

## Dunlop's History of Ireland

*Ireland, from the earliest times to the present day*

Robert Dunlop

1922

Celtic Ireland to 1169

•

*Geographical.* Ireland lies on the edge of what is called the European platform. She is separated on the east from Great Britain by a narrow and comparatively shallow sea, seldom exceeding fifty fathoms in depth ; but on the west, within thirty miles off Achill Head, the bottom of the sea rapidly sinks from 100 fathoms to oceanic depths. Regarded from above, Ireland resembles a shallow saucer, with a bit chipped out on the east side and another corresponding bit on the west side. Her most distinctive features are the ring of mountains that fringe her coast and her large central plain. Geologically, Ireland falls into two almost equal halves. The dividing line is a low range of gravel hills, stretching from near Dublin to Galway, called in ancient times the Eiscir Riada. North of that dividing line the country displays the same geological conformation as Scotland ; south of that line she presents a close affinity with Wales. What coal-measures she possesses are bituminous north of the Eiscir Riada and anthracitic south of it. North of the Eiscir Riada the mountains follow the trend of the Grampians, from south-west to north-east ; south of the Eiscir Riada they trend like those of Wales, east and west. Apart from her mountains, which belong mainly to the palaeozoic system, the most characteristic feature of the country is the great central plain of carboniferous limestone, to the existence of which Ireland owes her extraordinary capacities as a grazing country and also the large extent of her bogs. Out of a total area of twenty-one million-acres, five millions are reckoned as waste. Lough Neagh, the largest inland sea in the British Isles, alone accounts for nearly 100,000 acres, while the Bog of Allen is estimated to cover about 150,000 acres. Of rivers Ireland has a liberal supply. They are mostly broad, sluggish streams, originating in the bogs of the great central plain. From Fair Head in County Antrim to Crow Head in County Kerry Ireland measures 300 miles ; from Bloody Foreland in County Donegal to Carnsore Point in County Wexford she measures about 225 miles ; her average breadth is about 100 miles. In size Ireland is about two-thirds that of England, exclusive of Wales. At present her mineral wealth is, when compared with that of Great Britain, insignificant ; but at one time Ireland was probably the richest gold-producing country in Europe.

*Discovery of Ireland.* Our earliest information regarding Ireland is derived from a second-rate Roman poet of the name of Rufus Festus Avienus, who lived in the fourth century, in the time of the Emperor Theodosius. But Avienus's *Ora Maritima* is mainly a translation, with some additions, of a Greek work, which in turn was based on a *periplus* or book of voyages of Carthaginian or Phoenician origin. From Avienus we learn that Ireland was called Hiera, which is merely Eriú (from which Erin is derived) with the addition of a mistaken aspirate, leading people to suppose that even in those days Ireland was called the ' sacred island ' or the island Iera. Besides this Avienus, or his original, tells us that the people of Tartessus or Spain used to carry on a vigorous trade with Iera. In fact everything points to the conclusion that Ireland was discovered by the Phoenicians. The Phoenicians, however, were not, as is generally supposed, a Semitic people. They formed part of a group of peoples, whose centre of civilization was the island of Crete. They were the greatest mariners of the ancient world. Long before Rome was founded they had passed, from their settlements in the eastern basin

of the Mediterranean, at Tyre and Sidon, beyond the straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic. Spain with its rich deposits of silver belonged to them, so too did the tin mines on the coast of Cornwall, which they called the Cassiterides. From Cornwall they passed in time to Ireland, attracted thither by its rich gold-fields, its purple-bearing shells, and the pearl oysters that lined its coasts and fresh-water lakes. Wherever the Phoenicians went they established their factories, generally on some island near the mainland or on some strongly fortified headland. Some of these factories or settlements, like that of Dun Aengus on the Isle of Aran in Galway Bay, are still in existence to testify to the skill and enterprise of these ancient merchant sailors.

*Earliest Inhabitants.* When the Phoenicians first became acquainted with Ireland the country was populated by a small, dark-haired, and rather long-headed race, of the same type as that of Spain and western France. Generally speaking, the Ernai, as we may call this people, lived by fishing and hunting. They were a peaceful race. Their implements were still only of stone and bone, but they were not without some knowledge of agriculture. They were expert sailors, and could handle their skin and wicker-made coracles with great skill. Probably they had come to Ireland from the Continent in pursuit of the herring, and it is likely that they were the original inhabitants of the country. To-day they form the basic element of its population. After Ireland had long been in the sole possession of the Ernai another set of invaders appeared on the scene. These are the people known in Scotland as the Picts, in England as the Britons, and in Ireland as the Cruithne. They were a tall, well-built race, with reddish hair, blue-grey eyes, and rather round heads. Probably they originally came from the Baltic and very likely they were of Teutonic origin. They had a habit of tattooing their bodies. They were fond of music, especially of the bagpipes ; they loved story-telling and were greatly addicted to horse-racing and the chase. Unlike the Ernai, who seem to have lived in small detached groups, the Cruithne possessed a monarchical form of government, resting on a matriarchal basis.

*The Coming of the Gael.* After the Ernai and Cruithne had long shared Ireland between them a third set of invaders appeared on the scene. These were the Gael. The Gael are a branch of the great Celtic race which at one time dominated nearly the whole of Europe. The Celtic Empire was one of the largest the world has known, but it was one of the most unstable and short-lived. The Celts were a warlike conquering race. They were few in numbers compared with the peoples they subdued. Their superiority rested not merely on their personal prowess but on the quality of their weapons and especially on their iron sword. But the chief thing to note about the Celts is that, though they loved fighting, they were not exterminators. Their principle of government was based on a system of tribute. ‘ Tribute-taker’, indeed, is said to be the meaning of the word Celt. Wherever the Celts came we seem to hear them say to the people they had conquered, ‘ Don’t be afraid ; we are not going to kill you ; we are not even going to rob you of your lands : all that we require from you is the payment of tribute—preferably in gold ; if not, in kind.’ When or how the Celts came to Ireland we cannot precisely say. Tradition asserts that they came directly from Spain and, in this, tradition is probably correct. But there is no reason for believing that any Celt ever set foot in Ireland before the beginning of the third century B.C.

*The Gael in Ireland.* Once in Ireland the Celts, or as we shall call them, the Gael, gradually made themselves masters of that part of the country that lies between St. George’s Channel and the Shannon, which is now represented by the counties of Meath and Westmeath. Their progress was from the first very slow, and it was not till the end of the fourth century that they succeeded in extending their power over the greater part of the island north of the Eiscir Riada. At first the Hill of Tara served as a convenient centre for the Gaelic state ; but as the confines of the kingdom expanded and the original dynasty became split up into three main lines, two other capitals arose—the one at Aileach in Ulster, the other at Cruachan

in Connaught. Tara, however, always preserved its pre-eminence, and long after it had lost its political importance it retained its symbolical significance as the head and centre of the Gaelic state. The Feis of Tara was a national festival and to be King of Tara was equivalent, even down to the twelfth century, to being *ardri* or high-king of Ireland. But until the usurpation of that title by Brian Boroimhe no one but a pure Gael had ever held that office. And here it ought to be remarked that the Gaelic kingdom never extended southward much beyond the Eiscir Riada. In course of time the Gaelic language and Gaelic influence spread over the whole island, but neither the O'Briens of Thomond, nor the Mac-Carthies of Munster, nor the MacMurroughs of Leinster were ever accounted of Gaelic origin in the same sense and degree as were the descendants of Nial of the Nine Hostages. At best they were only half Gael, or as the phrase went Gail-Gael.

*Gaelic Constitution.* No people have ever displayed greater arrogance in the assertion of their racial superiority than have the Celts. In his own opinion the Gael was a gentleman *par excellence*. Work of a menial sort was a thing he would never soil his hands with. But he knew that if he was to enjoy life he must get others to work for him. The whole Gaelic polity rested on this view of things. In Ireland as on the Continent the Celts made no attempt to extirpate the native population. Except for that portion of it which he directly required for his own use, the Gael was content that the land should remain in the possession of its old proprietors. These became his clients or clansmen, whom he was entitled to spend at his will but whom he was also morally obliged to defend. The head of the state was the *ardri* or high-king. In theory no one but a pure Gael could attain to that dignity ; but with that limitation every chief, even of the smallest tribal division, was eligible for the post. The one condition was that he had the power to hold his own against his rivals. The power of the *ardri* rested not merely on his personal valour, but also on his wealth. Wealth consisted chiefly in cattle. If a chieftain had plenty of cattle he could hire them out and so purchase the obedience of those who took them. Wealth and power thus became convertible terms. In course of time the dignity of *ardri* was limited by agreement to two families and held by them in alternate succession. The practice made for unity, but after Brian Boroimhe's usurpation, the office of *ardri* again became the reward of contending chieftains or provincial sovereigns.

*Christianization of Ireland.* The period of settlement was followed by one of expansion and consolidation. It was a period of almost constant fighting, especially between the north and the south, and Ireland was still in the process of making as a Gaelic state when she was brought within the range of a fresh set of influences. Religion is one of those things that lie at the very bottom of human nature, and the race has still to be discovered that does not possess some dread of the supernatural which constitutes the fundamental element in all religion. What form of religion the earliest inhabitants of Ireland, the Ernai, professed we cannot certainly say, but there can be little doubt that, after they fell under the influence of the Phoenicians, their religion became that which is definitely associated with the erection of megalithic structures such as dolmens, pillar-stones, and stone circles. Two ideas underly this religion—the idea of immortality and the idea of the sun as the generating principle of all things. The system culminated in the worship of Baal. In Ireland the worship of Baal assumed under Celtic influences the form of religion known as Druidism. Ireland was still a heathen country and Druidism was still in full force when St. Patrick landed on the shores of Strangford Lough in 432. It was not the first time that Patrick had been in Ireland. More than thirty years before he had been brought thither as a captive by some marauding Irishmen and sold as a slave to an Antrim farmer of the name of Milchu. After he had herded Milchu's cattle for more than six years Patrick managed to escape and returned to his home and friends. Where that home was situated is still a matter of dispute ; but whether it was in Britain or in France it is certain that it was in the latter country that Patrick received his education, and that it was a Gallican bishop that consecrated him to the Irish mission. The misdirected piety of Patrick's more immediate biographers has so distorted the facts of his

missionary enterprise in Ireland that it is hard to say where truth ends and fiction begins. The outstanding and undisputed fact is that, after long years of labour, he succeeded in converting many of the Irish from Druidism to Christianity, and in establishing a number of Christian communities, of which his church at Armagh was the centre, in the north of Ireland.

*Beginnings of Irish Monasticism.* Patrick's intention had been to reproduce in Ireland the system of diocesan government that prevailed in the Gallican church ; but that system, resting for its working on the existence of towns, proved ill adapted to Ireland, and shortly after Patrick's death it seemed as if all sign of his missionary enterprise had disappeared. But Patrick had sown better than he wist. In particular his employment of Latin as the language of the Church was of great educative value and became the starting-point of a new school of learning. The movement was greatly advanced by the arrival of crowds of European scholars, monks and others fleeing from the merciless attacks of the Huns. Thanks to the activity of these new arrivals and the intense love of learning inherent in the Gael, Ireland in the fifth and sixth centuries became dotted with a number of large schools. The instruction given in such centres of learning as Bangor and Clonmacnoise was no doubt chiefly of a theological sort, but it stimulated the cultivation of Latin and led to the study of the classical writers of Rome. Among those who profited by the new learning was St. Columba. Columba was a pure Gael and a scion of one of the noblest families in Ireland. Being compelled to submit to a sentence of banishment, in expiation of a crime originating in his own passionate disposition, Columba retired with twelve disciples to the island of Hy or Iona in Scotland. From Iona he went to preach the gospel to the Picts of Caledonia. But here we are chiefly interested in him as the founder of Irish monasticism. Essentially the Columban system was merely the adaptation to the Church of the principles of tribal government. Its distinctive feature was the absolute independence of each individual church or monastic establishment. What the chief was in tribal affairs that the self-constituted abbot was in the affairs of his *muintir* or monastery. His authority rested solely on his personal sanctity and the esteem of his followers. Except for the undefined homage rendered by him to St. Patrick as the head of the Irish Church, he owned no superior and would brook no interference, lay or clerical, in the management of his establishment.

*Irish Missions on the Continent.* Columba's missionary enterprise among the Picts aroused great interest in Ireland, and among those who were seized with a desire to imitate his example was St. Columban of Bangor. What special reason drew Columban to make France the sphere of his labours we do not know. All that we know is that, having made up his mind to go thither, he established a monastic settlement at a little place called Anegray in the Vosges. France, or rather, as we should call it, the Frankish empire, was at the time divided into the three kingdoms of Neustria, Austrasia, and Burgundy. Anegray lay on the confines of Austrasia and Burgundy. The sovereign of Burgundy was a man called Gontran ; but two years after Columban's arrival Gontran died and his kingdom was united with Austrasia under the nominal government of Childebert, but actually under that of his mother, Queen Brunehaut, whose rivalry with Fredegonde, the wife of King Chilperic of Neustria, furnishes one of the most tragic chapters in Merovingian history. No objection had been taken by either Brunehaut or Gontran to Columban establishing himself at Anegray. The Franks were not heathens in the sense that the Irish and Picts were when Patrick and Columba preached the Gospel to them. Nominally they were, like their sovereigns, Christians. But the Christianity they professed was a savourless thing, and the Gallican Church itself was in dire need of reformation. Columban's establishment at Anegray and afterwards at Luxeuil was the beginning of a better state of affairs. But the Gallican bishops were annoyed at Columban's popularity. His piety and the austerity of his ' Rule' were a standing reproach to their own laziness and lax morality. At last, by arousing Brunehaut's jealousy, they succeeded in procuring an order for his banishment. But the ship on which he and his companions

sailed from Nantes was driven back by contrary winds, and Columban and his monks, stepping once more ashore, made their way from Nantes to Paris. With the good will of the King of Neustria they continued their journey to the Rhine, and thence, following the course of the river, to Lake Constance. Thence, after a time, Columban, leaving one of his best-loved companions, St. Gall, the founder of the famous monastery of that name in Switzerland, behind him, proceeded to Milan. There he succeeded in interesting the King of the Lombards, Agilulf, in his mission, and with Agilulf's permission he established a new monastery at Bobbio in the Apennines. In course of time Bobbio became one of the most famous Irish foundations on the Continent, and at Bobbio Columban passed quietly to his rest on 23 November 615. Columban was perhaps the most learned man in Europe of his time. His 'Rule', which long prevailed in the chief monasteries of the Continent, was remarkable for its severity and the extreme minuteness of its punishments ; but Columban himself was a very gentle and lovable character. Columban's mission marks the beginning of a new phase in the history of Irish Christianity. Following in his footsteps, either singly or in little companies of twelve, monk after monk quitted Ireland 'for his soul's sake' or 'the love of God', till Europe was filled with the name and fame of Ireland. But in giving of her best Ireland gained in the knowledge she obtained of European civilization, which even in its decay was superior to anything she herself could boast. To the knowledge she thus acquired was due that remarkable outburst of literary and artistic activity that marks the history of Ireland from the ninth to the twelfth century.

*Union with Rome.* Columban was still alive when St. Augustine arrived in England. Augustine's chief object was the conversion of the English. At first sight it may seem strange that, at a time when Irish monks were traversing the length and breadth of Europe, this particular work should have been left to Rome. But if we recall the horrible massacres and plunderings that had marked the conquest of England by the Anglo-Saxons, we shall readily understand the apathy with which the Celts, both of Wales and Ireland, regarded the spiritual welfare of their oppressors. But Augustine had another object in view beside the conversion of the English. It was well known that the Celtic Church differed in many respects, both as regards doctrine and ritual, from Rome. In particular its method of reckoning Easter, without regard to whether it coincided or not with the chief festival of the Jews, was a standing grievance with Romanists. Gregory the Great himself had had some controversy with Columban on the subject, but the latter had bluntly asserted his competence to decide the question as well as Gregory. Unfortunately, after inducing the Welsh bishops to meet him at a place on the Severn, known as 'Augustine's Oak', Augustine, by his rather tactless behaviour, only aggravated the controversy between the two Churches. Augustine's successor, Laurentius, did his best to repair his blunder, but failing to overcome the scruples of the Welsh bishops, he and his colleagues, the bishops of London and Rochester, addressed a joint letter on the subject of union with Rome to the heads of the Irish Church. The letter met with no immediate response, but it formed the subject of much conversation in Ireland, and finally at a meeting of the clergy of the south of Ireland, one of them, Cumine or Cummian by name, declared himself in favour of the proposal. Cummian's attitude rather surprised his brethren and some of them were strongly opposed to him, but in the end it was decided that as regards Easter, which was the main point in dispute, each one should act as he thought right in the matter. The decision was entirely in keeping with the tribal constitution of the Irish Church. By some the proposal was regarded with favour ; by others, and nowhere more obstinately than at Iona, it was greatly resented. So far as the Celtic Church of Northumbria was concerned the Synod of Whitby in 664 put an end to the discussion ; but it was not till 716 that the last trace of opposition to the Roman method of reckoning Easter disappeared in Ireland. Many years were still to elapse before the Irish Church entirely surrendered her independence, and, indeed, it may be said that, even after her formal incorporation with Rome at the Synod of Cashel in 1172, she maintained a more or less excentric position right down to the sixteenth century.

*The Making of Ireland.* What interest the history of Ireland possesses for the general reader from the fifth to the ninth century is chiefly connected with the progress made by the Irish Church at home and her influence as a civilizing agent on the Continent. The effect of the close connexion between Ireland and the Continent, established by the Irish missions, was to add to Ireland's importance as a centre of art and learning. But this is a subject with which we are not at present concerned. In political matters the progress made by Ireland during the same period was not so great. Still it was considerable. Roughly speaking, we are able to distinguish three main periods or stages in what we may call the making of Gaelic Ireland—the first extending from the arrival of the Gael down to the reign of King Laeghaire (Leary) when Patrick came to Ireland ; the second from Laeghaire's reign down to the Danish invasions at the beginning of the ninth century ; and the third from the usurpation of Brian Boromhe down to the Anglo-Norman invasion in 1169. The first period, as we have already remarked, is one of settlement and expansion, resulting in the occupation by the Gael of nearly the whole of the country lying to the north of the Eiscir Riada, known as Leith Cuinn or Conn's-half, and the Gaelicizing of the southern half or Leith Mogha. The second period and that with which we are here chiefly concerned is marked (1) by the establishment of three great divisions of the Gaelic power, centring respectively round Tara, Cruachan, and Aileach, which we may call the kingdoms : of Meath, Connaught, and Ulster ; (2) by the subdivision of these kingdoms into a number of clans and a struggle for predominance amongst those clans ; (3) by the exclusion of the Connaught branch from the *ardri*-ship and a fierce competition between Ulster and Meath or, as they were called, the northern Ui Neill and the southern Ui Neill, for the exclusive possession of the *ardri*-ship, ending in a compromise, by which each branch was to hold the office alternately. The period is one of constant fighting both between the rival families of the Gael and between Leith Cuinn and Leith Mogha. Towards the close of the period it seemed as if the whole island was going to be brought under the sway of one sovereign in the person of Donnchadha (Donough), the thirtieth *ardri* in descent from Nial of the Nine Hostages, the father of King Laeghaire, and the progenitor of the Ui Neill. But before this much to be desired result could be achieved Ireland fell a prey to the Danes.

*The Danish Invasions.* It was in the reign of Donnchadha's successor that the Danes first appeared off the coast of Ireland. It is usual to distinguish between two sets of these so-called Danish invaders, viz. those who came from Norway and are called by Irish writers Fionn Gail (Fingal) or Fair-haired Strangers, and those who came from Denmark proper called the Dubh Gail, or Dark-haired Strangers. In history both are known as the vikings, a word which means simply men of the fjords or bays. Their ships were long canoe-shaped vessels of from about 50 to 100 feet in length and 15 to 20 feet in breadth, capable of holding from forty to sixty men. They were built chiefly for speed, with high bow and stern, and were fitted out as rowing-boats, but being also provided with mast and sail they could easily be turned into sailing vessels. Next to swiftness their chief advantage was that, being comparatively light, they could readily be transported from one sheet of water to another, and being of shallow draught could be forced up any river of reasonable size. The vikings were a large-limbed, well-built, warlike, and extremely hardy race of men. Their one object was plunder, and being inspired with a fierce hatred and contempt of Christianity they naturally directed their earliest attacks against the rich monasteries that lined the coasts of Scotland and Ireland. Among the first to feel the weight of their sacrilegious hand was St. Columba's famous establishment on Iona. In the beginning the attacks of the vikings were chiefly confined to the islands off the mainland, but as their greed grew with the treasure it fed on, they gradually extended their raids into the interior of the country. As time went on their raids became more frequent, and in 837 a Norseman of the name of Torgils or Turgesius conceived the idea of making himself master of Ireland. The Irish offered what resistance they could, and in 845 the *ardri*, Melaghlin I, had the good fortune to capture Torgils, whom he promptly drowned in Lough Owel. After Torgil's death many of the Norsemen returned to their own country, and

the Irish were beginning to congratulate themselves on having outlived the danger when a fresh body of invaders hove in sight. This time the invaders were really Danes. Their numbers were considerable, and, having wrested Dublin from their predecessors, they made that port the centre of their operations not merely in Ireland but also against England and Scotland.

*Struggle for the Possession of Ireland.* In course of time the Danes entered into friendly relations with their neighbours, especially the O'Carrolls of Ossory. The result was that after the death of their own king, Ivor, called 'King of the Northmen of all Ireland and Britain', in 873, the Danes of Dublin chose Carrol, lord of Ossory, to rule over them. Carrol's accession was followed by what is called a period of forty years' peace. Of peace in the ordinary sense there was, it is true, little sign, but during Carrol's reign Ireland was apparently exempt from further attacks on the part of the Danes. Carrol, however, had no sooner died than a fresh body of invaders appeared on the scene. Collectively these newcomers are known as the Ui Ivor or descendants of Ivor, probably of that Ivor who died in 873. Finding Dublin in possession of the Irish, the Ui Ivor effected a landing at Waterford, which now became one of their chief settlements. From Waterford they spread themselves over the whole of Munster, so that, according to the annalists, there was not a house nor a hearth left standing between the Shannon towards the sea. Having brought Munster under their control the Ui Ivor now directed their efforts to recovering Dublin. This they accomplished in 917; but their endeavour to extend their power northward was frustrated by the heroic resistance of the *ardri*, Nial Blackknee, and his still more famous son Murtough 'of the Leather Cloaks'. Matters had reached this point when a fresh body of Danes succeeded in establishing themselves at Limerick on the Shannon. The possession of Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick placed the whole of southern Ireland at the mercy of the Danes. The misery they inflicted on the wretched inhabitants was indescribable. As the old chronicler writes, they had their duns and their forts and their landing-places everywhere so that they made spoil-land and sword-land of the country. They ravaged her chieftainries and her churches and destroyed her reliquaries and tore her books. For a time Murtough 'of the Leather Cloaks' stemmed their attacks in the north, but after his death in 943 the country north and south of the Eiscir Riada fell largely under their control.

*Brian Boroimhe's Usurpation.* With the capitulation of Mahon O'Kennedy, chief of the Ui Cennidigh of Thomond, it seemed as if further resistance to the Danes was out of the question. But Mahon's brother Brian refused to despair. His followers had dwindled to a mere handful, but with these he kept up a steady guerilla warfare till at last Mahon was forced by his obstinacy to resume the offensive. In 968 Mahon had the good fortune to defeat the Danes at Sulcoit in County Tipperary, and shortly afterwards he captured Limerick. But his success was regarded with jealousy by his allies, and at the instigation of Ivor and his sons he was treacherously murdered in 976. Mahon's place was instantly filled by Brian and, having punished his brother's murderers, Brian at once set about extending his power over the whole of Leith Mogha. Succeeding in this in 984, he then overran and subdued the province of Connaught. His possession of the whole of Leith Mogha and one province in Leith Cuinn was regarded as entitling him to the *ardri*-ship, but either because he was unwilling or not prepared as yet to contest the supremacy with Melaghlin II he came to terms with him in 998, on the understanding that they should share the sovereignty of Ireland between them. Perhaps it was that he had already fallen under the influence of that 'fairest of all women', Gormflaith (Gormley), wife of Melaghlin. Anyhow, he shortly afterwards conferred the kingdom of Leinster on Gormflaith's brother Mulmurray and gave his daughter in marriage to her son Sitric, King of Dublin. Such a suitor was hard to resist, and in the end Gormflaith transferred her favours from Melaghlin to Brian. Brian's marriage with Gormflaith was followed by a summons to Melaghlin to surrender the *ardri*-ship. This Melaghlin, owing to his inability to secure the support of the northern Ui Neill, was compelled to do. Whereupon Brian, with the

object of legalizing his usurpation, caused his name and claim to be entered in the *Book of Armagh*. Unfortunately, by this time either he had begun to grow tired of Gormflaith or she of him. Anyhow, about 1010 they separated, and Gormflaith went to live with her brother Mulmurray. Henceforth her one desire was to ruin Brian. To this end she worked hard to sow dissension between him and her brother, and to draw the latter into an alliance with Sitric, King of the Danes of Dublin. Meanwhile, owing perhaps to their mutual grudge against her,

Brian and Melaghlin had entered into an alliance for the purpose of destroying the Danish power at Dublin. Their joint attempt to capture Dublin in 1013 failed, but it was resolved to renew the attempt in the following year.

*Battle of Clontarf.* Recognizing their common danger, Sitric and Mulmurray employed the interval in enlisting all the mercenary support they could. A secret promise of Gormflaith's hand to Sigurd Lödverson, Earl of Orkney, and also to Brodir, Earl of York, drew both into the alliance, while the mere prospect of unlimited booty attracted a crowd of other hungry vikings to their standard. Shortly before Easter 1014 Brian and Melaghlin, at the head of their respective armies, converged on Dublin, the former taking up his position between the Liffey and the little river Tolka that falls into Dublin Bay at Clontarf; the latter slightly to the north of the Tolka. Both sides were fairly matched, but the benefit of position lay with the Danes and the men of Leinster. The battle began at sunrise on Good Friday, 23 April, and continued the whole day. Towards sunset the Danes began to give way and fell back on their ships. 'Methinks', said Brian's daughter to her husband, Sitric, 'the foreigners have entered on their heritage.' 'What meanest thou by that?' asked Sitric. 'That the foreigners are going into the sea', replied his wife; 'I wonder is it heat that is on them that they tarry not to be milked.' Her sneer angered Sitric and he struck her a heavy blow. But in truth the defeat of the Danes was complete. Such of them as escaped from the field of battle were drowned in the sea before they could reach their ships. The Irish lost almost as heavily as the Danes. Brian himself being too old to take an active part in the battle had passed the day in prayer. When he heard that his son's standard had fallen he gave up the day as lost, and consigning his soul to God and St. Patrick and his body to Armagh he prepared to die. As he was talking to his attendant a party of Danes passed his tent. They were Brodir and two of his followers. Looking into the tent one of them called out 'a priest'. 'No, no!' said the other, 'It is the great King Brian.' Whereupon Brodir turned back and with his battle-axe clove Brian's head in twain.

*Consequences of the Battle of Clontarf.* The battle of Clontarf is regarded by Irishmen as a great national victory, and so in a sense it was. It did not, as is generally supposed, free Ireland from the Danes. Sitric himself still retained possession of Dublin, and Waterford, Wexford, Cork, and Limerick still remained in the hands of the Danes. But the victory of Clontarf prevented Ireland becoming, like England, a Danish colony. On the other hand it must not be forgotten that at Clontarf there were Irishmen fighting on the side of the Danes, and that none of the northern Ui Neill took part in the battle. In truth the battle of Clontarf was due rather to personal than national causes. But the fact that such a splendid victory, as Clontarf undoubtedly was, had been won under the leadership of one whom every Gael regarded as a usurper was followed by important results. In the first place, by demolishing the fiction that no one who was not directly descended from Nial of the Nine Hostages could aspire to the ardrí-ship, it substituted personal merit for the mere claim of birth. Henceforth any one who aspired to become ardrí could only achieve his object by crushing his rivals or, as the Irish expressed it, 'with opposition'. This no doubt was unfavourable to the cause of unity, so far as Gaelic hegemony was concerned; but, by widening the basis of the state, it substituted a territorial for a mere tribal principle and thus prepared the way for national unity. That this national unity was never actually or only very imperfectly achieved was due mainly to the obstacles offered by the country itself—its large forests, extensive bogs,



primitive roads, and absence of towns. For, no matter how powerful the King of Ulster, or Meath, or Connaught, or Munster, or Leinster might be, his seat of government, whether at Aileach, or Tara, or Cruachan, or Killaloe, or Cashel, or Ferns, was far too remote from the other parts of the country to enable him to exercise more than a very imperfect control over them. The practice of exacting hostages as a pledge of loyalty no doubt minimized this defect, but it must be admitted that the fear of sacrificing his hostages seldom acted as a permanent check on an ambitious sovereign. All the same there can be no question that during the hundred and fifty years that elapsed between Clontarf and Strongbow's invasion Ireland made considerable progress in the direction of national unity, and but for that invasion might possibly have succeeded in attaining it.

*The Re-making of Ireland.* At first, however, as was to be expected, the death of Brian Boromhe in his hour of triumph was followed by a period of disorder. Melaghlin of course seized the opportunity to reassert his position as ardrí, but no one paid any attention to him, and after his death in 1022 Ireland, in the quaint language of the annals, was governed 'after the manner of a free state': in other words every one acted as he thought fit in his own eyes. With the accession, however, of Brian's grandson, Turlough O'Brien, in 1064, things began to assume a more orderly appearance. Turlough was a strong ruler, and his claim to the ardrí-ship seems to have been pretty generally acknowledged by his contemporaries. His death, however, in 1086 was followed by a fierce struggle between his son and successor Murtough O'Brien and Donnell O'Loughlin, head of the northern branch of the Ui Neill. After much fighting O'Loughlin succeeded in 1090 in forcing not only O'Brien but also O'Conor of Connaught and O'Melaghlin of Meath to recognize his supremacy; but in 1097 O'Brien managed to reassert his independence, and having in turn brought O'Conor and O'Melaghlin under his control he again ventured to contest the supremacy with O'Loughlin. The struggle only came to an end with O'Brien's death in 1119. Two years later O'Brien was followed to the grave by O'Loughlin. Their deaths enabled Turlough O'Conor to assert his claim to the ardrí-ship; but O'Conor had a strong rival in his father-in-law O'Melaghlin of Meath. Having, however, ousted O'Melaghlin from his kingdom, O'Conor next directed his attack against the MacCarthies of south Munster. But Cormac MacCarthy proved a tough opponent, and before O'Conor could establish his mastery over Leith Mogha, Turlough O'Brien's grandson joined in the fray. By the united efforts of O'Brien and MacCarthy O'Conor was soon driven into a defensive position and forced to come to terms with O'Melaghlin. This was in 1141. Next year Conor O'Brien died. His death enabled O'Conor to renew his attack on the MacCarthies. This time he had O'Melaghlin's support, but there was no real friendship between them and their rivalry afforded Donnell O'Loughlin's grandson, Murtough, a chance to assert his pretensions to the ardrí-ship. Eventually O'Loughlin succeeded in establishing his authority over the greater part of the island, including the Danish kingdom of Dublin; but it was only after Turlough O'Conor's death in 1156 that he became undisputed ardrí. Turlough's successor was Rory O'Conor. Next to O'Loughlin Rory was the most powerful man in Ireland, and after O'Loughlin's death in 1165 he found little difficulty in obtaining a general acknowledgement of his claim as ardrí. O'Conor had only been on the throne four years when Ireland was again exposed to the attacks of a fresh set of invaders. But before entering on this epoch it will be well to explain how Ireland was being forced out of her isolated position into the wider sphere of European politics.

*Ireland, Rome, and England.* The battle of Clontarf, though it removed the danger of Ireland becoming a Danish kingdom, did not secure the expulsion of the Danes. Dublin, Waterford, Limerick still remained in their possession. Their attitude towards the Irish was still one of hostility; but after Clontarf the character of the Danes underwent a remarkable change. From pirates, bent wholly on the acquisition of plunder, the Danes gradually assumed the manners of peaceful traders. Thanks to their energy in this direction the old commercial relations between Ireland and the Continent, which their invasion had

interrupted, were re-established, and soon a vigorous trade between Dublin and Bristol sprang into existence. More than this, in laying aside their piratical habits the Danes became Christians ; but such was their pride of race that they would on no account own any connexion with the Irish Church. Nothing would satisfy them but to enter into communion with the Church in England. Their repugnance to the Irish Church favoured the policy of Lanfranc and the Romanizing party in England of obtaining a closer control over the Church of Ireland. Unfortunately, the tribal character of the Irish Church and the absence of any regular system of diocesan government presented a formidable obstacle to the realization of Lanfranc's plan. The same difficulty was experienced by his successor Anselm, and it was actually to an Irishman of the name of Malachy O'Morgair, commonly called St. Malachy, that a closer assimilation of the ecclesiastical system of Ireland with that of England was due. Malachy's friendship with St. Bernard of Clairvaux, led, as is well known, to the introduction of the Cistercian Order into Ireland and the foundation in 1157 of Mellifont Abbey, the proud precursor, within a few years, of half a score such monasteries. The effect of the establishment of the Cistercian Order in bringing Ireland into closer touch with the Continent, and through the Continent with England, is unquestionable. But of almost greater importance in this respect was Malachy's endeavour to secure a formal recognition from the Papacy of the archiepiscopal claims of Armagh and Cashel, as representing the two main divisions of Leith Cuinn and Leith Mogha, by a grant of the *pallium* to each. Malachy did not live to see the fulfilment of his desire, and it is doubtful if the plan sanctioned by Pope Eugenius, and actually carried into effect at the Synod of Kells in 1151, of including Dublin and Tuam in an equal distribution of the *pallia* with Armagh and Cashel, would have received his approval. The plan no doubt answered the political situation fairly well, but it left the question of the primacy as between the Irish and Danish Church unsettled and, by confirming the former in its independence, it left room for those irregularities in ritual which were a constant source of annoyance to orthodox churchmen. Three years after the Synod of Kells, Nicholas Breakspear succeeded to the chair of St. Peter as Adrian IV. In conveying Henry's congratulations to him in 1156, his old friend, John of Salisbury, drew Adrian's attention to the deplorable condition of the Church of Ireland, and suggested as a means of weaning the Irish from their 'bestly customs' that Ireland should be brought under the civilizing control of England. The result was that on leaving Rome John of Salisbury carried with him a letter from Adrian to Henry conferring on him the *dominium* of Ireland. The gift was not one that Henry greatly valued. For some time he played with the idea of handing over Ireland to his brother William ; but being dissuaded by his mother, the Empress Matilda, from taking this step, he had apparently forgotten all about the matter when it was suddenly recalled to him two years later by the rather dramatic appearance before him of Dermot MacMurrough, ex-King of Leinster.

Ireland, from the earliest times to the present day (1922)

Author : Dunlop, Robert, 1861-1930

Subject : Ireland — History

Publisher : [London] : Oxford University Press

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor: MSN

Book contributor : Robarts — University of Toronto

Collection : robarts ; toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/irelandfromearli00dunluoft>

Edited and uploaded to [www.aughty.org](http://www.aughty.org)

April 15 2013