various institutions doing similar work throughout the world. This meant that ‘not the least nor the loneliest should ever be without a house’. Still, she hesitated ‘to cross the final line’. This was because, as an Irish Protestant, she found it difficult to disassociate Catholicism from the political violence exercised by some of its members. She ‘had then, and still have, a strong feeling against the taking of sides and the creation of bitterness and hard feeling, which the very name of politics introduces at once into religion’. I am grateful to Bill Power for the reference to the *Cork Examiner* announcement of her conversion [reproduced in the *Limerick Leader*; 4 July, 1926].

⁹⁴ During his later life, Fr Leonard lived in All Hallows College. He was author of several books on St. Vincent de Paul and St. Louise de Marillac. He was a long standing friend and correspondent of Mrs Jacqueline Kennedy. In 2014, their correspondence was entrusted by officials of All Hallows to an auction house without advertence to Mrs. Kennedy’s estate, which holds the copyright to her letters. After these events and the publication of some of the letters in the *Irish Times* and elsewhere, the Vincentian order, as distinct from the College, asserted their physical ownership of the Kennedy letters, withdrew them from sale and returned them to the estate considering ‘the respect due to what is correspondence of a private nature’ [See: Michael Parsons, ‘Jackie’s letters sent back to the Kennedys’ *The Irish Times*, Saturday 6 September, 2014].

⁹⁵ ‘Why I am a Catholic’.

⁹⁶ When Hazel Lavery died in 1935, her husband wrote to Louie: ‘if a record of her life was to be written, it would have been you she would have chosen to write it’ See: Sinéad McCoole, *Hazel: A Life of Lady Lavery 1880-1935* (Dublin, 1996) p. viii.

notably Michael Collins, were hospitably received. She too converted to Rome assisted by Fr Leonard.⁹⁷ One of Louie's novels, *A Bird of Strange Plumage* (1927) is based on Lady Lavery. According to Jean Prendergast, another friend was Mrs Josephine McNeill, wife of the Irish High Commissioner in London.⁹⁸ Louie went on to produce a great number of books – light comedy; detective novels – right up to World War II when publication was severely curtailed by paper shortages. She joined the Detection Club in 1930. Other new members that year included G.K. Chesterton, Agatha Christie, Ronald Knox, A.A. Milne and Dorothy L. Sayers.

After the war, in 1946, she came to live in Cork, a locale reflected in her last novel entitled *Shandon Hall* (1950). In 1948 she suffered a stroke that paralysed her right side but she learned to write with her left hand. Denis Rolleston Gwynn, Research Professor in the History Dept. of University College Cork, invited her to stay in his Montenotte home. Gwynn (b. 1893), a great grandson of the Young Irelander William Smith O'Brien (a scion of Drumoland Castle⁹⁹) and son of Stephen Gwynn, M.P., served in 1916 with the RMF as 1st Lieutenant but was invalided out in 1917. He had worked as a journalist and Catholic activist in London during the twenties¹⁰⁰ and presumably built on his previous acquaintance as editor of *New Ireland* with Louie there. At some stage during that time, she tended to Gwynn when he was ill. It was on that account¹⁰¹ that when she suffered a stroke, Gwynn took her into his own home in Cork.¹⁰² He requested Dr James Good, by then a colleague at UCC, 'to bring her Holy Communion while her own priest was away'.¹⁰³ She died on 28 January 1963 and is buried in Rathcooney Cemetery, Co. Cork. On her gravestone is the Platonic inscription: 'The snare is broken and my soul is set free'. Later that year, Prof. Gwynn married Alice (*née* Trudeau), Hazel Lavery's daughter by her first husband, Ned Trudeau¹⁰⁴ which caused a frisson in Cork society because of their disparity in age. The Professor and his wife moved to Malahide, Co. Dublin.

Dr Good 'often wondered: did Mrs Rickard keep the original [Matania illustration]? Did she bring it to Cork, and if she did, would Gwynn have taken possession of it and

⁹⁷ In 'Hazel Lavery—model, muse, mask' *Irish Arts Review* (Summer 2010) Philip McEvans avers that 'her willingness to pose may be seen in her adoption of Catholicism and a meretricious Irishness', p. 93.

⁹⁸ [Location: 5301] James McNeill went on to become second Governor General of the Irish Free State but his term of office was cut short following de Valera's actions to denigrate the office. His wife was appointed first female ambassador of the Republic by Sean MacBride as Minister for External Affairs. Her father, James Ahearne, was a Fermoy hotelier and merchant.

⁹⁹ Like Mitchelstown Castle, designed by James and George Richard Pain, students of the leading London architect of his day, John Nash, who had had many commissions in the south of Ireland. The Pain brothers worked on such Irish 'Great Houses' as Lough Cutra Castle (Co. Galway; as supervisor for Nash); Drumoland Castle (Co. Clare; after 1825); Blackrock Castle (Cork; 1828); Strancally Castle (Co. Waterford; c. 1830), Adare Manor (Co. Limerick; 1833)—as well as Mitchelstown, which was to be their most important commission. James lived in Glentworth St. Limerick (d. 1877) and his younger brother, in Cork (d. 1838).

¹⁰⁰ He was for a time editor of the *Dublin Review*. He was literary executor for Walter McDonald, whose *Reminiscences of a Maynooth Professor* so offended the Maynooth Trustees that they sought to have it bought up on its appearance and destroyed.

¹⁰¹ Source: Letter to writer from Dr James Good [30 October, 2014].

¹⁰² In Glendinning, *Elizabeth Bowen*, Victoria Wedgwood is described as dining in the Gwynn household in Cork with Elizabeth Bowen (whose father's second wife, Mary, was a sister of Gwynn's father, Stephen). Wedgwood later wrote that Gwynn lived 'in blameless devotion with a late-Victorian femme fatale [Mrs Rickard], now nearly 80, and still incredibly the beauty and toast of Munster...[who]...ran through an astonishing number of husbands on both sides of the Irish Channel, before settling to this charming and platonic attachment'. [p. 186].

¹⁰³ Source: Memo to writer from Dr Good [12 April, 2010].

¹⁰⁴ Trudeau died five months after his marriage to Hazel (*née* Martyn). In turn, his daughter, Alice Livingston Trudeau (1904-91) married Capt. Jack McEnery, Irish Free State army on 5 March 1930 in France. She had four children by McEnery.

taken it to Dublin when he got married?'¹⁰⁵ Her Last Will and Testament¹⁰⁶ was made on 16 November, 1961 but there is no mention of Matania's image, strongly suggesting that she did not have it by then, at least. As far as paintings go, we know that Gwynn donated Louie's portrait¹⁰⁷ to the Dublin City Hugh Lane Gallery.¹⁰⁸ There is no mention of the 'Last General Absolution' in his Last Will and Testament, dated 30 April, 1963.¹⁰⁹ Prof Gwynn died on 10 April, 1973. With him may have gone the best source of information about the making and fate of the 'Last General Absolution of the Munsters at Rue du Bois' since it has he who first published her account of that evening and had been in close contact with her through the years until her death in his home.

Epilogue

There was another war bereavement in the Moore family. The Canon and his wife lost not only a son-in-law but also a grandson. He was Edward Francis Courtenay Moore (b. 1898), son of Courtenay Edward Moore (b. 1870), a railway engineer.¹¹⁰ C.E. Moore had separated from his wife, Jane King Moore (née Askins, daughter of the Vicar of Dunamy, Co Louth) by 1908. Jane went to live in Bristol (where she had a brother, a doctor) with her two children, a boy and a girl. Her son attended Clifton College in that city. In 1917, 'Paddy' Moore, as he was known, went up to Oxford. In June, under the auspices of the University Officers Training Corps, he was billeted at Keble College and assigned to share a room (on the basis of the proximity of their surnames' initial letter) with Clive Staples Lewis, called at his own insistence 'Jack', from Belfast – but with strong family roots in Cork city and county.¹¹¹ What ensued when Jack met Paddy was central to Lewis's subsequent home life. Worried about the fate of their respective loved ones if either was killed in the war, the two young men pledged that each would 'look after' them in the event one of them survived the coming ordeal. Paddy, assigned to the Rifle Brigade as a 2nd Lieutenant was killed resisting a major German attack at *Pargny* on 24 March 1918.¹¹² He received the Military Cross for 'conspicuous gallantry and

¹⁰⁵ Letter to writer: 30 October, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ In it she bequeathed an investment of £2,000 in Irish Government Stock and all her furniture to her 'friend Denis Rolleston Gwynn' whom she also appointed executor. She also made provision for her housekeeper of £500 and of £50 to her maid: otherwise, the residue and remainder of her property, after payment of 'just debts and Funeral and Testamentary Expenses', was left to her son. [Date: 16 November, 1961].

¹⁰⁷ According to Jean Prendergast [Location 5280], another portrait of Louie was painted by Patrick Lambert Larking in 1924.

¹⁰⁸ He also donated works by William Leech, R.A. Dunlop and Roger Fry.

¹⁰⁹ After providing for his wife, Alice, and making a bequest of £1,000 to the National Council for the Blind, Gwynn left 'the sum of £4,000 free of legacy duty' to Mrs Rickard's son, Victor, Swiftsden Farm Hurst, East Sussex. [Date: 30 April, 1963]. As a Sandhurst cadet (in July, 1932), Victor's home address was 30, Halsey St, London, SW3. Lieutenant V. Rickard of the Cameron Highlanders sent flowers on the occasion of his grandmother's burial service in 1937. He married Joan Haig in 1939 and they had three children, Alexander (b. 1944), Catherine (b. 1939) and Patricia (b. 1955). He is listed as having an address, St. Catherine's, 50 Egerton Rd., Benbridge, Isle of Wight in 2003 in *The Peerage*, Person Page: 392324.

¹¹⁰ See entry on Moore by Ron Cox in R.C. McWilliam and M. Chrimes (eds), *Biographical Dictionary of Civil Engineers in Great Britain and Ireland* (London, 2014) vol. 3 (1890-1920).

¹¹¹ See my 'C.S. Lewis: The "Norton Principle" Applied' *Doctrine and Life*, Vol 63, No 9 (November, 2013), pp 21-9.

¹¹² According to Paddy's sister Maureen, the news did not reach her mother for six months. Apparently, the designated next-of-kin was her husband (referred to by his separated wife as 'the Beast' because of the inconstancy of his financial support) and he did not pass on the War Office *communiqué*. [See George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C.S. Lewis* (London, 2005) p. 132.] Nevertheless, because of the primogeniture of her father's descent from his mother Jessie Mona Moore (née Duff), the prior death of her brother, Paddy and a rare provision for the continuance of the line by a female, Maureen Moore was recognised by Lyon Court as 8th Baroness of Hempriggs after the death of Sir George Cospatrick Duff-Sutherland-Dunbar, 7th Baronet. Maureen also inherited Ackergill Tower, near Wick in Caithness in north east Scotland. [See: my 'C.S. Lewis and a Chronicle of the Moores', *Irish University Review*, Spring/Summer 2009, p. 99]

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initiative'. In fulfilment of his promise Lewis invited his friend's mother and sister to share a succession of student dwellings in Oxford when he resumed his studies there after the war. Eventually they purchased a home together outside the city and were joined by Lewis's brother, Warren. Mrs Moore died in 1951, still cared for by Jack Lewis.

On 5 August, 1914, the father of Louie's friend,¹¹³ Elizabeth Bowen (then fifteen years old), learned, on stopping by the post-office at Rockmills, Co. Cork, that England had declared war on Germany. The Bowen family was on its way by pony and trap to a garden party in Mitchelstown Castle. In *Bowen's Court*, a history of her family, she wrote that this social event was destined to be:

A more final scene than we knew. Ten years hence, it was all to seem like a dream – and the Castle itself would be a few bleached stumps on the plateau. To-day the terraces are obliterated, and grass grows where the saloons were. Many of those guests, those vehement talkers, would be scattered, houseless, sonless or themselves dead. That war ... was to go far before it had done with us.¹¹⁴

Bowen, added this comment: 'if the Anglo-Irish live on and for a myth, for that myth they constantly shed their blood' attested on 'tablets in Protestant churches' of 'deaths in remote battles; swords hung in halls'. Presumably the myth she was referring to – one that underpinned the 'fearful haemorrhage'¹¹⁵ of the First World War – was that the interests of the Anglo-Irish were best met by service (pre-eminently military service) to the United Kingdom. Their opponents on the island of Ireland also subscribed to the need for blood sacrifice,¹¹⁶ feeding too on nationalist sentiment,¹¹⁷ albeit that its object was differently conceived.

Jack Lewis appreciated the power of myth. It organises the variety of individual experience, both quotidian and exceptional – but in any case affected by and affecting collective events at ever increasing magnitudes from the familial to the national. This functionality means that there is a kind of inevitability attached to the appearance of myths in virulent form from time to time (including those that underpin overweening national pride). And, as Yeats put it, in 'The Stare's Nest by my Window', if we feed 'the heart on fantasies' it will grow 'brutal from the fare/ More substance in our enmities than in our love'.

Lewis wrote the *Narnia* chronicles to teach children to nevertheless be open to what is beyond the mundane, proffering the jarring image of a talking lion (Aslan) – but with the aim of harnessing fantasy to good purpose. He believed, moreover, that there was one

¹¹³ Michael Parsons of the *Irish Times* received a letter from Dr Ita Beausang of Clontarf, Dublin, which described being invited to lunch at Prof. Gwynn's house in Montenotte where the other guests included 'Elizabeth Bowen, Eddie Sackville West, the Earl of Rosse and a London art dealer' [Saturday, August 23, 2014]. Incidentally, this makes clear that Louie had ready access to professional advice if the 'Last Absolution' was still in her possession and if she wished to dispose of it as she reached the last stage of her life. After giving a lecture on the subject of this article to the Fermoy Field Club, I was approached by a lady who told me that as a child in Montenotte, Mrs Rickard was her next door neighbour. She had had no idea of her life-story and achievements, as described above.

¹¹⁴ *Bowen's Court*, p. 436. A Dairygold milk-powder plant now occupies the elevated site of the Castle. This placement can be seen as an illustration of a change of power in Ireland following on the tragedy of the First World War.

¹¹⁵ A phrase to be found in a tribute to his kinswoman, Elizabeth Bowen, by Martin Mansergh in *The Legacy of History* (Cork, 2003) p. 320.

¹¹⁶ In addition to the well-known speeches on this theme by Patrick Pearse, see, for example, the reference to 'his knightly capacity for self-immolation' in Seán Moylan's oration at the funeral of Ernie O'Malley as late as March 1957.

¹¹⁷ The ambivalent role of churches, including the Irish church, in the face of nationalism is explored in Anna Grzymala-Busse, *Nations under God: How Churches Use Moral Authority to Influence Policy* (Princeton, 2015).

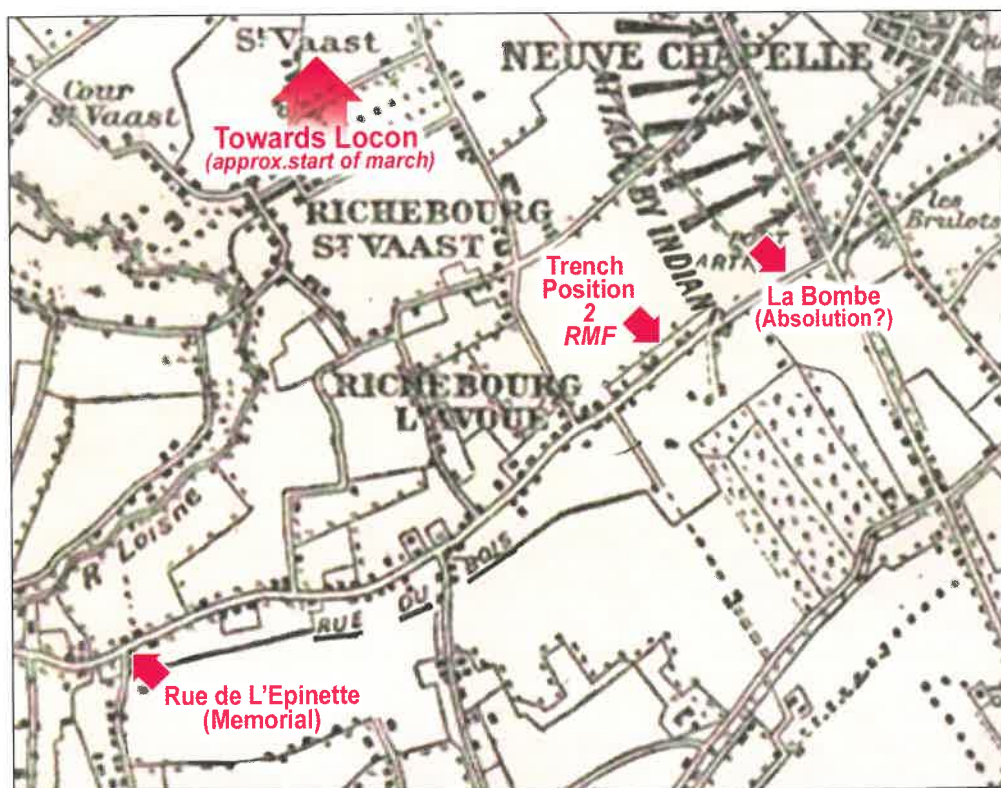


Mrs Victor Rickard (1876-1963) *(Courtesy of Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane)*



Fortunino Matania, 'The Last General Absolution of the Munsters at Rue du Bois'.

myth that had the singular advantage of being true. The Christian myth told of a blood sacrifice to end all blood sacrifices – that of the Lion of Judah. Clearly, no such finality has been reached in humanity’s unfolding history but Lewis tried to nurture a hope that, as Julian of Norwich put it, ‘all manner of thing shall be well’. This may seem a counter-intuitive reaction in light of all that happened to him and Mrs Rickard, and their generation – a challenge, often taken as an affront, to common sense philosophy but that’s what he, she, and many others believed, relying on a tradition that had sustained many generations before them.



Contemporary Map indicating direction (off image) of approximate starting point of the march on evening 8 May 1915 (near Locon) and two proposed sites for the location of the ‘Last Absolution’. Either on the left, at the intersection of Rue du Bois with Rue de L’EpINETTE (where the memorial was erected in 2015 or on the right, L’Entre de la Rue du Bois en arrivant par la Bombe — and the destination of the march: the trench position on the Rue du Bois of the 2nd Batt. RMF.

