

History of the Irish state to 1014

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I have brought together scattered fragments of early history, and thus attempted to construct for the first time a continuous and reasonable account of the Irish commonwealth down to the death of its greatest leader Brian Boru.

In past times I spent many years in preparing a history of mediaeval Ireland, and endeavouring to divest myself of prejudice and ignorance. I finally realized that no such history could be rightly written until the conditions of Ireland itself were investigated, as revealed in the native sources, sagas, poems, annals, genealogies, and the like, which are the State Papers on the Irish side, and need as serious study as the English State Papers. I therefore put together in "The Making of Ireland" some fragments of what I had written, and set aside the mass of the rest, to make a new beginning. The last half-dozen years have been entirely devoted to this task.

It was a task apparently hopeless. Nor could it have been undertaken without the aid of Dr. Eoin MacNeill, our leading guide in Old Irish history. By his fruitful labours in neglected sources such as the old genealogies, by his ingenious investigations on every side, and his new interpretations, he has opened to us roads of knowledge hitherto unexplored, notably in the study of Irish law. With characteristic generosity he has given to me, not only encouragement, but the free use of his historical notes, published and unpublished. For his unfailing advice and criticism I owe him my sincere gratitude. I owe it to him also to say emphatically that if I have used any part of his material with lack of historic judgment, or with undue stress or exaggeration, the error lies solely with myself.

We may hope that the older Ireland will not always remain to the modern nation an unknown world. We are not without material for Irish studies. Indeed we may well marvel that, in spite of a destruction that scarcely ever ceased during eleven hundred years, so much should have survived. Since the prodigious efforts of O'Curry and O'Donovan much progress has been made, both by Irish workers and by scholars abroad. Unfortunately the results of their work remain scattered in various journals, un-coordinated, and necessarily inaccessible to most students. Our ancient records have been often badly transmitted, and sometimes only in a single version. There is still no dictionary of the older and most difficult language. Formidable errors of translation have therefore been inevitable in a speech so remote and so obscure. The most valuable source of knowledge, the Laws, have under these conditions been translated in such a way as to produce a sort of quagmire where no prudent investigator has found it safe to set his foot. Grave confusion, moreover, has been caused by the use of feudal terms of law to describe the ordering of a society framed centuries before feudalism was invented. Errors and difficulties will, however, gradually be overcome.

I have not attempted to write a political history of the period, but simply to give a clear notion of the social and organized life of the Irish, their national character, culture, and laws. The methods by which the whole mass of the people were enlisted in the service of the law : the ceaseless transforming of strangers into citizens : the ancient problem of north and south : all these and many other questions, remote as they may seem to some of us, are in fact vital for Ireland after more than a thousand years. In these pages we may trace the magnanimity with which Brian Boru approached such difficulties. Nothing is more evident than the admirable judgment with which the Irish chose their heroes, and the fidelity of their long national memory. It is never wrong.

A. S. Green

Foreign settlements in Ireland

From about 876 Irish annals tell of comparative freedom from foreign attacks for some forty years. The range of wars and enterprises undertaken by Norse and Danes had become in fact too great even for their stupendous energy, and may have in some degree relaxed the strain on Ireland. A sign of the change may be seen in the carrying of the relics of Columcille in 874 to Ireland as to a place of comparative safety. Even the rule of Dublin was contested. Ivar's friend and ally Cearbhall king of Ossory was said to have been king of the Foreign settlement of Dublin from 873, and to have held it till his death in 888. Flann Sinna (king of Ireland since 879) apparently claimed sovereignty in the city, but was defeated by the Foreigners in 888. After 889 Dublin seems to have been under the rule of another Cearbhall, king of Leinster, called "king of Liffe of ships." In 902 he united the men of Brega and Leinster in an attack on the fort and expelled the Foreigners, who escaped half-dead, wounded and broken, leaving half their ships behind. After Cearbhall, for forty years "a most excellent king of the Leinstermen, died of anguish" (909), Dublin was probably dominated for a time by the high-king Niall Glundubh (916-919).

It was, however, ominous that in these years of supposed peace the national assembly of Tailtiu was interrupted and gradually abandoned. In over four hundred past years there had been five failures to hold the assembly—in 717 a king of Brega, who aspiring to the high-kingship was deposed and exiled to Britain, returned and failed to make good his claim by disturbing the Fair. In 833 Cathal king of Munster attempted to preside at Tailtiu, and was prevented by the king of Meath. In 811 the high-king Áed Oirdnide from Ailech was forbidden to hold the Assembly by interdict from the monastery of Tallaght, whose rights of sanctuary had been violated by the southern Uí Neill : he proceeded to hold it, but failed : "neither horse nor chariot came thither ;" until the sanctuary of Tallaght received many gifts in reparation. In 827 the Assembly was broken up "against the Gallings" by the high-king Conchobor : it is probable that Conchobor, harassed by pirate raids on the Bregian coasts, and by the wars of king Feidlimid of Munster aiming at the high-kingship, deferred the Assembly against the wishes of the Gallings in neighbouring territories, who grudged the loss to them, and tried to hold the festival on their own account till the king enforced obedience. In 831 there was a "disturbance" of the Assembly owing to a dispute concerning the reliquaries of S. Patrick and S. MacCuilinn of Lusk, brought no doubt for the purpose of oaths in some important litigation.

These rare events, however, were of a very different order from the calamities when Tara, within an easy ride from Ath Cliath, lay under the constant menace of the Dublin fort. Henceforth we hear only of disaster. In 873 the Fair of Tailtiu was "not celebrated, without just and sufficient cause, which we have not heard to have occurred from ancient times." Again in 876 "without just and sufficient cause" there was no Fair held ; and once more in 878. Ten years later "it happened that the Fair of Tailtiu was not celebrated," and again in 889, and the fact becomes so normal throughout the following years that the annalist no longer records it. In 916 Niall Clundubh in the first year of his kingship held the Fair once more. There was "interruption" at the next attempted celebration, and no Fair was held from that time till its brief "renewal" by Mael Sechnaill in 1007.

The history of the tenth century for some seventy years is sharply divided between the separate issues of the south and of the north—the fall of Leth Moga, and the fight of Leth Cuinn against the Foreigners.

Cormac mac Cuilenan (901-908), bishop-king of Munster, was a famous man of letters, who by force of learning and statesmanship brought the dynasty of Cashel to its highest power, ruling with an authority almost equal to the high-king. He was said to have compiled the Irish "Glossary" known by his name. Also the "Psalter of Cashel," which survives only in excerpts and quotations that mark it as probably having been a collection of historical and

genealogical matter. But above all we have proof of the wide range of Cormac's enthusiasm for "Ireland universally," and his remarkable influence, in the last great gift he bequeathed his country before his tragic death—the "Book of Rights," unparalleled in that age outside the Byzantine empire. We have seen that two scribes, by tradition Selbach and Oengus, were employed by him to draw up a state document recording the kingdoms of Munster, and giving in two poems allotted to each of them their position, obligations, and relations to the king of Cashel, and what was due to them from him. The prose comments which accompany the poems show by their style, and by discrepancies of statement, that they were not part of this early edition but were added later. Cormac's Book was sent round to the principal kings of the other Provinces as a model to be followed by them. Every one of them accepted his scheme of recording their ancient tradition, and thus was completed a "Book of Rights" for all Ireland. There is no more remarkable illustration of the ceaseless work of unification which was carried on by the continuous tradition of dwellers in the same island, and the devotion of their schools of learning.

Dr. MacNeill has gathered from many scattered allusions, and from annals apparently compiled at Durrow in Ossory with all appearance of authentic detail, the story of the disastrous battle which closed the work of Cormac [1]. The unfortunate king was encouraged by Flaithbertach, abbot of Inis Cathaig on the Shannon, himself in the line of succession to the kingship of Cashel, to defy the high-king Flann Sinna by invading Leinster—the territory beyond all others jealously guarded by the Uí Neill high-kings, their choice vassals from whom they alone for five hundred years past had claimed the right of demanding homage and tribute. Cormac induced the king of Ossory to join him, crossed the Barrow in 908 and encamped for the night at Belach Mugna (Ballagh-moon in Kildare), on one of the much-disputed points of the borderland between Leinster and Meath. There the king of Leinster was posted. The reason, set up no doubt by Flaithbertach, for Cormac's expedition appears to have been a claim to jurisdiction over the monastery of Ross Glaise ("of the Munstermen"), founded by S. Eimhine or Eimíne, and called also by his name Manistir Eimhín, "Monaster-evan." The founder appears to have been of the stock of the Munster kings, and the epithet *na Muimnech* "of the Munstermen" (cp. Magh Eo na Sasanach, "Mayo of the Saxons") seems to indicate that the community continued to be recruited from Munster. The combination of king and churchman in Cormac would have led to the double method of asserting jurisdiction, a method of political churchmanship resented by the chiefs and their hostings. Flann Sinna must have been warned, for when the morning came Cormac found not only the army of the Leinster king in front of him, but the high-king and the king of Connacht coming upon his left flank. "Let the clergy fight their own battles," was the cry raised by Cormac's men when they found themselves between two hostile armies. The king of Ossory attempted to retreat but was cut off and killed. The battle became a rout. King Cormac was unhorsed and beheaded. Leinster soldiers rushed with their trophy to Flann Sinna. But according to popular legend the king of Leinster rebuked the ferocity of his men, and taking in his hands the head of the holy bishop kissed it and handed it three times round his body. A local tradition lingers that the body was borne in a waggon drawn by seven oxen, who unguided carried it to an ancient pagan burying-place, where it was laid and a little church built, Killeen Cormac. Two Munster abbots were slain in the battle. Flaithbertach, abbot of Inis Cathaig, alone among the leaders escaped, to become himself in time king of Cashel (913-944).

The Ossory collection of annals and tales gives the story of queen Gormlaith [2], daughter of the high-king Flann Sinna, who had apparently been betrothed to Cormac, and when he became an ecclesiastic was given in marriage to Cearbhall, victor over Cormac at Belach Mugna. Cearbhall, wounded in the battle, lay long ill, and once, as the queen sat on the couch at his feet he boasted rudely over the death of Cormac. Gormlaith reproached him for contempt of so good a king. In his anger Cearbhall with his foot cast the queen from the couch to the floor. Thus affronted in the presence of others, she left her husband and went back to her father, who refused to receive her, not desiring a quarrel with the formidable warrior Cearbhall. Gormlaith then sought protection from Niall Glundubh, king of Ailech. Cearbhall

died of his wounds the year after the battle. In the “ song of Cearbhall’s sword” [3]—the famous sword given him by his father proudly known as “ King of Vikings”—his court bard recounts the feats of the warrior hero : “Where Finn of the feasts is they will hail thee with ‘ welcome’ ” ends the poet. Niall married Gormlaith, and in 916 on Flann Sinna’s death became king of Ireland. Thus Gormlaith, chosen to be queen of Munster, became in turn queen of Leinster, queen of Ailech, and queen of Ireland. An old poem represents her standing by the grave of Niall and commanding a monk not to set his foot upon that clay. She died in religious retirement in 948, forty years after the battle of Belach Mugna [4].

Great veneration attended the memory of king Cormac. But with him at Belach Mugna ended the five hundred years of undisputed sovereignty of his house at Cashel, the glory of the Eóganacht dynasty, and the long peace and security of Munster. Six years later the Norse occupied Waterford without opposition. After the conquest of Normandy by Rollo (876-913) those of his followers who had no mind to abandon their seafaring adventures sailed to new raids on Scotland, north England, Wales, and Ireland. Sitric, grandson of Ivar, led an immense fleet to the Liffey in 919. Another grandson had established himself at Waterford in 914. After successive raids from 915 to 920 Danes from the Hebrides, utterly hostile to Dublin, occupied Limerick, which was strongly fortified, and soon after established dependent colonies in Cork, Youghal, Thurles, and Cashel itself, under authority of Ivar, king of Limerick and of the Foreigners of Munster (930). When the last of the ecclesiastical kings of Cashel, abbot Flaithbertach, instigator of the fight at Belach Mugna, ended his obscure reign in 944 the whole province lay helpless, open to raiders from port to port. So heavy, it was said, was the tribute demanded by the Foreigners “ that there was a king over every territory, a chief over every *tuath*, an abbot over every church, a steward over every village, and a soldier in every house, so that none of the men of Erin had power to give even the milk of his cow, nor as much as the clutch of eggs of one hen in succour or in kindness to an aged man, or to a friend, but was forced to preserve them for the foreign steward, or bailiff, or soldier. And though there were but one milk-giving cow in the house, she durst not be milked for an infant of one night, nor for a sick person, but must be kept for the steward, or bailiff, or soldier of the Foreigners. And, however long he might be absent from the house, his share or his supply durst not be lessened, although there was in the house but one cow, it must be killed for the meal of one night, if the means of a supply could not otherwise be procured. . . . And an ounce of silver *findruni* for every nose, besides the royal tribute afterwards every year ; and he who had not the means of paying it had himself to go into slavery for it” [5]. The weakened kings of Cashel could make no opposition to plundering expeditions that swept the country from sea to sea. The Annals tell little of Cellachán, successor of the abbot-king—that in 941 he was taken hostage to Ailech and that in 944 he won a victory, in which many were slain, over a rival claimant to the throne, Cennétig of the Dál gCais or Thomond ; and that he died in 954. A king Maelfoitharlaugh is only once mentioned in the Annals at his death in 957 ; Dubdabairenn was slain by his own people in 959 ; and Fergraidh had the same fate in 961 ; Cellachán’s son Donnchad died in 963.

Cellachán himself (ancestor of the Mac Carthaig family who were rulers of Desmond after their expulsion from Cashel) became in a later generation hero of one of the romantic tales which, in the furious strife of family rivalries, were used to revive the glories of ruined dynasties, and buttress up claimants scarcely upheld by fading hopes. The famous saga of the “ victorious Cellachán of Cashel” was a counterblast of the Eóganachta to the saga of Brian Boru, the hero of the rival house of the Dál gCais. The saga tells of Cellachán’s forlorn wanderings through-out the desolated Munster with his “ mottled bag round his neck,” seeking charity for his “ melodious clerical offices,” while he spied out the fortresses and strongholds, lands and woods, if he should be driven to fight for his territory. It recounts the great words and speech of the queen his mother, who forced the rejection of Cennétig of the Dál gCais, and the election of her son by the seven free *tuatha*, when they put their hands in his hand, and placed the crown on his head at Glennamain of Cashel. “ Their spirits were raised at the grand sight of him. For he was a king for great stature, and a brehon for eloquence, and

a learned saga-man for knowledge, and a lion for daring deeds.” Then follow the “royal battles” of Cellachán. At Waterford he was driven back by a fleet from Dublin. Captured by guile, on some enticing promise of a Scandinavian princess, he was carried from Dublin to Armagh for safe keeping ; and thence his messengers brought word to Munster—“ if I am carried away from Ireland let the men of Munster take their ships and follow me ;” on which the Munster host marched to his rescue by Athenry and Sligo and Assaroe, and thence eastward to Armagh. The enemy fled, bearing away Cellachán to Dundalk, where their ships lay. But a fleet gathered from the whole coast had already left Munster and was nearing Dundalk. “ Give honour to Cellachán in the presence of the men of Munster !” cried Sitric ; “ let him even be bound to the mast ! For he shall not be without pain in honour of them.” And Cellachán from his place of torment lifted his head and sang :

“ I see what your champions do not see,
Since I am at the mast of the ship,
A fleet that will not flee to the sea ;
It is a place of watching where I am.”

The Irish fleet was victorious, the bonds of Cellachán were cut by an heroic follower, and he was borne back to Cashel by the men of Munster. Of this passionate tale there is no word in the Annals. We only know from them that Cellachán died in 954, bearing with him some fading remnant of Cashel leadership in the south—a glimmer of which illuminates the saga of the last glory of the ancient dynasty [6].

In the north there was the same story as in the south of renewed strength and order in the attack, but it was there met by increasing organization of the Irish forces in defence.

The half-dozen years before 922 probably marked the time of the most complete ravaging of Ireland in a universal campaign. In 916 the defence of the country fell to the high-king Niall Glundubh. His mother Lann, sister of Cearbhall king of Ossory, had a famous history as wife of two high-kings and mother of two : her first husband Mael Seachhinn (+ 860) was father of Flann, who succeeded him as high-king and died in 916 : by her marriage with Aed Finliath (+ 879) she was the mother of Niall Glundubh. He opened his reign by celebrating the long-forsaken Fair of Tailtiu. His first hosting in 917 was with the forces of the northern and southern Uí Neill to aid the south by waging war on the “ Genti” in the middle land between Waterford and Limerick, near Clonmel. By their strong reinforcements they drove him back. He at once made alliance with the king of Leinster to attack the Norsemen of Waterford. The two armies fortified themselves in the field, face to face with the enemy for three weeks. Niall urged the king to attack from his post. The Norsemen, however, took the lead, holding their position against Niall while their main body attacked and routed the men of Leinster at Cenn Fúait, close to the harbour on the Leinster side. There is no word of any men of Munster in the fight, and the Norsemen held Waterford without challenge till the Norman invasion.

In 918 Niall attacked the army in Dublin, where the invaders posted on the Liffey, within a ride of Tailtiu on one side, and on the other intriguing with the men of Leinster and Ossory, were a formidable menace. The wide confederation of the northern Irish ranged with him is shown by the list of the twelve kings slain at his side, among them the king of east Ulster, the kings of Brega, of the middle kingdom, Conchobor royal heir of Tara, Flaithbertach royal heir of In Fochla. Sitric’s new host met him on the north bank of the Liffey near the present Islandbridge, and in the “ battle of Dublin” or the “ battle of Cell-mo-Shámhóg,” so called from a neighbouring church, Niall was mortally wounded. His heroic reign, brief and stormy [7], has left a perpetual remembrance in the surname O’Neill. The term Uí Neill is a race name that goes back to the king of the Nine Hostages ; while O’Neill, the earliest instance in Ireland of a family surname (save that of O’Ruairc in the tenth century), is one which could only properly be given to the descendants of Niall Glundubh. The first O’Neill named in

history is Domnall, son of Muirchertach and grandson of Niall, king of Ireland from 956 to 980.

The battle of Cell-mo-Shámhóg (919) was the last effort of the Irish to drive the Foreigners out of Dublin. If later Annals record battles and victories and casting out of the Norsemen, it was only the expelling of leaders, and no attempt was possible to interfere with the citizens, or to hold Dublin for the king of Ireland.

A campaign from Dublin, beginning with the destruction of the stone church at Kells and the massacre of many martyrs there in 920, opened universal war of the Foreigners on the north. Their armies raided the wealthy monastic settlements and occupied Armagh. In 921 the triumphant king Sitric left Dublin, said the Annals, “through Divine power ;” in fact, however, his journey was to take up a kingdom in Northumbria. “A most cruel king of the Norsemen,” his cousin or brother Gottfrich, took his place—devastating the north and plundering Armagh. The death of the twelve kings at Cell-mo-Shámhóg was avenged by Muirchertach son of Niall, who met and defeated the Foreigners with great slaughter near Armagh in 921, so that only a few escaped “by aid of the glimmering of the night.” In spite, however, of raids and ravages no Scandinavian settlements were established in the north, though trading stations on the coast were continued and probably some new ones opened. In his turn Gottfrich on Sitric’s death took his way across the sea for the Northumbrian kingdom, and being expelled from it returned to Dublin (927). After a few years of war with the rival kingdom of Limerick (which had been ravaging Clonmacnois and the islands of the Shannon), and with the warriors of Waterford, he “died of anguish” in 934.

Donnchad king of Meath succeeded Niall Glundubh as high-king. But the hero of the war for twenty-two years was Niall’s son Muirchertach king of Ailech, Donnchad’s designate successor, now leading a general rally of the Irish to clear the Norsemen out of northern Ireland. His first battle against Gottfrich ravager of the north was on the field in 921, where none were saved but by “the glimmering of the night.” In 926 he defeated the Foreigners at Carlingford and carried off two hundred of their heads ; and in the next January won another victory at the bridge of Cluain-na-Cruimther the “meadow of the priests” near Anagassan, when the son of Gottfrich was killed in battle with great slaughter ; and half his host besieged for a week at Ath Cruithne until Gottfrich himself came from Dublin to their aid. Trouble had meanwhile arisen between Muirchertach and the high-king, for in 927 he made “interruption of the Fair” of Tailtiu against Donnchad, in consequence it was said “of a challenge of battle between them ; but God separated them without any slaughter or bloodshed.” Possibly Donnchad, jealous of his great fame, accused him of aiming at the high-kingship before his time : or there may have been a dispute about Donnchad’s daughter whom Muirchertach married. But the quarrel was not enduring. In 932 Muirchertach was again warring near Dublin, where he slew earl Torulbh, son of king Sitric and cousin of the reigning king Gottfrich. The next year when foreign fleets were swarming on the northern coasts and in the lakes, he met a plundering host and defeated them so that they left two hundred and forty heads and their spoils. As king of Ailech he joined the hosting of Donnchad king of Tara in 938 to besiege the Foreigners at Ath Cliath and devastated the land as far as Mullaghmast, which shows that the Foreigners had support from Leinster. There was a demolition of Ailech by the Norsemen in 939 against Muirchertach, who was carried off to their ships ; but was immediately ransomed—“God redeemed him from it.” Again in 940 he joined with the king of Ireland to lead a united hosting against Leinster and Munster, and took away hostages. His victories were renowned a century after his death, when a list of his triumphs was recorded by Flann of Monasterboice [8], who gives an expedition by sea against the Norsemen of the Hebrides which is also mentioned in the genealogies, and by the Four Masters in 939 : “A fleet [was conducted] by Muirchertach son of Niall, and he carried off much plunder and booty from the Insi-Gall after gaining victory and triumph.”

The most daring feat of Muirchertach was the hosting in 941, the year of the birth of Brían Boru, which gave him his famous title “of the Leather Cloaks” [9]. In a winter of “great frost

so that lakes and rivers were passable” Muirchertach saw his opportunity as heir designate to assert the prerogative of a high-king on progress round his territory to demand hostages as token of his authority. Gathering about a thousand picked men, he gave to each a protecting cloak of prepared skin, and set out from Ailech on a triumphant circuit of the island, claiming from each province in turn hostages for the high-king. A contemporary poem tells of this amazing journey where each man’s cloak was his house and shelter ; when music stirred the men to dance heavy noise was made by the shaking of the hard skins. Keeping their left side to the sea they marched, carrying off the king of east Ulster as they passed east of Loch Neagh to Mag Rath and Glenn Righe to the delightful fair Mag nEalta — the rich lands by Dublin. From the Tara country, the home of Donnchad’s race, and ruled by him as king, Muirchertach demanded no hostage. Encamped near Dublin, where he had secret friends, he took abundant food and tribute from the surrounding lands of the Foreigners, and brought away as hostage “ Sitric the wealthy.” The hosting was pursued by the men of Leinster and the race of Cennselach (who had probably been drawn under the influence of Dublin) to Glen Mama, and to the old royal fort at “ cold Ailenn” (near the modern Kildare), where that night the snow was driving from the north-east. They stayed a night at Belach Mugna, in a frost so hard that as they lay the snow did not “ wet their fine hair.” Ossory yielded to them. Moving hither and thither along the border-lands to secure the submission of various *tuatha* “ with cheerfulness and with willingness,” they ravaged the country of the Déisi and prepared to strike into Cashel. There was a sudden battle, when Muirchertach was called from his game of chess, and the warriors threw off their leather cloaks for the fight. In the end Muirchertach received as hostage Cellachan, king of Munster, and “ brought him back in subjection to Donnchad.” At Kilmallock the army stopped a night, and then turned their faces north to “ Conn’s Half,” by Kincora and the formidable snowbound passes over the wild hills of the Dál gCais : “ I did not meet since I left my home a pass like unto Cretshalach” (now Cratlagh). The king of Connacht went with them as hostage willingly, without a fetter. And by Mag Ai and Crúachu they marched to the ford of Seanach, now Ballyshannon, and with mighty feasting and content went on to the glorious festival of the heroes at Ailech. “ Attend each man of them,” Muirchertach sent word to his queen, “ as a high-king should be attended.” First in order of honour he named his hostages, “ the kings of Erin in fetters,” and then the “ hundred heroes of distinguished valour, of the race of the fierce fair Cenél nEógain.” For a few months the royal hostages were liberally entertained after their rank, and were then dutifully handed over to the high-king of Ireland.

The feat was astounding. Muirchertach had chosen a season when the foreign marauders were frozen into their harbours, but never before had fighting-men been called out for winter war, and never had such a period of service been demanded. Through prolonged hardship he inspired in his soldiers an enthusiasm to match his own. A “ circuit of Ireland” in ordinary conditions lay within the unspoken right of every high-king. But inherent power—even if it passed to the heir designate—could only be used by a leader of outstanding quality, one who could command both circumstance and men. High-kings in normal times preferred little or no interference with the kingdoms of their neighbours. There was nothing normal in Muirchertach’s heroic exploit, his last achievement before he too, like his father twenty years earlier, fell in battle with the invaders. In 943 Muirchertach of the Leather Cloaks, king of Ailech, and “ the Hector of the West of the world,” was killed on a Sunday, March 4th, by the son of Gottfrich king of the Dubh-Gaill, near Ardee. The high-king Donnchad died in the next year, 944 : and with these catastrophes came the only breach in the alternate succession between the Uí Neill of north and south that happened between 734 and 1002.

Donnchad should have been succeeded by the king of Ailech ; but Congalach of the southern Uí Neill, now made king out of his turn, was doubtless elected for his fame as a successful man of war. Dublin raiders, perpetually recruited from the seas, had grown in strength and daring. In 934-935 they had plundered in Meath to the treasure-centres of Lagore and Knowth, and west to Clonmacnois, when “ they stayed two nights in it, a thing that hath not been heard of from ancient times.” Congalach in 944 with the king of Leinster

attacked Ath Cliath and carried off jewels and treasures and great spoil. A raid on Clonmacnois in 946 was avenged by him in the battle of Slane (947) when he defeated the famous king of Dublin, Amlaibh Cuaran. In 948 he slew the son of king Gottfrich and sixteen hundred of his men, and the next year led a hosting which wasted O'Meith. The Foreigners in revenge besieged Meath and Brega for six months, and burned the belfry of Slane, with the crozier of S. Erc, "the bell that was the best of bells," and the lector and a multitude along with him; while a royal heir of Ireland was killed after slaughtering two thousand or more of the enemy. In 951 the whole of the churches round the Tara region were plundered, and three thousand men or more captured, together with a great booty of cows and horses, of gold and silver. Congalach was killed fighting in Leinster at the head of many other kings against the Dublin army under Amlaibh Cuaran (956). It was in the last year of his life that Domnall son of Muirchertach led the Irish in the Norse method of war, carrying their ships from the mouth of the Bann across Loch Neagh, and along the Blackwater and over Oriel to Loch Erne and Loch Oughter (955); a feat repeated in 963 under the same Domnall, then high-king (956-980), when ships were borne across Sliab Fuait to Loch Ennel near Mullingar, "which had not been done from most ancient times." The object was purely military, and evidently could never have been accomplished on inferior light roads over soft ground. Domnall's life of ceaseless war ended in Armagh "after penitence" (980).

It has been supposed that absence of national feeling, and petty wars among the Irish, handed over their country to the enemy. The Annals do not support this theory. If the Gaill had depended on internal strife they could have overrun all east Ulster, the place of their first settlements and the region of incessant historical conflicts. In Middle Ireland the old battle-area from the Liffey to the Shannon was right in the line of the most profitable Scandinavian raids from Dublin to Clonmacnois and Limerick; and the Gaill were astute enough from 858 onwards to make use of family dissensions and border feuds, so as to find allies on occasion among princes entangled in local quarrels [10]. They formed alliances round Dublin, as for example in Ossory or Leinster or Brega. But in this middle land the "Genti" took no hold. Their permanent settlements were by the sea. Dublin itself held land north of the city probably equal in extent to the greater part of the modern county—stretching beyond the fertile plain still known as Fingal, and the "water of Gabhar" which from the site of the ancient lake (now drained and known as Lagore) flows through Swords.

The memory of the "kingdom of Dublin" was preserved for a thousand years in the maritime jurisdiction of the later Dublin Corporation over a long line of coast from the river Delvin below Drogheda to Arklow—where down to the time of Elizabeth and of the Georges the city had authority to receive custom and exercise all Admiralty rights, the Lord Mayor being "Admiral of Dublin." Four inlets of the sea, or "fiords" as the Norse called them—Strangford and Carlingford to the north—and Wexford and Waterford to the south—lay outside the actual kingdom, but were closely connected with it. Settlers in Waterford occupied a district known as Gall-tir or "foreign territory," later called Gaultiere. Its kings after 913 were at times of the same family as the Dublin kings, and the port was sometimes independent and sometimes united to Dublin. Wexford seems to have been pre-eminently a peaceful trading settlement; the first part taken by the Wexford Norsemen in Irish wars was in the defence of their town against the Anglo-Normans. The Danes of Limerick also took a stretch of land for their "kingdom." But nowhere did the strangers venture far from the security of their harbours and fleets. In spite of their victories and raids, their multiplying numbers and their skill, they were never able in face of the national resistance to occupy the country, and made no attempt to settle down except on the coast with the sea-road open. Through two hundred years of war no Irish royal house was destroyed, no kingdom was extinguished, and no supremacy of the Danes replaced the national supremacy of the Irish. "Though the oppression was great," wrote MacFiris in 1650, "and though the disturbances caused by foreigners ... in Erin in that way were frequent, it has not been told that they laid a holding in it for their descendants [11]." Dr. MacNeill notes the curious fact that it was the Celtic-speaking

countries—Brittany, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland—which yielded no more than a small part of their land to the Scandinavian invaders.

The ordered settlements of the Foreigners marked a passing over of power from the warrior to the merchant. Dublin harbour was a natural meeting-ground of peoples, a centre of traders on the southern voyage from Scandinavia and the islands to Gaul and Spain, or making their way by York or by Bristol to the North Sea and the Baltic, and by the “East-way” to Russia and Constantinople. Before long the city became a common mart—Icelandic sailors, men of Norway, and royal speculators landing from a cruise to sell their merchandise or their plunder. There in 871 Olaf and Ivar had trafficked with their two hundred ships’ lading of spoil and captives. Angles, Britons, and Picts. In course of time almost every king of Norway sailed his fleet into the harbour, to drive off the rival Dane, to broaden his traffic, to spy out some new store of merchandize, to load up with corn and meat. Biorn, son of king Harald Fairhair, owner of trading ships, was known as “the Merchant” or “Freightman,” a title not thought derogatory to the kingly class of rovers [12]. “You must this summer make a trading voyage,” said earl Hakon to his friend Thori Clack, “as is customary now with many, and go to Dublin in Ireland.” To Dublin came “Gille the Russian merchant” with the “Greek hat” to buy captives for the Iceland market. According to the story that Brían Boru exacted from the Dublin Norsemen a tribute of a hundred and fifty vats of wine the trade was rich, whether from the Moselle or Bordeaux or Spain. A ninth-century poem on the Hill of Allen by the Curragh tells of its “wine barque upon the purple flood” [13]. Notices in Scandinavian tales of merchant voyages show a good business in kingly cargoes of cloth. Dublin became the centre of a mighty confederation. Members of the same line were kings in Dublin, in Man, and in York. They married into the chief houses of Ireland, Alba, and the Hebrides, and gave leading settlers to Iceland. The Irish Sea swarmed with fleets of swift longships with from ninety to a hundred and fifty rowers or fighting men on board. Active commerce across England can be traced by names recorded in Domesday Book of Norse and Irish emigrants—towns and villages from Cheshire to Yorkshire known as *Irebi* or *Iribi*, Old Norse for “the township of the Irishman” (maybe a Norse emigrant)—and Norse-Irish personal names such as Gilemichel, Ghilapatrik, Maccus, Glunier or Iron Knee, Finegal or a White Foreigner. Irish and Norse, in fact, were allied in the common trade of the kings of Dublin and of York [14].

War was no longer the real concern of the Foreigners. It is true that the kingdoms of Dublin, Waterford, and Limerick had some political interests ; and cities in Ireland, like the trading cities of Italy and other European countries, maintained armies and waged wars to further their own purposes. But they recognized no external authority. They sought no foreign allies for their wars, but trafficked for aid in Ireland itself. They were in fact steadily taking their place in the national life. The will of the chapmen as against the warrior was for compromise and a reasonable safety : “lading is less than life” [15], they held. To practical men of affairs who had settled abroad for business trading agreements were more profitable in the long run than mere pillage and slaughter. From the “Book of Rights” we learn that the Gaill settled about Dublin paid tribute to the king of Leinster—seven hundred cloaks a mere part of it [16]. After the middle of the tenth century the history of the Scandinavians in Ireland, in spite of incursions from outlying parts such as Man, Galloway, the Hebrides, and scattered islands, is the history of a gradual drawing together of the peoples into a community with common interests. Settlements purely commercial increased along the coasts till the Annals no longer found it worth while to mention occurrences so common and normal—settlements reaching from Larne, the most northerly point, by Carlingford, Dundalk, Drogheda, Dalkey (*dealg, dolk*, a thorn), Howth, Lambay, Wicklow, Arklow, Wexford, Helwick, Cork, to Smerwick the farthest to the west. Traders may have bargained then just as they bargain now. A few years ago a Danish schooner from Marsthal sailed into the little Irish harbour of Ardglass. Getting into port the crew trafficked for herrings, counting out a hundred and ninety-five barrels by “chequers,” while the Ardglass men checked the number on notched sticks. Neither knew one word of the other’s tongue. So the Danes did business and sailed

away, as their forefathers had probably done a thousand years ago. Merchants were pre-occupied with their own business : and two hundred years later, at the Norman invasion, Giraldus describes the old Danish forts vacant and neglected, while on the other hand the harbours were full of activity and business. “ It is quite certain,” says Dr. MacNeill, “ that any harbour or trading station which is found to have existed in the time of the first Norman invasions took its origin from a Danish colony.”

The close intercourse of the Foreigners with the Irish is shown by the early and constant marriages between the two races. The Annals, of course, only mention alliances of high degree, but among ordinary people Irish names are frequent in the Foreigners’ households, and Norse names among the Irish. The slave-trade had its strange stories. A Norse saga tells of a dumb woman bought by an Icelander for her beauty at three times the price of a slave. Years later he found her talking to her child ; and she confessed that her father was a king, Muirchertach of the Leather Cloaks it would seem, and that since she was taken captive at fifteen years old she had spoken no word but to her little son, whom she had secretly urged to go back to Ireland : “ I have fitted you out from home as best I know how and taught you to speak Irish, and so it will make no difference to you where you are brought to shore in Ireland.” Another of Muirchertach’s daughters, mother of the high-king Mael Sechnaill, married Amlaibh Cuaran king of Dublin, and her son Gluniarainn reigned in Dublin on his father’s death. Norse warriors strengthened their position by alliances with Irish women of kingly houses. There were descendants in Iceland of Cearbhall king of Ossory (+ 887). His grandson Dufthak founded an Icelandic family and three of his daughters married Norsemen. His grand-daughter married Thorstein the Red, son of Olaf the White. This Olaf had himself married a daughter of Áed Finnliath, later high-king. The very legend of Cellachán, enticed to his capture by the promise of a Scandinavian princess, shows the common expectation or belief of the public. The most famous figure, the Cleopatra of her time, was Gormflaith sister of Maelmordha king of Leinster, described in a Norse saga as “ the fairest of all women and best gifted in everything that was not in her own power” (that is her physical beauty), “ but it was the talk of men that she did all things ill over which she had any power” [17]. Irish verses tell of her “ three leaps which a woman shall never take—a leap at Ath Cliath” (where she made an apparently lawless alliance with Amlaibh Cuaran, king of the Dublin Danes)—“ a leap at Temair” (in her connection with Mael Seachlinn, by whom she was divorced or repudiated)—“ a leap at Cashel of the goblets” (when she chose Brían Boru, who in his turn also cast her off). No doubt there was a protest by the pure-blooded nationalists against mixed marriages, recalled for us by the saga in praise of Cellachán of Cashel : “ Far from you is hereditary relationship with any Lochlannach hero” [18].

Christianity had no attractions for the sea-rovers and traders, in whom the perils of the north had bred a ruthless common sense, indifferently applied to all problems of this world or of the next. In 921 we see signs of a new tolerance shown by “ a most cruel king of the Norsemen,” Gottfrich, in his plundering of Armagh when “ the houses of prayer, with their company of *céli Dé* and of sick, were protected by him, and the church besides, except a few houses in it which were burnt through negligence” : also possibly in the bargain of the Foreigners who ravaged Kildare in 964, and allowed ransom when “ its sorrows were compassionated by the wonderful piety of Niall Ua h-Eruilb, nearly all the clerics being redeemed for God’s name ; viz. the full of the great house of S. Brigit, and the full of the oratory, is what Niall ransomed of them with his own money.” But any entry of the Scandinavians into the Christian faith was slow and intermittent. Sitric king of Dublin was temporarily converted in England about 925, but later relapsed. His successor died a pagan in 942. The son of Sitric, Amlaibh Cuaran (of the sock or the sandal, probably from his wearing Irish tanned leather shoes), took up the kingship about 951 and for thirty years reigned as the most famous of the kings of Dublin. His conversion led the way to many others, and after the victory of Mael Seachlinn over the Norse in 980 he went on pilgrimage to Iona—the first Scandinavian pilgrim from Ireland (19). But the Dublin men for the most part, even if in name Christian, held to their heathen practices and made their oaths on Thor’s Ring which lay on the altar of

his temple till it was carried off in 994 by the high-king Mael Sechnaill—a ring of silver and gold worn on the priest's arm during ceremonies, and for greater solemnity dipped in the blood of sacrifices. There were not enough converts to require a bishop till 1035. It was even later, somewhere about 1100 A.D., before Scandinavians began to write down the story of their people in their own tongue. For centuries to come they clung to the profitable slave-trade : the many high-born Irish ladies and “ fair Irish maids” carried away in this traffic are noted in Scandinavian stories. The political propaganda of the later romantic “ Wars of the Gaedhil and the Gaill,” describing the retaliation of the Irish in the plunder of Limerick (968), seizing “ their soft youthful bright matchless girls, their blooming silk-clad young women, and their active large and well-formed boys,” illustrates the literary perversion that followed such traffic : as a stipend in the “ Book of Rights” from the king of Cashel to the king of Cnoc Aine of “ ten Foreigners without Gaelic” (imported slaves) is a sign of public degradation.

[1] Eoin MacNeill : “ Phases of Irish History,” p. 261.

[2] *Ib.*, pp. 262 *seq.*

[3] Kuno Meyer : “ Ancient Irish Poetry,” p. 72.

[4] Osborn Bergin, in “ Miscellany to Kuno Meyer,” p. 357.

[5] “ War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill,” pp. 49, 51.

[6] MacNeill : “ Phases of Irish History,” p. 266. For the saga of Cellachán see “ Caithreann Cellachain Caisil ;” trans. Alex. Bugge. Christiania, 1905.

[7] See the poems of Flann Mainistrech in *Archivum Hibernicum*, II, pp. 52 *seq.*

[8] *Archivum Hibernicum*, II, 36, 79-80.

[9] “ The Circuit of Ireland,” by Cormacan Eigeas, 942. (Ed. John O'Donovan for Irish Arch. Soc, 1841.)

[10] Such alliances are frequent. Four Masters, 857 : “ Annals of Ulster,” 863, 868, etc.

The Ostmen of Dublin at the battle of Hafersfiord in 872 had Irish allies, or “ Westmen” distinguished by their “ white shields” (possibly of wicker). It is suggested that they may have been led by Cearbhall king of Ossory or his son-in-law. (Haliday : “ Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin,” p. 95 ; Laing : “ Sea Kings of Norway,” I, 287.)

[11] “ Fomorians and Norsemen” : Alex. Bugge, pp. 10-11.

[12] Laing : “ Sea Kings of Norway,” I, 305-306.

[13] “ Hail Brigit” : Old Irish Poem (trans. Kuno Meyer).

[14] See Bugge : “ Norse Settlements in the British Islands” (*Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Fourth Series, IV, pp. 176-178).

[15] “ Njal Saga,” II, 8.

[16] “ Book of Rights,” p. 219.

[17] “ The fairest of all women”—“ Njal Saga,” II, 323, Her “ three leaps”—Four Masters, II, p. 821.

[18] “ Caithreann Cellachain Caisil” (trans. Alex. Bugge, Christiania, 1905).

[19] Gougaud : “ Les Chrétientes Celtiques,” p. 356.

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