

Kathleen Clarke

An Easter Widow

by Helen Litton

Kathleen Daly Clarke was born in Limerick on 11 April 1878. Her parents were Edward Daly, of Limerick city, and Catharine O'Mara, of Ballingarry, County Limerick.

Edward's father, John, a constitutional nationalist, supported the non-violent Daniel O'Connell, but two of his sons, Edward and John, were more radical, and joined the Fenians. Both lads spent some time in prison for this, and John took part in the 1867 Fenian Rising, afterwards escaping to the United States. Edward settled down to work as a lath splitter at Spaight's Timber Yard, and married Catharine in 1873. The couple had eight daughters and one son; that son, also Edward (Ned), was born five months after his father's death, in 1890. Edward's last job was as weighmaster for Limerick Harbour Board.

Kathleen was the third daughter, and was twelve when her father died. He was given one of the largest funerals ever seen in Limerick. The family was left fairly destitute, though nationalist sympathisers collected £130 (about £8,000 today) and set Mrs Daly up in a public house at 3 Shannon Street. This failed after a year, and the elder



Kathleen Daly Clarke

girls, their mother and their aunt, Laura Daly, tried to keep going as dressmakers, without much success. Edward's brother John, who had joined Clan na Gael in New York, had been imprisoned in England for taking part in a dynamite campaign, and this damaged the family reputation in many eyes.

They were rescued from penury by another Daly brother, James. James had emigrated in the 1850s, and established himself in New Caledonia, a French-

owned island in the Pacific. In 1894, his fortune made and his family reared, he took over his brother's family, buying a large house called Clonlong on the Tipperary Road, in Limerick. Two of the girls worked in Cannock's department store, but Kathleen insisted on working for herself, as a dressmaker and tailor, and built up a thriving business.

In 1896, after twelve years' imprisonment, John Daly was released from prison and was welcomed in Limerick as a hero. He moved in with the large Daly family, and James soon left for Australia – a constitutional nationalist, he was at odds with the politics of the other Dalys. John made a highly successful lecture tour around the United States, speaking for the Fenian amnesty campaign, and came home with enough money to establish a bakery at 26 William Street. This became the family home, and their main support. His nieces worked in the bakery, except for Kathleen, who stayed a self-employed dressmaker. A second bakery was opened in Sarsfield Street in 1912.

In 1898, Tom Clarke was released from prison in England, where he had served



Daly family before Kathleen's departure to the USA, in 1901. Standing (L-R): Nora, Annie, Agnes, Carrie, Laura. Seated (L-R): Kathleen, Madge, Edward

fifteen years on dynamiting charges. He came to Limerick, where his old prison companion John Daly was now the first nationalist mayor, and he and Kathleen fell in love. Their correspondence, now in the National Library of Ireland, portrays an increasingly deep affection and commitment. However, the family was not supportive; Kathleen was only 20, and Tom was 40, aged by imprisonment and apparently in frail health. He could not find work in Ireland, and headed to New York in 1899. Kathleen followed him as soon as possible, and they were married in 1901. Their first son, John Daly, was born in June 1902.

They lived in New York, in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Tom worked in an iron-foundry, and edited the Clan na Gael newspaper *Gaelic American*; Kathleen ran an ice-cream and candy store for a while. However, Kathleen's health disimproved, and they were advised to leave the city. They moved to Manorville, Long Island, where they ran a market garden, rather unsuccessfully. From Kathleen's memoir, it is clear that these were very happy years for her. By 1907, however, Tom was noting war-clouds in Europe, and considering a blow at Britain if a war should come. Kathleen knew their happy times were at an end, but did not oppose him; this was his life's ambition, and she would not stand in his way. They returned to Ireland in December 1907.

Tom's sister Hannah ran a tobacconist shop in Dublin, and she helped him to set up a similar business. His first shop was at 55 Amiens Street, followed by a second one in 1909, at 75A Parnell Street. This second little shop, barely big enough to hold a counter and a couple of customers was destined to become a centre of revolutionary activity. Clan na Gael sent money to help Tom to revive the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) with a view to rebellion, and he began to build up contacts with activists such as Sean MacDiarmada and Bulmer Hobson. Meanwhile, the family grew: Tom junior was born in March 1908 and Emmet in August 1909. In 1910, No 55 was closed, and a new shop opened at 77 Amiens Street, with living space overhead.

She ran the house, raised her sons and worked in the shops, and was also involved in nationalist activities. In 1912 she was married by Kathleen's brother



Kathleen Clarke with her three sons, after the execution of Tom Clarke

Ned, who had left Limerick and worked as a clerk in Dublin. Ned wanted only to be a soldier, and his dream was realised in 1913, when the Irish Volunteers were established in response to the Ulster Volunteer Force. In 1914 Cumann na mBan was founded, as an auxiliary to the Volunteers, and Kathleen Clarke was one of the founder members, becoming head of the Central Branch. She threw herself into the drilling and first aid training, and produced successful fundraising ideas such as selling green, white and gold badges, and commissioning pamphlets on historical events. The first of these was written by Patrick Pearse, by now making a name for himself in nationalist circles.

As the movement towards a rebellion gained momentum, Tom worked harder and harder, chairing committees, publishing newsletters, maintaining contacts with republicans all over the country, and acting as treasurer for the money which Clan na Gael regularly sent across the Atlantic. The outbreak of the First World War had robbed the Irish Volunteers of most of its members, as they followed John Redmond's appeal to aid the Allies against Germany. The remaining forces, about 11,000 men and women, were ever more determined to strike while Britain was distracted elsewhere. However, they were becoming bored endlessly drilling and training, and Tom seized on the death of the old Fenian Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, in New York, to plan a huge set-piece funeral calculated

to demonstrate the strength of the republican movement, and to revive its spirit. The massive procession, in July 1915, encouraged many more young men and women to join the Volunteers and Cumann na mBan. It culminated in Patrick Pearse's stirring appeal to the ghosts of the past, and the promise of the future.

Before the Rising took place, Kathleen was apparently sworn into the IRB, so that she could retain the information needed to reconstruct it if the leaders died. She was resigned to the prospect that Tom would die, although she agonised about the future of their children, and the loss of the love of her life. She found it hard to say goodbye as he went to spend Easter Sunday night in a hotel, but would not let him see her displaying weakness. He was already distraught at the delay in their plans, caused by Eoin MacNeill's countermanding order, and needed to be kept calm. She spent all that week in her home (now in Fairview), planting rows of cabbages to distract herself, listening to gunfire in the distance (indeed, a bullet once whistled past her) and only occasionally getting news from the city. Her sisters Laura and Nora, members of Cumann na mBan, arrived from Limerick, and went into the GPO to find out what was going on, but she was not strong enough to accompany them. She only knew that the fighting had ended when an armoured car with British soldiers arrived to arrest her, on suspicion of having been involved in the Rising.

Kathleen was brought to Dublin Castle for the night, but at midnight she was taken to Kilmainham Jail to visit Tom. She understood what this implied, and stiffened herself for this final interview. She and Tom spent a couple of hours together in his small cell, talking of many things, but not of personal feelings, in case it would break them. She was surprised that he was still alive, as he had sworn never to face imprisonment again, but he had decided to make the British pay for the bullet rather than kill himself. He was shot early the following morning, 3 May, after the executions of Patrick Pearse and Thomas MacDonagh. There is some evidence to suggest that his execution was bungled, and that he had to be shot twice. Kathleen walked home that morning by herself, but was later joined by her sisters Madge



Photo of the Daly family in 1894.

Back row standing (L-R): Catharine Daly, James, Lollie, Jim Jones, Eileen, Madge.

Front row seated (L-R): Nora, Edward (Ned), Agnes, Mrs. Margaret Daly, Kathleen, Laura.

Seated on the floor (L-R): Carrie and Annie.



Catharine Daly (née O'Mara)

(Courtesy of the Daly Collection at the Glucksman Library, University of Limerick)

and Laura, who were afraid for their brother Ned. That evening they were brought to Kilmainham to say goodbye to him. Kathleen was recognised by one of the soldiers, appalled to see her again so soon. Ned Daly was shot on the morning of 4 May, aged 25.

Kathleen immediately began to set up a Dependants' Fund, for which Tom had left money, and this work helped to distract her for a time. She drove herself too hard, and soon after suffered a miscarriage. She had not told Tom they were expecting another child, hoping to spare him that regret. Her children stayed down in Limerick with their aunts, and she tried hard to keep life normal for them, sending Emmet a birthday card and present in August that year. The Dependants' Fund ran out of money soon, as the sheer number of dependants was unexpected, and this required more fundraising activity, spearheaded by Cumann na mBan. As secretary of the Fund she chose Michael Collins, because he was to reorganise the IRB, and this job provided a good cover for his travels around the country.

Kathleen's next few years passed in this kind of work. She could not reopen the shops, which had been raided and destroyed. From May 1918, because of suspicions of a 'German plot', she spent nine months in Holloway Jail, London, with Constance Markievicz and Maud Gonne MacBride. She was released

early because of heart trouble. She was elected to Dublin Corporation for Sinn Fein, and when the illegal First Dail was established, she was one of the judges of the Republican Courts. During the War of Independence, she was active as a courier, smuggling money and weapons to the Volunteers, now called the Irish Republican Army. Her home was raided by the Black and Tans more than once. In Limerick, the Daly home was raided too, and all the contents were taken out and burned on the Ennis Road. Her sister Agnes had her hand cut open and her hair cut off.

Kathleen became a Sinn Fein TD as a member of Sinn Fein, but lost her seat in 1922. She had been among those TDs who vehemently opposed the Anglo-Irish Treaty, and took the anti-Treaty side during the Civil War. Her memoir says very little about that devastating time, but her home was raided again, as it had been by the Black and Tans, and the bakery in Limerick was taken over by Free State troops and looted. In 1924 she made a lecture tour through the United States, fundraising for dependants of the IRA. In 1926, she became a founder member of Fianna Fail, and was appointed a Senator; in 1928 she was again elected as a TD.

She was not fond of Eamon de Valera, whom she saw as a 'politician', something she despised, and they clashed over the 1937 Constitution. She, along with other

women TDs, criticised what they saw as its anti-woman articles, and spoke passionately about the equal rights for women which had been promised in the Proclamation of 1916. Through all this time she remained a member of Dublin Corporation, and in 1939 she achieved the distinction of becoming Dublin's first woman Lord Mayor, an event which caused great excitement. She remained in this position for two years, dealing with numerous problems caused by the Second World War (the 'Emergency'), and retired on the grounds of ill-health. She resigned from Fianna Fail in 1943, and stood unsuccessfully for Clann na Poblachta in 1948. Retiring from politics, she lived for some time with her son John Daly in Sandymount, Dublin, working on many voluntary groups and committees such as hospital boards and the National Graves Association. In 1965 she moved to Liverpool to live with her son, Dr Emmet Clarke, whose two sons were her only grandchildren. She died there on 29 September 1972, aged 94, and was brought back to Dublin, where she was given a state funeral. She is buried in Deansgrange Cemetery.