

The Elysium or Otherworld

*A Literary History of Ireland*

From Earliest Times to the Present Day

By

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[An Craoibhín Aoibhinn]

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE GAELIC LEAGUE, THE ONLY BODY IN IRELAND WHICH APPEARS TO REALISE THE FACT THAT IRELAND HAS A PAST, HAS A HISTORY, HAS A LITERATURE, AND THE ONLY BODY IN IRELAND WHICH SEEKS TO RENDER THE PRESENT A RATIONAL CONTINUATION OF THE PAST,

I DEDICATE

THIS ATTEMPT AT A REVIEW OF THAT LITERATURE WHICH DESPITE ITS PRESENT NEGLECTED POSITION THEY FEEL AND KNOW TO BE A TRUE POSSESSION OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE.

*DO CHONNRADH NA GAEDHEILGE.*

*A Chonnradh chaoin, a Chonnradh chóir,  
Rinn obair mhór gan ór gan cabhair,  
Glacaidh an cíos a dlíghim daoibh,  
Guidhim, glacaidh go caoimh mo leabhar.*

*A cháirde cléibh is iomdha lá  
D'oibrigheamar go breágh le chéile,  
Gan clampar, agus fós gan éad,  
'S dá mhéad ár dteas', gan puinn di-chéille.*

*Chuireabhar súil 'san bhfear bhi dall,  
Thugabhar cluas donfhear bhi bodhar,  
Glacaidh an cíos do bheirim daoibh,  
—Guidhim, glacaidh go caoimh mo leabhar.*

PREFACE

THE present volume has been styled—in order to make it a companion book to other of Mr. Unwin's publications—a “Literary History of Ireland,” but a “Literary History of Irish Ireland” would be a more correct title, for I have abstained altogether from any analysis or even mention of the works of Anglicised Irishmen of the last two centuries. Their books, as those of Farquhar, of Swift, of Goldsmith, of Burke, find, and have always found, their true and natural place in every history of *English* literature that has been written, whether by Englishmen themselves or by foreigners.

My object in this volume has been to give a general view of the literature produced by the Irish-speaking Irish, and to reproduce by copious examples some of its more salient, or at least more characteristic features.

In studying the literature itself, both that of the past and that of the present, one of the things which has most forcibly struck me is the marked absence of the purely personal note, the absence of great predominating names, or of great pre-dominating works ; while just as striking is the almost universal diffusion of a traditional literary taste and a love of literature in the abstract amongst all classes of the native Irish. The whole history of Irish literature shows how warmly the efforts of all who assisted in its production were appreciated. The greatest English bard of the Elizabethan age was allowed by his countrymen to perish of poverty in the streets of London, while the pettiest chief of the meanest clan would have been proud to lay his hearth and home and a share of his wealth at the disposal of any Irish "ollamh." The love for literature of a traditional type, in song, in poem, in saga, was, I think, more nearly universal in Ireland than in any country of western Europe, and hence that which appears to me to be of most value in ancient Irish literature is not that whose authorship is known, but rather the mass of traditional matter which seems to have grown up almost spontaneously, and slowly shaped itself into the literary possession of an entire nation. An almost universal acquaintance with a traditional literature was a leading trait amongst the Irish down to the last century, when every barony and almost every townland still possessed its poet and reciter, and song, recitation, music, and oratory were the recognised amusements of nearly the whole population. That population in consequence, so far as wit and readiness of language and power of expression went, had almost all attained a remarkably high level, without however producing any one of a commanding eminence. In collecting the floating literature of the present day also, the unknown traditional poems and the Ossianic ballads and the stories of unknown authorship are of greater value than the pieces of bards who are known and named. In both cases, that of the ancient and that of the modern Irish, all that is of most value as literature, was the property and in some sense the product of the people at large, and it exercised upon them a most striking and potent influence. And this influence may be traced amongst the Irish-speaking population even at the present day, who have, I may almost say, one and all, a remarkable command of language and a large store of traditional literature learned by heart, which strongly differentiates them from the Anglicised products of the "National Schools" to the bulk of whom poetry is an unknown term, and amongst whom there exists little or no trace of traditional Irish feelings, or indeed seldom of any feelings save those prompted by (when they read it) a weekly newspaper.

The exact extent of the Irish literature still remaining in manuscript has never been adequately determined. M. d'Arbois de Jubainville has noted 133 still existing manuscripts, all copied before the year 1600, and the whole number which he has found existing chiefly in public libraries on the Continent and in the British Isles amounts to 1,009. But many others have since been discovered, and great numbers must be scattered throughout the country in private libraries, and numbers more are perishing or have recently perished of neglect since the "National Schools" were established. Jubainville quotes a German as estimating that the literature produced by the Irish before the seventeenth century, and still existing, would fill a thousand octavo volumes. It is hard to say, however, how much of this could be called literature in a true sense of the word, since law, medicine, and science were probably included in the calculation. O'Curry, O'Longan, and O'Beirne Crowe catalogued something more than half the manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy, and the catalogue of contents filled thirteen volumes containing 3,448 pages. To these an alphabetic index of the pieces contained was made in three volumes, and an index of the principal names, etc., in thirteen volumes more. From a rough calculation, based on an examination of these, I should place the number of different pieces catalogued by them at about ten thousand, ranging from single

quatrains or even single sentences to long poems and epic sagas. But in the Academy alone, there are nearly as many more manuscripts which still remain uncatalogued.

It is probably owing to the extreme difficulty of arriving at any certain conclusions as to the real extent of Irish literature that no attempt at a consecutive history of it has ever previously been made. Despite this difficulty, there is no doubt that such a work would long ago have been attempted had it not been for the complete breakdown and destruction of Irish Ireland which followed the Great Famine, and the unexpected turn given to Anglo-Irish literature by the efforts of the Young Ireland School to compete with the English in their own style, their own language, and their own models.

For the many sins of omission and commission in this volume I must claim the reader's kind indulgence ; nobody can be better aware of its shortcomings than I myself, and the only excuse that I can plead is that over so much of the ground I have had to be my own pioneer. I confidently hope, however, that in the renewed interest now being taken in our native civilisation and native literature some scholar far more fully equipped for his task than I, may soon render this volume superfluous by an ampler, juster, and more artistic treatment of what is really a subject of great national importance.

National or important, however, it does not appear to be considered in these islands, where outside of the University of Oxford—which has given noble assistance to the cause of Celtic studies sympathisers are both few and far between. Indeed, I fancy that anybody who has applied himself to the subject of Celtic literature would have a good deal to tell about the condescending contempt with which his studies have been regarded by his fellows. “ I shall not easily forget,” said Dr Petrie, addressing a meeting of the Royal Irish Academy upon that celebrated example of early Celtic workmanship the Tara Brooch, “ that when in reference to the existence of a similar remain of ancient Irish art, I had first the honour to address myself to a meeting of this high institution, I had to encounter the incredulous astonishment of the illustrious Dr. Brinkley” [of Trinity College, President of the Academy] “ which was implied in the following remark, ‘ Surely, sir, you do not mean to tell us that there exists the slightest evidence to prove that the Irish had any acquaintance with the arts of civilised life anterior to the arrival in Ireland of the English ?’ nor shall I forget that in the scepticism which this remark implied nearly all the members present very obviously participated.” Exactly the same feeling which Dr. Petrie encountered was prevalent in my own *alma mater* in the eighties, where one of our most justly popular lecturers said—in gross ignorance but perfect good faith—that the sooner the Irish recognised that before the arrival of Cromwell they were utter savages, the better it would be for everybody concerned ! Indeed, it was only the other day that one of our ablest and best known professors protested publicly in the *Contemporary Review* against the enormity of an Irish bishop signing so moderate, and I am sure so reasonable a document, as a petition asking to have Irish children who knew no English, taught through the medium of the language which they spoke. Last year, too, another most learned professor of Dublin University went out of his way to declare that “ the mass of material preserved [in the Irish manuscripts] is out of all proportion to its value as ‘ literature,’ ” and to insist that “ in the enormous mass of Irish MSS. preserved, there is absolutely nothing that in the faintest degree rivals the splendours of the vernacular literatures of the Middle Ages,” that “ their value as literature is but small,” and that “ for educational purposes save in this limited sense [of linguistic study] they are wholly unsuited,” winding up with the extraordinary assertion that “ there is no solid ground for supposing that the tales current at the time of our earliest MSS. were much more numerous than the tales of which fragments have come down to us.” As to the civilisation of the early Irish upon which Petrie insisted, there is no longer room for the very shadow of a doubt ; but whether the literature which they produced is so utterly valueless as this, and so utterly devoid of all interest as “ literature,” the reader of this

volume must judge for himself. I should be glad also if he were to institute a comparison between “ the splendours of the vernacular literatures ” of Germany, England, Spain, and even Italy and France, prior to the year 1000, and that of the Irish, for I am very much mistaken if in their early development of rhyme, alone, in their masterly treatment of sound, and in their absolutely unique and marvellous system of verse-forms, the Irish will not be found to have created for themselves a place alone and apart in the history of European literatures.

I hardly know a sharper contrast in the history of human thought than the true traditional literary instinct which four years ago prompted fifty thousand poor hard-working Irishmen in the United States to contribute each a dollar towards the foundation of a Celtic chair in the Catholic University of Washington in the land of their adoption, choosing out a fit man and sending him to study under the great Celticists of Germany, in the hope that his scholarship might one day reflect credit upon the far-off country of their birth ; while in that very country, by far the richest college in the British Isles, one of the wealthiest universities in the world, allows its so-called “ Irish professorship ” to be an adjunct of its Divinity School, founded *and paid* by a society for—the conversion of Irish Roman Catholics through the medium of their own language !

This is the more to be regretted because had the unique manuscript treasures now shut up in cases in the underground room of Trinity College Library, been deposited in any other seat of learning in Europe, in Paris, Rome, Vienna, or Berlin, there would long ago have been trained up scholars to read them, a catalogue of them would have been published, and funds would have been found to edit them. At present the Celticists of Europe are placed under the great disadvantage of having to come over to Dublin University to do the work that it is not doing for itself.

It is fortunate however that the spread of education within the last few years (due perhaps partly to the establishment of the Royal University, partly to the effects of Intermediate Education, and partly to the numerous literary societies which working upon more or less national lines have spontaneously sprung up amongst the Irish people themselves) has, by taking the prestige of literary monopoly out of the hands of Dublin University, to a great extent undone the damage which had so long been caused to native scholarship by its attitude. It was the more necessary to do this, because the very fact that it had never taken the trouble to publish even a printed catalogue of its Irish manuscripts—as the British Museum authorities have done—was by many people interpreted, I believe, as a sort of declaration of their worthlessness.

In dealing with Irish proper names I have experienced the same difficulty as every one else who undertakes to treat of Irish history. Some native names, especially those with “ mortified ” or aspirated letters, look so unpronounceable as to prove highly disconcerting to an English reader. The system I have followed is to leave the Irish orthography untouched, but in cases where the true pronunciation differed appreciably from the sound which an English reader would give the letters, I have added a phonetic rendering of the Irish form in brackets, as “ Muighmheadhon [Mwee-va-on], Lughaidh [Lewy]. ” There are a few names such as Ossian, Meve, Donough, MuiTough and others, which have been almost adopted into English, and these forms I have generally retained—perhaps wrongly—but my desire has been to throw no unnecessary impediments in the way of an English reader ; I have always given the true Irish form at least once. Where the word “ mac ” is not part of a proper name, but really means “ son of ” as in Finn mac Cúmhaíl, I have printed it with a small “ m ” ; and in such names as “ Cormac mac Art ” I have usually not inflected the last word, but have written “ Art ” not “ Airt, ” so as to avoid as far as possible confusing the English reader.

I very much regret that I have found it impossible, owing to the brief space of time between printing and publication, to submit the following chapters to any of my friends for their advice and criticism. I beg, however, to here express my best thanks to my friend Father Edmund Hogan, S.J., for the numerous memoranda which he was kind enough to give me towards the last chapter of this book, that on the history of Irish as a spoken language, and also to express my regret that the valuable critical edition of the Book of Hymns by Dr. Atkinson and Dr. Bernard, M. Bertrand's "Religion Gauloise," and Miss Hull's interesting volume on "Cuchullin Saga," which should be read in connection with my chapters on the Red Branch cycle, appeared too late for me to make use of.

RÁTH-TREAGH, OIHCHE SAMHNA  
MDCCCXCIX.

*There is for every nation a history, which does not respond to the trumpet-call of battle, which does not limit its interests to the conflict of dynasties. This the history of intellectual growth and artistic achievement if less romantic than the popular panorama of kings and queens, finds its material in imperishable masterpieces, and reveals to the student something at once more vital and more picturesque than the quarrels of rival parliaments. Nor is it in any sense unscientific to shift the point of view from politics to literature. It is but a fashion of history which insists that a nation lives only for her warriors, a fashion which might long since have been ousted by the commonplace reflection that, in spite of history, the poets are the true masters of the earth. If all record of a nation's progress were blotted out, and its literature were yet left us, might we not recover the out-lines of its lost history ?*

#### The Irish Elysium and Belief in Rebirth

CÆSAR, writing some fifty years before Christ about the Gauls and their Druids, tells his countrymen that one of the prime articles which they taught was that men's souls do not die — *non interire animas*—“but passed over after death from one into another,” and their opinion is, adds Cæsar, that this doctrine greatly tends to the arousing of valour, all fear of death being despised.” [1] A few years later Diodorus Siculus wrote that one of their doctrines was “that the souls of men are undying, and that after finishing their term of existence they pass into another body,” adding that at burials of the dead some actually cast letters addressed to their departed relatives upon the funeral pile, under the belief that the dead would read them in the next world. Timagenes, a Greek who wrote a history of Gaul now lost, Strabo, Valerius Maximus, Pomponius Mela, and Lucan [2] in his “Pharsalia,” all have passages upon this vivid belief of the Gauls that the soul lived again. This doctrine must also have been current in Britain, where the Druidic teaching was, to use Cæsar's phrase, “discovered, and thence brought into Gaul,” and it would have been curious indeed if Ireland did not share in it.

There is, moreover, abundant evidence to show that the doctrine of metempsychosis was perfectly familiar to the pagan Irish, as may be seen in the stories of the births of Cuchulain, Etain, the Two Swineherds, Conall Cearnach, Tuan Mac Cairill, and Aedh Sláne. [3] But there is not, in our existing literature, any evidence that the belief was ever elevated into a philosophical doctrine of general acceptance, applicable to every one, still less that there was ever any ethical stress laid upon the belief in rebirth. It is only the mythological element in the belief in metempsychosis which has come down to us, and from which we ascertain that the pagan Irish believed that supernatural beings could become clothed in flesh and blood, could enter into women and be born again, could take different shapes and pass through different stages of existence, as fowls, animals, or men. What the actual doctrinal form of the familiar idea was, or how far it influenced the popular mind, we have no means of knowing.

But as Mr. Nutt well remarks, “ early Irish religion must have possessed some ritual, and what in default of an apter term must be styled philosophical as well as mythological elements. Practically the latter alone have come down to us, and that in a romantic rather than in a strictly mythical form. Could we judge Greek religion aright if fragments of Apollodorus or the ‘ Metamorphoses’ were all that survived of the literature it inspired ?” [4] The most that can be said upon the subject, then, is that the doctrine of rebirth was actually taught with a deliberate ethical purpose that of making men brave, since on being slain in this life they passed into a new one amongst the Celts of Gaul, that it must have been familiar to the Britons between whose Druids and those of Gaul so close a resemblance subsisted, and that the idea of rebirth which forms part of half-a-dozen existing Irish sagas, was perfectly familiar to the Irish Gael, although we have no evidence that it was connected with any ritual or taught as a deliberate doctrine.

In reconstructing from our existing literature the beliefs and religion of our ancestors, we can only do so incompletely, and with difficulty, from passages in the oldest sagas and other antique fragments, mostly of pagan origin, from allusions in very early poems, from scanty notices in the annals, and from the lives of early saints. The relatively rapid conversion of the island to Christianity in the fifth century, and the enthusiasm with which the new religion was received, militated against any full transmission of pagan belief or custom. We cannot now tell whether all the ancient Irish were imbued with the same religious beliefs, or whether these varied—as they probably did—from tribe to tribe. Probably all the Celtic races, even in their most backward state, believed—so far as they had any persuasion on the subject at all — in the immortality of the soul. Where the souls of the dead went to, when they were not reincarnated, is not so clear. They certainly believed in a happy Other-World, peopled by a happy race, whither people were sometimes carried whilst still alive, and to gain which they either traversed the sea to the north-west, or else entered one of the Sidh [Shee] mounds, or else again dived beneath the water. [5] In all cases, however, whatever the mode of access, the result is much the same. A beautiful country is discovered where a happy race free from care, sickness, and death, spend the smiling hours in simple, sensuous pleasures.

There is a graphic description of this Elysium in the “ Voyage of Bran,” a poem evidently pagan, [6] and embodying purely pagan conceptions. A mysterious female, an emissary from the lovely land, appears in Bran’s household one day, when the doors were closed and the house full of chiefs and princes, and no one knew whence she came, and she chanted to them twenty-eight quatrains describing the delights of the pleasant country.

“ There is a distant isle  
Around which sea-horses glisten,  
A fair course against the white-swelling surge,  
Four feet uphold it. [7]

Feet of white bronze under it,  
Glittering through beautiful ages.  
Lovely land throughout the world's age  
On which the many blossoms drop.

An ancient tree there is with blossoms  
On which birds call to the Hours.  
Tis in harmony, it is their wont  
To call together every Hour.

Unknown is wailing or treachery

In the familiar cultivated land,  
There is nothing rough or harsh,  
But sweet music striking on the ear.

Without grief, without sorrow, without death,  
Without any sickness, without debility,  
That is the sign of Emain,  
Uncommon, an equal marvel.

A beauty of a wondrous land  
Whose aspects are lovely,  
Whose view is a fair country,  
Incomparable in its haze.

The sea washes the wave against the land,  
Hair of crystal drops from its mane.

Wealth, treasures of every hue,  
Are in the gentle land, a beauty of freshness,  
Listening to sweet music,  
Drinking the best of wine.

Golden chariots on the sea plain  
Rising with the tide to the sun,  
Chariots of silver in the plain of sports  
And of unblemished bronze.

At sunrise there will come  
A fair man illumining level lands,  
He rides upon the fair sea-washed plain,  
He stirs the ocean till it is blood.

Then they row to the conspicuous stone  
From which arise a hundred strains.  
It sings a strain unto the host  
Through long ages, it is not sad,

Its music swells with choruses of hundreds.  
They look for neither decay nor death.

There will come happiness with health  
To the land against which laughter peals.  
Into Imchiuin [the very calm place] at every season,  
Will come everlasting joy.

It is a day of lasting weather  
That showers [down] silver on the land,  
A pure-white cliff in the verge of the sea  
Which from the sun receives its heat.”

Manannán, the Irish Neptune, driving in a chariot across the sea, which to him was a flowery plain, meets Bran thereafter, and chants to him twenty-eight more verses about the

lovely land of Moy Mell, “ the Pleasant Plain,” which the unknown lady had described, and they are couched in the same strain.

“ Though [but] one rider is seen  
In Moy Mell of many powers,  
There are many steeds on its surface  
Although thou seest them not.

A beautiful game, most delightful  
They play [sitting] at the luxurious wine,  
Men and gentle women under a bush  
Without sin, without crime.

A wood with blossom and fruit,  
On which is the vine's veritable fragrance ;  
A wood without decay, without defect,  
On which are leaves of golden hue.”

Then, prophesying of the death of Mongan, he sang—

“ He will drink a drink from Loch Ló,  
While he looks at the stream of blood ;  
The white hosts will take him under a wheel of clouds,  
To the gathering where there is no sorrow.”

I know of few things in literature comparable to this lovely description, at once so mystic and so sensuous, of the joys of the other world. To my mind it breathes the very essence of Celtic glamour, and is shot through and through with the Celtic love of form, beauty, landscape, company, and the society of woman. How exquisite the idea of being transported from this world to an isle around which sea-horses glisten, where from trees covered with blossoms the birds call in harmony to the Hours, a land whose haze is incomparable ! What a touch ! Where hair of crystal drops from the mane of the wave as it washes against the land ; where the chariots of silver and of bronze assemble on the plain of sports, in the country against which laughter peals, and the day of lasting weather showers silver on the land. And then to play sitting at the luxurious wine—

“ Men and gentle women under a bush  
Without sin, without crime !”

I verily believe there is no Gael alive even now who would not in his heart of hearts let drift by him the Elysiums of Virgil, Dante, and Milton to grasp at the Moy Mell of the unknown Irish pagan.

In another perhaps equally ancient story, that of the elopement of Connla, son of Conn of the Hundred Battles, [8] with a lady who is a denizen of this mysterious land, we find the unknown visitor giving nearly the same account of it as that given to Bran.

“ Whence hast thou come, O Lady ?” said the Druid.

“ I have come,” said she, “ from the lands of the living in which there is neither death, nor sin, nor strife ; [9] we enjoy perpetual feasts without anxiety, and benevolence without con-



tention. A large Sidh [Shee, “fairy-mound”] is where we dwell, so that it is hence we are called the Sidh [Shee] people.”

The Druids appear, as I have already remarked, to have acted as intermediaries between the inhabitants of the other world and of this, and in the story of Connla one of them chants against the lady so that her voice was not heard, and he drives her away through his incantation. She comes back, however, at the end of a month, and again summons the prince.

“’Tis no lofty seat,” she chanted, “upon which sits Connla amid short-lived mortals awaiting fearful death; the ever-living ones invite thee to be the ruler over the men of Tethra.”

Conn of the Hundred Battles, who had overheard her speech, cried, “Call me the Druid; I see her tongue has been allowed her to-day [again].”

But she invisible to all save the prince replied to him—

“O Conn of the Hundred Battles, druidism is not loved, for little has it progressed to honour on the great Righteous Strand, with its numerous, wondrous, various families.”

After that she again invites the prince to follow her, saying—

“There is another land which it were well to seek.  
I see the bright sun is descending, though far off we shall reach it  
ere night.  
’Tis the land that cheers the mind of every one that turns to me.  
There is no race in it save only women and maidens.”

The prince is overcome with longing. He leaps into her well-balanced, gleaming boat of pearl. Those who were left behind upon the strand “saw them dimly, as far as the sight of their eyes could reach. They sailed the sea away from them, and from that day to this have not been seen, and it is unknown where they went to.”

In the fine story of Cuchulain’s sick-bed, [10] in which though the language of the text is not so ancient, the conceptions are equally pagan, the deserted wife of Manannán, the Irish Neptune, falls in love with the human warrior, and invites him to the otherworld to herself, through the medium of an ambassadress. Cuchulain sends his charioteer Laeg along with this mysterious ambassadress, that he may bring him word again, to what kind of land he is invited. Laeg, when he returns, repeats a glowing account of its beauty, which coincides closely with those given by the ladies who summoned Bran and Connla.

“There are at the western door,  
In the place where the sun goes down,  
A stud of steeds of the best of breeds  
Of the grey and the golden brown.

There wave by the eastern door  
Three crystal-crimson trees,  
Whence the warbling bird all day is heard  
On the wings of the perfumed breeze.

And before the central door

Is another, of gifts untold.  
All silvern-bright in the warm sunlight,  
Its branches gleam like gold.” [11]

In the saga of the Wooing of Etain we meet with what is substantially the same description. She is the wife of one of the Tuatha De Danann, is reborn as a mortal, and weds the king of Ireland. Her former husband, Midir, still loves her, follows her, and tries to win her back. She is unwilling, and he chants to her this description of the land to which he would lure her.

“ Come back to me, lady, to love and to shine  
In the land that was thine in the long-ago,  
Where of primrose hue is the golden hair  
And the limbs are as fair as the wreathed snow.

To the lakes of delight that no storm may curl,  
Where the teeth are as pearl, the eyes as sloes,  
Which alight, whenever they choose to seek,  
On the bloom of a cheek where the foxglove glows.

Each brake is alive with the flowers of spring,  
Whence the merles sing in their shy retreat ;  
Though sweet be the meadows of Innisfail,  
Our beautiful vale is far more sweet.

Though pleasant the mead be of Innisfail,  
More pleasant the ale of that land of mine,  
A land of beauty, a land of truth,  
Where youth shall never grow old or pine.

Fair rivers brighten the vale divine,  
There are choicest of wine and of mead therein,  
And heroes handsome and women fair  
Are in dalliance there without stain or sin.

From thence we see, though we be not seen,  
We know what has been and shall be again,  
And the cloud that was raised by the first man’s fall,  
Has concealed us all from the eyes of men.

Then come with me, lady, to joys untold,  
And a circlet of gold on thy head shall be,  
Banquets of milk and of wine most rare,  
Thou shalt share, O lady, and share with me.” [12]

The casual Christian allusion in the penultimate verse need not lead us astray, nor does it detract from the essentially pagan character of the rest, for throughout almost the whole of Irish literature the more distinctly or ferociously pagan any piece is, the more certain it is to have a Christian allusion added at the end as a make-weight. There is great ingenuity displayed in thus turning the pagan legend into a Christian homily by the addition of two lines suggesting that if men were not sinful, this beautiful pagan world and the beautiful forms that inhabited it would be visible to the human ken. This was sufficient to disarm any hostility to the legend on the part of the Church.

From what we have said it is evident that the ancient Irish pagans believed in the possibility of rebirth, and founded many of their mythical sagas on the doctrine of metempsychosis, and that they had a highly ornate and fully-developed belief in a happy other-world or Elysium, to which living beings were sometimes carried off without going through the forms of death. But it is impossible to say whether rebirth with life in another world, for those whom the gods favoured, was taught as a doctrine or had any ethical significance attached to it by the druids of Ireland, as it most undoubtedly had by their cousins the druids of Gaul.

[1] “ De Bello Gallico,” vi. 14.

[2] See “ Voyage of Bran,” vol. ii. pp. 107-111, where all these passages have been lucidly collected by Mr. Nutt.

[3] All of these have been studied by Mr. Nutt, chap. xiv.

[4] Vol. ii. p. 121.

[5] In a large collection of nearly sixty folk-lore stories taken down in Irish from the lips of the peasantry, I find about five contain allusions to the belief in another world full of life under water, and about four in a life in the inside of the hills. The Hy Brasil type—that of finding the dead living again on an ocean island—is, so far as I have yet collected, quite unrepresented amongst them. An old Irish expression for dying is going “ to the army of the dead,” used by Deirdre in her lament, and I find a variant of it so late as the beginning of this century, in a poem by Raftery, a blind musician of the county Mayo, who tells his countrymen to remember that they must go “ to the meadow of the dead.” See Raftery’s “ Aithreachas,” in my “ Religious Songs of Connacht,” p. 266.

[6] Admirably translated by Kuno Meyer, who says “ there are a large number of [word] forms in the ‘Voyage of Bran,’ as old as any to be found in the Wurzburg Glosses,” and these Professor Thurneysen ascribes unhesitatingly to the seventh century. Zimmer also agrees that the piece is not later than the seventh century, that is, was first written down in the seventh century, but this is no criterion of the date of the original composition.

[7] I give Kuno Meyer’s translation : in the original

“ Fil inis i n-eterchéin  
Immataitnet gabra rein  
Rith find fris tóibgel tondat  
Ceitheoir cossa foslongat.”

In modern Irish the first two lines would run

“ [Go] bhfuil inis i n-idir-chéin  
Um a dtaithnigeann gabhra réin.”

*Réin* being the genitive of rian, “ the sea,” which, according to M. d’Arbois, the Gaels brought with them as a reminiscence of the Rhine.

[8] Preserved in the Leabhar na h-Uidhre, a MS. compiled from older ones about the year 1100. See for this story “ Gaelic Journal,” vol. ii. p. 306.

[9] “Dodeochadsa for in ben a tirib beó ait inna bi bás na pccad na imorbus, *i.e.* [go], ndeachas-sa ar san bhean ó tíribh na mbeó, ait ann nach mbionn bás ná peacadh ná immarbhádh.”

[10] Also contained in the Leabhar na h-Uidhre, a MS. transcribed about the year 1100.

[11] Literally : “ There are at the western door, in the place where the sun goes down, a stud of steeds with grey-speckled manes and another crimson brown. There are at the eastern door three ancient trees of crimson crystal, from which incessantly sing soft-toned birds. There is a tree in front of the court, it cannot be matched in harmony, a tree of silver against which the sun shines, like unto gold is its great sheen.”

[12] A Befind in raga lim / I tir n-ingnad hifil rind / Is barr sobairche folt and / Is dath snechtu chorp coind. Literally : “ O lady fair wouldst thou come with me to the wondrous land that is ours, where the hair is as the blossom of the primrose, where the tender body is as fair as snow. There shall be no grief there nor sorrow ; white are the teeth there, black are the eyebrows, a delight to the eye is the number of our host, and on every cheek is the hue of the foxglove.

“ The crimson of the foxglove is in every brake, delightful to the eye [there] the black-bird’s eggs. Although pleasant to behold are the plains of Innisfail, after frequenting the Great Plain rarely wouldst thou [remember them]. Though heady to thee the ale of Innisfail, headier the ale of the great land, a beauty of a land, the land I speak of. Youth never grows there into old age. Warm, sweet streams traverse the country with choicest mead and choicest wine, handsome persons [are there], without blemish, conception without sin, without stain.

“ We see every one on every side, and no one seeth us ; the cloud of Adam’s wrongdoing has concealed us from being numbered. O lady, if thou comest to my brave land, it is a crown of gold shall be upon thy head, fresh flesh of swine, banquets of new milk and ale shalt thou have with me then, fair lady.”

*Apropos* of the Irish liking for swine’s flesh, Stanihurst tells a good story : “ ‘ No meat,’ says he, ‘ they fansie so much as porke, and the fatter the better. One of John O’Nel’s [Shane O’Neill’s] household demanded of his fellow whether beefe were better than porke. ‘ That,’ quoth the other, ‘ is as intricate a question as to ask whether thou art better than O’Nell.’ ”

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