

History of Ireland: Introduction

The history of Ireland ; from the earliest period of the Irish annals, to the present time

Thomas Wright

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Introduction.

THE history of all nations depends on so great a variety of documents of different degrees of merit or authenticity, that to understand properly the character of the history of any particular people, it is necessary to have some notion of that of its historical records, or, in other words, we require in some degree to know the national literature of the people whose history we would appreciate. Strictly speaking, the whole circle of the national literature of a country belongs to its history ; and in the earlier ages of society the historian is obliged to take this definition in its widest extent, although in periods of higher civilization historical literature forms a special and strongly defined class. In Ireland, owing to circumstances peculiar to that country, we find in its historical records at a very late period a singular mixture of the imaginative character of the earlier, with the prosaic accuracy of the later period.

The various races and tribes who formed the chief portion of the population of modern Europe had no written literature before their conversion to Christianity; and hence they adopted the alphabets of Rome or Greece, according to the country of the missionaries who were their teachers. The letters which they possessed before were calculated only for cutting inscriptions on wood or stone. They were those elaborately formed characters which among the Anglo-Saxons and Germans are known by the name of Runes, and which the Irish designated by the synonymous word in their language, Oghams. The literature of all people in this state of society was preserved only by the memory, and was passed from one to another, and from generation to generation, orally ; its preservation being the particular duty of an important and very influential order, who are commonly designated by the name of bards or poets. It was their business to commemorate the mythic stories relating to the origin of their tribe, as well as its great exploits or misfortunes at a later period, the latter, though exaggerated and disfigured in accordance with their prejudices and passions, belonging much more to what we strictly consider as history than the former, although the transition from one to the other is almost imperceptible. These, however, were the only materials upon which the early history of all nations was founded.

The books which were first written by the Christian missionaries were copies of the Gospels or of the Psalms in Latin, some of which, owing to their extreme beauty, to their reputed sanctity, and to other circumstances, have been preserved to modern times, and the Irish, like the Anglo-Saxons, possess such manuscripts dating from a period approximating to that of their first conversion. It was a long time subsequent to this before the vernacular language of the people was committed to writing in anything but brief notes and glosses to assist the teacher in explaining the Latin text. The old order and the new one—the bard and the Christian priest—continued to live together without so much of rivalry as might be expected, the bard gradually resigning the religious part of his character to the priest, while the priest left the commemoration of historical events as the special province of the bard ; and this state of things lasted during a longer or shorter period, according to the slowness or rapidity of the march of civilization. In Ireland it has continued to a very late period ; and

hence, while among the Anglo-Saxons and the Franks, and most of the branches of the Germanic race, the creations of the bards soon began to be regarded in their true light of romances, in Ireland the popular conviction that they were strictly historic has hardly yet been overthrown. The modern historian of that country has thus to deal with a great mass of materials which his judgment repudiates, although popular belief or prejudice will not allow them to be neglected.

The work of the bare annalist of contemporary events began at a later period, and originated with the priest or monk. All the older chronicles are strictly monastic chronicles, and they dwell most on such events as were interesting to the religious house in which they were written, or at least which affected the interests of the church ; and they are written with prejudiced feelings, which we have not always the means of detecting. They are only absolutely authentic from the time at which we can prove them to have been written contemporarily, the earlier portion being compiled from tradition, abridged from the bardic songs, or copied from some other chronicle. For it was the common practice, when a monkish writer undertook to make a chronicle for the use of his monastery, to borrow the chronicle of some other house, and copy nearly literally all the entries previous to the date at which he began writing it ; so that, among our old chronicles, a large portion of them is copied from one another. This circumstance shows how necessary it is that, in examining the historical records of former ages, we should make ourselves thoroughly acquainted with the literary history of the records themselves, so as to be able to appreciate the materials from which they were compiled, and to know how far they are in each case independent of the other existing authorities which were partly compiled from the same materials. It is not unusual to find a modern historical writer quoting four or five authorities as supporting each other's testimony to the truth of a fact, when, in reality, they are all mere copies from one original chronicler, who is himself not deserving of our trust.

It is an unfortunate circumstance that the bardic poetry, perhaps from the old deeply rooted habits of the order, was never committed more than partially to writing, and that accidentally, and probably not at the choice of the bards in whose memory it was preserved. Among the Anglo-Saxons in England we find no traces of written poetry of this kind till the tenth and eleventh centuries, when poems or fragments of poems were taken down from recitation by a person here and there, who was curious in collecting such things, as we now collect scraps of poetry into albums ; and one or two of these collections have been pre-served, from the circumstance of their having been given to the library of a public body. It appears that the same practice began in Ireland about the same time, and that it prevailed in that country during the subsequent period much more extensively than in most other countries. In fact, the bardic order, which had always flourished there more than in the surrounding lands, became divided then into two classes, which are constantly mentioned in the native chronicles, the poets or minstrels and the historians, and which were still often combined, as we find one man frequently described as the poet and historian of his tribe, and, as in the older bardic class, the character of poet or historian continued to be hereditary. It is to the latter we owe the written materials of history.

Two collections of Irish bardic poems of the description just alluded to have attained an extraordinary celebrity among Irish writers under the names of the PSALTER OF TARA and the PSALTER OF CASHEL. The first of these is mentioned by the old annalists as a book of great antiquity ; it is ascribed by some to a period antecedent to the Christian era, while others attribute it to the reign of Cormac, in the third century after Christ, and it is said to have been preserved at the royal palace at Tara, and to have been continued by the bardic historians at

subsequent periods. This book had ceased to exist long before we have any information of an authentic description relating to it, and its history seems to be enwrapped in obscurity and fable ; we only know that it is pretended that some portion of it was copied into the Psalter of Cashel, and as the latter book is known to have consisted in part of bardic poetry, there may have been a still older collection of such poetry preserved at Tara. The Book of Cashel, so called from its having been preserved in the cathedral of that city, and believed to have been compiled by Cormac mac Cuilenan, king of Munster and archbishop of Cashel at the beginning of the tenth century, appears without any doubt to have been a very early manuscript, and was the first record of which we have any authentic information of the bardic poetry of the Irish, and of the romantic history which composes the earlier portion of their annals. Copies of it were certainly in existence in the seventeenth century, of which Geoffrey Keating made extensive use in his history of the fabulous periods of the Irish Annals, and they are said to be still preserved, although there appears to be some uncertainty as to the depository which conceals them from the knowledge of the public. However, the original work was used subsequently in the compilation of similar books by others of the early Irish writers.

The materials contained in the Book or Psalter of Cashel related more especially to the history of Munster ; and another work, said to have been little more than a copy of the Psalter of Cashel, was known as the BOOK OF MUNSTER. The other great principalities of the island possessed similar compilations, written at various subsequent periods. The BOOK OF LEINSTER, which related more particularly to the affairs of that province, is still extant in a manuscript copy in the library of Trinity College, Dublin. The BOOK OF ULSTER and the BOOK OF ORGIAL contained similar collections relating to the northern parts of the island : and several similar manuscripts exist, or are known to have existed, relating to Meath and Connaught. Two much larger collections were made for the history of Sligo—the BOOK OF LEACAN, compiled at different periods from the twelfth century to the fifteenth, by the Mac Firbises, the hereditary poets and historians of Sligo, and the BOOK OF BALLYMOTE, compiled at the monastery of that name in the fourteenth century. These two works are preserved in the library of the Royal Irish Academy ; they include copies of the similar books which existed in the other great provinces—those of Cashel, Leinster, Ulster, and Orgial, besides the history of Ireland, and especially of Sligo and Connaught, down to the fifteenth century ; and they were valued so much even at a late period, that the latter, which belonged originally to the Mac Donoughs, was purchased of them in 1522 by Hugh Duv O'Donnell of Donegal for *one hundred and forty milch cows*.

The important position held by the poetic and historical families in the various Irish septs, is proved by the care with which their deaths are recorded by the native chroniclers ; and this circumstance also enables us in some cases to trace their direct descent from the old bardic caste. Like them they were often rich in landed property and in goods, and sometimes even they were chiefs of their sept. Thus the Mac Firbises, who were the hereditary historians and poets of Hy-Fiachra in Sligo, and at one period of all Connaught, formed a separate clan, whose original territory was Magh-Broin in Tyrawley, but who moved thence and finally settled at Leacan in the barony of Tireragh. The Book of Leacan was compiled by various members of this family during three centuries, and is said to be one of the most voluminous of the Irish chronicles. We learn from different annalists, that Awlave More mac Firbis, historian (or *ollav*, as it was termed in Irish) of Hy-Fiachra, died in 1138 ; that Giolla Iosa More mac Firbis, historian of the same district, died in 1279 ; that another Giolla Iosa mac Firbis, Donogh mac Firbis, and Fearbisigh mac Firbis, all celebrated historians, died respectively in the years 1301, 1376, and 1379 ; and that Giolla Iosa More mac Firbis, a “ famous antiquary,” of Leacan, and Mac Iosa mac Firbis, a poet of the same clan, both died in 1418.

The last of this family of antiquaries was Dubhaltach, or Duaid mac Firbis, of Leacan, who was employed in making collections for sir James Ware, and who was murdered in 1670 at Dunflin in the county of Sligo. The O'Dalys were the hereditary poets of Westmeath, and are often mentioned in the Irish chronicles. The singular adventures of one of this family will be found recorded in the following history (p. 131 of the present volume). The O'Dugans were the hereditary bards and historians of the O'Kellys of Hy-Maine, as the O'Maolconrys were of the proud and powerful sept of the Siol-Murray, which exercised so great an influence over the never-ending revolutions of Connaught. Of the latter family, also, we find many notices in the native annalists. Tanaidhe O'Maolconry, celebrated as a poet and historian, is said to have died in 1136. Another "historian" of the same family, Neide O'Maolconry, nourished in the same century. Maoilin O'Maolconry, the historian of Siol-Murray, died in 1266. In 1270, Dubhsuileach O'Maolconry and Dunlaing O'Maolconry were removed from the dignity of chief historians of Connaught, and that honour was conferred upon Tanaidhe More O'Maolconry. In 1310, Torna O'Maolconry, as chief poet and historian of Connaught, attended at the inauguration of Feidlim O'Connor. Conaing O'Maolconry, "chief poet of Connaught," died in 1314; Tanaidhe O'Maolconry, "an eminent poet of Connaught," in 1385; Donough O'Maolconry, "chief poet of the O'Connors of Connaught," in 1404; Conaing O'Maolconry, "poet of Connaught," in 1420; Maoilin O'Maolconry, "chief poet of Connaught," in 1441; Tanaidhe O'Maolconry, "an eminent poet of Connaught," in 1446; Carbry O'Maolconry, "a famous historian of Connaught," in 1511; John O'Maolconry, dignified with the high-sounding title of "chief poet and historiographer of Ireland," in 1566; and Maurice O'Maolconry, an eminent poet of Connaught, died in 1600. Several members of this family became distinguished ecclesiastics, and one of them, Florence O'Maolconry, archbishop of Tuam, a Franciscan friar eminent for his learning, was the founder of the Irish Franciscan monastery at Louvain, and died at Madrid in 1629. We can trace down the bardic character of this family to a still later period, for Peter O'Maolconry was an eminent Irish poet at the beginning of the eighteenth century. A fine manuscript on vellum of bardic poems, written about the fourteenth century, and now preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, was compiled by the O'Maolconry's, although they appear in general to have worked more as annalists. To them we owe the ANNALS OF CONNAUGHT, a voluminous chronicle of that province from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, a copy of which is preserved among the manuscripts in the library of the Royal Irish Academy.

The Irish bibliographers give us long lists of Irish chronicles, many of which are extant, and many of which no longer exist, and are known only by name. The bards appear to have become annalists by slow gradation, and the only Irish chronicler we know previous to the twelfth century, is Tigernach O'Braoin, an ecclesiastic, and not apparently a member of any one of the bardic families. Tigernach was abbot of Clonmacnoise and Roscommon, and his death is placed by the Four Masters in the year 1088. This father of Irish annalists, shows himself so far free from the prejudices which seem to have been inseparable from the "antiquarianism" of the descendants of the bards, that he rejects the earlier fabulous history, and applies a certain spirit of criticism to the compilation of the subsequent annals. We have no very distinct notion whether any Irish chronicles, strictly such, existed previous to the compilation of the ANNALS OF TIGERNACH, and served for the foundation of that work, or whether the Irish history detailed in it was abridged from older bardic poetry and memorial verses, a class of documents which are frequently quoted by the compiler, and which are almost the only Irish authorities he mentions. Tigernach began his work with what he considered the commencement of the authentic history of his country, the reign of Kimbaoth, which he places three centuries before Christ (*omnia monumenta Scotorum usque Kimbaoth incerta erant*), and from that period he takes the foreign Latin chronicles then best known,

and reduces the Irish history as well as he could to their chronology. The few manuscripts of this chronicle now extant are unfortunately mutilated in more than one place ; but they end in the year 1088, the same in which their compiler is said to have died. They are written partly in Latin and partly in Irish, according to the sources from which the outlines of events were taken.

This is infinitely the most valuable of all our authorities for the early history of Ireland. The subsequent chronicles have generally more of a local character, and, unless where they copy Tigernach, are, as far as we can judge in ignorance of their materials, less authentic ; they differ widely from him in their critical spirit, for they adopt all the early fables, and they borrow more largely from romance, but they preserve local traditions of importance, especially relating to times nearer those in which they wrote. They are all, however, valuable when they become contemporary historians, more valuable, indeed, from the circumstance that each gives the history of his own sept or province more fully and partially than the others. It is thus that one copy of the ANNALS OF INISFALLEN, the next in antiquity after those of Tigernach that are now extant, furnishes us with the best and most detailed account of the battle of Clontarf, in which the great Brian Boru was slain. These annals were compiled in the year 1215, and commence with a brief chronicle from the beginning of the world to the time of St. Patrick, after which they are rather more detailed. They are continued in the manuscript from 1215 to 1320, by another hand. Compiled by a monk of the celebrated abbey of Inisfallen, they are naturally most copious on the affairs of Munster. The ANNALS OF BOYLE, compiled more briefly by a monk of the abbey of Boyle in Roscommon, in the year 1246, resemble much in their general character those of Inisfallen, and are also written partly in Latin and partly in Irish. The object of chronicles like these was to preserve the dates of a certain number of historical facts, considered most useful and interesting by the individuals who compiled them, and who only entered into long details on particular occasions. They begin with a brief chronology of the history of the world, compiled from the Latin writers, such as Orosius, Bede, &c., and among the events noted from these authorities, the Irish compilers have inserted a few of the bardic stories of the fabulous histories of their own country.

The Irish chronicles become much more numerous during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Among these, one of the most valuable is the ANNALS OF ULSTER, compiled in the latter half of the fifteenth century by a learned ecclesiastic of Fermanagh, one of the Maguires. They were subsequently continued to 1541, so that, combined, these annals contain the history of Ireland, and more especially of the northern province, from the beginning of the Christian era to the middle of the sixteenth century. The fifteenth century, a period at which the native Irish chieftains seemed to be regaining their power, was especially the age of Irish historians and of Irish poets, and several valuable chronicles were composed at that period, of which, as few of them are at present accessible, it is unnecessary to give a detailed list. Among them is a history of Thomond, from the landing of Henry II. in Ireland to the year 1318. Another valuable Irish chronicle, relating more especially to Munster, known as the BOOK OF FERMOY, is believed to be still extant. At a much later period, a learned and laborious member of the sept of the Mac Geoghegans of Westmeath, Conla mac Geoghegan, completed in the year 1627 a compilation from the older chroniclers and historical writers, commencing with the fabulous ages, and ending in the year 1466, but which is understood to be chiefly a translation from the ANNALS OF CLONMACNOISE. This work, written in English, exists in several manuscript copies, although it has never been printed.

But the best known and most celebrated of the later compilations of this class is that which goes under the name of the ANNALS OF THE FOUR MASTERS, and which we owe to one of the family of the O'Clerys, the hereditary bards and historians of the O'Donnells of Tirconnell. Michael O'Clery, born about the year 1580, in the county of Donegal, was a Franciscan friar at Louvain, and having, by his knowledge of Irish antiquities, attracted the attention of his fellow-countrymen there, who were anxious to publish the ecclesiastical history of Ireland, he returned to his native country to collect materials for their undertaking. There he formed the design of compiling an Irish chronicle more complete than any of those which preceded it, and he is said to have spent fifteen years in collecting the materials, visiting most parts of Ireland in search of the manuscript works of the earlier historians. He was assisted throughout by two other O'Clerys, and by an O'Duigenan, of the family of the ancient historians of Roscommon. From these four labourers the chronicle received the title by which it is best known, though it has also been frequently called the ANNALS OF DONEGAL, because it was written in the Franciscan monastery of that town. Two of the O'Maolconrys of the Siol-Murray also lent their assistance in the compilation of this work. It commences with the fabulous ages, and is brought down to the year 1616. From the date of the dedication we learn that it was completed in the year 1636. Michael O'Clery died in the monastery of Donegal in the year 1643. Although these annals are, as they profess to be, a general chronicle of Ireland, the history of the southern division of the island is very imperfect, while Ulster and Connaught occupies chiefly the attention of the compilers, who are especially copious and partial in recording the deeds of the O'Donnells of Tirconnell. It must also be observed that the compilers of this chronicle are not very exact in their dates, from the fact of their having followed the chronology of documents which were not all founded on the same system.

Documents like those just described can only be made accessible and useful to the modern historian when they are printed and translated, and it is to be regretted that as yet but a very small portion of them has undergone this process. A learned Irish historical antiquary, Dr. Charles O'Conor, who held the office of librarian to the duke of Buckingham at Stowe, printed, at that nobleman's expense, four quarto volumes of the Irish historians of the earlier ages, under the title *Rerum Hibernicarum Scriptores Veteres*. This collection, which at present is a very rare and expensive book, contains the original texts accompanied with a Latin version of the Annals of Tigernach, those of Inisfallen ; and Boyle, the Annals of the Four Masters from the commencement to the year 1172, and the portions of the Annals of Ulster extending from 431 to 1131. Until within the last two or three years, these were the only portions of the native Irish chronicles that were printed, so that, unless acquainted with the Irish language, and so situated as to be able to consult the manuscripts in the public and private libraries where they are deposited, the modern historian of Ireland had no means of making himself acquainted with the Irish account of events during the long and important period from the first landing of the Anglo-Normans in the latter half of the twelfth century to the reign of James I. At length, in 1845 and 1846, an enterprising publisher of Dublin gave to the public a translation of the whole of the Annals of the Four Masters from the year 1171 to the conclusion of that compilation in 1616. This translation, by Owen Connellan Esq., " Irish Historiographer to their late majesties George IV. and William IV.," is accompanied with numerous useful notes. Two years later, in 1848, the Irish text of this chronicle, with a new English translation, appeared in three volumes, under the title of "*Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters, from the earliest period to the year 1616, edited from the autograph Manuscript, with a Translation and copious Notes, by John O'Donovan, Esq., M. R. I. A., Barrister-at-law.*" This edition is rendered valuable to the historian by the collation of the text of the Four Masters with that of several other Irish chronicles, and the insertion in the notes of very numerous variations and additions from them, which give it in a great measure

the advantage to be derived from the publication of English translations of those different records. The chief chronicles which Mr. O'Donovau has used for this purpose are, the old English version of the Annals of Clonmacnoise, by Mac Geoghegan, an old English translation of the Annals of Ulster, and a portion of the Annals of Leacan translated in the seventeenth century for sir James Ware.

Still our Irish materials relate chiefly to the northern portion of the island ; few of the annals of the southern province during this long period are accessible, and they are all exceedingly scanty in the information they give us relating to the affairs of the English pale. We are inclined, however, to believe, from the general character of the chronicles which have been published, that the loss the history of Ireland sustains from the non-publication of the others is not perhaps so great as might be supposed. They all contain the same kind of information, chronological records of predatory expeditions of one chief against another, battles, murders, and deaths of individuals, with no great variation in the mode of relating them or diversity in the circumstances, and little or no information as to the origin of these petty feuds, their secret motives, or even as to the sentiments and manners of the people ; so that if they were all printed and translated, the chief gain would be an addition to our bare list of such events as these, which would not throw much further light on the general history of the country. They are, moreover, compiled with partial feelings, and are so imperfect as historical narratives, that we should know very little of some of the most important revolutions which have passed over the island, did not foreign documents come to our aid. We should literally know nothing of the events of the Anglo-Norman invasion, if we had not the contemporary narratives of Giraldus Cambrensis and the anonymous Anglo-Norman *trouveur*.

The interest created in England by the events which followed the landing of king Dermot's Anglo-Norman allies induced Giraldus Cambrensis to compile his two works on the condition and history of Ireland in the latter part of the twelfth century, the *TOPOGRAPHY OF IRELAND*, and the *HIBERNIA EXPUGNATA*, or history of the Anglo-Norman invasion, of which a detailed account is given in the present volume (pp. 117, 118), and which are certainly the most important records of the history of Ireland in that age. The first, although largely disfigured with the prejudices of the writer, as well as those of the time, is still the only account of Ireland and Irishmen, as they existed at that period, which we possess ; and we have nothing therefore with which to attest its accuracy so as to separate always the true from the false, but it probably contains more of truth than some modern writers have been willing to admit. We have every reason to consider Giraldus's history of the Anglo-Norman invasion as a carefully written history, and as perfectly accurate in its general details, and in the sentiments and motives which are attributed to the various personages who acted prominent parts in it ; the writer was intimately acquainted with those personages, and received his information from their own lips ; it was evidently his wish to give a true history, and the excusable partiality which leads him to eulogize his own relatives is not of that character which detracts in any important degree from the high character of his work. In one or two instances his memory, or some confusion in his notes, seems to have led him into an error in the order of minor events, which we are enabled to detect by another, and a very important document, the *ANGLO-NORMAN POEM ON THE CONQUEST OF IRELAND BY HENRY THE SECOND*, the work of a contemporary *trouveur*, or bard, who had gathered his information partly from Irishmen, and who, by his acquaintance with the interpreter of king Dermot, named Maurice Regan, who had been employed in all the transactions between the Anglo-Normans and their Irish allies, had the advantage of hearing the version of the eventful story as told by the latter, which, it must be avowed, confirms in a remarkable manner the general accuracy of Giraldus

Cambrensis. The two works of Giraldus were printed in the original Latin by the antiquary Camden, in his collection of English chronicles published under the title of *Anglica, Normannica, Cambrica, a veteribus scripta* ; an old English translation of the History (*Hibernia Expugnata*), by John Hooker, “ of Excester,” will be found in the first volume of Holinshed’s Chronicles. The Anglo-Norman poem is preserved in a manuscript on vellum of the thirteenth century, now in the archiepiscopal library at Lambeth, but which was once in the possession of sir George Carew, who made a very incorrect analysis of it in English, which was printed in the last century in Harris’s *Hibernica*. The poem, however, which is imperfect at the end, and wants a few lines at the beginning, was printed in the original language in 1836 ; but until the present work was published, it has only been known to the historians of Ireland through Carew’s analysis. Had this poem been preserved without mutilation, we should probably have known the name of the writer.

After the age of Giraldus Cambrensis, an English writer from time to time gives us an interesting, if slight, glimpse of the state of the sister island, which helps to fill up the more barren records of the English pale, or the wearisome and partial list of Irish plundering expeditions. Among these accidental records we may merely mention, as the most curious, the short narrative of the expedition of king John (p. 128 of the present volume), the account of the death of the earl of Pembroke, given by Matthew Paris (p. 140), the Anglo-Norman and Irish Songs (pp. 152, 163), the story of the persecutions carried on against the lady Alice Kyteler and her friends (p. 172), Froissart’s account of the first visit of king Richard II. to Ireland (p. 206), and the French poem on the second expedition of the same monarch (p. 211).

There also comes to our assistance now another class of historical documents in the shape of a few Anglo-Irish chronicles, which give us some of the historical traditions of the English pale, as they were preserved, apparently, in its principal towns and in some of the great English families. The oldest record of this kind is one which, unfortunately, has not yet been published, and is therefore inaccessible, although the original manuscript is said to exist in Ireland—the ANNALS of John Clynn, a Franciscan friar of Kilkenny, who flourished about the middle of the fourteenth century. A brief Latin chronicle of Ireland, closing with the year 1370, was printed in Camden’s *Britannia*. A historical manuscript, known as the BOOK OF HOWTH, and compiled at different times in the latter part of the fifteenth and earlier part of the sixteenth centuries, contains a number of notices, of different degrees of authenticity, relating to the affairs of the English pale during that period. It is understood to have furnished the greater part of the materials for a chronicle compiled at the end of the sixteenth century, known as HANMER’S CHRONICLE. Earlier in this century, another ecclesiastic of Kilkenny, James Grace, prior of St. John’s, compiled a chronicle known as GRACE’S ANNALS OF IRELAND ; and another similar work appeared subsequently under the same title of ANNALS OF IRELAND, by Thady Dowling chancellor of Leighlin. Two or three other chronicles of Ireland were composed shortly before, or soon after, the year 1600, such as that published in Holinshed, and the compilations of Marleborough, Campion, and Stanihurst, which contain valuable notices taken from documents no longer known, or from the traditions of the English pale.

A variety of circumstances had called the attention of Englishmen to the affairs of Ireland during the reign of queen Elizabeth, which led to a number of publications on the history of that island, and on the condition of its inhabitants, and by these we are first made tolerably well acquainted with its internal state. The manners of the Irish and the state of the country are now pictured to us by such writers as Spencer and others, who lived among

them ; and the contemporary history is told in a number of printed tracts, written by the persons who had served in that island either as soldiers, statesmen, or lawyers.

We have yet said nothing of the most important and authentic of all historical documents, the OFFICIAL RECORDS of the English government. From the thirteenth century, these are preserved in Ireland in great abundance, and some small portions of them have already been published under the direction of the Irish Record Commission. These documents, however, are mostly of a class which do little towards explaining the facts they announce or authenticate ; and of themselves they offer but a dry outline, often only a list of names, which it requires the more intelligible, though less certain, statements of the chronicler, the narratives of contemporaries, or the still less substantial traditions of subsequent times, to clothe them in an intelligible form. Some of these records are, it is true, more significant than others ; and this is especially the case with that very important class of documents which are generally classed under the title of STATE PAPERS. A few letters and reports on the affairs of Ireland before the sixteenth century, written by those who were employed in them, have been preserved, and some of them have been made use of in the following pages. From the reign of Henry VIII. downwards, they become infinitely more numerous, and are found in large quantities in the State Paper Office, in some other public offices, in great public libraries, such as that of Lambeth Palace, and in the private archives of the descendants of many of the statesmen who distinguished themselves in Irish history from the reign of Elizabeth to more modern times. A considerable mass of these valuable materials has been given to the public in the second and third volumes of the *State Papers published under the authority of his Majesty's Commission*, which contain the whole of the papers relating to Ireland during the reign of Henry VIII. preserved in the State Paper Office, in the Chapter House at Westminster, and among the manuscript collections of sir George Carew in Lambeth library. These are freely used in the following pages. It is to be regretted that the slow progress of the publications of the English State Paper Commission has not yet placed within our reach the similar documents of some of the subsequent reigns.

We have thus slightly pointed out the general character of the various records of Irish history, which, emanating from different sources, must be examined, sifted, and compared together, to form a connected view of the condition and revolutions of that country previous to the reign of Elizabeth. The general use of printing has multiplied to an indefinite degree the materials of history subsequent to that period. Almost every one who had a complaint to make, or an opinion to give, now laid it before the public through the agency of the press, and controversial pamphlets, personal narratives, and a long list of other historical and political tracts, followed each other in quick succession. This mighty engine of modern civilization was soon made subservient to the publication of some of the older materials of history, and the greater interest which Ireland daily excited, encouraged men like sir John Davies, sir George Carew, sir James Ware, the learned Ussher, and others, to collect documents and commit them to print. The religious animosities, which now became hot and implacable, led to the publication on a still more extensive scale, by the zealous Catholics of that age, of another class of Irish records, the *Saints' Lives*, which we have not mentioned before, because they are not only less authentic than many of the others, but because they really add little to our knowledge of historical events. They consist chiefly of traditions and legends which have no local position in our annals ; although, compiled chiefly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, they contain some illustrations of the condition of Irish society at that period.

The power of the Irish septs was utterly broken in the wars which followed the great insurrection of 1641, but the misgovernment, or at least the mistaken measures, which had so long weighed upon that country, still remained in a great degree unreformed. The struggle between contending races and parties was, however, removed from the field to the senate, and, with the exception of a few wild and senseless outbreaks, we must now quit the records of the wars of contending chieftains for those of the less sanguinary combats of contending orators and the intrigues of politicians. Political pamphlets became every day more numerous, and these were soon followed by the more systematic and continued strife of newspapers and political journals. It would be useless here to attempt to give a description of the various classes of materials for the history of the last and present centuries.

The interest just mentioned as having been excited by the affairs of Ireland under the Tudors and the Stuarts soon led to various attempts at compiling the history of the island. One of the earliest of these is *THE CHRONICLES OF IRELAND*, published in Holinshed's Chronicle, derived entirely from English sources. About the same time an Irish parish priest, a native of Tipperary, named Geoffrey Keating, who had studied at Salamanca in Spain, was occupied in compiling a history of his own country, chiefly from the native authorities. *KEATING'S HISTORY OF IRELAND* was written in Irish, and exhibits a total want of historical criticism in its author. The original has not been published, but the earlier part of it, which consists of a compendium of the wild fables of the bards relating to the earlier history of their country, has been translated into English more than once, and the translations have gone through several editions since the commencement of the last century. Philip O'Sullivan, a descendant of the O'Sullivans of the county of Cork, who was a sea-captain in the Spanish service under Philip IV., and was therefore strongly prejudiced in his religious and political opinions, published in 1621, a quarto volume entitled *HISTORIC CATHOLICS HIBERNIÆ COMPENDIUM*, which gives a sketch of the history of Ireland from the earliest times, and especially of the wars in the reign of Elizabeth and James I. from 1588 to 1618. The author, indeed, gave the earlier history as an introduction to that of his own times.

These works were followed by the more able compilations of sir James Ware, and by the still more complete history of Ireland from the English invasion to the reign of Charles II., published in two volumes 4to. in 1689, under the title *HIBERNIA ANGLICANA*, by sir Richard Cox, a native of Bandon in the county of Cork, who held successively the high offices of judge of the Common Pleas and lord chancellor of Ireland. A few years before this, in 1665, a Catholic ecclesiastic of Ireland, John Lynch, a native of Galway, had published a history of Ireland in Latin, intended chiefly as a confutation of Giraldus Cambrensis, and therefore entitled *CAMBRENSIS EVERSUS*, or *Cambremsis Overthrown*; and in 1685 appeared *O'FLAHERTY'S OGYGIA*, a very learned work on the earlier history of Ireland, written also in Latin. An English version of this work appeared in 1793. Roderick O'Flaherty, its author, was a gentleman farmer of the barony of Moycullen in the county of Galway, who died in 1718, at the advanced age of eighty-nine.

In the latter half of the last century appeared two important works on Irish history, the *History of Ireland from the earliest period to the English invasion*, by Sylvester O'Halloran, who has given the fabulous history more fully than Keating himself, and the *History of Ireland from the invasion under Henry II. to modern times*, by the Rev. Dr. Thomas Leland, senior fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and prebendary of St. Patrick's. The latter work is especially valuable from the extent of Leland's researches, and from the great use he made of records then existing in Dublin, and of other manuscripts to which he had access, so that it has become as it were the foundation on which modern histories of Ireland have been built.

But the labours of Dr. O'Connor, of sir William Betham, and of other learned and diligent antiquaries in Ireland, as well as the publications of the Record and State Paper Commissions, and of the various societies now established in Ireland for the publication of historical records, have added greatly to the stores of information which Leland had at his command.

It will be seen by this slight outline of the materials of Irish history which now exist, how wide is the field of research on which the historian is necessarily thrown. Till the eighth century at least, the history is traditional and uncertain, and we can have little hesitation in considering the greater portion of it as fabulous. The more authentic records appear to have commenced about the time of the first Danish invasions, and perhaps arose from the wish of the monks to preserve in their different houses memorials of the severe persecutions to which they had been exposed in the desolating wars which followed the appearance of the Northmen on the Irish coasts. The outline of events during the ninth, tenth, and eleventh centuries, has a general appearance of truth, although, from our ignorance of the exact manner in which they were originally recorded, it is impossible to try them by minute criticism. The long and often successful struggle which the Irish sustained against the Danes, must be ascribed to their habitual practice in the predatory warfare which characterised these invasions, which were much more fatal in countries more advanced in social civilization. That the Danish invasions had everywhere a demoralizing effect, there can be little doubt ; and it is not improbable that in Ireland they assisted in breaking up kingdoms where there was something more like settled government and peace than we find in the numerous petty principalities that divided the island when we become intimately acquainted with its position. But the extraordinary glory and prosperity which characterizes the heroic ages of Irish history, we owe no doubt to the glowing imagination of the bards. The tendency of English supremacy ought to have been, and no doubt was intended to have been, to reduce the anarchy by which Ireland was torn under the chiefs of the native septs beneath one paramount government and law ; but this tendency was thwarted by the peculiar character of the times, and its real effect was to throw among the already disorganized population new septs, of a foreign race, with new chiefs, more turbulent even than the natives themselves. It is the unceasing and monotonous struggle of these discordant elements, enlivened but a little from time to time by the affairs of the English pale, that must occupy the historian from the twelfth century to the sixteenth. Society in Ireland had then become so thoroughly disorganized, and the animosities and feuds with which the island was filled, as well as the hatred towards the government of the English pale, had become so inveterate, that the policy which might have been pursued with advantage to all parties in the middle of the twelfth century, was no longer possible, and it required another long and sanguinary struggle before the power of the English government was sufficiently strong to enforce that order which had been so long unknown in Green Erin. Our materials for the history of this struggle are more numerous and diversified in character, and it is therefore far more intelligible. It required still a century and a half to render the English government paramount in Ireland, and then the country was left a prey to a multitude of grievances which had become so deeply rooted in the course of ages, and which, from the peculiar agency by which that power had been established, were obstinately persisted in, as though they were looked upon as the rights of conquerors. The history of Ireland from the reign of Charles II. to the present time, is that of a continual struggle for the redress of grievances. During a large portion of that period England itself had been the scene of a bitter struggle between political factions ; and it must be confessed that the government of Ireland has too often been treated as little better than a plaything in the midst of those factions, and that, till recently, its grievances have seldom received the due attention which its position as an important part of the British empire required.

The circumstances of the political condition of Ireland, its varying relations with the English government, and, above all, its petty animosities, influenced in no small degree the character of the materials of its history, and the spirit in which they were received. The Irish annalists previous to the sixteenth century are much less hostile to the English than panegyrists of the particular septs to which they happened to belong. But the hostility of the natives to a foreign race had naturally enough increased among them the spirit of nationality, even to an exaggerated degree, and, amid the sufferings and exasperations of the present, they listened with more fervour than ever to the recitals of their bards, which told of the glory of Ireland in ancient days, until their poetic fables became a part of every Irishman's belief, and even sober historians found it difficult to escape this influence. At the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, there was an evident desire in England to become acquainted with the real character and condition of the Irish, with a view to ameliorating it, and the English writers of that age speak of the natives of the sister island with far greater indulgence than had been usual in this country ; but this feeling soon gave way before the religious fanaticism which characterized the succeeding age, and the dreadful hatred of everything Irish which followed the rising of 1641. Irish history began now to be written more than ever in the party spirit which seemed to have taken possession of everybody's heart. English writers appeared to have for their grand object to throw contempt on the Irish character, and to make a parade of Irish disloyalty, Irish turbulence, and Irish cruelty. The protestants were actuated during this period by an exaggerated horror of everything papistical, while the catholics of France and Spain exerted themselves to embitter the hatred which their less enlightened brethren in Ireland bore to the English heretics, until this island of the far west seemed fated to be the spot in which the two creeds were to weary each other out in mutual destruction. Foreign intrigues now, indeed, exerted no small influence in keeping up the discontent and agitation which reigned in the sister island. The spirit thus raised was more violent and more difficult to appease, even than that left by the long sanguinary struggle of the middle ages, and it has continued more or less to animate the generality of writers on Irish affairs down to our own days. Too many historical writers have lost sight of historical truth in the intensity of their prejudices, and others seem to have written history with no other object than to strengthen and perpetuate them. Leland's History of Ireland has the rare merit of being in a remarkable measure free from these national prejudices.

At the same time it must be allowed that, with such a mass of discordant materials, not only too often prejudiced in themselves, but which have been intentionally disfigured and misinterpreted by writers who have used them, it is no easy task to write an impartial history of Ireland, or even to examine and compare the various records of the events of past ages, so as to obtain the nearest approximation to truth which can now be expected. Fortunately for us, much has now been done to relieve us from some portion of the latter task, and we have not hesitated to profit by the labours of numerous predecessors, such as Ware, Coxe, Leland, and Moore. We have fortunately been enabled, by the recent publication of Irish chronicles, and numerous other documents totally unknown to them, as well as by the communication of many historical records relating to Ireland from collections not generally accessible, to add considerably to the knowledge of Irish history derived from former historians, and, in many instances, to correct their statements. We have endeavoured, and shall continue to endeavour, to be strictly impartial, to abstain from entering into political or religious discussions, and to relate the events, in the order they present themselves, in the true light which a comparison of the records appears to throw upon them, without any leaning to one side or to the other. In this course we have hitherto proceeded, anxious, if possible, while we write without prejudice ourselves, to avoid shocking the prejudices of others. We have given at some length the primeval history of the Irish kingdoms, as sung by the bards, and the early history of

Christianity in Ireland, as handed down to us by the medieval ecclesiastics, because, however great may be the portion of mere tradition and fable which they contain, they have become so deeply enwrapped in all our notions of the history of Ireland, that we could not reject them without incurring the charge of neglecting a not unimportant portion of our work. To criticise or examine such stories would lead to no satisfactory result. For this latter reason, also, we have given the subsequent history prior to the Anglo-Norman invasion, simply as we gather it from the native chronicles. After the establishment of an English government in Ireland, it becomes more necessary to study our materials critically, and use them with caution, and this necessity increases as we proceed.

The history of Ireland ; from the earliest period of the Irish annals, to the present time ([n.d.]

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