

Green Isle Misty Ocean

The Story of Saint Patrick : embracing A Sketch of The Condition of Ireland before The Time of Patrick, during His Life, at His Death, and immediately after it.

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There is no heroic poem in the world but is at bottom a biography, the life of a man ; and there is no life of a man faithfully recorded but is a heroic poem of its sort, rhymed or unrhymed.—CARLYLE.

When Erin first rose from the dark, swelling flood,
God blessed the green island, and saw it was good ;
The emerald of Europe, it sparkled and shone.
In the ring of the world, the most precious stone.

DRENNAN.

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Facts are the same everywhere ; but for the setting forth of the facts as they are presented in this “ Story,” and for many of the lessons deduced therefrom, the author claims that these “ apples of gold” are in his own “ pictures of silver.” He will welcome criticism, whether adverse or favorable, for he would greatly prefer to know wherein he may be in error ; and where the views presented are just they may become more useful in being ventilated by discussion.

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Dear Shamrock of Erin ! so sacred and green.
Though ages of sorrow thy past years have seen ;
From childhood’s bright morning to manhood’s decline
Thy leaflets we wear o’er our hearts ever thine.

In sadness we loved thee, and earnest our prayer.
Long years of rich blessing may yet be thy share.
When strife o'er thy verdant soil ever shall cease.
Thy three leaves the symbol of Love—Union—Peace.

T. E. E.

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There is a mistiness enwrapping the annals of that “ Green Isle of the Ocean,” which obscures in a great measure the facts both before and after the commencement of the Christian era.

The prehistoric legends of Ireland are, however, of considerable importance in obtaining a pretty accurate view of its earliest settlements. The long continuance of tribal government, and the existence of a special class whose duty it was to preserve the genealogies of the ruling families, and to keep in memory the deeds of their ancestors, were favorable to the growth and preservation of these legends. Long pedigrees and stories of forays and battles were preserved, but were altered more or less in being transmitted from father to son.

But as there had been no great conquest for centuries by foreign races to destroy these traditions they were not eradicated by internal contests and displacements of tribes.

When these Irish prehistoric legends are therefore divested of their extraneous additions, they express the broad facts of the peopling of Ireland, and are in a measure in accordance with the results of archæological investigation.

Keeping these things in view, these prehistoric legends inform us that several principal peoples were the earliest settlers of Ireland.

We must, however, remember that no two histories of Ireland seem to agree as to the strifes, changes, and rules which characterized that unhappy country during its earliest centuries. It is simply impossible to reconcile the historical accounts handed down by the sages or scribes of those primitive times, when Ireland was a battleground for fierce wars of petty kings and chieftains.

There is an early tradition that Gomer, the eldest son of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah, was the progenitor of the early branches of the Celtic family, and of the modern people who are known as Gaels, or Scotch Highlanders, of Celtic origin.

A curious compilation called “The Book of Invasions” tells us that the first people who arrived in Ireland were under the leadership of Parthelan, and came from Scythia, or middle Greece, in the fifteenth century before Christ, and settled at Kenmare, on the southwest coast of Ireland. Parthelan divided the coast into four parts, giving to each of his four sons a part, and having occupied Ireland for three hundred years, they all died of a plague.

From the earliest period Ireland was well wooded and the interior full of marshes. It was occupied by a sparse population of forest tribes, who were doubtless of the aboriginal race of western and southern Europe. There is no date given for the arrival of this race, and it is said that these people were in Ireland when Ireland itself was discovered, as people were in San Salvador when it was discovered by Columbus.

The incoming of the first Celts with Parthelan, who were akin to the later people called Scots, who settled on the sea-coast and built fortresses on the principal highlands, was a marked era in the earliest history of Ireland, for these people, with the “forest tribes,” formed the earliest basis of the population.

Different parts of Ireland seem to have been settled at different times by people varied in origin and traits of character. The north people were probably a branch of the Celts; the eastern and central people were an offshoot of the British and Belgic tribes; and the people of Munster were of a southern or Gallic type. The Britons came from that part of France which lies between the river Seine and the English Channel, and which includes Normandy as well as Brittany. Three other tribes, called the invading tribes, came from between the river

Humber and the shore of the North Sea. While the people who inhabited the British Isles were of the same stock as those of Gaul, yet they flowed into these isles in two streams, one from the neighboring Gaul, and one from some country east of Gaul, by way of the North Sea.

Another instalment of Celts, consequent upon their displacement from other countries by conquests of the Romans, soon after arrived. These commenced a war upon the various tribes they found in Ireland, and having conquered many of them, reduced them to servitude.

The foremost of the conquering tribes was called Scotraige, and having acquired the leadership of the free clans, were then called Scoti. These Scots gave the name of Scotia to Ireland, a name which it retained till the eleventh century, when the old name Hibernia, given to it by the Latin writers, was revived—a name which, on the authority of a learned scholar, is the Latin form of the word Erin.

As these Celts formed the basis of the population in Gaul, Thrace, Asia Minor, and Caledonia, as well as in Ireland, it will be interesting to look at their origin, trace them through the nations, and study their characteristics as given by credible historians.

The Aryans were a primitive people who lived in pre-historic times in Central Asia, east of the Caspian Sea and north of the Hindu Mountains ; and from them sprang the Celtic, Teutonic, Slavonic, and other races. It was a division of mankind otherwise called Indo-European or Indo-Germanic. These people, moved either by the pressure of their increasing numbers or by the restlessness of their disposition, migrated in great hordes eastward. A side wave of this great flood of people poured over the Apennines, submerged Rome, and spread out in weaker waves over southern Italy. Many years afterward they swarmed into Thrace, and a part of them pushed into Asia Minor.

We have no credible account of the separation of the Celts from the other Aryans or Indo-Germans. Invading eastern Europe, they were driven westward and settled in France and Spain, spreading themselves into north Italy, Belgium, and the British Isles. This migration was doubtless made long before the dawn of British history. More than six hundred years before the Christian era the country of the Gauls was visited by the Phenicians and the Greeks. They found the people a race of warlike savages, who dressed in the skins of beasts, dyed or tattooed their limbs and bodies, made drinking-cups of the skulls of their enemies killed in battles, and strangled the unfortunate strangers wrecked upon their coasts. Their only religion was the worship of trees, fountains, thunder, and all things wild or strange in nature.

The Phenicians and subsequently the Greeks carried on some trade with this wild people with the result of introducing a few civilized arts among them.

The present town of Marseilles was founded 600 B.C. by Grecian traders. Six years later these barbarians, under their general, Belmus, captured and plundered Rome, but were driven out by the Roman leader Cornilleus. During the two hundred years following there were frequent wars between the Gauls and Romans. Those who settled in northern Italy, the cisalpine Gauls, were submerged by Rome about 220 B.C. Cæsar subdued Gaul proper in eight campaigns between the years of 58 and 50 B.C. The loss of the Gauls in the last struggle was probably nearly a million of men.

At the time of this conquest the Gauls had a number of fortified towns, they had invented various implements for use in husbandry, and excelled in the arts of working in metals, in embroidery, and the manufacture of various kinds of cloth. But they were rude in manner and rough in speech. They practised polygamy and worshiped many gods, to whom they offered in sacrifice the captives taken in war. They are described by Roman writers as a large, fair-skinned, and yellow-haired race, social, turbulent, enthusiastic, imaginative, and vain. Because of their noisy and fluent speech, Cicero compared them to town-criers, and Cato remarks admiringly of their tact in turning an argument against their opponents.

They wore their hair long and flowing, and delighted in showy garments. Their chiefs wore much jewelry, large head-pieces of fur and feathers, with gold and silver waist-belts, from which hung enormous sabers. They went into battle with all this finery on, but threw it off in the heat of the conflict. They fought fiercely, armed with barbed, iron-headed spears, heavy broadswords, and lances.

After their subjugation by Cæsar the Gauls remained entirely quiet for more than two centuries, and the civilization of the country proceeded rapidly under the influence of Roman rule. Many towns were built, new arts introduced, and commerce was stimulated. The national habits and religion retired by degrees to the northwest, and at last found their only refuge in the islands beyond it.

Christianity was first introduced into Gaul about 160 A.D., by teachers sent out by the Apostles and their successors. During the fourth and fifth centuries the country was taken from the Romans by the Franks, a German tribe which gave its name to the country.

The French people to-day are of mixed ancestry, deriving their characteristics from the Celts, Romans, and Franks.

The Irish are the only people from Gallic or Celtic ancestry who have been mixed so slightly with other nationalities as to show, even to the present time, the survival of the physical and mental traits of the Gallic Celts.

Historians seem unanimous in tracing the inhabitants of Thrace, in the centuries immediately preceding the Christian era, to the influx of the Celts from southern and eastern Europe. Of the inhabitants of Thrace in those days, we are informed by eminent historians of their habits and practices. Polygamy was general, and when the husband died his favorite wife was slain over his grave. Before marriage the Thracian women enjoyed the utmost liberty, but after marriage they were guarded with Turkish rigor.

Wars and robbery were the only honorable occupations of the men. They lived to steal either from one another or from the neighboring people. When not fighting or plundering, they spent their days in savage idleness, or quarreling over their cups. They were courageous, or rather ferocious, after the fashion of barbarous people, yet they lacked the steady valor and endurance of disciplined troops. At all times their warfare displayed more fierceness and impetuosity than fortitude. Their treachery was probably no greater than that of other barbarians.

When the Romans under Cæsar invaded Britain fifty years before Christ they found the islands occupied by a tribe of the Cymric Celts, a people descended from the Belgic Gauls, who had crossed over to the island from the mainland opposite.

These people were called Britons. A tribe of similar origin, the Caledonians, inhabited the northern half of the island, and still another tribe occupied the adjoining island of Ireland, then called Scotia, whence its inhabitants were known by the name of Scots ; but they called their island Eri, whence it is supposed that they were originally descended from wanderers from the land of the Spanish or Iberian Gauls.

The Romans governed Britain for three centuries in justice and tranquillity, but the Caledonians made themselves very troublesome by plundering incursions, and the Romans made a stone wall across the narrowest part to keep the northern barbarians off.

These Caledonians were called Picts by the Romans, because they painted their bodies. Early in the third century the Saxons from north Germany made incursions into Britain, and these, with the Picts on the north and the Scots on the west, harassed the Britons, who were protected, as far as possible, by the Romans, until the fall of their empire in the fifth century.

The Celts in their dispersions through different countries made themselves a “ terror” wherever they went, and were so troublesome to the Romans in Asia Minor, where they had been driven because of their marauding and plundering, that they were hemmed in by the emperor to the province of Galatia, so called because these people were Gauls.

Here the Apostle Paul visited them, preached to them the gospel, and founded several churches, the first Celtic churches of which we read in history.

In writing an “ Epistle” to them afterward he deplores their “ fickleness,” in backsliding so quickly after conversion, and with such little persuasion from the tempter.

Paul had reached Galatia a broken-down traveler. He had halted on his journey because his strength had given out, and he must stay until regained. This in his letter to them he freely confessed. “ Because of the weakness of the flesh I preached to you at first,” is his language. He was physically unable to proceed, and, moreover, he was afflicted with some malady the nature of which tended to excite contempt and even repulsion in beholders. Yet in spite of all this the warm-hearted Galatians or Celts received him with enthusiasm. Paul testifies that had he been “ an angel of God,” or “ Jesus Christ” himself, they could not have shown him greater hospitality.

They thought themselves happy, indeed, that he had become their guest; there was nothing they would not have done for him, even “ to the digging out of their eyes to give him,” as they said, with a touch of genuine Celtic exaggeration, and yet with a true streak of kindness and hospitality, for which Celts are still distinguished.

These Galatians, be it remembered, were of Celtic descent. Galatian is synonymous with Gallic. They were the relics, as we have seen, of a Gallish or Celtic invasion that swept over southern Europe in the early part of the third century before Christ and poured into Asia Minor. Here the Celtic tribes maintained themselves in independence, under their native princes, until, a hundred years later, they were subdued by the Romans, and their country formed a province of the empire.

While they had retained much of the ancient language and manners, they had also readily acquired Greek culture, and were superior to their neighbors in intelligence.

None of the New Testament churches possessed a more strongly marked character than did those in Galatia. They exhibited the well-known traits of the Celtic nature. They were generous, impulsive, vehement in feeling and language, but vain, fickle, and quarrelsome.

Eight out of the fifteen works of the flesh enumerated in the twentieth and twenty-first verses of the fifth chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, works in which the Galatians indulged, were sins of strife. They could hardly be restrained from biting and devouring one another (chapter V. 1-5). They were prone to "revelings and drunkenness."

They had probably, too, a nature bent toward a scenic and ritualistic type of religion, which made the spirituality of the gospel pall upon their taste, and gave to the teaching of the Judaizers who had come among them its fatal bewitchment. "The beggarly elements of the world" still bewitch.

The Romans, dreading the influence of these Celts, pushed them westward, and the Teutons, following up this pressure upon the Celts, drove them into Gaul and also into what is now known as the Three Kingdoms—England, Scotland, and Ireland. In these kingdoms they found a refuge, especially in Devon, Cornwall, Wales, the country from Mersey to the Clyde, and in Irene, or Ireland.

It must be remembered that while the Roman Empire was almost coextensive with the entire world, its legions, for whatever cause, never set foot on Ireland, nor could they ever penetrate into the great natural fortresses of northern Caledonia.

Other peoples struggled for the mastery of Ireland, as the Nemedians, the Ferbolgs, the Danaans, and the Melisians, but the Celts, under a leader called Scotraige, finally gained the mastery and were afterward called, as we have already stated, Scots.

The leader of these Scots was Tuathal, who founded a feudal system in Ireland, which existed when Patrick appeared upon the scene, and which ruled Ireland while the Scotia power endured.

Hitherto the island had been divided into four provinces, each province ruled by its own king, but Tuathal took a portion from each of the other provinces and of these formed the province or kingdom of Meath, which by its rental supported the chief king, who had his capital at Tara. Tuathal made himself chief king, and to him all the other kings were subject.

He built in Munster the sacred place of the Druids, now called the Hill of Ward, near Athboy. He established also a similar religious center for each of the other provinces. The sacred place of Munster was then called Tiachtga ; that of Connaught was called Usnech ; that of Ulster was Tailti, now Telltown ; and Temair, or Tara, was in Leinster.

Each of these sacred places had its great religious druidical festival.

The great festival at Tiachtga was called Samium, now Allhallow-tide. On this occasion all the hearths in Munster must be rekindled from the sacred fire, for which a tax was due to the king.

The great festival of Beltaine was celebrated at Usnech, now the hill of Usnagh, in Westmeath. This was observed in the month of May. The horse and garments of every chief who came to the festival formed a part of the toll of the king of Connaught.

At Tailti (Telltown) a great fair was held at certain intervals on the 1st of August, at which were celebrated games supposed to have been established by Lugaid of the Long Arm, one of the gods of Dia and Ana, in honor of his foster-mother, Tailti.

It was here that Tuathal erected a royal sacred fort, called a dun, in which was placed the shrine of the Ulaid, and to the kings of which the rents of the fair belonged. These rents consisted chiefly in a fine due for each marriage celebrated there.

At Tara, the principal royal residence, he established the feast of Tara, which was a general assembly of the provincial kings and other sub-governors of Ireland who came to do homage to the Ardri, or over-king.

The feast continued to be held from Tuathal's time to 554 A.D., when the last was held by Dairmait, son of Cerball. The establishment of the feast is also attributed to the prehistoric king Eochaid Ollam Fota, which implies that Tuathal merely reestablished it.

As a reparation for the loss of his two daughters at the hands of the treacherous and wanton king Boroimhi, Tuathal imposed a heavy tribute upon the province of Leinster, which was to be paid every season forever after. This tribute, which afterward caused so many wars, consisted of 6000 cows, 6000 hogs, 6000 wethers, 6000 copper caldrons, 6000 ounces of silver, and 6000 mantles.

After introducing several social reforms, one of which was the choosing of supervisors of the most expert workmen in the kingdom, Tuathal met his death at the hands of Mai, 109 A.D., who seized the throne.

In the year 125 A.D., Cond, the hero of the hundred battles, became king, and entered upon a career of warfare which continued with varying fortune until he was slain by Tiofraid Tirech, king of Ulster. About this time Mug Nuadat founded a dynasty that ruled Munster for many years.

The career of Cormac the son of Art, who lived in the first half of the third century, was remarkable for its treacherous cruelty, and afterward for its justice and wisdom. Having in his youth been banished from Ulster, he aroused the sympathy of Thedy, a noble of considerable influence, and of Lughhaigh, an invincible hero, who espoused his cause and marched against the king of Ulster.

After a hard-fought battle and a great display of heroism on the part of Lughhaigh, the king of Ulster was slain and his army overwhelmed. Thedy in the contest received three wounds, which the ungrateful Cormac caused to be filled—one with an ear of barley, another with a black worm, and the third with a point of a rusty spear, hoping in this way to torture him to death; but the wounds healed after a year of great suffering. In the meantime Cormac became established on the throne of his father, and afterward ruled Ireland with great wisdom. He was converted to Christianity, but died seven years afterward, being choked with a salmon bone.

During the latter part of the same century, Niall, a powerful and ambitious monarch of Ireland, invaded France and plundered the country.

In this discursive sketch of the first settlers of Ireland we have seen that the Celts, wherever they have been, have demonstrated that they are a very important branch of the Indo-German family.

If we look at them in Gaul, we see there that their incessant warfares bespeak at least activity of mind and body. If we look at them in Ireland, we see that the Irish missions have done a great deal for European civilization. If we look at them in Britain, we see that their traditions have deeply influenced medieval literature.

One great defect of the Celts is incapacity for political organization. Their very enthusiasm, lively feeling, and vivid imagination have prevented them from taking coolly and deliberately those measures which lead to national unity ; hence it is that they have given way before the more practical Roman and Teuton. The Teuton has quiet resolution, sturdy common sense, a talent for public life, state organization, and political dominion. The Celt has genuine refinement of manner and feeling and high poetic susceptibilities.

We have also seen what a mixed race the inhabitants of Great Britain and Ireland are. At the invasion of Britain by the Romans the inhabitants included Phenician, Roman, and German elements, which had become incorporated with the native Britons, who were of Celtic descent, and to these have since been added the Anglo-Saxons.

The inhabitants of Ireland are no less composite and complex, since they have sprung, as we have seen, from peoples in the northern parts of Europe, Asia Minor, and Central Asia, with a large infusion of immigrations from Gaul and from ancient Germany and Scandinavia. Though the inhabitants of Ireland may have retained some of the bad qualities of the peoples from whom they have sprung, they are nevertheless distinguished for many of their best traits, and in several of these are not a whit behind some of the best peoples on the earth.

Salutation to the Celts.

Hail to our Celtic brethren, wherever they may be,
In the far woods of Oregon, or o'er the Atlantic sea—
Whether they guard the banner of St. George in Indian
vales,
Or spread beneath the nightless North experimental sails—
One in name and in fame
Are the sea-divided Gaels.

A greeting and a promise unto them all we send ;
Their charter our charter is, their glory is our end ;
Their friend shall be our friend, our foe whoe'er assails
The past or future honors of the far-dispersèd Gaels.
One in name and in fame
Are the sea-divided Gaels.

T. D. MCGEE.

CHAPTER II.

The Primitive Social Condition of Ireland.

Oh, to have lived like an Irish chief when hearts were fresh
and true,
And a manly thought, like a pealing bell, would quicken
them through and through.
And the seed of a gen'rous hope right soon to a fiery
action grew.
And men would have scorned to talk and talk, and never
a deed would do.

C. G. DUFFY.

The constitution of the Irish social system was tribal. It divided the population into numerous tribes, which were again subdivided into smaller clans, composed of families and individuals descended from a common ancestor, from whom tribes and clans took their name. This division of the people into tribes or clans was a fundamental feature of primitive Irish society, and must be always kept in view by any one who would understand the constitution of the church founded by Patrick and his successors.

Each tribe had its chief, and the chiefs of the tribes were subject to the king of the province, and these provincial kings were subject to the chief king. The chieftainship and the kingship were all elective, although the choice was limited to the relatives of the ruling chief. The successor of a chief was chosen in the lifetime of the latter. Though the choice was confined to relations, the eldest son was not necessarily elected, but generally the ablest man in the chiefs connections, and the person on whom the choice fell was called the Tanish.

There were five kings in Ireland in those early times, the realms of four of them nearly corresponding to the present four provinces, except that by taking a portion from each of the four, in the year 130 A.D., Meath was formed into a separate central kingdom, its ruler being recognized as over-king, and having his residence at Tara in Meath, till the middle of the sixth century.

When a strong man held the place of supreme ruler his controlling power was everywhere felt. But it often happened that the provincial king or chief was abler and more powerful than the over-king, in which case the central control was little more than nominal.

A true Irish king of those days is beautifully described by Thomas Davis in the following lines :

The Cæsar of Rome has a wider domain.
And the great king of France has more clans in his train ;
The scepter of Spain is more heavy with gems,
And our crowns cannot vie with the Greeks' diadems ;
But kinglier far, before heaven and man,
Are the Emerald fields and the fiery-eyed clan.
The scepter, and state, and the poets who sing.
And the swords that encircle a true Irish king.

For he must have come from a conquering race—
The heir of their valor, their glory, their grace ;
His fame must be stately, his step must be fleet ;
His hand must be trained to each warrior feat ;
His face as the harvest moon, steadfast and clear,
A head to enlighten, a spirit to cheer ;
While the foremost to rush where the battlebrands ring,
And the last to retreat is a true Irish king.

But there were other grades in society than these. The people were not only divided into ranks and grades, as we have described, but these grades were also designated, by the number of colors they were permitted to wear. The lowest were only permitted to wear one color, and none but the royal family could wear seven. The rank next to royalty was composed of the learned order : these wore six colors. This is an indication of the high estimation in which learning was then held. This custom of wearing colors is the origin of the Scotch plaid, worn by the Highlanders till this day.

The dwellings of the primitive Irish deserve also a word. These houses were, in many places, such as might be expected of a race that feared attacks from neighboring people. Many of them were circular inclosures called by various names, but were in reality forts, inside of which were the chief habitations of the people. They were erected for shelter and protection, and in the case of the better class of these forts, in which the chiefs resided, they were surrounded by two ramparts. The houses inside of these were usually constructed of wood and wattles.

The early Christian churches were similarly constructed, and generally plastered over with clay. There were also numerous circular stone forts.

A large portion of the country was then covered with dense forests, in which the oak predominated. In these forests, boars, wolves, and other wild beasts roamed. So extensive were these forests that Ireland was at one time called “ Island of the Woods.”

Hunting was common, but agriculture was also practised. The wealth of the people consisted chiefly of cattle, pigs, sheep, and horses.

The members of one tribe formed a number of communities ; each community had a head, who had under him kinsmen, slaves, and retainers. Each of these communities occupied a certain part of the tribe land. The arable part was cultivated under a system of tillage ; the pasture-land was grazed by all, according to certain customs ; and the wood, bog, and mountain formed the unrestricted common land of the community.

And what this village community was to the tribe the homestead was to the community. In that homestead dwelt the representative freeman, capable of acting as a witness, or going bail for his neighbors.

So long as there was abundance of land each family grazed its cattle upon the tribe land without restriction. Unequal increase of wealth and growth of population naturally led to its limitation, each head of a household being entitled to graze an amount of stock in proportion to his wealth, the size of his household, and his acquired position.

The arable land was annually apportioned, but generally some of the richer families succeeded in evading the exchange of the allotments, and of converting part of the common land into an estate. This course of conduct soon created an aristocracy.

The head of the homestead who had held the same land for three generations was called a lord, of which rank there were several grades, according to their wealth in land and chattels. Several grades in society were similarly formed, and gradually sprang into existence.

It should also be remembered that the man selected to be the head of the tribe, or the chief of the clan, must have certain specified qualifications, viz., he must be the most experienced, the most noble, the most wealthy, the wisest, the most learned, the most popular, the most powerful to oppose, and the most steadfast to sue for profits and to be sued for losses. In addition to these qualities, he should be free from personal blemishes and deformities, and of fit age to lead his tribe or clan, as the case might be, to battle.

In order to support the dignity of the chief or chieftain a certain portion of tribe or clan land was attached as a perquisite (an apanage) to the office. This land, with the fortified residence upon it, went to the successor of the chief, but a chief's own property might be divided at his death, as an inheritance, among the members of his family. There was also another order, called entertainers. These were obliged by law to provide for strangers and travelers. They were dignitaries among their fellow-men, and were required to be the proprietors of seven town lands, to have seven herds of cows, each herd to contain one hundred and fifty. Their mansion was required to be accessible by four different avenues ; and a hog, sheep, and beef were required to be in constant preparation, that whoever called should be fed without delay.

All this was gratuitous. Probably it was this social custom and provision which gave the Irishman an idea of his elysium in the next world, where, according to the description of it in the olden times, the pig is as conspicuous as he is to-day in the cabin of the Irish peasant. Here is the description of an Irishman's elysium in those days :

“ There are three trees always bearing fruit ; there is one pig there, always alive, and another pig ready cooked ; and there is a vessel full of excellent ale.”

The laws by which the people were governed, as we shall see, were singularly just and sympathetic, protecting the weak against the strong and the rich, and opening a door to wealth and high rank for ability and industry.

It is recorded in an old manuscript that speaks of the age of Cormac, one of Ireland's earliest, wisest, and strongest rulers, who lived in the middle of the third century, “ that the world was full of all goodness in his time ; there were fruit and fatness of the land, an abundant produce of the sea, with peace, ease, and happiness. There was no killing nor plundering in his time, but every one occupied his land in happiness.”

This description of those times may be rather rosily drawn, but Cormac had doubtless come under the influence of Christianity, and sought to follow the Golden Rule. Be that as it may, the social primitive condition of Ireland, we can well imagine, was somewhat similar to the condition portrayed by the poet in his beautiful words, on

The Brave Old World.

There was once a world, and a brave old world,
 Away in the ancient time,
When the men were brave and the women fair,
 And the world was in its prime ;
And the priest he had his book.
 And the scholar had his gown,
And the old knight stout, he walked about,
 With his broadsword hanging down.

Ye may see this world was a brave old world,
 In the days long past and gone.
And the sun he shone, and the rain it rained,
 And the world went merrily on ;
The shepherd kept his sheep.
 And the milkmaid milked her kine.
And the serving-man was a sturdy loon
 In a cap and doublet fine.

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CHAPTER III.

The Ancient Laws of Ireland.

When on Sinai's top I see
God descend in majesty,
To proclaim his holy law,
All my spirit sinks with awe.

When on Calvary I rest,
God, in flesh made manifest,
Shines in my Redeemer's face.
Full of beauty, truth, and grace.

MONTGOMERY.

The inhabitants of Ireland were governed, from a very early period, and for many centuries, by what were called the Brehon Laws. These laws obtained this name because they were made by the judges.

These judges were hereditary, and each administered justice to the members of his tribe, while seated in the open air, on a few sods, on a hill or rising ground. The language in which these laws were written is a convincing proof of their antiquity, and also the subject-matter of many of them indicates the primitive nature of the society which then prevailed. Their style of composition differs from that of the vernacular Irish language of the present day ; time has modified much of the spelling and many of the grammatical forms, also several of the legal terms. Some phrases of constant occurrence in these Brehon Laws have become obsolete.

Some of these statutory documents are ascribed to Cormac MacArt, a wise and celebrated monarch of Ireland, in the middle of the third century; and allusions are made in them to a general revision of them in the fifth century, at the suggestion of St. Patrick, who, in conjunction with certain kings and learned men, expunged from them many enactments which savored of paganism ; yet many traces of heathenism were not removed, especially their provisions respecting marriage, and its relations and obligations—provisions that demonstrate that Christianity had not yet exercised its full influence upon those who were either the enactors or revisers of these laws.

By these laws a community or village comprised separate families and individuals, numerous enough to occupy what might be called a barony, or enough land to supply all their necessities by pasture and cultivation ; and within this barony a court and a complete system of social organization were established.

In each of these communities lands were set apart permanently for the support of the chief ; and means were arranged by which portions of the common land could within certain limits be acquired by individual owners. The grades of life were numerous, and regulated by the amount of wealth possessed in cattle, and in a prescribed assortment of agricultural implements and household goods.

The houses were constructed of timber and wattle-work, surrounded by open spaces, of prescribed extent for each class. The shortest limit for this space was the distance to which the owner, seated at his door, could throw a stone of a given weight.

There were slaves and serfs and farmers and landlords, the relationship between which we need not specify in detail, except that they resembled very much the relationship between such classes in modern times.

The use of coined money was practically unknown, and the standard of value was the cow.

The succession to the territorial headships was, as we have stated, elective within certain hereditary limits, and the succession to the tribal rights, and rights of ownership in land, was hereditary.

The law of marriage, as we have already hinted, allowed many irregular relations, but protected the property both of the irregular and of the lawful wife. The lawful wife could only protect herself from an unlawful one by the withdrawal of her separate property, and by fines which must be paid to her on such an occasion.

The looseness of the connubial tie, evidenced by these laws, was one of the evils calling for reform, alleged by the Irish prelates in their letter, praying Pope Alexander III. to ratify the grant of Ireland made by Hadrian IV. to King Henry II. of England in the twelfth century.

The upper classes put out their children to be nursed and educated by the poorer members of the community, who received a fee for their fostering care, and had a claim in their old age upon the child fostered and educated.

This fostering care commenced with infancy, and in the case of girls terminated at thirteen years of age, and of boys at seventeen years. Under this system of early training the Brehon Laws provided that girls of the less wealthy class must be taught to use the handmill and

the sieve, to bake and to rear young cattle. Girls of the higher class must be taught to sew, cut out garments, and embroider.

The poorer boys must be taught kiln-drying and wood-cutting. The boys of the upper class were taught chess-playing, the use of the missile, horsemanship, and swimming. The clothing, besides the nursing-cloths supplied by the parents, was to be regulated according to their station, from sober-colored stuffs for the children of the less wealthy to scarlet cloth and silks for the children of those of the rank of the king.

Provision was made for the necessary correction of the pupil, and fines were to be imposed for the excess of correction, with many other reasonable and necessary laws.

Contributions were levied for the repair of the roads and bridges, etc., and each community had a public mill, a fishery, and a ferry-boat.

Markets were held, and great fairs, at distant places and long intervals of time. Either party might rescind a contract within twenty-four hours.

There was a law for “tramps” and “waifs” and “serfs,” for caring for wrecks at sea, and for sustaining ship-wrecked sailors. All fines were graduated in the interest of the poorer classes, and crime and breach of contract reduced the guilty ones from a higher to a lower grade of society.

Privileges were given to those attending the fairs, and a violation of some of the necessary laws for securing peace and decorum at these fairs was in some instances punishable with death, and in other cases was punished with a pecuniary fine. At these fairs new laws were proclaimed, and old laws were read over publicly to the people. Imprisonment was unknown, but the culprit was fettered. There were laws for the regulation or settlement of cases out of court, and for bringing other cases to a higher jurisdiction, for which professional advocates were appointed.

These laws defined the respective rights both of the clergy and of the laity, and among the rights expressly guaranteed to the latter “was the recital of the Word of God to all who would listen to it and keep it.” Thus this time-honored law, the right to God’s most precious Word, was secured to the people of Ireland by this ancient Irish law.

The boundaries of their laud were preserved by laying a quantity of burned ashes on the ground, and big stones on these, and to these places they carried boys, showed them the ashes and stones, and whipped them soundly, that they might remember the place, and tell it to their children.

The main features of these laws were similar to those of the common law of England. Take them all in all, these were not hard laws by which Ireland was governed at the time when Patrick appeared upon the scene.

God’s law is perfect, and converts
The soul in sin that lies ;
God’s testimony is most sure,
And makes the simple wise ;
The statutes of the Lord are right,

And do rejoice the heart ;
The Lord's command is pure, and doth
Light to the eyes impart ;
Unspotted is the fear of God,
And doth endure forever ;
The judgments of the Lord are true,
And righteous altogether ;
They more than gold, yea, much fine gold.
To be desired are ;
Than honey from the honeycomb
That droppeth, sweeter far.

DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL.

The story of Saint Patrick : embracing a sketch of the condition of Ireland before and after
Patrick's time (1895)

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