

Longer Fenian Romances.

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The Causes of the Battle of Cnucha (Fotha Catha Cnucha). This piece describes the causes of the hereditary feud that existed between the sons of Morna, or Connacht Fianna, led by Aedh or Goll mac Morna, and the Leinster Fianna. After giving the genealogy of Nuada and Tadhg, his son, it describes the beauty of Tadhg's daughter, Muirn Munchaemh, and Cumhall's desire to marry her. Being refused, he carried her off by force. He was ordered by Conn, King of Tara, to give up Muirn, but instead of doing so he eloped with her to Scotland. Then Conn gathered his forces and united with the Luaigne of Tara under Urgrend, or Uirgrena, s. of Lugaidh Corr, together with Aedh mac Morna and the Connacht warriors to attack Cumhall. They met in the Battle of Cnucha and Cumhall was slain. Aedh's eye was put out in the fight by Luchet, who, in revenge, was slain by Aedh. This was the beginning of a feud between the Leinster and Connacht Fianna which afterwards completely separated them and made of the hitherto united band two hostile troops. Aedh was henceforth called Goll "the blind" on account of the loss of his eye. After the battle Muirn returned to her father, Tadhg, but he gave orders that she should be burned alive in punishment for her flight with Cumhall. She fled to Conn for protection, and he sent her into the care of a sister of Cumhall, Bodhmall the Druidess, Fiacaill's wife. Here Fionn was born, and was first named Deimne ; as soon as he was old enough he proclaimed war with Tadhg and demanded full eric for his father's death. Tadhg gave up to him Almu for ever and a portion of his own hereditary land. A peace was patched up between Fionn and Goll, which lasted until "the slaying of the Sucking-Pig of Slanga," on the plain of Teamhair Luachra (parish of Dysart, Co. Kerry). [1]

The Boyish Exploits of Fionn (Mac-ghníomhartha Fhinn). This tale opens with an account of the Battle of Cnucha similar to the above, save that Conn is not mentioned. The simplicity and directness of both pieces are a sign of their age ; there is none of the redundancy of the later tales. They give a brief narration of events, couched in short sentences, and show no effort after literary style. The story goes on to relate the rearing of Fionn in the forest and his early adventures, his boyish feats of courage, and the adoption of his name Fionn "fair" in place of Deimne on account of the fairness of his appearance. He visits the plain of the Liffey (Magh Life) and takes part in hurling on the lawn, hunts deer in the Slieve Bloom Mountains (Sléibhe Bládhma), and hires himself into military service to the King of Bantry in S. Munster ; he also remains some time with a king in Co. Kerry, and passes thence into Connacht. Afterwards he seeks the R. Boyne, to study with Finn-eigeas and to watch for the "Salmon of Knowledge" from the pool of Feic, the eating of which was to endue him with wisdom and with the gifts of magic and prophecy. When the salmon was caught, Fionn was put to cook it, but happening to touch it with his thumb, he burned himself and put the thumb into his mouth, by which means all magical knowledge became revealed to him. Henceforth, whenever he was in difficulty he had recourse to his "Thumb of Knowledge ;" when he put it under his tooth he obtained the direction he was in need of. The allegory of the Salmon of Knowledge, which must be caught in youth and which is watched over by the aged sage of learning, is repeated in Irish Literature under many forms. The piece closes with Fionn's well-known poem in praise of Spring. [2]

Battle of Gaura (Cath Gabhra). There are both prose and poetical versions of this tale in existence. It must be an ancient tale, for there is a short poem referring to it in the Book of

Leinster. The causes of this battle ... closed the period of Fenian power. One of the finest passages in Ossianic Literature is the account in the poetical version of the death of Oscar, and of the grief of Oisín, his father, and the Fians for their chief.

Some portions of the Scottish version of the poem are identical with the form preserved in Ireland.

The Colloquy with the Ancient Men (Agallamh na Senorach). This is by far the longest and most important of all the prose pieces belonging to the Fenian cycle. It is a collection or corpus of stories relating to the Fianna and their chiefs thrown together in the form of a Dindsenchus or geographical guide. The stories are supposed to be related by Caeilte mac Ronan to St. Patrick as they travel together with their companies of followers through the Provinces of Ireland, each place at which they stop suggesting to Caeilte some reminiscence of the ancient days when Fionn and his people were yet alive and when the Fianna were in their glory. By one of those fortunate chances to which the Irish loved to attribute the preservation of their old legends, Caeilte and Oisín, with twice nine companions, are supposed to have survived by a hundred and fifty years the destruction of their comrades at the Battle of Gaura (Gabhra), and after wandering through Meath they meet St. Patrick at Drumderg, an old fort belonging to Fionn. As Patrick is finishing his chanting of the canon, he perceives drawing near him a band of enormous men attended by huge wolf-dogs, both men and dogs being evidently of another age and time. None of the clergy reached to the shoulders of the newcomers, and as they came up and sat down the priests gazed on them in terror. By degrees they take courage to ask their names and origin. In a few words Caeilte replies to these questions, and he adds that they, with the Fianna, were sustained through life by “the truth that was in their hearts, the strength in their arms and the fulfilment in their tongues.” Patrick grows curious to hear tales of the bygone days in which they lived, but he fears that such worldly converse will distract the mind from religion. “Were it not for us an impairing of the devout life, an occasion of neglecting prayer and of deserting converse with God, we should feel the time pass quickly as we talked with thee, O warriors.” And again : “Success and benediction attend thee, Caeilte, thy tale is to me a lightening of spirit and of mind, tell us now another tale.” This friendly eagerness of the saint to hear the old Pagan legends is the key to the whole of this long tale. There are none of the contentious and wrangling passages which occur in the Ossianic poems proper, that is, in those in which Oisín converses with St. Patrick. Caeilte and the Saint have the most perfect appreciation of and respect for each other, and a beautiful courtesy is shown in all their dealings together. Patrick’s hesitation is allayed by the appearance of his two guardian angels, who assure him emphatically that so far from it being displeasing to God that he should listen to all that the old warriors can tell of their former life, he is divinely commanded to write down their tales “on tabular poet’s staffs and in the words of ollaves,” because it will be “a pastime to the nobles and companies of the latter time to give ear to these stories.” Thus reassured, the Saint throws himself with zest into the occasion and, having first baptized the visitors, he and his band accompany them round Ireland, each glen and wood and hillock bringing up reminiscences and tales of long ago.

The tales are of different ages, and gathered evidently from many sources ; there is no connection between them beyond their subject and the manner of their telling : some are brief and fragmentary, others are told at great length. At frequent intervals Caeilte breaks out into some song which arises naturally out of the subject of his tale. These songs are often of great beauty and prove a deep and sympathetic love of natural scenery. The fairy element enters largely into the stories. We have innumerable tales in which the Fenian heroes ; they are no longer inaccessible deities set far apart from human life ; they come as troops of beautiful

half-divine, half-human, beings to take their part in it. They are placed on the same level with the sons of Milesius as “two tribes that are equal ;” they enter into combat with the Fenian warriors and can be slain by them, or they can suffer death by drowning and in other ways. They fall in love with human beings and are wedded to them. We learn in the *Battle of Ventry* that there “was not a leader or chief of the Fians of Erin whose wife or mother or foster-mother was not of the Tuatha dé Danann ; hostages of the Tuatha dé Danann are taken by the Fenian warriors, and it is even possible to use towards them the old Irish custom of “fasting upon them” in order to obtain some demand. Like Caeilte himself, these fairy people submit themselves to Patrick and give the Saint a general command over their hosts ; all sense of impossible distance between the race of mortals and the fairy people is done away, and “the Fianna of Ireland had not more frequent and free intercourse with the men of settled habitation than with the Tuatha dé Danann.” Very close to earth, too, is “the flock-abounding Land of Promise,” and the birds of that land are constantly heard making melody. The Fenian heroes pass in and out of the sídh-dwellings, which are no longer confined to one or two special spots, as in the older times, but are thought of, as they are thought of by the peasantry to-day, as found everywhere beneath the grassy hills and slopes of Erin. [3]

Towards the close of the “Colloquy” Caeilte and Oisín meet again at Tara, and here the remnant of the Fianna who had accompanied them “lay their lips to earth and die” amid the silent grief of the whole of Ireland. It is characteristic of the piece that Dermot mac Cearbhal is reigning at Tara, and we thus have three separate epochs, that of the Fians, that of Patrick, and that of Dermot and Columcille, united together.

The Battle of Ventry (Cath Finntrága). This long tale is still familiarly known in the part of Kerry in which the scene is placed. It is a comparatively modern tale, probably not much older than the oldest manuscript in which it is contained, which is of the fifteenth century, but it is found in numerous late paper manuscripts. It describes an invasion of Ireland by Daire Donn, King of the World, accompanied by the Kings of France, Greece, India, Spain, Norway, and numerous other potentates, in order to avenge the dishonour done to the King of France, Bolcan or Vulcan, whose wife and daughter had been carried off by Fionn. Among the host is a daughter of the King of Greece, who is described as “the best woman-warrior who ever came into the world,” and who has a terrible hand-to-hand struggle with Fionn himself.

The hosts are guided by Glas, a warrior of the Fenian band, who had been expelled by Fionn from Ireland in consequence of an endeavour he had made to betray the Fenian leader to King Cormac mac Airt. He leads them round the southern shores of Ireland into Ventry Harbour (Finntraigh or “White Strand”) in Co. Kerry, which is said to be the property of the King of Spain, and there they ride on smooth water, “filling the borders of the whole harbour, so that the sea was not visible between the boats,” the great bark of the King of the World sailing first into the harbour. All the landing-places in Ireland are said to have had Fenian watchmen guarding them, but the watchman of Ventry is a son of Bran, son of Febal, [4] of the Tuatha dé Danann, and before warning Fionn and his troops who are in the north of Ireland of the arrival of the foreigners, he arouses the fairy hosts, who come in great armies, led by their chiefs, the gods Lir, Bodhb Derg, etc., to attack the hosts of the invaders.

The foreigners are described as inquiring whether these are the armies of the Fianna, and Glas replies : “Not so, but they are another troop of the men of Erin who dare not be above ground, but live in the sídh-brughs (fairy palaces) underground.” When the troops of Fionn arrive on the scene a lengthened and terrific conflict (it lasts for a year and a day) ensues, in which the foreigners, who are armed with the most strange and venomous weapons, usually

get the best of it, in spite of a succession of brilliant deeds done by Fionn himself and all his chief warriors. The most picturesque passage in this long story is that at the close, which describes the death of Cael and the lament of Gelges (called also Crede), his wife, over his body. The passage is, however, only found entire in one copy (Rawl. B. 487). "Fergus went where Gael was, and asked him how he was." "Sad is that, O Fergus," said Cael. "I pledge my word, that if my breastplate and my helmet were taken off me and all my armour, there would not be a particle of me that would not fall asunder ; but I swear that I am more grieved that yon warrior that I see should get away alive to the foreigners, than I myself to be as I am. I leave my blessing with thee, O Fergus," said Cael, "and take me on thy back towards the sea, that I may swim after the foreigner, and he will not know that I am not one of his own people ; for it would be well with me if that foreigner fell by me before my soul were parted from my body."

Fergus lifted him up and took him to the sea and set him swimming after the foreigner ("Allmurach"). The Allmurach waited for him till he reached the vessel, because he thought he was one of his own people. Gael raised himself up, however, and he swimming alongside the ship. The foreigner stretched out his hand to him. Gael grasped it by the slender wrist and closed around it his firm-clenching inseparable fingers, and gave a manly truly-valiant tug at him, so that he pulled him out overboard. Then they clasped their graceful heroes' hands across one another's bodies, and went together to the sand and gravel of the clear sea, and neither of them were seen from that time forth.

Then came the women of rank and the gentlewomen, and the minstrels and gleemen and skilled men of the Fianna of Erin to search for and to bury the kings and princes of the Fiann, and everyone of them that could be cured was carried where he might be healed. And Gelges, daughter of Mac Lugach, the wife of Cael, son of Crimthan of the Harbours, came, and over all the borders of the land were heard the feeble cries and the truly sorrowful sobs that she uttered aloud in seeking her gentle mate amongst the slaughter. And as she was there, she saw a crane of the meadow and her two young, and the wily creature that is called the fox, watching her young, and while she covered one of the birds to shelter him, he made a dart at the other bird, so that she had to stretch herself between the birds, and she would rather have got and suffered death by the wild beast than that her birds should have been killed by him. And Gelges mused greatly on this, and she said : "I wonder not that my fair lover is so loved by me, since the little bird is in such distress about her birds."

Then she heard a stag on Druim Ruiglenn above the harbour, and it was bewailing its hind vehemently from one pass to the other. For they had been nine years together and had dwelt in the wood that was at the foot of the harbour, to wit, Fidh Leis, and the hind had been killed by Fionn, and the stag was nineteen days without tasting grass or water, lamenting its hind. "It were no shame for me," said Gelges, "that I should die of grief for Cael, when the stag is shortening his life for grief of the hind. . . . Small need is there," she said, "for me to bewail Cael and the Clanna Baeiscne, for mightily the birds and the waves bewail them."

We have to remark in the Battle of Ventry Harbour the introduction of matter taken directly from the older Cuchulain stories. The descent from Ulster of the Boy-corps to aid Fionn in the fight, and their brave effort and sad destruction, is an incident precisely parallel to their defence of Cuchulain during his period of exhaustion in the *Táin bó Cuailnge*. There are other examples in the Literature of the transference of episodes from the one cycle into the other. The Scottish Book of the Dean of Lismore contains a fine poetical rendering of this piece. It represents the hosts of the Fianna as having accomplished a greater slaughter of the foreigners than they are represented as having made in the prose account. The leader of the foreigners, Daire Donn, is here called sometimes, as in the prose version, King of the World ;

sometimes King of Lochlann. It was usually Greek or Scandinavian princes who were thought of as Kings of the World in the Irish tales, but we find the British King Arthur sometimes so named.

The Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grainne (Tóruigheacht Dhiarmuda agus Ghráinne). One of the longest and most imaginative tales of the Fenian literature. Though we possess no copy of it earlier than the fifteenth century, the incidents on which it is founded must have been known as early, at least, as the tenth century, for in the eulogy supposed to be written for St. Columcille by Dallan Forgall, a bard of the sixth and seventh centuries, and which in its existing form is believed to be of the ninth century, there occurs a gloss which quotes this verse : “ As Grainne, daughter of Cormac, said to Fionn —

There lives one
From whom I would love a long look.
For whom I would give the whole world
O, Son of Mary ! though it be a privation !”

This quatrain evidently alludes to the love of Grainne for Diarmuid, which is the subject of this story, and shows that the story itself was a familiar one when the tenth-century scribe wrote his glosses and explanations on the old poem whose words had already become obscure to readers in his own day. Such a chance survival as this of a single verse proving the existence of a legend centuries before any written version that we have of it, should warn us that care must be exercised in dating the origin of tales or pieces merely by the manuscripts of them that have come down to us. It is especially necessary to remember this in regard to the Fenian tales, which seem to have been familiar to the people long before they were recognised by the professional scribes or admitted into the written literature. The tale is told with much simplicity and with none of the long adjectival passages which deface a portion of Irish prose romance. It describes Fionn’s intention in his old age to marry again after the loss of his wife, Maighneis, daughter of Garadh mac Moirne, [5] and the advice of his friends that he should wed Grainne, the young daughter of Cormac mac Airt, King of Tara. Fionn agrees, and although since the Battle of Cnucha there had been constant enmity between Cormac and Fionn, the King consents to the old man’s wooing of his daughter, and for this purpose he comes with a troop of his foremost warriors to Tara and they sit down to the banquet prepared for them by the King in the Miodhchuarta or Banqueting Hall of Tara. Now Grainne had never seen Fionn, and when her father had announced to his daughter the Fenian chief’s intention of marrying her, she had merely replied : “ If he be a fitting son-in-law for thee, why should he not be a fitting husband and mate for me ?” But when she finds that her future husband is “ a man older than her father,” she lays her plan to escape from the bargain she has made. “ Then Daire ‘ of the Poems,’ son of Morna, arose and stood before Grainne, and sang her the songs and the verses and sweet poems of her fathers and of her ancestors ; and then Grainne spoke and asked the Druid, ‘ What is the thing or matter wherefore Fionn is come to this place to-night ?’ “ “ If thou knowest not that,” said the Druid, “ it would be no wonder if I knew it not.” “ I would like to learn it of thee,” said Grainne. “ Well, then,” said the Druid, “ it is to ask thee as wife and as mate that Fionn is come to this place to-night.” “ It is a great marvel to me,” said Grainne, “ that it is not for Oisín that Fionn asks me, for it would be fitter to give me to such as he than to a man that is older than my father.” “ Say not that,” said the Druid, “ for were Fionn to hear thee, he himself would not have thee, neither would Oisín dare to take thee.”

Grainne then inquires the names and status of each of the guests, and she sends to her Grianan or women’s house for a chased goblet which she fills with medicated wine and sends round the table, putting the larger number of the guests into a deep sleep. While the others are

unconscious she approaches Oisín and Diarmuid O'Duibhne, offering herself alternately to each as wife, provided that either will take her away from Fionn. They both stoutly refuse ; and Grainne then puts Diarmuid under those " heavy Druidical bonds," or *geasa* from obeying which there was believed to be no escape for a true hero, to take her away that night ; the unwillingness of Diarmuid being shown in every way when at last he is obliged to obey. The rest of the tale describes their wanderings and their pursuit by Fionn, with the efforts made by their friends among the Fianna to arrange for their escape.

The character of Grainne is an uncommon one in Irish Literature. She is selfish, frivolous, and light-minded ; the contrast between her vain and coquettish disposition and Diarmuid's noble conduct towards her is very well brought out. Although she obliges Diarmuid to sacrifice his honour and renown, and his place in the Fenian forces for her, the lightness of her affection is shown by her consent to marry Fionn, from whom she had fled, and who had compassed the death of Diarmuid, immediately she was free to do so. It is curious that a very unfavourable opinion of women should be ascribed to Grainne's father, Cormac. Among the dicta with which he is credited is the following on women. " I know them, but I cannot describe them. Their counsel is foolish, they are forgetful of love, headstrong in their desires, fond of folly, prone to enter rashly into engagements of much garrulity. Until evil be good, until the sun hide his light, until the stars of heaven fall, women shall remain as we have said. Woe to him, my son, who desires or serves a bad woman, woe to everyone who has got a bad wife !" The opinion held of Grainne by the Fenian troops is shown by the reception they accorded her when, not long after Diarmuid's death by the treachery of Fionn, he goes to seek her out, and " left not plying her with sweet words and loving gentle discourse, until he brought her to his will. . . When the Fians of Erin saw their old chief and Grainne coming towards them in that guise they gave one shout of derision and mocking at her, so that Grainne bowed her head with shame. ' We trow, O Fionn,' quoth Oisín, ' that thou wilt keep Grainne well from henceforth.' "

We should like to draw attention to the close similarities that exist between portions of this tale and that of Tristrem and Iseult (Isolda). They are too remarkable to be explained except by the supposition that both derived, in part at least, their inspiration from Ireland. It will be remembered that Iseult lived in Dublin, and that it was there that Tristrem or Tristan (Pictish, Drostan ?) sought her as bride for the aged king Mark, who was his uncle. In both cases it is the woman who tempts the man to unfaithfulness, and the man for a long time resists ; in both they fly into the forests and wander from hiding to hiding, and in both they are helped by a faithful hound. As the love-philtre binds the lovers together in a bond they are powerless to break, so the " love-spot" of Diarmuid, if seen by a woman, cannot fail to awaken a passion of affection. He is on this account called *Diarmuid na m-ban*, or " Dermot of the Women." In both stories, also, the lover's passion is expressed with a force and sentiment found elsewhere in no part of the literature of contemporary Europe. The atmosphere of the story of Tristrem and Iseult is, like that of the Fenian tales, one of sylvan pleasures and the chase rather than of war and turmoil. We can hardly refrain from imagining that this tale of Iseult's love, whose passion and intensity so caught the imagination of the mediæval world that it may justly be styled the first love-story of modern Europe, arose out of similar conditions and about the same period as that of the famous but less widely known story of Grainne. There is, at least, no doubt that at a time when as yet the attention of heroic literature elsewhere was centred upon themes of war or bravery, or concerned itself with religious subjects, Ireland had evoked from her own imagination a series of the most touching and tender tales of love.

The episode of the death of Diarmuid has become classic. Diarmuid being a foster son of Angus of the Brugh and brought up in the company of the gods, was not subject to the natural

ills of life. Like Achilles, he was vulnerable only in the heel, and in the popular traditions of his death, after having killed the boar of Ben Gulban, he is bidden by Fionn to measure the length of the hide. This he did by pacing the skin from the head to the tail, but Fionn, who was determined on his death, required him to measure it a second time in the contrary direction, and in walking against the bristles his foot was pierced by one of them, and of this he died. In the longer story he dies of wounds inflicted by the boar in the chase, to which he had been incited by Fionn, who was his own house-guest at the time, and who knew that *geasa* or prohibitions had been laid upon Diarmuid by the god Angus, his foster-father, that he never should hunt a boar.

As he lies in the agonies of death, Fionn and his followers come up and gaze upon Diarmuid. "It likes me well to see thee in this plight, O Diarmuid," said Fionn; "and I grieve that the women of Erin are not now gazing upon thee; for thy excellent beauty is turned to ugliness, and thy choice form to deformity."

"Nevertheless it is in thy power to heal me, O Fionn," said Diarmuid, "for when the noble gift of divination was bestowed upon thee at the Boyne, it was given thee that to whomsoever thou should'st give a drink out of the palms of thy hands, should be restored to youthfulness and health from any sickness that might happen to him at the time." For a long time Fionn refuses to fetch the drink that Diarmuid craves, but he is at last forced through shame, and because of the urgency of his followers, to go and look for water.

"I know no well whatever upon this mountain," quoth Fionn.

"That is not true," said Diarmuid; "for but nine paces from thee is the best well of pure water in the world."

Then Fionn went to the well, and raised the full of his two hands of the water; but he had not returned more than half-way when he let the water run down through his hands, and he said that he could not carry the water.

"I swear," said Diarmuid, "that it was by thine own will thou didst let it run away." A second time Fionn went for water, but when he had come about the same distance, a thought of Grainne came to him, and he let the water trickle through his hands. Then Diarmuid let fall a piteous sigh of anguish when he saw that.

"I swear before my arms," said Oscar, grandson of Fionn, "that if thou bring not the water speedily, O Fionn, only one of us twain shall leave this hill alive." Because of that speech which Oscar made, Fionn returned to the well a third time, and brought the water to Diarmuid; but as he came up the life parted from the body of Diarmuid. Then the company of the Fians of Erin that were on the spot raised three great exceeding mighty shouts, wailing for Diarmuid O'Duibhne, and Oscar looked fiercely and wrathfully upon Fionn, and he said that it was a greater pity that Diarmuid should be dead than were it he himself who had perished, and that the Fianna had lost their mainstay of battle through his death."

Ben Gulbain (Anglicised Ben Bulban) is a long low mountain between Roscommon and Sligo, but Scotland also claims to possess the spot on which Diarmuid died. There is a Tor Gulbin in the braes of Lochaber, but his grave is pointed out in Glenshee in the eastern part of Perthshire. He was, in fact, a semi-divine personage, a re-incarnation of Angus Og, the god of Youth and Beauty, and he is the Adonis of the Gael. From the accident of the name of his grandfather he became identified with the district of Corca Ui Dhuibhne in Kerry, but he seems to have been of the tribe of the Decies. The traditions of him have, however, become

associated with the south-west of Ireland, where he is still most vividly remembered, and some of his genealogies connect him with Munster. [6] A poetical rendering of this tale found in Scotland gives the more popular account of the death of Diarmuid from a prick of the bristle in the foot when measuring the boar's skin backward. The account of Fionn's refusal to bring water to the dying man is, however, omitted.

Among the more popular Fenian tales and ballads are the following :

The Little Brawl at Allen.
The Battle of Cnoc an Air.
The Chase of Sliabh Guilleann.
The Pursuit of the Giolla Decair.
The Festivities at the House of Conan of Ceann Sleibhe.
The Enchanted Fort of the Quicken Tree.
The Adventures of the Lomnochtan of Slieve Riffe.
The Enchanted Cave of Keshcorran.
The Kern of the Narrow Stripes.
The Carle of the Coat.

Ossianic Poetry.

The poetry belonging to the Ossianic literature may be roughly divided into two parts : the long ballads, which frequently contain the same incidents as those found in the prose pieces, and the shorter lyrics found interspersed in the prose narrations, and particularly in the " Colloquy," or else detached as separate poems. It is only the long descriptive ballads that can properly be called Ossianic. The larger number of them are supposed to be composed by Oisín, Fionn's son, and take the form of dialogues carried on between him and St. Patrick, but others are simple lays uttered in connection with the events out of which they take their rise. Fionn was regarded quite as much in the light of a poet as of a warrior, and one of the earliest and most charming poems found in Gaelic Literature is his lyric " In praise of May," which is said to have been written in his youth to test his learning. It is found both separately and at the close of " The Boyish Exploits of Fionn." [7]

Duanaire Finn.—Two collections, one made by Irish scribes early in the seventeenth century, the other by a Scottish ecclesiastic early in the sixteenth century, have, fortunately, preserved for us a number of the ballads ; others are found separately and are contained in a multitude of manuscripts, mostly of modern date (i.e., from the fifteenth century onward), scattered throughout the country. These two collections, which we may consider together, are known as the *Duanaire-Finn*, or Poem Book of Fionn, and the Book of the Dean of Lismore. The former was written, according to notes on the margin, by three different scribes at Louvain during the years 1626-27 for a certain Captain Somhairle or Sorley MacDonnell, who was probably serving in the Netherlands at that time. It is now preserved in the Franciscan Library, Dublin. The poems must have been collected in Ireland and transcribed for him into a book which also contains, among other matter, a copy of the prose " Colloquy with the Ancient Men" and another Fenian ballad. Several of the poems in this collection do not seem to exist elsewhere, so that we have special cause to commend the love of his native literature shown by this Irish soldier on foreign service.

Few of them are ascribed to Oisín ; they are usually supposed to be spoken by Fionn himself or by Caeilte or Goll mac Morna. It is possible that they are older than the Ossianic ballads proper, as many of the poems refer to Goll, and they represent him in an altogether

more favourable light than that under which he appears in the poems ascribed to Oisín. They show little sign of that grotesque element which marks the later ballads ; Conan, the comic figure of the more modern poems, being here represented as a brave warrior and faithful friend. Nor is there any sign at all in them of the contentious wrangling between Oisín and St. Patrick, which is the most marked feature of the ballads ascribed to the latter poet.

There is a greater seriousness about these earlier poems than in those of a later age ; the bombastic element does not take so large a place. The heroes are still regarded as men of renown, whose history is dignified and grave ; later they often degenerate into merely comic figures, whose exploits are designed chiefly as a pastime or to raise a sociable laugh around the turf fire on a winter's night.

The Irish collection contains, in addition to the true Fenian lays, a large number of poems loosely connected with the history of the Fians, but strictly dealing with the mythological cycle. These are of peculiar interest, as they contain allusions and traditions otherwise unknown to us. Such is the curious poem of the Crane-Bag which carried the treasures of Manannan, or the poem of the Hunt of Balor's Pig, or the still more interesting " Song of Fionn's Shield," which carries the history of this weapon back to the pre-historic Battle of Moytura.

The battles in which the shield played a conspicuous part are related, and the great personages are named to whom it successively belonged. Among them were the Dagda, Tadhg, s. of Nuada, Cumhall, and finally Fionn himself, by whom a long series of battles were fought with it. Among them are said to have been thirty-five battles outside Ireland, and eighteen gained over the Tuatha dé Danann.

The Book of the Dean of Lismore.—The second collection of which we have to speak is that made by Sir James M'Gregor, Dean of Lismore, Argyleshire, about the year 1512, and called from this circumstance the " Book of the Dean of Lismore." The poems were collected in the Western Highlands and are of the same type as those preserved in *Duanaire-Finn* ; together they form a great corpus of Fenian poetry. The Irish collection is written in middle Irish with the spelling somewhat modernised, but retaining the older spelling in some places ; the twenty-eight Ossianic poems found in Argyleshire were written down by the Dean in the Roman character of the fifteenth century, but the spelling is phonetic. This, while it is valuable as preserving the pronunciation of the words, made the manuscript a difficult one to decipher, especially as it contained many obsolete words. Some of the poems are in pure Irish, some in pure Scotch Gaelic, and others are in a mixed dialect and preserve the Irish or Scottish idiom according to the closeness with which the writers kept to the written form of the ballad. Of the purely Irish origin of many of the poems there can be no doubt. There are productions by such well-known Irish bards as Tadhg óg O'Higgin (d. 1448), Muireadach O'Daly, called Muireadach Albanach, or " Murray the Scotchman" (d. about 1224), and several others of the O'Daly family ; and there are copies of poems found in the Irish annals, some of them attributed to very early writers, such as the Lay of Queen Gormliath, lamenting the death of her husband, Niall Glunduth, or " Black-knee," who died early in the tenth century. There are several poems in this Scottish collection which are either entirely or in part identical with copies known in Ireland. Such are the poems on the Battle of Gaura and on the Hill of the Fair Women (*Sliabh na m-ban fionn*). The use of the word " sliabh" is a sign, if any were needed, of the direct Irish origin of this piece, for it is never used in Scotland to signify a mountain, " Beinn," anglicised " Ben," being the invariable Scottish word. A very amusing poem also found in *Duanaire Finn* is that which describes the efforts of Caeilte to obtain from King Cormac the release of Fionn mac Cumhall from the confinement in which he held him, by capturing two of every sort of beast and fowl known at that time in Ireland.

This duty had been imposed on him by the monarch of Ireland as the only condition on which his chief's release could be procured. The King believed that he had demanded an impossible task, and it was indeed only by extraordinary efforts that Caeilte succeeded in driving before him to Tara his modern Noah's Ark of birds and beasts, for as soon as he had got together one set of animals he found that the others had dispersed themselves over the plain or taken to flight through the air. A short prose version of this legend, which preserves what is possibly a complete record of the birds and animals known in Ireland at the time it was composed, gives a different motive to Caeilte's efforts. Here it was Grainne who insisted on the apparently impossible task being accomplished before she would consent to marry Fionn, whom she disliked.

Among Scottish poetical versions of stories best known in Ireland in their prose forms are the Death of Diarmuid, the Battle of Ventry, and fragments of the Sickbed of Cuchulain. There is more of the mingling of the two cycles in these Scottish poems than is usual in Ireland. For instance, Emer is, in one poem, made to fall in love with one of the Ulster Fians ; and there are certain whole poems mixed with the Ossianic ballads that belong properly to the Cuchulain period. Such are, for instance, the poem on the Death of Conlaech, and Conall Cernach's " Lay of the Heads," both known also in Irish copies. [8]

MacPherson's " Fingal" and " Temora."—When MacPherson, in 1762 and 1763, composed his " Fingal," and " Temora," which purported to be, and doubtless were, founded on fragments of these old ballads learned by him in the Highlands, he was much blamed for having confused the two cycles of tales and thrown together ideas and incidents belonging to distinct periods of composition and different historical traditions. But although he probably carried this confusion to a degree hitherto unknown, he did not do so of set purpose ; he merely used all the fragments of legends and poems that had come in his way, combining them into long poems without any pretence of historical accuracy. The chief error for which he is to be blamed was that he altogether changed the style and character of the poems he pretended merely to reproduce, and yet persisted in presenting them to the public as old Gaelic ballads collected by himself in the Highlands ; while, in fact, they were original poems composed by him upon subjects suggested by the old floating traditions still alive in his day among the Gaelic-speaking people, and with some fragments of which he had become familiar in travelling through the West of Scotland and the Isles. His work had the merit of attracting attention to a great body of tradition existing both in Ireland and Scotland which had hitherto only been locally known, and of inspiring Gaelic societies and collectors to rescue the fast-disappearing manuscripts in which the tradition had been preserved ; but it had, at the same time, the misfortune of presenting these ballads to the public in a literary form so radically unlike their natural aspect that his poems gave the reading world a false idea of the style and contents of Gaelic literature. To some ears, the polished and high-sounding rhapsodies of " Fingal" and " Temora" will appeal more than the sterner and simpler tone of the Gaelic ballads ; to others, his compositions will seem wearisome and vague.

There is, however, no danger that in the present day these original poems will be mistaken for the compositions of the older bards, and for this increased general knowledge of the originals we may largely thank MacPherson himself. The publication of his poems and the controversy they aroused gave the Ossianic poems and the legends of the Fians an interest and value which they had never before possessed, even to the nations among whom they had their origin. The Scottish Highland Society, the Irish Ossianic Society, and other bodies either came into existence about this time in order to collect and preserve the legends, or they used their resources for this purpose ; while a large number of private collectors have since then

searched libraries and cottages for manuscripts or have taken the tales down orally from the mouths of the people.

Age of the Scottish Tradition.—It is impossible in the present uncertain state of our knowledge with regard to the origin and age of the Fenian legend to say at what time it passed over into Scotland. From the sixth century onward the connection between the North of Ireland and the South-Western Districts and Isles of Scotland had been of the closest possible kind. The establishment of the Dalriadic princes in Argyleshire, and of St. Columba and his followers at Iona, had been only the first steps in a union which grew closer age by age. It was strengthened not only by constant intercourse, but by frequent inter-marriages between the princes of the powerful and almost independent Celtic dynasty of the Lords of the Isles, who ruled in the Western Highlands from the twelfth to the sixteenth century, with daughters of the great Irish houses of the North of Ireland. At the marriage of one of the most powerful Lords with a lady of the Irish family of O’Cathan towards the close of the thirteenth century, tradition says that twenty-four families from Ulster settled in the Scottish Highlands, and at a later date, a scion of the House of the Isles acquired land in Ireland and founded the Antrim branch of the family. It seems reasonable to suppose that it was during the time of this later intercourse, that is, from the thirteenth century onward, rather than in the sixth and seventh centuries, that the tradition of the Fianna became rooted in Scotland. Only a few stories belonging to the Cuchulain cycle, such as the Death of Conlaech and the Tragical Death of the Sons of Usnach, were invented in Scotland, or rooted themselves there and became localised in various spots ; but the whole Fenian cycle in its historical outline appears to have been known, though the folk-stories underwent special late developments in the two different countries. For a very long period, from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries, just when the expansion of the Fenian legend was most rapidly going on and manuscripts containing the poems and legends were multiplying, the literary connection between Ireland and Western Scotland was of the closest kind. Many well-known bards and minstrels and several heads of bardic schools are mentioned in the Annals as having been chief preceptors or poets of Erin and Alba, *i.e.*, of Ireland and Scotland, and the careers of men like Muireadach Albanach or Giolla Brighde mac Conmidhe, show how constantly these teachers and poets travelled to and fro between the two countries. Among the men holding this distinguished position were Maclose O’Daly (d. 1185), O’Carroll the blind minstrel (d. 1328), Tadhg óg O’Higgin (d. 1448), and Tadhg O’Coffey (d. 1554).

The hereditary bards and ollavs of the Macleans were O’Neills of the North of Ireland, and the M’Vurichs, who occupied a similar position in the family of the Clanranalds, were of Irish descent, and had received their education in Irish Colleges of poetry and scribal learning. A large number of manuscripts and poems bear the names of Irish scribes and poets, and the oldest of the Gaelic manuscripts preserved in Edinburgh are written in Irish Gaelic and in the Irish character. Through a part of this period, those students who desired to perfect themselves in writing and in the knowledge of their day, appear to have resorted to the Irish schools.

The Ossianic Ballads.—It is probable that most of the long ballads which form the Ossianic Poems proper are later than and are formed upon the prose tales on the same subjects, and that these again come later in time than the simple narrative lays. The dialogue form, into which most of them are thrown, is much less dignified than the earlier style of plain narration, and the actual story is constantly interrupted by disquisitions on the part of Oisín, who compares in a petulant tone the excellence of the household and hospitality of Fionn with the privations endured and enforced by the monks, while St. Patrick replies by extolling the happiness of heaven into which, he says, the Fenian warriors, on account of their Pagan beliefs, cannot enter. These comparisons lead to a constant wrangling between the

Christian Saint and the Pagan warrior which is quite unlike the deference shown to St. Patrick by Caeilte in the prose “ Colloquy with the Ancient Men.” Passages of this kind occupy so large a place in these poems that it is necessary to give a specimen.

In the poem known as “ The Colloquy of Oisín and Patrick” (*Agallamh Oisín agus Phadraig*) the old hero begins by recounting the feats of his companions in the old time, and bewails his own loneliness and the mournful and quiet life he is now living among the clergy, where fasting and the ringing of church bells have replaced the great feasts and the outdoor life of the Fenian epoch. Some of the stanzas in this poem are very smooth and charming.

“ I have heard music sweeter far
Than hymns and psalms of clerics are ;
The blackbird’s pipe on Letterlea,
The Dord Finn’s wailing melody. [9]

The thrush’s song of Glenna-Scàl,
The hound’s deep bay at twilight’s fall,
The barque’s sharp grating on the shore,
Than clerics’ chants delight me more.”

He then recounts the battles of Fionn and bewails the death of the heroes, their hounds, and their followers, and he says, if Fionn were alive he, Oisín, would speedily abandon the clerics and their prayers and follow once more the wild deer with the dogs through the glen. He asks Patrick to pray that Fionn and the Fenians may enter heaven, but Patrick stoutly refuses to offer any petition for Fionn, and says that he is bound fast in hell with all his companions. This leads to a violent altercation, Oisín asserting that no bonds could hold one so mighty as Fionn, nor would his followers permit him to lie in pain for a single instant. When this dies down Oisín begins again by enquiring whether the hounds of the heroes will be let into heaven.

Tell me in confidence, O Priest,
If Fionn is left without, at least,
Will they let Bran and Sgeolan in
Those gates of heaven fast shut on Fionn ?

Patrick replies :

Old man, who lackest grace and sense
From whom I get no recompense,
The courts of heaven and heaven’s King
Will never let these creatures in.

And so the interminable discourse goes on. Patrick, as a rule, is represented as a hard and stern old man lacking in kindness and sympathy, but fine words are occasionally put into his mouth, as when he declares with dignity :

“ It is my King who made the heavens,
It is He who gives might to the hero,
It is He that created the universe,
It is He that showers the blossoms on the trees.”

This poem may be taken as a general model upon which many of the longer Ossianic ballads are formed,

- [1] These were magical swine which re-appeared as often as they were killed and eaten. The last Slanga pig is said to have satisfied twenty-five battalions. Tadhg is here erroneously called “ Tadhg of the Towers,” which suggests that the version must be later than the reign of the celebrated King of Connacht of that name who died 954 A.D., and with whom he seems to have been confused.
- [2] There are manifest imitations of the boyish feats of Cuchulain in this piece ; this is even more evident in a poem on the subject in the *Duanaire Finn* XV., where the prophecy of Cuchulain’s future greatness is repeated for Fionn ; but there is no mention of the combats or slaughter. The feats are all peaceful.
- [3] Here, as elsewhere, the gods or fairy-folk are regarded by the Christian teachers as “ demons.”
- [4] See *The Voyage of Bran*, Vol I., p. 127.
- [5] The matrimonial arrangements of Fionn are exceedingly involved ; one MS. mentions five wives, but Maighneis is not one of them. We could add others from other accounts.
- [6] The Campbells of Argyllshire are called, fancifully, “ Clann Diarmuid.”
- [7] Textbook, Part I., pp. 225-6.
- [8] In Ireland it is usually the Tuatha dé Danann cycle that is mixed up with that of the Fians ; but confusion between the Cuchulain and Fian cycle is not uncommon.
- [9] “ Do chualas ceól ba bhinne na bhur g-ceól
Gidh mór mholas tu an chliar ;
Sgaltarnach loin Leitreach Laoi,
'S an faoidh do ghnídh an Dord Fhiann.”

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