

Short History Irish People

A Short History of The Irish People From The Earliest Times to 1920

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1922

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Language versus Race.—Whenever the various races came into contact, much intermingling took place. Tribes of one race were often interspersed with those of another race. This appears to have occurred in particular in the North, where many of the Teutonic tribes, prior to the third century B.C., were tributary to their Celtic neighbours. There was much similarity in the social and economic systems of both, especially in the tenure of land—so important in primitive societies. To this is probably due the fact that in later history we find some tribes of Teutonic race speaking a Celtic language. Neither in early history nor in modern times is the language spoken by a people a reliable test of the race to which that people belongs.

The Earliest Inhabitants.—The fact that a Celtic language was the earliest tongue that we know with certainty to have been spoken in Ireland is not, therefore, a sure indication that the earliest inhabitants of the country in historic times were purely of Celtic race. It is certain that Ireland was early occupied by *pre-Aryan peoples*, traces of whose language even are said to be found in some of our place-names. The extent to which these were absorbed by the later Aryans is uncertain. Our annals suggest that the early colonies completely disappeared, and that the later ones were almost altogether supplanted by their respective successors. Modern critical students hold, on the other hand, that a large proportion of the inhabitants of Ireland were pre-Aryan in race, whose identity became merged in that of the later Celtic speakers.

There is uncertainty, too, as regards the origin of the Celtic speakers themselves. We know nothing positive as to their race, the countries from which they came to Ireland, the number of colonies which came, or the respective periods at which they arrived. Tradition says nothing of their race, but tells, as we shall see, of various waves of immigration, all of which are said to have originated in *Greece* and the countries on the east of it, and to have come to Ireland, some from the North, and some from the South, each succeeding wave supplanting the one which preceded it. It is also held, on the other hand, that the process of colonisation was gradual, and that some of the latest arrivals of Celtic speakers were originally *Teutonic* in race.

The Gaels and the Brythons.—The one fact of which we can be certain, therefore, is that when first we get a definite view of early Ireland we find it inhabited by a people who called themselves Gaels. They spoke a Celtic language which they called Gaelic, and which still lives under that name. *Gaelic* was the language of the earlier of the two Western waves of

Celtic immigration whose tongues are still spoken. The second wave—which did not reach Ireland—was that of the *Brythons* or *Cymry*. To the Gaelic branch belong *Irish* and *Scottish* have been, are questions of the merest conjecture. This applies especially to the accounts of all the colonies which are said to have landed before the coming of the “Milesians” and they may, therefore, be summarised as “mythological” history.

Earliest Colonies.—The first colony after the Flood is said to have been that led by *Partholan*, whose followers occupied the plains of Moynalta, north of the Liffey, for 300 years until they were all cut off by a plague. Thirty years afterwards the *Nemedians* came from Scythia. Their possession of the island was contested by the *Fomorians*, a race of sea-robbers of uncertain origin, whose great stronghold was in Tory Island. So oppressive were the exactions of the Fomorians that after two hundred years the bulk of the Nemedians fled from the country in three bands, from which eventually sprang the *Firbolgs*, the *Tuatha Dé Danann*, who were successive colonists of Ireland, and the *Britons*, who occupied what is now England and Wales.

The *Firbolgs*.—Two bands of the Nemedians had fled to Greece. The descendants of one of these bands, after a lapse of two centuries, again returned to Ireland under the name of the Firbolgs. They landed in three separate bodies, numbering 5,000 in all, and occupied the country without opposition. They divided the island amongst five of their princes, and thus originated the popular conception of the “five provinces.” To the Firbolgs is ascribed the erection of the great stone forts such as Staigue Fort in Kerry and Dun Aengus in Arran.

The legend of the Firbolgs is generally accepted as representing a *real race of men*, who probably settled in various small groups in Ireland. Who they were, however, is uncertain. They are thought to have been related to the *Belgae*, a Celtic-speaking people, probably Teutonic in race, one branch of which occupied the south-west of Britain, while another branch was situated on the rivers Seine and Mame, between the Celts of Gaul on the South and the Teutons on the North.

Tuatha Dé Danann.—The next colony consisted of the descendants of the other Nemedian band which had settled in Greece. These were known as the Tuatha Dé Danann. They had become skilled in all the arts, and were feared on account of their magical powers. They travelled across Europe to *Lochlann* or Scandinavia, where they remained for a time teaching in four cities. Next they moved to the *north of Britain*, where they stopped for seven years. Thence they came to Ireland on the heels of the Firbolgs, when the latter had been only 36 years in occupation of the country. Under their King, “*Nuadha of the Silver Hand*,” they defeated the Firbolgs in the battle of *South Moytirra* near Cong (in Co. Mayo), and 27 years afterwards defeated the Fomorians—who still infested the country—at the battle of *North Moytirra* (in Co. Sligo). For two centuries they retained possession of the island. Many of the Firbolgs remained, however, especially in the West; and they figure as a distinct people long after the Tuatha Dé Danann themselves had been swept away.

To this people are ascribed the great sepulchral monuments at New Grange on the River Boyne. They, too, are said to have brought to Ireland the *Lia Fáil*, or “Stone of Destiny,” upon which the High King was crowned at Tara. Some believe that this famous stone was brought in later times by an Irish Colony to Scotland, and was thence taken to Westminster by Edward I of England. It is more strongly held, however, that the stone is that which still crowns the hill of Tara.

It is fairly certain that the fabled Tuatha Dé Danann were *not a real people*. The references to them are not definite ; and they disappear after the coming of the Milesians, when they vanish into the hills and raths to reappear as fairies. Their chief personages were probably the gods of the Pagan Irish, who, after the introduction of Christianity, came to be looked upon as having been human beings. It is probable also that to this mythical people were ascribed many of the adventures of other colonists in their struggles with the earlier inhabitants.

“Legendary” History.—The traditions of the coming of the “Milesians”—the last of the Celtic-speaking colonies which came to Ireland—are more definite than those of the earlier colonies. They convey a clearer impression of dealing with real people and real events. They are, however, full of impossible details, and abound in absurdities and inconsistencies. The details which are given of the prolonged travels of the Milesians from *Scythia* through *Egypt* and *Spain* are obviously improbable : while the list of unimportant kings—nearly every one of whom is alleged to have been killed by his successor—is also obviously fictitious. But the purely mythological literature of the earlier traditions is absent, and the stories, incredible as they are in many respects, appear to be based upon some truth in important events. The accounts of the early “Milesians” may, therefore, be termed “legendary” history.

Origin of the “Milesians.”—The “Milesians,” the last and most famous in tradition of the early colonies, arrived, according to various accounts, between 1700 years B.C. and 1000 years B.C. The legends speak of their extensive journeyings during many centuries from their original habitation in Scythia through Thrace, Egypt, “Gothland,” Britain and Spain. One of their leaders, named *Gadelius*, from whom the name of Gaedheal is said to be derived, is mentioned as a contemporary of Moses. In Spain their leader was *Mileadh*, or *Milesius*, who had married an Egyptian princess named *Scota*, and from the two they took the names of “Milesians” and “Scots.” Through all their travels they had been animated by the prospect of an “Island of Destiny” in the West, which was to be occupied by their descendants. Accordingly, in the time of Mileadh they despatched an expedition under his uncle *Ith* to discover this sacred island. Ith landed in Ireland, but was mortally wounded in an encounter with the inhabitants, and his dead body was brought back to Spain.

The “Milesian” Invasion.—Mileadh had died before the return of Ith’s expedition, but his eight sons, and the other chiefs, resolved to leave Spain with their followers for the island of which they were told. In thirty ships, with thirty soldiers and a number of followers in each, they set sail, and landed at three different spots—*Inbhear Slainghe* (Wexford Harbour), *Inbhear Scéine* (Kenmare River), and *Inbhear Cólpa*, (the Bo]rne). Five sons of Mileadh were lost in the landing, including *Donn*, who was drowned in Kenmare River ; and *Colpa*, lost in the Boyne ; and *Ir*, who was shipwrecked on the western coast. The “Milesians” defeated the Tuatha Dé Danann in two battles ; the first at *Slieve Mis* (in Co. Kerry), in which the defending force was led by their Queen Eire, and in which *Scota* was slain ; the second at *Taillte* (“Telltown” in Co. Meath) where the Tuatha Dé Danann were finally overcome, and their three Queens, *Eire*, *Fodla* and *Banba*, were slain.

“Milesian” Settlement—The victorious “Milesians” now divided the country between their principal leaders. It is evident, however, that the original inhabitants were not exterminated. The new colonists, comparatively small in numbers, established themselves as a dominant class, but sections of the pre-Milesian people remained distinct but tributary tribes in many parts of the country—and, indeed, in some districts retained their independence. *Heremon* and *Heber*, two sons of Mileadh, divided the sovereignty of the country : to the followers of their brother *Ir* was given part of “Ulster,” while the followers of their uncle *Ith*

settled in a territory in the south-west called *Corkalee* (*Corca Luighe*). *Amergin*, the other surviving brother, who appears to have been the “soothsayer” of the expedition, was not allotted any independent position. Heremon and Heber quarrelled very soon: Heber was slain, and Heremon became the *sole ruler*.

The “Milesian” Families.—To the four princes of the “Milesians”—Heremon, Heber, Ir, and Ith—all the “free clans” of Ireland in later times, professed to trace their lineage. From Heremon the ruling families of most of Ireland claimed their descent, from Heber those of Munster, from Ir those of Ulaidh (counties Down and Antrim) children, but of this numerous family only two figure in legend. These were Laoghair (Layra) and Cobhthaigh (Coffey). Coffey had usurped the throne and banished Layra’s grandson Labhraidhe (Lowry) called “*Loingseach*,” or “The Mariner.” Lowry fled to Gaul, where he gathered a band of mercenaries with whom he landed on the coast, marched up the river *Barrow* to Dinn Riogh (*Dinn Ree*), the royal residence, where he slew the usurper and his principal followers. From the lances or *Laighne* (pronounced *Lyna*), which the foreign auxiliaries of *Lowry Laingseach* carried, the name of Laighin (*Lyne*) or “Leinster,” is said to be derived.

All of the so-called “Heremonian” families trace their descent through Ugaine Mór—those of Laighin from the successful Lowry, and the others from the defeated Coffey.

The *division of Ireland* into twenty-five parts made by Ugaine lasted for nearly three centuries, when it is said to have been ended by Eochy Feylagh, the father of Queen Maeve.

Tradition and Theory.—The foregoing traditions of early Ireland, beginning in pure mythology, obscured by wild legends, and only towards the end revealing an occasional glimpse of actual facts which are consistent with later circumstances, are obviously not history. Modern scholars have endeavoured to ascertain the truths that underlie them, and have formulated reasonable theories of the origin of the early inhabitants of Ireland. According to these the last colonisation was much more recent than is stated in our traditions, and consisted of different bands slowly pushing through the country, and establishing themselves as a dominant class over the earlier inhabitants, who, however, still remained in distinct tribes, and formed the majority of the population. These late arrivals, big, blond, fair-haired men as they are always described, were *Celtic speakers*, but probably Teutonic in race, who came to Ireland through Britain. In the densely wooded and thinly populated country many small bodies might be long settled in any part before arousing hostility, and even then it would be only that of their nearest neighbours.

It may be safely said that Irish history is reliable as to genealogies and the broad features of the principal events from the Christian Era, and that it is fairly reliable, from a more remote period, as a guide to such outstanding events as the foundation of Emania and the taking of Dinn Riogh.

Section III. The Period in Literature

The Use of Letters.—It is evident that the reliability of our early traditions must depend greatly upon the time at which written records were first made and preserved. The period at which the use of letters figure at one time as gods and at another as kings and heroes. The literature referring to this period produced in later ages has been grouped as the

“ mythological cycle.” The “ *Leabhar Gabhála*” (*Lour Gawaula*) or “ Book of Invasions” fragments of which are preserved in the Book of Ballymote and Book of Leinster, tells of the early colonies. The “ *First Battle of Moythrra*” describes the battle in which the Firbolgs were defeated, and King Nuadh lost his hand. The “ *Second Battle of Mqytirra*” narrates the defeat of the Fomorians, the slaying of “ Nuadh of the Silver Hand” by the Fomorian “ *Balor of the Evil Eye*,” and the death of Balor by the spear of Lugh Lamh-fhada (“ *Lugh the Long-handed*”). In the “ *Fate of the Children of Tusireann*” we learn how Lugh compelled his rivals to collect the *eric* or fine which enabled him to defeat the Fomorians. The “ *Fate of the Children of Lir*” and the “ *Destruction of Dinn Riogh*” are among the many other pieces which deal with events laid in this period.

Irish Mythology.—The frequent references in our literature to the gods and goddesses of Pagan Ireland render necessary some knowledge of those mysterious deities. They do not hold the position held by the classical deities, their different attributes are not so definite, and their relations to each other are not so clear. The *Dagda* and his son *Angus* resided in *Brugh na Boinne*, where are situated the great sepulchral mounds of New Grange on the Boyne. *Lugh* and *Ogma* were brothers of the *Dagda*. Lugh gave its name to the city of Lyons in France, and in Irish to the month of August (*Lughnas*), in which month the Games of *Taillte* (Teltown) were celebrated in his honour. *Manannán*, the son of *Lir*, was a sea-god ; *Goibniu* was the metal-worker ; *Diancecht* the healer. Amongst the goddesses were *Dana* or *Ana*, the “ mother of the gods” ; *Brigit*, a daughter of the *Dagda*, and the goddess of poetry ; and the war-goddesses *Macha* and *Mór-rigu*.

There is much in the relations of the various deities to suggest that the gods of different eras had become grouped into one Pantheon.

TABLE OF PRINCIPAL DATES [1]

- (?) Arrival of Parthalonians . 2266
- (?) Arrival of Nemedians . . 1936
- (?) Arrival of Firbolgs . . 1536
- (?) Arrival of Tuatha De Danann 1500
- (?) Arrival of Milesians . . 1300
- (*Siege of Troy*) . . . 1200
- (*Solomon's Temple*), , . 1000
- (?) Ollamh Fóla ... 800
- (*Alexander the Great*) . . 330
- Foundation of Eamhain Macha *circa* 300
- The naming of Laighin . *circa* 250

Decay of Celts in Europe from about 250

(Wars of Romans against Carthage) . . . 264-146

CHAPTER II

From The First Century B.C. To The Coming of St Patrick (A.D. 432)

Section I. Decline of Eamhain and Rise of Tara

The “ Five Provinces ” (Eochy Feylagh).—The division of Ireland into twenty-five parts, ascribed to *Ugaine* having lasted for three centuries, is said to have been ended by *Eochaidh Féidhleach* (Eochy Feylagh), who was King of the people of Leinster shortly before the Christian Era. He is said to have restored the legendary “ *Five Provinces* ” of the Firbolgs, and to have placed sub-Kings over each. This division, however, seems to have been as lightly regarded as were any of the previous ones, and it is not until the time of St. Patrick that we get *definite political sub-divisions* of Ireland. For the present, we can only witness the gradual development of the supremacy of certain families in different parts of the island. The conquering clans, who, in course of time, established the Irish states, gradually extended their power over the clans around them, leaving them undisturbed in their own territories under their own chiefs, but subordinate to and paying tribute to the chiefs of the superior clans. Whether or not these latter clans were more recent comers is still a matter of speculation.

The Decline of Eamhain (Connor MacNessa.)—Shortly before the Christian Era the most powerful Kings in Ireland were those who ruled in Emania founded three hundred years before. This family (said to be descended from *Ir*) was called the Clanna Rudhraidhe (*Clanna Rury*) from one of its early kings. Its sway extended over Ulaidh (*Ulaidh*—the people of Ulla, or “ *Ultonians* ”), and in early times spread over nearly all the North, and, at least, as far South as Tailte (in Co. Meath). Its king at this time was *Connor Mac Nessa*. “ *Ultonian* ” literature gives us vivid accounts of his power, his palace and court, and of his military knights called the “ *Red Branch* ” (*Craobh Ruadh*—*Creeve Rua*). In his reign, however, internal dissensions broke out, and a number of the chiefs of the Red Branch seceded under the leadership of *Fergus*. Soon afterwards a war, which lasted for seven years, broke out between Connor and Maeve of Connacht, who was aided by Fergus and other seceding Red Branch heroes. The power of the Clanna Rury was checked ; and, from that time forward, steadily declined. The war between Connor and Maeve is celebrated in the “ *Táin bó Chualigne* .”

It is thought that the Ulaidh belonged to an *early race of settlers*, who in the rest of Ireland had been overcome by later arrivals, and in Ulaidh alone had maintained their independence. Important clans claiming descent from the Clanna Rury are found in the centre, west and south of Ireland, occupying a subordinate but perfectly distinct position. [2]

Queen Maeve.—The war which broke the power of the Clanna Rury was shared in by contingents from every part of Ireland. It was led by the celebrated princess *Maeve* (Meadhbh). She is said to have been a daughter of Eochy Feylagh, and to have married a Firbolg chief of Connacht, who was made sub-King of part of Connacht by Eochy. By her was founded, according to legend, the palace of Cruachan (*Croghan* in County Roscommon), which afterwards became the seat of the founders of the Kingdom of *Connacht*.

The "Attaeotti" Revolution.—The next event of importance is that which is revealed in the stories of the rising of the "*unfree clans*," which occurred soon after the Christian Era. The subject tribes or Attaeotti (*Aitheach Tuatha*), oppressed by the exactions of their conquerors, rose in revolt, and were aided by the King of *Ulaidh*. They slew or expelled most of their masters, but were at length subdued by *Tuathal "Teachtmhar"* or "The Legitimate," who defeated them in the battle of *Aicill* or Skreen (in Co. Meath).

The accounts of this revolution are clear enough to indicate some *great political upheaval*, out of which arose a great central dynasty to rival those of Eamhain on the north and Laighin on the south.

Dynasty of Tara Founded.—When Tuathal had subdued the revolting clans, he is said to have founded a new province called *Midhe* or "Meath," by cutting off portions of the other provinces. The centre of this new Kingdom was the palace of *Tara (Teamhair)*, while other royal palaces were those of *Uisneach*, *Tlachtgha* (the Hill of Ward), and *Taillte* (Teltown). To Tuathal may therefore be ascribed the foundation of the Kingdom of Meath, and the establishment of the *great dynasty of Tara*, which ruled the clans of the great open plain from the sea to the Shannon, and afterwards sent out *branches* to rule over the clans of more than half of Ireland.

The "Borumha" Tribute.—Tuathal is also said to have originated the famous *Borumha* (Boruma) *tribute*, which for 500 years was the cause of fierce fighting between the Kings of Tara and the people of Leinster. The traditional cause of the Borumha was an act of treachery on the part of the King of Laighin towards Tuathal, in revenge for which the latter imposed a heavy tribute upon the people of Leinster. It would appear that the Kings of Tara, endeavouring to extend their power southwards over the plains between the Leinster Mountains and the Bog of Allen, and to bring the tribes settled there under tribute, were resisted by the descendants of *Lowry Loingseach*. Whatever may have been the origin of the Borumha, the rivalry between the two families of Ugaine lasted for many centuries ; the Kings of Meath asserting a right to tribute from all Leinster, and their opponents claiming as strongly to be the independent rulers of all its tribes. It is to be noted that the Borumha was supposed to be divided amongst the "Heremonian" families only—that is Meath and its off-shoots [3], the rulers of which were all descended from Tuathal, and his grandson Conn.

Section II. The "Royal Families" of Ireland

Genealogies.—Nothing was of greater importance to the clans of Ireland than the records of their *ancestry*. Until the time of the final destruction of the clan system itself, every tribe jealously preserved the tradition of its descent from some famous ancestor. In early times these records were of vital importance : they were the title deeds of the clan to the territory it occupied ; they formed the bond which united various clans into one great tribe ; they justified the tributes which the different Kings imposed upon their subordinate clans. The genealogies of the clans were, therefore, carefully recorded, especially in the cases of those "*ruling clans*" who imposed tribute upon their neighbours, and who afterwards supplied the Kings who ruled over the great divisions of the island.

The Three Dynasties.— We have seen that those "ruling clans" claimed to be descended from the early leaders of the "Milesians". This is pure fable, due to a boastful tribal spirit which, not content with a really historical origin, traced back an ancestry through a line of

unknown Kings to Heremon, Heber, Ir, or Ith—and even beyond them to Noah ! These spurious ancestors may be rejected. But, having discarded them, we still find remaining as cardinal facts in Irish History the *great groups of families*. We also find that of three of these groups each has a common ancestor in three famous rival Kings. It is certain that the Kings and “ruling clans” of all the independent Kingdoms of Ireland (except Ulaidh) during historical times descended from one of three real personages—*Cahir Mór, Conn, and Mogh Nuath*—who flourished about the middle of the 2nd century. In them we find the *origin of the chief dynasties of Ireland*, and of the families who in later years professed to trace their ancestry back to mythical times.

Leinster Dynasty ; Cahir Mór—Soon after the reign of Tuathal, the rival Leinster family of Ugaine found themselves in conflict with new enemies on their west. These were some *southern tribes* who crossed the Barrow and overran the plains on the east of that river. The Leinster-men, with the aid of “Irian” and other auxiliaries, succeeded in defeating the invaders. A large territory on the west of the Barrow was granted to their Northern allies, who occupied it as a sort of military outpost, and became known as the “*Seven Tribes of Laoighis (Leix)*.” Thus secured on the south they renewed the contest with the Kings of Tara on their north. Their King, Cahir Mór, was finally defeated and slain by *Conn*, the grandson of Tuathal, but he had firmly established the dynasty of Laighin, and his posterity reigned as independent Kings of that territory.

From Cahir Mór are descended all the “*ruling clans*” of Leinster, from whom the Kings were chosen, and who were free of tribute. Through him, also, all the other families of the Leinster branch of “Heremonians” trace their descent.

Tara Dynasty : Conn “of the Hundred Battles.”—No sooner had Conn defeated his Leinster rival than the King of Tara found himself forced to defend Meath against the same power which had previously attacked Leinster. Having been foiled in one direction the Southern tribes now moved in another, and advanced along the south bank of the Shannon between that river and the Slieve Bloom Mountains. Here under their King *Mogh Nuath* (Nuadhat) they came into conflict with the grandson and successor of Tuathal. The two antagonists at first agreed to divide the whole island between them, “*Leath Chuinn*” the northern half, going to Conn, and “*Leath Mhogha*” the southern half, to his rival. But within twelve months Conn vanquished and slew his enemy in the battle of *Magh Leana* (near Tullamore). The two-fold division quickly ended as a political factor, but the names remain in ordinary use in Irish speech to the present day. His many victories won for Conn the title of “*Céad Cathach*” or “*of the Hundred Battles*,” [4] but he fell at length fighting against *Ulaidh*.

From Conn were derived the Kings and “free clans” not only of Meath, but also of the Kingdoms to the north, north-west, and west, which were afterwards founded by his successors. In other words the second and more important branch of “*Heremonians*” are all the clues to the alliances and rivalries which took place up to the coming of the Normans, and also to the historical reasons for the conflicting claims which prohibited unity before and after that event.

“ Milesian” and authentic Ancestries

<i>Legendary Ancestors.</i>	<i>Later Ancestors.</i>	<i>Dynasties.</i>
Heremon} (Ugaine)	Cahir Mór	Leinster Meath (and off shoots)
Heber	Mogh Nuadhat . .	Munster
Ir }	Fergus . . Conal Ceamach . .	Ulster (Claima Rury)
Ith	Lewy Mac Con	(unimportant)

Section III. Growth of Tara and of Cashel

The chief interest in the dynasties thus firmly established in the second century centres around the descendants of *Conn* and of *Mogh Nuadhat*. During the next two centuries we find the vigorous descendants of Conn building up a strong and compact Kingdom whose centre was Tara, until eventually his posterity overflowed to establish new dynasties of the “*Siol Chuinn*” in other parts of the island. During the same period the race of Mogh Nuadhat—or more correctly of his son Oilioll Olim—not only maintained their supremacy over the numerous powerful tribes of the South, but extended their sway further, both north and east, until their Kings from their *new seat in Cashel* ruled over nearly all Leath Mhogha.

Cormac Mac Art (A.D. 227-266).—In the reign of Cormac Mac Airt, a grandson of Conn, Tara reached its greatest splendour. During a long reign of forty years he carried on wars against the Clanna Rury, the descendants of Cahir Mór and of Oilioll Olim, and also against the tribes of Connacht. But his greatest fame was as an administrator and as patron of laws and learning. To Cormac are ascribed most of the buildings, which covered the Hill of Tara, chief among them being the “*Teach Miodh Chuarta*,” or Banqueting Hall, of whose glories the early literature contains glowing descriptions. Colleges for war, history, and law were also established by him, and during his reign the first mill erected in Ireland was built on the slopes of the royal hill. He is said to have had compiled the “*Saltair of Tara*” (now lost), which contained an account of the territories ruled over by the King of Tara, and the tributes payable to him in respect of them. Retiring from the throne, he wrote “*Teagasg Ríogh*,” or “*Instruction of a Prince*,” full of enlightened principles of conduct and government. Tradition says that Cormac had gained some conception of Christianity, and that accordingly he left instructions that he was not to be buried in the Pagan cemetery of the Kings called “*Brugh na Bóinne*” at Newgrange on the Boyne.

The “Fianna.”—Cormac Mac Airt is one of the principal characters in the mass of literature which narrates the exploits of the Fianna or “*Fenians*.” That these were organised bodies of *professional soldiers* under their own leaders, independent of all tribal ties, seems to be clear. Although the stories relate mostly to the Fianna who dwelt on the borders of Leinster and Meath, there were also similar bodies in Connacht and in Munster. Mostly we find the Fianna in opposition to the Kings of Tara. Under their leader, Cumhal (Cool), they were defeated by Conn at Cnucha or Castleknock, but in the time of Cormac, we find them under *Fionn, the son of Cumhal*, in alliance with the King, a fact which may account for some

of the splendour of his reign. In the reign of Cormac's son, *Cairbre of the Liffey*, they again are hostile, and are finally destroyed by him at the battle of Gabhra, near Skreen in Meath (A.D. 284).

Niall of the Hostages (A.D. 379-405).— So powerful had the Kings of Tara become that in the next century we find them carrying their arms into the neighbouring island, and even to the Continent of Europe. Three hundred years before, *the Romans*, having subdued the Celts of what is modern France, had also conquered (A.D. 81) the southern part of Britain, known to the Gaels as "*Albion*" and now called England. The Britons were all enslaved except those in Wales and other parts of the West. In the north of "*Alba*" or *Scotland*, the "*Picts*," and some Gaels, who had settled in a district called *Dal Riada*, [5] remained independent. The Roman dominion was now on the decline, and Britons and Picts and Gaels assailed the common enemy. In their attacks they were aided by different expeditions from Eire. One of the most famous leaders in these expeditions was *Niall, King of Tara*, called "of the Nine Hostages." He first aided the Gaels of Dal Riada against the Picts, and then led both against the decaying Roman power. Eventually, Niall carried his arms across to the Continent, and was killed on the banks of the Loire. Soon after his death the Romans finally withdrew their soldiers from Britain (A.D. 411).

In the accounts by Latin writers of these attacks the name "Scots" generally signifies Gaels, as it was not until long afterwards that Alba became known as Scotland—taking its name, indeed, from the Gaelic colonists who in later years established it as a unified Kingdom.

The Southern Kingdom of Caiseal.—While the descendants of Conn were thus engaged in establishing a compact Kingdom in the central plain stretching from the Shannon to the sea, another great power was being slowly developed in the South by the posterity of his rival, Mogh Nuadhat. Of the two branches of his family, the Southern, or *Eoghanacht*, was at first the more powerful. At first these occupied all the territory on the southern bank of the Lower Shannon, but gradually penetrating into the mountains on their west, and through the great forest of *Coill Mór*, which lay on their south, they settled colonies and brought all the tribes of the South under tribute. Then they turned eastwards along the slopes of the Galtees to the upper waters of the Suir, and in the 4th century seized upon the Rock of Cashel. This conspicuous and imposing place upon the border of their territory became thence-forward regarded as the seat of the Southern Kingdom—a Tara of the South—and the "*King of Caiseal*" was entitled to the services or tributes of the tribes of Munster.

The Dal Chais cross the Shannon.—At the same time as the Eoghanachta were establishing their supremacy in South Munster, their rival kinsmen, the *Dal Chais*, [6] were expanding on the North. Eventually they crossed *the river Shannon* into the traditional province of Connacht, and under Lughaidh Meann, settled down in permanent occupation of a large territory corresponding to most of the present County Clare (A.D. 300). Many of the surrounding tribes, also, were brought under tribute. Their movement northwards along the banks of the Shannon continued for many years, and was only finally stopped in the fifth century when a king of the new Connacht dynasty planted the Ui Maine tribes as a barrier to their progress.

The Dal Chais had the right of "*alternate succession*" with the Eoghanachta to the throne of "Cashel." In early years the rule was fairly well adhered to, but in later times it was frequently broken.

- [1] Events not connected with Irish History will be inserted in italics and brackets in the Tables of Dates appended to each chapter.
- [2] *The “ Ultonians ” are also said to have been of “ Pictish ” origin.*
- [3] *Tara, Oirghialla, Aileach and Connacht.*
- [4] *More correctly “ the Hundred Fighter.”*
- [5] *“ Dal Riada ” consisted really of two sections, one in Ireland and one in Scotland, separated only by a narrow sea.*
- [6] *The older, and literary, spelling is “ Dál g-Cais.”*

A Short History of the Irish People from the Earliest Times to 1920 (1922)

Author : Mary Teresa Hayden , Mary Hayden, George Aloysius Moonan

Publisher : Longmans, Green and co.

Year : 1922

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : University of California

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/ashorthistoryir00moongoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.augty.org

September 22 2013