

EOIN MACNEILL  
MEMOIR OF A  
REVOLUTIONARY SCHOLAR

*Edited by*  
BRIAN HUGHES

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Eoin macneill (1867–1945)**

**E**oin MacNeill was born John McNeill on 15 May 1867 in Glenarm, County Antrim, the sixth of eight children born to Archibald and Rosetta McNeill.<sup>1</sup> MacNeill's upbringing in a small catholic enclave in the Glens of Antrim would have a profound influence on his life, and particularly his enthusiasm for the Irish language, Irish history, and Irish culture. He was educated first in a local school and then under a private tutor before enrolling in St Malachy's College, Belfast, where he was a pupil for four years from 1881. In his final year at St Malachy's, MacNeill secured a scholarship in Modern Languages for the Royal University of Ireland and later earned a degree in constitutional history, jurisprudence, and political economy, attending lectures at Trinity College Dublin and King's Inns.

When MacNeill was appointed to a junior clerkship in the accountant-general's office at the Four Courts in Dublin in 1887, he became the first clerk to be appointed by competitive examination, as well as the first catholic. MacNeill held this position for 22 years, relinquishing both the position and pension entitlements to take up the chair of early (including medieval) Irish history at UCD. His interest in the Irish language coincided with his move to Dublin and from 1887 MacNeill undertook the study of Irish, initially (and mostly unsuccessfully) hiring a private tutor. This was followed by study under Dr Edmund Hogan SJ and annual summer visits to the Aran Islands to perfect his spoken Irish. For MacNeill, the language and culture were key and indisputable elements of national identity and always more important than political or state power. This ideology was manifested in MacNeill's leading role in the foundation of the Gaelic League in 1893. MacNeill was editor of *Irisleabhair na Gaeilge* (the *Gaelic Journal*) (1894–7), co-editor of *Fáinne an Lae* (1898–9), and then the first editor of *An Claidreamh Soluis* (1899–1901). This was combined with the unofficial and unpaid role of secretary, which MacNeill fulfilled from 1893 to 1897. The heavy work load and travel schedule the position generated, all carried out in MacNeill's spare time and in addition to his work in the Four Courts, resulted in a nervous breakdown which left MacNeill with a lifelong distaste for correspondence. From 1902 he was a leading figure in attempts to establish an Irish-language printing business to make Irish language books accessible and affordable for a wide audience. As he notes in his memoir, MacNeill ignored advice warning him against moving

Biographical notes are drawn primarily from the memoir, Michael Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill: scholar and man of action, 1867–1945* (Oxford, 1980) and Patrick Maume and Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'MacNeill, Eoin (John)', in *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (henceforth *DIB*).

into the difficult printing trade and the enterprise led to significant losses, including personal debts accrued by MacNeill. In 1903 MacNeill succeeded Fr Michael O’Hickey as vice-president of the Gaelic League and was elected president in 1916.

On 19 April 1898, Eoin MacNeill married Agnes Moore, known commonly as Taddie and a sister of a classmate at St Malachy’s, in Ballymena, County Antrim. They had eleven children, eight of whom survived to adulthood: Niall (b. 1899), Brian (b. 1900), Eibhlín (b. 1903), Turlough (b. 1904), Máire (b. 1904), Roisín (b. 1907), Seamus (b. 1908), Éilis (b. c. 1914).

Among MacNeill’s most significant contributions to Irish history was his article, ‘The North Began’, published in *An Claidheamh Soluis* on 1 November 1913 in response to threatened armed resistance to Home Rule among Ulster Unionists. If it might be accused of underestimating the sincerity of Ulster unionist hostility to Irish nationalism – MacNeill was, somewhat naively, adamant that sectarian divisions had been deliberately fostered by British policy to keep Ireland subservient – the importance of ‘The North Began’ lies in what it precipitated. Encouraged by advanced separatists associated with the IRB, who saw MacNeill as a moderate voice acceptable to broader public opinion, MacNeill took the lead in organising an armed Irish Volunteer force. The first public meeting at the Rotunda in Dublin, with MacNeill presiding, saw 3,000 men join with a peak of between 150,000 and 180,000 members across the country by 1914. When John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, demanded control of the organisation, MacNeill reluctantly agreed to allow Redmond to co-opt 25 nominees to the Volunteer committee in order to avoid a potentially devastating divide. As it happened, a split came anyway when Redmond called for the Irish Volunteers to support the British war effort and go ‘wherever the firing line extends’. MacNeill, as editor of the organisation’s organ the *Irish Volunteer*, was critical of Redmond’s call and a small group (some 12,000 members) remained loyal to MacNeill, keeping the title Irish Volunteers while the Redmondites took on the name of Irish National Volunteers.

MacNeill was no pacifist, and was prepared to support and advocate the use of force in defence of Irish nationalism, but he had very clear ideas about the conditions that would justify armed action by the Volunteers. Not a man to take a decision quickly or lightly, he put significant thought into his position. In early 1916 he wrote a memorandum (though this was never presented for discussion) arguing against military action without a significant chance of success. For MacNeill, to fight in any other circumstances was ‘morally wrong – and that to my mind is final and decisive.’ Those responsible would ‘incur the guilt not only of that action itself but of all its direct consequences’; to kill in those conditions would equate to ‘murder’.<sup>2</sup> This was at odds with the IRB-led minority who sought to strike a blow while Britain was at war, and thereby revive a latent Irish separatist spirit. MacNeill was kept aloof of plans for rebellion but was certainly aware that something was being planned behind his back, though reluctant to split the movement by confronting the conspirators. In early April 1916, MacNeill was convinced by the doctored ‘Castle document’ that a crackdown on the Volunteers was imminent and agreed to support the planned

<sup>2</sup> F.X. Martin, ‘Eoin MacNeill on the 1916 Rising’, *Irish Historical Studies*, 12 (1961), pp 234–40.

offensive action of the IRB's military committee (of whose existence MacNeill remained unaware).

The week leading up to the Rising was tense and fraught for MacNeill as he learned first (on Thursday, 20 April) of the plans for insurrection, then of the loss of German arms and arrest of Roger Casement, and that the 'Castle document' had been forged. This prompted MacNeill to do what was in his power to prevent the Rising and the issue of a 'countermanding order' — the act for which MacNeill is perhaps most often remembered. The order, delivered to units across the country and published in the *Sunday Independent*, delayed the outbreak of the Rising by 24 hours, went some way to reducing the numbers of Volunteers who turned out on in Dublin on Easter Monday, and frustrated plans for a national uprising.

Despite his attempts to prevent the Rising from taking place, MacNeill was arrested in its aftermath when he attempted to meet with General Sir John Maxwell in the hope of ensuring no further outbreaks of violence. Tried by court martial and sentenced to penal servitude for life, MacNeill was imprisoned in Dartmoor and Lewes before his release as part of a general amnesty in June 1917. His imprisonment — fellow opponent of the Rising Bulmer Hobson avoided arrest — perhaps went some way to rehabilitating a reputation tarnished in many eyes by his actions before Easter week and, in spite of some stiff opposition, MacNeill took an active role in the reconstituted Sinn Féin party. At the Sinn Féin convention on 25 October 1917, MacNeill was bitterly attacked by Constance Markievicz and Kathleen Clarke but, with the support of Arthur Griffith and Éamon de Valera, was elected to the party committee with 888 votes. At the 1918 general election he was the successful Sinn Féin candidate for South Derry and for the National University of Ireland, retaining both seats in the May 1921 elections in the northern and southern parliaments respectively. In January 1919, he had been elected as minister for finance in the first Dáil but was replaced by Michael Collins and relegated to the newly created Ministry for Industries in a reshuffle in April 1921.

In August 1921 MacNeill was elected as speaker of the Dáil and was in the chair for the debates on the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 and January 1922. Though MacNeill, as speaker, did not vote, he expressed his support for the Treaty in the Dáil. The general election that followed in 1922 saw MacNeill elected as a pro-Treaty TD, the time for Clare, and his appointment as minister for education. MacNeill was a reluctant politician, and a rather inactive and often ineffectual minister, but he was a strong advocate of the firm measures taken by the government to defeat anti-Treaty republicans during the civil war; he was a particularly forceful voice on the policy of executions. In 1923 MacNeill was appointed head of the Irish delegations to both the Imperial Conference, held in London, and the fourth assembly of the League of Nations in Geneva, the first time the Irish Free State had been represented at these meetings. A much more disagreeable task came the same year when it was announced that MacNeill had been selected as the Irish representative to the Boundary Commission, formed under Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish treaty to come to a settlement on the exact delineation of the border with Northern Ireland. MacNeill describes it in his memoir as 'the most disagreeable duty

I had ever undertaken for to my mind it was nothing short of an outrage on Ireland, and I may say on civilization, to be asked to draw a line across this country dividing it on a basis of religious differences.’<sup>3</sup> MacNeill was, in many respects, a scapegoat for the Free State government but his own inactivity did nothing to help matters. When reports were leaked that the commission was to recommend that the boundary remain virtually as it was, MacNeill saw his position as untenable and resigned his seat on the commission and his ministerial portfolio. He ran as a Cumann na nGaedhael candidate in the 1927 general election but was unsuccessful.

MacNeill’s electoral defeat in 1927 saw a welcome return to his academic pursuits. He had been deprived of his chair at UCD following arrest in 1916 but was reinstated in June 1917 and held the post until his retirement in 1941. If his political career ended in failure, it was soon followed by what might be considered one of his greatest achievements. In 1928 MacNeill was instrumental in the foundation of the Irish Manuscripts Commission; Professor Robert Dudley Edwards suggested that ‘it is probably due more to Eoin MacNeill than to anyone else that the Irish Manuscripts Commission was established’.<sup>4</sup> The destruction of material relating to over 700 years of Irish history in the Public Record Office at the Four Courts just six years earlier, during the Irish Civil War, was at the forefront of the minds of those who established the Commission. It was created with the remit of preserving, disseminating, and promoting original primary source material for the study of Ireland’s past, and has achieved remarkable success in those aims since. MacNeill was appointed chairman of the Commission at its first meeting in January 1929 and held the position until his death in 1945. MacNeill’s immense contribution to cultural and historical life in Ireland is further evidenced in his time as president of the Irish Historical Society (1936–45), the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland (1937–40), and the Royal Irish Academy (1940–3) (from which he had been temporarily expelled after 1916).

Eoin MacNeill died of abdominal cancer at the family home on Upper Leeson Street on 15 October 1945. He is buried in Kilbarrack Cemetery.

### the memoir

In 1932, MacNeill began work on a memoir of his life and career. He had been urged by members of his family to put on record ‘an account of his life and particularly the historical events in which he had taken part.’ When MacNeill eventually agreed, it was with the proviso that he ‘would never write it himself.’<sup>5</sup> The text that follows was, instead, dictated by MacNeill to a typist who came to the family home. Journalist Leila Carroll took the first dictation between 1932 and 1933 and the bulk of the memoir was put on paper during this first session. There followed a long respite – possibly necessitated by the volume of work required during the difficult early years of the Irish Manuscripts Commission – before MacNeill once again resumed his dictation, this time to another journalist, Ita Mallon, in 1939. A

<sup>3</sup> Memoir, pp 191–2. [The page numbers here and below refer to the pagination in the original document].

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Deirdre McMahon and Michael Kennedy, *Reconstructing Ireland’s past: a history of the Irish Manuscripts Commission* (Dublin, 2009), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Typescript note by Máire MacNeill, 10 Sept. 1947 (MAI, BMH CD/7).

rough table of contents was produced and on 4 January 1940 Mallon seems to have forwarded a copy of the text with the promise that ‘I shall be able to clear up any blanks on Tuesday next’.<sup>6</sup> It is not clear if the proposed meeting ever took place, but many blanks certainly remained unclarified.

In the months that followed, Mallon undertook a major revision of the text, making substantial manuscript changes to spelling, grammar, and syntax, and removing repetitious passages. She also made some suggestions for structural changes and areas on which MacNeill might expand or provide additional information. On 7 November 1941, Mallon forwarded the typescript text with her manuscript emendations to MacNeill. She further recommended an ‘alphabetical index’ might be of use to the reader and encouraged MacNeill to ‘set down more personal recollections of the Boundar[y] Commission’: ‘If the Commission’s report is not published, it will be an invaluable record, and if it is, it will give more interest to your memoirs.’ Mallon had also suggested an additional chapter on “‘famous men I have met” (and women)’ and wrote that by including this ‘you could introduce the University and cultural background as well as the political, and give a fuller account of your activities.’<sup>7</sup>

As sensible as many of Mallon’s suggestions may have been – and there was, no doubt, scope for more on both the Boundary Commission and MacNeill’s academic career – they were never approved or otherwise by MacNeill. He had dictated the memoir from memory, without recourse to notes or papers, and the text was never revised. After MacNeill’s death in 1945 it was agreed by family and friends that the original typed draft represented ‘what he actually dictated’ and that Mallon’s additions ‘should not be considered part of his memoir’.<sup>8</sup> With this in mind, it was considered desirable to type up a new version of the original text, ignoring Mallon’s handwritten additions.

In 1947, the Irish government established the Bureau of Military History, with the aim of gathering together testimony of those involved in the struggle for independence. Between 1947 and 1957, the Bureau collected 1,773 ‘witness statements’, 66 annexes to witness statements, and 14 collections of documents relating to people who did not contribute statements. They also gathered 322 collections of original documents, referred as ‘Contemporary Documents’, some of which were originals and others copies, as well as 215 collections of press cuttings, 12 voice recordings, and 246 photographs.<sup>9</sup> In the summer of 1947, Agnes MacNeill temporarily donated the original typescript of the memoir to the Bureau. Two copies were made, one of which was returned to Agnes MacNeill, and the other kept by the Bureau.<sup>10</sup>

The original copy of the memoir, as dictated by MacNeill and with the handwritten comments by Ita Mallon, is part of the MacNeill papers housed in the UCD Archives (LA1/G/371). Two copies of the second typescript version, with minor handwritten emendations by Máire MacNeill, are also held in UCD (LA1/G/372, on which the present edition is based, and LA1/S). Another is kept in Bureau of Military History

<sup>6</sup> Mallon to MacNeill, 4 Jan. 1940 (UCDA, MacNeill Papers, LA1/G/371).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Typescript note by Máire MacNeill, 10 Sept. 1947 (MAI, BMH CD/7).

<sup>9</sup> Diarmaid Ferriter, ‘In such deadly earnest’, *The Dublin Review* 12 (2003).

<sup>10</sup> Typescript note by Máire MacNeill, 10 Sept. 1947 (MAI, BMH CD/7).



Contemporary Documents collection at the Military Archives of Ireland (BMHCD/7).

In his important biography of Eoin MacNeill, published posthumously in 1980, Michael Tierney<sup>11</sup> (who had married MacNeill's daughter Eibhlín in 1923) wrote that the memoir in its current form would 'require much editing before it could be published.'<sup>12</sup> Many of its themes and topics are underdeveloped, it is sometimes scattered in its chronology, there is no real sense of a chapter structure, and it is often repetitive, with MacNeill repeating several anecdotes on more than one occasion. It certainly needed substantial work and some serious revision before a contemporary publisher would have even considered it. But, in some ways, this is what makes it so powerful as a historical document. This is not a carefully sculpted or manicured account of MacNeill's life, framed to meet the needs of a publishing house or the reading public, but something much more immediate. It is not even entirely clear if MacNeill ever really intended it for public release in his lifetime. That is not to say that MacNeill was not interested in making his side of the story available for posterity. The section on the Easter Rising, for example, can be read alongside MacNeill's thoughts on the Rising as composed in its aftermath. On 9 May 1916, while MacNeill was in prison, he composed a day-by-day account of the lead up to the Rising. A version of this account, copied from MacNeill's original pencil notes by his daughter Eibhlín, is among the MacNeill papers in UCD.<sup>13</sup> In late 1917, MacNeill composed another memorandum explaining his rationale and actions in the months and days leading up to Easter Sunday 1916; the final two paragraphs in particular appear to be a direct response to criticism faced by

MacNeill during the Sinn Féin convention in October 1917.<sup>14</sup> On a number of occasions in the memoir MacNeill contradicts recent publications containing what he describes as 'invented' accounts, based on 'important and malicious gossip'.<sup>15</sup>

As will become clear, the failure to fully edit the text meant that several passages and anecdotes are repeated in similar or even identical fashion. This repetition, though undesirable in a traditional autobiography, here gives the reader a real sense of certain ideas on which MacNeill was entirely convinced, the ideas he was most keen to record; the repetition of the maxim that Edward Carson was 'our chief agent' in bringing about Irish independence is a noteworthy example.<sup>16</sup> In that sense, and unsurprisingly so given the circumstances of its creation, it often feels more like the record of a conversation with MacNeill than a work of autobiography, as much an important piece of oral history as a memoir in the sense we usually understand it. Its value, though, is not in question. Indeed, Tierney acknowledged that 'it provides an essential framework for any attempt at a biography, and my debt to it will be apparent on almost every page.'<sup>17</sup>

The memoir gives an important account of MacNeill's actions, and those of his

<sup>11</sup> See *DIB*.

<sup>12</sup> Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill*, p. xvi.

<sup>13</sup> 'Royal Arms' (UCDA, MacNeill Papers, LA1/G/126).

<sup>14</sup> This memorandum was edited for publication by F. X. Martin in *Irish Historical Studies* in 1961: Martin, 'Eoin MacNeill on the Easter Rising', pp 245–51.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, *Memoir*, p. 115, 159.

<sup>16</sup> *Memoir*, p. 171.

<sup>17</sup> Tierney, *Eoin MacNeill*, p. xvi.

opponents, in the weeks leading up to the Easter Rising. MacNeill offers a clear statement on the rationale of his reasons for opposing the plans of Patrick Pearse and his fellow conspirators. He is critical of Pearse's 'notion of heroism on the Cuchulain model'; for MacNeill the nation is a living entity, not 'a sort of mystical abstraction' as he felt others had come to see it.<sup>18</sup> The memoir also enlightens us as to how MacNeill spent Easter week 1916, an important addition to the historical record given the tendency for him to conveniently disappear from the Easter Rising narrative after Easter Sunday. MacNeill's discussion of his time in prison in 1916–17 and 1920–21 is a similarly useful addition to the record on political imprisonment and internment during the Irish Revolution.<sup>19</sup> There is also, towards the end of the memoir, a poignant account of the shooting and death of Kevin O'Higgins in 1927, an event to which MacNeill was a witness.<sup>20</sup>

This is very much a memoir of MacNeill's career as an activist, organiser and politician. Readers interested in, for example, the origins and activity of the Irish language revival of the late nineteenth century and, in particular, the work of the Gaelic League will find much of interest within the pages that follow. Regrettably, however, there is little insight into his impressive and important academic career. MacNeill seems to have deliberately chosen to focus on his public career rather than his academic life. While a brief allusion is made to some of his early writing on Irish history, his decades of scholarship and teaching go unrecorded. As an historian of early Ireland, and part of a discipline still in its infancy, MacNeill was a pioneer. His most well known work is probably *Phases of Irish History*, first published in 1919, but he wrote and published extensively throughout his long career.<sup>21</sup> MacNeill's nationalism and interest in the Irish language influenced his scholarly work, and particularly his decision to investigate the early history of Ireland. His scholarship was influential in a modern sense for its focus on rigorous empiricism and commitment to original primary source material. This at a time when professional historical study was still developing and manuscript material was not widely available.

Most notable in its absence from the memoir is the Irish Civil War, 1922–3. Though MacNeill speaks in some detail about the debates in Dáil Éireann about the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 and January 1922 – during which he held the 'troublesome and tiresome job' of speaker of the Dáil<sup>22</sup> – there is no sustained discussion of the violent and bitter conflict that followed between anti-Treaty republicans and the provisional government and Irish Free State in which MacNeill held a ministerial portfolio. There is a vague reference contrasting the good-natured behaviour of Sinn Féin supporters in 1917 and 1918 with 'what was experienced after 1921'.<sup>23</sup> The only other mention actually downplays the Civil War: MacNeill suggests that the nationalist split that followed the naming of Charles Stewart Parnell

<sup>18</sup> Memoir, p. 112.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, William Murphy, *Political imprisonment and the Irish, 1921–21* (Oxford, 2014).

<sup>20</sup> Memoir, pp 197–8.

<sup>21</sup> For a list of MacNeill's publications, see F. X. Martin, 'The writings of Eoin MacNeill', *Irish Historical Studies* 6 (1948), pp 44–62.

<sup>22</sup> Memoir, p. 186.

<sup>23</sup> Memoir, p. 146.

as co-respondent in the divorce proceedings of Captain William O'Shea in 1890 was 'deeper and sharper and more widespread than anything we experienced afterwards even at the height of the civil war in '22.'<sup>24</sup>

MacNeill's silence about the Civil War is certainly not unusual among those who saw it to its conclusion and the composition of the memoir began less than a decade later when its wounds were still raw (and would remain so for much longer than that). The Civil War had been personally devastating for MacNeill, something he was clearly reluctant to discuss. When his terminally ill sister, Annie McGavock, had travelled to Dublin (November 1922) to convince MacNeill to spare the life of Erskine Childers, then under a sentence of death, the siblings quarrelled and were not reconciled. While two of MacNeill's sons joined the National Army in 1922, a third, Brian, remained loyal to his anti-Treatyite colleagues in Sligo. On 2 September 1922, he was shot and killed by National Army troops at Benbulbin. The death of Brian had its own unique impact on MacNeill. The family had remained close, despite their political divergence, and MacNeill was a firm devotee (regardless of any evidence to the contrary) of a somewhat idealised version of his son's death: he believed that Brian had shaken hands and laughed with the men who had found him dying and that reports suggesting Brian had been killed after surrendering were merely devised to torment him. After the Civil War MacNeill would lay wreaths at the cenotaph dedicated to Michael Collins and Arthur Griffith on Leinster Lawn, and the site of the ambush during which Collins was fatally wounded at Béalnabláth, but never visited the cross at Benbulbin that marked the death of Brian MacNeill.<sup>25</sup> The silence in his memoir speaks volumes.

In spite of its somewhat fragmentary nature, the memoir that follows is a valuable historical document. It is significant not just in giving an account of Eoin MacNeill's remarkable career in his own words, but also for what it says about MacNeill's thinking in the 1930s, a decade after the establishment of the Irish Free State of which he was a part. Its publication by the Irish Manuscripts Commission is a timely and fitting tribute to a man who did so much to create that important institution.

#### editorial conventions

Editorial intrusion into the original text (UCDA, MacNeill Papers, LA1/G/372) has been kept to a minimum. Máire MacNeill made some minor manuscript changes correcting typographical errors. In each of the three copies of this version of the memoir (UCDA, MacNeill Papers, LA1/G/372 and LA1/G/371; MAI, BMH CD/7) there are corrections unique to that document. As the intentions of the creator of the text in its current form, they are, where relevant, reflected here. A very small number of additional silent corrections have been made where a typographical or punctuation error may hinder understanding, but for the most part these have been left as in the original. There are numerous examples, for instance, of missing or erroneous punctuation (commas and quotation marks most notably) but these do not generally

<sup>24</sup> Memoir, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Anne Dolan, *Commemorating the Irish Civil War: history and memory, 1923–2000* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 3.

obstruct the reader and have remained untouched. Similarly, misspellings, archaic spelling, and incorrect capitalization of proper nouns have been left as in the original, but corrected where necessary in the footnote at their first mention.

Editorial insertions are presented in square brackets, as are the page numbers in the original document. The original contains several blank spaces where it was presumably intended to add additional information. When the author's intention is clear, the blanks have been filled and marked in square brackets, but have been indicated with [blank] when the original intention remains unclear. There are also some notes and reminders where MacNeill or the typist clearly intended to look up a specific piece of information later. To give a fuller sense of MacNeill's intentions, these have been left unedited unless they might affect understanding. Similarly, headings and dating are inconsistent but have also been retained to give a sense of the progression and timing of MacNeill's dictation, except on some rare occasions where a heading was misleading or irrelevant.

Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information in the footnotes has been taken from *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, eds James McGuire and James Quinn (9 vols, Cambridge, 2009; [www.dib.cambridge.org](http://www.dib.cambridge.org)).

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(Unpublished)

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Widow of the late Professor Eoin MacNeill,  
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[p. 1] I was born on May 15th, 1867, twenty years to a day after Daniel O'Connell's<sup>1</sup> death. My people in Glenarm all belonged to the same local stock. They belonged to families of hillside farmers. My father's<sup>2</sup> home was in a little hamlet in Glencly, high up on the hill overlooking Carnlough Bay. My mother's<sup>3</sup> family, their name was McAuley, had their home farther up in the same glen. My grandfather's wife was of Presbyterian stock. Her name was Ann Doak. All the rest of my forbears were catholic. My mother's father was a doctor in Glenarm, Charles McAuley.

Glenarm was on the border between the main region of County Antrim, largely settled with Presbyterians from Scotland, and the region of the Glens, stretching north as far as Ballycastle where there was an earlier Scottish settlement under the Mac Donnell's who came in from Argyll and the Hebrides after the breakdown of the earldom of Ulster. These were mixed with the old Irish stock of the county and were nearly all catholics. In my memory there was no native of the parish of Glenarm, who spoke Irish, and I think the same was probably true of Glencly. My mother knew many who could not speak English. Her father Dr. McAuley, carried on his profession among the Irish speaking people of the North and I have always suspected that he himself must have known Irish, but he belonged to a generation when it had become customary, as it has at one time or another in most parts of the country, for parents to conceal their own knowledge of Irish from their children.

It may have been the same in my father's case, for I often heard him explaining the names of places, giving the English meanings, and when he pronounced the Irish names, he did so with a pronunciation that I recognised in later years to be peculiarly and exactly Irish.

[p. 2] Inland towards the mountains, especially in the Braid Valley, there was a mixture of these populations and many living in that direction spoke a pure Scottish dialect of English, as distinct as may be found in the poetry of Burns.<sup>4</sup> In fact Burns was a favourite among them. But even in my own time, there must have been some who spoke Irish. My father used to travel about there buying hay and potatoes and other produce, and as a child I often accompanied him. On one of these journeys I remember meeting at the foot of Slemish an old man whose name was Harry McLoughlin and who had the reputation of being the last man in the district to say his prayers in Irish. My mother's mother<sup>5</sup> belonged to the O'Neill family of Glenarriff, the surviving descendants of the main line of the O'Neills of Dungannon, whose pedigree went back to Con Bacach,<sup>6</sup> father of Shane the Proud,<sup>7</sup> as will be found in O'Donovan's<sup>8</sup> notes on the Annals of the Four Masters.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel O'Connell (1775–1847), barrister, politician, and nationalist leader responsible for Catholic 'emancipation' and a failed attempt to repeal the Union: *DIB*.

<sup>2</sup> Armbald MacNeill (b. 1882), father of Eoin MacNeill.

<sup>3</sup> Rosetta McNeill (née Macauley) (1827–1917), mother of Eoin MacNeill.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Burns (1759–1796), Scottish poet and lyricist, widely accepted as Scotland's national bard (*ODNB*).

<sup>5</sup> Mrs Macauley (née O'Neill), maternal grandmother of Eoin MacNeill.

<sup>6</sup> Conn 'Bacach' O'Neill (Ó Néill) (c. 1484–1559), 1st earl of Tyrone, gaelic lord, ancestor of Eoin MacNeill.

<sup>7</sup> Shane (Seaán) O'Neill (c. 1530–1567), youngest son of Conn 'Bacach' O'Neill, gaelic lord, chief of the O'Neills of Tír Eóghain (1558–1567).

<sup>8</sup> John (Seán) O'Donovan (Ó Donnabháin) (1806–61), Irish scholar, edited *Annála Ríoghtachta Éireann: annals of the kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616*, 7 vols. (Dublin, 1848–51).

When I was a little child, an old woman who was a native of Glenarriff, the wife of one of my father's employees, used to be in the house looking after our infantile wants. Her name was Peggy McKendry. Her husband's name was Peter Carnegie. Peggy always addressed us by the Irish form of our names, and frequently threw in other remarks in Irish. Long years afterwards when I was on a visit to the home locality, I heard that Peggy was still alive. She was living in a small house in Larne and I called to see her. We had great delight in meeting each other and plenty of reminiscences. Her husband used get into difficulties occasionally with my father, and I think that was the cause of one remark of Peggy's that I remember from that meeting.

[p. 3] "Och? God be wi' Archie MacNeill," she said, "but he was a terrible man when he was angry. I think I can see him leppin' the height of that ceiling."

My father's name was Archibald, and he was known to the whole countryside as big Archie and we when we were children were simply called "Archie's Ones."

I want to say something now about Glenarm. It is a small town at the mouth of the Glenarm River. There is a small harbour there and in my memory there was a very lively shipping trade with Scotland. There was a strong sea-going tradition among the people and quite a number of the elder farmers round about were Captain This and Captain That, retired sea captains, mostly from coasting sloops and schooners. The trade was in the export of the local limestone as it was called, the geologists say it is crystalline chalk, used for chemical works in Scotland, also iron ore from the mines in Glenarm exported to furnaces in Ayrshire.

There was hardly a day that some of these small sailing ships or small coasting steamers would not be lying to in the harbour, and so we were in continual intercourse with the sailor folk, Irish and Scottish.

The town was on one side of the river, Lord Antrim's Castle and its grounds on the other side. The Earls of Antrim were for centuries the High Chiefs of the MacDonnell Clan on both sides of the sea. From the mouth of the river for some miles back to the foot of the mountains the Earl of Antrim's private demesne extended, a lovely piece of country, with much of the old natural forest and herds of wild deer. This above all was the place where I loved to ramble, along with my brother James,<sup>9</sup> until we became old enough to be sent off to colleges for our education and even after that it was our favourite rambling ground in the holiday times.

[p. 4] I went to St Malachy's College in Belfast<sup>10</sup> and James to Belvedere College in Dublin.<sup>11</sup> My father had started life as an apprentice to the shipbuilding trade, completed his apprenticeship, became a journeyman and in that capacity made a voyage as ship carpenter that he used often talk about afterwards. The voyage was to

<sup>9</sup> James McNeill (1869–1938), civil servant, diplomat, and brother of Eoin MacNeill. Born in Glenarm, County Antrim; graduate of Blackrock College, Dublin and Emmanuel College, Cambridge; served with the Bombay presidency in India (1890–1914); elected to Dublin city council, 1920; assisted in drafting of Irish Free State constitution, 1922; high commissioner of the Irish Free State in London (1922–28); last governor general of Ireland (1928–32). Unlike Eoin, James always spelled his surname 'McNeill'.

<sup>10</sup> St Malachy's College, Belfast, was founded in 1833 as a Catholic grammar school for boys and remains one of the oldest in Ireland. MacNeill was a pupil there from 1881.

<sup>11</sup> Belvedere College, Dublin, founded in 1832 by the Society of Jesus as a secondary school for boys.

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