

This Little Western Island

Sketches of Irish History, Antiquities, Religion, Customs, and Manners

By

The Author of “ Three Years in Italy.”

Selina Martin

With an Introductory Preface

BY Charlotte Elizabeth

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IF the addition of the following historical sketch of early Irish history to the many that have preceded it, should be deemed a work of supererogation, I (must take to myself no small share of the blame. The dear friend who supplies it originally wrote a part of it in a series of letters, for the pages of the Christian Lady’s Magazine ; and it proved so acceptable to many readers, that I could not but warmly recommend her making it a separate publication. With this design, the Letters have been carefully revised, and several portions of them re-written. Considerable and valuable additions of interesting historical facts have also been given, and the whole has been arranged and printed in separate Chapters.

It is strange that, in the face of multiplied “ Histories of Ireland,” the ignorance prevailing with respect to the earlier periods of that history is greater than any that we like to plead guilty to, in reference to the most remote, barbarous lands. In England it is wholly overlooked ; and even within the limits of the Green Isle itself there has been no lack of the same oblivious prejudice. I say deliberately, prejudice ; for what else could lead a people, a refined, educated people, to acquiesce in the monstrous anomaly of viewing their native country in the light of a *terra incognita* ; a land whose splendid relics of by-gone architectural and other grandeur, were fitted only for some enterprising antiquary to grope about in ; and the stirring legends of ancient glory suitable but for the lips of those who, having never learned to despise their native language, might recount the deeds of other days over the dying embers of a turf fire, in the mud cabin of some dreary bog.

To these two parties—to the persevering antiquary, and the patriotic peasant, we do indeed mainly owe what has been preserved to us of Ireland’s early fame ; and the more attentively we examine them, the better they are found to harmonize in their testimony, respectively borne. The Christian will not under-value such helps to a right view of God’s dealings with this most interesting country : he will trace in her earliest conflicts, in her intestine wars, and fierce struggles of rival aspirants, the ever-changeful, yet always consistent manifestation of the power with which the god of this world holds fast a captive prize. Always intellectual, enterprising, energetic, the ancient race of Ireland might have been led “ to feel after God, if haply they might find him,” had not the subtle enemy perpetually embroiled them in mutual quarrels, at once originating from, accompanying, and producing a thirst for conquest, and for revenge. At length the morning of truth dawned on the combatants ; their swords were sheathed, and the powers of their minds being directed from above into the right track, they became a light to the surrounding nations, heralds of the gospel throughout Europe, so

vividly did they reflect the day-beam from on high, alike in their lives and in their writings. Yet again, Satan, prevailed to draw a cloud over this brilliant sky, and Popery re-enacted with double fury, and more ruinous success, the part, performed by Paganism of old.

Upon this branch of the subject I do not now enter, since the design of the present volume does not embrace it ; but I view with deep interest the progress of this species of knowledge among the youth of the growing generation, earnestly hoping that they will turn it to account for the benefit of a country and a race, to which all we of English birth, and all of English descent now naturalized in Ireland, are bound by ties not to be broken. We are bound by responsibilities too little heeded of men, but very distinct and very awfully strong in the sight of God. “ Brotherly kindness” has, indeed, of late years, and among sincere Christians, taken place of that contempt with which the native race had been for centuries regarded, and which was retorted by them with ten-fold scorn and hatred against those whom they were taught to designate Saxon intruders. In no country under heaven, probably, was the command to “ honour all men” so universally set at nought as in Ireland ; and when we become a little better acquainted than we usually are with the records that every peasant is familiarized to from his cradle, we may more readily comprehend the root and the growth of that rancorous hostility and disdain with which they too generally regard us. Popery has unchristianized them, as she does every people enclosed in her net ; and the deeds of their pagan forefathers wear in their eyes no repulsive aspect : they accord well with the genius and spirit of the present race, who long to emulate their exploits, and to drive from the soil such as they are taught to regard as natural enemies ; and who are indeed the natural enemies of the evil spirit now working in the children of disobedience, inasmuch as they are, or at least all profess to be, and very many are, the faithful soldiers and servants of Christ. We may turn a right knowledge of early Irish history to a far more practical use than the history of any other country, seeing to what purpose it is applied by the lineal descendants of those of whom it treats ; and by conceding a little to them on the point of ancestral pride, and realizing in ourselves what its fruits must be, where the humbling spirit of a pure faith has not cast down imaginations, and things that exalt themselves against Christ, we may discover a shorter and surer avenue to their warm hearts, than we have, generally, yet availed ourselves of.

The period of which my dear friend has principally treated, was anterior not only to the introduction, but to the very invention of Popery. The policy of those deadly enemies to Ireland, who lord it over the faith and the consciences of her aboriginal race, is to identify the two ; to represent all the famous warriors of old as fighting under and for the crucifix, and by the most impudent anachronisms to bolster up their assumptions. It is no small matter to be enabled to combat this formidable error : to shew, by means of a correct acquaintance with the real antiquities of Irish history, the falsehood of these tales—the utter disconnexion of such epoch with the modern innovations of Popery. On these grounds I am anxious to see my friend’s little volume in every family, every school, and its contents impressed on the memory of our youngsters, while those of maturer age may privately acquire a lesson, perhaps too long deferred. I would fain apply to this beloved land, what is said of another afflicted race, “ It is the time of Jacob’s trouble ; but we shall be saved out of it.” Sure I am, that to lend a hand in any way to the blessed work of her country’s deliverance, or even to the amelioration of any among the numerous evils that oppress her race, would be to my Christian sister a reward far beyond what the poor fleeting breath of human applause, or all the hoards of worldly wealth could possibly bestow ; and to the blessing of God I feel it a privilege to commend this unobtrusive little volume, knowing that He can cause the weakest effort of a willing hand to prosper in the great work that His servants have to do.

CHARLOTTE ELIZABETH.

Introduction.

IN order to interest young persons in the past history of their country, the following Sketches have been prepared. The information is condensed into the smallest compass, that young readers may be saved from the toil and weariness of exploring long, uninteresting, and dubious narratives. The compilers of Irish history generally attempt nothing new ; they walk in the steps of those who have preceded them with little variation ; but there is still an unbeaten path—a wide and unexplored field open for investigation.

We would first take a glance at our country in the dark days of paganism, and then pass on to the time when the Sun of Righteousness arose and shed a glory over this little western island, while the greater part of the earth's inhabitants were still involved in the midnight of heathenism. That there was such a day of brightness in Ireland, and that the Irish were then an enlightened people, there are too many concurring testimonies to render it any longer a doubtful assertion. The sacred Scriptures were readily received by the people ; and, reading them for themselves in simplicity and truth, they drew from their pages the pure doctrines of the gospel. Romanism had not corrupted or biassed their minds—there was no false teacher to forbid the laity the use of that divine revelation, which God himself gave with an express command, that it should be perused by all, and taught, not to grown persons only, but to children, as they sat in the house, or walked by the way. The Irish shewed their veneration and love for the Scriptures by their care of them. The small boxes in which they preserved them still exist, as monuments of their respect for the sacred volume. This important fact is fully established, by means of the laborious researches of several well known authors whose works are before the public. The reader is particularly referred to the writings of the Rev. Christopher Anderson, and Henry Monck Mason, L.L.D., to whose instructive volumes, as well as to those of Sir W. Betham, the writer of these pages is much indebted.

Two of the principal historians of Ireland are Keating and Leland. Keating has commenced his history, which was written in Irish, at so early a period that it is impossible, from the obscurity in which they are involved, to substantiate or place implicit credence in all his details. In the preface to the edition of his history, which was translated into English by Dermot O'Connor, antiquary of the kingdom of Ireland, and published in 1809, it is stated that Keating studied in the college of Salamanca, in Spain, for twenty-three years. On his return to Ireland he was appointed parish priest of Tybrud. He was considered to be learned, very zealous in religion, and of a patriotic spirit. In the zealous discharge of his sacerdotal duties he exasperated the temper of a man who became an inveterate enemy, and obliged him to take refuge from his persecution in the retired fastnesses of the wood of Aharla, which lies between the Galtee mountains and Tipperary. In this concealment, he wrote his history, not for the desire of gain, but for the benefit of his countrymen.

His esteem for the Irish language is described in the following lines :—

The Irish language is completely sweet ;
In aid of it no foreign e'er did meet.
A copious, free, keen, and extending voice,
And mellifluent, brief ; for mirth most choice.
Although the Hebrew language be the first,
And that, for learning, Latin be the best.
Yet still, from them, the Irish ne'er was found.
One word to borrow, to make its proper sound.

He died in the year 1644—at least that is the date of the inscription to his memory in raised letters over the door of the church at Tybrud.

There are many incredible legends in his history, for in those early times people believed in superstitions dreams and visions which at present would not be listened to. The reasons which Keating assigns in the preface to his work for writing his History of Ireland, were the means he possessed, from his knowledge of the Irish language, of becoming acquainted with public chronicles and ancient authors which enabled him to rescue his country from the fabulous relations which misrepresented the character of its people, and to raise their memories from the oblivion in which they had been buried. He says, “ I trace the antiquity of the Irish much higher, and with better authority than other writers, and give a particular account of the most ancient Irish, the Gadelians ; and if any one should suppose that I bestow too large encomiums upon that brave and illustrious tribe, or speak with partiality of their exploits, let it be considered that I have no temptation to be unjust, being myself originally of English extraction.”

He then states that he is induced to write his history, because every modern historian who had written on Ireland, while they commended the country, despised the people ; and that he was led to pursue the untrodden path of searching the original records, in order to vindicate the character of his countrymen, and compile “ a true and impartial history.” After eulogising the character of the ancient Irish for their bravery and learning, he remarks that “ no people in the world took more care to preserve the authority of their public records,” and that these were usually presented in their public assemblies in the presence of “ the most learned and eminent antiquarians in the country.”

These records, written in the Irish language, he adds, “ contain particular relations of all the memorable battles and transactions that happened in Ireland from the first account of time, and give an account of the genealogies of the principal families in the island.” He considers these records as good authority, from the consideration that they were the production of “ above two hundred chroniclers and antiquarians, whose business was to preserve and record all actions and affairs of consequence.” These men had revenues and salaries settled upon them for their services ; and their annals and histories were submitted for examination to public assemblies, composed of persons of rank, and eminent for learning, who met for that very purpose.

These chronicles, he believed, from the number of the public registers in whose hands copies were placed, were never wholly destroyed by the Danish invaders ; and this, he states, was an advantage that no other country in Europe possessed ; for the Romans, Gauls, Goths, Saxons, Saracens, Moors, and Danes, generally suppressed or destroyed the public records of the countries they invaded ; but in Ireland this was rendered impossible by the multiplicity of copies, and the care with which they were preserved by the antiquarians. And as to the accuracy of the genealogies, Keating observes, that there were in Ireland a learned body of men called Druids or sooth-sayers, whose peculiar duty it was to take a strict account of them, “ and also to record the most memorable transactions that happened in the kingdom.”

The Rev. Dr. Leland, Fellow of Trinity College, published his History of Ireland about the middle of the last century ; but with the exception of a short “ preliminary discourse on the ancient state of that kingdom,” he commences his history from the invasion of Henry II. In this “ Discourse,” he states, that “ it is no part of his design to explore the antiquities of the Irish to decide on the authenticity of their scattered records ;” and he further adds, that he “ is particularly disqualified for such attempts by being totally unacquainted with the Irish language.”

Dr. Johnson has given his opinion of Leland's history in the following words :—" Dr. Leland begins his history too late ; the ages which deserve an exact inquiry are those ; for such there were, when Ireland was the school of the West—the quiet habitation of sanctity and literature. If you could give a history, though imperfect, of the Irish nation, from its conversion to Christianity to the invasion from England, you would amplify knowledge with new views and new objects."

We have endeavoured to follow the advice of Dr. Johnson, in giving a history of our country until the arrival of Henry II. It is not designed, nor would it, indeed, be practicable, to give a closely connected narrative of early events in this country ; but in addition to the most important and best authenticated facts of Irish history, we have studied to introduce a variety of valuable information relating to its antiquities, and the religion, customs, and manners of its inhabitants, which, it is to be hoped, will prove interesting and instructive to many, especially to our young readers.

A continuation of the history from the period of the English invasion is now preparing for publication.

S. M.

Clapham Common,
February, 1844.

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SKETCHES OF IRISH HISTORY

Ireland's first name in the native language—First inhabitants called Firbolgs—Institution of Tailtean, and tilts and tournaments—Famous Coronation-stone called Lia fail—The use made of it—Its removal to Scotland, and afterwards to Westminster—An account of the Milesians—The Scythian race of kings—Leaber Gabala—Fileas—Sir Isaac Newton's account of the first settlers—Arts, navigation, and letters, introduced into Europe by the Phenicians—The Irish Bethluisnon—The Milesian invaders encounter a storm—One of their vessels wrecked on Scielg Mithill—Account of the island—Landing of three Milesian brothers—Battle of Tailtean—Death of Amergin—Ireland divided between Heremon and Heber—Contention between the brothers—Death of Heber,

IRELAND'S first name, in the native language, was *Inis na Bhfioldkbhuidhe*, which signifies The Woody Isle. It was also called *Inis Alga*, The Noble Isle, and was inhabited by a race of Belgians called Firbolgs by the Irish which claimed the same descent as the Scythians or Gadelians, originally from Magog, the son of Japhet.

This wandering tribe (the sons of Nemedius) were driven from their former settlement in Greece by harsh treatment. In order to keep down their growing power, they were compelled to carry earth in leathern bags from the valleys to the tops of the highest mountains and craggy rocks, that those places which nature had made bare and barren, might be rendered fertile. From this employment their name is derived. *Fir* signifies men ; *Bolg*, bag. Ireland became their refuge and resting-place from hard labours and tyranny, until they were again driven from their strongholds. New-settlers arrived from Greece by whom these older inhabitants were overcome and mostly slain.

Mention is made of one of the last of the Firbolgs, Lughaidh, (surnamed the Long-Handed), King of Ireland, as having instituted the assembly of Tailtean, and appointed tilts and tournaments resembling the old Olympic games which were observed every year upon the first day of August ; a day still distinguished by the name of Lughnansa, now called *Lammas*.

Ireland was called Inisfail from a famous stone named Lia fail which derived its name from the city Falias, whence the Tuatha de Danans removed it to Ireland.

“ From this strange stone did Inisfail obtain
Its name, a tract surrounded by the main.”

It was also called the fatal stone or stone of destiny. Hector Boetius in his history of Scotland calls it Saxum fatale. It was held in high veneration as an enchanted stone, and is mentioned by many historians as having the peculiar property of making a terrific sound, resembling thunder, so loud as to be heard at a great distance when any of the royal Scythian race was crowned upon it ; but the stone was silent if the elect sovereign was not of that race.

“ Unless the fixed decrees of fate give way,
The Scots shall govern, and the sceptre sway,
Where'er this stone they find, and its dread sound obey.”

All the different monarchs of Ireland, in succession, were crowned upon this stone, until the year of our Lord 513, in the reign of Murtough, (the son of Earca) whose brother Fergus the Great, having subdued the Scottish nation and obtained the crown, sent to Ireland for the stone of destiny that on it he might be crowned and thus secure the succession to the Scythian race. Upon so great a consideration, Murtough, willingly yielding to his brother's wishes, parted with this treasure ; and although, as Keating observes, from the birth of the Redeemer the stone lost its great charm of sending forth solemn sounds, still it was held in high veneration for some innate virtue it was supposed to possess.

Some of our readers may have seen the old chair in Westminster Abbey in which this famous stone is now placed. In Rapin's history of England we learn that in the year 1296, Edward the First, when he so easily obtained the title of Scotland's King, took possession of the “ stone on which the inauguration of their kings was performed. The people of Scotland had all along placed in that stone a kind of fatality. They fancied that whilst it should remain in their country their state should remain unshaken ; but the moment it should be removed from thence great revolutions would ensue. For this reason Edward had it conveyed from Scone that he might make the Scots believe the time of the dissolution of their monarchy was come, and put an end to all hope of recovering their liberty.

“ Kenith, King of the Scots, having made a great slaughter of the Picts near the monastery of Scone, placed a stone there enclosed in a wooden chair for the inauguration of the kings. It had been brought out of Ireland into *Argile* and King Edward caused it to be conveyed to Westminster. On it was engraven this distich :—

“ ‘ Ni fallat Fatum, Scoti quocumque locatum,
Iuveniunt lapidem, regnare tenentur ibidem.’ ”—CAMB.

Keating remarks that in its present position under the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey, the prophecy concerning it seems to be accomplished ; for the royal family of the

Stuarts succeeded to the throne of England soon after the removal of this stone. This family was lineally descended from the Scythian race, from Maine Leamhna son of Corc, King of Munster, son of Luighdheach, son of Oilioll, son of Fiacha Muilleathan, King of Munster, son of Eogan Mor, son of Oilioll Ollum, King of Munster, who descended lineally from Heberus Fionn, son of Milesius, [1] King of Spain, every prince of which illustrious family, successively received the crown upon this stone.

Fergus the Great, a descendant from Heremon, was the first King of Scotland of the Scythian or Gadelian race. He subdued the kingdom and was the first absolute monarch of Scotland who acknowledged no foreign yoke. Some of the Picts had the title of Kings of Scotland ; yet they were no more than tributary princes to the Kings of Ireland from the reign of Heremon who drove them out of Ireland and compelled them to settle in Scotland.

According to the testimony of an Irish antiquary, “ the Irish kings of the line of O’Donell, sat upon the summit of a hill, surrounded with the principal nobility and gentry of their country ; one of the chief of them advancing towards him presented him with a straight white wand, and upon the delivery of it he used this form—‘ Receive O King the command of thine own country and distribute justice impartially among thy subjects.’ ”

The ceremony of the rod may appear trifling, but it contained “ an excellent moral ; it was straight and white to recommend uprightness in judgment, and to intimate that a prince should rule with clean hands unstained with the blood of his people.”

We shall pass over the details of the enchantments and spells by which the Tuatha [2] de Danans possessed themselves of this noble island. They are as absurd as Keating’s confused account of the first invasion of Ireland before the flood. From mysterious and fabulous legends he must have taken them.

The next invaders and conquerors of Ireland, the Gadelians, seem to have been a branch of the same tribe, sprung from the same Scythian ancestor, Magog. Josephus observes that the Grecians call the Scythians by the name of Magogi because they were the descendants of Magog. Historians give them the character of a brave and generous people.

We come now to inquire who the Milesians were, since from various sources of information, we are taught to believe, that they were the true race which established themselves in Ireland.

Policronicon and other foreign authors call the Milesians, or posterity of Gadelas, Scyti, or Scythians. Sir James Ware says, “ The learned know how common the name of the Scythians is among ancient writers, and it is a received opinion of the most diligent inquirers into the antiquities of Ireland, that the European or Celto-Scythians, divers times sent colonies into Ireland.” From these Scythians came that race of kings in number 181, who ruled Ireland for so long a period. These were all of the same blood and descendants, in a direct line, from Milesius and Gadelas. According to the account of Walsingham in his Hypodigma, “ after the host of Pharaoh was over-whelmed in the Red Sea the Egyptians drove out a Scythian prince who resided among them lest he should take advantage of the weakness of the government and make an attempt upon the crown. When he was expelled the country with all his followers, he came to Spain, where he and his people lived many years and became numerous, and from thence they came into Ireland.”

Another account states that at a time of great scarcity, when by reason of a long period of drought a famine was produced in Spain, these people having great confidence in the bravery

of their soldiers, resolved on seeking out a more plentiful land to dwell in and being directed by Caicer, the chief among their priests or Druids, who predicted that the posterity of Gadelas should obtain possession of a western island, they steered their course westward, and discovered our Emerald Isle called Erin, which signifies the island of the West.

There is an old book entitled *Leaber Gabala*, i. e. the Book of Invasions, the production of a very ancient author which contains the accounts given by the native Fileas who were the learned men or philosophers of those early times. Their accounts of the invasions and first inhabitants of Ireland generally coincide with foreign testimonies.

That Ireland was peopled by a colony of ancient Spaniards is a generally received opinion. There are many circumstances which corroborate the truth of the ancient records in this statement ; and the Irish character still partakes of that which the Universal History gives of the ancient Spaniards,—“ a brave, free, noble, and hospitable nation ; possessed of all the virtues of the old Celts and inheriting fewer of their vices than any other of their descendants.”

In Sir Isaac Newton’s *Chronology* (Dublin edit.) a colony of Spaniards is mentioned, by the name of Scots, [3] or Scythians, settled in Ireland in the fourth age of the world.

In the accounts of the native Fileas, nearly the same record is transmitted to us. The Fileas in their several departments, took in all the subjects of poetry and became not only the directors of the public taste, but also of manners. The Irish monarchs were ever attended by their Fileas, Bards, and Croteries, i.e. musicians, both in court and camp, from whom they received information, advice, and entertainment. A saying of one of these is transmitted to us. Teig Mac Darg, a Filea in the household of O’Brien of Thomond, thus reminded his patron of his own importance, or rather that of his profession,—“ Though it be every man’s duty to possess the ear of his sovereign with useful truths ; yet it is more particularly the duty of the Filea ; for to such alone it is that princes lend an ear.”

Newton, who in his *Chronology* quotes the best authorities, states, that soon after the dispersion of the Phenicians into the countries bordering on the Mediterranean, the great Egyptian, Sesostri began his conquests and subjected most part of the then known world, and Spain among the rest, to his dominion. This event took place, according to Newton, in the days of Solomon. Spain derived the knowledge of letters from the Greeks and also from the Phenicians, who occupied the sea-coast.

The arts, navigation, and letters, it is well known, were first introduced into Europe by the Phenicians. Our ancient Irish bards celebrate Phenius as the instructor of their ancestors on the continent, and the Phenician alphabet is in part retained in the Irish Bethluisnon.

It is said that the Irish language is called Gaelic from Gadalas ; and from Eberus Fionn the island was named Hibernia, and from Ir, Irlanda. These names, together with Heremon and Amergin, we find among the Milesian invaders.

In approaching the western coast of Desmond, these Spanish invaders encountered a storm, and many of their vessels were foundered. That of Ir is particularly mentioned. There is a small island called Sceilg Mithill, [4] which is a solitary rock some leagues from land. Against it the impetuous waves dashed the vessel of one of the bravest of the Milesian princes, and he was lost with all his followers. Heremon, Heber, and Amergin with difficulty effected a landing,—the first at Inbher [5] Colpa, (now called Drogheda), the two others at Inbher Sceine, in the county of Kerry.

They had many successful encounters with the Tuatha de Danans ; and we find one record in particular of the Battle of Tailtean in which these last were totally defeated, and their kings, together with most of their forces, slain. All who escaped the general slaughter fled for concealment into the woods and caverns of the country, leaving the land to the conquerors. After some time they crept forth from their hiding-places and by degrees becoming familiar with the new inhabitants, obtained the liberty of subjects.

Amergin having lost his life in this contest, the two remaining brothers, Heremon and Heber, divided the country between them.

“ The two commanders shared the isle between them :
The north division Heremon enjoyed—
From the rich vale, where in delightful streams
The Boyne, the darling of the ocean, flows.
Southward from thence, the royal Heber reigned,
And his dominion to the sea extended.”

For about a year there was no rivalry between the brothers : but afterwards their peace was broken, and a fierce contest commenced which ended in the death of Heber, leaving Heremon sole monarch of Erin.

By some it has been said that this account of the invasion of Ireland must be a fabrication by reason of the art of navigation being then unknown, as also the use of the chart and compass, and that there was no such thing as shipping known in the world at that period of time when it is said the Milesians invaded Ireland. But this assertion is founded in the grossest ignorance ; for since the deluge there has at least been some kind of shipping. Noah’s ark was a great ship built by the order and under the direction of the Almighty ; and this vessel may have served as a model for other vessels, whereby soon after the flood men passed from island to island, peopling different nations, according as Divine Providence marked out for them the bounds of their habitation. Several islands, far remote in the seas, were inhabited by the increasing posterity of Noah, long before the use of chart or compass was discovered. To deny this, would be to deny what the most early accounts affirm. And cannot that God who endowed man with intelligence and the means of inventing the chart and compass, be his pilot without them ? Great and small ships are mentioned in the Bible. St. Paul sailed in a large ship, since there were on board 276 souls. There are many records in Irish history of Africans who at several periods of time visited Ireland, and gave accounts of certain stars worshipped by the mariners as their good or evil guides over the deep and distant seas.

Eusebius and other historians speak of the Grecian fleet before Troy, and of much shipping and long voyages, 1249 years before the birth of Christ, when the use of chart or compass was unknown. Why, then, should the Gadelians be excluded, who were accounted an ingenious, adventurous, and warlike people, from seeking out an island for their habitation ?

The stars, Castor and Pollux, were their compass.

And we hear of the storm which Jonah for his disobedience encountered at sea, 862 years before Christ. David, in speaking of the great and wide sea, says, “ There go the ships.” Psalm civ. 25. And again,—“ They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters ; these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep.” Psalm cvii. 23-30.

Ereamhon's reign—The arrival of the Picts in Ireland—Heremon's reign—Iriel, called the Prophet—Eithriel's good reign—Tighermas reigned A.M. 2816—The first golden mine discovered—Different dyes found out—Introduction of idolatrous worship—The place of slaughter—Tighermas struck dead by lightning, in the plain of adoration—Names of places in Ireland, and ornaments found bear testimony to idolatrous worship—Sacred groves and wells—Fairies—Banshee—Great tribunal of the Druids—Baal's fire—Worship of the heavenly bodies

It is stated in the annals of Inisfail, &c., that Ereamhon, the first of the Milesian race in Ireland, reigned fourteen years sole monarch. In the beginning of his reign a people came into Ireland from Thracia. They were called Picts, because they painted their faces with several sorts of colours, which gave them a fierce and horrible appearance. They landed in the east part of Leinster, and fought a battle with the Laganians, in which the prince of Leinster was wounded, and many of his followers slain. When this news reached Ereamhon, he went out with a considerable force against the Picts, whom he completely defeated ; nor would he allow them any footing in Ireland, but sent them off to a country north-east of this island, now called Scotland, to which he also sent many of the progeny of Breogan, called Brigantes, and of the Tuatha de Danans. Cathluan was the first king of the Picts in Albain, or Scotland. After him 60 Pictish kings reigned, ending with Constantine.

Heremon reigned in Ireland from A.M. 2738 to 2752. He left three sons, Muimhne, Luighne, and Laighre, who reigned conjointly and peaceably for three years, at the expiration of which period the elder brother died, and their cousins, the sons of Heber Fionn, *i.e.* the Fair, rebelled against the survivors, both of whom were slain in battle. There remained still a younger son of Heremon : Iriel, who was famous in these early times. He was revenged for the death of his brothers, by that of his four cousins, who fell in battle. After four successful battles, Iriel was suffered to reign unmolested for a time ; during which interval he did much for the promotion of agriculture, and laboured to effect other improvements in Ireland. He cleared a great part of the country of woods, and built seven royal palaces. He was wise and learned, and wrote a history of the Gadelians. By some it is said that he reigned ten years ; by others twenty. From a habit of foretelling events, he was called Iriel the Prophet. He was succeeded by his son Eithriel, who began to reign in 2766, and for twenty years was monarch of Ireland. He was also distinguished for learning, and probably finished the history and travels of the Gadelians, which his father had commenced. He was likewise remarkable for his valour and military accomplishments. In his time great part of Connaught and Leinster were cleared of wood. But his good reign and his life were terminated in a battle fought against him by Conmaol, the grandson of Heber Fionn, who gained the victory and obtained the crown in the year 2786 ; he being the first who reigned in Ireland as absolute monarch of the Heberian race. He spent a life of warfare with the family of Heremon, and came off conqueror in 25 pitched battles.

We shall not follow Keating in his long list of kings, many of whose names are merely mentioned ; for however they might interest some who love to trace genealogies, they could not profit the young people for whom these Sketches are written. For the same reason we shall pass over many bloody battles and inhuman barbarities, which are recorded to have taken place in these dark times of paganism.

In 2816 Tighermas commenced his reign. He was of the posterity of Heremon, and the grandson of the learned Eithriel. In his reign the first golden [6] mine was discovered in this country, near the river Liffey, by a man named Juchadhan or Uchan, who, being expert in the working of metals, the management of the ore was committed to his care.

About the same period of time, different dyes were found out, particularly blue and green, and the people also began to decorate their persons. Tighernas enacted a new law respecting clothing. The slaves were ordered to appear in one colour only. A soldier had liberty to wear two, and a commanding officer three. Gentlemen, or farmers of property who entertained strangers hospitably, were privileged to wear four colours ; and the nobility who ranked higher were to have five. Persons of the highest rank, in which were included the king, the queen, the chronologers, and men of eminent learning, were allowed to wear six colours.

The most remarkable event in the life of Tighernas, was his introduction of idolatrous worship into Ireland. He erected Pagan altars and began to establish his religion (which was the same as that set up by Zoroaster in Greece), about one hundred years after the Milesians had taken possession of the country. The idol which he set up was called Crom-Cruach. [7] It was a stone capped with gold. Twelve other rough stones were placed round it, to represent the signs of the Zodiac. The worshippers sacrificed the first-born of every creature to this idol on the day of Saman.

On this festival-day, Tighernas issued a peremptory order that these sacrifices should be made, and that men, women, and children should prostrate themselves on the ground in worshipping the idol, until they drew blood from their noses, foreheads, ears, and elbows. Many died in consequence of the severity of this exercise, and hence the place of worship was called Maghsleicht, which signifies place of slaughter. (*Vet. MSS., quoted in the Collection de Reb. Hibern. No. 12.*)

While Tighernas with many other idolators was in the act of worshipping, they were struck dead by some awful visitation from heaven. This however did not put a stop to those unholy rites which were practised by every people that conquered Ireland until the Christian religion triumphed over paganism.

Another record states that Tighernas was the first who adored idols and built altars in Ireland. At one of these in Breifne, in the county of Leitrim, he and many of his fellow-worshippers were struck dead by lightning from heaven. The place was afterwards called *Maigh Sleacht*, the plain of adoration.

The names of many places still retained, give evidence that there were, at one time, fire-worshippers in Ireland. Thus Baltinglass, or Bael-teinglass, means the pure fire of Bel or the sun, which is called the Great Father or the Great God.

At this place the chiefs sat in council ; and within the entrenchments the nobles were stationed near the scene of debate.

Cahir, or Caer, in Gaelic, signifies oracle; [8] and the Irish word Grain, signifies the sun ; from whence are the following names—Knox-greine, and Tuamgreine, hills of the sun ; Cairne-grayney, the sun's heap, now called granny's bed; Grain-beacht, the sun's circle.

New Grange, near Drogheda, probably received its name from the same cause. Of this place Faber remarks, “ The narrow passage, in fact, and the stone bowls of this Irish grotto are merely the counterpart of those in the cave of Trophimus, the pagodas of Hindostan, and the Pyramids of Egypt.”

There is also a Cromleach, or tomb-altar, near Cloyne, called Carig Croith, or the sun's rock.

Many monuments have been discovered, shewing that the heavenly bodies were worshipped by the ancient Irish. Golden ornaments have been dug up in the bogs, in the form of a crescent—such as were used in worshipping the moon, which was called ReSlieve-mis, in Antrim, signifies mountains of the moon.

The Irish had also sacred groves and wells, the superstitious veneration for which has not yet passed away. Witness the blood-stained path round many of these holy wells, which on naked knees they traverse as a penance for sin. At all these wells the sacred tree is found, upon which each devotee leaves a piece of his or her torn-off garment, suspended on a branch, which must never be broken. It originated in an idolatrous custom, and now the people say it is a preservative from sorcery or witchcraft, which in olden times was attributed to the Tuatha de Danans, and to the Druids.

We are still told of the *Sidhe*, or fairies, inhabiting those old venerated trees, and “ living among the pleasant hills ;” and of the Ban-sidhe, or Banshee, which attends each Irish family “ *of the real sort,*” to give notice of a death among their relations.

Baal, or Bel, was the chief deity of the Irish. Beelsaman was his title, which signifies Lord of Heaven. On the evening of the great festival day, called the day of Samhin, all who were condemned by the Druids on the preceding March were burned, or purified between two fires.

The great tribunal of the Druids was held on the hill of Usneach, in Westmeath. The summit of this hill was the point at which the five provinces of Ireland met. Many of the farmers, in paying the May rent to their landlords, still denominate it Cios-na-Bealtinne, which signifies, the rent of Baal’s fire. [9] There are few parts of the country in which you may not find those sloping stones, called Druids’ altars and Cromleachs, originally called Bothal, the House of God.

One of the Irish kings named Tuathal, of whom you shall hear more hereafter, built the royal seat of Tlachtga, where the fire Tlachtga was appointed to be kindled. This fire was deemed sacred, and was employed to summon the priests, augurs, and druids of Ireland, to repair thither, and assemble upon the eve of All-saints, in order to consume the sacrifices that were offered to their pagan gods ; and it was enacted under the penalty of a great fine, that no other fire should be kindled upon that night through-out the kingdom, in order that all the fires in the country might be derived from this sacred fire. To obtain this fire was esteemed a great privilege, for which every person who procured it paid a scraball, in value about three pence, every year to the king of Munster, as an acknowledgment that the piece of ground on which the palace Tlachtga was built, had been taken from the province of Munster and added to Meath.

Tuathal, who was one of their most famous kings, after he had mounted the throne, established a new political constitution. He obtained a law for the exclusion of the other royal families from the throne, and engaged the nation, by solemn oath, to elect all their future monarchs out of his own race ; and hoping to keep down the aristocratical spirit, he took tracts of land from each of the five provinces, and formed a sixth province, now called Meath. In his newly-erected province, all affairs of national importance were transacted under his own inspection. Every matter relative to religion was regulated at Tlachtga, in the county of East Meath. The remains of this sanctuary may still be traced near Drogheda, being the tumulus at New Grange, an account of which you will find in Beaufort’s Ancient Topography of Ireland.

The convocation of Visneach was kept upon the first day of May, where they offered sacrifices to the principal deity of the island, whom they adored under the name of Beul. Two of these May-day fires were kindled in every territory in the kingdom, in honour of this pagan god. It was a solemn ceremony, at this time, to drive a number of cattle of every kind between these fires ; which was supposed to be a preservative, or charm, against murrain and other pestilential distempers among cattle, for the following year. And from these fires, which were made in honour of the god Beul, the day upon which the Christian festival of St. Philip and St. James is held, is called in the Irish language *La Beultinne*. This word is derived from *La*, which in Irish signifies a day ; *Beul*, the name of the pagan god ; and *Tinne*, which is the same with fire in English.

The vestiges of pagan worship can be easily traced in different parts of the kingdom. The unhewn pillars still standing, remain as monuments of the adoration of the sun. These, with the circle of upright stones, the sacred heaps or cairns, and the tomb-altars, called Cromleach, all originated with the Phenicians, together with the horrible rites or “ burnt-offerings,” of human victims in which parents sacrificed even their children. The idolatrous Jews fell into this fearful abomination, as is described in Jeremiah vii. 31, 32. Well might they designate such a scene of horror, the “ valley of slaughter and of shrieking.” It was also called Tophet, from the practice of beating drums, during the ceremony, to drown the cries of the children sacrificed in the fire to Moloch.

The worship of the heavenly bodies and the study of astronomy, were linked together. As the Irish derived the one from the Phenicians, the other followed in course.

[1] In Paxton’s Illustrations, he tells us of a fragment of Miliesius, the ancient historian of Phenicia, by Abydenes—quoted by Eusebius.

[2] The word Tuatha signifies leader.

[3] Scuits or Scots, in the Celtic, signifies restless wanderers.

[4] The top of Sceilg Mithill is flat with little depth of earth. It measures three acres in breadth and is the resort of numerous wild fowl which fatten upon it. Round this islet are precipices, nearly inaccessible, which tower magnificently over the foaming surge beneath. Difficult and dangerous as the ascent is, there are many who expose themselves to the risk for the sake of the birds, which they contrive to ensnare, and their flesh affords a delicious repast. This island is still frequented by Popish devotees.

[5] Inbher signifies river.

[6] An experienced engineer, Richard Griffith, Esq., in his “ Report to the Royal Dublin Society, on the Metallic Mines in Leinster,” in 1828, says—“ If we may judge from the number of ancient mine excavations which are still visible in almost every part of Ireland, it would appear that an ardent spirit for mining adventure must have pervaded this country at some very remote period. In many cases, no tradition that can be depended upon, now remains of the time or people by whom the greater part of these works were originally commenced. It is worthy of remark, that many of our mining excavations exhibit appearances similar to the surface workings of the most ancient mines in Cornwall, which are generally attributed to the Phenicians.”

Of the Ballycastle coal works, on the coast of Antrim, the Rev. W. Hamilton gives the following account :—“ The antiquity of this work is pretty evident, from hence that there

does not remain the most remote tradition of it in the country ; but it is more strongly demonstrable from a natural process which has taken place since its formation ; for the sides and pillars were found covered with sparry incrustations, which the present workmen do not observe to be deposited in any definite portion of time.”

Of our earliest colonists, the Damnii, or Danaans, it is said :—“ The superior intelligence of this people, and of the Clanna Rhoboig, considered with Tacitus’ account of the trade of Ireland, induce me to suppose that the coal works at Ballycastle, on the northern coast, which exhibit marks of ancient operations, had been worked by either or both.”
—*Wood’s Inquiry into the Primitive Inhabitants of Ireland*.

[7] This frightful image, Crom-Cruach, was, it is said, destroyed by St. Patrick ; in regard to which O’Flaherty says, “ In commemoration of this memorable annihilation of idolatry, I believe the last Sunday in summer is by a solemn custom dedicated throughout Ireland, and commonly called Domnach Cromerach, that is the Sunday of Black Crom, I suppose on account of the horrid and deformed appearance of this diabolical spectre.”
—*Ogygia*, p. iii. c. 22.

St. Patrick, it is stated, attended the celebration of the Taltine Games, and preached to the multitude assembled on that occasion. After this he visited the Plain of Slaughter, in the county of Leitrim.

[8] Miss L. C. Beaufort. Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy.

[9] See Moore’s History of Ireland.

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