

To you, Frances Browne

By Lisa O'Donovan

Born in Stranorlar, Donegal, a small rural town
She was named after her mother, Frances, Frances Browne
With 11 brothers and sisters, she was the seventh in line
A big family indeed! As families were at that time
But Frances was different. She couldn't learn to read or write
This was due to small pox, which robbed her of her sight
However, she was a curious, inquisitive child
She wanted to learn, her desire for knowledge running wild
She listened to her siblings' homework, done after school
She learned everything by heart, making her memory a tool
Soon the bartering began, with family, friends and neighbours
They would read to her in exchange for chores, tasks and favours
Before long, Frances became the narrator, the composer, the creator
Her boundless creativity, talent, ambition becoming greater and greater
From short stories, to novels, to poems - she wrote them all!
With poverty, geographic isolation, lack of education, female, blind - she found her call!
More than a hobby or a pastime, her work was popular and published
She was well-known, the title 'the blind poetess of Ulster' established
She moved from Donegal, to Edinburgh, to London, with her sister at her side
Her sister, Rebecca, acted as a reader, scribe and guide
While her reader, scribe and guide changed, her passion for writing did not

Her countless pieces are still being found, and will never be
forgot

Her work, 'Granny's Wonderful Chair', is one of the most
famous

Translated and reprinted, Frances has gained literary celebrity
status

She is an inspiration, a visionary, a shining example to people
far and near

With such legacy and spirit, one thing is blatantly clear

She is deserving of more than a medal, a trophy, an award, or
a crown

So, in awe, we raise a glass, to you, Frances Browne.