

On The Fians Of Erin

And The Poems Of Oisin, The Celebrated Bard.

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“ The era,” says Dr. Drummond, “ of Finn and the Fenians is as distinctly marked in Irish history as any other event which it records.” I hope I shall be able to prove the correctness of this statement.

We are informed, in the Annals of the Four Masters, that Finn O’ Baoisgne was killed at a place called Ath-Brea, on the banks of the Boyne, A.D. 283, by a chief of the Lugnians of Tara, a tribe from whom the barony of Lune took its name ; and his grandson, Osgar, the son of Oisin, was slain by Carbre Lifeachar (of the Liffey), monarch of Ireland, in the battle of Gaura, A.D. 284.

The pedigrees of Finn, Oisin, Goll, and all the Fenian chiefs, are recorded in the Books of Ballymote, Leacan, and that of Duaid Mac Firbis, with as much apparent accuracy as those of the O’Briens, O’Neills, or any other Irish family. It is stated in these MSS. that Finn, the son of Cumhall, was descended from Baisgne, from whom the Fenians of Leinster took the name of the Clan of Baisgne, was descended from Nuada Nacht, monarch of Ireland about a century before the Christian era. The name of Finn’s mother was Murn Muncaem, daughter of Teige, of a princely family of Bregia, in Meath, and it is said that in her right he inherited the principality of Almain, now Allen, in the County of Kildare, where he had his chief residence.

Mac Firbis, who was the best antiquary of Ireland in his time, from whom O’Flaherty, author of the Ogygia, received instruction, and who also assisted Sir James Ware in his antiquarian researches, states, in his great book of Pedigrees, on the authority of an ancient record called the Book of Airis, that Finn fell A.D.283, being the year previous to that in which the death of Carbre occurred. The second wife of Finn was Ailbe (or, according to others, Aille), daughter of the monarch Cormac, son of Art, son of Con of the hundred battles, who mounted the throne of Ireland A.D. 227. Oisin was the son of Finn ; and another son of his, as stated by O’Flanagan, was Fergus, who was always styled by Irish writers the Bard of the Fenians, and there are many ancient copies of his poems to be seen in the libraries of the Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College, Dublin.

Mac Firbis informs us that there were several chiefs of the name of Finn prior to Finn, the son of Cumhall, and that some of them were of the Firbolg or Belgic race of Tara and Offaley, whom he calls Athach Tuath (anglicised Attacots by some writers), and that this was one of

the three tribes from which the chiefs of the Fenians were elected ; for he states that the chief commander was chosen for his excellence in activity and feats of arms.

This military force was instituted before the Christian era, and had attained its greatest perfection in power and influence in the reign of King Cormac, in the third century. It was then considered as the national militia of Ireland, and none were admitted into the body but select men of the greatest activity, strength, stature, perfect form, and valour ; and, when the force was complete, it consisted of seven *Catha*—that is, battalions or legions,—each battalion containing three thousand men : making 21,000 for each of the five provinces, or about one hundred thousand well disciplined men in time of war for the entire kingdom. Each of the provincial forces had its own chief commander, or general. Finn, the son of Cumhall, as King of the Fenians, was commander-in-chief of the entire army, in the reign of Cormac ; and, although the monarch of Ireland for the time being was to have control over all their movements, yet they often resisted his authority. A commander was also appointed over every thousand of these troops, and each *Cath*, or battalion, had its bands of musicians and bards to animate the men in battle and celebrate their feats of arms.

The military weapons used by the Fenians were swords, spears, darts, javelins, the battle-axe, slings, bows, and arrows, many specimens of which—dug out of the earth in various parts of Ireland—may be seen in the Dublin museums.

The standards and banners of the Fenians were made of *Sról*, which term O'Reilly explains, in his Dictionary, by the words silk or satin ; but it is believed by others to signify fine linen. These standards are described in one of the poems ascribed to Oisín, entitled “ The Lay of the Sixteen Chiefs ; or, the Cattle Prey of Tara,” which I have translated. They were of various colours—blue, green, red, and white, and bore representations of various trees, animals, military weapons, and musical instruments, such as the yew tree, the mountain ash, the Irish wolf-dog, the deer, spears, pipes, &c. These standards also bore significant names, and that of Finn was called *Gal-Greine*, signifying Beam of the sun, or sun-burst, and on it was represented the sun and its rays.

The military dress of the Fenian Militia was of various colours. The Books of Leacan and Ballymote, compiled in the fourteenth century from ancient manuscripts—such as the Psalter of Cashel, the Book of Glendalough, and several others—inform us that in the reign of Tigearnmas, monarch of Ireland, cloths were first dyed purple, blue, and green ; and that he established the custom of using one colour in a slave's garment ; two in that of a soldier ; three in the apparel of military officers and young noblemen ; four in that of a *Biatach*, or one who had lands from the crown for the maintenance of a table for strangers and travellers ; five in that of lords of districts ; and six in the dress of an *ollav*, or chief Professor ; and in that of the King and Queen seven. He also introduced the wearing of gold and silver ornaments, and many specimens of such—and of very great value—may be seen in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy.

“ This law of the number of colours in the *ollav's* garments,” says Charles O'Conor, in his Dissertations on the History of Ireland, “ did more towards gaining esteem and respect than all the golden trappings of the East ; and yet cost nothing. It produced a noble emulation among men of letters, who, on approving themselves skilled in the *Fileacht*—that is, in the arts and sciences of the land—received the vesture of six colours.

“ The fashion of this vesture was so admirably adapted to the manners of a martial nation, that it received very little change through all ages. It helped to display action, and exhibited the actor in the most advantageous manner. One piece covered the legs and thighs of the

wearer closely. The *Braccon* (striped or parti-coloured), or piece annexed, was so conveniently contrived as to cover the breast better than modern dress, while the close sleeves gave the soldier all the advantages he could require in the use of his arms. The covering of the head, or *Bared*, was made of the same stuff and rose conically, Like the cap of a modern grenadier, (or, rather, in the style of the old Phrygian bonnet.) I have seen a representation of these dresses in the carvings on the tomb of Fedlim O'Connor, King of Connaught, at Roscommon (he died A.D, 1265), and the remains of this species of apparel are still preserved in the Highlands of Scotland."

It may be doubted by some that the Irish were acquainted with the manufacture of cloth at an early period. The Earl of Charlemont, in a paper written in 1786, which appears in the first volume of the Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy, proved from a passage of an ancient Florentine poet, and other authorities, that this country exported her woollen fabrics to Italy in the fourteenth century, when such manufacture was unknown in England. The Italian poem, from which Lord Charlemont quotes, was composed before the year 1364, and is entitled *Dittamondi* or *Data Mundi*. The passage which relates to the woollen manufacture of Ireland is to the following: effect : — "In like manner we pass into Ireland, which among us is worthy of renown for the excellent *serges* that she sends us." After quoting several other authors in corroboration of this passage, Lord Charlemont says : —

"From all these several facts, and particularly from the passage of our author, we may fairly conclude that Ireland was possessed of an extensive trade in woollens at a very early period, and long before that commodity was an article of English export. Manufactures are slow in being brought to that degree of perfection which may render them an object coveted by distant countries, especially where the people of those countries have arrived at a high degree of polish ; and if, in the middle of the fourteenth century, the *serges* of Ireland were eagerly sought after, and worn with a preference, by the polished Italians, there can be no doubt that the fabric had been established for a very long time before that period." Evidently those *serges* must have been of mixed or various colours, and were, probably, similar to the *plaids* and *tartans* of the present time.

The Book of Howth, a MS. of the fifteenth century, and now in Lambeth Library, London, gives some interesting account of the Fenians. "In Ireland," it states, "there were soldiers called *Fiana Eirionn*, appointed to keep the sea coast, fearing foreign invasion or foreign princes to enter the realm. The names of the commanders of these soldiers were *Fionn*, son of *Cumhall*, *Coloilion*, *Caoilte*, *Osgar* son of *Oisin*, *Dermod O'Duibhne*, *Goll Mac Morna* and divers others."

Pinkerton, in his "Inquiry into the History of Scotland," says of Finn and his forces, that "he seems to have been a man of great talents for the age, and of celebrity in arms. His formation of a regular standing army, trained to war, in which all the Irish accounts agree, seems to have been a rude imitation of the Roman legions in Britain. The idea, though simple enough, shows prudence, for such a force alone could have coped with the Romans had they invaded Ireland."

The Book of Ballymote gives an account of a battle fought A. D. 190, between Con of the hundred battles, monarch of Ireland, and Eogan More, otherwise called Mogh Nuad, King of Munster. The cause of this battle was as follows : — The monarch having appointed *Crimthan*, son of *Niacorb*, as King of Leinster, *Crimthan* endeavoured to exclude from power the posterity of *Cahir More*, who were till then in the sovereignty of Leinster. At this time *Cumhall*, the father of *Finn*, was commander of the Clan of *Baisgne*, or the Leinster warriors, and having formed the project of dethroning the monarch *Con*, and restoring the race of *Cahir*

More, he communicated his intention to Eogan More, who promised him his assistance. Whereupon Cumhall collected his forces, and being joined by the Heberians of Munster, headed by their King, both armies marched to oppose Con. The monarch, having collected all his forces, both armies fought a memorable battle at a place called Cnucha, in Moy Liffey, now supposed to be Castleknock, in the vicinity of Dublin, in which many thousands were slain on both sides ; but the victory was at length won by the army of the monarch Con, chiefly through the valour of the celebrated warrior Goll, the son of Morna, who commanded the Clan of Morna, or Connaught forces, and slew the heroic Cumhall in single combat. A full account of this battle is recorded in a Fenian work entitled *Cath-Cnucha*, or the battle of Cnuca, of which there are copies in several public libraries, and in the hands of many Irish scholars.

The death of Cumhall by the hand of Goll in this battle, was the cause of frequent contentions between the Clan of Baisgne and the Clan of Morna, which are often alluded to in the poems of Oisín, and ultimately proved the destruction of those military forces. The following is from an old MS, in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy relative to Finn and his strife with the Clan of Morna, which has been quoted by Dr. Drummond in his Essay on the Poems of Ossian.

“ Carbre Lifeachar, the son of King Cormac, obtained the crown, and was called Lifeachar because he was fostered near the river Liffey in Leinster. This monarch was killed in the battle of Gaura which was fought upon this occasion.”

“ There were two principal septs of the Fiana of Ireland—the Clan of Morna and the Clan of Baisgne. This Baisgne was the ancestor of Cumhall, who was Finn’s father, commonly called Finn the son of Cumhall. Finn had a son and daughter. The daughter was called Samhair, and was married to Cormac Cas, King of Munster, the ancestor of the O’Briens of Thomond. By her Cormac Cas had three sons, Tine, Conla, and Mogha Corb, a name which signifies the chief of the chariot. This Mogha Corb was King of Munster in the reign of the monarch Carbre. Finn’s son was Oisín, and was head of the clan of Baisgne, who, falling at difference with the Clan of Morna, was protected and assisted by Mogha Corb, his sister’s husband. The Clan of Morna, who were then the monarch’s mercenary soldiers, were headed by Aedh Caemh, or Hugh the Mild, son of Garaigh Glundubh (or, of the Black Knee), son of Morna, assisted and backed by the monarch Carbre ; so that this civil war continued between the Fiana for seven years ; and at length the Clan of Morna provoked the monarch and the other princes of Ireland to war upon Mogha Corb, King of Munster, because he protected the Clan of Baisgne, hoping by that means that they should be deserted by the King of Munster, and so be utterly expelled the kingdom, which the monarch did, although that Oisín was his sister’s son. But the King of Munster adhered faithfully to the Clan of Baisgne, and consequently followed the Battle of Gaura, wherein the monarch Carbre was slain, after he had reigned twenty-seven years.”

The following account of the battle of Gaura has been collected from various Irish MSS.
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After the death of Finn, whose remains it is stated were buried on the top of Slieve Cuailgne, now Slieve-Gullion, in the county Armagh, the Fenians were commanded by his son Oisín ; and at the time of the Battle of Gaura, Osgar, the son of Oisín, commanded the Fenian forces. The army of Munster, commanded by Mogha Corb, and by his son Fear Corb, or the hero of the chariot, was composed of the Clan Deagha of Desmond and the Dal-Cas of Thomond, joined by the Fenians of Leinster. The army of the monarch Carbre was composed of the Royal forces of Meath and the men of Ulster, together with the Clan of Morna, or the

Connaught warriors, commanded by Hugh, King of Connaught, son of Garaidh, and grandson of Morna of the Fir-Bolg or Belgic colony. The Munster forces and the Fenians of Leinster marched to Meath, and (says the Book of Howth), came to Garristown, and they, perceiving their enemies so nigh, embattled themselves there ; and after having kissed the ground and given a great cry, as their manner was, of which cry that name was given Baile-Gaura, or Garristown—the word *Gara* in Irish signifying cries or shouts,—one of the most furious battles recorded in Irish history ensued, which continued throughout the whole length of a summer's day. The greatest valour was displayed by the warriors on each side, and it is difficult to say which army were victorious or vanquished.

The brave Osgar was slain by the monarch Carbre, but Carbre himself soon afterwards fell by the hand of a champion named Simeon, the son of Corb, of the tribe of the Fotharts, who gave name to the barony of Forth in the county Wexford. Both armies amounted to about fifty thousand men, the greater part of whom were slain. Of the Fenian forces, who consisted of twenty thousand men, it is stated that eighteen thousand fell ; and, on both sides, thirty thousand warriors were slain. The sanguinary battle of Gaura is considered to have led to the subsequent fall of the Irish monarchy, for, after the destruction of the Fenian forces, the Irish kings never were able to muster a national army equal in valour and discipline to those heroes, either to cope with foreign foes or to reduce to subjection the rebellious provincial kings and princes ; hence the monarchy became weak and disorganized, and the ruling powers were unable to maintain their authority, or make a sufficient stand against the Danish and Anglo-Norman invaders of after times. This battle was fought at a place called Garristown, a village and parish in the barony of Balrothery, county of Dublin, four miles north-west from Ashbourne. The battle is well described in a modern version of one of the poems attributed to Oisín, entitled the Battle of Gaura, from which are the following passages : —

We then raised our standards
To commence the battle of Gaura,
We ourselves, and the Fenians of Leinster,
Against Carbre and the Clan of Morna.

Then Fergus, the poet, prepared,
The chief bard of the Fenians,
To encourage us on to the fight
In advancing to the battle of Gaura.

March onward, valiant Osgar !
Thou cleaver of the heads of heroes,
And by thy prosperous standard
Obtain renown and victory.

Acquire fresh conquering courage
Against Aedh, the son of Garai,
And against the opposing kings.
And completely subdue them by slaughter,

We marched closely to the conflict.
And advanced against the king and his forces ;
And such a sight as then appeared
Will never again be recorded.

My son then rushed onward
On the battalions of Tara
Like a hawk amongst small birds,
Or like a dashing wave of the ocean.

We made a fierce charging onset
Against the forces of the men of Erin,
When three hundred chieftains fell
By Osgar's sword of the powerful strokes.

From the overwhelming blows of Osgar,
And of the clan of Morna of combats,
You might behold, over the glens,
A flashing fire from the clash of their arms.

On the fall of Osgar in the battle, he says : —

Lastly we raised the heroic Osgar
Exalted on the shafts of our spears ;
We conveyed him to a rising ground
To warn the Fenians of our sorrowful loss. [1]

The Fenians were so weakened at this battle that they never were able to recover their former consequence, and we are informed that Oisín and Cailte, two of the principal surviving warriors of the Clan of Baisné, devoted the remainder of their lives to the composition of poetry and history, like many of our retired military officers of the present time.

In a work usually entitled “ The Dialogue of the Sages,” namely Oisín and Cailte, they are represented as relating the achievements and military exploits of the Fenians, in the presence of the then reigning monarch at Tara. There is a copy of this tract in the Book of M'Carthy Riabhach, sometimes called the Book of Lismore, a MS. on parchment compiled in the fourteenth century, although the language is apparently of a much earlier date. The MS. is the property of the Duke of Devonshire, and is at present in the library of the Castle of Lismore. There is another copy of the Dialogue of the Sages, contained in a vellum MS. of the thirteenth century, the Book of O'Maelconry, in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, which I have seen.

In this work, which is carried on by way of dialogue between Cailte and Oisín, they give the situation and history of the names of several hills, mountains, rivers, lakes, rocks, and caverns in Ireland which derived their names from, or had any connexion with, the actions or military achievements of Finn and his Fenian warriors. The history of these places is first given in prose, and the poems of Finn, Cailte, Oisín, and other Fenian poets, are quoted as the authorities. The poems are 44 in number, containing altogether 1,542 verses or lines. Among these is a poem of 190 lines, which gives an account of the Fenian chiefs, or kings as they are styled, from the time of Fiacha Finn (the fair) in the year 15 of the Christian era, till the time of Oisín, the last chief of that military order. The two first stanzas of this poem are addressed by Oisín to Cailte, requesting to be informed who was the first that obtained a division of Ireland for the kings of the Fenians, and put that army under pay. Cailte, in reply, states that he is well acquainted with the history of these affairs, and proceeds to relate to him that Feradach became king of Ireland, and that Fiacha Finn, instead of contending for the monarchy, contented himself by becoming king of the Fenians, on the terms of having his portion of the kingdom and certain stipulated privileges, for the maintenance of his own rank

and also for the support of his forces. This division of the land, as stated by Duaid MacFirbis, in his MS. Book of Pedigrees, now in the possession of the Earl of Roden, was seven townlands out of every *Triocho-Cead*, or barony throughout Ireland. Feredach reigned 22 years, and on his death Fiacha Finn resigned the office of king of the Fenians and became monarch of Ireland. Fiacha appointed Morna his successor as king of the Fenians ; and Cailte enumerates seventeen chiefs who succeeded to this high office in Munster, Leinster, Ulster, and Connaught, and the number of years they commanded these forces respectively, from the time of Fiacha Finn to that of Oisin, who was their acknowledged chief for ten years. Then follows an account of the five principal persons in each profession and order of society, such as the five chief Druids, Physicians, Bards, or Poets, heroes, generals or commanders of armies, the most hospitable ; and of the five greatest statesmen in Ireland, he says : —

Cuicer is gaithe um ceill n-grind
Ro boi aentig an Eirind,
Fithel agus Flaithri a mhac,
Aillmhe is Cairfre is Cormac.

Five the most eminent for profound wisdom
That lived in one mansion in Erin,
Were Fithel and Flaithre his son,
Aillve, Carbre, and Cormac.

Fithel and Flaithre were chief Brehons or judges to Cormac and Carbre, the monarchs of Ireland, and they wrote a code of laws, in the execution of which they were aided by Cormac and Finn, the son of Cumhall. There are very ancient copies of these laws in Trinity College Library, Dublin, which are now being prepared for publication.

Here I may briefly state that in Irish poetry there are three kinds of verse, and it is said that all the ancient poems of Oisin are composed in the first of these, called *Dán Direach*, or accurate metre. “ This,” says O’Molloy in his Irish Grammar, “ is the most abstruse and difficult kind of composition under the canopy of heaven. In it there are seven requisites, namely, a certain number of quatrains in each stanza or verse ; a certain number of syllables in each quatrain or line ; concord, correspondence, termination, union or alliteration, and chief or head. The four first of these are indispensably necessary for each kind of the *Dán Direach*, but the three last are not.”

In this poem, which is ascribed to Oisin, there are four quatrains in each stanza ; there are eight syllables in every verse or line ; there is also concord, or two words in each line beginning with the same class of consonants or vowels ; correspondence or rhyme, which signifies an agreement in the quantity of vowels or consonants of the same class. Termination requires that if the last words in the second and fourth lines exceed one or two syllables, those of the first and third must be one syllable less, as for instance *Eirind* and *Cormac*, the two last words in the second and fourth lines in this stanza, are words of two syllables, while those of the first and third are *grind* and *mac*, or monosyllables ; and the entire stanza forms in itself a sentence, making perfect sense independent of any other. So that this test of prosody stamps this poem with genuineness and antiquity. Not so with Macpherson’s Ossian, for he gives nine syllables in one line, whilst in a corresponding line there may be found only six or seven, as shown by O’Reilly, the author of the Irish Dictionary and Grammar. The fact is, he did not speak the Gaelic and knew but very little of the written language ; and in his translation from his original English he threw words into it without regard to union, correspondence, or any other rule of prosody, the pure consequence of his helpless ignorance. But Armstrong and Stuart are more to blame, as authors in the Gaelic language, in quoting this

patois as an authority in their Grammars and Dictionary, thus compelling their readers to unlearn what was right and adopt what is erroneous and corrupt.

This poem is printed in the first volume of Dr. O'Connor's *Rerum Hib. Scriptores*, from an old MS. in the Bodleian Library, Oxford, but he has given no translation of it ; and this is the poem that was shown by the Librarian at Oxford to Mr. Macpherson, when that gentleman had the honesty to confess that he could not read or translate one line of it. Then, in the name of common sense, how could he translate the language of the third century when this was beyond his comprehension ? The supposition, therefore, that he translated the poems of the Caledonian Bard of the third age is too absurd to be entertained for one moment. I may add that the work entitled the " Dialogue of the Sages," which contains this poem, is intended to form one of the volumes of the Ossianic Society, and will be edited by my learned friend John Windele, of Blair's Castle, Cork.

There is an Irish MS., written on old vellum, in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, which contains two poems by Oisín and one ascribed to Finn, the son of Cumhall. This MS., from which I have taken some extracts, was compiled in the twelfth century, and from the antiquated language and other internal evidences of these poems, it must be admitted that they were copied from some ancient record or records that existed anterior to the tenth century. We have no just reason to doubt their genuineness as being originally the compositions of Oisín, when we remember the many liberties of modernizing the language usually taken by the scribes, through whom they have been handed down to us. One of these poems by Oisín relates to the battle of Gaura, and has appeared in one of the volumes of the Ossianic Society. In the other Oisín informs us that, by order of the monarch of Ireland, a fair and races were held at the Currach of the Liffey, now the Curragh of Kildare, on which day he composed this poem. He then relates an anecdote about Finn, who went one time into Munster to attend the fair and races of Clogher, in the present county of Limerick, which were ordered by Fiacha Muilleathan, King of Munster. It happened that a black race horse, which was the property of Dil the Druid, and grandfather to the King, won all the races, after which the Druid bestowed it on the King, who immediately presented it to Finn, the son of Cumhall. Finn prized this steed very much, and afterwards won many races by him. At the termination of the races Finn, Oisín, and Cailte made a tour of the kingdom of Kerry, which is fully described.

In the Library of the Royal Irish Academy is an Irish MS. of the twelfth century entitled *Leabar-na-h-Uidhri*, or the Book of the Brown Cow, so named, it is said, from the original having been written on the hide of that animal. A partial account of its history has been recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters, and, from its present appearance, we may infer that only one-third or one-fourth of its original matter now remains, and the larger portion is, therefore, perhaps lost for ever. We are informed by one of the writers of the Annals of the Four Masters, as also by the Book of Lismore, that the MS. which originally bore this title was compiled at Clonmacnois in the time of St. Kieran, in the sixth century. It appears, therefore that this book contained a copy of the original with large additions from other MSS., such as the Book of Drumsnaght, the Book of Slane, and several others, of which we know nothing, except their titles, quoted in this book.

In the remaining fragment of this MS. are accounts of the derivations of the names of some remarkable places in Ireland, copied, no doubt, directly from the original Book of Dinseanchus of the sixth century ; also poems by Dalian Forgal, the chief Bard of Ireland in the sixth century ; and by St. Columba, the Irish Missionary to the Picts and Gaels of North Britain. Dr. O'Connor has stated, in his Catalogue of the Stowe Library, that there was an old MS. there which contained a copy of Dalian Forgal's poems, and in the margin of the MS. his

grandfather, Charles O'Connor, had written "that he did not understand this old poem," although he was the best Irish scholar in Ireland in his time. By this test of the ancient language Dr. O'Connor severely criticises the modern corrupt dialect of Macpherson's poems of Ossian.

Colgan, in the seventeenth century, speaking of the poems of Dallanus, says, they are written in the ancient style and that, consequently, they were, in a great degree, unintelligible in after times, even to many who were skilled in the old idiom of their country. According to Colgan there were poems by Oisín and Cailte on vellum, in the Irish Library at Lovain. This probably was a copy of the Dialogue of the Sages.

The Book of the Brown Cow gives the history of Conor Mac Neasa, King of Ulster at the beginning of the Christian era ; of the Red Branch Knights or Fenians of Ulster, and of the seven years' war carried on between them and the men of Connaught. The title of this tract is *Tain bo-Cuailgne*, or the Cattle Raid of Cooley, a district in the County Louth. There is another copy of this work in the Book of Leinster of the twelfth century, which I have partly collated with a modernized copy, as it is intended to be published by the Ossianic Society. The modernized copies of this work and of the Tale of Deirdre supplied Macpherson with materials for his *Darthula*. The language and style of the copies in the Books of the Brown Cow and of Leinster are very antiquated. It also contains a history of Cormac, monarch of Ireland in the third century, in whose reign the Fenians were raised to their highest perfection and efficiency as a military force. It also gives an account of the Battle of Cnuca, in which it states that Cumhall, the father of Finn, was slain by Goll, the son of Morna, thus corroborating the historical facts recorded of those persons in the Books of Leacan and Ballymote and other MSS. [2]

The Book of Dinshancus, another of our ancient records, was originally composed by Ainergin, son of Amalgai, Chief Bard to Dermot, who reigned monarch of Ireland from A.D. 544 to A.D. 565. This work gives an account of noted places, as fortresses, raths, cities, hills, mountains, plains, lakes, rivers, &c., and of the origin of their names. There are copies of this work in the Books of Leacan and Ballymote, and also in a vellum MS. at Oxford, which was compiled directly from the Psalter of Cashel of the 10th century and from other more ancient MSS., as described by Dr. O'Donovan in his Introduction to the Book of Rights, published by the Celtic Society of Dublin (see p. 31.) In this work the account of each place is first given in prose ; and poems, or extracts from poems, of the earliest writers are quoted as authorities, and some of these are by Finn, the son of Cumhall, and by Fergus, the Bard of the Fenians. The language of these poems is so obsolete as to almost deter some of the best Irish scholars of the present time from attempting a translation of them. One of these poems by Finn is given as an authority for Fornocht, a place now called Farnagh, near the town of Moat in the barony of Clonlonan, county Westmeath. Finn had one of his fortresses here, which was destroyed, and Oisín and Cailte are represented as encountering the people who committed the destruction. As this work was composed about the middle of the sixth century we are enabled, by its means, to trace Oisín so far back as to approach within two or three centuries of the very era in which he flourished. This work is also intended for one of the publications of the Ossianic Society.

There is another class of Ossianic poems which is very numerous, and copies of them are still to be found in the hands of many Irish scholars throughout Ireland. Hundreds of these are to be seen in the Libraries of Trinity College, Dublin ; the Royal Irish Academy ; Oxford, British Museum, and in different places on the Continent. The language of these poems, for the most part, is comparatively modern, and if ever they were composed by Oisín they must have been greatly changed and manufactured, with additions and interpolations, so as to make the poet and St. Patrick cotemporaries. These are now in course of being published by

the Ossianic Society. Of these modern poems I have myself translated thirty-three, amounting to nearly 8,000 verses or lines.

It does not follow that although we have not the original of these modern poems of Oisín that they never existed in any other form. On the contrary we have very strong reasons to believe that they did, for the language of the copies of them, written in the 15th century, has all the appearance of genuine antiquity. The language is correct, and the versification is strictly according to the rules of Irish prosody. In a work composed in the seventh century called *The Primer of the Bards*— i.e., a *Prosody* — there are compositions quoted in the examples given of which no trace now remains. The numerous MSS. that contained those poems are at present unknown.

Theophilus O'Flanagan has given in the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society, Dublin*, two correct specimens of these poems, with poetical translations. They are entitled “ *The Black-bird of Derrycarn*,” and “ *The Lay of Talc, son of Treun*.” Here (he says) the alliterations, unions, correspondences, auricular harmonies, and other particulars requisite to the accuracy and elegance of Irish poetry, are most scrupulously and chastely retained. Vast numbers of these poems are still preserved in Ireland, written and by rote. They are even still the great source of long, night's entertainment in the Irish speaking parts of Ireland, together with the old romances, or Fenian stories, all upon the exploits of the Fenian Heroes, or ancient Irish militia.”

About a hundred years ago the Irish shanachies sang portions of these poems to Irish tunes, which are now lost ; and it appears that this was also the practice amongst the *seu-lais* in the Highlands of Scotland, for we are informed by Dr. Young, in a note on one of those poems he collected there, entitled *Laoi-a'í De'rp*, or the *Lay of Dergo*, that “ the music to which it was anciently sung is still preserved in the Highlands of Scotland, and has been lately published in Mac Donald's collection of Highland airs.”

In the year 1789 appeared Miss Brooke's *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, of which a second edition was published by Christie, of Dublin, in 1817. In this work Miss Brooke has given seven of our Ossianic poems, in the original Irish, with translations in English verse. The titles of these are as follow : — *The Lay of Conlaoch, the Lamentation of Cuchullin ; the Lay of Magnus the Great ; the Chase of Slieve Gullion ; the Lay of Moira Borb (or, the Fierce) ; the War Ode of Osgar, son of Oisín, and the War Ode of Goll, the son of Moma*. I am informed by the President of the Society that, in his collection of Scotch Gaelic poems, there are two that were taken down from recitation by the Highland Bards in the last century, which agree nearly stanza for stanza with the corresponding poems published by Miss Brooke, and with those circulating in manuscript among the peasantry of the South of Ireland.

O'Reilly has pointed out, in his *Essay*, the Irish poems from which Macpherson stole his materials for *Ossian*. He shows that the poem of *Carthon* is founded on the *Lay of Conlaoch* ; his *Fingal* is partly taken from the *Lay of Magnus the Great* ; his episode of *Barbar and Fainasollis*, in the third book of his *Fingal*, is taken from *Moira Borb* ; the fourth Book of *Fingal* is founded on the *War Ode of Goll*. The combat between *Osgar* and *Lollan* seems to be a bad imitation of *Moira Borb*. The death of the children of *Usnagh* is the poem on which he framed his *Darthula*. The original of the *Battle of Lara* is not given by the Gaelic Society in their printed Gaelic originals, but a poem in *Gillie's* collection of Gaelic poems, printed at Perth in 1786, called *Earragon*, is the poem on which the battle of *Lara* is founded. In Dr. Young's collection this poem is given, from which, he says, it is evident that the Highlanders believed *Finn, Oisín, Goll, Osgar, &c.*, were Irishmen. There are good copies of this poem to be had in Ireland. Dr. Young says of the poem entitled *Oisín's Dialogue* that the Highland

sgeulais have been very busy in corrupting it, partly of necessity, from their want of a written standard, and from their vain desire of attributing Finn and his heroes to Scotland since Macpherson's publication ; they seem to have intentionally corrupted in some passages, as may be seen by comparing the Earse copies with each other. We must look, he says, to the Irish copies for the remedy of the corruptions in the Highland poems of Oisín. In Mr. Hill's copy of this several passages have been corrupted in order to make Finn a Scotchman, and in one place Eirin, Ireland, is commuted to Albin, Scotland.

“ The death of Osgar, in the first Book of Temora, is grounded on the battle of Gaura ; and many passages of it are, indeed, literally translated. But great liberties, as usual, have been taken with the original, and he refers to p. 313 of the Perth edition. Macpherson (Dr. Young says) makes Carbre call Osgar son of the moody Morven, without any authority from the Highland original, in order to support his indefensible fiction that Oisín was a Scotchman. Of the poem entitled the Lay of Con, the son of Dergo, he says :—This entire story has been so altered by Mr. Smith that nothing remains in common with the original but the names. Wherever Fiana Eiríonn, or the Fenians of Ireland, or any such terms in favour of Ireland, occur in this or the other poems they are omitted in the Perth edition and other words substituted in their place.”

“ Ireland (says Dr. Drummond) possessed an undisputed claim to the poems of Oisín for fifteen hundred years. The historians handed down in written records, never to be effaced, the genealogy of Finn, the son of Cumhall, and chronicled the age in which he lived, the battles he fought, the monarch he served, and the mode in which he died. Macpherson metamorphosed the Irish general into a Caledonian King, and placed him on the throne of a kingdom which was never noticed by any historian.”

I may here state that Dr. Drummond has rendered several of the poems of Oisín into English verse, which have been published.

From all those concurring testimonies which I have quoted, it is clearly evident that the Clanna Milidh, usually called Milesians, were originally known as the Scoti, and that their country was called Scotia, or the land of the Scots, many centuries before that name was given to modern Scotland. It has also been shown on unquestionable authorities, that the Gael of Caledonia were colonies from Ireland, and spoke and wrote in the language of their mother country. From the continued intercourse carried on between the two nations from the third to the sixteenth century, it is evident that the same manners and customs, the same traditions, legends, historical compositions, poems, songs and music, were common to both.

I have shown that many of the poems of Oisín, the Irish biard, and other Fenian poets, are still preserved in our Irish MSS., and I have named the libraries in which they are to be found. Some of these MSS. are as old as the 11th and 12th centuries, and these are merely copies from more ancient records, which are now supposed to be lost or mouldering in some of the Libraries on the Continent. These poems made their way into Scotland at an early period, and there cannot be a stronger proof of their great antiquity than their preservation in that country for so many centuries by oral tradition, although with dialectic changes.

Any statements, therefore, at variance with these long established historical truths, be they ever so plausible, when unsupported by authorities of equal antiquity and respectability, must be looked upon, by all men of candour and discernment, as fictions invented for selfish or lucrative purposes. Macpherson never did or could produce any authorities to give stability to his compositions ; his chief arguments were to vilify our historians, and abuse the language of one of the most learned nations in Europe in the eighth century. His supporters, with all their

ingenious arguments, have failed to prove the authenticity of his poems, because nothing but the production of the originals, nothing but proofs, positive proofs, will convince the learned of the present day.

[1] This poem is given in full in the first volume of the works of the Ossianic Society, the Editor of which had the use of these papers while preparing it for press, but that volume is long out of print.

[2] The following translation of a passage from the Book of the Brown Cow, relative to Cailthe and Finn is taken from Dr. Petrie's work on the Round Towers of Ireland :—" We were with thee, O'Finn, said the youth (i e. Cailthe). Hush ! said Mongan (another name of Finn) that is not good (fair). We were with thee, Finn, once, said he ; we went from Alinain (Allen, in County Kildare). We fought against Fothad Airgthech with thee at Ollarba (now Olderfleet, at six mile water, in the County Antrim). We fought a battle here (recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters at A.D. 285); I made a were with thee, Finn, once, said he ; we went from Alinain (Allen, in County Kildare). We fought against Fothad Airgthech with thee at Ollarba (now Olderfleet, at six mile water, in the County Antrim). We fought a battle here (recorded in the Annals of the Four Masters at A.D. 285) ; I made a shot at him, and I drove my spear through him This is the handle that was in that spear. The round stone from which I made that shot will be found, and east of it will be found the iron head of the spear buried in the earth ; and the Carn of Fothad will be found a short distance to the east of it. There is a chest of stone about him in the earth. There are his two rings of silver, and his two bracelets, and his torque of silver, on his chest ; and there is a pillar stone at his Carn ; and an Ogam (inscribed) on the end of the pillar stone which is in the earth. And what is in it is, EOCHAID AIRGTHEACH (buried) Here. It was Cailte that was here along with Finn. All these things were searched for by the youth who had arrived, and they were found." — p. 108. If Ogham was a Christian invention how comes it here at this pagan grave ?

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