

# Mary Leadbeater

(1758–1826)

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Mary Leadbeater was born in 1758 in the village of Ballitore, County Kildare, Ireland, to Richard Shackleton, a schoolmaster, and his second wife, Elizabeth Carleton. Her parents were Quakers and educated their daughter at home. As a child she wrote poetry, kept a journal, and published some verse anonymously. In 1784 her father took her to London, where she met Edmund Burke (who had been her paternal grandfather's pupil), George Crabbe, and Sir Joshua Reynolds. In 1791 (a year after Joshua Edkins published her work in *A Collection of Poems, Mostly Original, By Several Hands*),<sup>1</sup> she married William Leadbeater, an Irishman of Huguenot descent and a former student of her father's. They remained in Ballitore, where her husband was a landowner and had a small farm and where she ran the local post office. The couple had several children.

Leadbeater's letters show that she was intensely interested in public affairs and social issues such as the abolition of capital punishment, the improvement of living conditions for the poor, and the establishment of savings banks and schools. Her first book, *Extracts and Original Anecdotes for the Improvement of Youth* (1794), published anonymously in Dublin, includes "divine odes" as well as poems on secular subjects and an account of "the people called Quakers." Ballitore was occupied, then sacked, by insurgents in 1798. She and her husband only narrowly escaped death, and for years she had nightmares of massacre. In 1808 she published *Poems*, comprising a collection of sixty-seven poems and a poetic rendition of her husband's prose translation of a fifteenth-century sequel to the *Aeneid*. "The Negro" makes a case against slavery, and other poems concern family, village, friends, and her patron, Edmund Burke, who is the subject of six poems.

In 1811 Leadbeater published *Cottage Dialogues Among the Irish Peasantry*, with an introduction and notes by Maria Edgeworth. Like Edgeworth, she

1. Vol. 2 (Dublin, 1790).

sympathetically portrayed ordinary life among the Irish laboring classes with wit and humor. Edgeworth says in the introduction that the conversations “seem actually to have passed in real life; the thoughts and feelings are natural, the reflections and reasoning such as appear to be suggested by passing circumstances or personal experience.” Leadbeater’s purpose was didactic, and she urged the poor to practice industry, cleanliness, dutifulness, sobriety, and thrift. The book had gone through four editions by 1813. A sequel directed at the rich, *The Landlord’s Friend*, came out in 1813. *Tales for Cottagers* (1814), written with her mother, came out the following year. *Cottage Biography, being a Collection of Lives of the Irish Peasantry* (1822), the last book in the series, traces the lives of real Irish people. In *Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton* (1822) she edited her parents’ letters together with her mother’s memoirs. *Biographical Notices of Members of the Society of Friends who were Resident in Ireland* came out in 1823. She died in Ballitore on 27 June 1826 and was interred in the Quaker cemetery.

*Annals of Ballitore* was published posthumously in 1862 as volume 1 in *The Leadbeater Papers; A Selection from the Mss. and Correspondence of Mary Leadbeater* by Richard Davis Webb, a printer whose purpose was to preserve Irish culture. *Annals* gives an account of life in Ballitore from 1766 to 1823, including a description of the horrors of the rebellion of 1798. The second volume includes Leadbeater’s correspondence with Edmund Burke (including letters from him), Melusina Trench, Maria Edgeworth, and George Crabbe.

MAJOR WORKS: *Extracts and Original Anecdotes for the Improvement of Youth* (Dublin, 1794); *Poems . . . to Which is Prefixed her Translation of the Thirteenth Book of the Aeneid; with the Latin Original, Written in the Fifteenth Century, by Maffaeus* (Dublin and London, 1808); *Cottage Dialogues Among the Irish Peasantry* (London, 1811); *The Landlord’s Friend* (Dublin, 1813); *Cottage Biography, being a Collection of Lives of the Irish Peasantry* (Dublin, 1822); *Annals of Ballitore*, vol. 1 of *The Leadbeater Papers; A Selection from the Mss. and Correspondence of Mary Leadbeater* (London, 1862).

EDITED WORKS: *Tales for Cottagers*, with Elizabeth Shackleton (Dublin, 1814); *Memoirs and Letters of Richard and Elizabeth Shackleton* (London, 1822).

TEXT USED: Text of “Lines Written in a Bower” from *Poems*.

## Lines Written in a Bower

Dear, lovely bow'r, to-morrow morn  
From thee I haste away:  
Say, will the sun with smiles adorn  
That melancholy day!

Ah yes! the sun as bright will shine,  
The flow'rs as gaily blow;  
Nought but this hapless heart of mine  
Will wear the gloom of wo.

10 How quickly am I forc'd to haste  
From scenes so fair and new!  
Thy charms I just began to taste;  
Sweet Abbeville, adieu.

What though to me more lovely vales  
And sweeter shades are giv'n!—  
A pang the parting spirit feels,  
Though leaving earth for Heav'n.  
(1808)