

The Tuatha de Danann

Alfred Nutt

1897

The *dinnshenchas* of Mag Slecht and the mythic reign of Tighernmas ; the Annalistic account ; apparent discrepancy with the Dinnshenchas—The true nature of the Tighernmas tradition ; consequences for Irish mythology—Classification of Irish mythical literature concerning the Tuatha de Danann — The Annalistic account ; the romantic account of Battle of Moytura ; the Rabelaisian element in Irish mythology ; comparison of Annalistic and romantic accounts ; necessary deduction as to agricultural origin of the Tuatha de Danann ; Dinnshenchas mentions of the Tuatha de Danann and discussion of the traditions concerning the fairs of Carman and Taitinn—The heroic saga mentions of the Tuatha de Danann ; validity of this evidence ; comparison between the mythic literature of Greece and Ireland ; true import of heroic saga evidence—Development of the Tuatha de Danann mythology.

The Annalistic Account of Tighernmas.

A CONVENIENT starting-point for our investigation into the origin and nature of the mysterious folk of the goddess Danu is afforded by the *dinnshenchas* of Mag Slecht. From it we learn that at Hallowtide—at the close, that is, of the autumn and beginning of the winter season — the ancient Irish worshipped the image or symbol of a god with human sacrifice. Now the Irish annals have somewhat to say about the cult practised at Mag Slecht. In the Annals of the Four Masters we read, A.M. 3656 (*i.e.* according to the chronology of the Four Masters, 1538 years before the birth of Christ), as follows concerning Tighernmas, king of Ireland at the time : ‘ It was by Tighearnmas also that gold was first smelted in Ireland....It was by him that goblets and brooches were first covered with gold and silver in Ireland. It was by him that cloths were dyed purple and blue and green. It was in his reign that the three black rivers of Ireland burst forth....At the end of the year he died with three-fourths of the men of Ireland about him, at the meeting of Mag Slecht, in Breifne, at the worshipping of Crom Cruach, which was the chief idol of adoration in Ireland. This happened in the night of Samhain (All Hallows) precisely. It was from the genuflections that the men of Ireland made about Tighearnmas here that the plain was named.’

Keating, a contemporary of the Four Masters, adds many details in his summary of the older annals. He dates Tighernmas, A.M. 2186 (1219 years before Christ in his system of chronology). Nine lakes burst over the land in his time ; ornaments, fringes, and brooches were first used by the Irish upon their dress ; he first established it as a custom in Ireland that there should be one colour in the dress of a slave, two in that of a peasant, and so on to the nine colours in the dress of a king or queen ; he first began to offer idolatrous worship to Crom Cruaich in Ireland, about a hundred years after the arrival of the Gaels (p.223).

Nature and Import of Annalistic Account.

In dealing with the statements of these seventeenth century compilers we must remember that they confined themselves to extracting from the older historical writers what they deemed most worthy of preservation, to comparing the varying accounts of the same personage or event, noting that which they considered the best, and to arranging chronologically the facts they recorded. Keating was, luckily for us, a man of liberal faith, and admitted many stories which the Four Masters evidently rejected as fabulous. He was also far less precise in his chronology. But in the main, the principle and the practice of both compilers are the same ; the traditional history is accepted as genuine, even though it be necessary here and there to correct its statements. Now, this traditional history was put together, in the form under which it is reproduced by the seventeenth century writers, from the eighth to the eleventh century. We can detect two drafts—the first belonging to the eighth century, the second to the renaissance period (950-1150) of Ireland's recovery from the Viking invasions. Of the first draft only one considerable fragment has survived imbedded in the *Historia Brittonum* of the eighth-ninth century Welsh chronicler, Nennius. But it is probable that many of the traditions preserved in the Dinnshenchas go back to this draft even where they do not represent the scattered, independent local

traditions upon which it was based. The second draft is represented by a number of poems, assigned to antiquary historians of the tenth and eleventh centuries, [1] in which the history of the country was memorised for teaching purposes, and by annalistic works compiled by the same class of men or founded upon their writings. The most learned and critical of the eleventh century Irish chroniclers, Tighernach, judged the traditional history, prior to the third century B.C., to be ‘*incerta*.’ [2] The statements concerning Tighernmas which have just been quoted from compilations of the seventeenth century, but which go back to the eleventh century at the latest, would thus have come under Tighernach’s condemnation. But traditions may have interest and value even if they are not history in the sense of being an actual record of fact, and it would be unwise to disregard these traditions because an eleventh century Irish chronicler had sufficient critical insight to discern their unhistorical character.

Discrepancy between Annals and Dinnshechgas.

If we examine the statement concerning the cult of Crom Cruaich found, on the one side, in the Dinnshechgas, on the other, in the Annals, we notice an apparent discrepancy. The Dinnshechgas says that the idol was the god of every folk that colonised Ireland. The Annalists, on the contrary, first mention the cult in connection with Tighernmas, a king of the last race—the Milesian—that invaded Ireland ; and one of them, Keating, definitely ascribes its establishment to him. It seems natural at first blush to treat this discrepancy as due to difference in age between the two sources of tradition ; the Dinnshechgas, the older of the two, has, it may be thought, retained a trait, the pre-Milesian (*i.e.* pre-Goidelic, pre-Aryan) origin of the worship, which the Annals, representing the tradition of Milesian, *i.e.* Goidelic bards, have forgotten or slurred over. Or, again, it may be held to testify to a change in the nature of the cult consequent upon the settlement of the Goidels in Ireland. Such a change has been assumed by me to have taken place among the continental Celts, sacrifices which were at the outset purely agricultural in character suffering considerable modification at the hands of a warlike aristocracy ; here, it may be said, in evidence of a similar evolution among the insular Celts. But a tacit implication underlies both of these explanations—namely, that the legends recorded in the Annals have a genuine historic basis ; that the succession of the various races, said to have colonised Ireland, represents a genuine succession of races, or, at all events, of stages of culture. Such an implication is, in my opinion, baseless, and a careful examination of the tradition proves that the real solution of the problem must be sought for in another direction, and has consequences of a far wider import.

The Real Nature of the Tighernmas Traditions.

What have the Annals to say about Tighernmas ? His reign wears an aspect obviously fabulous. Not only is it marked by great natural convulsions, but within its limits the arts and crafts, the rules and appliances, of social life are stated to have originated. We cannot fail to recognise a variant of a myth found at the beginning of history in the case of nearly all early races which have attained to the conception of history at all ; the civilisation which early man sees around him—material, social, religious—must have had a cause, a beginning. This cause, this beginning, are sought in the activity, in the rule, of some greatly gifted king. The idea of slow evolution is either incomprehensible to man at a certain stage of mental development, or else is expressed wholly in mythic terms ; his tendency is to synthesise long periods of growth, and to express this synthesis under the concrete symbol of a wonder-working reign. Although this interpretation of the traditions about Tighernmas is put forward for the first time, [3] I do not think it will fail to command the assent of all who have studied early traditional history, and I venture to regard it as established.

It is but natural that religious worship should be among the institutions the origin of which is assigned to Tighernmas’s reign. The practices in question were intimately connected with the whole fabric of civilisation known to the framers of these traditions, and it would have gravely discredited my interpretation if reference to them had been lacking.

We can now appreciate the significance of the fact that Tighernmas’s reign, the starting-point of Goidelic civilisation as the Goidel bards and wizards imagined it, is not assigned to the first arrival of the sons of Mil in Ireland, but to a period dated by different Annalists a hundred to one hundred and

fifty years later. Milesian history prior to Tighernmas, including the account of the Milesian invasion and struggle against the Tuatha de Danann, is as purely mythological as is the history of the Tuatha De themselves. I do not imply by this that the traditions concerning Tighernmas are historic, in the sense of being a record of fact, in contradistinction to earlier mythical traditions ; in a sense they, too, are mythical, but they are myths of a different character from those euhemerised in the annalistic account of the Tuatha de Danann. In the one case we have a mass of fiction based upon the personification of natural phenomena, or arising out of a ritual worship of natural energies and manifestations ; in the other we have a synthesis of genuine historic processes expressed in a concrete symbol. The traditions about Tighernmas thus furnish us with a fixed point in the confused welter of prehistoric Irish mythic romance. The Goidels believed at the time that with this king started their civilisation, a vital element of which was their religion. Before him then their history is, in reality, occupied with beings, the object of religion—gods, that is ; in other words, it is a mythology in the usual acceptation of the term.

This is a consequence of considerable moment for the criticism of the Irish pre-Christian records, reached solely by an unforced exegesis of the texts. A still more momentous consequence follows, for the reconstruction of Irish pre-Christian belief ; the origin of this belief was by the Irish Celts themselves associated with the practice of ritual sacrifice, thus confirming amply both the statements of classical observers respecting the importance of this element in the religion of other branches of the Celtic race, and the inferences concerning it deduced from the classical account of Celtic metempsychosis. The results, drawn from two wholly disconnected series of facts and observations, confirm each other, without, I trust, either result being due to a strained interpretation of the evidence. In this connection we cannot fail to be struck by the annalistic statements that Tighernmas perished whilst adoring Crom Cruaich, recalling as it does the fact that the ritual sacrifice of the king-priest, the representative and incarnation of the god, is the supreme act of worship in similar cults among other races.

If, in the light of this theory, we turn back to the double stream of tradition from whose apparent discrepancy concerning the Crom Cruaich cult we started, we plainly discern that it is apparent only. The Dinshenchas statement may be regarded as testifying to a stage of tradition in which the mythic and heroic history of the race have already begun to be symbolised as successive colonisations of the island, without attaining the degree of precision and detailed fullness found in the Annals ; it simply notes the immemorial antiquity of the worship in Ireland. The Annals belong to a more advanced stage ; the mythology has been thoroughly euhemerised, with the consequence that the mythical reign, the fount and origin of civilisation, instead of being placed in the very beginning of the Annalistic record, is inserted in a long series of shadowy reigns, and its true character is thus disguised.

The theory I have just expounded by no means excludes the possibility that the Annalistic records may likewise reveal changes and developments in the ritual, following the arrival of the Goidels in Ireland. It is not necessary to assume at this stage that the cult we postulate belonged to this or that race exclusively. Our interpretation of the records is consistent either with the hypothesis of its purely Goidelic character, or with the supposition that it was taken over by the Goidels from a conquered pre-Aryan population. A myth concerning the origin of the cult would naturally attract to itself, influence, and be influenced by, any traditions concerning later modifications of the cult.

The mythical nature of the Tuatha de Danann has indeed been taken for granted throughout the course of this investigation. I could not do otherwise than agree with all previous writers on the subject whose knowledge and critical capacity qualified them to form a judgment. It was well, however, to clearly establish the fact, not on the strength of the romantic fiction devoted to this mysterious race of beings, but on the far more cogent, because undesigned, evidence afforded by the form under which the traditions have come down to us, and the method adopted for turning them into pseudo-history. All doubt on the subject being, as I venture to think, finally removed, we may now proceed to consider the general mass of legendary fiction connected with the Tuatha de Danann.

Classification of Irish Mythical Literature.

Extant evidence may be divided into several classes. (1) We have in the *Dinnshenchas* a considerable mass of undated fragmentary tradition. It is *a priori* likely that the eleventh to twelfth century compilers of this collection took their matter indiscriminately from all kinds of sources, and the hastiest perusal confirms this surmise. Much of the matter contained in it may go back to the earliest stage of Irish story-telling, but each special item has to be tested upon its own merits. (2) In the *Annals* we find the fortunes of the *Tuatha De* euhemerised—*i.e.* these beings, originally gods, figure as mortal kings and heroes with well-assigned dates. This process of euhemerisation must have begun not very long after the Irish became acquainted with Christianity and Christian-classic culture ; it offered the simplest means of saving the legends to which literary class and people alike were attached. As the tradition has come down to us it belongs, in the main, not to the pre-Viking period of formation (to the sixth-eighth centuries, that is), but to the great antiquaries of the tenth-eleventh centuries who reconstructed Irish history and Irish legend after the stress of the Viking invasions had died away. The possibility of new elements having been introduced during the Viking period (roughly speaking, 800-950) must always be kept in view. In both these classes of tradition we find matters concerning the *Tuatha De* grouped together and forming more or less compact wholes. (3) But our next class of evidence is furnished by the incidental references to the *Tuatha De* scattered throughout the heroic legends, and of which so many examples have been quoted throughout this essay. I have cited sufficient to bear out the assertion that the tellers of these heroic legends did *not* regard the *Tuatha De* in the same light as the *Annalists*. Far from treating them as men who had once lived and were now dead, the *Tuatha De* figure in the legends as supernatural beings— immortal, or at all events un-assigned to any definite period. (4) A further class of evidence is constituted by tales presenting substantially the same sequence and mass of incidents as the *Tuatha de Danann* sections in the *Annals*, but conceived and related in a romantic spirit. The question has not yet been even raised, let alone settled, whether these tales represent the material upon which the *Annalist* worked, or are romantic amplifications of the *Annalistic* statement. [4] (5) There is, finally, another class of evidence : the belief of the Irish peasantry of this and the previous century in the fairies who have succeeded to the attributes of the *Tuatha de Danann* ; our estimate of the value of this evidence must, of course, largely depend upon the results disclosed by our examination of the earlier classes.

The Annalistic Account of the *Tuatha de Danann*.

It will be convenient to note precisely what the *Annals* have to record. The *Four Masters* and *Keating* give, between them, the gist of what may be called the pseudo-historic or euhemeristic version—a version the outlines of which had begun to assume shape in all probability as early as the seventh century, but to which, even as late as the eleventh century, a distinguished Irish chronicler, *Tighernach*, refused historic credibility.

According to the *Four Masters* the *Firbolgs* took possession of Ireland, *anno mundi* 3266 (*i.e.* 1928 years before Christ), and ruled until they were vanquished by the *Tuatha de Danann* in the year 3303 at the battle of *Moytura*. In this battle *Nuada*, king of the *Tuatha de Danann*, lost his hand, and (it being a rule among the ancient Irish that no one with a personal defect or blemish could rule) *Bress*, son of *Elatham*, reigned in his stead. After seven years, *Bress* resigned the kingship to *Nuada*, who had had a hand of silver made for him by *Dian-Cecht* and *Creidne* the artificers. After a twenty years' reign *Nuada* was attacked by the *Fomorians*, led by *Balor* of the mighty blows. In the ensuing, the second battle of *Moytura*, *Nuada* was slain by *Balor*. He was succeeded by *Lugh*, the long-handed, who reigned for forty years, and was in his turn succeeded by *Eochaidh Ollathair*, named the *Daghda*. Suffice to say, that the rule of the *Tuatha de Danann* lasted until the year 3500, when the sons of *Mil* invaded Ireland, and in the battle of *Tailtinn* totally defeated the *Tuatha De*, after which two of the *Milesian* chieftains divided Ireland between them.

Such is the bald narrative of the *Four Masters*, which represents the supreme effort of the antiquary-historian class to rationalise Irish mythology, and to present it as a sober record of fact. If we turn to *Keating*, we note a far more liberal acceptance of the mythical, romantic element found in the older writers from which he and the *Four Masters* drew. Thus, we learn from him that the *Tuatha De Danann* were expert in magic art. An example of this is quoted from their history before they

came to Ireland. They inhabited the present Greece, and, when the Athenians were assailed by the Syrians, aided them most effectually, ‘ for they used to send demons into the bodies of the slain Athenians, quickening them by means of their heathen lore’ (p. 136). Thus the first glimpse we obtain of them is in that capacity of masters over the essence and manifestation of life which they retain throughout Irish legend. Afterwards they went to the north of Europe, where they dwelt a while in the four cities of Falias, Gorias, Finias, and Murias, whence they sailed for North Britain and Ireland, bringing with them four talismans : the Lia Fail, which possessed the property of roaring under every king of Ireland on his election [5] ; the sword of Lugh the long-handed ; the spear that the same Lugh used ; and the caldron of the Daghdha. When they reach Ireland, they surround themselves with a magical mist, under cover of which they land unperceived. The account of the two battles of Moytura is substantially the same as in the Four Masters, but the supernatural character of the race is, more or less, definitely asserted in many of the passages quoted from older writers. It is, however, in his account of the Milesian invasion that Keating reproduces the largest amount of fable ; much of this is of no interest, being simple monkish fabrication with a view to connecting the Goidels with the peoples of antiquity, and in especial with the Hebrews, but some interesting facts may be noted. Thus, Mil him-self is made a contemporary of Pharaoh Nectanebus, a perfectly acceptable date if we regard the Milesian invasion as a romantic account of the Goidelic settlement in Ireland ; it is true that this settle-ment conflicts utterly with Keating’s later chronology, which places the arrival of the sons of Mil in Ireland about 1300 B.C., but this is only one proof among many of the way in which independent and mutually inconsistent traditions were forced into one Procrustean bed by the Irish antiquaries. When the sons of Mil approached the coast, the Tuatha de Danann defended themselves by their old expedient of a magical mist, and by raising a magical storm, but in the end they were defeated. Such is the pseudo-historical account. Even in Keating, with his love for a romantic tale, the rationalising process has been thoroughly carried out, and, save for a few chance references, little remains to attest the mythical character of the Folk of the goddess Danu. It is significant that one of them should com-memorate this capacity to restore the dead to life, whilst another ascribes to them the power attributed by classical writers to the priestesses of Sein, namely, of raising and quelling storms by art magic.

The Battle of Moytura.

We may now compare a text belonging to the fourth class of evidence discriminated above—that of romantic tales which relate substantially the same events as those found in the Annals. The text in question is known as the Battle of Moytura, and has been edited and translated by Mr. Whitley Stokes in the twelfth volume of the *Revue Celtique*. It has only survived in a recent MS. (of the fifteenth century), and its linguistic features do not allow its ascription, *in its present form*, to an earlier period than the eleventh century. But I must again repeat, the date of the redaction, which has fortuitously come down to us, yields no certain clue to the date of the story itself. As the *Revue Celtique* is not accessible to the general reader, a somewhat full summary of the tale may be of interest.

The opening finds the Tuatha de Danann ‘ in the northern isles of the world, learning lore and magic, and druidism and wizardry and cunning.’ The tradition is substantially the same as in Keating, but the latter can hardly have known our story, or he would not have missed its picturesque details. Thus, of the talismans it is told : ‘ the spear of Lugh, no battle was ever won against it or him who held it in his hand ; the sword of Nuada, when it was drawn from its deadly sheath, no one ever escaped from it ; the Dagdae’s caldron, no company ever went from it unthankful.’ We then learn that the Tuatha De made an alliance with the Fomorians : Balor, grandson of Net, giving his daughter Ethne to Cian, son of Dian-Cecht, ‘ and she brought forward the gifted child. Lug.’ The Tuatha De then invaded Ireland, and here comes in a naive bit of rationalism, which betrays the composite nature of our text, and the lateness of its final redaction : ‘ they burnt their barques at once on reaching Connemara, so that they should not think of retreating to them, and the smoke and mist that came from the vessels filled the neighbouring land and air ; therefore it was conceived that they had arrived in a mist.’ The first battle of Moytura follows, between the Tuatha de Danann and the Firbolgs ; the latter are defeated, and seek refuge with the Fomorians. Nuada, being wounded, is ineligible for king-ship, and the choice falls upon Bres, whose father, Elatha, is king of the Fomorians. ‘ Now the con-ception of Bres came to pass in this wise. Eri, Delbaeth’s daughter, a woman of the Tuatha De, was one day looking at the sea and the land, and she beheld the sea in

perfect calm as it were a level board. And as she was there she saw somewhat. A vessel of silver was revealed to her on the sea.... Then she saw that in it was a man of fairest form. Golden yellow hair was on him as far as his two shoulders. A mantle with bands of golden thread was around him. His shirt had trimmings of golden thread. On his breast was a brooch of gold, with the sheen of a precious stone therein.' He woos ex-peditiously, and the maiden is not coy. When he would leave her she wept. ' Severing from thee I lament ; the fair youth of the Tuatha Dea Danonn have been intreating me in vain, and my desire is for thee as thou hast possessed me.' He leaves her a gold ring, charging her not to part with it save to one whose finger it should fit. He also tells his name. ' Elotha, son of Delbaeth, [6] King of the Fomorians, hath come to thee. Thou shalt bear a boy, Eochaid Bres, that is, Eochaid the beautiful.' When the boy was born he had a fortnight's growth after a week, and at seven had reached a growth of fourteen years. Now when he was made king, the Fomorians ' bound their tribute upon Ireland, so that there was not a smoke from a roof in Ireland that was not under tribute to them.' The Tuatha de Danann champions were also reduced to menial service ; Ogma had to carry a bundle of firewood, the Dagdae to build raths. The story is then told of Dian-Cecht's making a hand of silver for Nuada, and of his slaying his son who approved himself a better leech than his father. Meanwhile, the chiefs of the Tuatha De murmured greatly against Bres : ' their knives were not greased by him, and however often they visited him their breaths did not smell of ale.' For this niggardliness he was made the subject of the first satire known in Ireland, and he was only allowed to remain king on promise of remitting the rent and tribute. But in his heart he purposed gathering together the champions of the Fairy-Mound, even the Fomorians, to overmaster the tribes. He got the recognition ring from his mother, and together they went to the land of the Fomorians. Recognised by his father, the latter refused to help him because his cause was not just, but sent him to Balor, King of the Isles, and to Indech, son of Dea Domnand, King of the Fomorians, ' and these assembled all their forces westwards unto Ireland, so that they made one bridge of vessels from the Foreigner's Isles to Erin.' [7]

Nuada was in sovereignty over the Tuatha De. Once a great feast was being held at Tara, and the doorkeeper beheld a strange company coming towards him. ' A young warrior, fair and shapely, with a king's trappings, was in the forefront of the band.' On being asked his name, he answered that he was ' Lug, son of Cian, son of Dian-Cecht and of Ethne, daughter of Balor.' He was then asked his craft, ' for no one without an art entered Tara.' ' A Wright,' said he. They needed no wright. ' A smith.' They needed no smith. ' A champion.' No ! ' A harper.' No ! ' A hero.' No ! ' A poet and historian.' No ! ' A sorcerer.' No ! ' A leech.' No ! ' A cupbearer.' No ! ' A brazier.' No ! Then he said, ' Ask the king if he has a single man who possesses all these arts, and if he has, I will not enter Tara.' The king then ordered the chessboards [8] in Tara to be sent out to him, and he won all the stakes ; and when *that* was told to Nuada, ' Let him into the garth,' said the king, ' for never before has a man like him entered this fortress.' Lug approved himself equally skilful as warrior and as harpist ; and when Nuada beheld his many powers, he considered if here were not a champion able to put away the bond-age under which they suffered from the Fomorians ; and he changed seats with Lug until thirteen days were ended. [9] Thereafter Lug met with the Dagdae, Ogma, Goibniu, and Dian-Cecht, and they held secret converse for a year, and they summoned to them the wizards of Ireland, and their leeches and charioteers and smiths and farmers and brehons. But the king first sought to learn what aid he could gain from his followers. His sorcerer, Mathgen, would cast the mountains of Ireland on the Fomor-ians, and roll their summits against the ground—the twelve chief mountains of Ireland would support the Tuatha de Danann, in battling for them ; his cupbearer would bring the twelve chief lakes of Ireland before the Fomorians, so that they should not find water therein whatever thirst might seize them—but drink should be provided for the men of Ireland, ' though they bid in battle to the end of seven years' ; his druid would pour three showers of fire on the foes of the Fomorians, and would take out of them two-thirds of their valour and their bravery and their strength, and would bind their urine in their own body and in the body of their horses—but every breath the men of Ireland exhaled should be an increase of valour and bravery and strength to them. Then said the Dagdae : ' The power which ye boast, I shall wield it all myself.' ' Thou art the *good hand*' (Dagdae), was the cry ; and the name stuck to him afterwards. Lug and Dagdae and Ogma obtained counsel and aid from the three gods of Danu, and during seven years they prepared for battle.

At length the two hosts found themselves in presence. The men of Ireland made a resolution not to allow Lug to go into the battle, as they feared an early death for him, owing to the multitude of his

arts. The chiefs of the Tuatha De gathered around him, and he asked each one what power he wielded. In turn, Goibniu the smith, Dian-Cecht the leech, Credne the brazier, Luchta the wright, Ogma the champion, the Morrigan, sorcerers, cupbearers, druids, poets, and witches, vaunt their prowess. Lastly, the Dagdae declares that under his club the bones of the enemies shall be as hailstones under the feet of herds of horses. And so, when the battle raged, the weapons of the Tuatha de Danann, how-ever much they suffered, were repaired at once by Goibniu and his comrades ; the slain and maimed were restored to life or healed by Dian-Cecht and his kin. In vain did some of the Fomorian warriors sacrifice themselves to frustrate the magic wiles of their foe. But the Fomorians were mighty warriors, and the battle was desperate ; ‘ harsh was the thunder throughout the battle, the shouting of warriors, the clashing of shields, the flashing and whistling of glaives, the rattling and jingling of quivers, the winging of darts and javelins, the crashing of weapons.’ Nuada fell by Balor. ‘An evil eye had Balor ; never was it opened save only on the battlefield. ... If an army looked at that eye, though they were many thousands in number, they would not resist a few warriors.’ He had acquired this power thus :

‘ His father’s wizards were cooking wizardry ; he came and looked over the window, and the reek of the brew came on his eye.’ He and Lug met, and Lug slew him with the cast of a sling, which carried the eye through the head, and thrice nine of his host died beholding it. The Fomorians were routed ; and, as to the slain, ‘ they are in no wise to be numbered till we number stars of heaven, sand of the sea, flakes of snow, dew on a lawn....and the Son of Ler’s horses in a sea storm.’ Lug and his comrades captured Bres ; to save his life he undertook that the kine of Erin should always be in milk, but this would not avail him ; then, that the men of Ireland should reap a harvest in every quarter of the year, but this would not avail him ; finally, he named the lucky days for ploughing and sowing and reaping, and for this he was spared.

The Rabelaisian Element in Irish Mythology.

In the above summary I have simply given the sequence of the events common to this romantic tale and to the Annals, or which, at least, may reasonably be supposed to underlie the Annalistic account. The tale is told in a very confused way, offers incidents which are obviously out of place, or interpolated from other tales, and has a kind of underplot formed by adventures of the Dagdae. These are conceived in a Rabelaisian—and at times an ultra-Rabelaisian—vein, of which the Dagdae’s visit to the Fomorian camp may serve as a specimen. Having asked for a truce, which is granted, he is offered his fill of porridge by the Fomorians ; the king’s caldron is filled for him, five fists deep, into which went fourscore gallons of new milk and the like quantity of meal and fat. Goats and sheep and swine were put into it, and all were boiled together with the porridge. The entire mess was spilt into a hole in the ground, and the Fomorian chief threatened death to the Dagdae unless he consumed it all. The Dagdae was equal to the task ; and little wonder that at the end his belly was bigger than a house caldron. The complications which ensue are discreetly omitted by Mr. Whitley Stokes in his translation, alike on grounds of decorum and from the great obscurity of the passage. Indeed, it is noteworthy that, although on the whole the language of the tale is comparatively recent—not older, that is, than the eleventh century—and although certain portions give the impression of having been redacted perhaps a century or two later, yet, on the other hand, many passages are so archaic as to baffle Mr. Whitley Stokes, the greatest living authority on old Irish. If it be further added that the oldest portion of Cormac’s Glossary—a text that is of the tenth century—contains, *s. v.* Nescoit, an episode of our tale almost verbally the same, the reader, with Annals and romantic tale before him, will not be in-clined to dispute the conclusion that the latter cannot be regarded as an amplification of the former, but must, on the contrary, be held to represent the mass of fiction out of which the Annalists extracted their dry and bald pseudo-history. It is true that our tale, the only considerable surviving fragment of this romantic literature, is late in redaction, and has probably been considerably worked over in de-tails, but it reproduces with substantial accuracy, I believe, the matter as well as the tone and manner of an earlier version. In especial I regard the Rabelaisian, Aristophanesque element not as accidental and secondary, but as primary and essential, and as belonging therefore to the earliest literature in which the Tuatha de Danann mythology was embodied. It is no chance coincidence, but is due to the essential kinship of the two bodies of mythic fiction, that this very element is prominent also in the mythology which has Dionysus for its centre.

Comparison of Annalistic and Romantic Accounts.

Now, if the Annalistic account be compared with the romantic one, it is seen that whereas the former, as befits the dignity of history, is wholly concerned with the strife in war and policy of rival races, the latter has for underlying theme the agricultural welfare of the land. The rule of Bres is marked by want and famine ; his defeat is signalised by the return of material prosperity, which he is forced to guarantee, and by the institution of agriculture properly so called. It hardly needs pointing out that this element is not likely to have been introduced by story-tellers of the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries. We possess a number of stories which may with certainty be assigned to these centuries, and which do develop the Tuatha de Danann mythology in a romantic vein, and probably without much regard for the authenticity of the traditions ; but their development is on quite different lines. It is the princely, courtly, amorous, and wizard side of the Tuatha de Danann upon which they lay stress, and which they exaggerate in a manner that wearies when it does not offend. The rude and simple buffoonery of the comic interludes in the older mythic tales is, as a rule, foreign to the later mediæval fiction, which, *mutatis mutandis*, occupies in Irish legendary literature somewhat the same place that the Amadis cycle does in the literature of chivalric romance. [11]

We must pause here for a moment and sum up the results of our investigation. The mythical nature of the Tuatha de Danann is proved by the fact of their preceding, in the legendary history of the race, the fabulous king to whose reign is ascribed the origin of civilisation ; the story of their arrival in Ireland, of their conflict with the Firbolgs and Fomorians, of their dispossession by the sons of Mil, is thus, in the main, [12] mythology. At a comparatively early date, say in the seventh century A.D., the process of turning this mythology into pseudo-history began—a process similar in its essential spirit to that by which Euhemerus and other classic writers endeavoured to rationalise Greek mythology. The Annalistic account has preserved, however, some of the mythical features of the god clan—*e.g.* their magical power generally, and their dominion over the weather specially. The romantic fiction in which the mythology had been embodied, and from which the Annalists extracted their narrative, has disappeared in its earliest forms, but is represented with substantial accuracy by the only considerable remaining fragment of the second stage of this fiction—the Battle of Moytura. Here we find the magical powers of the Tuatha De strongly insisted upon, and likewise a connection of these beings with the agricultural welfare of Ireland, wholly lacking in the Annalistic account. The surmise that the Tuatha De are, in part, at least, gods of growth and fertility, manifestations of the spirit of life animating in ever fresh transformations the whole of nature, is strengthened by the fact that in the legendary description of the beginning of civilisation (Tighernmas' fabulous reign), religious worship is identified with the cult of Crom Cruaich, a cult of ritual sacrificial nature, probably akin to that of which Dionysus was the object among the Greeks.

Dinnshenchas mentions of the Tuatha de Danann.

The Dinnshenchas mentions of the Tuatha de Danann now claim our attention. In the first place, it is noteworthy that out of the 161 legends from this collection printed and translated by Mr. Whitley Stokes from the eleventh to twelfth century compilation, no less than forty-eight, or nearly one-third, are wholly or mainly concerned with the fortunes of this mysterious race. How large the proportion is must strike the student who remembers that in the literature which we can with certainty assign to the centuries preceding the eleventh, the Tuatha de Danann cycle, as such, fills a very small place. One could not wish for a more effective reminder how much of Irish mythic romance has perished beyond recovery, how unsafe must be any argument founded solely upon the occurrence in extant literature of this or that legendary theme. [13]

As a sample of the legendary matters contained in the Dinnshenchas, let us take the account of the origin of the famous fair held every third year at Carman on the first of August. ' There were three men who came from Athens and one woman with them, sons of Extinction son of Darkness son of Ailment, and their names were Violent, Black, and Evil, and her name was Carman. By spells and charms and incantations the mother ruined every place....So they came to Ireland to bring evil upon the Tuatha de Danann, by blighting the corn of this island upon them. To the Tuatha de Danann that seemed ill. So Ai, son of Ollam of their poets, and Cridenbel of their lampooners, and Lugh Laebach of their wizards, and Be'cuille of their witches, went to sing charms upon them, and parted not from

them till they had driven the three men over sea.' Carman, left as a hostage, dies of grief, ' and she asked the Tuatha de Danann to hold her fair at her burial-place, and that fair and place should always bear her name. And the Tuatha de Danann performed this so long as they were in Ireland.'... ' For holding the fair, the Leinstermen were promised corn and milk, and freedom from control of any other province in Ireland ; that they should have men royal heroes ; tender women ; good cheer in every several house ; every fruit like a show ; and nets full of fish from waters. But if it was not held, they should have decay, and early greyness, and young kings.' [14]

Explanation of the Carman Legend.

The full significance of this legend is not apparent until we recall that the first of August was a day sacred to Lug, the slayer of Balor, the master of all arts, the father of Cuchulinn, and, possibly, as we saw in the first volume, the oldest lord of the Happy Otherworld. In addition to the triennial festival at Carman, an annual festival was held at Tailltin in Meath, the institution of which was definitely ascribed to Lug. The story is thus told in the *dinnshenchas* of Tailtin : ' Tailtin, daughter of Magmor, was the wife of Eochu the Rough, son of Dua the Dark. 'Tis by him the fortress of the Hostages was built in Tara, and she was the foster-mother of Lug, the son of the Dumb Champion. 'Tis she that asked her husband to clear away for her the wood of Cuan, so that there might be an assembly around her grave. And after that she died on the calends of August, and her lamentation and funeral games were held by Lugaid. Hence we say Lugnasad.' [15] Keating, in his account of the festival, remarks that the ' games resembled those called Olympic in Greece,' a remark far truer than he knew. For just as the Olympic games were at the outset the festival of one special Greek tribe, to which circum-stances gave a pan-Hellenic character, so we may judge that each Goidelic tribe celebrated its own Lugnasad, and that the same historic circumstances which made Tara a political, made the neighbour-ing Tailltin a religious centre, and gave to its Lugnasa a character of pre-eminence which it retained for over thousand years at least. The natural tendency would be to associate the god's name solely with his chief festival, and to drop it in the mention of other festivals. But we are justified in taking all the celebrations into consideration if we wish to form a clear idea of the nature of the festival. It happens, too, and not infrequently, that the secondary and more neglected examples of a rite preserve its primitive traits better than the leading ones, to which a larger mass of extraneous matter becomes, in the course of time, attached. If, then, we take both legends as referring to the same festival—the one (Carman) special to the Leinster tribes, the other (Tailltin) common to the whole Irish race, we cannot fail to note the predominantly agricultural character of the rite ; it is connected with the dis-comfiture of evil powers hostile to vegetation, upon its due performance depends the welfare and increase of the soil. That both accounts should start the festival from the death of a woman is sug-gestive in connection with Professor Rhys's explanation of the term Lugnasad as Lug's marriage— *i.e.* in his interpretation, the wedding of sun-god and earth, from which the life-giving produce of the soil was to spring. This sacred marriage is, as we know, a widespread feature of the agricultural ritual studied by Mannhardt and Mr. Frazer, as underlying the polytheistic mythology of Greeks and Germans. But just as the ritual often culminated in the sacrifice of the king-priest, the symbol or incarnation of the animating spirit of vegetation, so, too, his consort suffered not infrequently a like fate. Such an interpretation of the legend as is here suggested cannot be regarded as assured, but it is at least plausible.

We have met with Bres, the Fomorian king over the Tuatha de Danann, both in the Annals and in the romantic ale. The *dinnshenchas* of Carn Hui Net runs as follows : ' Bres, son of Elathan, died there ; 'tis he that in the reign of Nechtán Fairhand, King of Munster, demanded from every rooftop in Ireland a hundred men's drink of the milk of a hornless dun cow, or of the milk of a cow of some other single colour. So Munster's kine were singed by him (Nechtán) in a fire of fern, and then they were smeared with a porridge of the ashes of flaxseed, so that they became dark brown. That was done by the advice of Lugh Mac Ethlenn and of the wizard Findgoll, son of Findamnas ; and they also formed three hundred cows of wood, with dark brown pails in their forks in lieu of the udders. These pails were dipped in black bog stuff. Then Bres came to inspect the manner of these cattle, and so that they might be milked in his presence....All the bog stuff they had was squeezed out as if it was milk....The Irish were under a *geis* to come thither at the same time, and Bres was under a *geis* to drink what should be milked there. So three hundred bucketsful of red bog stuff are milked for him, and he drinks it all ! [16] Little wonder that he died in consequence.

This curious legend has all the appearance of being one of those explanations of ritual which are the source of so many myths. The statement that the men of Ireland were under a *geis* or taboo to assemble at a particular place and time seems to indicate a festival of a similar character to the Lugnasad, and the remainder of the story is a description of the rites practised (passing the cattle through the fire as a substitute for actual sacrifice?) and an attempt to account for them.

At times we catch in the Dinnshenchas legends far-off echoes of a giant world, so mighty and so remote as to leave upon the mind the same thrill of uncanny wonder as is provoked by the mythical lists in Kilhwch and Olwen. ‘Tuirbe’s strand, whence was it named? . . . Tuirbe Fragmar, father of the Gobbán Saer, ’tis he that owned it. From that heritage he used to hurl a cast of his axe from the Hill of the Axe in the face of the flood tides, so that he forbade the sea, and it would not come over the axe. And no one knows his genealogy, unless he be one of the defectives who fled from Tara before the Master of Many Arts’ (*i.e.* Lug). [17]

In this legend, which tells the power of Goibniu’s father, we have not only a supreme manifestation of Tuatha de Danann dominance over the forces of nature, we have also, as Mr. Whitley Stokes has pointed out, a close parallel—the only one in the Aryan story-treasure—to a feat of Vishnu’s told of in Aryan-speaking India at much the same time probably that the Goidels first landed in Ireland.

To return to the purely agricultural side of Tuatha de Danann power. This is how the Plain of Life got its name. ‘Lifé, daughter of Cannan the Pict, wedded Deltbanna, son of Drucht. . . . Out of the elfmound of Bodb on Femen was he. South of Tara they set up, and because the plain over which she came seemed beautiful to her, she asked that her name might be in it; and Deltbanna dealt out no more liquor for the men of Erin until yon plain was called by his wife’s name.’ [18]

Nor is the semi-humorous element noticeable in the oldest romantic tales concerning the Tuatha de Danann absent from the Dinnshenchas. We are told that ‘Gaible, son of Ethadon, son of Nuada of the Silver Hand, stole a bundle of twigs which Ainge, the Dagda’s daughter, had gathered to make a tub thereof. For the tub which the Dagda had made for her would not cease from dripping while the sea was in flood, but not a drop was let out during the ebb. He hurled a cast of that bundle, and a fair wood grew thereout.’ [19]

Mention has already been made in vol. i. (p. 211), of the legend known as the Conquest of the Sid, which tells how Angus, son of the Dagda, won his fairy palace of the Brugh and of its marvels. ‘Great was the power of the Dagda over the sons of Mil, even after their conquest of Ireland,’ says this tale. ‘For the Tuatha de Danann, his subjects, destroyed the corn and milk of the sons of Mil, so that the latter were forced to make a treaty of peace with the Dagda. Not until then, and thanks to his goodwill, were they able to harvest corn and drink the milk of their cows.’ [20]

This is perhaps the most definite statement that can be recovered from Irish mythic literature concerning the agricultural essence and potency of the Tuatha de Danann; for this reason I have reserved it until now. The evidence previously adduced would suffice, I maintain, even in the absence of this statement, to assign to the Folk of the goddess Danu the *rôle* of protectors, fosterers, inspirers of vegetable and animal life; and when this *rôle* is found connected with the practice of ritual sacrifice, the conclusion as to the true nature of the Tuatha de Danann seems inevitable.

Heroic Saga mentions of the Tuatha de Danann.

But, it may be said, only one or two phases of the complex personality of the Tuatha De have been considered. Other evidence concerning these beings has been neglected. In this chapter I have adduced texts which, on the whole, deal with the Tuatha de Danann mainly, if not solely, and as a distinct group of individuals. But the many stories quoted in earlier chapters, alike from the Dinnshenchas and the Heroic Sagas, clearly show that this is not the only mode of their appearance in Irish mythic romance. Throughout the entire range of that romance, whether it tell of the Milesian kings who founded Emania, of the Ulster king, Conchobor Mac Nessa, and his knights, of Cormac, or of Finn and his band of warriors, the Tuatha de Danann appear as the friends, the protectors, the

rivals, the opponents, of the mortal heroes. The story-tellers seem ignorant of any limitation of time imposed upon these wizard champions—they remain eternally wise and courteous and amorous throughout the thousands of years strung together by the chroniclers. Limitations of place, on the contrary, may be noted, especially in the later romances—the invisible kingdom of Erin being parcelled out among the folk of the *sid* as definitely as its outward form was shared among the races of Niall or Owen, of Connall or of Brian.

How does the consideration of this aspect of the Tuatha de Danann affect the estimate of their nature we have based upon the more purely mythological texts ? To rightly answer this question we must keep steadily in view what each class of mythico-romantic literature really is, and what is the true import of its evidence. Comparison between Ireland and Greece has already proved fruitful and illuminating. Resort may again be had to this expedient, and it may prove of value not only as illustrating the unfamiliar Irish by the familiar Greek literature, but as throwing new light upon the latter.

Comparison of Greek and Irish Mythic Literature.

We know Greek mythology on the literary side from several sources. We have the witness of the heroic poems, the most famous of which, the Homeric, have come down to us entire, whilst we have a considerable amount of information concerning the secondary and more imitative works. This, the *epic tradition*, may be dated from the tenth to seventh centuries B.C. The interest is primarily heroic, only secondarily mythological. From the eighth and seventh centuries we have the systematised, crudely philosophical account of the mythology which has come down to us under the name of *Hesiod*. To a somewhat later period belong the more romantic versions of mythological episodes known as the *Homeric Hymns*. From the seventh to fifth centuries we have a number of scattered references in the *lyric poets*, especially in Pindar, at the close of this period ; in the main the lyrists follow the epic tradition, but seem also to have preserved traces of a number of local sagas which had not attained the honour of incorporation in the epic cycles. In the fifth century the *dramatists* furnish us with a great mass of new material only in part derived from the epic tradition, whilst the historian and philosopher make the first essays of critical rationalism applied to the mythology. But not until the great creative impulse of Greek literary art is long spent, not until the critical, antiquarian, *Alexandrine period*, do we get systematised surveys of the whole or definite portions of the mythology. The second century Apollodorus and Antoninus Liberalis ; the first century Parthenius (imitated by Ovid), have preserved much precious material. Meanwhile, the critical philosophical spirit had been busily at work, and the mythology had either been rationalised into pseudo-history, as by Euhemeros, or refined away in a maze of metaphysical subtleties. But all this time, and for centuries longer, the practice of worship was kept up, the rites were duly performed, the personages of the ecclesiastical hierarchy recorded ; and, from the mass of inscriptions and other historical texts relating to what may be called religious archaeology, we derive valuable hints concerning the formal side of the mythology. So conservative were the ministers of public worship, that in the second century after Christ, Pausanias, travelling through the Greek world, describing the shrines *de visu* and transcribing, where not deterred by religious scruples, the temple legends, transmitted to the modern world what is in some respects the most precious and authentic source of information concerning the myths of Hellas. At the present day the investigator of Greek religion starts, in the first place, with what may be the very latest recorded testimony—inscriptions, etc., dating possibly from the Christian period, or the evidence of *Pausanias* concerning the actual facts of worship ; the Alexandrine compilers are often found to have an evidential value superior not only to the dramatic and lyric development of the epic tradition, but even to the very fount of that tradition—to Homer himself. The euhemeristic and philo-sophical interpretations are of value solely as witnesses to the existence of that which they endeavour to explain.

If we compare Greece and Ireland we see at once that the inscriptional, historic evidence by which, in the former, we can control and supplement the information derived from literature, is, in the latter, wholly lacking. Moreover, whilst the almost entirety of Greek mythic literature is earlier than, and absolutely unaffected by, Christianity, the entirety of Irish mythic literature, in its present form, is later than Christianity, and has been affected by Christian classic culture to some extent. In spite of these profound differences, comparison between the two literatures is not only possible but fruitful. The earliest Irish heroic cycles correspond to the Greek epic tradition, but it is doubtful if

any Irish epic tale occupies in Irish literature the same position the *Iliad* does in Greek ; rather must the Irish tales be regarded as answering partly to the latest cyclic poets, partly to the archaicising, imitative school represented in Greece by the third-century Apollonius Rhodius. The Irish Hesiod is the Book of Invasions, but unfortunately this is, of all portions of the Irish mythic record, the one which has been most deformed by the alien culture of Christianity. Luckily, a small amount of the mythology, treated euhemeristically in the Book of Invasions, has come down to us in romantic form ; this may be compared with those myths preserved by the Homeric Hymns. Finally, to the compilatory, descriptive section of Greek mythological literature—Apollodorus, Antoninus Liberalis, Pausanias—correspond, though very imperfectly, the Irish compilations, known as the Coir Anman, or mythico-heroic bio-graphy, and the Dinnshenchas, or mythico-heroic topography.

Just, then, as the student of Greek myth turns to the actual details of the cult and to the literature which is most closely connected therewith, if he wishes to form a clear idea of the nature and origin of a divinity, using the poetic representation by the epic or dramatic singer as a secondary and controlling source of information, so the student of Irish myths must seek for precise evidence as to the nature of the Irish gods from the compilations rather than from the heroic sagas. The reason is evident. All forms of literature—the rudest as well as the most sophisticated—are subject to the same necessity, that of interesting the hearer or reader in the fortunes of the personages presented to him. In heroic sagas the gods can but appear as foils to or conveniences for the hero ; they are not the leading characters, and it is essential that their powers or fortunes should not compete with those of the real heroes. Moreover, from the numberless incidents of the god's career known to the heroic singer, it is almost inevitable that certain ones alone should be chosen for the complex web of his narrative. Fighting and love-making are the staple of heroic saga as of all romance ; it is the warlike and amatory side of the Pantheon which will be represented in it far more frequently and certainly than that which would find expression in the ritual legends.

'Tis then, I would urge, vain to seek in mentions of the Tuatha De, scattered through the Cuchulinn and other heroic sagas, aught else than, in the nature of things, we can find there—reference to the warlike and amorous exploits of these beings, presented so as to be an effective foil to the fortunes of the mortal or semi-mortal hero. It is much that we were able to recover from the heroic sagas the picture of beings pre-eminent in art magic, capable of assuming all shapes at will, lords of a land of ideal plenty in which every form of vivid, sensual, material enjoyment is present; masters of the mystery of life, by whom the perpetual flow and transformation of the animating essence (which in this world can only be maintained by bloody sacrifice and inevitable death) is so ordered and governed that neither death nor decay assail them. It would be too much to look for those myths, dependent upon and symbolising the ritual, which form the root of all the complex manifestations of the divine personality. As it is, now that analysis has led us to this point, the connection of the two conceptions we are investigating must seem natural and legitimate ; the god from whose favour are sought fertility and increase, who is himself the incorporate symbol of life and growth manifest in perpetually recurring, ever varying, yet eternally similar forms, is also lord of the land in which fertility and increase find their highest expression.

Development of the Tuatha de Danann Mythology.

The development of the mythical literature connected with the Tuatha de Danann may now be briefly sketched. Originally, if we may judge from analogy, it doubtless consisted wholly of chants forming part of the ritual, and of legends accounting for and interpreting ritual acts. Out of such materials there would gradually arise a mythology—an attempt, that is to say, to represent the phenomena of the natural and social world under the guise of a divine history. Removed one degree from its primitive function of being a simple assistant and exponent of the ritual acts upon which depends the material welfare of the race, the mass of mythic legend becomes complex and plastic; its divine *dramatis personæ* acquire a wider range of attributes, supplementary, as a rule, to the primitive conception, but often transcending and supplanting it. A body of narrative comes into being, plot and incidents and personages of which are readily adaptable to that idealised representation of racial history known as heroic saga. But when the gods enter the world of mortal heroes, they must bow to the conventions of heroic legend ; they insensibly put off more and more of their primitive character, and tend to approximate to the ideal standard of their mortal antagonists and interlocutors. In the case

of the Tuatha De, two of their essential characteristics not only persist after their inclusion in the heroic sagas, but are developed and influence the development of the heroic epos. As holders and givers of life, the Tuatha De are alike deathless and capable of manifestation under the most diverse forms—hence their wizard might, hence, too, the attribute of deathlessness so marked a feature of themselves and their land ; as bestowers of fertility and increase, they are, by their nature, liberal and amorous. Thus is formed that picture of these beings found in the oldest heroic sagas, long antedating, in all likelihood, the rise of Christianity, almost unaffected by the advent of the new faith, and persist-ing in literature down to this very century. The fairy loves of Etain or of Cuchulinn, the hosts of Connla or Cormac, had sufficiently sloughed off their godhead to retain their place undisturbed in the heroic romance which was loved with equal fervour by the half-pagan bard and the Christian saint. It went otherwise with the mythology properly so called. This could not but conflict with Christianity, and was only preserved under a form—the pseudo-historic—which masked its real nature, or, as in the case of the Battle of Moytura, was associated with and subordinated to the pseudo-history. To some extent the process of turning the mythology into history may have reacted upon the heroic sagas, though most of them had assumed a settled shape long before. Some modification seems to have taken place with a view of bringing them into line with the Annalistic schemes devised by the antiquary class. The fact, too, that beings, originally deathless, were assigned to definite dates, tended, in some cases, to emphasise that ‘ mortalising’ (if I may coin the word), of the Tuatha De, which itself was a necessary consequence of their inclusion in these heroic cycles.

Pre-eleventh century Irish literature has thus preserved the outlines of the mythic narratives which grew out of the old chants and ritual legends, but only more or less disguised as pseudo-history ; in the case of certain texts—*e.g.* the Battle of Moytura—the disguise is slight and unessential, the body of the story is genuine mythology. It has also preserved, in the narrative of the dealings between the Tuatha De and the heroes, glimpses of these beings which are but little younger in age than the purely mythological conceptions. Both forms—mythic and heroic—had passed into literature long before the Viking invasion ; their substance persists in the post-Viking redactions, although the latter have certainly been affected in small details by the events of the ninth and tenth centuries. But as a whole, myth and heroic epos alike belong to the oldest and most genuine manifestations of Gaelic belief and romantic fancy.

In post-eleventh century literature, as is but natural, the Tuatha De tend to break away more and more from their primitive mythological basis, and to develop upon lines laid down in the heroic sagas. It is possible, also, that the lateness of the date at which the great southern heroic saga, that of Finn and his warrior band, came into the hands of the professional bardic class, is responsible for the obliteration of certain mythic features of the Tuatha De in this cycle. On the other hand, it must not be forgotten that the wizard god-clan plays a far more important part in the Fenian than in the older cycles. [21] Be this as it may, the tendency in the mythic romance of the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries is to accentuate the courtly, amorous, and magic side of these beings ; to leave in the shade their original agricultural character, and to eliminate the Rabelaisian element.

It should be added that the true nature of the Tuatha De was never entirely lost sight of in Ireland. I have already quoted several passages clearly showing that Irish scribes and antiquaries recognised these beings as the gods of their ancestors, and were led astray neither by the romantic nor by the pseudo-historic presentment of their forms in the literature of the time. More remarkable still is the fact, as vouchsafed for by an entry in the Book of Armagh (*i.e.* dating at the latest from the tenth century), that the mythical belongings of these beings were correctly described ; the unknown writer styles them *dei terreni*—gods of the earth.

I have hitherto refrained from making any use of the fairy belief of modern Ireland. It was necessary, in the first place, to form a clear idea concerning the nature and development of the ancient belief with which it is connected. Historical and mythological evidence has been adduced in support of the contention that the Tuatha De are, in the main, deities of agriculture, and that their worship consisted, in the main, of ritual sacrifices.

- [1] Thus the statement that Tighernmas first smelted gold in Ireland is found in a poem by Gilla Coemain (who died 1072), preserved in *The Book of Leinster*, p. 16. The passage is quoted by M. d'Arbois, *Cycle Myth.*, p. 200.
- [2] Tighernach's *Annals* are being edited and translated by Dr. Whitley Stokes, in vol. xvii. of the *Revue Celtique*.
- [3] M. d'Arbois, it is true, equates the reign of Tighernmas with the 'golden age,' when Kronos was Master of the Universe, in Greek mythology (*Cycle Mythologique*, p. 200), but his opinion of the texts differs considerably from mine.
- [4] M. d'Arbois, in his *Cycle Mythologique* assumes their priority to the Annalistic account, but does not discuss the question in any detail.
- [5] Cf. vol. i. p. 187. The earliest preserved mention of the talisman is in a poem of Eochaid ua Flainn's, preserved in the Book of Leinster.
- [6] Bres is thus apparently a son of brother and sister, as is Siegfried in German legend.
- [7] All this part of the story is undoubtedly coloured by events of the Viking period.
- [8] Here occurs in the original one of the interesting examples of scribal interpolation which are not uncommon in Irish texts. 'But if chess was invented at the time of the Trojan war, it had not reached Ireland then, for the battle of Moytura and the destruction of Troy occurred at the same time.' The interest of such an interpolation is manifold ; it shows the class of men to whom is due the final redaction of these stories, thoroughly well educated—nay, learned for their time, and gifted with critical power as well as with learning. Familiar with the Annalistic chronology as it had been developed by a succession of learned antiquaries, the scribe could not but note what seemed to him a gross historical blunder. Nevertheless, he made no change in the text he was re-producing, but contented himself with providing an antidote in the shape of a marginal note, which some later copyist transferred to the text. Obviously a man like this—a worthy and faithful but pedantic scribe—would do nothing in the way of romanticising his text. Rather may we conclude that if he felt justified in making any change, and this instance would seem to show that he didn't, he would have toned down and rationalised it.
- [9] Thus giving him the kingship for a time.
- [10] The Rabelaisian passages which introduce the Dagdae are closely allied in style and tone to the great middle-Irish Rabelaisian burlesque, *The Vision of Mac Conglinne*. As Professor Wollner has acutely pointed out in his Introduction to Professor Kuno Meyer's edition and translation, the Vision has come down to us in two forms : a shorter one which may go back to the eleventh or early twelfth century ; a longer one which is probably as late in redaction as the thirteenth century. The author of this second version followed the lines of the old story fairly closely, but clothed it in a form as picturesque, humorous, and masterly of its kind as anything in literature before Rabelais himself. Professor Wollner has made it evident that neither version is a mere Irish imitation of the continental stories about the Pays de Cocagne, but represents a native development, on the burlesque side, of the fancies presented romantically in the Elysium voyages. It may, in fact, be regarded as a parody on the *genre* of mythic-romantic narrative studied in the first section of this essay. Professor Wollner states that all the elements of Mac Conglinne's vision of the land of unlimited eating belong to an early stage of agricultural development.
- [11] There are exceptions—e.g. the story known as the Pursuit of the Gilla Dacker (*Silva Gadelica*, pp. 292-311; Joyce, *Old Celtic Romances*, pp. 221-273). But the comic element is supplied by the Fenian heroes rather than by the T. de D. wizards.
- [12] I say, in the main, as it is not impossible that historical conflicts between the invading Goidels and the races they found in possession of Ireland may have supplied some details to the final redaction of the mythology.
- [13] The Dinnshenchas references are to Mr. Whitley Stokes' edition and translation of the Rennes MS. (*Revue Celtique*, vols. xv. and xvi.), of the Oxford MS., issued separately under the title *Bodley Dinnshenchas* (D. Nutt) ; and of the Kilbride MS., issued separately under the title *Edinburgh Dinnshenchas* (D. Nutt).
- [14] R. D. No. 18.

[15] R. D. No. 99 ; also Ed. D.

[16] R. D. No. 46.

[17] R. D. No. 125 ; also Ed. D.

[18] R. D. No. 12.

[19] R.D. No 11.

[20] Quoted, *Cycle Myth*. p. 69.

[21] The reason for this is, I think, obvious. The Northern cycle was fashioned by the bards at a time when the heroic tradition was still looked upon as history ; it was sung before men who claimed descent from the heroes. Hence the subordination of the immortal, the prominence of the mortal element.

The voyage of Bran, son of Febal, to the land of the living ; an old Irish saga (1897)

Author : Meyer, Kuno, 1858-1919 ; Scél Túan maic Cairill ; Dindsenchas

Volume : 2

Publisher : London, D. Nutt

Language : English ; Irish

Digitizing sponsor : Wellesley College Library

Book contributor : Wellesley College Library

Collection : Wellesley_College_Library ; blc ; americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/voyageofbranson02meyer>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

May 23 2011