

Eachtra and Imram Tales

An Irish Precursor of Dante

A Study on the Vision of Heaven and Hell ascribed to the Eighth-century Irish Saint
Adamnán

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The Irish heroic tales having passed through the hands of Christian redactors, the question occurs whether we must ascribe to them any ethical element that occurs therein. Although it is hard to pronounce with certainty, where they contain no express reference to the Christian faith, it would be rash, and probably a mistake, to reply in the affirmative in all cases. Certain ethical ideas there must have been in pre-Christian Ireland, and the places and the mode in which we find them are often those in which they might most naturally appear. In the instances referred to, there is nothing inconsistent with a system of ethics far more primitive than that to which the ancient Irish might conceivably have attained. Moreover, there is nothing about the passages in question suggestive of an interpolation ; they arise quite naturally out of the narrative, and in one striking instance, that of Segda Saerlabrad, are expressly bound up with the pagan idea of human sacrifice in a manner that no Christian writer could or would have invented. Neither does it seem likely that an ecclesiastical writer who should make such interpolations in the interest of the Christian religion would make no mention of that religion in connection with them. The very tales in question show in what a clumsy and perfunctory manner such interpolations were made, when it was found expedient to bring an ancient legend into agreement with Christian doctrine.

Instances of this are furnished by the prophecies of Manannán Mac Lír in the *Voyage of Bran*, and the reference to the Judgment in the Adventures of Connla. The last-named story further contains a prophecy of the coming of the law which shall destroy Druidism and its charms ‘ upon the lips of black lying demons.’

As previously mentioned, there exists in these same stories a connection between the Eachtra and Imram classes of tales. In several of them the hero departs in his curach in quest of a Wonderland that lies oversea, [1] passing in the course of his voyage through the herds of sea-monsters which beset the heroes of the Imrama, and beholding marvels and visiting enchanted islands entirely similar to those which occur in the latter.

In the Imrama proper we may note in an ascending scale the gradual preponderance of Christian ideas, and the assimilation of the old Irish conception of the Otherworld to a genuine eschatology. Some of them, such as the *Voyage of Bran*, and Cuchulainn’s quest of the sons of Doel Dermait, relate a purely pagan legend, though the clerical redactors have sought to dissociate them from the paganism which was scarcely forgotten in their day by the interpolation of a Christian prophecy, or the like, as in Christian Rome the statues of the Olympian deities were converted into the effigies of Christian saints by the apposition of a nimbus to their heads. Then come a group written from a Christian point of view, and enforcing a lesson in Christian morals, although the framework of the story and most of the episodes are derived from the older literature :[2] such are the Voyages of Maelduin, of the sons of Ua Corra, and of Snedgus and Mac Riagla. Finally, there are the purely ecclesiastical Imrama, included in the acts of one or other of the saints, of which class the Voyage of St. Brendan is in every way the most important example.

We have been induced somewhat to anticipate the earliest of the Imrama, and to give the greater part of the description of Manannan's Elysium contained in the Voyage of Bran, in order to present in a single view the different forms in which the Otherworld was conceived by the ancient Irish. The story goes on to relate how, the maiden's song ended, the branch leapt back again into her hand, and she vanished ; but the glamour was on Bran, and he set forth in his curach across the sea. Here he meets Manannán Mac Lír, traversing the sea in his chariot like a veritable Poseidon. [3] The god accosts Bran, and sings to him a song concerning his Elysian realm beyond the sea. His description adds but little to that contained in the maiden's song ; one touch, however, we may note, by reason of its frequent occurrence in subsequent writings. He speaks of a ' charming delightful game,' at which the denizens play over their wine, ' men and gentle women beneath a bush, without sin, without transgression.' This passage has been accredited to Christian transcribers ; however, the remarks previously offered in relation to such interpolations in general would seem to apply to the present case. The very poetical description of the Tír Tairngire contained in this tale, while thoroughly in accord with the more primitive legends, though amplified and drawn by a more masterly hand, is marked by a refinement of imagination and execution more than sufficient to account for the occurrence of the idea in question, without any air of incongruity with the rest of the description. [4] We may add that it seems most unlikely that a Christian scribe would, if he could, introduce a touch of the kind, when he has not found it necessary, in this and other legends where the old Irish conception of the Otherworld has undergone an euhemerising and Christianising process, to delete the episodes of enchanted dúnns and islands where the wayfarer is refreshed with delights akin to those of the Mohammedan Paradise. [5] Manannán's song in the present tale contains a palpable interpolation of the usual kind, in the form of several stanzas prophetic of the coming of Christ.

Another Imram belongs to the Cuchulainn cycle, and in its original form was probably older than any other story of this class that has come down to us, but it is only preserved in a later redaction. Cuchulainn having overcome in battle the king of the Ui Maine, the king put a spell on him that he should know no peace until he had ascertained why the children of Doel Dermait had left their country. Cuchulainn could find no one to tell him this, and became a prey to unrest. At length he had occasion to fight a duel with the king of Alba's son, whom he vanquished and would have slain, but that the prince begged his life, which Cuchulainn granted him on condition that he would solve the riddle. This the prince could not do himself, but he promised to take Cuchulainn to those who could. Cuchulainn accepted these terms, and embarked on board the prince's ship with his charioteer Loeg and his comrade Lugaid. They first came to a fair island, wherein was a dún surrounded by a wall of silver and a stockade of bronze upon it. They received a cordial welcome, but upon propounding their question were directed to another island, where dwelt Achtlann, daughter of Doel Dermait and wife of Condla Coel Corrbacc, a kind of marine Enceladus, who used to lie all across his island, and at every breath he drew would send a great wave along the sea with the wind of it. Achtiann guided them to a third island, where two great giants bore joint rule, Corpre Cundail, a kinsman of Doel Dermait, and Eochaid Glas Corpre. The former challenged Cuchulainn to fight, and, being overcome, treated him hospitably, and told him of Doel Dermait's children, who were held captive in that island by Eochaid. Next day Cuchulainn attacked Eochaid in his ' Place of Torture,' the Glenn ; but the giant was so tall that Cuchulainn could only reach him by jumping on to the rim of his shield, from which Eochaid kept blowing him off each time. Cuchulainn, however, by dint of one of those gymnastic feats for which he was famous, leapt into the air over the giant and slew him from above. He then released the captives, who straight-way bathed in the giant's blood, and being thus healed of their tortures and sufferings, were enabled to return to their own country. In this story, which assuredly bears small imprint of Christian influences, we probably have the earliest form of that episode of the release of the captives of some giant or wizard, which recurs in the Graal

romances, and is one of the most frequent incidents of the romantic tales of chivalry. [6] Its meaning is clear, the release of the dead from the powers of the lower world, a feat which is no less frequently accomplished by different means, in mediæval stories, by a saint or jongleur, according as the scope of the work is religious or comic.

The earliest of the Christian Imrama that we possess is *The Voyage of Maelduin's Curach*, the composition of which Professor Zimmer refers to the eighth century at latest, though it contains interpolations which Mr. Nutt considers to have been made at the end of the tenth century. [6] It relates a voyage undertaken by Maelduin, a young noble of the Eoghanachta, in order to find the murderer of his father who had been slain by a marauder of Leix. The tale is a remarkably fine one of its kind, and its simple and picturesque prose is by no means improved upon by Tennyson's poem, the subject of which it suggested. It is long, and contains a great variety of incidents, some of which, it is very possible, may not belong to the original Celtic stock, but may be due to classical sources. Certain it is that a great part of them belong to that class of 'ferlies' which old writers used to place in *terræ incognitæ*, and have their analogues in the writings of Herodotus and Aelian, and, Mr. Stokes says, Megasthenes, to whom we may add Lucian and Sinbad. The majority of them, however, are variants, and often developments, of topics common in Irish legend. We must content ourselves with giving a brief summary of those episodes which most illustrate the development of the Otherworld legend in Irish ecclesiastical literature.

As usual, the narrative mainly consists of the visits paid by the wanderer to a number of enchanted islands, which are mostly of the usual Wonderland pattern, though the present description of them contains, in most cases, certain distinctive features of its own. The wanderers are entertained in stately duns, with walls and palisades of the precious metals or of crystal; they are regaled with magic food; there is the usual Calypso episode, etc. etc. One island is raised above the sea upon a pedestal; in another is a river of fire; one is encompassed with a wall of water; over another a stream rises on one side and descends on the other, forming an arch like a rainbow; upon another is a tall column with a mystical veil depending from it and enshrouding the island,—all of which recall features of the Paradise described in the *Fís Adamnáin*.

Some of the incidents bear a decidedly infernal significance. On one island the voyagers beheld a horse-race, and heard the shouts of the crowd; both jockeys and spectators were demons. It has been suggested that this incident, for which no parallel exists, so far as I am aware, in earlier narratives, may be of Norse origin; possibly it may be one of those loans from classical literature before referred to, and ecclesiastical influences may have depicted in Stygian colouring the pagan Elysium in which departed heroes continue to ply their wonted sports. [7] At the same time, it is possible that the writer may have dealt in a like manner with the sports of Magh Mell, in Manannán's Elysium, described in the *Imram Bráin*. Of course, the question of foreign importation turns upon the other question, whether horse-races, as well as chariot-races, were known in Ireland at the date when the *Voyage of Maelduin* was written.

On another island they saw a party of demon smiths forging a mass of glowing metal, which one of them threw after the curach, as Polyphemus threw the rock after Odysseus. [8] On another they came to a huge, hideous mill, and the miller, huge and hideous to match, told them that the grist which he cast into his mill was all things that had been begrudged on earth. This demon miller is rather a favourite symbol in Irish legend, and is not confined to professedly religious compositions. It occurs in the story of Mongán in a slightly different form; in the *Voyage of the sons of Ua Corra*, who saw all manner of precious things cast into the mill, and the miller told them, 'I cast into the mouth of the mill all things for which grudging has

been made, and 'tis the Miller of Hell I am' ; and it survived in local tradition as the *Muillann Luprachán* (Pixies' Mill) near Tuam. [9]

There is something weirdly picturesque in this demon miller who casts into his Mill of Vanities, and grinds down there, all the objects of worldly covetise ; the conception reminds us rather curiously of the mystical Wheat-sieve in the carnival hymn of the Florentine Piagnoni, *Il Trionfo del Vaglio*.

In striking contrast to these rude sketches of the infernal realm is a short but vivid episode in which the subjects borrowed from the primitive Elysium are rendered by a master's hand. One island by which the voyagers passed was surrounded by a wall of fire, which revolved about the island continually. ' There was an open doorway in the side of that rampart. Now whenever the doorway would come (in its revolution) opposite to them, they used to see (through it) the whole island and all that was therein, and all its indwellers, even human beings, beautiful, abundant, wearing adorned garments, and feasting, with golden vessels in their hands. And the wanderers heard the ale-music. And for a long space were they seeing the marvel they beheld, and they deemed it delightful' (trans. W. S., *loc. cit*) [10] Never perhaps in sacred or profane literature has a passage of equal brevity portrayed with equal vividness that Celestial Feast which, as fact or symbol, enters into every creed ; from the gross delights of that ' humbler heaven' which ' kindly Nature' has given to the hopes of primitive man, to the imagery wherewith higher creeds seek to picture the indescribable *ben dell intelletio*. There is no superfluous detail, and none is needed, but the picture flashes out before the reader's eye as it did before Maelduin and his crew—that ideal region, cut off from the wanderers by a fiery wall which forbids their access, but grants them a fleeting vision before they pass on their way.

This tale contains a group of incidents which are largely represented in the Acts of the Irish Saints. On one island an old hermit, fifteenth in descent from St. Brenainn of Birr, dwelt beside a lake. Hard by, a great eagle, very old, alighted, bearing in his beak a branch and berries on it. Two other eagles came and picked off the vermin which infested the plumage of the first ; they then ate of the berries and cast others into the lake, after which the old eagle plunged into the water, and washed until his youthful vigour returned to him, after which they all flew away. One of Maelduin's crew bathed in the lake wherein the berries had been cast, and lost neither tooth nor hair, nor suffered from any infirmity until the day of his death. As we have seen, mystical birds abound in Irish descriptions of the Otherworld, but in the present curious episode we can easily recognise the classical legend of the Phœnix. Mr. Nutt well develops this point in the essay to which we have so often had occasion to refer, and gives an interesting parallel in an Anglo-Saxon poem on the Phœnix. For this, and the discussion thereon, we must refer the reader to Mr. Nutt's work. We may note the very characteristic way in which the Irish writer adapts the foreign incident to the accepted forms of the national literature. The rejuvenescence of the eagle is effected not by fire but by water, which owes its properties to certain berries dropped therein, these evidently belonging to the species which dropped from the quicken-trees—a variant of the hazels of Buan—into the wells where the Salmon of Knowledge consumed them, and thereby acquired his supernatural virtues.

Another island was covered with trees, which were the resort of birds ; and here dwelt a man, clad with his own hair. This was a pilgrim from Ireland who had been wrecked on the island, and the birds were his children, with whom he was to abide there till Doomsday.

Another anchorite, likewise clad with his own hair, dwelt upon an island surrounded with a golden rampart, and the ground of the island was white as down. [11] He was fed by a fountain, which ran on Wednesdays and Fridays with whey or water, on Sundays and the feasts of Martyrs with good milk, and on High Days with ale or wine.

On yet another island dwelt a hermit covered with white hair, so that he looked like a white bird. He had been cook at the monastery of Torach, where he used to embezzle and sell the provisions of the community, and hoard the proceeds, until he became exceeding rich, and waxed proud. One day he was bidden bury a peasant ; on digging the grave, he was accosted by a corpse already buried on the spot, who forbade him to lay that sinner's corpse atop of him, a holy man. The cook asked the corpse what boon he would grant him for compliance ; the corpse replied, ' Eternal life ' ; and the cook found another resting-place for the peasant. Some time later, the cook felt a desire to quit the island, so he set forth in a curach, laden with all his ill-gotten wealth. At sea he was hailed by a man seated upon a wave, who told him that all the air about him was thick with demons, because of his pride and thefts, and bade him fling all his riches into the sea. He obeyed, reserving to himself only a little wooden cup. The man gave him seven cakes and a cupful of whey-water, which the cook carried to a rock, and this was his only food for seven years, after which time he had lived on salmon which an otter had brought him periodically. [12] In the man sitting upon the wave, it is impossible not to recognise an adaptation of Manannán Mac Lír, who drove over the waves in his chariot to meet Bran.

The prevalence of the island-hermit incident in Irish legend is accounted for by the early history of the Irish Church. The pastoral duties and missionary work of the early saints necessitated frequent voyages to the Western Isles of Scotland, to Britain and to Gaul, while that passion for solitude and retirement, which alternated in them with an intense activity in their calling, and even a vehement partizanship in public life, found full gratification on the small islands which fringe the western coasts of Ireland. These islands naturally became the scene of those miracles which in Ireland, as elsewhere, clustered about the names of the saints ; but here, as in other things, a strong nationality asserted itself, and recollections of the island Paradise of antiquity entered largely into the legends of the saints, rendering easy the transition from the island retreat to the Paradise where the saints dwelt with Enoch and Elijah, beside the Tree of Life, amid the songs of the bird-souls of the righteous. No doubt a certain number of these wandering saints would be blown out of their course to strange lands, and bring back tidings of the wonders they had actually seen, which would lose nothing in their passage from mouth to mouth. One such case is reported by Adamnán himself, that of one Baitan, who set out with several others in quest of an ocean solitude, but returned after long wanderings. [13]

In the *Voyage of the Curach of the Ua Corra*, [14] the ethical and eschatological element is entirely in the ascendant. Conall Dearg ua Conaill Fhinn, a rich and hospitable noble of Connacht, being discontented at having no children, entered into a compact with the Devil, who undertook that Conall should have children, on condition that they should belong to himself. In due lime Conall's wife bore him triplets, who received ' heathen baptism ' by the names of Lochan, Einne, and Silvester. These grew up to be mighty men of valour ; howbeit, they considered that as they belonged to the Devil, it was hard if they might not harry his enemies. Accordingly, they set themselves to plunder and burn the churches and monasteries of Tuam, and of half Connacht besides. Finally, they proposed to add the last touch to their guilt by murdering the Erenach of Clogher, their mother's father, and burning his church on him. The better to effect their purpose, they visited the Erenach and partook of his hospitality, and went to sleep, awaiting the coming of night. Then Lochan had a dream, wherein he saw Hell with its four rivers, one of them full of toads, another of serpents, the third running fire, and the fourth ice. He also saw the ' Piast of Hell,' ' and abundance of heads and feet on it,' a form under which ' the old Dragon ' often appears in Irish sacred legend. He was then taken to Heaven, and saw ' the Lord Himself on His throne, and bird-flocks of angels making music to Him,' the sweetest singer of all being Michael, in form of a bird. On waking, he related his vision to his brethren, and they all, moved to repentance, vowed thenceforth to serve

God instead of the Devil. Accordingly, ' they made staves of their spear-shafts, ' instead of beating their spears into pruning-hooks, and betook themselves to St. Finden of Clonard, to whom they made confession. He instructed them in religion for a year and a day, and then bade them go and restore the churches which they had destroyed. This they did ; and then, ' one day when they came forth over the edge of the haven, they were contemplating the sun, as he went past them westwards, and they marvelled much concerning his course. " And in what direction goes the sun," say they, " when he goes under the sea ? And what more wondrous thing," say they, " than the sea without ice, and ice on every other water ?" [14]

These reflections, so typical of the old Irish attitude towards Nature, although to us they may seem to be more in keeping with the ideas of much more recent times, awoke in the *Uí Corra* that spirit of wandering, than which, perhaps, no other *Leanamhán Sidhe* casts more potent spells on man. They got a friend, a Wright, to build them a ship, wherein they embarked, with a bishop, a priest, a deacon, a ship-wright, a buffoon, and a servant, being nine in all; then, at the bishop's bidding, they committed themselves to the guidance of the winds.

The incidents of the voyage and the lands they visited resemble those described in the Voyage of Maelduin, several of the islands at which they touched exhibiting the *mise en scène* of pagan legend, adapted in the usual manner to the Christian drama. Thus on one of these islands they found an orchard of fair, fragrant apple-trees, and a most beautiful river flowing through it ; and ' when the wind would move the tree-tops of the grove, sweeter was their song than any music' (trans. W. Stokes, *loc. cit.*). And the apples and the river, which was of wine, cured all wounds and sickness. Many of the adventures belong to the common stock of wonder voyages ; here, as in the Voyage of Maelduin, mention is made of the island uplifted above the sea by a pedestal, whence the voices of the islanders could be heard, but the speakers not seen ; of the watery arch, the pillar and net, the demon smiths, etc. On one island flowers were growing as big as tables, dropping honey, and about them beautiful bright bird-flocks were singing. Here dwelt a ' son of the Church, ' Dega, a disciple of the Apostle Andrew, who had gone on a pilgrimage across the ocean to expiate his having forgotten his nocturn one night ; he was awaiting Doomsday on that island, together with the birds, who were the souls of holy human beings.

In these islands, the abode of pilgrims and hermits until Doomsday, we have, in a pagan setting, the limbo of the *boni sed non valde*. A little further on, we come to what is the first incident of a purely Purgatorial nature occurring in this class of literature. One island was divided into two parts—the one part inhabited by the living, the other by the dead. Multitudes were lying there on red-hot flagstones, with red-hot spits through them, howling terribly as a fiery sea sent its billows of flame over them. These were they who had failed to make expiation for their sins on earth, and were tormented in this manner until Doomsday.

The voyagers also perceived flocks of birds rising from out of a river, pursued by eels, otters, and black swans. These were the spirits of the damned, let out of Hell for a day's respite on Sundays, though they were not allowed to enjoy this boon in peace, for the eels, etc., were demons that kept pursuing them. One of these birds had three beautiful rays on its breast ; this was a woman who had forsaken her husband, but had brought him food when sick and in want. This notion that the damned were periodically allowed a day's holiday [15] was generally accepted by the early Church in Ireland, as elsewhere. Sometimes, as here, this was believed to take place so often as every Sunday ; by some, only on the great festivals of the Church, as Christmas Day and Easter, Our author, like several other of the Irish Churchmen, was a strict Sabbatarian, and gives to violations of the Sunday a place disproportionately large, visiting them with a severity that seems excessive. For instance, a solitary rower was rowing with a fiery spade upon a fiery river, the waves of which kept breaking over him ; this was a boatman who had plied his trade on Sunday, The lurid picturesqueness of

this figure, worthy of Dante, is spoiled by the disproportion between crime and punishment. A horseman bestrode a fiery horse ; he had stolen his brother's horse, and ridden him on a Sunday. There was also a black, smoky giant, carrying an iron staff as big as a mill-shaft, and flakes of fire, as big as fleeces, coming out of his throat. This was no Typhoeus, nor heresiarch, nor conqueror, the scourge of nations, but a man who had carried firewood on a Sunday ; for this he now bore on his back a bundle of faggots, the load of six oxen, which would blaze up, ever and anon, when he would fling himself into the sea, ' but it was increase of pain to him.'

Reference has already been made to the demon miller, grinding the world's vain riches. One island was peopled by men wailing aloud as they were mangled by the fiery red beaks and talons of sable birds, while their tongues were aflame within their heads ; these were dishonest smiths.

Other islands which the Ui Corra visited were variants of the earthly Paradise, being inhabited by pilgrims, solitaries, etc., like those already described.

The *Voyage of Snedgus and Mac Riagla* [16] is equally Christian in conception, and in some respects approximates yet more closely to the eschatology of the *Fis*. The men of Ross, unable to endure the tyranny of Fiacha, their chief, killed him, thereby rendering themselves liable to death. At the instance of St. Colm Cille, this doom was commuted to the old Irish punishment of exposure on the sea ; and they were set adrift, sixty couples of them, in as many small boats, ' for God to judge them.' It was Snedgus and Mac Riagla that were sent to bear this sentence to them, and shortly afterwards they embarked on their own account to make a pilgrimage to the East. After visiting several islands of the familiar type, they came to one whereon was a great tree, and many beautiful birds perched thereon. And ' melodious was the music of those birds, singing psalms and canticles, praising the Lord. For they were the birds of the plain of Heaven, and neither trunk nor leaf of that tree decayed' (trans. W. Stokes, *loc. cit.*). On the top of the tree sat a great bird, with a head of gold and wings of silver, who told of the Creation of the World, of the Nativity, Baptism, Passion, Resurrection, etc.; ' and he tells tidings of Doom ; and then all the birds used to beat their sides with their wings, so that showers of blood dropt out of their sides, for dread of the tidings of Doom.' (*Ibid.*).

After which they came to a land where they found the banished men of Ross, who were to abide there until Judgment, for they were guiltless in what they had done ; Fiacha having apparently deserved his fate. ' Good is this island,' they said, ' wherein we are, for in it are Elijah and Enoch, and noble is the dwelling wherein is Elijah.' And they showed the voyagers a lake of water and a lake of fire, which should long since have come over Eire, had not St. Patrick and St. Martin been praying for the land.

The travellers asked to see Enoch, but were told that he was ' in a secret place, until we shall all go to battle on the Day of Judgment.' [17]

We might have expected to find Enoch and Elijah in the Terrestrial Paradise, in company of the bird-flocks, as in other writings, but the construction of the Imram was commonly loose. The introduction of them shows that the fusion of the national traditions with the teaching of the Church was now complete. This is equally apparent in the description of another island, on which they landed : ' A great lofty island, and all therein was delightful and hallowed. Good was the king that abode in this island, and he was holy and righteous,' etc, (trans, W. Stokes, *loc. cit.*). His dún had one hundred doors ; at each door was an altar, and at

each altar a priest, celebrating the Eucharist. This king and his dún again remind us of the castle of the Graal.

We have now traced, in outline, the development of the Otherworld theory in Irish legend, from its primitive conception as a Land of Cockayne, presided over by the Dagda, with his inexhaustible ale-vat and ready-roasted pigs, to its identification with the Terrestrial Paradise, though without losing its distinctive features. One step only remained to be taken before the *Imram*, thus modified, should pass beyond the country of its birth, and assume a prominent place in the literature of mediæval Europe. This step was taken in the group of stories—some legendary, others more or less historic, though intermingled with legendary matter—which narrated the voyages of the Irish Saints, or, rather, in that most famous example of its class which purports to give an account of the travels of St. Brendan of Clonfert, surnamed ‘ the Voyager.’ So entirely does it surpass all others in popularity and influence, and especially in those circumstances which connect it with our subject, that it may be taken as the representative of its class ; as, however, it is later in date of composition than the *Fís Adaináin*, and even reproduces some passages of the latter, it may be left for a later section.

The authors of the Voyages of the Ui Corra, and of Snedgus and Mac Ríagla, had not only given an entirely Christian tone to the *Imram*, but, without abandoning the imagery of the Otherworld handed down by the national traditions, had blent therewith a number of conceptions derived through the medium of the Apocalyptic literature of the early Church from both classical and Hebraistic sources. Further, they prepared the transition from the *Imram* to the *Fís*. [18]

[1] In the story of Cormac, Manannan’s Paradise, instead of lying oversea, is placed within a dún, at which Cormac arrives by land.

[2] So the group of Carolingian romances, which long passed for the work of Archbishop Turpin, retained the characteristics of a barbarous society in their views concerning magic, superstition, morals, etc, though sanctified by the addition of ecclesiastical miracles, and other mallets of edification, which earned for it the formal approval of Pope Calixtus II. in the year 1122.

[3] Manannán is presented in like fashion in the story of Mongán.

[4] So in the tale of Mider, *ante*, where, as here, it is introduced into the description of the pagan Elyaiam, Magh Mór ; the ecclesiastical interpolations, as here again, being brought in in the usual incongruous manner

[5] As in the *Voyage of Maelduin’s Curach*, an *Imram* of substantially the original type, treated from a Christian point of view. The trait is copied in the *Adventures of Tadhg Mac Céin*, a late mediæval romance composed in the archaic style, where it receives from Tadhg the characteristic comment, “ Tis queer, though charming” ; he evidently regarded it as an example intended rather for edification than imitation. It is interesting to note how the idea occurs in modern Irish poetry, as, indeed, practically, in Irish peasant life.

In poor Mangan’s beautiful Love Ballad, translated or imitated from the Irish, the hero—

‘ Sheltered by the sloe bush black
Sat, laughed, and talked, while thick sleet fell
And cold rain.
Thanks to God ! no guilty leaven
Dashed our childish mirth.

You rejoice for this in Heaven,
I not less on earth.'

[5] One of the most explicit instances occurs in the Graal series, in the *Queste*, when Perceval informed that the Castle of Maidens is Hell, and the captives therein are the souls that await Christ's coming; the seven knights that defend the castle being the seven deadly sins (Nutt, *Studies*, etc, p. 41).

[6] Edited and translated by Mr. W. Stokes in *Rev. Celtique*, ix.-i., from a version contained in the L.U., parts being completed from later versions. Cf. *Voyage of Bran*, i. 162-3.

[7] Para in gramineia exercent membra palaestris;
Contendunt ludo, et fulva luctantur arena, etc.
VIRG, *Aen.*, vi. 643-3.

[8] *Odyssey*, ix. 481 *Sqq.*

[9] David Fitzgerald, 'Popular Tales of Ireland,' *Rev. Celtique*, iv 189 *sqq*

[10] The root conception belongs to the common stock of Celtic tradition. We shall see more of the fiery rampart later on; for the revolving wall, cp. the castle in the Welsh story of Peredur, which spun round faster than the winds.

[11] Probably a reminiscence of some hermit who had chosen a snowy region in the North for his retreat.

[12] A similar miraculous provision by the agency of some animal occurs in the legends of several of the Irish hermits. In Wolfram's Parsival, the Grail appears as a 'stone which yields all manner of food and drink, the power of which is sustained by a dove, who every week lays a Host upon it.'—Nutt, *Studies*, etc., p. 35.

[13] *Vita S. Columba*, I. xiv.

[14] *Iomram Churraig h-Ua g-Corra*, ed. and trans, by Mr. W. Stokes, in *Rev. Celt.*, xiv. 22 *sqq.*, from the Book of Fermoy, a MS. of the fourteenth century. The tale, in its present form, is later than that of Maelduin, though Professor Zimmer considers that the original was written early in the eighth century, the present being probably 'a thirteenth century *rifacimento*, save the opening portion, which he (Zimmer) thus looks upon as being the earliest fragment of this genre of story telling.'—Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, i. 162. Mr. Stokes, however, regards the extant version as a work of the eleventh century, *loc. cit.*

[14] Here, again, the harp in the hands of a modern minstrel re-echoes the ancient tune :

And as I watch the line of light, that plays
Along the smooth wave tow'rd the burning west
I long to tread that golden path of rays,
And think 'twould lead to some bright isle of rest.'—Moore

[15] A similar belief existed in the old Latin religion. Outside the city gates of every town there used to be a pit, the 'Mundus,' which was regarded as the receptacle of the souls of the dead. It was covered with a flagstone, which was lifted on three days in the year, occurring in August, October, and November, to give the imprisoned souls a holiday. Cp. the belief, once prevalent all over Europe, and still existing in many parts, that on All

Souls' Eve the spirits would go through their towns in procession, and visit their former homes.

[16] *Imrum Snedghusa agus Mic Riagla*, ed. and trans, by Mr. Whitley Stokes, *Rev. Celt.*, ix.12 *sqq.*, from the Yellow Book of Lecan, before mentioned ; and see O'Curry, *MS. Materials of Irish History*, pp. 333 *sqq.* Mr. Stokes ascribes the tale to the middle of the seventh century ; Mr. Nutt, to the middle or latter part of the ninth cent—*Voyage of Bran*, 1. 231.

[17] The anticipation of a general battle immediately prior to the Judgment, though an article of many religions [*e.g.* the Persian, the Norse, etc.), is unusual in Irish writings of the present class ; it is probably suggested by the prophecies contained in the Revelations, and in the prophetic books of the Old Testament, more especially the mention of the Battle of Armageddon in Rev. xvi. The mention of Enoch in connection with this battle is singular, and suggests the legend of Enoch in the Talmud. The disappearance of a national hero, and his seclusion until he shall appear to take part in some great conflict, though common to the traditions of most races (some of the most familiar being Arthur, Dietrich of Berne, Holger Danake, Frederick II.—not Frederick I., Barbarossa), has always appealed to the Irish imagination], and recurs in the modern folk-tales of Gearoid Iarla, O'Sullivan, the MacMahon, etc. It will be remembered that on Mr. Parnell's death many believed that the Chief was not really dead, but had only disappeared for a time.

[18] There is no intention to suggest that the *Echtra*, the *Imram*, and the *Fís*, or the tales in each group, succeeded one another in the order in which they are referred to in the text, either in their present form or in their original composition, least of all as regards the very ancient materials which are embodied in all of them. It has been attempted to present them in such order as may best illustrate the development of the eschatological idea, and the increasing fusion of native traditions with the Church legends. A later writer, on account of his subject, or for other reasons, might sometimes employ a more archaic form of narrative than some of his predecessors.

[18] Sanctorum quoque angelorum dulces et suavissimas frequentationes luminosas habere meruit. Quorumdam justorum animas crebro ab angelis ad summa coelorum vehi, Sancto revelante Spiritu, videbat. Sed et reproborum alias ad inferna a demonibus ferri sacpenumero aspiciebat—*Vita S. Columba*.

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