

In the interval which elapsed between the battle of Magh Rath (637) and 795, when the Norsemen first appeared, there were the usual wars between chieftains and kings, which occurred in every community where there was no strong central authority. We shall not weary our readers with an enumeration of them. Their monotonous futility has little interest for the historian.

The Scandinavian invasion, if it can be properly so called, may be conveniently divided into two periods—(1) from 795 to the coming of the Dubh-Gaill and of Olaf the White in 845, and (2) from 845 to the battle of Clontarf in 1014. During the first period, as in France and Britain, the invasion took the form of raids for plunder by separate bands, and often simultaneously at distant points. These raids seldom went far inland, and did not interfere materially with the internal warfare, which proceeded with much vigour, as usual, between the native chieftains. In order to show more clearly the true nature of the invasion of the Northmen we deem it necessary to summarise in considerable detail the account of their raids as we find them recorded in our Annals. Our readers may, perhaps, find these particulars wearisome, but there is no royal road to truth in the matter

In 795 Rathlin or Lambay was raided ; in 798 Innis Patrick, *i.e.*, Holm Peel, Isle of Man ; in 807 Innishmurray, off Sligo, and part of Roscommon ; in 803 and 806 Iona, when twenty-six monks were slain ; in 812 Connemara, when the Northmen were defeated in Mayo ; in 813 Mayo, when they defeated the men of Mayo ; in 819 Howth, and the islands at the mouth of Wexford Harbour ; in 820 Cork and Cape Clear ; in 821 Bangor ; in 822 Downpatrick, the invaders defeated the “ Osraige,” but were defeated by the Ulidians in the same year ; in 823 the hermit, Etagal, was carried off from Skelig Michil, and died from hunger and thirst ; in 824 Lusk and Meath ; in 825 Dun Lagen, near Glendalough ; in 826 Wexford ; in 828 Dunleer and Clonmore in Louth ; in 831 Muirtheimne, in Louth, and Maelbrihte, the King, taken captive with his brother, and carried off to the ships. A battle was gained over the “ Muintir” of Armagh, and a great number of them taken captive. In 831 took place the first plundering of Armagh, thrice in one month. The Ui-Meith Macha, Mucknoe, Donaghmoine, and other churches in Monaghan and Louth, Maghera in Derry, and Connor in Antrim, were raided. In 832, the first year of Niall Caille, a great slaughter was made of the foreigners at Derry ; Clondalkin was plundered by the foreigners, Lismore was burned, Dromeskin (Louth), Loughbrickland (Down) were raided. Separate bands of raiders must have been at work. [1]

In 833 the foreigners were defeated in Coshma (Limerick) by the Ui Fidhgeinte. Glendaloch, Slane, and Fennor were raided, and the greater part of Clonmacnoise was burned. In 844 Ferns and Clonmore were raided. Mungret, near Limerick, and other churches, were burned. In 835, Kildare, Louth, Bregia (N. Dublin) and Durrow were plundered. In 836 there was most cruel devastation of Connact, and a battle-slaughter of the Daisi. In 837 there were sixty ships on the Boyne, sixty on the Liffey, and these fleets plundered and spoiled the plain of the Liffey and East Meath, “ both churches and habitations of men, and goodly tribes of flocks and herds.” A battle was gained at Inver-na-mbarc, near Bray, over the Southern Ui Neill from the Shannon to the sea, “ where such slaughter was made as never was heard of.” However, the kings and chieftains escaped. The churches of L. Erne, Clones, Devenish, Freshford, Kilkenny, Inis Caltra, Ballylongford (Kerry), and Bealach Abhra (Cork) were destroyed. A slaughter was made of the foreigners at Eas Ruadh, at Carn Feradaigh (Limerick), and at Fearta Fear Feig, on the Boyne. In this year was the first taking of Ath Cliath by the foreigners. A battle was gained over the Connacht men. 838—A fleet on L. Neagh. The territories and churches of the North of Ireland were plundered, and Cork and Ferns burned. 839—The burning of Armagh, with its oratories and cathedral. The plundering of Louth by the foreigners of Lough Neagh ; and they made prisoners of many bishops, and wise and learned men, *and carried them to their fortress*, after having, moreover, slain many others. 840—A fortress was made by the foreigners at Linn Duachail, out of which the territories and churches of Teffia were preyed. Another fortress was made by them at Dublin, out of which they plundered Leinster and the Ui Neill (South) as far as Slieve Bloom. 841—The killing and burning of the Abbot of Linn Duachail. [2] A fleet of Norsemen on the Boyne at

Rosnaree, another on Lough Swilly, and a third at Magheralin. Clonmacnoise, Castledermot, Birr and Seirkieran were plundered. 842—Clonfert was burned. 843—Cluana-an-dobhair, near Killeigh, in the King's County, and Dunmask were plundered. Nuadhat and the Abbot of Tir-da-Glas were martyred, and Forannan, the Primate of Armagh, was captured, with his relics and Muintir, and taken to Limerick to their ships. *Here comes the first mention of Turgesius in the Annals (843 F.M., recte 845).* An expedition by Turgeis, lord of the foreigners, upon Lough Ribh, so that they plundered Connact and Meath, and burned Cluain-mic-Nois, with its oratories, Cluain Fearta Brennain, and Tir-da-Glas, Lothra and many others in like manner. A battle was gained over the foreigners by King Niall, the son of Ædth, in Magh Itha, and a countless number fell. Turgeis was taken prisoner by Maelseachlainn “and his drowning afterwards in L. Uair (L. Owel), through the miracles of God, and Kiaran, and the saints in general.” [3] St. Kiaran's special anger is accounted for by the fact that Ota, the wife of Turgesius, took her seat, we are told, on the high altar in the church at Clonmacnoise, and gave audience and answer from it.

We think that the inference to be drawn from the entries we have given (perhaps at too great length) is that up to 845 A.D., the period we are now dealing with, no Scandinavian kingdom was established in Erin, and that the supposed sovereignty of Turgesius over the Gael for thirty years, as Giraldus states, or for fifteen years, as Todd and O'Mahony suggest, or for seven years as Berchan prophesied, is unsupported by trustworthy evidence, and is part of the historical romance connected with the tyrant Turgesius.

Todd was greatly influenced in the view he took of the reign of Turgesius by the statement in the *War of the Gael with the Gaill*. The author of that work states that Turgesius came with a great royal fleet into the North of Ireland, and assumed the sovereignty of the foreigners, and occupied the whole of Leath Chuinn, and “usurped the Abbacy of Armagh, and was in the sovereignty of the North of Ireland.” Todd fixes the date at 831 or 832, and infers that the duration of the tyranny of Turgesius cannot have been more than about thirteen years. He observes, “for nine years after his coming he seems to have been content with his secular possession of the country, or unable to overthrow the power of the ecclesiastical authorities. It was not until 841 that he succeeded in banishing the bishop and clergy, and usurped the abbacy, that is to say, the full authority and jurisdiction in Armagh and the North of Ireland.” Even if this account was reliable it would fall very far short of proving that Turgesius was Ard High over all Erin, or had reduced it to subjection. The only evidence we can find supporting such a view before Giraldus are the prophecies.

Berchan, the chief prophet of heaven and earth, said : —

Seven years shall they be—not weak their power  
 In the High Kingship of Erin,  
 In the abbacy of every church,  
 The Heathen of the Port of Dublin,  
 There shall be an abbot of them over this my Church ;  
 He shall not attend to Matins,  
 Without Pater, without Credo,  
 Without Gaelic ; only a foreign tongue.

And Beg Mac De : —

When the bell was rung at Warm Tailten,  
 Ciaran, the rich old man of Saighir,  
 Promised to Erin three times  
 Parties of Danes of the black ships (*dubh longsi*) [4]

These prophecies and the legends connected with them probably reached the ears of Giraldus, who is the first prose writer who speaks of the conquest and subjugation of the whole country. He tells us that in the time of Feidlimidh, the Norwegians came to Erin with a great fleet, took possession with the strong hand and destroyed the churches, and that Turgesius, their leader, having subdued the country in a short time, and making a circuit through it, “incastellated” it in suitable places in every direction. “So you may see,” he continues, “in every direction, earth works with deep ditches, very

lofty and circular, and often triple. There are also walled castles still perfect, but ancient and deserted, remaining from these ancient times, to be seen to the present day. The Irish do not care about castles. The wood is their castle and the marsh their ditch. Turgesius then ruled Ireland peaceably for a time (thirty years) until he fell by their stratagem of the maidens.” [5] The maidens’ stratagem is evidently, as Todd points out, an imitation of Hengist’s treacherous banquet to Vortigern, as described by Nennius (c. 47). It runs thus : —

Turgesius was a successful suitor for the hand of Maelseachlainn’s daughter, and went to take home his bride, accompanied by fifteen youths. She went to meet her lord, accompanied also by fifteen youths disguised as maidens and armed with daggers, who fell upon and slew Turgesius and his companions. [6]

Giraldus was manifestly referring to the Danish forts, as the peasantry call them, and Staigue Fort and the great mounds and work at Brugh na Boinne. It is on the popular legends about these and the story in Nennius that he built his narrative.

Keating follows Giraldus, and tells us : —

Turgesius, the Norse tyrant, with his armies of the men of Finn-Lochlainn, held supreme power in Erin for thirteen years after he had been previously the scourge of that country for seventeen years, for during that length of time he had been exercising violence and rapine on the inhabitants. But when the nobles of Erin saw that Turgesius had brought confusion on their country, and that he was assuming supreme authority, and reducing them to thralldom and vassalage, they became inspired with a loftiness of mind and fortitude of spirit and a hardness and firmness of purpose that urged them to work on right earnestly and to toil zealously against him and his plundering hordes. But though numerous were the battles the Gael fought against Turgesius he at length succeeded in vanquishing the Gaelic nation, and reduced it to bondage and serfdom to himself and to his almuraigh (foreigners). [7]

At the commencement of the second period (845-1014) the entries in our Annals relating to the coming of the Black foreigners (Dubh-Gaill) may be summarised as follows : —

In 847 a fleet of seven score ships of the king of the foreigners came to contend with the foreigners in Erin before them. The new foreigners were henceforth commonly called the Dubh-Gaill, or black foreigners, and the old foreigners were called Finn-Gaill, or fair foreigners. In 849 the Dubh-Gaill arrived at Athcliath, and made a great slaughter of the Finn-Gaill, who had settled there. They made another attack on the Finn-Gaill at Linn Duichail, and made a great slaughter of them there. In 851 a fleet of eight score ships of Finn-Gaill arrived at Snam-Eidhneach (*i.e.*, Carlingford Lough) to give battle to the Dubh-Gaill, and they fought with each other for three days and three nights, and the Dubh-Gaill were victorious. The Finn-Gaill left their ships to them. In 852 came Olaf, son of the King of Lochlann, and all the foreign tribes in Erin submitted to him, and a rent (*cios*) was given to him by the Gael. [8]

Now, who were the New Foreigners ? Where was Lochlann ? Dubhgaill, black foreigners, cannot mean people of the dark or brunette type. Whether they came from Scandinavia or Denmark, the overwhelming mass of the raiders must have been blonde or fair. “ At the northern limit (which includes Scandinavia and Denmark),” writes Ripley, “ we find that about one-third of the people are pure blondes, characterised by light hair and blue eyes, about one-tenth are pure brunettes, the remainder, over one half, being mixed, with a tendency to blondness. There is no appreciable difference between Scandinavia and Denmark as regards pigmentation, and dark types do not change to blonde.

We can scarcely distinguish a Swede from a Dane to-day, or either from a native of Schleswig Holstein or Friesland, They are all described to us by chroniclers, and our modern research corroborates the testimony ; as tawny-haired, fiercely blue-eyed barbarians.” [9]

It seems probable, we think, that they were different tribes, nominally at least subject to the King of Lochlann. We can thus more easily understand their ready submission to Olaf Beg MacDe says, as we have seen, that they had black ships. [10]

“ One of the captains was a red-haired maiden.” Saxo-grammaticus tells us they used black tents for concealment. [11] And they probably wore black armour of some kind. Glun-iarrainn, iron-knee, and Glun-dubh, black-knee, seem to refer to some black iron defensive armour, and so, probably, were called the “ Black Foreigners.”

This shire land, over which Olaf made himself king, was, no doubt, in part at least, what in after time came to be known as Fingal. It extended as far north as the Delvin rivulet, a little south of the Nannie water, and inland, in theory at least, as far as the salmon swam up, in accordance with Norse law—*i.e.*, to the Salmon Leap, Lixlot, now Leixlip. The rent of this portion Olaf no doubt received, and this is probably what is meant by our annalists. He most assuredly did not get rent from the High King, or the provincial Kings of Erin. There never was a conquest and occupation of a large part of Erin like the Danish occupation of England. Besides Dublin and Dublin-shire, they built and held forts, with some territory adjoining, at Limerick, Cork, and Waterford, and occupied some places along the coast. Elsewhere there was no permanent occupation.

The Gaelic name of the place where now is Dublin was Ath Cliath—the Ford with the Hurdle Bridge. The Scandinavians called it “ Dyflin,” a corruption of the Gaelic name for that inlet at the confluence of the Poddle and the Liffey which formed a harbour where ships were moored, and which the Gael called “ Dubhlinn,” or black pool, from the dark colour given to the water by the bog which extends under the river. [12]

The termination of the names of three of the provinces is Norse, the Norse, “ ster” (= stadr, place) being added to the Gaelic name. as Mumhan-ster, Munster ; Ulad-ster, Ulster ; Leighin-ster, Leinster ; Connact-ster (Kunnakster, Connact) was not retained by the Anglo-Normans, or Angevins. But these names were never used by the Gael when speaking their own tongue, and it must not be supposed that they indicate conquest or occupation of these provinces by the Northmen.

Feordr is a frith or bay, while a small crescent-formed inlet is called a *vik*. There were five Norse fiord names in Erin—Wexford, (L. Carmen) Waterford, (L. Daccaich, or Port Lairge), Carlingford (Snamh Eidhneach), Strangford (L. Cuan), and Ulrick’s fiord (L. Larne). “ There are,” writes Joyce, “ little more than a dozen places in Ireland at the present day bearing Danish names, and these are nearly all on or near the East coast. Worsae (p. 71) gives a table of 1,373 Danish and Norwegian names in the middle and northern counties of England.” He adds, “ This appears to me to afford a complete answer to the statement that we sometimes see made—that the Danes conquered the country, and that their chiefs ruled over it as sovereigns.”

After the coming of Olaf, from 853 to 875, there were the usual periodical raids and plunderings such as we have described. After this came what are known as the forty years’ rest, during which time there came no fresh reinforcements from the north. The Norsemen in Erin during this time raided and made hostings like the native chieftains, won and lost battles, but made no additions to their territory. They appear to have been gradually taking their place among the tribes of the Gael, and there were alliances and intermarriages from time to time between them. During all this time the High King exercised his sovereign rights as usual—enforced the payments of rent or tribute and exacted the delivery of hostages, as the following summary will clearly show : —

In 802 Aodh Oirnidhe, Ard-Righ, went with a large army into Meath and divided it into two parts between the sons of Dòmhnall, viz., Conchobar and Ailill. They were the sons of the last Ard-Righ. Ailill was slain in battle by Conchobar the following year.

In 805 he divided Leinster between the two Muiredachs.

839—The plundering of Feara Ceal and Dealbhna-Eathra (a large part of the King’s County) by Niall Caille, the High King. Feidlimidh, King of Munster, plundered Meath and Breagh, and he rested at Tara after having in one day taken the hostages of Connact.

840—An army was led by Feidlimidh to Carman (Wexford) and by Niall Caille to Maghochtair (N. Kildare) to meet him. A battle ensued, and Niall “ bore away the crozier of the devout Feidlimidh by

the battle of swords.” Feidlimidh was abbot or bishop of Cashel according to O’Donovan. The same year a battle was gained by Maolruanaedh, the father of King Maelseachlainn, over Diarmaid, son of Conchobar, and Diarmaid was slain.

844—The plundering of Donnchadh, son of Follamhan, and of Flann, son of Maelruanaedh, by Maelseachlainn, son of Maelruanaidh. The plundering of the Termon of Ciaran (*i.e.*, Clonmacnoise) by Feidlimidh, King of Munster ; but Ciaran pursued him, as he thought, and gave him a thrust of his crozier, and he received an internal wound, so that he was not well until his death. He died in 845. The annalists (*F. M.* and *Ulst.*) add, to our amazement, that he was the best scribe and anchorite of his time. Does the word “ anchorite,” taken in connection with his crozier, imply that the devout Feidlimidh was a bishop in Orders, as distinguished from a secular bishop (if we may use the phrase), claiming to be bishop or abbot in right of his crown of Munster without ecclesiastical status ? [13]

852—Maelseachlainn proceeded to Munster as far as Ineoiu na n-deisi (near Clonmel), and enforced hostages and submission from them, for they had given him opposition at the instigation of the foreigners.

854—He went again to Cashel and carried off the hostages of Munster.

857—He went into Munster and stayed ten nights at Neim (the Blackwater) and plundered it southwards to the sea after defeating their kings at Carn Lugh-dach. He carried off their hostages from Gowra Road to the Bull of Dursey Island and from the Old Head of Kinsale to East Arra of the Arran Isles.

858—He led a hosting of Munster, Leinster, and Connact and the Southern Ui Neill, into the North. Aedh Finnliath attacked his camp at night, and destroyed many in the middle of the camp, but was finally defeated, with great loss, for Maelseachlainn and his army manfully defended the camp against the people of the North. Aedh then formed a league with the foreigners. This was not, however, the first occasion on which the Gael made alliance with them. As far back as 849 Cinaedh, King of Cianachta Breagh, turned against Maelseachlainn at the instigation of the foreigners, so that he wasted the Ui Neill, both churches and districts, from the Shannon to the sea. The following year he was drowned in the Nanny, which flows through Ceannacta Breagh, by Maelseachlainn and Tighernach, with the approval of the good men of Erin, and of the coarb of St. Patrick especially. Aedh Finnliath then rose out against Maelseachlainn at the instigation of Cinaedh’s brother and successor in the chieftainry.

859—There was a great hosting by Olaf and Ivar and Cearbhall, King of Ossory, who was then in alliance with them into Meath. Maelseachlainn then held a royal meeting at Rahugh, in Westmeath, and the coarbs of Patrick and Finnian used their influence to establish peace and concord between the men of Erin. Cearbhall joined Leth Chuinn, and Maelgualach tendered his allegiance and was stoned to death by the foreigners.

860—Aedh Finnliath and Flann, son of Conang and Olaf and the foreigners, raided Meath, and Cearbhall, King of Ossory, came to the aid of the High King.

In the following year, 861, when, he had become High King, the foreigners, rifled New Grange, Knowth, Dowth, and the Great Mound at Drogheda. Lorcan, King of Meath, was with them thereat, and was blinded by Aedh the following year. [14]

The reign of this Cearbhall, as King of the Norsemen of Athcliath, is not mentioned in our annals, but Todd and Haliday are of opinion that the reconciliation we mentioned was only temporary, and that there is good evidence that either in alliance with, or elected by, the Norse of Dublin, he became King there about 872, and reigned until 888. His death in that year seems to have inspired the Gael with the hope of obtaining possession of Ath Cliath by the expulsion of the Northmen. Flann, the High King, joining his forces to those of the King of Connact and aided by the ecclesiastical authorities, attacked them, but was routed in a battle in which fell the King of Connact, the bishop of Kildare, the abbot of Killdalkey, and many others. [15]

## A Winter Circuit.

BEFORE we reach the period of the forty years' rest (875-915), we find entries in our annals relating to the Gaill-Gael, who are sometimes referred to as the apostate Irish who had renounced their baptism. The word usually means the Gael over sea,—the “ sea-divided Gael,” the inhabitants of Argyle (Aírer-gaedela) of Galloway (Gall-gaedhela), the Hebrides, Cantire, and other places. The Gaill-Gael, however, we now speak of were different ; they were resident in Erin. They are referred to in the Annals of Ulster and of the Four Masters, but it is nowhere stated that they had lapsed into paganism. Aedh Finnliath gained a great victory over Gaill-Gael at Glenn Foichle (Glenelly, near Strabane), in 855. Bishop Reeves was of opinion—and we think rightly—that these were foreign mercenaries. [16] It is clear, however, from the *Three Fragments of Annals* that the Gaill-Gael were located in Munster and other parts of Erin. The first of these Fragments, which relates chiefly to the Ui Neill, was composed in the North ; the other two “ evidently belong to Ossory or Leix, and were compiled in some monastery there ; but nothing is known of the age or nature of the MSS. from which Dubhthach Mac Fírbisigh copied these Fragments.” The author of the Third Fragment states that Maelseachlainn [858] made a great hosting against the Munster men, and against Cearbhall, King of Ossory, his brother-in-law, and defeated them in a pitched battle at Carn Lughdhach, near Gowran, in Kilkenny. [17] He continues :—“ Though Maelseachlainn had not come on this expedition to take the kingdom of Munster for himself, he ought to have come to kill all the Gaill-Gael who were killed there, for they were a people who had renounced their baptism, and they were usually called Northmen, for they had the customs of the Northmen, and had been fostered by them ; and though the original Northmen were bad to the churches, they were by far worse in whatever part of Erin they used to be.” In the same year (858) a victory was gained by Cearbhall over the Gaill-Gael of Aradh Tíre (Barony of Arra, Tipperary.”[18]) He gives an instance of their sacrilegious spoliations under the date of 854 :—“ In this year many forsook their Christian baptism, and joined the Lochlanns, and they plundered Armagh, and carried away all its valuables ; but some of them did penance, and came to make restitution (venerunt ad satisfactionem).” [19] Forsook their baptism may mean here merely that they were recreant and untrue to it, especially in not going afterwards and making restitution.

There were, no doubt, many Gael taken captives, and, when young, brought up as pagans, and there may have been individual cases of persons renouncing the Faith, and there were, also, no doubt, mercenaries who had been brought up as pagans ; but in the absence of all mention of a class of apostate native-born Gael in Erin by our Annalists it is safe to assume that no such class ever came into existence.

The forty years' rest corresponds very nearly with the reign of Flann Sinna, the son of Maelseachlainn (877-915). For this period we shall give only a few illustrative details. In 888 the Northmen raided Kildare, and carried off fourteen score captives to their ships. In 890, led by Gluniarn, they raided Armagh, and carried off 710 persons into captivity. In 895 (F.M.) they were on L. Neagh, and carried off the “ Etach Padraig,” *i.e.*, Patrick's raiment (or crozier ? ) [20]

In 895 they were defeated by the men of Louth and Ulidia, with the loss of 800 men. In this battle fell Olaf, the son of Ivar, and Gluntradna, the son of Gluniarn. In 901 the North men were expelled from Ath Cliath, by Cearbhall, the son of Murigen, and the Leinster men and the men of Bregia, and leaving great numbers of their ships behind them they fled half dead to Ireland's Eye, where they were besieged. During these years Flann, too, was busy. In the first year of his reign (877) he plundered Munster from Killaloe to Cork, and in 880 made another raid, and carried off their hostages. In 906, joined by Cearbhall, he plundered from Gowran to Limerick. The celebrated Cormac MacCuilenain was King of Munster at this time, and his principal adviser was a fiery abbot, Flaithbhertach, of Inis Scatterry. [21] They led a strong force in the following year (907) into Meath, and defeated the army of Leath Chuinn, on the historic battle-field of Magh Lena, near Tullamore, and they subsequently defeated the Southern Ui Niall and the men of Connact, and carried off the hostages of Connact in their great fleets on the Shannon.

Cormac was bishop of Cashel as well as King of Munster. Some say that he had married the daughter of Flann Sinna—Gormlaith, the blue-eyed princess, and had repudiated her. Others say, with more probability, that there was only a betrothal between them, and that the engagement was broken off. [22] In either case Gormlaith was not likely to be a peacemaker. At this time she was the wife of

Cearbhall, the son of Murigen, the King of Leinster who must not be confounded with Cearbhall, the King of Ossory, and subsequently became the wife of Niall Glundubh. An ecclesiastical element was also added to the seething cauldron. [23] There was at this time a famous monastery at Monasterevan which had been founded by Evin, of the line of Eogan Mor, and the monks in the abbey were all Munster men, and it was called *Muimneach i.e.*, of the Munster men. Cearbhall, King of Leinster, took forcible possession of it and expelled the monks, who promptly laid their grievances before Cormac and the fiery abbot, who was himself of the line of Eogan Mor. It is also stated that Cormac demanded the *boroma* from Leinster, However this may be, the result of these complications, which we shall not attempt to unravel, was that a pitched battle was fought (908) at Bealach Mughna (Ballaghmoon), in Kildare, about two and a half miles north of Carlow.

Woeful indeed was the tumult and clamour of that battle, for there rose the death-cry of the Munster men as they fell, and the shouting of the Leinster men, exulting in the slaughter of their foes. There were two causes why the fight went so suddenly against the men of Munster. The first was because Keilcher, a relative of Finguime (Cormac's predecessor) jumped hastily upon his steed and cried out, "Flee, O Free Clans of Munster; flee from this terrific conflict, and let the clerics fight it out themselves, since they would accept of no other conditions but that of battle from the men of Leinster." He then clapped spurs to his horse and quitted the field with his followers. The second cause was that Ceallach, the son of the King of Ossory, who was on Cormac's side, also rode off the field with the men of Ossory. A general rout followed. Neither boy, man, or cleric found quarter; all were slaughtered indiscriminately. Cormac rushed towards the van of his division. His horse fell on the slippery blood-stained field. His neck was broken in the fall, and he died saying, "Into Thy hands O Lord, I commend my spirit." And then some wicked folk came up and pierced the body with their spears and cut off his head. [24]

His loss was mournful, for he was a King, a bishop, an anchorite, a scribe, and profoundly learned in the Gaelic tongue. He was the author of "Cormac's Glossary," by far the oldest attempt at a comparative vernacular dictionary made in any language in modern Europe, which has fortunately come down to us. "The Psalter of Cashel," now lost, was compiled by him, or under his direction. He appears to have known Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and Danish, and to have been one of the finest old Gaelic scholars of his day, and withal, an accomplished poet. His verses are now lost. [25]

The forty years' rest ended in 915 A.D. The year before a new fleet of Norsemen arrived at Waterford, and were soon followed by strong reinforcements. Munster was raided, and the Gael roused for once to something like united action. Flann Sinna died at Tailtin in 916, and was succeeded by Niall Glundubh, the son of Aedh Finnliath. Niall at once summoned all his forces to meet the new invasion. He led the Northern and Southern Ui Neill to the aid of the men of Munster and Leinster. The campaign, however, resulted favourably for the Norsemen. The men of Leinster were defeated at Cenn-fuait, Kildare was raided, and Dublin reoccupied. Next year (917) Niall reassembled his forces and advanced on Dublin. A decisive battle was fought on the 19th of October at Kilmashogue, near Rathfarnham, about five miles south of the present city. The army of the High King included the Southern and Northern Ui Neill, the men of Little Ulster, and the men of Oirghialla. The men of Leinster, Munster, and probably the men of Connacht, were engaged defending their own territories. The Gael were routed with red slaughter: Niall was slain with, some say, twelve kings or chieftains around him. The Four Masters mention Conchobar, Ua Maelseachlainn, *regdamna*. of the Southern Ui Neill; the King of Little Ulster, the Lord of Oirghialla, and many others.

"Sorrowful that day was holy Erin  
To view Magh-Neill (i.e., Erin) without Niall."

This defeat was, however, avenged in the following year by Niall's successor, Donnchadh, the son of Flann Sinna, who gained a signal victory over the Norsemen in North Dublin. There fell as many of the nobles and rank and file of the Northmen as had fallen of the Gael in the battle of Kilmashogue. Notwithstanding this victory, we find Godfrey in possession of Dublin in 926, from which he plundered Armagh, but spared the "oratories," the Ceile De, and the sick. The Northmen then sent divisions north and east and west. The force that went north was encountered and defeated by Muirchertach of the *Leather Cloaks*, as he came to be called, the son of Niall Glundubh, and from this time until his death (943) he was the mainstay of the Gael in the north. He was then King of Aileach,

and, if he had survived, would undoubtedly have been the next Ard Righ in succession to Donnchadh. He married, first, Flanna, the daughter of Donnchadh, the Ard Righ, and, secondly, in 940, Dubdara, the daughter of Ceallach, King of Ossory. The entries in our Annals respecting him are most interesting, and present a view of the social state of Erin, which is almost incomprehensible.

926—Two victories by Muirchertach over the Northmen. The second at Cluain na g-cruimthir, where 800 were killed.

927—War with Duach, the chieftain of Glenn Given (Derry), during which the chieftain was slain.

In the same year Donncliadh, the Ard Righ, was prevented from holding the fair of Tailtin by Muirchertach in consequence of a challenge of battle between them, but God separated them without slaughter.

929—Donnchadh led an army to Leitrim against Muirchertach, but they separated without bloodshed.

932—Torolbh, the jarl, commanding a fleet of Norsemen on Lough Neagh, was slain by Muirchertach.

933—Muirchertach was defeated by Gaelic chieftains in Meath.

938—A challenge of battle between Donnchadh and Muirchertach until they made peace, united their forces, marched to lay siege to Dublin, and spoiled the country of the foreigners from Ath Cliath to Ath Truistin, near Athy.

939—The Northmen plundered Aileach and took Muirchertach prisoner to their ships on Lough Swilly, but he made his escape from them soon after, to the great joy of the Gael.

940—A hosting by Donnchadh, Ard Righ, and Muirchertach into Leinster and Munster until they took hostages from them.

941—Muirchertach raided Ossory and the Desies ; made a royal expedition to the Hebrides, from which he brought back much plunder and booty, and hearing that Callaghan of Cashel had made a slaughter of the Desies for submitting to him the year before, he set out in mid-winter of the same year on his famous circuit of Erin with one thousand picked warriors. This expedition is celebrated in a famous poem by Cormacan Eigeas (*the Poet*), who died in 948. He was the chief poet of the Northern Ui Neill and the friend and follower of Muirchertach, and seemingly accompanied him. The poem is very interesting, as it illustrates the manners of the time, social and political, and deserves, consequently, a somewhat detailed notice. It commences : —

Muirchertach, son of the valiant Niall (Glundubh),  
Thou hast taken the hostages of Inis Fail,  
Thou hast brought them all unto Aileach,  
Into the *grianan* of the splendid steeds.  
Thou didst go forth from us with a thousand heroes  
Of the race of Eogan of the red weapons  
To make the great circuit of all Erin.  
O, Muirchertach of the yellow hair,  
The day that thou didst set out from us eastwards  
Into the fair province of Conchobar (Mac Nessa)  
Many were the tears down beauteous cheeks  
Among the fair-haired women of Aileach.

They spent a night at Oenach Cros in Antrim—"Not more pleasant to be in Paradise"—and brought Loingseach of Linne as a hostage ; a night at Dun Eachach on the Ravel Water, and brought the King of Ulidia with them ; a night at Magh Eath (Moira) ; a night at Glenn Righe (the vale of the Newry river) ; a night at Casan Linne in Down ; and a night at Ath Gabla on the Boyne.

We were a night at Ath Cliath ;  
It was not pleasing to the foreigners.  
There was a damsel in the fort  
Whose soul the son of Niall was. [26]  
She came forth until she was outside the walls,  
Although the night was bad throughout.

Bacon and fine good wheat and joints of meat and fine cheese were given by the beautiful queen,  
and a coloured mantle for each chieftain.

We carried off Sitric of the treasures ;  
To me was assigned the duty of keeping him,  
And there was not put upon him a handcuff,  
Nor a polished tight fetter.

They were a night at Dunlavin ; a night at cold Kilcullen. The snow came from the north-east.

Our only houses, without distinction of rank,  
Were our strong (sheep ?) skin cloaks. [27]

They brought off Lorcan, King of Leinster, with a rough, bright fetter on him. They spent a night at Ballaghmoon, near Carlow, and passing into Ossory, received food, and ale, and hogs from its hospitable chiefs. “ Not a man of them returned to his house without a beautiful present of dress.” They received coigne and tribute from the Desies, and marched to Cashel. [28] The men of Munster were disposed to fight, but Callaghan of Cashel said : —

O men of Munster, men of renown,  
Oppose not the race of Eogan ;  
Better that I go with them *as a hostage*.  
We took with us, therefore, Callaghan the Just,

Who received his due honour ;  
A ring (of gold ?) of fifteen ounces on his hand,  
And a chain of iron on his stout legs.

They spent a night in *Hy Cairbre* (Coshma, Limerick) ; a night at Killaloe, and then turned homewards. At Headford they found the Kings of Connact awaiting them, and Conchobar, the son of Tadhg the Bull-like.

The ard-righ of vallant Connact  
Came with us, without a bright fetter,  
Into the green *griaman* of Aileach.

Nearing home,

A giolla was despatched to Aileach  
To tell Dubhdara of the black hair,  
To send women to cut rushes.  
“ Bestir thee, Dubdara” (spoke the giolla),  
“ Here is company coming to thy house,  
Attend each man of them  
As a king should be attended.”

The noble kings were attended “ as if they had been clerics,” “ ten score hogs ; ten score cows ; 200 oxen ; three score vats of curds, which banished the hungry look of the army,” twelve vats of choice mead ; and all this was the gift of the queen, from her separate property, which was repaid to her by Muirchertach, “ twenty hogs for every hog, a good return.” At the end of four months, Muirchertach offered the noble kings to Donnchad, the ard righ, who courteously declined to accept them from his son-in-law, and said :—

Receive my blessing nobly,  
May Tara be possessed by thee.  
May the hostages of the Gael be in thy house,  
O good son, O Muirchertach. [29]

Muirchertach was slain (943) in a battle fought near Ardee, by Blocar, the son of Godfrey, and the foreigners, who marched to Armagh after their victory, and plundered it. The hostages taken to secure Muirchertach's succession were then liberated, and on the death of Donnchadh (944), the rule of alternate succession was disregarded, and Congalach, of the southern branch, became Ardrigh. A rival claimant then appeared, of the line of Conal Gulban, Ruadhri Ua Cannannain, from Tir-Conaill. He defeated Congalach, who was supported by Olaf Cuaran, in a pitched battle near Slane, in Meath (947). In 948 he defeated Congalach again and plundered Bregia. He encamped at Muine Brocain, and there assumed the name and authority of High King of Erin, and the "dues of the King of Erin were sent to him from every quarter" (*Four Masters*). In this position he was attacked by the foreigners and after a desperate struggle in which six thousand of the foreigners fell, Ruadhri was slain in the "counterblow" of the fight, but the victory finally remained with his army. Congalach then held the sovereignty without further opposition, and led a hosting into Munster, raided and plundered West Munster, and killed the two sons of Kennedy, the son of Lorcan, Echtighern and Donnchuan. In the following year (951), he made a hosting with a great fleet on Lough Derg, and took the hostages of the Munster men, over whom he obtained sway after some opposition.

In the same year, probably whilst Congalach was away harrying the men of Munster, the foreigners, under Godfrey, the son of Sitric, raided Meath, and "carried upwards of three thousand persons with them into captivity, besides gold, silver, raiment, and various wealth and goods of every description."

During the reign of Congalach an event occurred (950), which deserves particular notice, as showing the use to which a Round Tower was put in time of danger. The cloitech of Slane in Meath was burned by the Northmen, "with its full of relics and distinguished persons, and the crozier of the patron saint, and the bell, which was the best of bells." The following items are also of interest : —

951—Clonfert plundered by Callaghan of Cashel and the Munster men.

953—Clonmacnoise plundered by the foreigners of Limerick, and the Munster men along with them.

954—Inis Uladh, near Donard (Wicklow), plundered by Olaf Cuaran and Tuathal, son of Ugaire.

954—Saighir Ciaraan plundered by the Munster men.

Congalach raided Leinster in 956. The Leinster men sent word to Olaf Cuaran, and the foreigners of Ath Cliath, who laid a battle ambush for him, and he was slain with many chieftains near the Liffey, not far from Dublin. He was succeeded by Domhnall, son of Muirchertach, of the northern Ui Neill. Many years afterwards Domhnall, the son of Congalach, made alliance with Olaf, and fought a pitched battle against the High King at Kilmoon, near Dunshaughlin in Meath, in which he was victorious, but failed to oust King Domhnall, who continued to reign until he died (978) at Armagh. He was afterwards called Domhnall of Armagh, because he resided there a long time to do penance. He was succeeded by Maelseachlainn II., Maelseachlainn the Great, who was the last Ardrigh of the Gael who ruled without opposition.

During the sixty years that elapsed from the battle of Kilmashogue (919), the Northmen of Athcliath had made no addition to their territory near Dublin. As in the previous period, they were seemingly settling down into the position of Gaelic chieftains. There were frequent intermarriages and shifting alliances between them and the older settlers, now with one chieftain, now with another, for war or plunder. Many of them had probably been by this time converted to Christianity.

There were also raiding expeditions conducted by themselves independently. Territories were harried, termons violated, and monasteries rifled, but these regrettable incidents occurred also

amongst the Gael themselves. The fusion of the two branches of the Nordic race, if yet distant, seemed to be approaching. From the accounts given in the historical romances, and particularly in the “*War of the Gael with the Gaill*,” to which we shall refer later on, the notion is widely diffused that the country was at this time, and thence onwards to the battle of Clontarf (1014), reduced by the tyranny of the Northmen to a state of absolute barbarism and savagery. This, however, was not the case. The raiding meant little more than cattle-lifting. The number of men slain in the numerous combats was not great, and is no doubt, as is usual in such cases, greatly exaggerated by the annalists and bardic narrators. It is probable, we think, that more Irishmen in proportion to population fell in battle or died from wounds and disease in the wars of the nineteenth than in the wars of the tenth century. Nor could the rifling of the monasteries have been fruitful of much spoil after the earlier attacks. There were no treasures hoarded or deposited in them, and their modest equipment of valuables, consisting, apart from the cattle, principally of relics, shrines, chalices, and other altar requisites, could be easily hidden away if the cloitreach was not available or was considered insecure. And the burning of the “wattle and dab” buildings could not be much more than a temporary inconvenience. It has been said that it was harder to burn than to build them. We make these observations, not to extenuate the outrages, but to call attention to exaggerations.

The most serious part of these raidings by the Northmen was the taking of captives. In several instances recorded in our annals the captives were carried off to the ships and were, no doubt, either ransomed or reduced to slavery. With the Gael we hear very little of prisoners or captives. In battle, apparently quarter was seldom if ever given. Later on we shall meet with an instance where the defeated Northmen were put to death or sold as slaves at Singland near Limerick. We are, therefore, on the whole prepared to find that notwithstanding much that needed reformation in the social state, learning and literature flourished during the ninth and tenth centuries. The most celebrated names besides Cormac Mac Cuilenain, already mentioned, were Flann Mac Lonain, “the Virgil of the Gael,” a contemporary of Cormac’s; Cinnaeth Ua hArtacain (+973), Eocaid O’Flynn (+984 c), Cormac an Eigeas, Maelmarra of Fahon, MacLiag, and others. Nor was the gentler sex unrepresented. Gormlaith, the wife of Niall Glundubh, was a poetess of considerable merit. Many of her poems express her sorrow for his loss. We give the following graceful lines as a sample :

Monk, remove thy foot,  
Lift it off the grave of Niall ;  
Too long dost thou heap the earth  
On him with whom I fain would lie.

Too long dost thou, Monk, there  
Heap the earth on noble Niall ;  
Thou brown-haired friend, though gentle,  
Press not with thy shoe the earth,

Do not firmly close the grave,  
O Priest, whose office is so sad.  
Lift off the bright-hair’d Niall Glundubh ;  
Monk, remove thy foot. [30]

[1] 832 — A great number of the “muintir” of Clonmacnoise were slain by Foidlimid, King of Cashel, and all their termon burned to the doors of the church. In like manner the “muintir” of Durrow also to the doors of the church.—*F. M.* A battle gained over the “muintir” of Kildare in their church by Cellach, King of Leinster, when many were slain—*Ann, Ulst.*

[2] Linn Duachail, at the tidal opening of the Rivers Glyde and Dee, in Louth, S.E. of Castle Bellingham.—Todd, *Wars of the Gael and Gall*, Ixii.

[3] The Annals of Ulster and the Four Masters do not state that Turgeis was drowned by Maelseachlainn, which was the form generally used by them when the drowning was punitive or criminal. The words seem to point rather to a drowning by the miracles of the saints. Macgeoghan states that Turgeis was drowned by Maelseachlainn.

[4] Todd, *Wars of the Gael*, 10 and 225.

- [5] Giraldus, *Roll Series*, v. 182.
- [6] Todd, *Wars of the Gael*, xlv.
- [7] Keating, O'Mahony, 505.
- [8] In the Landnamaboc, or Book of Settlements in Iceland, we find the following statement about Olaf, the White, who was, undoubtedly, the Oalf who came to Erin in 853, ten years before the death of Maelseachlainn : — “ Anlaff, the White (Oleif ?) was the name of a host-king. He was the son of King Ingiald, the son of Helgi, the son of Helge, the son of Anlaf (Oleif's Sonar), the son of Godfred, the son of Halfdan, Whiteleg, the King of the Upland (E. Norway) folk. Anlaff, the White, harried in the West in wrecking cruises, and won Dyflin (Dublin) and Dublin shire— (Dyflinshire)—and made himself king over it. He took to wife Aud, or Ead, the Deep Wealthy, the daughter of Cetilflatneh, the son of Beorn Buna, lord of Norway. Thor-slan, the Red, was the name of their son. Anlaff fell in Ireland (fell a Irlande) in battle, but Aud and Thor-slan went to the Southreys (Hebrides). — Vegfusson, *Origines Islandicæ*, Landnambok, 11-14, Vol. I., 76, 1905.)
- [9] Ripley, W., *Races of Europe* I., 68 and 314.  
Loch in Gaelic frequently means fiords, or arms of the sea, e.g., Foyle, Swilly, Belfast, Carmen, (Wexford), Lurgan (Galway). Whatever may be the true meaning of Viking, it is highly probable the Gael understood it to mean the men of the Fiords—*Lochlannach*.
- [10] *War of the Gael*, p. 225 and 41.
- [11] For the tents were dusky in colour and muffled in a sort of pitchy covering that they might not catch the eye of anyone who came near. Saxorammatius, V. 167. The captain was the famous Ingen Ruadh.
- [12] Haliday.—*The Scandinavian Kingdom of Dublin*, 23.
- [13] *F. M.* 840 A.D.— “ The reader must bear in mind that Feidlimidh was abbot or bishop of Cashel in right of his crown of Munster.” We doubt this. Macgeoghan writes of “ his great irregularity and great desire of spoyle.”
- [14] *Three Frag*, 151.
- [15] Many of the learned in Erin composed praise poems on Cearbhall, the King of Ossory, in which they commemorated every victory he had won, and Aengus, the high, wise abbot, the Coarb of Clonfert Molua (Kyle), at the foot of Slieve Bloom, most of all. O'Donovan observes that it is highly probable that the accounts which were so laudatory of the King of Ossory were based on these poems, which were preserved in the monastery there.  
In the Landnama-boc we find the following reference to Cearbhall (Carroll) : “ Afterwards Egwind (Eg-wind-e) took to wife in Ireland Riforta (——), the daughter of Cear-ral. She gave birth to a boy in the Southreys (Hebrides, Sodor), and put him to fosterage there. Two winters later they went back to the island (Sodor) to see the boy, and saw a boy there with fair eyes, but there was no flesh on him, for he was starved, and so they called the boy Helge, the Lean. He was afterwards put into fosterage in Ireland. Eg-wind was called the Ostman, or Eastman, because he came west over the sea out of Sweden in the east. Helge was brought up in Ireland.” And also, “ at the time Iceland was settled from Norway, Adrianus was Pope of Rome . . . Cearrall (Cearbhall) King at Dublin.” “ Before Iceland was settled by the Northmen, there were there those people whom the Northmen called Papas. They were Christian men, and people think that they must have been from the West of the Sea because there were found after them Irish books and bells and croziers (baglar), and yet more things by which it might be perceived that they were West men.” — Are's (+1148), Landnama boc, Vegfusson, *ubi. sup.*, 13, 14 and 145.
- [16] *Four Masters*, 1154. The Cinel Eogain and Muirchertach Ua Neill sent parsons over sea to hire, and they did hire the ships of Gaill-Gael of Ara (Arran, Ceantire, the Isle of Man, and the borders of Alba in general).
- [17] O'Donovan, *Three Fragments*, 2 and 139. This hosting, and the battle of Carn Lughdhach, are mentioned in the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Four Masters*.
- [18] A victory was gained by Cearbhall, Lord of Ossory, and by Ivar in the territory of Aradh Tire over the Cinel-Fiachach (barony of Moycashel, Westmeath), and the Gaill-Gael of Leath Chuinn.  
— *Four Masters*, 856 A.D.
- [19] *Three Fragments*, 127.
- [20] O'Donovan says it was, probably, a garment preserved in some old chapel near L. Neagh. We suggest that it was a crozier like the “ Etach Mochaoi,” which was a pastoral staff, and called *eiteach* (winged) from a legend that it flew from heaven. Reeve's *Adamnan*, 450.
- [21] Flaithbheartach afterwards became king of Cashel, i.e., Munster. He resigned the kingship, and went on his pilgrimage in 920 (F.M.), and was succeeded by Lorcan, the grandfather of Brian

Boru.

[22] Even if there was a contract *per verba de presenti*, as sometimes happened in those days between persons of tender years, it would be nullified by Cormac becoming a professed religious, if the marriage was not consummated, and we think it likely that Cormac was a “religious,” like his successor, Flaithbertach, the abbot of Inis Scattery.

Se quis dixerit matrimonium ratum non consummatum per solemnem religionis professionem alterius conjugura non dirimi anathema sit.

*Conc. Trident*, sess. xxiv., can. 6.

[23] Cf. O’Halloran, *History of Ireland*, 185.

[24] Keating (O’Mahony) 529.

[25] *Four Masters*, 903 (*recte*, 908), A.D. Hyde, *Literature*, 420.

[26] Haliday suggests that the damsel was Donnflaith, the daughter of Muirchertach and the wife of Olaf, She was the mother of Gluncaran.

[27] *Ar gcocail corra croicinn*. This is generally rendered “leather cloaks.” They were, we think, dressed sheep-skins, untanned and unshorn.

[28] Duhdara, wife of Muirchertach, was, as we have stated, the daughter of the chieftain of Ossory.

[29] The word *grianan* occurs twice in the poem.

(1). Into the *grianan* of the splendid steeds (line 4),

*Is in greanan ghall groideach.*

This O’Donovan renders : —

Into the stone-built *grianan* (palace) of steeds.

(2). Into the green *grianan* of Aileach (line 150),

*i n-greanan uaine Oiligh*

This O’Donovan renders : —

Into the green Palace of Aileach.

The 151st hue is :—

*Adhaigh i Moigh Ai uaine.*

A night on green Magh Ai (a celebrated plain in Roscommon).

We think that the meaning of *grianan* here is not a palace, but an enclosure, or paddock ; a meaning which it bore until recently, as we have already stated (o. xiv.), in the Highlands.

“Enclosures in the Highlands were called *grianans*”—Bonwick, *Druids*, 192. The troop of hostages, with their attendants, were, we think, accommodated in tents, or “wattle and dab” buildings, within the “horse paddock,” at Aileach. The epithet “green” is then as applicable in line 150 as in line 151, but we confess we do not understand what is meant by a *green*, stone-built, palace. Muirchertach is referred to in line 16 as “of the great steeds” (*Mhor-groidigh*).

[30] Dean of Lismore’s Book. 75 Gaelic, 101 English.

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