

O'Halloran's History of Ireland

*The complete history of Ireland, from the earliest times: being compiled from a connected continuation by approved standard writers*

Sylvester O'Halloran

1845

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PREFACE

In former times, the study of History was attempted by only a very few devoted admirers. The dignified historian was surrounded with almost astrological mystery, and the persevering student became an abstracted being, like Manfred, diving—

“——— to the caves of death,  
Searching its cause in its effect ; and drew  
From wither'd bones, and skulls, and heap'd-up dust,  
Conclusions most forbidden”

Latterly, we have too many demands on our attention, and we aim at too much general knowledge, to appropriate many years to the pursuit of any one branch of science. With these reasons, the historical novel became a pleasing vehicle for the useful truths of History. This arrangement, however, has been found inadequate, because captivating writers are much more numerous than faithful historians. Students of taste and discrimination, whose aim is correctness, will always prefer the wheat of truth, if it could be gleaned and threshed from the straw that surrounds it. This desirable object has been attempted in History of Ireland which is now submitted to the judgment of the public. .

The ordinary difficulties of preparing “ a reflex of complex events” are much increased by the generally partisan character of a large portion of the evidence relating to Irish History. James Madison has well remarked, that “ the Irish nation. has been as much traduced by the pen of History as it has been by the rod of Power.” To claim praise by making a parade of our industry in this History of Ireland, would have produced a bulky compendium of merely factitious importance. We are quite willing, however, to receive credit for showing the reader how to master the whole subject.

The text has been compiled from the best authorities ; dulness of record is avoided as much as possible ; and it will be perceived that, in order to furnish a true and lively narrative, the variations of different writers are noted, with discriminating and connective remarks. In adopting this latter method of construction, we are conscious of having deviated from the rigid canons of historical composition ; but our excuse will become more and more apparent, as the student travels over the dusty road of research where we have laboured.

For the First Division, the text adopted is that of Sylvester O'Halloran, an Irish gentleman, who brought to his task a fund of classical erudition, great candour, sound sense, and sincere patriotism. In the conjectural portions of History, these qualities are

often more likely to produce a true and faithful book than the highest attainments of mere authorship.

The two following Divisions continue the narrative down to the present times.

This original and highly interesting compilation is in the hands of a committee of gentlemen, who will endeavour to avoid those partialities and defects which occasionally characterize the productions of individual writers on Irish History. At the same time, it will be the most agreeable part of their task to accord full justice to the history of a great and glorious country, which has produced some of the noblest characters that ever excited the admiration of the world. A D. 1778

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*To The Right Honourable*

*Morough O'Bryen,*

*Earl and Baron of Inchiquin, Barron of Burren, and Lord Lieutenant, and Custos*

*Rotulorum of The County of Clare.*

MY LORD :

No nation paid greater attention to its history and antiquities than the ancient Irish. The care of letters was a particular object of state attention ; and the laws and ordinances respecting history, philosophy, and poetry, became a part of the studies of our monarchs. [1] The numerous universities of the kingdom were founded on such liberal principles, that not only the natives, but strangers from different parts of Europe, were received into them, and supplied with all the necessaries of life, *and even with books, gratis !* The Venerable BEDE is an unexceptionable authority for these facts, with respect to the Saxons ; [2] and proofs are not wanting that such was the case with other nations of Europe. [3] Need more, my Lord, be said to the point, than, that such was the pre-eminence, of the Irish in letters, that, by universal consent, the kingdom acquired the title of *Insula Doctorum !*

But the protection they vouchsafed to the sciences, did not diminish their love for arms. In other countries, arts and letters were the consequences of power and conquests : in Ireland, they attended and added vigour to both. Glory, intrepidity, and the love of their country were the constant themes of the antiquarians and bards ; and how well our princes, our nobility, and military profited by their lessons, our annals sufficiently proclaim. While the rest of the world bent the knee to all-powerful Rome, Ireland alone remained free and independent, and held forth her arms to support every struggle for liberty in Britain and Gaul. From Tacitus we may collect, [4] that Rome could not count on the peaceable possession of Britain, until Ireland was subdued, being the country from whence the disaffected drew their resources ; and the subsequent periods of our history will show who were the real authors and promoters of these mighty confederacies, which accelerated the ruin of that extended empire !

Why a history, in itself so curious and instructive—which throws new lights on history and chronology in general, and (*what makes it still more valuable*) which is the only one, of all the nations of Europe, that has been transmitted to us pure and uninterrupted, from the remotest antiquity to this day—why, I say, it should be, not only greatly neglected, but grossly misrepresented in modern times, is not to my purpose to inquire. It is sufficient, my Lord, that, animated with the love of truth, and of my country, I have laboured to render that justice to our ancestors which had been so long denied them, and to lay open to public view these annals, which seemed to have been destined to dust and oblivion ! A work of this kind, extracted from pure native records, unsophisticated with modern systems and modern opinions, I flatter myself will appear no unacceptable present to your Lordship, and to the curious.

To whom, my Lord, with greater propriety could such an attempt be inscribed, or who better entitled to this mark of respect and attention than the EARL OF INCHQUIN, the lineal descendant of the first of heroes and legislators, the renowned BRIEN BOIRUMHE, and through him, of Heber, eldest son to Milesius ? To support and protect whatever may tend to elucidate the History of Ogygia ; and by your precepts, as well as example, to induce others to unite in a cause so interesting to letters, are in fact, my Lord, duties which you owe to your own dignity and to your ancestors, as well as to your country. For what avails it that Ireland should, in justice, rank foremost among the nations of Europe ; and that her sons, for purity, antiquity, and nobility of blood, exceed all others, if these facts are not properly set forth ? Her title to precedence is not the less valid because it has not been fully asserted ; and it may be said, that the neglect of Irish History is the only enemy to its dignity. From your Lordship, for instance, to Heber, are reckoned ninety-three generations in your house, of which number, eighty-four were kings of Thomond, kings of Munster, or monarchs of Ireland ; so justly may the *atavis edite regibus* of Horace be applied to your Lordship. Thus a peerage could be no accession of honour to it ; and this is so true, that all North Munster were in flames when it first became known that such a title was adopted. The same thing happened in Ulster, when Con O'Neill assumed the title of Earl of Tyrone : it was the case with Mac Carthy in Desmond, with Fitz Patrick in Ossory, etc.

However solicitous I have been to render this work worthy of public attention, your Lordship's protection, and the title which it bears, yet I am satisfied that an undertaking on so extensive a plan, and on a new scale, must necessarily be subject to many imperfections ; and I greatly regret that my situation in life would not permit me to devote to it all that leisure which it merited, and which I wished. Yet, be its defects what they may, I will venture to affirm that it exhibits a clearer and more comprehensive view of the true state and importance of Irish History than any other work extant.

Deign favourably, my Lord, to receive this public testimony of my esteem and attachment, the greatest I can offer, and permit me the honour to subscribe myself, with the highest respect,

My Lord,  
Your Lordship's most obedient,  
and most devoted humble Servant,  
SILVESTER O'HALLORAN.

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Preliminary Discourse  
To The First Division.

Nothing has proved so great an obstacle to the study of ancient history, as the very great uncertainty in ancient chronology. The Babylonians, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Chinese, have carried their different chronologies so amazingly far back, that to credit them, one would be almost tempted to suppose the world eternal ! The Greeks came much later into the custom of recording historical events ; and, it must be confessed, that where they have touched on remote periods, their eras are, to the last degree, uncertain. Even in sacred writ we meet with great discordance in point of chronology ; the Septuagint translation of the Bible, and many of the fathers, reckoning three thousand five hundred and thirteen years from the creation to the vocation of Abraham ; while the Hebrew text, and some of the principal fathers of the Church, fix it at two thousand and twenty-three ! It is on account of this great uncertainty in ancient chronology, that Varro, the most learned historian and philosopher of ancient Rome, deemed every relation which preceded the first Olympiad, (i. e. the year of the world 3232,) to be obscure, fabulous, and unworthy of public notice !

A variety of causes have concurred to make chronology so unsettled, and of course its concomitant, history, so unsatisfactory. No two nations of antiquity are in accord as to any fixed epocha, nor even as to the length of the year, or the time when it should commence. The Greeks began their era of certain history from the Olympiads, and the Romans from the foundation of their city. Some have counted time from the solar, others from the lunar year. Even in the Christian world some centuries had passed, from the Incarnation, before it was agreed to compute time from that epocha. To this may be added the different periods in which letters were introduced into countries, the repeated convulsions and revolutions which every nation of the continent has experienced, and the neglect and destruction of annals and records, ever attendant on such general calamities !

The nation, whose history I have honour of presenting to the public, has experienced none of these misfortunes, at least not in so remarkable a degree as to destroy all her annals, or bring her chronology into any kind of doubt. They appear to have been, from the most remote antiquity, *a polished people*, and with propriety they may be called, *the fathers of letters* ! Sequestered in a remote island, giving laws to neighbouring states, and free from foreign invasions for the certain space of two thousand and sixty years, they had time and leisure to attend to their history and antiquities ; and they certainly exceeded all nations of the world in their attention to these points ! As I have endeavoured to elucidate a variety of obscure parts in ancient history, and to determine many controverted eras in ancient chronology by the annals of Ireland, it is but just that the candid critical reader should receive the clearest evidences and the fullest information, as to their authenticity. This matter satisfactorily explained, he will then no doubt naturally inquire, why a history so manifestly interesting to letters, and which throws such light on the early laws,

religion, and customs of the Celtæ, should have lain so long concealed from public view, especially in ages learned and inquisitive as this and the last have proved ? But of these points in their order ; and first as to our chronology.

The Milesians began their own immediate history with Phænius, the inventor of letters, and their great ancestor. They have not determined on the precise period of time in which he flourished ; but yet the generations and names of his lineal successors, to the sons of Milesius, have been preserved with such care and accuracy ; and the same subject, from that period to this day, has been continued with such unexampled fidelity, that it will require little trouble to determine it, with precision and certainty, by admitting of the following reasonable computation. Twenty-three generations are counted from Phænius to Heber, and I have allowed thirty-five years to each generation, which I think (considering the remoteness of the time and longevity of the people) will be deemed a fair and reasonable medium. If to this we add eighty-one years for the supposed extent of his life, it will make up the gross term of eight hundred and eighty-six years. By the Reim-Riogra, or Royal Chronology of Giolla-Caomhain—a writer of great antiquity—ninety monarchs of Ireland are reckoned from Heber to Conaire the Grand, in whose administration the Incarnation happened ; and the reigns of these princes, one with another, according to his computation, amounts to one thousand six hundred and fifty-seven years. But, in this list, a reign of seventy-seven, of seventy, and of sixty years is allowed to some princes ; to one in particular (and, it would seem, merely on account of his surname of Soaglach, or the Long-lived) a hundred and fifty is given ! But, in Ireland, the monarchy was elective with respect to persons, though hereditary in point of blood. Minors were declared incapable of governing ; and no prince could become a candidate for the throne who had not passed the age of twenty-five. Revolutions were frequent, and the strongest sword always determined the contest. Sound criticism and plain sense seem to concur in reducing so improbable a period to a reasonable time, and will, I think, justify me in lopping off an exuberance of three hundred and ninety-three years from this account ; so that from the birth of Phænius to the Incarnation comprehends a space of two thousand one hundred and forty-six years, in which a clear chronology, subject to the severest scrutiny, is exhibited, and which, if not under, does not exceed true time.

From this period the Irish chronology is allowed to be accurate, by the most critical judges of the matter. Yet, as Sir James Ware, and, from him, most British writers, who were very incompetent judges, have affirmed that our chronology at best is but uncertain till the landing of St. Patrick ; let us, for argument sake, admit it to be so, and endeavour to reconcile the number of reigns in this interval to reason and chronology. Loaghaire began his reign A. D. 428, four years before the landing of St. Patrick, and twenty-nine princes intervened between him and Conaire. From the landing of Patrick the most incredulous have not doubted our chronology ; nor could it be otherwise, as the time of his legation was so well known to foreign as well as domestic writers. Fifty-one monarchs swayed the Irish sceptre from the days of Loaghaire to those of Roderic O'Connor, last monarch of Ireland. Now, if we compare the number of reigns in the first and second stages of our history, or from Heber to Conaire, and from him to Loaghaire, with those in the third, *or uncontrovertibly true time*, we shall see a very close agreement, and that the periods preceding this last epocha are rather contracted than enlarged. Let us suppose upon an average, that the reigns of these princes, one with another, did not exceed fourteen years each ; and

when we consider the nature of an elective government, where each prince generally fell by the sword of his successor, it seems a fair medium. The number of reigns from Heber to Conaire are ninety years, which, at an average of fourteen years to each reign, will give us one thousand two hundred and sixty years, just four years less than the time assigned ! From Conaire to Loaghaire were twenty-nine years, which, at an average of fourteen years to each reign, will give us four hundred and six years, which is twenty-two years less than true time ; and fifty-one reigns from Loaghaire to Roderic, multiplied by fourteen, produce but seven hundred and fourteen years, which is about forty years less than the real time. Thus it appears (I apprehend) evident, that instead of extending, I have sensibly contracted our ancient chronology, and that if it does not want half a century of true time, it cannot be deemed a day beyond it.

From this chronology, the periods in which the following interesting facts happened, appear thus : The invention of letters by Phœnius (computing from the Hebrews) was in the year of the world 1912, the sixty-second year of his age, and sixteenth of his reign.

The introduction of letters, of arts, and sciences into Egypt by Niul, the son of Phœnius , took place in the year of the world 1941.

The Cretans received the Phœnician alphabet from Cadmus the high-priest, son of Sru, and brother to Heber Scot, in the year of the world 2046 ; and this at once explains a matter very doubtful and very interesting to ancient history. The Greeks unable to determine the time in which Cadmus lived, have conjectured it to be after the days of Moses. Now in his days the Hebrew alphabet contained twenty-two letters, which is six letters more than the Cadmean ; and the dominions of the Israelites bordering on Phœnicia, have made some literati suppose that this last alphabet must have contained more letters than antiquity has attributed to it ; but we now plainly see that Cadmus preceded Moses by more than four centuries, which at once removes all doubts, and justifies the reports of antiquity.

The first Phœnician settlement in Africa took place in the year of the world 2279. For it is agreed on that, long before the days of Joshua, a Phœnician colony had made a settlement about Carthage, though, till now, the time has not been determined on with any kind of precision.

Briotan, the son of Feargus, with his followers, retired from Ireland to Britain, A. M. 2380 ; and from him the country took this name, (its more ancient one being Inis-More, or the Great Island,) as all our antiquities declare. From the settlements in Wales the people were called Cimri, not from being the descendants of Gomer ; *cumar* in Irish denoting a hilly country, as Wales undoubtedly is.

The Firbolgs, or Belgæ, entered Britain, A. M. 2541 ; the Damnonii, or Tuatha da Dauaans, A. M. 2736 ; the Picts took possession of Albany, A. M. 2744 ; and the Irish Brigantes, of Cumberland, etc, A. M. 2749.

The Brigantes of Spain (so called from Breogan, grandfather to Milesius) became a respectable, warlike, and commercial people, about A. M. 2600 ; and a part of their posterity conquered Ireland in the year of the world 2736.

As to the history of the people, on which this chronology is founded, every evidence and every circumstance that can in reason be expected, seem combined to stamp authority on it. From Phœnius to the sons of Milesius, their exploits, their travels successes, and disappointments, have been narrated from age to age with such an air of native simplicity and candour, that it would be hard to conceive—even supposing it all imposture—what could be proposed by the deception. The shortness of the voyages ; their coasting from land to land ; and the length of time they were tossed about, so as to take some years in passing from Phœnicia to Getulia, plainly show that this expedition was undertaken in the very infancy of navigation. Their posterity remained nearly three centuries after this on the African coast, (though a commercial people,) before they ventured to sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules ; and from the time of Bratha's landing in Galicia to the conquest of Ireland by the sons of Milesius, included the space of a hundred and fifty years ; so formidable did the venturing to launch into the great Atlantic ocean appear to this people ! Nay, the circumstance of their being at this time furnished with reflecting and refracting glasses, evidently points out the progress they had made in navigation. But when we find accounts so reconcileable to reason wonderfully strengthened by the collateral evidences of foreign nations, and *throwing day* on the obscurest parts of their different histories, can we in justice refuse our assent to them ? That the Milesian colony were a learned and polished people when they landed in Ireland, the circumstance of their transmitting to posterity the records of the nations who preceded them there, seems alone strongly to prove. Amhergin was then their high-priest. A part of his duty, as well as that of his successor, was, the care of history and genealogy. We have yet preserved in the Leabhar-Lecan part of his writings, particularly a relation of the landing of his brethren and their followers in Ireland, with the numbers who perished in the attempt, in a beautiful style of poetry. From this epocha we behold a regular succession of princes, all great encouragers of arts and letters, and some highly celebrated for their erudition and for their writings. We trace the rise of literary societies, the modes by which adepts passed doctors in different faculties, and the great immunities which this order of men possessed ; confirmed by Cæsar, with respect to the Gauls, many centuries after. We behold arts, manufactures, and commerce, keep equal pace with letters, as well as their usual concomitants, wealth and power !

The very form of the Irish constitution shows to demonstration, that it could not subsist without letters. We see, from the prince to the peasant, the nation divided into different classes, and all posts of honour, trust, and profit in these different orders, hereditary in certain families ;—even in the hierarchy, for above seven centuries, the episcopal order was confined to certain septs. Though our history had been silent on this head, yet we should conclude that a class of people must have been set apart to preserve the genealogies of these different families : how could order or subordination be otherwise preserved ? Cæsar tells us that the Gauls were divided into different classes ; and by way of explaining this, does he not at the same time proclaim the flourishing state of letters there, and the great privileges granted to this order of men? [5] But modern skeptics affirm, that the Irish knew not the use of letters till the landing of St. Patrick. But if this apostle first introduced letters into Ireland, they must undoubtedly have been the Roman. And did the Roman alphabet THEN contain no more than seventeen letters ? Were these arranged like ours, or were they of similar structure ? If all these interrogatories are to be answered in the negative, as they undoubtedly must, what will become of our visionaries ? But to remove for ever so

great an obstacle to true history and chronology, Cæsar himself tells us that the Gaulish letters in his days resembled the Greek, and such is the Irish letter even at this day! Now, as from this remark of Caesar, it becomes evident that the Gauls and Romans had different kinds of alphabets, it must be a certain consequence that the Irish could not borrow their letters from ancient Rome, and our history sufficiently proclaims them the eternal enemies of that people.

But, besides all this, the more critically we examine, and the deeper we explore the annals of Ireland, the more convinced we shall become of their genuineness. The monarchy, in every period of our history, was confined to the posterity of the three sons of Milesius *only*, except in three instances in the line of Ith, who were in main of the same royal stock. Though all descended from one common ancestor, yet they were divided in interests ; and the clearest head and strongest sword generally gained the monarchy. If any doubt had ever been entertained of the veracity of Irish history, must it not have come out, some time or other, in the many bloody contests for sovereignty so disgraceful to our annals ? Would it not even serve as a political stimulus the more to inflame the contending parties ? But no such thing ! Though of different interests, and highly inimical to each other, yet were they in perfect unison as to their being of one common stock ! And nothing can more fully prove this than the very mode of inaugurating our different princes, as well monarchical as provincial, which in no instance was ever deviated from. After the election was declared, and before the coronation oaths were administered, the chief senachie, or antiquarian, stepped forth, and after bending the knee to the throne, announced to the people aloud, “ That Brien-Boirumhe, ancestor to the present earl of Inchiquin, (for instance) the son of Cineidi, the son of Lorcan, the son of Lachtna, the son of Core, son of Anluan, son of Mahon, the son of Turelach, the son of Cathil, the son of Aodh-Caomh, the son of Conal, the son of Eochadh, and so on to Gollamh or Milesius, and from him to Phænius, etc., was monarch of Ireland and Albany.” And this is the reason that our antiquarians have been so careful to recite the pedigrees, and note the houses from which our different monarchs came ; which, though disgusting in many instances to readers, yet we see was observed for the wise purpose of preserving both the constitution and the history of the kingdom pure. In every particular, except the right of governing, they were in perfect accord. The line of Heber, or house of Munster, being descended from the eldest son of Milesius, claimed a kind of prescriptive right to the monarchy ; yet the Heremonians, though the youngest branch, gave infinitely more monarchs to Ireland. The Heberians deemed this a kind of usurpation, and the Heremonians contended that, in a country where the sword determined the dispute, power and intrepidity, not seniority, justified the claim. We have yet preserved a poem, written by Torna-Eigeas, chief bard to Niall the Grand, in the fourth century, reciting the bloody contests between him and Core, King of Munster, for the monarchy. In this, he with great elegance and delicacy, lays before his reader the pretensions of both houses, and the arguments used by their different advocates, and recapitulates the bloody wars carried on from the days of Heber to his own time for this object—an irrefragable proof surely, even then, of the authenticity of our earlier annals. St. Patrick in the next age presided over the literati in several conventions ; and our annals, such as we now find them, were then, and in every succeeding age to the last century, never called in question by those who had the best right to judge of them. The uncommon care taken to preserve them pure and uncorrupt, when attended to, must satisfy the most incredulous.



Every province had its history ; every powerful chief, his poet and antiquarian. Their persons were declared sacred, and their ample possessions unmolested. The different provincial records and histories were every third year examined by a committee of the national assembly ; and nothing was admitted into the Seanachas-more, or Great Antiquity—so called as being the national history—but what was strictly true. The greatest punishments awaited such antiquarians as attempted to disguise truth or impose falsehoods ; and no instance is recorded of any senachie being convicted of these crimes ! These hereditary bards and historians flourished through every period of our history. They existed in Thomond, in Connaught, and in Ulster, in some degree, *even to the Revolution*.

We are yet possessed of copies of the Book of Munster. It recites the travels of the Gadelians, from their dereliction of Egypt to the conquest of Ireland, and notes down with great precision the different generations that intervened. From this period the history is confined to the exploits of this house only, as kings of Leath-Mogha, or monarchs of Ireland, just as they happened. The line of Ith, or Brigantes of Munster, had their hereditary antiquarians also ; and Forchern, one of our most celebrated senachies, was poet to Conrigh, the son of Darius, of the Deguids of Munster, who was contemporary with Julius Cæsar.

The Book of Leinster begins with Jughaine the Great, (from whom Jiggin's-Town, near the Naas,) monarch of Ireland, A. M. 3587 ; and through his son Loagaire-Lorc, narrates the exploits and actions of his successors as kings of Leinster. The Book of Leath-Cuin traces the Heremonian line from the conquest of Ireland to the reign of Jughaine, and then, through his son Cobthaig, continues the same subject to the twelfth century. This psalter got the title of Leath-Cuin, as it treated of all the stock of the Heremonians, in the northern division of Ireland, according to the famous partition treaty in the second century. Keating and other writers of the last century, mention a noble copy of this work on vellum, with the coats of arms of the principal chiefs of Ulster and Connaught, elegantly blazoned on its margins. The Connaught book is quoted by Usher and others, and several extracts from it may be found in the *Leabhar-Lecan*. The house of Emania, or line of Ir, which cut so conspicuous a figure in our annals, were great protectors of the literati of Ireland on several occasions, and could not have been without their bards and antiquarians ; and to their care it is owing, that their exploits and those of the Craobh-Ruadh, have been so well pre-served. As soon as a new government was established in a part of Ulster, in the fourth century, on the ruins of that great house, we find also a new chronicle commenced under the title of the Book of Oirgial, so called from the new name given to that territory, in which the exploits of these conquerors and their successors, with their pedigrees, are accurately noted down.

Besides these are the Book of Synchronisms, in which the provincial kings are synchronised with the monarchs of Ireland, and the Reim-Riogia, or Book of Reigns, which notes down exactly the number of years each of these monarchs governed. From these records principally are almost all the other books and annals of the kingdom taken, with the genealogies of families. It is by their means that the Irish are enabled to trace their pedigrees so much higher than other nations, and that, as Camden himself acknowledges, “ The antiquities of every other nation compared to that of Ireland is but as if of yesterday ! ” This unexampled protection afforded to letters, and care of their history and antiquities, made the Irish deem all the neigh-

bouring states barbarous. In the life of St. Fiacre, in the seventh century, on meeting his countryman St. Chilian, in France, he thus addresses him : “ Quid te charissime frater, ad has barbaras gentes deduxit ?” No wonder, then, if a people who traced their pedigrees from the Scythians and Egyptians, the noblest races of antiquity, should glory in their ancestry, and look down with condescension and pity on the pretensions of other nations ! If the histories of Britain, Gaul, and Germany cannot be traced higher than the fifth century, and that, beyond this era, no traces even of their princes can be found, how absurd, then, to attempt to carry the pedigrees of private families higher ? But in Ireland, not only the blood-royal, but the genealogies of the entire Milesian race have been carefully preserved, with the numbers of saints’ and illustrious men their principal families produced. It could not, from the nature of the constitution, be possibly otherwise, since rank and subordination depended on it. This reminds me of an anecdote that happened soon after the late war in Germany. The prince of Saxe Hilburghausen being one day in a large circle, descanting on the high antiquity of his house, and that his ancestors were dukes in the reign of Charlemagne, General CDonnel, (descended from Niall the Grand, monarch of Ireland in the fourth century), fatigued with his vanity, coolly answered, “ Mon prince, vous êtes bien heureux d’avoir être né en Allemagne—si vous étiez chez moi, à peine auriez vous les droits d’un bourgeois !”

The very names of territories, rivers, lakes, and mountains, and even the surnames of families, allude to different periods of our history. None dared impose arbitrary names on places or people. They were first proposed by the antiquarians, and after-wards approved of by the national representatives—at least by the literati—and these names, and the reasons why they were imposed, were entered into the national records. From these it is, that, even at this day, we know, for instance, why from Ealgnait, or Ealga, wife to Partholan, the first invader of Ireland, the country got the name of Inis-Ealga, or Ealga’s island, and that after her children different lakes and mountains were called. The names of almost all the territories, rivers, and lakes, through the kingdom, are, in like manner, explained by our history. As to surnames, when first assumed in Ireland, they were not arbitrarily imposed, but, with great taste and judgment, were directed to be taken from some illustrious ancestor belonging to the family, to which the epithets O’ or Mac were to be prefixed, which implied the son or successor of such a man. Can the Greeks or Romans bring such proofs of the authenticity of their histories and antiquities ? Had they men set apart, endowed with uncommon privileges and immunities, to attend to these great objects ? and were their different accounts examined from time to time by committees of the national assemblies ? Josephus, in his Discourse against Apion, upbraids the Greeks for their shameful ignorance of early history and chronology, and accounts for it by observing, that they kept not public registers, nor had they hereditary antiquarians to superintend this department. “ Not so (says he) with the Phœnicians, the Chaldeans, and with us (the Jews,) who have, from remote antiquity, *by means of registers, and the care of persons particularly appointed to this office*, preserved our histories beyond all other nations.” May not this retort of Josephus on the Greeks be, with equal propriety, applied by the Irish to the enemies of their high antiquity—the only thing they have now left to boast of ! And is it not a strong defence of our history that it has been preserved in the same manner ? What authorities had Livy to ground his early history on ? It is true, some mention is made of Pictor and Piso, and of registers kept by the high-priests ; but does not Livy himself confess that almost all of these were destroyed by the Gauls in their sacking of Rome, and by others ? And yet, who doubts

the veracity of this history, because some records must have undoubtedly remained ? If we find the genealogies of our princes noted in the different reigns, is not the same method observed in the Bible, the historical parts of which were preserved by persons set apart for that office ? Our princes appeared in battle with crowns of gold on their heads ; and such was the established custom among the Jews. [6] In the battle of Muirtheimne, fought before the Incarnation, in that of Magh-Lena, and in subsequent ones, to the death of Ceallachan and Brian-Boirumhe, it was usual for a prince or great commander to lament, in extempore odes, the loss of heroes slain in battle. Instances of this we frequently meet with, and yet the custom was not peculiar to Ireland, since we find it observed by the Jews also. Thus David makes a song of lamentation for the deaths of Saul and Jonathan ! [7]

Too much care cannot certainly be taken to prove the veracity of our history and the certainty of our chronology, since both are capable of throwing such new and interesting lights on history and antiquity ; and while I become thus a professed advocate in the cause of my country, I persuade myself that *I am pleading the cause of letters in general*. To pass by the sunshine which our history throws on that of the early Greeks, and other neighbouring nations, were we to consider that it is the only key to the Greek and Roman accounts of the legion, laws, and customs of the ancient Celtæ, that alone should entitle it to the particular attention of the literati of Europe. Cæsar's account of the constitution of Gaul, and the Druidical order, [8] are only reconcileable to reason and truth, by recurring to Irish history : the Samnothei, and other orders of religious among the Celtæ, are, in like manner, elucidated by applying to the same pure fountain. But of all these matters I have already sufficiently descanted in the first part of my *Introduction to Irish History*. The moment the Romans acquired any certain knowledge of Ireland, (which was in the days of Agricola,) that moment they proclaimed its power and consequence. Tacitus tells us that her ports were then more resorted to, by foreign merchants, than those of Britain. [9] By his relation, the Romans seemed well acquainted with its value, and the great advantages they should derive by its acquisition. He even expressly declares the impossibility of keeping Britain in due obedience to Rome without the reduction of Ireland—the country which supplied the malcontents with the means of revolting on every occasion. From that period to the dereliction of Britain, we shall behold Ireland the very soul of all the confederacies formed there against Rome.

Though Ireland constantly braved the power of Rome, yet we see, as early as A. D. 431, Palladius sent by Pope Celestin as apostle “ to the Scots believing in Christ,” for so were the Irish then, and for many centuries after, called. The next year he consecrated Magonius, who was well versed in the Irish language, for that mission ; and to add greater dignity to this embassy, he created him a patrician ; for a title, not a name, it undoubtedly was. Need it be told that this was an institution of Constantine the Great, much more honourable than that of the *patricii* of heathen Rome ; and that several kings of France afterwards gloried in the title ! Thus Ireland, exempt from Roman power, had Palladius, and after him Magonius, or, as he is generally called, Patrick, sent to Ireland early in the fifth century ; whereas Britain, so long a Roman province, did not receive Augustine for a century and a half later ! Long before this period, our writers notice numbers of Irish Christians labouring to spread its tenets through the neighbouring states ; and, soon after, all Europe proclaimed the erudition and piety of her sons, insomuch that through them the nation, by *universal consent*, got the glorious and unexampled titles of *INSULA SANCTORUM ET DOCTORUM* ! It was

not enough that they sent their missionaries, and of the purest blood in the kingdom, to instruct, in letters and Christianity, the (then) barbarous circumjacent nations, but they opened for them colleges in different parts of the kingdom, on so extensive and generous a plan, that not only (says the Venerable Bede) were these strangers supplied with meat, drink, and lodging, *but even with BOOKS gratis !* [10] They were, at this time, eminent in sculpture, painting, and music, and were acquainted with the sciences in an exalted degree ! Could they have borrowed these from Rome ? They had little connection with her. Would not the technical terms in arts and sciences savour of the country from whence they were acquired ? They were all pure native Irish ! But if the Romans gave arts and sciences to the Irish, why did they withhold them from the rest of Europe ? Or why pitch on a people, as the conveyancers of them, so remote, and with whom they had no friendly correspondence ? The truth is, Rome had not those arts and sciences, in an eminent degree, at that time ; and the inundations of different enemies pouring into the empire will explain it.

If, then, Ireland, in those early days of Christianity, became so renowned for arts and sciences, that when a lettered man of Britain, or of the continent, was for any time absent, it became a common proverb—*Amandatus est ad disciplinam in Hibernia !* is it not a strong presumptive proof that she must have possessed them before this period, even though our histories had been silent on this head, though such was not the case ? But the truth is, our history is the only means left to arrive at any tolerable knowledge of the ancient state of Europe, and the true commentary to the Greek and Roman accounts of it. Modern visionaries tell us that all Europe was in a state of barbarity, till reclaimed and civilized by the Romans ; and yet the early Greek writers confess that from the Celtæ they borrowed many things, both in theology and philosophy, and even adopted the very terms of those people ! Cæsar, from his own knowledge, proclaims the flourishing state of letters in Gaul, and the great immunities enjoyed by its literati.

As much have the moderns been in the dark with respect to the feudal government that prevailed over Europe. They have represented it as a barbarous custom, which originated after the destruction of the Roman empire ; but it was certainly far removed from this. By the feudal constitution, places, honours, and employments were hereditary in certain families, and the knowledge of these ranks could only be preserved by letters. What government could bid fairer for durability, than where subordination was established ? And had we wanted other instances, the history of Ireland would sufficiently prove this, where we behold it flourishing from the reign of Heber to nearly the end of the twelfth century, including a space of two thousand four hundred and thirty-seven years ; and it continued in Thomond, and in parts of Connaught and Ulster, to near the middle of the last age ! What a contrast between it and that of ancient Rome under her emperors ! There we behold often the vilest of the people, without regard to blood or rank, raised to the purple ! What were the consequences ? intrigues, conspiracies, proscriptions, destruction of all subordination, and, in a short time, a final period put to the most powerful and extensive government in the world !

The feudal system was neither barbarous nor impolitic : it was revived on the continent after the annihilation of Roman tyranny ; and this furnishes us with a strong proof how little the Celtæ were improved by the Romans, since neither their laws nor customs were adopted by any of the nations subdued by them, which shows in what

an abject state they were held. But though they endeavoured to reestablish that mode of government which their ancestors enjoyed in happier days, yet the destruction of their annals and literary foundations, made it impossible for them to bring it to that perfection in which it flourished among a people unacquainted with such hardships. Such was the Irish nation ! Here feudal government flourished in full lustre, and arts and sciences were eminently protected. The crown was hereditary as to blood, but elective as to the person ; and this nomination was confined to the chiefs of the people. No female could be vested with supreme command ; and the issue of the female line had no pretensions to the succession. Public employments of every kind were hereditary in families ; and no overt act of the present possessor could injure the claims of his successors. People were set apart to attend to the genealogies and exploits of the different great families, while a higher order took care of the actions and pedigrees of the blood-royal. The literati preceded the nobility, and preserved always those privileges and immunities which Cæsar tells us the literati of Gaul possessed in his days. On the revival of letters on the continent and the establishment of schools, we read that doctors in different sciences disputed *even with the equestrian order* for precedence, and it was in many instances granted to them. Has not this a manifest allusion to earlier periods ? About this time, the kings of France and emperors of Germany received the equestrian order before their coronation ; and in Ireland a prince was incapable of command, who had not been entered into the military school when seven years old, and received the *gradh-gaoisge*, an order of knight-hood, at eighteen ! Though it be universally agreed on, that the equestrian orders of Celtic Europe were not taken from the Romans, yet writers are by no means in accord as to their origin, some dating them from the Crusades, others from an earlier period ; but all in unison, that their commencement was after the destruction of Rome. However, Cæsar is positive that they flourished in Gaul in his days ; and three hundred years earlier, Manlius got the surname Torquatus, from wearing the gold torques of a Gaulish knight whom he killed in battle, and which ornaments our Irish knights, by public decree many centuries prior to that epocha, constantly wore !

Thus the laws and customs which prevailed in Europe in the middle ages, and which, in some instances, operate at this day, have a manifest allusion to remoter periods ; and the accounts which Cæsar and Tacitus have given, prove they have. But where shall we look for an elucidation of subjects so interesting ? not among succeeding Roman writers. This people, so much venerated in modern days, destroyed every other vestige of Celtic civilization ! But Ireland, free from the incursions of that rapacious and oppressive people, *only* can illustrate by her history their relations, and rescue the credit of Cæsar, as a writer, from the specious objections of moderns. He says, that the letters and religion of the Gauls came from Britain, or more properly the British isles ; [11] and that in everything but their Druid mysteries, they used a Greek letter. But most moderns, as if better acquainted with these matters than a living witness, affirm that letters must have been rather brought from the continent to the British isles ; though to prove the truth of the reverse we see Cæsar affirm that, *even in his own days*, such as chose to excel in letters, repaired thither for further improvement ! But, say moderns, in the days of Cæsar, Britain did not make a figure in letters sufficient to justify his assertion ; granted : yet we are not rashly to conclude that he advanced a falsehood ; we should rather look for an explanation of the matter. Now Ireland and Britain, from the earliest times, have been called the British isles, so that the word Britannia may be as well taken for Ireland ; and if its history explains and justifies everything advanced by Cæsar relative to this matter, why attempt totally to

reject such authority ? That it does, upon a careful investigation of the matter, cannot be controverted. [12] Besides, we see how satisfactorily our annals account for what he says of the Gaulish letter being Greek ; as it appears that to our ancestors the Greeks were indebted for their alphabet. Thus Cæsar is in accord with Irish writers, that the learning and religion of the ancient Celtæ came from Ireland ; and to prove this, our history is the clearest comment upon what he and other ancient writers have advanced on the subject.

And as on the revival of letters it is universally confessed that Ireland was then the grand emporium of learning, we may safely presume that, had the continental annals of remoter days been preserved, they would confirm her claim in as full a manner. Thus, Lucian tells us that Hercules, among the Gauls, was represented as an old man, with a bald head and long white beard ; that through his tongue were several fine gold wires, which were again fixed to the ears of the people, who seemed to follow him with pleasure. That by this they represented the powers of eloquence, not of strength ; and on this account they called him Hercules *Ogmios*. Now when the reader is informed that Ogham was the name of the ancient hieroglyphic character, (and probably of the Gaulish too, the figure of which is exhibited in the present work,) he will at once account for the Gauls calling their Hercules *Ogmios*. Again, Floras, in his relation of the Allobrogian war, tells us that among the captives who graced the triumph, Bituitus appeared in his silver chariot, and his arms of *different colours*, such as he fought with. [13] That the equestrian order in Ireland fought in chariots in early days, our annals testify ; that they did so in Gaul, Pausanius and Cæsar declare ; and these chariots were highly ornamented with gold, silver, and precious stones. But what can Florus mean by the *discoloribus armis* of Bituitus ? Metals were early worked here to great perfection, and they took uncommon pains to ornament and enrich their arms. In the reign of the monarch Eochaidh, A. D. 2909, the art of staining swords and javelins, etc., of different colours, was first invented and brought into use, for which reason he was surnamed Faobhar-glass, or of the Green Edge, because his weapons were mostly of this colour.

Having endeavoured to remove from the mind of the candid and learned reader, those prejudices which malevolence and ignorance have so long thrown on the annals of Ireland, it remains that I should explain why a history *so highly interesting to letters* should not only be so little known, but be also so shockingly misrepresented to all Europe ! Among the ancients, Strabo, Pomponius Mela, and Julius Solinus, have drawn horrible pictures of the manners and customs of the Irish nation. But these same writers are in accord, that the country was as bleak and inhospitable as the people were savage and barbarous ; so that their total ignorance of the nature of the climate is the best apology for their misrepresentation of its inhabitants. Besides, Ireland was then, and always continued, the avowed enemy to Rome ; no wonder, then, that her writers should regard her with an inimical eye.

[1] Teagasc-Cormbhic-Mhic-Art, or the Royal Admonitions of Corinac to his son Cairbre.

[2] Histor. Ecclesiast. Britan. lib. iii. cap. 27.

[3] Vita St. Cataldi, Usserii Primord, Eccles. Britan. p. 755, etc.

[4] Vita Julii Agricolaë.

[5] Comment lib. vi.

- [6] 2 Sam. i. 10. 1 Chron. xx. 2, etc.
- [7] 2 Sam. i. 17, etc.
- [8] Commentar. lib. vi.
- [9] Vita Jul. Agricol.
- [10] Histor. Eccles. Brit. lib. iii. cap. 27.
- [11] De Bello Gallioo, lib. vi. cap. 13, 14.
- [12] Introduction to Irish History, part L chap. 2, 3.
- [13] Lib. iii. cap. 2.

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