

The Reconstruction of the Tintown Camp.

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The Civil War in Ireland arose from the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty with Britain in December 1921. Many loyal supporters of the Republic rejected this Treaty on the grounds that Ireland could not remain under the Crown of Great Britain and within the British Empire. The demands for national self-determination and conflicting views on this Treaty, set old comrades at each other's throats throughout the country, in a conflict that divided families, communities and the nation. It also ended the Irish Revolutionary movement as a united nationalist front and was replaced by a bitter, divisive and vindictive Civil War.² This dark period in Irish history had serious long-lasting effects for generations to come. Throughout the Civil War, many anti-Treaty leaders and supporters were interned in prison camps throughout Ireland, under the command of the new Provisional Government.

This essay will reconstruct one of these internment camps, the Tintown Internment Camp, which was situated in the Curragh, Co Kildare during the Civil War in Ireland. The main purpose of this research is to explore the material culture to discuss the community that existed in the Tintown Camp. The essay will do this by using an autograph book, created by a Republican prisoner in the Camp during the Civil War. The essay will begin by discussing the origins of the Civil War in Ireland and the reason why internment camps were established. It will examine Tintown Camp itself, focussing on its physical make-up and the lives of the internees. Finally, and most significantly, it will explore the autograph book, to examine the lives and Republican aspirations of those interned in the camp.

According to Paul Caffrey, "material objects are important for what they are and for what they represent; they are the physical embodiment of both the culture and the values of the period in which they were produced".³ Therefore, studying material culture of a specific period or event, such as the Civil War in Ireland, can help us to understand the role of the objects in expressing ideas about memory, identity and aspirations.⁴ Important Irish material culture includes many autograph books, which were made in prisons and internment camps throughout the Civil War. The primary source for this essay is a privately owned autograph book, which belonged to Thomas Greene, a prisoner in the Tintown Camp in 1923. The book contains thirty-five pages. Some pages, including the back cover, are no longer extant. Thirty-three prisoners contributed to the book. Entries in the book range in date from May 1923 up to December 1923, and include a range of political statements, poems and illustrations. These entries are mainly in English, with occasional pieces in the Irish language. Exploring the autograph book as a piece of material culture, sheds light on the ideals of the Republicans who were interned in the Tintown Camp throughout the Civil War. The power of objects like the autograph book used for this essay, lies not in its use as 'evidence' but ways in which different understandings of the Civil War can be explored and considered.⁵ Further evidence for the camp will be explored using archival documents from the Military Archives to gain information regarding the social and physical makeup of the Tintown camp.

The years leading up to, and during, the Civil War in Ireland were a period of immense violence with many political revolutions. These were defining moments for Irish

¹ This dissertation was submitted in partial fulfillment of the BA(Hons) in Digital Humanities, May 2017.

² J. M. Regan, *The Irish Counter Revolution 1921-1936* (Dublin, 2001) p. 3.

³ P. Caffrey, 'Irish Material Culture: The Shape of the Field' in *Circa Art Magazine*, 103 (2003), pp 29-32.

⁴ RTE, 'Century Ireland' (<http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/material-culture-and-1916>) (20 March, 2017)

⁵ RTE, 'Century Ireland' (<http://www.rte.ie/centuryireland/index.php/articles/material-culture-and-1916>) (20 March, 2017)

political history, with the outbreak of Civil War in June 1922 and the construction of the Irish Free State in December 1922.⁶ The signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty on the 6 December 1921 between Dáil Éireann representatives, Michael Collins, Arthur Griffith, Robert Barton, George Gavan Duffy and the British Government, created the Irish Free State. The relationship of the Free State to the Crown or the representative of the Crown, followed the laws, practices, and constitutional usage that existed between Canada and the British Government.⁷ Southern Ireland was to be known as the Irish Free State (Saorstát Éireann) and was partitioned from Northern Ireland.⁸ On 7 January 1922, after a bitter and lengthy three-week debate in the Dáil, the Treaty was eventually endorsed by a narrow margin of just seven votes, 64 votes to 57.⁹ The majority led by, Arthur Griffith, W. T. Cosgrave, Kevin O' Higgins and, above all, Michael Collins, saw the Treaty as 'a stepping stone'; it was a platform 'for freedom to achieve freedom'.¹⁰

The Irish Civil War was a direct result of the Treaty's signing. On the 14 January 1922, the Provisional Government, acting for the Irish Free State, was elected and, within days, Dublin Castle was handed over with a formal transfer of power from the British Government to the Provisional Government.¹¹ The anti-Treaty minority, under Eamon de Valera, the President of Sinn Féin, argued that the Dáil had no right to dismantle the Irish Republic already established by the votes of the people in the 1916. He stated "there is no use discussing it. The whole of Ireland will not get me to be a national apostate and I am not going to connive at setting up in Ireland another government for England".¹² For de Valera and many of the anti-Treaty Republican supporters, this Treaty meant an agreement of colonial status with all the trimmings of imperialism - an oath of allegiance to the British Crown had to be taken by members of any new Irish parliamentary assembly, a governor general, British bases and partition of the North.¹³ De Valera accused Collins and Griffith for failing to strive for further concessions which could have preserved Republican unity.¹⁴ However, de Valera's choice of Irish delegates, in particular, Collins and Griffith were often questioned.¹⁵ Many in the Dáil believed that the chosen men had not been a fighting delegation and unity could have been better achieved by de Valera's presence at the negotiations.¹⁶ De Valera resigned as President and was replaced by Arthur Griffith who was elected on the 10 January 1922, by a narrow majority of 60-58.¹⁷ There was strong Republican opposition to the Treaty, as many had felt disloyal to the principles of the 1916 Rising. Large areas throughout Ireland had been dominated by anti-Treaty members of Sinn Féin; this was made possible with the evacuation of the British troops.¹⁸

After the signing of the Treaty, a bitter division descended upon the country. The consequences of this political and military split changed the course of Irish politics for many years to come. Dublin's Four Courts had been occupied by anti-Treaty forces since mid-April.¹⁹ These men saw themselves as a symbol, the natural successors to the men and women

⁶ C. Townshend, *Ireland: The 20th Century* (London, 1999) p. 108.

⁷ *The Irish Times*, 7 December 1921.

⁸ D. Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State* (Dublin, 2005) p. 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹ J. Durney, 'The Curragh internees, 1921-21: from defiance to defeat' (Lord Walter Prize Essay), p. 7.

¹² *Dáil Éireann debates*, vol. T, no. 14, 6 January 1922.

¹³ D. Keogh, *Twentieth Century Ireland: Nation and State* (Dublin, 2005) p. 2.

¹⁴ M. Hopkinson, *Green Against Green, The Irish Civil War* (Dublin, 1988) p. 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

of the 1916 Rising, who had seized the GPO in similar circumstances.²⁰ Militarily, it was a dead end, but the Republicans, led by Rory O' Connor, were determined to make a defiant gesture of opposition to the Provisional Government and to the Treaty.²¹ At 4.30 on the morning of 28 June 1922, Free State troops opened fire on the occupied buildings. Inside the anti-Treaty forces remained defiant. Ireland, although back to war, was now at war with itself. The inevitable outcome was the near demolition of the Four Courts, and with it, Ireland's national archives dating back hundreds of years, and of course, irreplaceable. An ignominious surrender followed and the arrest of many of the anti-Treaty leaders weakened their cause at the very moment when their leadership was needed most. At the start of the Civil War, the anti-Treaty side held the military initiative, but pointless exercises such as the occupation of the Four Courts, meant that strategic opportunities were lost. Many such mistakes were to be made in the months ahead. Fighting had spread to the rest of Dublin and, before long, half of O Connell Street was in ruins. Many of the anti-Treaty leaders that escaped had fled South to continue the war. Provisional Government troops swiftly pursued their opponents. Many of these Republican were captured and interned in camps throughout Ireland.

Internment Camps throughout Ireland had originally been established to hold soldiers during the First World War, but later many of the camps were converted for sorting and holding prisoners during the 1916 Easter Rising. The Curragh Camp in Co Kildare had been the long established HQ of the British Army in Ireland. By the end of the nineteenth century the camp became the divisional headquarters and soldiers were trained there for fighting the Boer War.²² In 1921, the escalation of IRA activities throughout the country worsened and the British response was to detain these men in the original internment camps. Many anti-Treaty supporters were under military detention in the camp. The number of internees rose from 1,471 for the week ending 17 January 1921 to 4,454 for the week ending 16 July 1921.²³ These startling figures illustrate the obvious need for new internment camps throughout Ireland. The new camp at the Curragh military base, which became known as "Tintown", was a direct result of the growing number of anti-Treaty prisoners.

Tintown internment camp consisted of three camps, Tintown one, two and three. Tintown one was situated in the centre, with number two and three to the right and left.²⁴ Tintown one opened in early 1923.²⁵ The concrete-floor huts held approximately twenty men. The camps had the usual barbed wire fencing with lookout posts to prevent escapes. Hugh Boyle, had been a prisoner in Tintown hut four, stated on his arrival that "this place is like the garden of Eden".²⁶ Boyle also wrote about the conditions in which he lived noting "we have spring beds, the best of footwear and electricity".²⁷ Similar to Boyle's description of the camp was prisoner John Hayes, who stated that "they had two sheets, three blankets, a pillow and any amount to eat".²⁸ However, although there were reports of Tintown being described "like a hotel", there were also many who argued that Tintown was a place where many prisoners were severely neglected.²⁹ The prison diary of Joseph Campbell, written

²⁰ RTE 'The Madness from Within: The Irish Civil War' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl66ixAXm_A) (16 January, 2017).

²¹ RTE 'The Madness from Within: The Irish Civil War' (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gl66ixAXm_A) (16 January, 2017).

²² P. Tardif, *The North Irish Horse in the Great War* (South Yorkshire, 2015), ch. 1

²³ J. Durney, 'The Curragh internees, 1921-21: from defiance to defeat' (Lord Walter Prize Essay), p. 10.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²⁶ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/05, Hugh Boyle.

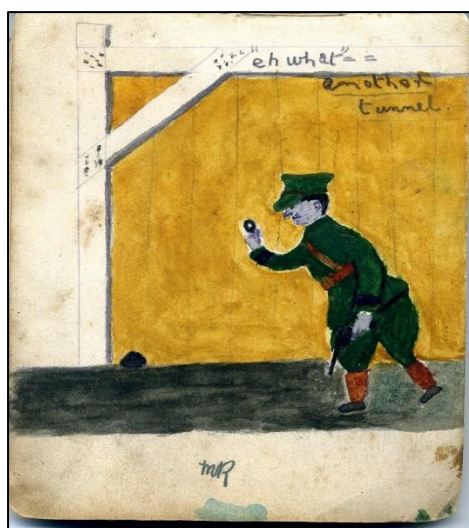
²⁷ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/05, Hugh Boyle.

²⁸ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/05, John Hayes.

²⁹ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/05, Sean O'Neill.

when he was transferred to the Curragh on 20 February 1923, contradicted that of the letters which were sent to the Director of Intelligence by Boyle and Hayes.³⁰ Campbell stated that “Tin huts, muddy roads of camp very desolate..... deprived of coal for stove...No Fire, alas! And it bitterly cold....we will get our usual evening comfort of a bowl of porridge and a mug of tea”.³¹ Campbell also described Saturday, 10 March 1923, for example as, “a general day of upset. Locked in Hut twelve until about 3-3.30 pm. No breakfast or dinner. We sat around fireless stoves. It was a bitter cold, raw, March day. I ate about a pound of raw flake meal to stave-off hunger”.³²

There were also documents recording the inspection of toilets and accommodation, signed by Thomas Mulcahy. The findings of these inspections revealed that “the toilets were unsatisfactory, they were sodden with urine, had severe smells, and the proximity of the latrines to the huts one, eight and nine was injurious to health”.³³ Evidence regarding escapes at the camp were documented. On 21 April 1923, seventy-four prisoners escaped from Hut one. The tunnel, through which they escaped, was described as “tunnel from Hut 1 camp leading into number 3 camp, the exit hole was about three yards inside the wire of number 3 camp”.³⁴ The court findings of this escape declared “that negligence was a contributory cause and the supervision between seven pm and eight am was inadequate”.³⁵ Escapes were a regular occurrence in Tintown. Below is a comical sketch from the autograph book, by one of the internees, displaying the obvious amount of escapes that had been planned or taken place in the camps throughout the Civil War.



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While the camp archives provide vivid descriptions of everyday life, the aspirations of the internees were ably captured in their personal effects, including autograph books. Autograph books were common in the early twentieth century, as they were cheap and readily available. This autograph book belonged to Thomas Green, from St Brigid's Terrace, Dundalk, Co Louth. This book reprises as a piece of memorabilia from his internment at Tintown. Material culture, like Greene's autograph book, presents an authentic account of the many opinions of the prisoners in the Tintown Camp. These autograph books have major

³⁰ J. Campbell, *As I was Among the Captives': Joseph Campbell's Prison Diary, 1922-1923* (Cork, 2001), p. 53.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³³ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/06.

³⁴ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/07.

³⁵ The Military Archives, Cathal Brugha Barracks Dublin, CW/P/08/07.

³⁶ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

historical value in the modern world. They were created for a number of possible reasons. The prisoners had a chance to express their opinions and ideals for future generations to read. The process of making the autograph books would have passed time for their owner, allowing them to read the material and other prisoners to contribute. These autograph books would have been of sentimental value to their owners, due to the entries composed by their fellow comrades. For Greene, his autograph book encapsulated the feelings of his anti-Treaty colleagues. Greene continued to support the cause for a free Ireland, even after his release, after the Civil War. He became interned again in 1934. According to Tim Pat Coogan, Thomas Greene along with four other men, was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for failing to account for his movements on the night of a bombing in Chapel Street, Dundalk.³⁷

While conditions in the camp were poor, the autograph books that survive from Tintown and elsewhere, point to a great comradeship between the prisoners. This autograph book was passed around the other prisoners; many wrote short epigrams or drew sketches in the book. The book contains recurring themes such as martyrdom, hope, the need to keep the fight for Ireland alive and satire. There are also many opinions on the topic of the Treaty, and the leaders involved in the decision-making at the time of the Civil War. Greene added his own views on the condition of Ireland in June 1923, "Far dearer the grave or the prison, illumined by one patriot name, than the trophies of those who have risen, our liberties ruins to fame".³⁸ Exploring the Kilmainham Gaol autograph books from 1916, similar themes appear in their books to that of Greene's book. The notion of martyrdom is obvious throughout them, however these prisoners admired Republicans such as Robert Emmet and Wolf Tone. Prisoner quotes from Robert Emmet's speech on the day of his sentencing to death, for treason appear throughout the Kilmainham books. For example, one prisoner quoted in 1916 "When my country takes her place among the nations of the earth, then, and not until then, let my epitaph be written".³⁹

Unsurprisingly, given the anti-Treaty stance of the prisoners, Eamon de Valera, was hailed as the hero throughout Greene's book. For the prisoners, de Valera became a symbol of the continuing fight for Ireland. Many prisoners wrote about the noble ideal man that de Valera was. One contributor, Sighle Humphreys was an active member of the Cumann na mBan in Dublin. She was arrested after her home was raided, on 4 November, and interned in Tintown Camp. Humphreys displayed her admiration towards de Valera in the following entry in Green's autograph book.⁴⁰

De Valera, my ideal of what a noble man should be,
Calm, reserved, warm, impulsive, and strong hearted as the sea.
Laughter, loving, glad and pensive, sad and happy combined.
Scorning all the empty shamming of the shallow empty mind.
True to principle and honour as a father, soldier or scholar.
Always gentle, always kind.⁴¹

Visual images throughout the autograph book also display the respect these Republicans felt towards de Valera. These prisoners reveal that de Valera's leadership was their great hope. For example, the image below is the first image in the autograph book, sketched by a prisoner

³⁷ T. P. Coogan, *The IRA* (New York, 1970) p. 72.

³⁸ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

³⁹ Kilmainham Gaol Museum, 'Autograph Book Collection' (<http://www.kilmainhamgaolautographbooks.ie/books/lewes-jail-april-1917-belonged-to-james-seamus-j-brennan/>) (11 May, 2017).

⁴⁰ S. Mc Coole, *No Ordinary Women* (Dublin, 2003), p. 95.

⁴¹ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

known as JH, in May 1923. The inscription is a poem using the eight letters of his last name to begin each sentence.

Dark be the night the dawn is appearing
Emerging from clouds – silver lined and steel grey
Victory certain the end now is nearing
All of us watching and waiting the day
Leaders and lover of Ireland we hail you
Earnest hearts bless the good work you have done
Right against might we swear never to fail you
After the battle for freedom is won.⁴²



There was a strong centrality of hope throughout the autograph book. Although these people were interned, they believed that someday Ireland would be free from British rule. The internees obviously drew inspiration from fallen leaders such as Thomas Mc Donagh. Two of the entries in the autograph book quoted from Mc Donagh's court-martial speech in 1916. Stating "As long as Ireland lives the brains and brawn of her manhood will ever strive to break the last vestige of the British rule in her territory".⁴³ The sketches in the book display images of fallen martyrs, one in particular was Saint Oliver Plunkett. Considering the influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland at the time, and Plunkett having been beatified three years prior to this sketch being drawn, it is hardly surprising that some of the prisoners drew inspiration from him. The story of how Oliver Plunkett maintained his Catholic duties in the face of English persecution and was hanged for his beliefs, no doubt resonated with many anti-Treaty Republicans.⁴⁴

⁴² T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁴³ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁴⁴ Raymond Murray, 'Plunkett, St Oliver', in James McGuire and James Quinn (ed.), *Dictionary of Irish Biography* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).



The prisoners quoted from Padraig Pearse's funeral speech for Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, in 1915. These men drew encouragement from Pearse's words: "And we know only one definition of freedom: It is Tone's definition; it is Mitchel's definition; it is Rossa's definition. Let no one blaspheme the cause that the dead generations of Ireland served by giving it any other name and definition than their name and definition."⁴⁵

Throughout the autograph book, the sense of anger and betrayal these prisoners felt towards the leaders and supporters of the new Irish Free State is palpable. Prisoner Thomas Carron's entry to Greene's book quoted from Liam Mellow's letter to his mother on the morning of his execution in December 1922. "The Republic is safe; our deaths have made that certain".⁴⁶ Prisoner Patrick Joseph Kelly, wrote July 1923, "God made the bees and the bees made the honey, IRA done the work and the staters took the money".⁴⁷ Although these prisoners felt betrayed they also presented a passionate plea for the fight to continue. Patrick Dunne displayed this will to fight again stating in Greene's book that "Although we trod around the Curragh Camp up to our eyes in muck, but what care we if old Ireland free if we up to our knees in blood".⁴⁸ Similar to Dunne, prisoner C Byrne added his poem into Greene's book. This poem was directed towards England and illustrated Byrne's desire for revenge.

To England

You may say to the world that you've won us
To your side in the conflict at last
You may go and proclaim we're forgotten
And forgiven the crimes of the past
You may say that the Battle is over
That we're vanquished, defeated, undone
But soon from your dreams you'll recover
Oh fool we've not even begun.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

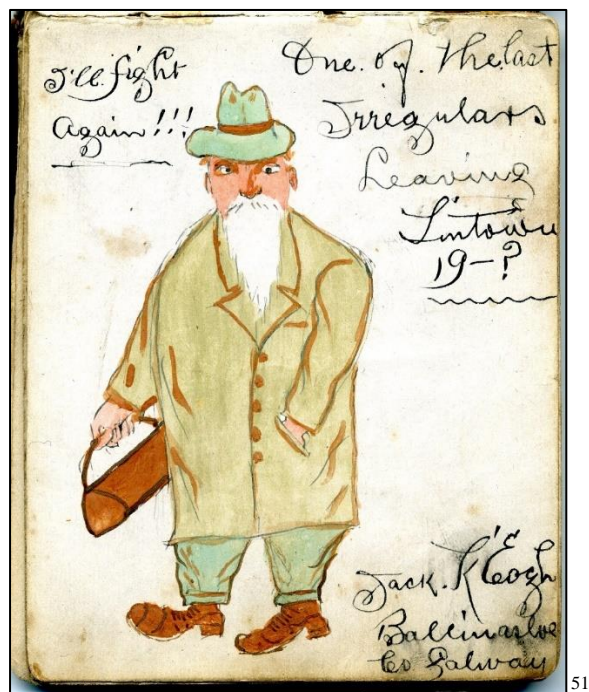
⁴⁶ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁴⁷ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁴⁸ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁴⁹ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

This sketch by Jack Keogh illustrates the opinions of the prisoners regarding the need to continue their fight for Ireland. This sketch represents one of the irregulars leaving the Tintown Camp, obviously quite a lot older than when he had entered. The inscription reads "I'll fight again".⁵⁰ This message reveals the opinion that no matter how long they were going to be kept in prison; they would always have the desire to fight to free Ireland.



Throughout the distressful time of the Civil War, and considering the living conditions for the prisoners in the camp, it is evident that they had not lost their sense of spirit. They still took time to add some light-hearted satire in Greene's book. Some of the prisoner's entries to the book were regarding women. Prisoner John Sayers for example stated "God made the world and rested, God made men and rested, God made women and since then neither God nor man has rested".⁵² Prisoner J Mc Gibbon, also wrote about his playful notions concerning women. He stated "She frowned on him and called him Mr, because in fun he merely kissed her, the very next night- her to spite, that naughty Mr kissed her sister".⁵³ It is obvious from exploring Greene's book that some of the men were missing the female presence in their lives. For example, Sayers made another entry later on in the book and stated "Four corners to my bed, four angels around my head, if one of them a girl shall be, never mind the other three".⁵⁴

In conclusion, although this autograph book is a piece of material culture, it is also a strong source of importance in understanding the ideals of the Republican prisoners during this time. The personal collection of autograph books from the 1916 Rising to the Civil War, all relate to the same aspirations. These men were fighting for the same cause, for a free Ireland. The significance of autograph books like Thomas Greene's, offers a new insight into the mind of the prisoner. It transports the reader back nearly a century and although it offers a bias perspective on the Civil War, because it was written by Republicans, it is nevertheless a

⁵⁰ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁵¹ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁵² T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁵³ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁵⁴ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

vital contribution to the history of the Civil War. The exploration of the autograph book revealed themes similar to that of the Kilmainham autograph books. The admiration for fallen leaders is embedded in the books. The love these prisoners felt for Éire is also blatantly obvious. In addition, the books reveal the mind-set of the prisoners, it was one of strength and courage. These men and women were never prepared to give up fighting to free Ireland. Prisoner Thomas Newman stated in Greene's book "Ireland unfree shall never be at peace".⁵⁵ This cause to free Ireland was built into the mentality of the prisoners. It was normal to them, they along with the dead generations gone before them, had witnessed hundreds of years of colonial rule, at the hands of the British. This generation of men and women would never be at peace until Ireland, including the six counties, was re-united and completely free from British rule. The image below is a sketch in Greene's book that was done by a prisoner. It illustrates the longing the prisoners had felt for the Irish country side. It suggests a tranquil, peaceful land which was far from the condition of Ireland in 1923.



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⁵⁵ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

⁵⁶ T. Greene, *Autograph book* (Tintown, 1923).

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