

The Historic Literature of Ireland.

an essay on the publications of the Irish Archæological Society, founded A.D. 1840, for the printing of the genealogical, ecclesiastical, bardic, topographical, and historical remains of Ireland —

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A FEW Continental authors have, within the present century, effected a complete change in the style of writing history. Eschewing the dull volumes of tedious compilers, they have had recourse to the works of the old contemporary chroniclers, by a careful collation of which, with legal and official documents, they have succeeded in producing an animated and life-like picture of the manners and customs of former ages ; “ in a complete narrative, exhausting texts, assembling scattered details, collecting even to the slightest indications of facts and of characters, and from all these forming one body, into which science and art unite to breathe the breath of life.” [1]

The writers, to whom we are indebted for this new school of historic literature, are Augustin Thierry and his brother Amédée, Michaud, Sismondi, Guizot and Barante. Scarcely inferior to any of these great historians, in depth of research and powers of narration, Macaulay, much as he habitually allows his political prejudices to obscure his judgment, may be regarded as their English representative.

The way was prepared for these attractive writers by the historic antiquarians and the publishing associations which, on the Continent and in England and Scotland, have been and still continue labouring to rescue the works of the old chroniclers from the dust and neglect of centuries. But for the exertions of such literary pioneers the most diligent author would scarcely be able, in the period of a single life, to bring together the materials necessary for the proper illustration of even one important era. The history of Europe would consequently still remain arid and repulsive as the driest and most uninteresting annals.

In France, the efforts of the publishing associations are ably seconded by the government, while in England and Scotland, the general appreciation of national historic researches, among the educated classes, has ever afforded ample and substantial encouragement to the literary antiquarian.

Far different has, hitherto, been the case in Ireland. Subjected, almost ever since the invention of printing, to perpetual civil war and religious persecutions, little time was there to be found for the cultivation of letters. Another no less potent cause acted against the study of Irish literature. This was the miscalculating policy which formerly dictated the eradication of the old Celtic language of the country. A short-sighted attempt, condemned equally by the evangelical Bedell, and the philosophic Boyle, at a time when it was most warmly pursued by its fanatical advocates ; and which only served to make the natives cling with a fiercer and more desperate tenacity[2] to the old tongue of their fathers, in which their dearest and most ennobling recollections and traditions were enshrined.

There are, even in the present day, many estimable persons in Ireland of opinion that the publication of historic documents tends to revive old prejudices and to awake bad feelings. Had this idea prevailed among the more enlightened of other countries, literature would not now have to boast of the works of Scott, of Lamartine, and of Manzoni. Such an argument, moreover, strikes at the dissemination of TRUTH, and has, we know by sad examples, led in Continental countries, to results most disastrous to the liberties of mankind. It is an incontrovertible fact, that political animosities have, in all nations, been designedly engendered and

fostered by the propagation of historic falsehoods, which are ever ready to usurp the place unoccupied by truth. The contemplation of the history of our ancestors, their misfortunes, their virtues, their errors and their crimes, cannot fail to exercise a beneficial influence on us, their descendants, inasmuch as one of the great masters of the human mind has told us that “ history is philosophy, teaching by example.” Despite all obstacles, it is, however, pleasing to recollect, that even in the worst times, a few men were to be found who, under most discouraging circumstances, at considerable personal sacrifices, and actuated solely by a love of their country’s literature, essayed and achieved much for the preservation of our historic documents. The names of Ussher, Ware, Colgan, Fleming, and Ward must ever be remembered with gratitude as the first who, by their elegant Latin treatises, rendered the ancient history of Ireland familiar to the learned of Europe. Since the seventeenth century, the study of Irish literature has never been entirely neglected, but notwithstanding all the efforts of individuals, the greatest and most important monuments of the early history of the country are still unpublished and inaccessible. A short view of these documents will give an idea of the obstacles which still continue to oppose the production of a true “ History of Ireland.”

An antiquarian^[3] of the seventeenth century, whose knowledge of Celtic literature has never been surpassed, tells us that in ancient times, “ every district in Ireland had its Bard, and its *Brehon* or Judge ; and the genealogies were so accurately entered in their books, that he who refuses credit to them, may equally deny faith in his father or grandfather, since our fathers and grandfathers were our witnesses, each generation committing them to the care of then successors.” “ Neither was there any order,” continues the same writer, “ lay or ecclesiastic in Ireland, which was not bound by penalties, as stated in our *Law Books*, and on pain likewise of honor and reputation, to preserve their genealogies and histories, So that on comparison with those of other districts and churches, they should be found to correspond ; and it was ordained by law that there should be always seven ranks or orders of the learned to inspect those books.

Many of those parchment volumes, still preserved, are exquisite specimens of calligraphy and artistical ornamentation ; they are in general named after the clan to which they belonged, or the place where they were compiled ; thus we have the “ *Book of the O’Kellys*” the “ *Book of the Mac Egans*,” the “ *Book of Leacan*” and the “ *Book of Ballymote*.” Their contents are various, comprising genealogies, annals, accounts of battles and important events, topographical tracts, lives of Irish saints, historical poems, romantic tales, treatises on law, medicine and scientific subjects, together with translations from the classics and the contemporary authors of foreign countries. In addition to the “ great books,” we possess an infinite number of short detached historical and scientific documents of considerable antiquity, and most important in illustrating the earlier portions of our annals. The old chieftains and heads of clans set a high value on these works, which they often purchased at enormous prices ; not unfrequently was the desire to possess them the cause of sanguinary contests, and even in some cases, a manuscript volume was taken as ransom for a prisoner of distinction, after gold and other valuable articles had been rejected. The contemplation of the historic importance of those documents, their precarious state, and the probability of their never being properly de-ciphered or translated, if neglected in the present generation, forcibly demonstrated to the more enlightened in Ireland and abroad, the necessity of taking immediate steps for their preservation. Hence, after much anxious thought and deliberation, several Irish Peers, a large number of Prelates and Clergymen of the Established Church, the Provost, some of the Fellows of the University of Dublin, and many of the members of the Royal Irish Academy, united, in forming a publishing association, which they decided on calling “ THE IRISH ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.” This body held its first meeting on St. Patrick’s Day, in the year 1840. Since that day, the Committee of the Society has continued to labour earnestly and nobly to rescue from oblivion and decay the scattered and obscure monuments of Irish history. For this purpose they have achieved much ; and the Institution, since its foundation, has formed a centre of literary attraction, around which the lovers of historic investigation

have collected and remained steadfast, even amid the fearful times of famine and sedition. It has, however, been justly remarked, that the efforts of this Society have not been properly seconded by those to whom it should most naturally look for support and encouragement. Its proceedings and publications have been almost unnoticed by those periodicals which have been hitherto regarded as the literary organs of the country, and which, instead of fostering native learning, from which the true glory of a nation is to be derived, have, in almost every instance, directed their attention to the productions of foreign authors and of foreign presses ; and, attracted by the history and antiquities of the most remote countries, they have totally overlooked what was passing in the literary world of Ireland.

The “ Irish Archæological Society” commenced its labours by publishing, in 1841, a thin volume, containing two “ Tracts relating to Ireland,” the first of which is an Irish poem,[4] written by Cormacan *Eigeas*, or the *Sage*, A.D. 942, on the military circuit made round Erin, in the preceding year, by Muircheartach, or Moriertagh Mac Neill, Prince of Aileach, in Ulster, with “ ten hundred heroes of the race of Owen of the red weapons.”

His object in this expedition was, “ to facilitate his peaceful accession to the throne of Ireland, by impressing the conviction on the minds of the Irish that he was the next most powerful, as well as the most legitimate heir to the monarchy then existing.”

The poem consists of two hundred and fifty-five *ranms* or stanzas, detailing minutely all the circumstances connected with the circuit. The Bard carefully recounts the various localities through which the army passed, and the tributes and gifts received from the Danish and native Princes ; concluding with an account of the return of the Irish troops and their hostages to the palace of Aileach, and a curious description of the prolonged festivities with which that event was commemorated.

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The Banquet of Dun na n-Gedh, and the Battle of Magh Rath ; an ancient Historical Tale. Now first published , from a MS. in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. With a Translation and Notes, by John O’ Donovan. Dublin : for the Irish Archæological Society. 1842.

The bardic accounts of this battle, and of the banquet by which it was caused, form the third of the Society’s volumes. It would be difficult to over-estimate the historic value of such documents ; the numerous particulars they contain of the manners and customs of the old Celtic tribes, together with their minute descriptions of persons, costumes, arms, and all other details connected with the events to which they relate, are so interesting and important, that we trust our literary antiquaries will see the propriety of directing their attention to the publication of a series of the ancient historic tales[5] of the Irish, numbers of which are still preserved, signally disproving the flippant assertion, that no materials exist for a civil history of the country, before the arrival of the Anglo-Normans.

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Hy-Many[6] or Maine’s territory, extended in ancient times from Clontuskert, near Lanesborough, in the county of Roscommon, southwards to the boundary of Thomond or the county of Clare, and from Athlone westwards, to Sefin and Athenry, in the present county of Galway. This district took its name from the chieftain Maine “ *Mor*,” or “ *the Great*,” head of a colony which, in the fifth century, migrated from Oriel in Ulster, seized the territory referred to, and reduced its old Fir-Bolgic or Belgic inhabitants to servitude. The semi-mythic account of this migration, given in the life of Saint Greallan, patron of Hy-Many, is a most singular and interesting illustration of the customs and superstitions of the old Irish clans.

The Clan Kelly, chief tribe of this region, took its name from Maine's descendant *Cellach*, (i. e., *the church founder*;) who flourished in the ninth century ; the present appellation O'Kelly being a corruption of the Celtic words *Ui Cellaigh* signifying literally, the descendants of Cellach.

The other chief families of Hy-Many, Mac Eochada or Keogh, O'Madden, O'Neachtain or Naghten, O'Maeilalaidh or Lally, Mac Aedhagain or Egan, and Mac Cnaimhin or Mac Nevin, held certain hereditary offices under the head of the district ; and one of the most valuable portions of the document before us is that which gives the details of the singular Celtic government and laws of " O'Kelly's Country," before the coming of the stranger. Of the many eminent men sprung from the chief family of this district, we may mention Colonel Charles O'Kelly, a distinguished officer, and author of the "*Macariæ excidium*" noticed in the present paper. Sir William O'Kelly, of Aughrim, who was appointed in 1699, by the Emperor Leopold, to the chairs of Philosophy and History, and chosen by the Austrian states, as head of their new College at Vienna ; Count Palatine, King-at-arms, and Poet-Laureat, to three successive Emperors. Baron O'Kelly, of the branch of Lisgallen, was Major-General under the famous Marshal Count Daun, at whose victory over Frederick the Great of Prussia, on 18th June, 1757, in the battle of Cotchemitz, or Kolin, the Lish Major-General was selected by the Austrian Marshal, to carry the account of his success to Vienna.[7] Count O'Kelly of Aughrim, " ancien employé du Conseil Suprême de Noblesse du Royaume des Pays Bas," has displayed much elegant erudition in his " *Essai historique sur l'Irlande*," published at Brussels, in 1837.

The family of Lally de Tollendal,[8] so celebrated in modern history, descended from the old warlike sept of O'Maeilalaidh (*O'Mullally*), of Hy-Many, and took its title from the castle of Tolendal (*Tulach na Dala*, or *The Hill of the Meeting*), four miles from Tuam. That enlightened philanthropist, the Rev. Samuel Madden, founder of the Royal Dublin Society, and of the " Madden Premiums," for the encouragement of learning in the University of Dublin, and " whose name," said Dr. Johnson, " Ireland ought to honour," is supposed to have also descended from one of, the old tribes of " O'Kelly's country." He was, indeed, a worthy representative of Owen O'Madden, head of the tribe in the fourteenth century, and who, according to the old Irish chronicler, was famed for " the splendour of his hospitality to the great and the humble, for there was not a house which the English chieftains wished more to frequent than the house of Owen, from their knowledge alike of his truth and hospitality, and from the splendour of his mansion to receive them ; for this fair prince erected for a habitation a strong castle of stone and fine timber, the like of which had not been erected by any sub-chief in Erin. He also repaired the churches of the country in general, and he taught truth to its chieftains, and kept his people from treachery and fratricide, and checked their evil customs and dissensions, and taught charity and humanity in his goodly districts."

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The present baronies of Carra, Erris, and Tirawly, in the County of Mayo, and the barony of Tireragh, in the County of Sligo, were formerly known as *Tir Fhiachrach* or Tireragh,[9] signifying the Land of the Sons of Fiachra, who was king of Connacht in the fourth century.

This territory was originally possessed by the clans of O'Dowda, O'Shaughnessy, O'Clerigh, and Mac Firbis. The two latter families were the hereditary antiquarians and historians of the district, and to their labours we are indebted for the preservation of many of our most important historical documents.

The O'Dowdas, who take that name from their ancestor, *Dubhda*, signifying literally " *the Dark Hero*" were the chiefs of Tireragh ; and have been ever distinguished by their gigantic stature and intrepidity. In the last century, members of this family were, for their eminent military services abroad, advanced to the rank of nobles, in Venice and in Germany. The

present representatives of the clan are Tadhg or Thaddieus O'Dowda, Esq., of Bunnyconnelan, in the county of Mayo, and Robert O'Dowda, Esq., Registrar of the Supreme Court of Calcutta.

The clan of O'Shaughnessy, in old times, held extensive possessions at and near Gort. A Latin author of the last century, speaking of them, says — "Little must he know of Ireland who hath not heard of the antiquity, grandeur, and loyalty of this great family." Descended from Guaire,[10] surnamed the "hospitable," king of Connacht in the seventh century, they were ever remarkable for their munificence and liberality. A writer who travelled through Ireland and the Continent, in the times of Charles the First, tells us, that the O'Shaughnessys then excelled in elegant hospitality all the nobility of Connacht, with the sole exception of the Marquis of ClanRicard. The lands of the O'Shaughnessys, forfeited in consequence of their attachment to the cause of King James the Second, were granted, for a term of years, by William III., to Sir Thomas Prendergast, whose character has been depicted, by Swift,[11] in the darkest colours, as a sordid betrayer of his friends, and a relentless persecutor of the Clergy of the Established Church. Owing to this loss, William O'Shaughnessy entered the French service, where he died in 1744, having attained to the rank of Colonel. On his death, his cousin, Colman O'Shaughnessy, titular Bishop of Ossory, essayed at law to recover the property of his ancestors. The suit was continued by his brother Robuck,[12] whose son Joseph, assisted by his relatives, took forcible possession of the mansion-house of Gort ; on which occasion the bells of Athenry and of Galway were rung for joy. The whole clan believed that the strangers were defeated ; and the Irish poets of the locality sung that the rightful heir was restored, and that the old splendour of the O'Shaughnessys was about to be renewed in the halls of their fathers. This triumph was, however, but of short duration. All the efforts of the O'Shaughnessys were rendered abortive by the influence of Prendergast's representatives, who re-obtained possession ; and are said, for carrying on their suit, to have borrowed eight thousand pounds from Lord Chancellor Mansfield, which sum was charged on, and paid by, the estate. Having been thus stripped of their inheritance, the old clan of O'Shaughnessy sunk into obscurity. A few months ago, the Gort property was wrested from its late proprietors by the " Incumbered Estates Commission," which is effectively fulfilling the predictions of the Irish Jacobite poets, who never ceased to sing " that Providence would only suffer the foreign churls, who had usurped the lands of the old English and of the noble Gaels of Erin, to hold their white mansions transiently." [13]

To the O'Clerighs we owe many valuable Irish historical compilations, one of the most important of which is the work known as " The Annals of the Four-Masters," so called from the number of antiquarians engaged in its production. This great body of annals, the most complete of which any northern European country can boast, is the only work extant which furnishes us with the history of the great Celtic tribes or families who, from the most remote times until the dissolution of the last remnant of the clan system, in the seventeenth century, constituted the old Irish nation — the vestiges of whose ancient greatness are still preserved in the names of almost every hill, river, and townland in our country.

The family of Mac Firbis of Tireragh did infinite service to Celtic literature by their collections of ancient legal and historical documents, the most important of which are, the *Leabhar Buidhe*, or " Yellow Book," the " Great Book of Leacan," or Lacken, and the " Book of Mac Firbis," copies of which invaluable manuscripts are now in the splendid library of the Royal Irish Academy. This race of hereditary historians became extinct in 1670, by the murder of Duaid Mac Firbis, at Dun-Flin, in Sligo. He was the author of the account of Tireragh, printed by the Irish Archæological Society, and of many other unpublished works, which show how deservedly he has been styled the most learned Irish antiquary of his time. One of the most interesting portions of the volume before us is that which treats of the ancient manner of inaugurating the Irish Chieftains, a subject hitherto involved in the greatest obscurity. The

editor has, however, in his appendix, brought together all the historic evidence bearing on this curious point,[14] and fully succeeded in giving us a view of the strange ceremonies performed on the occasion of electing a Chief: who, in times of peace, was to govern the tribe according to the laws of the *Brehons*, and under whose satin banner the clansmen were bound to march to the field of battle, when “ their own danger and the fear for their possessions” drove “ the noble tribes of sharp-spears ” to take up arms for the “ fertile, warm, music-loving old land of Erin.”[15]

Roderic O’Flaherty, “ to whom,” says the venerable Charles O’Conor, “ this kingdom cannot too much express its obligations,” is known to the learned world by his Latin volume, entitled “ *Ogygia, seu Rerum Hibernicanim Chronologia,*” published in 1685, and dedicated to James, Duke of York. Written in an elegant and vigorous classic style, the only work of its time which gives accurate information relative to the ancient history of Ireland, compiled from original manuscripts, and exhibiting an intimate acquaintance with the writers of ancient and modern ages, this book soon acquired a considerable reputation, and is quoted by almost every foreign author who treats of early Irish history. Dr. Smith, in his catalogue of the Cotton Library, commended our author for his learning and accuracy ; as did also that famous scholar, Edward Lhuyd, in the preface to his “ *Archæologia.*” Our ablest antiquarians since that time have admitted that, in it, he has given “ secure anchorage” to Irish history. “ He has settled the chronology of the Christian ages in Ireland with the greatest accuracy ; and even that of Scotland so precisely, that he may justly be esteemed the first chronologer of the affairs of that kingdom.” Stripped of his property by the Cromwellians, and only able to recover five hundred acres of his vast estate, after the Restoration, O’Flaherty applied the greater part of his time to the study of the history of his country. He was, however, fortunate enough to possess the intimate friendship of Mac Firbis and Dr. John Lynch, the two most eminent Irish antiquarians of the seventeenth century.

It is much to be regretted that the manuscript of the “ *Ogygia Christiana,*” or annals of Ireland from the reception of Christianity, and on which O’Flaherty expended much time and labour, should have been lost. It may, we trust, be yet brought to light — a hope which is strengthened by the recollection that it was only in the middle of the last century his “ *Vindication of the Ogygia*” was recovered, and published by O’Conor. The work under our consideration at present is O’Flaherty’s description of H-Iar, or West Counacht,[16] first published by the Irish Archæological Society, and supposed to be one of the many similar chorographical treatises compiled late in the seventeenth century, for the illustration of Sir William Petty’s Survey of Ireland. The contents of this document may be described as follows : —

“ After a general view of the boundaries, extent, and baronies of H-Iar Connacht, the author defines its borders, beginning with Loch Measg (Mask), in the north of the barony of Ross, and proceeding by the eastern limits, towards the south, including Loch Orbsen (Corrib), he turns to the west by the bay of Galway, and thence continues northward, along the shores of the Atlantic, to the Killary harbour, which flows inland, in the direction of Loch Measg, where he began. A general description is then given of the state and appearance of the interior ; its mountains, mines, woods, soil, rivers, and lakes; the bays and harbours round the coast; the productions of the country, as fish, fowl, beasts, &c. ; the ruins of ancient churches, chapels, and other religious places ; and finally, the natural disposition of the natives. After which the two great lakes, Measg and Orbsen, with some of the islands in the latter, are particularly described ; the river, town, and bay of Galway; the half barony of Ross, the barony of Moycullen, the three islands of Aran, and the barony of Ballynahinch, which completes the district.”

The principal tribe at an early period in Connacht, was that of the *Ui Flaithbheartaigh* or sons of Flaherty, said to descend from Duach, the Pagan King of Connacht, in the third

century, who was surnamed *Teangumha*, from the dulcet tones of his voice. “For,” says the old Irish chronicler, “the music of the harp was not sweeter than the sound of his words.” In the ninth century, and for long after, this clan dwelt to the east of the great lake Orbsen, or Loch Corrib, on the fertile plains of Moy Seola, now forming the barony of Clare, but which anciently included the district surrounding the present town of Galway. Here they continued to dwell, despite the hostile incursions of the surrounding septs, until the thirteenth century, when, having been driven out by the O’Conors and De Burghs, they crossed Loch Orbsen, and took possession of the districts extending from the western banks of that lake to the shores of the Atlantic, and to which the name of H-Iar, or West Connacht, has been in after ages exclusively applied. There, in course of time, they acquired greater power than they had ever attained in their ancient inheritance.[17] Separated from the rest of the kingdom in their peninsulated, and then almost inaccessible district, they interfered but little in the external transactions of the province, and lived on terms of amity and united defence with their neighbours, the ancient clan *Maille*, or O’Malleys.

“Until late in the sixteenth century,” says the editor, “the English knew as little of Iar-Connacht, or its people, as did their fore-fathers, in the days of Sir John Maundevyle, of the lands of Prestre John, or the men of Inde.” Leonard, Lord Gray, towards the end of the reign of Henry VIII, was the first Deputy of Ireland who ventured to approach these western regions. With him Hugh O’Flaherty entered into a compact to pay an annual sum to the king of one hundred shillings and one hundred pence, and to furnish, when required, forty well-armed kerns. In the reign of Elizabeth, Murrough *na d-tuagh*, or “of the battle-axes,” was appointed by the English as head of the O’Flahertys. His clansmen, however, became alienated from him for joining “the Queen of the strangers,” and presuming, under pretence of her authority, which they despised, to claim power over Donall, surnamed *Cron*, or the swarthy O’Flaherty, the legitimate chief of the tribe, whom they all acknowledged. The “Queen’s O’Flaherty” continued to be of considerable importance for some time, and received the honour of knighthood, to which it was contemplated to add the further dignity of a peerage ; but, having lost all influence with his countrymen, by his connection with the foreigners, he was allowed to sink into obscurity, without receiving the promised ennoblement. In the wars of 1642, the O’Flahertys joined the rest of their countrymen in the royal or national cause, and consequent forfeitures deprived them of their ancient property. In the seventeenth century, the entire territory of West Connacht was confiscated, and such of the O’Flahertys as survived war and famine were thrown landless on the world. The country was parcelled out, and after the Restoration was granted to several patentees. The principal of these were the Earl of Clan-Ricard, Richard Martin of Dangan, John Browne, ancestor of the Marquis of Sligo, the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, the Archbishop of Tuam, Sir George Bingham, of Castlebar, several descendants of the wealthy burghers of Galway, and others. The most extensive of these grantees was Richard Martin, Esq., “a ranke Papiste ;” but, so far as the acquisition of property was concerned, one of the most remarkable men of his time. He joined, or rather was obliged to join, the Irish army of James II., in which he was appointed captain of foot ; he afterwards submitted to William III., and obtained a free and general pardon.

“In conclusion,” says the editor, “it may be observed, that although West-Connacht, which equals in size some of our Irish counties, was wrested from the O’Flahertys, and transferred to new masters in the seventeenth century, it remains to this day, with all its natural advantages, one of the least improved and least productive portions of the same extent in Ireland. Hence the poet has sarcastically pointed to

“ ‘The houseless wilds of Connamara.’ ”

We have thus essayed to give an account of the works published by the Irish Archæological Society; but, as we before stated, the limits of this paper can only be expected to furnish a

brief and compendious view of their invaluable contents. It may, however, serve to indicate where precise and accurate information is to be found on particular portions of Irish history ; and if we succeed in awakening a desire for the study of their country's literature amongst those who have hitherto been strangers to it, our object will be fully attained. Still, it must be recollected that the Society's books are not intended to be "*popular*," in the general acceptation of that term ; such an idea is incompatible with the production of historic materials. These volumes form the foundation on which the future writer will rear the superstructure of a great national history ; and we hope henceforth to see our countrymen contributing to the production of such a work, by assisting in the preservation of the monuments left by their fathers, instead of seconding the efforts of ephemeral and delusive political projectors. Far, however, be it from us to advocate the study of this branch of self-knowledge to the exclusion of any other. But, we would have Irishmen to remember that it was not by the cultivation of the histories and antiquities of distant countries, that the author of "*Waverley*" raised "*Caledonia stern and wild*," into the land of tourists, and the favorite resort of Royalty. Nor was it by the study of a foreign literature that the thoughtful-souled Goethe, and the many-gifted Schiller, have made their German fatherland world-famous and illustrious. The mountain hamlet of Arquà, in Lombardy, is not now visited as the resting place of the Latin epic poet, but as the shrine which contains the relics of the Petrarca,

“ Whos rethorike swete
Enlumined all Itaille of poetrie.”[18]

It was fortunate for the fame of the great Florentine, that the good monks of the monastery, founded by the Irish St. Columbanus, at Bobbio, persuaded him to compose his "*Divina Commedia*," in the "*lingua volgare*" of his own country — a decision which influenced the fate of Italian literature, and rendered the lover of Beatrice Portinari immortal and revered as one

— “ Who, in times
Dark and untaught, began with charming verse,
To tame the rudeness of his native land.”[19]

The most unprejudiced critics have expressed their conviction, that the Irish melodies of "*the sweetest lyrist of our saddest wrongs*" will outlive his more elaborate "*works on distant countries* ; although the latter are replete with all the graces of the most exquisite poetry, and all the fascinating splendours of Oriental romance.

If we feel a proud satisfaction in contemplating the goodly volumes issued by the Irish Archæological Society, and which must be regarded as so many "*chartæ periturae*," rescued from almost inevitable decay and oblivion, let the honor be given to those disinterested and enlightened men, who, "*unactuated by antiquarian pedantry, and solely instigated by a sincere desire to do their duty in a cause of national interest and importance*," have organized and carried out their noble design of creating and fostering a native Irish literature. Despite almost insurmountable obstacles, and even at a time when our country was nearly reduced to the fearful state in which it was, when the historian of Elizabeth tells us, that, by the evil policy of bad ministers, "*little was left in Ireland for Her Majesty to reign over but ashes and carcasses*," and when "*the southern province seemed totally depopulated, and, except within the cities, exhibited a hideous scene of famine and desolation*."

It is scarcely possible to exaggerate the good which, in a country circumstanced like Ireland, is to be derived from historical research. Truth, we know, is powerful at all times, whilst its perversion is ever attended with the most disastrous consequences. The falsification of history has hitherto been, perhaps, the most formidable weapon in the armoury of the political demagogue. The publication of our true annals will totally deprive the mob-orator

and the factious journalist of their strongest hold on the passions of an irascible and imaginative race, easily excited by exaggerated and one-sided representations of former events. Irishmen will learn, from their own history, that they have been too much the victims of misguiding speculators and trading politicians ; and they will find that education and industry are the only true and lasting sources of national prosperity and greatness.

[1] Récits des temps Mérovingiens.

[2] The attachment of the Irish to their native language is very remarkable; we learn from a manuscript cited by Dr. Leland, sometime Fellow of the University of Dublin, that when, in former times, any of the clans were unable to withstand the hostile powers of the invaders, they used to claim the assistance of their neighbouring tribes, “ for the sake of the old tongue of the Gaels of Erin ;” an argument which never failed to elicit the desired reinforcements. It is a curious historical fact, that the Irish troops, who principally contributed to save the town of Louvain, in 1635, from the tremendous assault of the great French army under Marshals Chatillon and De Brezé, were, in that bloody contest, marshalled and commanded in the military terms which the language of their country supplied. A. Latin writer of the seventeenth century, who was conversant with most of the European tongues, tells us that the Irish language “ surpasseth in gravity the Spanish, in elegance the Italian, in colloquial charms the French, it equals, if it does not surpass, the German itself in inspiring terror. From the lips of the Irish preacher it is a bolt to arrest the evil-doer in the career of guilt, and to allure by its soft and insinuating tones to the paths of virtue. The witticism, the jest, and the epigram it expresses briefly; and, in the hands of the poet, it is so pliant and flexible, that the ‘ *Uraiceacht na n-eigeas*,’ or ‘ Precepts of the Poets,’ lay down rules for more than a hundred different kinds of metre ; so that in the opinion of men who are well acquainted with several languages, Irish poetry does not yield, either in variety, construction, or polish of its metres, to the poetry of any nation in Europe. Spenser himself corroborates this opinion, when he says : ‘ I have caused divers of Irish poems to be translated unto me, that I might understand them, and surely they savoured of sweet wit and good invention ; they are sprinkled with some pretty flowers of natural device, which gave good grace and comeliness to them.’” To maintain the manners and traditions of their fathers, against the efforts of the invaders, the Irish, says Augustin Thierry, “ made for themselves monuments which neither steel nor fire could destroy ; they had recourse to the art of singing, in which they gloried in excelling, and which in the times of independence had been their pride and pleasure. The bards and minstrels became the keepers of the records of the nation. Wandering from village to village, they carried to every hearth memoirs of ancient Erin ; they studied to render them agreeable to all tastes and all ages ; they had war songs for the men, love ditties for the women, and marvellous tales for the children of the house. Every mansion preserved two harps ever ready for travellers, and he who could best celebrate the liberty of former times, the glory of patriots, and the grandeur of their cause, was rewarded by a more lavish hospitality. The kings of England endeavoured more than once to strike a blow at Ireland in this last refuge of its regrets and hopes ; the wandering poets were persecuted, banished, delivered up to tortures and death ; but violence only served to irritate indomitable wills ; the art of singing and of poetry had its martyrs like religion ; and the remembrances, the destruction of which was desired, were increased by the feeling of how much they cost them to preserve.”

In allusion to those penal times, we find the following lines in a late anonymous writer :-

“ Ah, God is good and nature strong— they let not thus decay
 The seeds that deep in Irish breasts of Irish feeling lay ;
 Still sun and rain made emerald green the loveliest fields on earth,
 And gave the type of deathless hope, the little shamrock, birth ;
 Still crouching ’neath the sheltering hedge, or stretched on mountain fern,
 The teacher and his pupils met, *feloniously*— to learn :
 Still round the peasant’s heart of hearts his darling music twined,
 A fount of Irish sobs or smiles in every note enshrined ;
 And still beside the smouldering turf were fond traditions told
 Of heavenly saints and princely chiefs — the power and faith of old.”

The native poets delighted to revile

—“ the stranger’s tongue upborne by law.
Whose phrase uncouth distorts the Gaelic jaw,”

and found endless pleasure in eulogizing their own language. As an illustration of this we may quote a stanza from one of the poems of Donogh O’Mahony “ the blind,” a Munster bard of the last century : —

*“ As iseadh ba bhlasda, ba cneasda, bafhior-liomhtha,
Ba oilte, ba aite, ba thapadh a m-brigh bin ghuib ;
Ba shnaighte, ba shnasghlaine racaireachd gaois-laoithe,
Ni h-ionan’s glafairneach mhallaighthe ar bh-fior-naimhde.”*

“ Unlike the jargon of our foreign foe.
On raptur’d ear it pours its copious flow ;
Most feeling, mild, polite, and polish’d tongue,
That learned sage e’er spoke or poet sung.”

Mr. Christopher Anderson, a learned Scotch author, in his recently published work on the “ Native Irish,” labours to prove that the neglect of the Irish language has been alike injurious to the progress of English and that of general knowledge. Speaking of the natives, he says, “ the Irish is still the language of their hearts, and even of the best part of their understanding. In it they still continue to express their joy or sorrow ; for this is the language which is associated with their earliest recollections. In it their mothers hushed them to rest in the days of their infancy ; and in youth, if they loved music, they were charmed with the numbers of the ‘ Culan,’ or of ‘Erin go Bragh.’” Bopp, Grimm, Diefenbach, and other profound German philologists, have borne testimony to the special importance of the Irish language, as being the richest in its vocabulary and grammatical forms, at the same time that it possesses the most ancient and numerous records, of the nature of histories, laws, and poems ; and we may add, that the number of vocables in the Irish language exceeds 50,000.

[3] Duaid Mac Firbis, ob. 1670.

[4] *The Circuit of Ireland, by Muircheartach Mac Neill, Prince of Aileach ; a Poem, written in the year DCCCCXLII, by Cormacan Eigeas, Chief Poet of the North of Ireland : now for the first time printed ; with a Translation and Notes, by John O’Donovan.* Dublin : for the Irish Archæological Society. 1841.

[5] One of the most important of the ancient Irish historic tales is the “ *Tain bo Cuailgne*,” or “ Narration of the Cattle-spoil of Collon,” in the present County of Louth. This document, according to Mr. Curry, is as old as the seventh century, as is evident from the character of the language, manners, customs, and habits of the people mentioned in it ; and it contains no reference whatever to anything Christian. A fine copy of this tract is preserved in the “ *Leabhar na h-Uidhre*,” or the “ Book of the Dun Cow,” now in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy. This “ Book” was written early in the twelfth century ; the writer of it died in the year 1106, and he only compiled it from other works, which he quotes ; as, for instance, the “ Book of Drom Sneacht,” compiled before A.D. 400 ; the “ *Leabhar Buidhe*” or “ Yellow Book of Slane ;” the “ Book of Glengiven,” and others. The “ Book of the Dun Cow,” (so called, because the vellum on which part of it is written was made from the hide of the *Dun Cow* of St.Ciaran of Clonmacnois,) passed into the possession of the clan of O’Donel of Donegal. There is a memorandum in the book itself, written in the year 1345, which says that it was then in the hands of the O’Conor of Sligo, and that he had obtained it in ransom for John O’Docharty, chieftain of Ardmire, in the County of Donegal, whom he had taken prisoner. There is also a subsequent entry, written in 1470, which says — “ Pray for Hugh O’Donnel, who forcibly took this book from the men of Connacht, after they had held it during the reigns of ten Kings of Sligo.” “ It is much to be lamented,” says the late erudite George Ellis, “ that the Irish antiquaries should neglect to give us a series of their ancient popular tales, with a simple and literal English translation.” Such a publication would, we may observe, tend to throw light on the history of European romantic fiction, the origin of which has been hitherto conjecturally, and, as it is admitted, without sufficient foundation, ascribed by Mallet and Percy to the Danes, and by Salmasius and Warton to the Saracens. Documents are, however, preserved, written at a very remote period, which tell us that “ the four higher orders of the Irish poets,

namely, the *Ollamh, Anruth, Cli, and Cano*, were obliged to have seven times fifty *chief stories*, and twice fifty *sub-stories*, to repeat for kings and chieftains." The subjects of the chief stories were demolitions, cattle-spoils, courtships, battles, caves, voyages, tragedies, feasts, sieges, adventures, elopements and plunders. The particular titles of these tales are given in a vellum manuscript of the twelfth century, now in the Library of the University of Dublin. The foreign philologists, it may be added, have been unable satisfactorily to decide on the etymon of the name of the species of romance called *lai*, which, according to Le Grand, differed from the "Fabliaux," in being interspersed with musical interludes. This word seems, however, to correspond exactly with the Celtic noun *laoi* (pronounced *lee*), which is applied by the native Irish to compositions similar to those referred to by the French writer.

- [6] *The Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many, commonly called O'Kelly's Country. Now first published from the Book of Lecan, a Manuscript in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy ; with a Translation and Notes, and a Map of Hy-Many, by John O'Donovan.* Dublin : for the Irish Archaeol. Society. 1843.
- [7] This eminent officer was afterwards advanced to the rank of Lieutenant- General, and died in 1767- His wife, we may here remark, was the Countess de Marcolini, a favorite of, and maid of honor to, the Empress Maria Theresa ; her only daughter, Mademoiselle O'Kelly, was one of the youthful companions of, or in other words, brought up with, the daughter of the empress, Marie Antoinette (afterwards Queen of France), and finally married her own cousin, le Comte de Marcolini. As a curious specimen of minute investigation and research, we would desire to refer the reader to Note ii. of Mr. O'Callaghan's "Macarice Excidium," in which a list is given of all the officers of the name of O'Kelly in the army of King James.
- [8] The head of this family, an officer in the Irish army of King James II. retired to France after the Capitulation of Limerick. His son, the Count Lally de Tollendal, became Viceroy of India, and Grand Cross of the Order of Saint Esprit. In 1760 he maintained for eight months the town of Pondicherry against the English, under their gallant Irish General, Sir Eyre Coote, to whom he capitulated, after exerting every expedient which skill or valour could suggest. In 1766, the Count de Tollendal was, by an infamous and illegal arret, hurried to the scaffold, with more than savage barbarity. His son, who at that period was studying, under the name of Trophime, at the College d' Harcourt, was only acquainted with the secret of his birth at the very moment he was about to be deprived of his parent. On this painful subject he expresses himself as follows: — " Je n'ai appris le nom de ma mere que plus de quatre ans apres l' avoir perdue, celui de mon pere, qu' un seul jour avant de le perdre ; j'ai couru pour lui porter mon premier hommage et mon eternel adieu, pour lui faire entendre au moins la voix d'un fils parmi les cris de ses bour- reaux, pour l'embrasser du moins sur l' echafaud ou il allait perir. J'ai couru vainement — on avait, hate l'instant. Je n'ai plus trouve mon pere ; je n'ai vu que la trace de son sang." After this dreadful event young Lally continued for some time to pursue his studies at the same college, under the inspection of his cousin. Mademoiselle Dillon. Having conceived the determination to obtain the reversal of his father's attainder, he unceasingly pursued that object, and finally succeeded. His eloquence, filial piety, and the energy of his pleadings, having interested in his favour the most illustrious persons of his time, and amongst the rest Voltaire, who receiving the intelligence of his friend's success, became reanimated for an instant, on the bed of death, and wrote the following billet to Lally : — " Le mourant ressuscite en apprenant cette grande nouvelle : il embrasse bien tendrement M. de Lally ; il voit que le roi est le defenseur de la justice, il mourra content 26 Mai, 1778." These were the last lines ever penned by the great French author, " who," says a late writer, " was always a friend to virtue in distress."

Lally Tollendal is regarded as one of the early and rational friends of freedom in France. Endeavouring to arrest the atrocities of the Revolution, in preparing which he had been

no inconsiderable actor, he did not hesitate to attack Mirabeau himself, to whom he addressed that memorable sentence — “ On peut avoir de l’esprit de grandes idées, et être un tyran.” We will not here further pursue the history of this illustrious descendant of the old Irish clan of the “ O’Muliallys of the heavy blows.” He died in 1830, a Peer of France and Member of the Royal French Academy, of which, we are told, he was a distinguished ornament, both from the high merit of his numerous literary productions, as well as from his splendid oratorical talents.

[9] *The Genealogies, Tribes, and Customs of Hy-Fiachrach, commonly called O’Dowda’s Country. Now first published, from the Book of Lecan, in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy, and from the Genealogical MS. of Duaid Mac Firbis, in the library of Lord Roden ; with a Translation and Notes, and a Map of Hy-Fiachrach, by John O’Donovan.* Dublin ; for the I. A. S. 1844.

[10] “ *Cofial le Guaire,*” “ Hospitable as Guaire,” is a proverb in constant use among the Irish peasantry.

[11] See the “ Legion Club.”

[12] This name is a corruption of the Irish *Reahhach*, which is almost synonymous with *Dathi*, and signifies one expert in feats of arms.

[13] This sentiment pervades all the Irish Jacobite poems. The following stanza is taken from “ The Vision of Conor O’Riordan,” written about 1760, to the beautiful Munster air of “ *An Spealadoir,*” or “ The Mower :”

“ A woeful day, a dismal fate,
Will overtake your foes,
Grey hairs, the curses of deep hate,
And sickness, and all woes !
Death will bestride them in the night —
Their every hope shall meet with blight,
And God will put to utter flight
Their long-enjoyed repose !”

For further illustrations of this feeling among the native Irish, and which became extinct after the relaxation of the Penal Code, in 1793, the reader is referred to “ *The Poets and Poetry of Munster,*” by J. O’Daly. 12mo. Dublin: 1850.

[14] The following poetical version of that part of the ... work which relates to the inauguration of the Chief of the O’Neills, at the rath of Tulach Og (*the Hill of the Youths*), now Tullyhawk, in Tyrone, is from the pen of the late Mr. T. Davis, of Dublin :—

“ Come, look on the pomp when they ‘ make an O’Neill ;’
The muster of dynasts — O’Hagan, O’Sheil,
O’Cahan, O’Hanlon, O’Breslin, and all,
From gentle Ard Uladh to rude Donegal :
Saint Patrick’s successor, with bishops thirteen.
And ollavs, and brehons, and minstrels are seen.
Round Tulach Og Rath, like bees in the spring,
All swarming to honor a ‘ True Irish King.’

“ Unsandalled he stands on the foot-dinted rock.
Like a ‘ pillar-stone’ fixed against every shock.
Round, round is the Rath, on a far-seeing hill ;
Like his blemishless honor and vigilant will.
The grey-beards are telling how chiefs by the score
Have been crowned on the ‘ Rath of the Kings’ heretofore ;
While, crowded, yet ordered, within its green ring,
Are the dynasts and priests, round the ‘ True Irish King’ !”

“ The chronicler read him the laws of the clan,
And pledged him to bide by their blessing and ban ;
His *sgian* and his sword are unbuckled, to show
That they only were meant for a foreigner foe ;
A white willow wand has been put in his hand —
A type of pure, upright, and gentle command —
While hierarchs are blessing, the shpper they fling,
And O’Cahan proclaims him ‘ A True Irish King.’

“ Thrice looked he to heaven, with thanks and with prayer —
Thrice looked to his borders with sentinel stare —
To the waves of Loch Neagh, the heights of Straban ;
And thrice on his allies, and thrice on his clan
One clash on their bucklers ! — one more ! — they are still —
What means the deep pause on the crest of the hill ?
Why gaze they above him? — a war-eagle’s wing !
‘ Tis an omen!— Hurrah ! for the ‘ True Irish King.’

“ God aid him! God save him!— and smile on his reign—
The terror of England— the ally of Spain.
May his sword be triumphant o’er Sassanach arts !
Be his throne ever girt by strong hands and true hearts !
May the course of his conquest run on till he see
The flag of Plantagenet sink in the sea !
May minstrels for ever his victories sing.
And saints make the bed of the ‘ True Irish King!’”

[15] Fearfeasa O Cainte, Poeta Hibern. Sæc xvii.

[16] *Chorographical Description of West or H-Iar Connacht, written A.D. 1684, by Roderic O’Flaherty, author of the “ Ogygia.” Edited, from a M.S. in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, with Notes and Illustrations, by James Hardiman, M.R.I.A. Dublin : for the I. A. S. 1846.*

[17] The clan of O’Halloran was intimately connected with that of O’Flaherty, and migrated with it to Iar-Connacht. From this family Sylvester O’Halloran, the eminent Limerick surgeon, and author of several works on Irish history, is erroneously supposed to have descended. We may add that all the Blakes of Galway are said to descend from Richard Caddie, surnamed *Niger* or *Blacke*, Sheriff of Connacht in 1306, and Bailiff of Galway under Richard De Burgo, the “ *Red Earl* ” of Ulster, in 1312.

[18] Chaucer ; Prologue to the “ Clerkes Tale.”

[19] Akenside.

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