

Haverty's History of Ireland

The history of Ireland, ancient and modern : derived from our native annals ... and from all the resources of Irish history now available ...

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Whoever attempts to trace on the map of the world the route ascribed in the text to the ancestors of Milesus will find himself seriously puzzled. In all the accounts of these perigrinations two distinct expeditions are alluded to, one by the east and north, and the other westerly, that is, through the Mediterranean Sea and the Pillars of Hercules. The latter is intelligible enough, but the former would imply a passage by water, from south to north, through the central countries of Europe. The Nemedians and Tuatha de Dananns would also appear to have passed freely in their ships between Greece, or Scythia, and the Northern Seas, without going through the Straits of Gibraltar. Some got rid of this difficulty by treating the whole story as a fable founded on the Argonautic Expedition and its River-Ocean, but even that famous legend of classic antiquity stands itself in need of explanation : and with that view it has been suggested that the Baltic and Euxine Seas were at some remote period connected, and that the vast, swampy plains of Poland were covered with water. A connected series of lakes may thus have extended across the continent of Europe from north to south ; and the lagunes along the present northern coast of the Black Sea may indicate what their appearance had been. Traditions of many of the physical changes which have taken place from time to time in the surface of Ireland, since the universal Deluge, such as the eruption of rivers, and the formation of new lakes and inlets of the sea, are preserved in the Irish annals ; and it is probable that the Greek traditions of Deucalion's Deluge, and the theories respecting the eruption of the Euxine into the Archipelago, and of a channel between the ocean and the Mediterranean through ancient Aquataine, may refer to a period when the ship Argo, and the barques of the descendants of Niul, might have passed from the shores of Greece to the Hyperborean Seas through the heart of Sarmatia, as indicated above.—See “ *A Vindication of the Bardic Accounts of the Early Invasions of Ireland, and a Verification of the River-Ocean of the Greeks.*” Dublin, 1852. Also the *Dublin University Magazine* for March, 1852

A judicious and accomplished Irish annalist, Tighernach, Abbot of Clonmacnoise, who died so early as A.D. 1088, has said that all the Scottish, that is, Irish, records previous to the reign of Cimbaeth, which he fixed at the year B.C. 305, are doubtful ; and we have, therefore, good authority, independent of internal evidence or of the opinions of modern writers, for placing on them but a modified reliance. We must be careful, however, not to carry our doubts too far. These ancient records claim our veneration for their great antiquity, and are themselves but the channels of still older traditions. Writings which date from the first ages of Christianity in Ireland refer to facts upon which all our pre-Christian history hinges, as the then fixed historical tradition of the country ; and the closest study of the history of Ireland shows the impossibility of fixing a period previous to which the main facts related by the annalists should be rejected as utterly fabulous. There is no more reason to deny the existence of such men as Heber and Heremon, and therefore, of a Milesian or Scottish colony, than there is to question the occurrence of the battle of Clontarf ; and the traditions of the Firbolgs and Tuatha de Dananns are so mixed up with our written history, so impressed on the monuments and topography of the country, and so illustrated in the characteristics of its population, that no man of learning who had thoroughly studied the subject would now think of doubting their existence. But, as we have said, it is for the main facts that we claim this credence.

These facts are, of course, mixed up with the quaint romance characteristic of the remote ages in which they were recorded, and the chief difficulty, as in the ancient history of most countries, is to trace out the substratum of truth beneath the superincumbent mass of fable.

The chronology of the pre-Christian Irish annals is obviously erroneous, but that does not affect their general authenticity. They were compiled for the most part from such materials as genealogical lists of kings, to whose reigns disputed periods of duration were attributed ; and those who, in subsequent ages, endeavored to form regular series of annals out of such data, and to make them synchronize with the history of other countries, were unavoidably liable to error. The Four Masters, adopting the chronology of the Septuagint and the Greeks, according to which the world was 5,200 year's old at the birth of our Saviour, refer the occurrences of Irish history, previous to the Christian era, to epochs so remote as to expose the whole history to ridicule ; while O'Flaherty, endeavouring to arrive at a more reasonable computation, and taking for his standard the system of Scaliger, which makes the age of the world before Christ some 1250 years less, reduces the dates given by the Four Masters by many hundreds of years ; but the degree of antiquity which even he allows to them surpasses credibility. Thus, according to the author of the *Ogygia*, the arrival of the Milesian colony took place 1015 years before the Christian era ; that is, about 260 years before the building of Rome, making it synchronize with the reign of Saul in Israel ; while, according to the Four Masters, that event occurred more than six hundred years earlier ; that is, many centuries before the foundation of Troy, or the Argonautic expedition ; and yet, at that remote period—sixteen hundred years, according to one computation, and at least a thousand, according to another, before Julius Cæsar found Britain still occupied by half-savage and half-naked inhabitants—we are asked to believe that a regular monarchy was established in Ireland, and was continued through a known succession of kings, to the twelfth century ! [1]

A chronology so improbable has naturally weakened the credibility of our older annals ; but neither bardic legends nor erroneous computations can destroy the groundwork of truth which we must recognize beneath them.

The ancient Irish attributed the utmost importance to the truth of their historic compositions, for social reasons. Their whole system of society—every question as to the rights of property—turned upon the descent of families and the principle of clanship ; so that it cannot be supposed that mere fables would be tolerated instead of facts, where every social claim was to be decided on their authority. A man's name is scarcely mentioned in our annals without the addition of his fore-fathers for several generations, a thing which rarely occurs in those of other countries.

Again, when we arrive at the era of Christianity in Ireland, we find that our ancient annals stand the test of verification by science with a success which not only establishes their character for truthfulness at that period, but vindicates the records of preceding dates involved in it. Thus, in some of the annals, natural phenomena, such as eclipses, are recorded, and these are found to agree so exactly with the calculations of astronomy as to leave no room whatever to doubt the general accuracy of documents found in these particulars to be so correct, at least for periods after the Christian era. [2]

Now, coming to the theories of Irish origins entertained by those who reject the authority of the old annalists either wholly or on this particular point ; it is certain, according to them, that Ireland has invariably derived her population from the neighbouring shores of Britain, in the same way as Britain itself had been peopled from those of Gaul. It was thus, they tell us, that the Belgæ, or Firbolgs, the Damnonians, and the Dananns came successively into Erin, as well as, in after times, that other race called Scots, whose origin seems to set speculation at

defiance. Navigation was so imperfectly understood in those ages that such a voyage as that from Spain to Ireland, especially for a numerous squadron of small craft, is treated with ridicule. The knowledge of navigation, which all admit the Greeks, and Trojans, and Phœnicians to have possessed, is not acceded to the early colonies of Ireland ; but it is argued that as people spread naturally into adjoining countries visible from those whence they proceeded, so it is only reasonable to suppose that Ireland received inhabitants from the coasts of Wales or Scotland, from which her shores could be plainly seen, rather than from Thrace or Macedon, or even from Spain. Similarity of names, also, comes to the aid of this theory ; for it seems probable enough that the Belgæ and Dumnonii of Southern Britain were the same race with those bearing almost identically the same names in Ireland. As to the name of Scots, it was never heard of before the second or third century of the Christian era, when it was given to the tribes who aided the Picts in harassing the people of South Britain, and their masters, the Romans. There is no Irish or any other authority of an older date for the application of the name of Scots to the people of Erin. Irish writers themselves suggest that *sciot*, a dart or arrow, may have been the origin of the word Scythia ; and with more probability might it have been that of the name Scoti, or Scots, as applied to men armed with weapons so called ; and once the name, from this or any other cause, came to be applied to the natives of Ireland, it is easy, we are told, to imagine how the Irish bards built upon it a fine romance, deriving it from an imaginary daughter of King Pharaoh, and perhaps borrowing from it also the idea of claiming for their nation descent from Scythia, the region, at that time, of fabulous heroism. These theories give wide scope to the imagination, and would substitute for the traditions of the old annalists conjectures quite as vague and inconclusive, however ingenious and learned they may be. [3]

It is generally agreed that the Firbolgs, or Belgians, were a pastoral people, inferior in knowledge to the Tuatha de Dananns, by whom, although the latter were less numerous, they were kept in subjection. It is also admitted that the Tuatha de Danann race were superior in their knowledge of the useful arts and in general information to the Gadelian, or Scottish colony, who, however, excelled them in energy, courage, and probably in most physical qualities. To their intellectual superiority the Danann colony owed their character of necromancers, as it was natural that a rude and ignorant people at that age should look upon skilled workmanship and abstruse studies as associated with the supernatural.

It is probable that by the Tuatha de Dananns mines were first worked in Ireland ; and it is generally believed that they were the artificers of those beautifully-shaped bronze swords and spear-heads that have been found in Ireland, and of which so many fine specimens may be seen in the museum of the Royal Irish Academy. The sepulchral monuments, also, of this people evince extraordinary powers of mind on the part of those by whom they were erected. There is evidence to show that the vast mounds, or artificial hills, of Drogheda, Knowth, Dowth, and New Grange, along the banks of the Boyne, with several minor tumuli in the same neighbourhood, were erected as the tombs of Tuatha de Danann kings and chieftains, and as such they only rank after the pyramids of Egypt for the stupendous efforts which were required to raise them. [4]

As to the Firbolgs, it is doubtful whether there are any monuments remaining of their first sway in Ireland ; but the famous Dun Aengus and other great stone forts in the islands of Aran are well-authenticated remnants of their military structures of the period of the Christian era, or thereabouts. That the Tuatha de Dananns were not a warlike people appears from the tradition of their remonstrance against the first landing of the Milesians, when they admitted that they had no standing army to resist invasion. [5]

Again the question is raised, were these Firbolgs, and Tuatha de Dananns, and Gadelians, all Celts ? And, in reply, it must be said that the term Celt, or Kelt, as it is more correctly pronounced, was unknown to the Irish themselves ; that the word is of classic origin, and was probably as indefinite as most geographical names and distinctions at that period appear to have been. Finally, it is suggested that in all probability none of the immigrations into Ireland were unmixed, and that the first population of the island was composed of Celtic, Slavonic, and Teutonic races, mixed up in different proportions. A Scythian origin is claimed for all in the Irish traditions, in which all are traced to Japhet, the son who received the blessing, and through him to the cradle of our race. [6]

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The Milesian Kings of Ireland.—Trial the Prophet.—Tiermas.—Crom Cruach : the Paganism of the Ancient Irish.—Social Progress.—The Triennial Assembly or Parliament of Tara.—Cimbaeth.—Queen Macha.—Foundation of Emania.—Ugony the Great.—New Division of Ireland.—Pagan Oath.—A Murrain.—Maeve, Queen of Connaught.—Wars of Connaught and Ulster.—Bardic Romances.

FROM the conquest of Ireland (B.C. 1700 [7]) by the sons of Gollamh, or Milesius, to its conversion to Christianity by St. Patrick (A.D. 432), one hundred and eighteen sovereigns are enumerated, whose sway extended over the whole island, independent of the petty kings and chieftains of provinces and particular districts. Of this number, sixty were of the race of Heremon, twenty-nine of the posterity of Heber Finn, twenty-four of the line of Ir, three were descended from Lugaid, the son of Ith, one was a plebeian, or Firbolg, and one was a woman. The history of their reigns is, to a great extent, made up of wars either among different branches of their own race or against the Firbolgs and others ; but numerous events are also recorded which mark the progress of civilization, the clearing of plains from woods, the enactment of laws, the of palaces, &c. The breaking forth of several rivers and other phenomena are mentioned, and a great number of legends many of them curious specimens of ancient romance.

Irial surnamed Faidh, or the Prophet, son of Heremon, began the struggle against the Fomorians and Firbolgs, the latter of whom kept the Milesian armies occasionally occupied for centuries after. The tribes of Firbolgs most frequently mentioned are the Ernai and the Martinei, the former of whom are described in one place as holding the present county of Kerry, and the latter the southern portion of the county of Limerick ; and in the reign of Fiacha Lavraine, who was killed in the year B.C. 1449, the Ernai are stated to have been routed in battle on a plain where Lough Erne, so called from them, subsequently flowed over the slain. Irial Faidh died on Magh Muai, which is supposed to be the plain near Knock Moy, a few miles from Tuam, after clearing a great many extensive plains and erecting several forts during the ten years of his reign.

B.C. 1620.—Among the early Milesian kings a prominent place is assigned to Tiermas, who is said to have been the first to institute the public worship of idols in Ireland. The notion which we can form of the paganism of the ancient Irish is extremely obscure. Owing to the scanty information which the old manuscripts afford us on the subject every one who has written about it has had ample scope for his own favorite theory, and some of these theories have been advanced with scarcely a shadow of foundation. We shall revert to this subject again, and for the present shall refer only to the worship of Crom-Cruach, the chief idol of the Irish, which stood in Magh-Slecht, or the Plain of Adoration, in the ancient territory of Breifny. [8] This idol, which was, covered with gold, was said to represent a hideous monster, and its name implies that it was stooped, or crooked, and also that it was black, for it is some-

times called Crom-Duv. It was surrounded by twelve smaller idols, and was destroyed by St. Patrick, who merely stretched forth towards it, from a distance, his crozier, which was called the Staff of Jesus. It is probable that Tiernmas only erected the rude statue, and that he found the worship prevailing in the country, and handed down, it may be, from the earliest Milesians ; but, at all events, he was punished for his idolatry by a terrible judgment, having been struck dead, with a great multitude of his people, while prostrate before Crom-Cruach, on the Night of Savain, or All Hallow Eve. Tiernmas reigned seventy-seven, or, according to others, eighty years ; and it was under him that gold was first smelted in Ireland, in the district of Foharta, east of the river Liffey, and that goblets and brooches were first covered with gold. According to Keating, it was he who first ordered that the rank of persons should be distinguished by the number of colors in their garments : thus, the slave should have but one color, the peasant two, the soldier three, the keeper of a house of hospitality four, the chieftain of a territory five, the ollav, or man of learning, six, and in the clothes of kings and queens seven colors were allowed. This regulation is attributed by the Four Masters to the successor of Tiernmas, and the rule is also somewhat differently stated. [9]

In the reign of Enna Airgeach, B.C. 1383, silver shields were first made at Airget-Ross, or the Silver Wood, on the banks of the river Nore. They were given, together with horses and chariots, to the heroes and nobility. King Monemon, who died of plague, B.C. 1328, first caused the nobility to wear chains of gold on their necks and rings of the same metal on their fingers. Deep wells were first dug in the reign of Fiacha Finailches, by whom the town of Ceanannus, or Kells, was founded, B.C. 1200. Four-horsed chariots were first used in the time of Roiachty, who was killed by lightning at Dun Severick, near the Giant's Causeway, B.C. 1024. Stipends, or wages, were first paid to soldiers, and probably to other persons in public employments, in the reign of Sedna Innarry, B.C. 910 ; and silver coin is stated to have been first struck in Ireland, at the silver works of Airget-Ross, in the reign of Enda Dearn, who, with many others, died of plague, at Slieve Mish, B.C. 881.

But the greatest step in social progress at that remote period of Irish history was the institution of the Feis Teavrach, or triennial assembly of Tara, by Ollav Fola (Ollamh Fodhla), the beginning of whose reign is fixed by the Four Masters at the year of the world 3883, corresponding with the year B.C. 1317. If we suppose the event ante-dated even by several centuries, this assembly would, nevertheless, appear to be one of the earliest instances of a national convocation or parliament in any country. All the chieftains or heads of septs, bards, historians, and military leaders throughout the country were regularly summoned, and were required to attend under the penalty of being treated as the king's enemies. The meeting was held in a large oblong hall, and the first three days were spent in enjoying the hospitality of the king, who entertained the entire assembly during its sittings. The bards give long and glowing accounts of the magnificence displayed on these occasions, of the formalities employed, and of the business transacted.. Tables were arranged along the centre of the hall, and on the walls at either side were suspended the banners or arms of the chiefs, so that each chief on entering might take his seat under his own escutcheon. Orders were issued by sound of trumpet, and all the forms were characterized by great solemnity. What may have been the authority of this assembly, or whether it had any power to enact laws, is not clear ; but it would appear that one of its principal functions was the inspection of the national records, the writers of which were obliged to the strictest accuracy under the weightiest penalties. These accounts of the Feis of Tara must be taken with due allowance for the coloring which the more ancient traditions on the subject received from the later writers who have delivered them to us ; but however cautiously we regard them—and no student of antiquity will now-a-days venture wholly to reject them—they should satisfy us that the pagan Irish were acquainted with the art of writing, notwithstanding the opinion to the contrary of so many moderns, who hold that letters were not introduced into Ireland before the time of St. Patrick,

Besides the establishment of the triennial assembly, Ollav Fola appears to have instituted other wise regulations for the government of the country. Over every cantred, or hundred, he appointed a chieftain, and over each townland a kind of prefect or secondary chief, all being the servants of the king of Ireland. He constructed a rath on Tara, called from him Mur-Ollavan, and died there, after a useful reign of forty years. [10]

A few of the Irish monarchs enjoyed very long reigns. Thus, Sirna Selach governed Ireland for 150 years ; and in a battle which he fought against the race of Heber, the Fomorian having been brought in to aid the latter, a plague fell upon them during the fight, and many thousands of his enemies perished on the spot. And of king Slanoll (that is, all health) it is related that there was no sickness in Ireland during his reign ; that he himself died without any apparent cause ; and that his body remained uncorrupted and without changing color for several years after his death.

B.C. 716.—The reign of Cimbaeth brings us to the commencement of what, according to Tigernach, may be considered as the authentic period of the Irish annals. [11] It is also a remarkable epoch for other reasons, and especially for the foundation of Emania, the royal palace of Ulster. The story of this palace is curious. About this period there lived three princes, Hugh Roe, or the Red ; Dihorba, and Cimbaeth (pronounced Kimbahe), the sons of three brothers, and all three claimed equal right to the crown. A contest consequently arose, which was finally adjusted by a solemn engagement that they should reign in turn for seven years each ; and this agreement was strictly carried out, until, at the end of his third period of seven years, Hugh Roe was drowned at Easroe, or Red Hugh's Cataract, [12] and left a daughter, Macha, surnamed Mongroe, or the Red-haired, who, when her father's turn to rule came round again, claimed it in his stead, and made war on the other two competitors to assert her right. A battle was fought, in which the red-haired lady was victorious ; and Dihorba having been slain, Macha arranged the dispute with the survivor, Cimbaeth, by marrying him and making him king. She then, as the legend goes, followed the five sons of Dihorba into Connaught, captured them by stratagem among the rocks of Burrin, and compelled them to build her a palace, the site of which she herself marked out with the bodkin or pin of her cloak, whence the name of the new palace, *Eamhuin*, which signifies a neck-pin. At all events, it was at the desire of Macha, and in the reign of her husband, Cimbaeth, that the palace of Emania, so celebrated in the history of Ireland for many centuries after, was constructed. This was the resort of the Red-branch Knights, and the palace of the kings of Ulster for 855 years, [13] until finally destroyed, as we shall see, by the three Collas. After the death of Cimbaeth, Macha reigned as absolute queen of Ireland for seven years, when she was slain by her successor, Rachtu Ridearg, who, in his turn, was slain by Ugaire Mor, or Ugonny the Great, who had been fostered by Cimbaeth and Macha, and thus avenged the death of his royal foster-mother.

B.C. 633.—Ugonny, who reigned forty years, is said to have carried his victorious arms far out of Ireland, so that his power was acknowledged “ all over the west of Europe, as far as Muir-Toirrian,” or the Mediterranean Sea. He divided Ireland among his twenty-five children, and exacted from the people an oath, according to the ancient Irish pagan form, “ by the sun and moon, the sea, the dew, and colors, and all the elements visible and invisible,” that the sovereignty of Erin should not be taken from his descendants for ever. This mode of binding posterity appears to have been a favorite one, as we find it again adopted, in the same precise form, by Tuathal Techtmar, one of Ugonny's descendants. The subdivision of Ireland into twenty-five parts was preserved for 300 years. [13]

Ugony the Great experienced the same fate as nearly all these ancient sovereigns, who, with very few exceptions, were slain each by his successor ; and among the most remarkable of the succeeding princes we find one named Maen, better known as Lavry Longseach, or Lowry of the Ships, who, having been driven into exile by his uncle, Covagh, son of Ugony, lived some time in Gaul, and returning thence with 2,000 foreigners, landed on the coast of Wexford, and marched rapidly to the royal residence at Dinrye, on the river Barrow, which he attacked at night, killing the king, his uncle, and thirty of the nobles, and setting fire to the palace, which was burned to the ground. He then seized the crown, and having reigned nineteen years was, according to the customary rule, killed by his successor (B.C. 523). Many legends are related of this Lowry of the Ships ; and it is said that the foreigners who came with him from Gaul were armed with broad-headed lances or javelins (called in Irish *laighne*), whence the province of Leinster has derived its name. [14]

For some centuries, about this period, few events of note are recorded. In the reign of Bresail Bodivo (B.C. 200), there was a mortality of kine, so great that, according to the Annals of Clonmacnoise, “ there were no more then left alive but one bull and one heifer in the whole kingdom, which bull and heifer lived in a place called Gleann Sawasge,” that is, the Glen of the Heifer, the name of a remarkable valley in the county of Kerry, where the tradition is still preserved.

B.C. 142.—Eochy, or Achy, surnamed Feyleach, (Feidhleach) from a habit of constantly sighing, rescinded Ugony More’s division of Ireland into twenty-five parts, and divided the island into five provinces, over each of which he appointed a minor king, tributary to himself. To one of these, Tinne, the king of Connaught, he gave in marriage his daughter Maeve (Meadhbh) or Mab, or Maude, celebrated in the old poetic chronicles for her beauty and masculine bravery, with which, it must be confessed, she did not combine the quality of feminine modesty. She figures as the heroine in many of the strange romances of the period ; among the peasantry her memory has descended to the present day as that of the queen of the Fairies of Connaught, and in her elfin character, although greatly metamorphosed, she is immortalized as the Queen Mab of English fairy mythology.

After the death of Tinne, Maeve reigned alone as queen of Connaught for ten years, and then married Oilioll, the commander of the martial tribe of the Gamanradians, or Damnonian knights of Iorras, a Firbolgic sept also celebrated by the bards as the Clanna Morna. [15] She made him king of Connaught, and survived him, although he lived to an advanced age. The Connaught palace of Cruachan was erected by her ; and in her time a war which lasted for seven years broke out between Ulster and Connaught, when the Gamanradians of Iorras Domnan, and the knights of the Craev Roe, or Red Branch of Emania, [16] were arrayed against each other, and performed wonderful exploits of valour, queen Maeve herself, at the head of her heroes, dashing into Ulster with her war-chariots, and sweeping the cattle of the rich fields of Louth before her across the Shannon. This deed has been celebrated in the ancient historic tale of the *Tain bo Cuailgne*, or Cattle-spoil of Cooley. The bards have indeed involved the whole of this period in the wildest romance, tainted, as might be expected, by pagan immorality, and darkened by deeds of cruelty in warfare. [17] They relate as the cause of this war a moving tale about the fair Deardry and the three sons of Uisneach, and the cruelty of Connor Mac Nessa, king of Ulster ; but the more probable account of the matter is, that Feargus Rogy, who was driven from Ulster by Connor in one of their intestine broils, fled into Connaught, and engaged the interest, together with the affections, of Queen Maeve, and by her assistance made incursions into the territory of Connor Mac Nessa. Among the champions of Emania in this war were Cuchullainn, and Conall Cearnach ; and among the Connaught heroes were Ceat Mac Magach, the brother of King Oilioll, and Ferdia Mac Damain, all names of Ossianic celebrity.

When Maeve was considerably more than 100 years old she was treacherously killed by the son of Connor in revenge for the death of his father, who was slain by Maeve's people ; and among her numerous children were three, of whom Feargus Rogy was the father, named Kiar, Conmac, and Corc, the progenitors of many of the families of the west and south of Ireland. Maeve lived about the commencement of the Christian era, her death, according to Tigernach, having taken place in A.D. 70, although, according to the Four Masters, she flourished more than a century before the birth of Christ.

This epoch is known in Irish history as that of the provincial kings ; and strange though it may seem, we have to trace to that remote date the origin of the worst ills of Ireland—namely, the subdivision of territory, and the establishment of a system of petty independent toparchs, which involved the country in perpetual local wars, and gradually extinguished every trace of a controlling power or central government.

THERE is a difference of opinion as to what Irish king reigned at the birth of Christ ; for while the Four Masters, O'Flaherty, and others assign that date to the reign of Creevan Nianair, the hundred and eleventh monarch of Ireland in O'Flaherty's list, other calculations push forward the reign of Conary the Great, the fourth preceding king, to the Christian era, and make Creevan a cotemporary of Agricola, the Roman governor of Britain. The latter king has been famous for his predatory excursions against the Britons, from one of which he brought home several "jewels," or precious objects, among the rest, "a golden chariot ; a golden chess-board, inlaid with a hundred transparent gems ; a cloak embroidered with gold ; a conquering sword with many serpents of refined, massy gold inlaid thereon ; a shield with bosses of bright silver ; a spear from the wound inflicted by which no one recovered; a sling from which no erring shot was discharged, &c. ;" and after depositing these spoils in Dun Creevan, [18] at Bin Edar, he died, as the Four Masters have it, in the ninth year of Christ.

It is thought to have been about this time that a certain recreant Irish chief waited on Agricola, in Britain, and invited him to invade Ireland, stating that one Roman legion and a few auxiliaries would be sufficient to conquer and retain the island. Agricola saw the importance of occupying a country so favorably situated, and prepared an expedition for the purpose ; but the project was abandoned for some cause not known, probably owing to the formidable military character of the people of Ireland ; and although Britain remained a province of the Roman empire for centuries after, and the natural wealth of Hibernia was well known, foreign merchants being even more familiar with her ports than with those of Britain, still a Roman soldier never set hostile foot on her much-coveted shores. The Scots of Ireland, and their neighbours, the Picts, gave the Roman legions quite enough to do to defend Britain against them from behind the ramparts of Adrian and Antoninus.

While the Milesians were exhausting their strength in internecine wars at home, or with incursions beyond the seas, a large portion of the population of Ireland, composed of various races, and with different sympathies, was engaged upon more peaceable pursuits. Those who boasted of a descent from the Scytho-Spanish hero would have considered themselves degraded were they to devote themselves to any less honorable profession than those of soldiers, ollavs, or physicians ; and hence the cultivation of the soil, and the exercise of the mechanic arts, were left almost exclusively to the Firbolgs and the Tuatha-de-Dananns ; the former people in particular being still very numerous, and forming the great mass of the population in the west. These were ground down by high rents, and the exorbitant exactions of the dominant race, in order to support their unbounded hospitality, and defray the expenses of their costly assemblies ; but this oppression must have caused perpetual discontent, and the hard-working plebeians, as they were called, must have easily perceived that their Gadelian

masters were running headlong to destruction, and that it only required a bold effort to shake off their yoke. It would be curious to know how this feeling developed itself until it was finally acted upon, or whether the popular discontent had any connexion with the invitation to the Roman general just referred to. Of the singular and successful revolution which was the result we have no accounts but such as reach us from a hostile source, and are colored by undisguised prejudice. According to these statements, the Aitheach-Tuatha, or Attacotti, as they are called in Latin, that is, the plebeians and helots of the conquered races, with many also of the impoverished Milesians, conspired to seize the country for themselves. [19] For this purpose they invited all the kings and nobles, and other leading Milesians, to a grand feast at Magh Cro, the great plain near Knockma, in the county of Galway ; and to provide for a banquet on such a scale, the plebeians spent three years in preparations, during which time they saved one-third of their earnings, and of the produce of the land. A great meeting and a feast seem to have had an irresistible attraction for the Milesians, who accordingly repaired to Magh Cro from every part of Erin, and there, after being feasted for nine days, they were set upon by the Attacotti, and massacred to a man. Only three chieftains, say the seanachies, escaped, and these were still unborn ; their mothers, who were the daughters of the kings of Alba, Britain, and Saxony, having been spared in the general butchery, and having found means to escape into Albion, where the three young princes were born and educated. It is plain, however, that many others also survived, as several Milesian families, not descended from these, are subsequently found in Ireland. The annals do not say how the conspiracy was hatched, and so effectively concealed during the many years required to bring it to maturity ; but after the massacre the Attacotti elected as their king, Carbry, one of their three leaders, who through contempt is called Carbry Cinncait, or the cat-headed, from having ears like those of a cat. Carbry reigned five years, during which time there was no rule or order, and the country was a prey to every misfortune. “ Evil was the state of Ireland during his reign ; fruitless her corn, for there used to be but one grain on the stalk ; fruitless her rivers ; her cattle without milk ; her fruit without plenty, for there used to be but one acorn on the oak.” [20] In fact the civil war was followed by one of its natural consequences, a famine. [21]

A.D. 14.—After the death of Carbry, his son, the wise and prudent Morann, refused the crown, and advised those who pressed it on him to bring back the rightful heirs. The young princes were accordingly invited home from their exile ; Faradach Finnfeachtach, or the Righteous, the son of Creevan, was elected king of Ireland ; and Morann, the Just, administered the law during his reign, so that peace and happiness were once more restored to Erin. “ The seasons were tranquil, and the earth once more brought forth its fruit.” It was Morann who made the famous collar or chain which judges after him were compelled to wear on their necks, and which, according to the legends, contracted and threatened to choke them when they were about pronouncing an unjust judgment. This collar is mentioned in several commentaries on the Brehon laws among the ordeals of the ancient Irish, and was used to test the guilt or innocence of accused persons.

The Attacotti were now subjected to more grievous oppression than ever ; and on the death of Faradach a fresh rebellion broke forth. This time the provincial kings were induced to join in the outbreak, which resulted (A.D. 56) in a desperate battle at Maghbolg, on the bounds of the present counties of Cavan and Meath, where the monarch, Fiacha Finfolay, was killed. Elim, king of Ulster, who had joined the plebeians, was chosen monarch, and had a troubled reign of twenty years, the people leading lawless lives, and the very elements, as in the former case, being at war with the usurper ; but at the end of this interval Tuathal Teachtar, or the Legitimate, the son of Fiacha Finfolay, and born in exile, returned on the invitation of a sufficiently powerful party, and slew Elim in battle at Aichill, or the hill of Skreen, in Meath, and once more brought back prosperity and order to the land. (A.D. 76.)

A.D. 106.—Tuathal Teachtar reigned thirty years, during which time he carried on a war of extermination against the ill-fated plebeians, no fewer than 133 battles having been fought with them in the different provinces. He established himself more firmly on the throne by exacting from the people a similar oath to that of Ugony Mor, “by the sun, moon, and elements,” that his posterity should not be deprived of the sovereignty.

He cut off from each of the other four provinces a portion of territory, of which he formed the separate province of Meath, as the mensal lands of the chief king ; he celebrated the Feis of Tara with great state, and held provincial conventions at Tlachtá, Uisneach, and Tailtinn, in the Momonian, Connacian, and Ultonian portions of Meath, and he imposed on the province of Leinster the degrading Boruwa, or cow-tribute, which continued during the reigns of forty succeeding monarchs of Ireland, being inflicted as an eric, or fine, on the king of Leinster, for having taken Tuathal’s two daughters as wives, on the pretence, when he asked the second one, that the former wife was dead, the death of both being the consequence. Tuathal’s great power, or the oath he exacted from his subjects, did not save him from the usual fate of the Irish kings, as he was killed in battle by his successor, Mal, who, in his turn, was slain by Tuathal’s son, Felimy Rechtar, or the Law-maker. Felimy, who died A.D. 119, was the son of a Scandinavian princess, named Baine, the daughter of Scal, king of Finland, and this connection shows the intercourse that existed between the Scots of Ireland and the Northmen at this early period. The great rath of Magh Leavna, in the present county of Tyrone, was erected by this princess. Felimy, the Law-giver, substituted for the principle of retaliation the law of Eric, or fine.

[1] Charles O’Connor, of Balenagar, says, in his *Dissertations on the History of Ireland*, that the Milesian invasion cannot have been much earlier or later than the year B.C. 760.

[3] Fiach’s hymn, admitted to be the composition of a disciple of St. Patrick, refers to the Milesian traditions of the Irish ; and among the authorities most frequently quoted by Keating, O’Flaherty, and other old writers, on the period of the Tuatha de Dananns, Firbolgs, and the Milesian colony, on account of their works being still preserved, are Maelmura of Fathan, who died A.D. 884 ; Eochy O’Flynn, who died A.D. 984 ; Flan Mainistreach, who died A.D. 1056 ; and Giolla Kevin, who died A.D. 1072 ; all of whom related in verse the written and oral traditions received by themselves from preceding ages. Shortly after the establishment of Christianity in Ireland, the chronicles of the bards were replaced by regular annals, kept in several of the monasteries, and from this period we may look upon the record of events in our history as, morally speaking, accurate. The statement of Mr. Moore, and of others of his school, that the primitive traditions of Irish history were fabricated to please a fallen nation with delusions of past glories, is monstrously absurd. They were in existence, and were cherished by the people ages before the fallen circumstances which Mr. Moore contemplates.

[4] See Dr. Petrie’s “*History of Tara Hill*,” and Dr. Wilde’s “*Beauties of the Boyne and Blackwater*.”

[5] In the *Book of MacFirbis*, written about the year 1650, it is said that “every one who is black, loquacious, lying, tale-telling, or of low and grovelling mind, is of the Firbolg descent ;” and that “every one who is fair-haired, of large size, fond of music and horse-riding, and practises the art of magic, is of Tuatha de Danann descent.” See these passages quoted by Dr. Wilde in an ethnological disquisition on these ancient races, founded on the peculiarities of human crania discovered under circumstances that identify them as belonging to the two races respectively. ‘*Beauties of the Boyne and Blackwater*,’ pp. 212, 239.

[6] O’Flaherty, in the first part of the *Ogygia*, gives the following as the results of his researches about the original inhabitants of Ireland :—That the first four colonies came into Ireland from Great Britain : that Partholan and Nemedius, descendants of Gomar by

Riphath, came from Northern, and the Firbolg colony from Southern Britain ; that these races spoke different languages; that the Tuatha de Dananns were the descendants of the Nemedians, who, after sojourning in Scandinavia, returned into North Britain, and thence, in the lapse of time, into the north of Ireland ; that the Dananns being subdued by the Scots, the Firbolgs, under the latter, again flourished in Ireland, and enjoyed the sovereignty of Connaught for several ages ; that the Fomorian, whether the aborigines of Ireland or not, were not descendants of Cham, nor from the shores of Africa, but from that country whence the Danes, in after ages, invaded Ireland ; and finally, that the Firbolgs and Tuatha de Dananns had frequent intercourse with each other before the conquest of Ireland by the latter.”

- [7] We continue to employ the chronology of the Four Masters, simply turning the years of the world into the corresponding years before Christ, as being more intelligible ; but the reader will observe that, as already stated, no reliance is to be placed on these dates until we arrive within a few centuries of the Christian era. All the computations at this early period are equally uncertain ; and we insert the dates merely for the sake of method, to mark the order of events, the relative duration of reigns, &c.
- [8] The village of Ballymagauran and the island of Port, in the present county of Cavan, are situated in the plain anciently called Magh-Slecht. The idol stood near a river called Gatbard, and St. Patrick erected a church called Donoghmore in the immediate vicinity of the place. O'Donovan's notes at reign of Tighernmas. Four Masters A.M. 3650.
- [9] The Scottish plaid is traced to this early origin.
- [10] The real name of this king was Eochy (pronounced Achy), but he is only known by his surname of Ollav Fola, that is, the chief poet or learned man (Ollav) of Ireland (Fola).
- [11] The Four Masters assign the beginning of his reign to A.M. 4484, corresponding with the year B.C. 716. O'Flaherty fixed it at the year B.C. 352 ; Keating about B.C. 460 ; and Tigernach at B.C. 305. This diversity exemplifies the uncertainty of early Irish chronology.
- [12] Now Assaroe, or the Salmon Leap, on the river Erne at Ballyshannon, where Hugh Roe was buried in the mound now called Mullaghshee.
- [13] Annals of Clonmacnoise. The remains of the palace of Eamhuin, or Emania, is now a very large rath, corrupt y called the Navan fort, situated about two miles west of Armagh. Near the hill is a townland which still bears in its name of Creeveroe (Craobh-ruadh), or the Red-branch, a memorial of the ancient glory of the place.—See Stuart's “ *Historical Memoirs of Armagh.* ”
- [13] Of Ugony's children twenty-two were sons, and of these only two left issue, all who claim to be of the race of Heremon tracing their descent through these two sons of Ugony.
- [14] This origin of the name is more generally received than the similar one mentioned above when treating of the Firbolg immigration.
- [15] The return of a number of the Firbolgs to Ireland, in the time of Queen Maeve, is an interesting fact in our history. It is stated in a MS. account of the Firbolgs, by MacFirbis (for the translation of a portion of which, as well as for the identification of the names that follow, we are indebted to Professor Eugene Curry), that the remnant of that people who continued in the Danish islands (the Hebrides) were about this period banished by the Picts, and that they passed over to Ireland, where they obtained, upon rent, the lauds of Rath Cealtchair, Rath-Conrach, Rath-Comar, &c., in Mealh. The rent, however, was too heavy, and they eloped with all their moveables over the Shannon, and received from Aible (as he is here called) and Meabh, the king and queen of that country (Connaught) lands running along the coast from Cruach Patrick to Loop Head, and embracing the southern parts of Galway and Roscommon, and all Clare. They were called the Clann Umoir on their coming into Ireland on this occasion, from Aengus, the Son of Umor, who was their king. The lands which they received in the west, chiefly on the sea-bord, continued to bear their names. Here are a few of them : —“ Aengus, son of Umor, at Dun

Aengusa, in Arann ; Cutra, at Loch Cutra (near Gort); Cimè, at Loch Cimè (now Lough Hacket) ; Adhar, son of Umor, at Magh Adhair (poetically for Thomond) ; Mil, at Muirbheach Mil (now Murvagh, near Oranmore) ; Doolach, at Daoil (?) ; and Endach, his brother, at Teach n-Eamlaigh (?) ; Bir, at Rinn Beara West (now Rinnbarrow, in Lough Dergart, in the Shannon) ; Mogh, at Innsibh Mogh (Clew Bay islands): Iorgus, at Ceann Boirne (Black Head); Banne Badanbel, at Laighlinne (?); Conchurn (not Conchubhar) on the Sea, in Inis Meadhain (one of the Arran islands) ; Loth-rach, at Tulaigh Lothraigh (?) ; Taman, son of Umor, at Rinn Tamain, in Meadraidhe (near Galway) ; Conall Caol, son of Aengus, son of Umor, at Carnconail, in Aidhne (now the barony of Kiltartan in Galway) ; Measca, at Loeh Measca (Lough Mask) ; Asal, the son of Umor, at Magh Asail, in Munster (plain round Tory Hill, near Croom) ; Beus Beann, son of Umor, the poet, &c.”

- [16] That the ancient Irish in very remote times had certain local orders of knighthood, cannot be denied : and the statement that Cuchullainn was admitted among the Red-branch Knights of Emania at the ago of seven receives a curious illustration from an incident recorded by Froissart, who relates that when four Irish king.s were offered the honor of knighthood by Richard, king of England, they stated that it had been already conferred on them, according to the custom of their own country, when they were but seven years of age — Froissart, vol. iv., chap. Ixiv.
- [17] About this period popular resentment rose so high throughout Ireland against the fileas or bards, for their abuse of the numerous privileges which they enjoyed, and their perversion of the laws, that a general outbreak against them took place, and they were expelled, indiscriminately, from a great part of the country ; but the tide of excitement was staid by Connor Mac Nessa, who prevailed on both parties to agree to certain reforms, and set the principal fileas to work upon a codification of the laws, which was accepted by the county at large, together with the reinstatement of the expelled fileas.—(*O’Conor’s Dissertations*, p. 131, ed. of 1812.)
- [18] Dr. Petrie and Dr. O’Donovan think that the Dun Crimhthain, or Fort of Creevan, was situated on the jutting rock where the Bailey lighthouse now stands, at Howth.
- [19] Several races were mixed up in the population of Ireland at the time of the Aitheach-Tuatha. Some say that their king, Carbry Cinnceat, was a Scandinavian. The Tuatha-Eoluirg who lived at that time in Tyrone were a Scandinavian race
- [20] Annals of the Four Masters.
- [21] Flann of Monasterboice synchronises the reigns of Carbry Cinncait and his immediate successor with the Emperors Titus and Domitian. Fifty years before the insurrection of the Attacotti. Conaire Mor, monarch of Ireland, was killed by insurgents at Bruighean-da-Dhearg, on the Dothair, or Dodder, a name which Dr. O’Donovan believes to be preserved in that of Boher-na-Breana, the road of the Bruighean or fort.

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