

The Bards of Ireland

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To a work specially devoted to record and illustrate the conduct, proceedings, demeanor and bearing of the Bardic Order in Ireland at a certain period of their career, it is necessary to premise a few notices explanatory of their position and history, and point out the nature of that extensive influence which they once possessed, and occasionally so signally abused. For our materials in such a task we have drawn upon a variety of sources, many of them confined to Manuscript and others more accessible. In this latter department much of our information has been derived from the Transactions of the Ibero-Celtic Society, a work edited and compiled by the late learned and laborious Irish scholar, Edward O'Reilly, Esq.; also from Walker's Irish Bards, but principally from our national Annals.

The term Bard, signifying a Poet, is common to several of the European languages as well as to the Irish to the Teutonic, Greek and Roman as well as Celtic. In Welch and Armoric the word is written *bardh* and *barth*; in Greek *bardos*, and in Latin *bardus*. As to its derivation there are various opinions, which are after all no better than conjectural. From the word *bard* is derived the family name of Mac an Bhaird; which means the descendant of the Bard; this has been anglicised to Mac Ward; and the Mac Wards are recorded in our Annals from almost the first establishment of surnames, as chief Professors of poetry in Ulster.

Tacitus, in his "Germania," gives an account of the German Bards, and says, that by the recital of their battle songs, which he calls *Barditus*, they greatly excited the valour of their warriors. The Bards amongst the Gauls were highly honoured. According to Pompeius Festus, a Bard in the Gallic language signified *a singer*, who celebrated the praises of heroes. Such was the respect paid to this ancient order, according to Diodorus Siculus, that they could put a stop to armies in the heat of battle. When a Bard appeared in an army, it was either as a herald or ambassador; hence his person and property were sacred in the midst of hostile forces. After a battle they raised the song over the deceased, and extolled the heroes who survived.

The order of Bards is of the very highest antiquity in Ireland. We are informed in our ancient Irish MSS. that *Amergin*, brother of Heber, Heremon, and Ir, the sons of Milidh or Milesius, was appointed by them, in their government of this country, their chief Bard, Druid and Brehon. There are four poems still extant which are ascribed to him as the first Milesian Bard.

The successor of Amergin in his poetic office appears to have been *Lughaidh*, or Lugad, son of Ith, and nephew of Milesius, as he is styled a *Fileadh* or poet. There is a poem ascribed to him in the Book of Invasions, which, it is said, he composed on the death of his wife Fail, the daughter of Milesius.

The next chief Bard (at a long interval) of whom there is any account was *Roighne Rosgadhach*, or Royné the poetic, son of Ugaine Mór, and brother of Mal who reigned monarch of Ireland in the time of Alexander the Great, or about three centuries before the Christian era. There is an historical poem in the Book of Invasions which is ascribed to this poet.

According to O'Reilly, in his account of Irish writers, *Adhna* was chief poet or Bard of Ireland about A.M. 3950; and on his death *Fercheirtne* the poet was appointed to the vacant chair by Oilíoll and Meave, king and queen of Connaught. Neide, the son of Adhna, who was in Alba (Scotland) at the time of his father's death, determined upon returning to Ireland, and asserting his right to the Laureatship. Upon his arrival at Emania, the seat of the kings

of Ulster, finding Fercheirtne absent he seized on the *Tuidhean* or Ollav's robe, and took possession of the bardic chair. Fercheirtne hearing of this incident, repaired to Emania, and meeting with Neide, a dispute for the professorship was carried on between the rival Bards upon the qualifications necessary for an Ollave. This dispute is entitled "The Dialogue of the two Sages," of which there are two ancient copies in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

About the commencement of the Christian era lived *Lughar*, the Laureate of Oilioll and Meave, who designated himself in one of his poems as a poet and Druid, and probably was then the chief Bard of Ireland.

In the second century of the Christian era lived the poets *Ciothruadh*, and *Fingin* son of Luchta. The former was the messenger or herald sent by Conn of the Hundred Battles to Mac Neid, king of Munster, with proposals of peace ; and the latter composed a poem upon the four roads, said to be made to Tara on the night of the birth of that monarch. It would seem that those two poets were the most distinguished of the bards in the reign of Conn of the Hundred Fights.

About A.D. 270 lived *Fergus finnbel* (or of the melodious mouth), son of Finn Mac Cumhall, and brother of Oisin, who was the chief poet or Bard of the Fians of Erin.

Towards the end of the third century lived *Flaithri*, son of Fithil, who it appears was poet to the monarch Cormac, and therefore in all probability the head of the Bards of Ireland in his time.

Cormac the monarch, having lost the sight of one of his *eyes* and being therefore incapacitated by the laws of the land from ruling the country, vacated the throne and applied the remainder of his life to literature. It is stated that he founded three colleges at Tara for the study of jurisprudence, history, and military science ; and it is more than probable that he was enrolled in the order of the Bards. At all events he caused the Psalter of Tara to be compiled, as the depository of the records of the nation. He wrote some laws and the instructions for his son Carbry of the Liffey, and ancient copies of those have come down to our times. Fithil, his chief Brehon or judge, also wrote some laws, copies of which may be seen in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

About the year 405 lived the poet *Torna Eigeas* (or Torna the learned), who fostered and educated the monarch Niall of the Nine Hostages, and also Core, king of Cashel or Munster, and most probably he was the chief bard of Ireland at the beginning of the fifth century.

Armstrong states in his Gaelic dictionary at the word Bard, that princes and warriors did not disdain to claim affinity with the order of the Bards. The Celts, being passionately fond of poetry, would listen to no instruction, whether from priest or philosopher, unless it was conveyed in rhymes. Thus we find a bard often entrusted with the education of a prince ; and only two centuries ago a Highland chieftain had seldom any other instructor.

About A.D. 433, Dubhthach Mac Ui Lughair, or Duvthach the grandson of Lugar, was pre-eminent amongst the Bards of Laoghaire (Leary), monarch of Ireland. This Duvthach was converted to Christianity by St. Patrick.

Amergin, son of Amalgaidh (or Awley), was chief poet or Bard to the monarch Dermot, who ascended the throne of Ireland A.D. 544, and died A.D. 565. The name Amergin is a strong proof that bardism was hereditary in certain families, as no doubt this person was so named after the first of the Milesian bardic order.

Under the year 596 is recorded Dalian Forgail, who, according to the writer of the following work, was not only Laureate of Ireland, but also of Alba, Britain and Gaul. Dalian was succeeded in the chief professorship by Shanchan the aged poet.

Besides the Ard Ollave or chief Bard of all Ireland, there was also an Ard Ollave of each of the five provinces, from amongst whom the chief Bard of Erin was elected, as stated in this work. It is said that the head professor of Ireland had thirty inferior bards as attendants, while the provincial chief Ollave had fifteen, but it appears that Shanchan largely increased the number of attendant minstrels, as it is stated that he took along with him to the court of Guaire, king of Connaught, no less than thrice fifty of the tuneful craft, independent of those he had left behind him. The number of bards that accompanied Dalian to the fortress of the king of Oirgiall, was thrice nine, which probably was the number determined at the great convention at Drom-ceat, when their numbers were reduced and limited, “ proportionate with the various provinces and districts in the kingdom.”

We are informed that in the great bardic Institution there were professors of music as well as of poetry, history and other arts, and perhaps also all the bards were skilled in music, as many are said to have performed on the harp with a master hand.

“ The monarch of Ireland,” says Sir James Ware, “ had always in his retinue ten officers, a lord, a judge, a Druid, a physician, a poet, an antiquary, a musician, and three stewards of his household ; the three first to assist him with their counsel, the three last to regulate and conduct the affairs of his family, and the other four to take care of his health and diversions.”

It is uncertain at what time seminaries or colleges were first established for the education of the Bards, but it is supposed to have been in the reign of Ollave Fodhla, or the learned professor, king of Ireland. He was originally king of Ulster and afterwards succeeded to the monarchy, some centuries before the Christian era. He was the first who instituted a Triennial Convention at Tara, and he is represented as a great legislator, and eminent for learning and wisdom.

In those seminaries it is said that the Druids instilled into the minds of the Bards, the rudiments of history, oratory and laws, through the medium of poetry. “ Their laws, their systems of physic and other sciences (says Keating) were poetical compositions, and set to music, which was always esteemed the most polite part of learning amongst them.”

Soon as the student had finished his course of education in those seminaries, an honorary cap called *Bairead*, and the degree of *Ollamh* or professor were conferred on him. Then he was supposed sufficiently qualified to fill any office of his order. And the most learned of these Ollaves were sometimes admitted into the Druidic hierarchy.

When the young Bard had received the degree of Ollave, the choice of his profession was determined by that of the family to which he belonged : he was either a *File*, a *Breitheamh*, or a *Seanchaidhe* by birth, offices which had been frequently united in the same person, but were generally disunited, being found too complex for one man. The term *Ollamh* signified a learned Doctor, or one eminently skilled in any art or science, and was therefore prefixed to the various learned professions. The *Ollamh na dán* or the *File* was the professor of poetry, and ranked highest amongst the bards. The *File* always attended in the field of battle upon the chief whom he served, marching at the head of the army, arrayed in a white flowing robe, harp glittering in his hands, and his person surrounded with *Oirfididh*, or instrumental musicians. While the battle raged, the bard stood apart, and watched in security (for the persons of the bards were held sacred) every action of the chief, in order to glean subjects for his lays. The *Ollamh na breitheamhnar* was the professor of Law. To the *Ollamh na reanchur*, belonged the department of history and antiquities. He also preserved the

genealogies of his patron. The Ollamh na ceól was the professor of music ; this class was also called *oirfididh*, i.e. musicians. Besides these there was a professor in every art and science, such as physicians, surgeons, mechanics, &c. Over each of these presided a chief styled *Ard Ollamh*. Thus we find in several passages in the Annals that the O’Coffeys, O’Higgins, and O’Dalys were chief professors of poetry over the schools of Ireland ; and many of those assumed the title of chief professors of the men of Ireland and Scotland, in Brehonism, Bardism, Minstrelsy, &c.

In early times several of the Kings of Ireland attained the high honour of being enrolled amongst the Bards ; and on the other hand we read that Cuan O’Lochain, who was chief Bard of Ireland in the year 1024, was appointed, during an interregnum, Regent of Ireland.

The Bards held a rank in the institutions of the country equal to the chief nobility, and had some of the highest seats appropriated to them at banquets and places of entertainment. They had extensive landed properties allotted to them, and many of them had their stately castles in after times. When surnames became established, the chief Bard was always styled as a prince or chief, with the definite article The prefixed to his name, as the Mac Egan or The O’Daly, just in the same manner that the Prince of Thomond was styled “ The O’Brien.”

Those learned men invariably kept houses of general hospitality for all travellers, and where the *litterati* might remain any length of time they pleased to stop. The annalists, in recording the deaths of many of those professors of the bardic order, inform us that they were men of wealth and affluence, and kept open houses for general hospitality, in which they entertained the rich and the poor. For example, the annalists state, that O’Duigenan of Kilronan, in the County of Roscommon, a learned historian, who died in A.D. 1496, kept an open house of general hospitality, and was one of the most wealthy Professors in Ireland, in cattle and herds ; and again, that Mac Ward, chief professor of poetry to O’Donnell (Prince of Tirconnell), president of several schools, a man profoundly learned in poetry and other arts, had founded and maintained an open house for general hospitality. We also read in the annals of many Medical Professors, who are represented as learned in many arts, men of great affluence and wealth, and also remarkable for hospitality.

It has been ascertained from the public legal Records that the rental of the landed properties of several of those professors even so late as the sixteenth century, would, at the present day, amount to upwards of four or five thousand pounds annually, besides the guerdons they received from the ruling sovereigns and chiefs ; many of them are stated to have maintained three or four schools on their estates, at which pupils were boarded and educated gratuitously. Throughout our annals we learn that almost all those professors died a natural death, very few of them having been slain in conflicts ; their persons and properties being held inviolate by all parties, as already observed. The *Eiric*, or compensation, levied for the killing of a chief professor, was next, in amount, to that required for a king or prince ; and it is recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, under the year 1400, that Gregory O’Maelconry, the intended chief professor of Siol Murray, in Roscommon, was accidentally killed by the cast of a dart, and one hundred and twenty-six cows were given as an *Eiric* or Fine, for his death, although it was by accident he had been slain.

The Bards were so highly esteemed by Niall O’Neill, King of Ulster, that, in the year 1387, he founded a house of general entertainment and support at Armagh, where they might meet and discuss the various branches of literature. In fact they were honoured and respected by all classes on account of their learning, and their high rank and influence in society.

At the inauguration of the kings and princes it was the duty of the Bard to recite aloud the inauguration ode, which he composed, and it was his privilege, as stated by Sir James Ware on MS. authorities, to place a white wand, the emblem of sovereignty and justice, in the

hands of the elected prince. The principal officers of the bardic order who attended officially at the inaugurations were the Brehons, Fileadhs and Seanchies or Historians.

The duty of the chief professor of history, and genealogy, at the inauguration, was to read and prove the pedigree of the prince ; and if a provincial king was a candidate for the monarchy of Ireland, his pedigree should be shown from one of the three sons of Milesius, namely Eber, Eremon and Ir, or from Ith, the uncle of Milidh. The Irish nobility were very exact in their pedigrees ; every petty chief had his own genealogist, who not only kept the pedigrees of the family, by whom he was retained, but also those of the other chiefs, whilst each genealogist was a check upon the others ; and hence our Irish pedigrees may be admitted to be more accurate than those of any other nation in Europe.

There are several families in Ireland who derive their surnames from the hereditary professions of their ancestors, and especially of the bardic order, such as *Mac an Bhreitheamhain*, or the descendant of the Brehon, anglicised to Brehony and Brehon ; *Mac an Bháird*, or the descendant of the Bard, and anglicised Ward, as already stated ; *O'Seanchain*, a name anglicised to O'Shanahan, and by some to Shannon, is believed to signify the descendant of the Historian ; *Mac an Leagha*, or the descendant of the Physician, anglicised Leech and Lee ; *Mac an Tiompánaigh*, or the descendant of the Tympanist, *Mac an Cruitín*, anglicised Tempany ; a name anglicised to Mac Curtin, being derived from *Cruit*, a harp, and *ín* the diminutive particle, signifying the small sized harp ; and we find in the Annals of the Four Masters, at the year 1404, that Giolla-Duivin Mac Curtin was Ollave of Thomond in music.

The following are the family names in which professions of the bardic order were chiefly hereditary. They are arranged in accordance with the ancient principalities of Ireland, namely Meath, Ulster, Connaught, Leinster and Munster, as described by O'Dugan and O'Heerin in their Topographies or general survey of the landed properties and proprietors of this country written in the fourteenth century.

MEATH. The O'Dalys were hereditary Bards of Meath, and were chiefs of the barony of Corcaree in the County of Westmeath ; and one of them is represented in the Annals of the Four Masters, at the year 1185, as chief Professor of Ireland and Scotland, head chief of Corcaree and Corcadaimh, a nobleman distinguished for learning, poetry and hospitality. So that this chief Bard of Erin, in the 12th century, who is styled a Nobleman, and head chief of two baronies, would rank in the scale of landed property, as a Baron, or Earl, among the nobility of the present day. The O'Dalys are also mentioned as chief Bards of Meath, under the years 1448, and 1474, after which time it would appear they removed beyond the Shannon, into the County of Galway, where they established themselves as a highly respectable family, and have latterly become Lords of Dunsandle.

The Mac Egans are mentioned in the Annals at the year 1409 as chief Brehons of the men of Teffia, that is to the O'Melaghlins, Mac Geoghegans, Foxes and O'Ferralls of Meath, Westmeath and Longford. The O'Higgins and the O'Coffeys, were also Bards to the Mac Geoghegans, Foxes and O'Ferralls, and some of them removed to the North in the 14th and 15th centuries, and became celebrated Bards and historians in Ulster and Connaught. There are many respectable families of this name in different parts of Ireland. See the O'Higgins mentioned as bards of Meath in the note on Rats and Mice.

ULSTER. The O'Hagans, who were chiefs of a large territory about Tullaghoge, in the parish of Desertcreight, barony of Dungannon, county Tyrone, presided as the hereditary Brehons at the inauguration of the O'Neills as kings of Ulster and princes of Tyrone. The Mac Namees were chief Bards to the O'Neills : Thus at the years 1434, 1507, we are informed by the Four Masters that Maelisa Mac Namee and Solomon Mac Namee were chief

poets or bards to the O'Neills ; and of the latter they state, " that he was a man learned in poetry, philosophy, and literature, and kept a house of hospitality." The O'Gneevs were also Bards to the O'Neills of Tyrone and Clanneboy ; and at the year 1376 the deaths of the following professors are recorded : " John O'Rooney, chief Bard to Magennis (in the county Down) ; Malachy O'Mulveena, chief Professor to O'Kane (in the county of Derry) ; and O'Hamil, chief Bard to O'Hanlon (in the county of Armagh), a man who kept a general house of hospitality, and never refused any one."

The O'Breslins were chief Brehons to the O'Donnells, princes of Tirconnell, and also to the Maguires, Lords of Fermanagh. The Mac Wards were chief Bards to the O'Donnells down to the seventeenth century ; and in the Annals one of them is thus recorded : " A. D. 1576, Mac-an-Bhaird, chief Bard to O'Donnell, a superintendent of schools, a man eminent in literature and general knowledge, the sustaining and supporting pillar of students and men of learning, died." The O'Sgingins were in early times the hereditary chief historians to the princes of Tirconnell, and were succeeded by the O'Clerys, who had their castle at Kilbarron near Ballyshannon. Of the latter family were the celebrated writers of the Annals of the Four Masters, one of the most veritable and impartial records ever produced in any country. The O'Clerys had large landed property as described in Inquisitions and other law documents, the annual rental of which would amount at the present time to three or four thousand pounds.

The O'Dunleavys, otherwise called Mac Nultys, were chief Physicians to the O'Donnells. In the Annals, at A.D. 1527, it is stated that the Doctor O'Dunleavy, namely Donagh the son of Owen, a Doctor of Medicine, and learned in other arts, a man of great affluence and wealth, and who kept an open house of general hospitality, died on the 30th of September in this year.

The Mac Criffertys were chief Bards to the Maguires of Fermanagh in the 14th century, but were succeeded in that capacity by the O'Hoseys. The O'Keenans were chief historians in Fermanagh, and the O'Cassidys were chief physicians to the Maguires.

CONNAUGHT. The Mac Egans were Brehons to the O'Connors, kings of Connaught. Maolisa Donn Mac Egan, Ard Ollamh (chief Professor) of Connaught, died A.D. 1329, according to the Annals of the Four Masters; and one of the Mac Egans is recorded under the year 1447 as chief Brehon of all Ireland. The O'Maelconrys were chief Bards and historians to the O'Connors. Torna O'Maelconry, the Bard to Felim O'Connor, has transmitted to us an account of the ceremonies performed at the inauguration of that prince in the year 1312, when it was the Bard's privilege to place the Regal Wand (as he calls it) in the hand of the prince. The landed property of the O'Maelconry, containing about 10,000 acres, comprised the present parish of Cloncruff in the county of Roscommon. Some of the written works of the O'Maelconrys are in the Bodleian Library and several other places ; and a member of that family was one of the Four Masters. The Mac Tullys were the hereditary physicians to the O'Connors.

The Mac Egans were Brehons to the O'Rourkes, princes of Brefney, and the O'Cuirnins were their Bards ; the O'Dalys were Bards to the O'Reillys, princes of East Brefney.

The Mac Egans of Ballymacegan were chief Brehons to the O'Kellys, princes of Hy Maine, in the counties of Galway and Roscommon, which princely family is now represented by Denis H. Kelly of Castle Kelly, Esq., an eminent Celtic scholar. The O'Dugans were hereditary Bards to the O'Kellys, many of whose works are still extant, particularly the large vellum manuscript of the O'Kellys, now buried in some English private collection.

The O'Duigenans of Kilronan were Bards and historians to the Mac Dermotts, princes of Moylurg in Roscommon and Marshals of Connaught. They were also Bards and historians to

the Mac Donnoghs, Lords of Corran in the county of Sligo ; and a member of the Kilronan family was one of the Four Masters. The Book of Ballymote, the property at one time of the Mac Donnoghs of the Castle of Ballymote, was written by an O'Duigenan. It is a large folio MS. on vellum ; was sold in the year 1522 for 140 Milch cows, and is now in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin.

The Mac Firbises of the castle of Leacan, in the barony of Tireragh, county of Sligo, were hereditary Bards and historians to the O'Dowds, Lords of Tyrawley and Tireragh in the counties of Mayo and Sligo. Duald Mac Firbis, the last hereditary professor of this family, lived about the year 1670. Several of the works of the Mac Firbises are still extant, such as the Book of Leacan in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, and the Book of Mac Firbis, the property of the Earl of Roden. The Mac Egans were Brehons to the O'Connors, Sligo, and probably to the O'Dowds also ; they were the principal professors of Brehonism all over Ireland.

LEINSTER. The O'Dorans were the Brehons to the Mac Murroghs, kings of Leinster. In the Annals at the year 1417 one of them is recorded as the Brehon of Leinster ; and again at the year 1447 it is stated that William O'Doran, chief Brehon of Leinster, and his wife died of the plague. The Mac Keoghs were the chief Bards to Mac Murrogh ; the O'Behans were his historians and genealogists, and the O'Shiels his hereditary physicians. The Book of Leinster, an Irish MS. written in the 11th or 12th centuries on vellum, is now in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin.

It is stated in the Annals at the year 1474, that the Mac Egans were chief Brehons to the O'Connors, princes of Offaley, which comprised the greater part of the King's County with portions of the Queen's County and of Kildare, in the ancient kingdom of Leinster.

MUNSTER. *Desmond or South Munster.* Another family of the Mac Egans were chief Brehons to the Mac Carthys, princes of Desmond. In later times the Mac Clancys were Brehons to the Earls of Desmond. The O'Dalys were the chief Bards of Desmond ; and the most celebrated of the satiric class in the reign of Elizabeth was Angus O'Daly, who made a tour of Ireland for the purpose of satirizing all the respectable Irish families and some of the Anglo-Irish too, for English pay, it is said ; but on his return home to Munster he was dispatched by O'Maher with a dagger as a reward for his malevolence. These satires were published by Mr. John O'Daly, Honorary Secretary to the Ossianic Society, in the year 1852. The O'Duinnins were historians and antiquaries to the Mac Carthys ; and the O'Cullinans were their hereditary physicians, as stated in the Annals at the year 1409.

Thomond or North Munster. The Mac Clancys, a branch of the Mac Namaras of Clare, were hereditary Brehons to the O'Briens, princes of Thomond and kings of Munster. We find the following notices of this bardic family in the Annals of the Four Masters. A.D. 1483. Connor oge Mac Clancy, chief professor of Thomond, a highly accomplished man, in literature and poetry, died, and was succeeded by Hugh Mac Clancy. A.D. 1492. Hugh Mac Clancy, chief professor of history and of the Brehon laws in Thomond, died. A.D. 1575. The Mac Clancy (Hugh), a professional lecturer, in laws and poetry, and one of the most upright Brehons of a territory, in Ireland, died ; and under the year 1576, it is recorded, that Mac Clancy was chief professor of Brehonism to the Dalcassians (the O'Briens and others), and a man who kept an open house for general hospitality.

The Magraths were chief Bards of Thomond. They are stated to have been men of great wealth ; and one of them is recorded in the Annals at the year 1343 as chief Bard of *Leath-Mogha*, which comprised Leinster and Munster. The Mac Curtins were the chief hereditary historians, and two of the name, Andrew and Hugh, who lived in the last century, were eminent writers of history and poetry. The Mac Gowans (a name anglicised or rather

translated Smith), Mac Bruodins and O'Dalys were also Bards and historians to the O'Briens, Mac Namaras, Mac Mahons, O'Loughlins, O'Connors, O'Gradys, and other chiefs in Clare, Limerick and Tipperary ; and the O'Hickeys were the hereditary physicians and surgeons in Thomond.

Some of the descendants of the bardic race have often exercised their hereditary skill in poetic composition even to within a recent period in many parts of Ireland. "To the present day," says Hardiman in his *Irish Minstrelsy*, "the rural Irish dread nothing so much as the satirical severity of their bards. Many a man, who would kindle into rage at the sight of an armed foe, will be found to tremble at the thought of offending a rhymer. One of the latter I have seen : his name was Brenan, and though he might not be called 'a fellow of infinite jest, or most excellent fancy' yet he was a ready versifier in his native tongue, and had wit enough to keep two large districts in the West of Ireland for many years amused by his rural songs and in dread of his broad local satire. He bore some faint resemblance to the ancient bards. He knew no settled residence. Whatever house he chose to stop at, and he seldom selected the poorest, became his home during the time of his stay. Generally welcomed with simulated, though often with real sincerity, the best bed, and place at table, were always at his service. Thus he lived to a good old age, feared for his satirical powers, but respected for his virtues. He has left behind some songs and sarcastic verses, but none of them above mediocrity."

We are informed by Keating and Walker, that the conduct of the Bards as a congregated body had, at various times, become so intolerable to the people, that they demanded of the state the banishment of the whole order. The first instance recorded of their oppression occurred in the reign of Achy the Third, who resolved on their expulsion ; but Conor Mac Neasa, King of Ulster about the beginning of the Christian era, a friend to the learned in general, but to the bards in particular, interposed his mediation and moderated the rage of the people.

The conduct of the Bards (says Keating) continued irreprehensible from the death of Conor Mac Neasa till Fiachaidh mounted the throne of Ulster. Then, and once again in the reign of Maolcoba, who governed the same province, the hand of the monarch was raised to chastise them, but they were shielded from the impending stroke by those generous princes, who invited and kindly received them into their dominions.

Invested (says Walker,) with honours, wealth and power ; endowed with extraordinary privileges, which no other subjects presumed to claim ; possessed of an art, which, by soothing the mind, acquires an ascendancy over it ; respected by the great for their learning, and revered, almost to adoration, by the vulgar, for their knowledge of the secret composition, and hidden harmony of the universe, the Bards became, in the reign of Hugh, intolerably insolent and corrupted, and their order a national grievance. They arrogantly demanded the golden buckle and pin, which fastened the royal robes on the Monarch's breast, and had been for many generations the associate of the sovereign ; they lampooned the Nobility, and were guilty of many immoralities. They not only grew burthensome to the state, which munificently supported the different foundations to which they belonged, but increased so prodigiously that the mechanic arts languished from want of artificers, and agriculture from want of husbandmen. Hence the Monarch convened an Assembly at Dromceat (A.D. 580) principally to expel the Bards from the kingdom, and to abolish totally the whole order. But at the intercession of St. Columba, who was summoned from Scotland to attend this Assembly, he spared it. He, however, reduced its numbers, allowing only to each provincial prince, and to each Lord of a Cantred, one registered Ollave or Professor, who was sworn to employ his talents to no other purpose but the glory of the Deity, —the honor of his country —of its heroes—of its females—and of his own patron. On these Ollaves he ordained, that their patrons should settle an hereditary revenue. He also, by the advice of the saint, erected new Bardic Seminaries, in the nature of universities, liberally endowing them, but limiting

the number of students in each. Of these seminaries, the reigning Monarch's chief Bard was always in future, to be principal, or President; and he had the right of nominating the Ollaves entertained by the princes and lords. A few specimens of the compositions of the Bards are given at the end of this volume.

THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE GREAT BARDIC INSTITUTION.

The following work, which is now published for the first time, has been usually designated as "The Introduction to *Tain-bo-Cuailgne*" or the cattle prey of Cooley, and as such is found prefixed to almost all the modern copies of that curious and interesting composition. In the more ancient MSS. which contain transcripts of the Cattle Raid, such as *Leabhar-na-Huidhri* and the Book of Leinster written in the 12th Century, this work is found totally disconnected with that tract, and we may therefore conclude that the *Imtheach* was written for another purpose. We learn from the latter part of the foregoing brief sketch of the history of the Bards, that at various times they had become obnoxious to the nation by reason of their overbearing insolence and exactions, and it is quite clear that the object of the writer evidently was to satirize the Bards, rail at their overbearing arrogance, check their influence, and cover their professional order with ridicule and contempt. It is, in fact, a severe satire on the whole order, and was, very probably, written, contemporaneously with Shanchan Torpest, the chief Bard of Erin in the seventh century. It is certain, however, that it was composed at a period subsequent to the *Tain-bo-Cuailgne*. The author engrafted, as it were, his satire on the Cattle Prey, by way of accounting for the origin of that composition, the writing of which on the Hide of the Brown Cow was superintended by St. Kieran of Clonmacnois.

The text given of this work has been copied from that part of the Book of Mac Carthy Riagh, a MS. of the 14th century written on vellum, which was until lately the property of Thomas Hewitt, Esq., of Summerhill House, Cork, a truly estimable gentleman most liberal in affording every access to his splendid Library and valuable collection of manuscripts. To him the Editor tenders his warmest thanks for many favours received at his hands.

The copy taken from the Book of Mac Carthy Riagh has been collated with another contained in a valuable MS. on paper belonging to the late Rev. Mr. Lamb of Newtown-hamilton; and as the tract in the vellum MS. is a little defaced at the beginning and ending, these portions have been supplied from the paper copy.

Denis H. Kelly of Castlekelly, Esq., in the county of Galway, whose knowledge of the ancient language of our Irish MSS. is well known, made a translation into English of this work in his own elegant style of composition, which he most kindly placed at the disposal of the Ossianic Society. The Editor, however, soon discovered that Mr. Kelly's original Irish text must have been very imperfect from the great variance observable in several passages from that of the vellum copy, and he therefore deemed it advisable to make his translation, in the first instance, independent of the other to avoid confusion and omissions. On comparing the two English versions he found them happily to correspond in all those passages common to both originals, which has convinced him of the correctness of this translation.

To my good friend John Windele, Esq., of Blair's Castle, Cork, the Members of the Ossianic Society are indebted for the production of this volume. I had much reluctance in undertaking such a task, being unwilling from past experience to encounter the labour and difficulty necessarily attending a work of the kind. My friend, however, whilst appealing to my patriotism and devotion to the good old cause of our national literature, promising at the same time such assistance as he was able to afford, prevailed, and I could no longer hesitate, knowing full well that I was in safe hands; and like an honest Irishman he has fulfilled his promise. He read in MS. my translation and notes, corrected the former where necessary, and amended and most essentially enlarged the latter. Mr. Windele's extensive and intimate

knowledge of the History and Antiquities of Ireland is well known to our reading public ; it is excelled by none and equalled by few, as his numerous contributions to our Archaeological literature testify. He was the first of the present generation to resuscitate the old inscriptions in the Ogham characters, the very existence of which was stoutly denied by some of our most eminent Antiquaries. He has collected so large a number of those inscriptions, discovered in various parts of Ireland, but particularly in the South, and found in sites and positions which proved beyond reasonable controversy that they belonged to a pre-Christian period, as to bring conviction to many that the ancient Irish had the use of letters before the introduction of Christianity into this country.

To our worthy and noble-minded President, who I am happy to say is a very good Celtic Scholar, I am greatly indebted for his careful reading of a considerable portion of the proof sheets of this volume whilst passing through the press ; and I take this opportunity of expressing my sincere thanks for the many valuable improvements which he suggested.

My best thanks are also due to my very good friends George Sigerson, Esq., M.D., and P. O'Herlihy, Esq., Queen's College, Cork, who suggested many improvements.

It is with infinite pleasure I have to acknowledge the kindness lately bestowed on me at the Royal Irish Academy. To the well recognized courtesy and urbanity of Edward Clibborn, Esq., the acting Librarian, have I been indebted for the fullest access to the very valuable collection of Irish MSS. in that magnificent Institution, whereby I have been enabled to take such extracts as I required without question or restraint, greatly to the advantage of the work in hands, and without which its completeness and value would be materially lessened. Facilities like these, so beneficial to literary enquirers, entitle the Academy to the best gratitude of the public generally, and of every friend of Irish literature especially.

Nor should I, amidst these acknowledgments, omit awarding my very sincere thanks for the kindness and services rendered to me in the progress of my investigations by Doctor Siegfried and the gentlemen connected with his department in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. I had only to ask the Doctor for any MS. in the Library, and he at all times placed it before me with such ready cheerfulness as to convince me that it was with him a pleasure to oblige. Never during my life time have I experienced more real courtesy in any literary Institution than I have in the College Library. It is only to be equalled by that which every person may be sure to experience in the Library of the Royal Dublin Society.

OWEN CONNELLAN,

*Clanbranssil Place,
Dublin, September, 1860.*

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