

BETSY GRAY

From Betsy Gray or Hearts of Down by Wesley Guard Lyttle, published originally 1888. The authorship or tune of the ballad, which according to Lyttle was a popular folk ballad, is unknown.

Oh, many a noble lad and lass
Who joined the fight of ninety-eight,
To right the cruel wrongs of years,
Did meet with sad and bloody fate.

On Ednavady's sloping heights,
In June, upon the thirteenth day;
In thousands stood the Patriots bold,
To fight for home and victory.

But bravest of them all, I weep,
Who mustered there upon that day,
And drew the sword for fatherland,
Was lovely, winsome Betsy Gray.

From Granshaw, near to Bangor town,
With Willie Boal that day she came;
Her brother, too, was by her side.
Inspired by patriotic flame.

And when the tide of battle raged,
And showers of bullets fell around,
Still in the thickest of the fight,
Was noble-hearted Betsy found.

When adverse fate with victory crowned
The loyal host upon that day,
Poor George and Willie joined the flight,
And with them lovely Betsy Gray.

Along the Lisburn Road they fled,
Pursuing Yeomen keeping watch;

Then Betsy drew her gleaming sword
And hid it in a farmhouse thatch.

She reached the vale of Ballycreen -
Her friends some distance were behind -
And quickly did she look around
A quiet hiding-place to find.

But, ere 'twas found, she heard a cry
Alas! too well she knew the sound;
Her brother and her sweetheart true
Had by the Yeomen been found!

Then from the grassy vale she sprang
This beauteous, noble, fearless maid -
And back she ran with bounding step,
That she might seek to give her aid.

Ah, what a sight then met her gaze!
Her Willie weltering in his gore;
And George, her brother, by his side,
Pleading for life in accents sore.

A Yeoman raised his sword to strike,
As Betsy to the rescue ran
"Oh, spare my brother's life!" she cried,
"Oh, spare him, if you be a man!"

She raised her white and rounded arm
As if to ward the dreaded stroke
Vain was her prayer – the weapon fell
And smote her hand off as she spoke.

Another of the murderous crew,
A man who came from Anahilt,
Laughed at the brutal deed and cried -
"More rebel blood must yet be spilt!"

He drew a pistol from his belt,
And shot poor Betsy in the eye;

She sank upon the heathery mound,
And died without a sob or sigh.

That night the murdered three were found,
By Matthew Armstrong – then a lad;
Who quickly running to his home,
Related there his tidings sad.

No tombstone marks that humble grave,
No tree nor shrub is planted there;
And never spade disturbs the spot,
Where sleeps the brave, where rests the fair.

Shame on the cruel, ruthless band,
Who hunted down to death their prey!
And palsy strike the murderous hand,
That slew the lovely Betsy Gray!