

“ idlact ocus druidect,” that is, of idolatry and druidism

Ireland's fairy lore

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The Irish called Scoti and Ireland Scotia. Caledonia called Scotia Minor. Irish and Erse languages. Landing of the Milesians in Ireland. Amergins decision.

ON page 175 of the fifth volume of the publications of the long since defunct Ossianic Society, we find Porphyry, the platonic philosopher; Claudian, the Latin poet of the fourth century ; Ethicus, the Cosmographer ; Saint Prosper, who died A.D. 466 ; Orosius, the Spanish historian, who flourished in the beginning of the fifth century ; Gildas Britanicus in the sixth century, and Saint Isidore and Vener-able Bede in the seventh ; and Saint Donatus, Bishop of Fiesoli who died A.D. 840, all referred to as calling the Irish Scoti and Ireland Scotia, or saying, as Ethicus did, that Ireland was inhabited by the Scoti.

And we know from Roden's " Insel der Heiligen" that the Irish were called Scots even as late as the fifteenth century, in several cities of Germany, Belgium, France and Switzerland where " Schottenkloester" or Irish monasteries had been founded, and were still largely supplied with religious from Ireland. And of course we know very well that the great John Duns Scotus, and the lesser lights Scotus Erigena and Marianus Scotus were so called in the Middle Ages to distinguish their nationality.

It was about the eleventh century, according to many eminent authorities, that the name became fixed on Scotland, or Caledonia, which when, and for a long time after, was known as Scotia Minor, on account of the predominant influence obtained by Ireland there through her colonies.

At that time the Gaelic language of Scotland and the Gaelic of Ireland were identical. Now the Erse, or Scotch, is a dialect of the Irish. And, anterior to that time, the Scotch Gaelic has no literature of its own as distinct from the ancient Irish literature.

The Milesians, or original Scots, had much trouble in effecting a landing in Ireland. Coming from Spain where they had been for ages, they approached the Irish coast, to find the magical arts of the Tuatha De Danaan in full operation to prevent their landing. Now the island is made invisible; now it is seen, but only as a thin long ridge of land almost submerged; and, somehow, impossible to approach.

Finally, however, they were able to anchor their ships at the mouth of the river Slaney in B.C. 3505.

Ireland at the time was governed by three Tuatha De Danaan kings, MacCoill, MacCecht and Mac-Greine ; and their queens were respectively Eire, Fodla and Banba, each of whom gave her name to Ireland ; but the name, Eire, is that which sticks, to the present day. The other two names are beautiful, indeed, but have almost ever been relegated to the fields of romance and poetry.

The Milesians accomplished little or nothing from their location at the mouth of the Slaney. They were driven out to sea by a magical storm, and we next hear of them landing at Inver Skene or Kenmare Bay. They marched north to Drumcain, which was afterwards called Tara, met the three kings there and demanded that they surrender the sovereignty of Ireland or fight for it.

The De Danaan kings pretended to have been taken by surprise, and complained that that was not a fair and square way of waging war or demanding surrender. They wanted at least three days to consider whether they would give up the island and leave it, or submit to the Milesian yoke, or raise an army and give battle; and in the interval they wanted the invaders to leave the island altogether.

Amergin, one of the sons of Miled, and chief brehon and bard of the colony, was appealed to as to the justice of the claims of the De Danaan, and the appeal came from the De Danaan themselves. As we are getting this information from the introduction to Amergin's poems in the Books of Lecan and Ballymote, we prefer to give some of the dialogue.

"We," said MacCoill, son of Cearmad, "will abide by the decision of Amergin, your own brehon, and should he pronounce a false judgment it is certain that he will be killed by us."

So sure were they that injustice would not pass unpunished.

"Pronounce the judgment, Amergin," said Eber Donn, the Milesian.

"I will," said Amergin, "let them have the island."

"What direction shall we take?" said Eber Donn.

"We are to set out nine waves to sea," said Amergin.

"That," says the scribe, "was the first judgment pronounced by the Milesians in Ireland."

Amergin delivered this judgment in a poem of eight verses. By means of a gloss interlined by a later scribe, Owen Connellan of the Queen's College, Cork, about the middle of the last century, was able to translate or rather, as he himself expresses it, to interpret, this most interesting and curious relic of antiquity. Here is his translation :

"The men whom we found dwelling in the land, to them is possession due by right. It is, therefore, your duty to set out to sea over nine green waves; and if you shall be able to land again in spite of them, you are to engage them in battle, and I adjudge to you the land wherein you found them living. I adjudge to you the land in which you found them dwelling, by the right of battle. But although you may desire the land which these people possess, yet yours is the duty to show them justice. I forbid you from injustice to those you have found in the land, however you may desire to obtain it."

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Contest of Milesian valor with Danaan magical art. Bonn. Aranan. Milesians nine waves out to sea. Great storm raised. Digression to Amergin's poems and ancient Irish metre. Milesians, after several losses, land. Battles of Slieve Mish and Tailte.

THE Milesians were much disappointed at Amergin's decision. "If my advice were taken," said Donn, the son of Miled, "the matter would be decided by battle; for if it be in the power of the Druids of the Tuathe Da Danaan, we never shall be able to regain Erin."

The Milesians had no fear in open battle, but against Druidical enchantment they had misgivings about being able to land. It was a contest of valor against the resources of magical illusion and power.

"The Book of Ballymote" and the "Great Book of Lecan" give Amergin's poems, with an introduction. From the introduction we learn that "The Milesians then departed from Tara southward and arrived at Inver Fele (the mouth of the River Feal, or Cashin on the Shannon in the County of Kerry) and Inver Skena (the Bay of Kenmare) where their ships were at anchor, and they set out over nine waves to sea.

"The Druids and Files of Erin then chanted incantations, by which they raised such a storm as caused everything that was at the bottom of the sea to be raised to its surface, and by the violence of the storm the fleet was driven from the coast far westward to sea and was separated."

“ This is a Druidic wind” said Donn, the son of Miled.

“ It is,” responded Amergin, “ if it does not blow above the masthead.”

Whereupon Aranan, the youngest of the sons of Miled, went up the mast to ascertain the fact, but was thrown therefrom, and while in the act of falling he said that the wind did not prevail beyond the masthead.

He (Aranan) was the pilot of Donn’s ship and was the pupil of Amergin.

“ It was deceitful in our soothsayers,” said Donn, “ not to have prevented this magic wind.”

“ There was no deception,” replied Amergin, and standing up he said as follows :—

“ Ailim iat nereann,
Ermac muir motac,
Motac sliab sreatac,” etc.

The poem is in the Conaclone Versification, in which the last word of each line is the first word of the next. This metre seems to have been peculiar to ancient Ireland, and might easily seem to us to be a kind of verbal jugglery ; although it may have been justly regarded as highly artistic for the remote age to which it is ascribed.

As a matter of fact the ancient Irish bard was supposed to deliver his verses at very short notice, if not spontaneously, as we see Amergin doing here.

This poem of Amergin’s is a prayer that the Milesians may regain the land of Erin “ whose mountains are great and extensive ; whose streams are clear and numerous ; whose woods abound with various fruits ; whose rivers and waterfalls are large and beautiful ; whose lakes are broad and widely spread ; which abounds in fountains on elevated grounds.” “ May we gain power and dominion over its tribes,” he continues. “ May we have kings of our own ruling at Tara,” etc.

It is remarkable that the Milesians concluded that the storm that dispersed them was a magical one, because it did not blow above the masthead, because, as they thought, there was nothing to destroy above that point ; whereas if it were a natural tempest, it would fill the surrounding air without any regard to what it might, or might not, destroy. It is remarkable also that this piece of shrewdness is transmitted to us with such circumstantial detail through a period of perhaps 3000 years or more.

The Milesian fleet was wrecked along the rocky coast. Remnants of it landed in such widely separated places as the coast of Kerry and the mouth of the Boyne. Terrific battles were fought at Sleive Mish in Kerry and at Tailte in Meath. In both of them the Milesians were victorious. Although only three of the sons of Miled and a correspondingly reduced number of their people had landed they were able to overthrow the Tuatha De Danaan and take possession of the island.

The annalists give the year A.M. 3500 as the date of the first attempt of the Milesians to capture the island, and the year 3501 as the date of its subjugation ; so that there must have been about one year’s warfare. MacCoill, MacCeacht and MacGreine, the De Danaan kings who had governed Ireland in rotation, the period of the sovereignty of each being one year in his turn, were killed in the battles ; and what disposition more worthy of themselves could the chivalrous Milesians have made of the three queens Eire, Banba and Fola than to send them into the fairy mansions of the island they would not leave ?

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Amergin. The Gods. Amergin and Hesiod. The philosophy of Amergin's poems. Amergin's poetical prayer on landing in Ireland. De Jubainville's comments. An analogous Welsh poem. Scotus Erigena. O'Molloy on Conaclone. Amergin and St. Patrick.

BEFORE looking into the councils of the Tuatha De Danaan, after they were conquered by the Milesians, and noticing the plans they made for their future, it will be well to give a little more attention to the poems of Amergin, associated as these are with the very beginnings of the Milesian history of Ireland.

It was on the first of May the Milesians began their conquest. This day was sacred to Beltene. Beltene was one of the names of the god of death, the god who gave life and also took it away.

Amergin felt profoundly that his people's fight was against gods in the persons of the Tuatha De Danaan ; and his four extant poems derive all their force and character and tone from that conviction. He believes with Hesiod that matter precedes the gods, that they are not independent of it, that science or general knowledge which may have come from the gods may be used to overthrow them, that the great phenomena of visible nature are above them, and may also be turned against them.

He identifies science with its object, regards it as Being itself, of which the forces of nature and all sensible being are but visible manifestations. " Thus it is that the file, who is the visible embodiment of science in human form, is not only man but eagle, vulture, tree, plant, sword or spear."

Amergin glorifies this science by which he hopes to overthrow the gods ; and he identifies himself with it and with everything to which it is extended. When he speaks, he speaks for some undefined power back of all the gods. His philosophy is regarded as pantheistic and he speaks for God in all his poems.

In the poem or prayer he recited on first landing in Ireland, he says :

" I am the wind which blows over the sea;
I am the wave of the ocean ;
I am the murmur of the billows ;
I am the ox of the seven combats ;
I am the vulture upon the rock ;
I am a tear of the sun ;
I am the fairest of plants ;
I am a wild boar in valor ;
I am a salmon in the water ;
I am a lake in the plain ;

I am a word of science ;
I am the spear-point that gives battle ;
I am the God who creates in the head the fire (of
thought).
Who is it that enlightens the assembly on the mountain,
if not I ?
Who telleth the ages of the moon, if not I ?
Who showeth the place where the sun goes to rest, if
not I ?
Who can direct you to where the waters run clearest,
if not I ?
Who can bring the fish from its recesses in the sea,
as I can ?
Who can cause the fish to approach to the shore, as
I can ?

Who can change the hills, mountains or promontories,
as I can ?”

The phrases “ if not I” and “ as I can,” are supplied from explanatory glosses. The poet’s reasoning is something like this : “ God does all these things ; God is all these things; they are inseparable, I might say, indistinguishable from him; they are but the manifestations of him in action, they are identical with him, as I am ; if they are ascribable to him they are ascribable to me, because I am but one more external evidence of him.”

And then comes the higher, the special claim, when Amergin says : “ I am a word of science.” “ The file,” says De Jubainville, “ is the word of science, he is the God who gives to man the fire of thought ; and as science is not distinct from its object, as God and nature are but one, the being of the file is mingled with the winds and the waves, with wild animals and with the warrior’s arms.”

An analogous poem is found in a Welsh manuscript of the fourteenth century. It is ascribed to the poet Taliesin. Amergin says, “ I am a tear of the sun.” Taliesin says, “ I have been a tear in the air.” Amergin says, “ I am the vulture upon the rock.” The Welsh bard says, “ I have been an eagle ;” and so on, wherever Amergin says “ I am” the Welsh man says “ I have been,” thus substituting the idea of successive metamorphoses for what De Jubainville styles the vigorous pantheism of Irish philosophy.

If De Jubainville had said Celtic, and not Irish, in this connection we would be inclined to find no fault. But we have good reason to think that he regards the ancient Celtic pantheism as tainting Irish philosophy to a very undesirable extent even in early Christian times.

The particular poem of Amergin that we have been analyzing is not in Conaclone. O’Molloy, who wrote his *Grammatica Latino-Hibernica* in Rome, and published it there in 1677, tells us that Conaclone is the most difficult species of composition under the canopy of heaven.

Nevertheless, what depths of philosophy Amergin was able to cram into that sententious and monotonous metrical style ! Mere translation was not enough to develop the meaning of such verse ; it had to be interpreted in the light of every circumstance that threw, or could throw, any light on it.

Two other poems of Amergin are extant. In one of them, in Conaclone, already noticed, and beginning “ ailim iat n-Erend,” he invokes the earth and the sea, mountains, woods, rivers and lakes. It is an invocation addressed to Ireland deified.

In the other poem, not in Conaclone, the sea is mentioned first, but the earth is next referred to as a divinity that it would not be well to slight. He appeals to the “ fish-abounding sea,” “ to the fruitful earth,” “ to the irruption of fish,” “ to the fish under the waves,” and the object of the appeal, as we are left to gather from the circumstances and from the tenor of the poems, is to get all these forces to aid his people in their fight against the Tuatha De Danaan gods. His prayer is heard and the gods are overthrown.

Who can contemplate those appeals of Amergin, made at the very dawn of our history, without being reminded of the “ Lorica” of Saint Patrick, sung on his way to Tara ; perhaps, over a thousand years later on ?

Amergin appeals to the elements for aid. Saint Patrick appeals to Christ to protect him from the elements, and to turn all their powers and properties to his advantage.

How pathetic is the figure of Amergin, standing away back in the “ cloudland,” appealing to the forces that are anterior to all the gods, appealing over their shoulders to a higher power, and in the helplessness of heathenism confounding this power with visible nature and her forces and laws ! What could it all have been but the feeling away down in the depths of his soul that back of all these gods there was One in whose hands they were all but common clay!

From the old Celtic philosophy of Amergin, how easy is the transition to the true philosophy! The one is suggested in the other. This old Celtic philosophy was the kind that would yield at once to the “Kindly Light” of Christianity. It was made in the designs of Providence, a preparation for it.

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The Fairies. Banba, Fola and Eriu. Why Irish manuscript books named after places, etc. A manuscript really a library. Ireland's literature, in its preservation, an indication of Ireland's destiny. Ogham characters. Book of Ballymote. Banba, Fola and Eriu in succession ask each that the island should be named after her. Fate of Donn.

OUR readers may be curious by this time to know why the old Irish books or manuscripts, we have been citing, were called by such peculiar names. It was the habit of the old Irish writers or scribes to state four circumstances in particular about the books they were writing or copying. The copyist made no alteration in these circumstances, if he found them already stated in the work he was copying, but merely added his own name as scribe or compiler, with any new circumstances that had arisen in connection with the compilation and which he considered worthy of notice.

These circumstances were the place in which the book was written or compiled, the date of its compilation, the name of the author and the occasion or circumstances that led to its being undertaken. This continued to be the custom of those who wrote the Gaelic language, even down to the time of the Four Masters.

Sometimes compilations are named after the compilers as well as after the place. The “Annals” now known as the “Annals of Ulster” were formerly better known as the “Annals of Senait MacManus,” and the “Annals of the Four Masters” are sometimes called the “Annals of Donegal.”

These huge tomes or ‘Books’ are not confined to any one subject, but include a vast variety of subjects, having no connection with each other at all, beyond the fact that they are bound up in one great manuscript. They are thrown together promiscuously. You find a love story or a courtship, or a voyage or a vision in the same parchment with a pitched battle or a treatise on medicine or astronomy. The “Book” is really a library.

When one considers the patience and care with which these books were copied and re-copied and the high appreciation in which they were held, the thought becomes irresistible that Almighty God Himself had, by a special providence, decreed that Ireland should not be entirely divested of the internal evidence she bore of the mighty influence she was destined to wield in the civilization of the world.

The “Book of Ballymote” is peculiarly valuable as containing a grammatical tract and a key to the Ogham cypher-writing. It has also many translations and adaptations from the Greek and Roman classics, genealogies of saints and other hagiological and much biblical matter.

A book-collector named O'Donnell bought it from one of its last private owners, a man named McDonough. The price paid was 140 milch cows. McDonough parted with the book willingly. Never-theless he seems to have regretted having to part with it. Either that, or the scribe thought the price too high: for he says that “although the book is good, buying a book from McDonough is a purchase from a churl.”

The Gaelic text of this great book which belongs now to the Royal Irish Academy would make 2500 pages of such a work as the “Annals of the Four Masters,” large quarto.

“The Book of Lecan,” compiled by a member of the famous literary family of the MacFibris in the County Sligo in A.D. 1417, is very much like the “Book of Ballymote” in its contents. Nearly every one of these great collections includes a copy of the “Libur-Gabala,” or “Book of Invasions.”

In this latter, we find a more detailed account of Banba, Fola and Eriu, or Eire, as the word is now spelled. These were the Tuatha De Danaan goddess-queens. The Libur tells us that the Milesians had to fight against demons; and says that these demons were the Tuatha De Danaan.

Some copies of this book represent the contending forces as having fought the battle of Sleive Mish, in Kerry, on the occasion of the first landing of the Milesians, before the appearance at Tara and consequently before their temporary retirement from the island. While marching northward to Tara after this battle, we are told, they met first Queen Banba and she told them that if it was to conquer Ireland they had come, their expedition was not just.

“ It is for that indeed we came,” said Amergin.

“ Then,” said Banba, “ grant me at least one favor, that the island be called by my name.”

“ It shall be so,” said Amergin. But the island did not bear her name very long ; for proceeding a little farther, they met Fola and she asked the same favor and Amergin granted it.

Ireland did not long enjoy Fola’s name either ; for, at Usnech, the Central point of Ireland, they met Eire. She was the only one of the three who gave them a cordial greeting. “ Welcome, warriors,” said she, “ you are come from afar. This island will belong to you for all time, and from here to the farthest East there is none better ; no race will be so perfect as yours.” “ It is not to you,” cried Eber Dorm, the eldest of the sons of Miled, “ that we owe any thanks, but to our gods and our own prowess.” “ What I announce has no concern for you,” said Eire, “ you shall not enjoy this island; it will not belong to any descendants of yours.” She then begged that the island be called after her and Amergin granted the request.

After the grudging reception given the warriors by Banba and Fola it might appear surprising and even startling to find Eire giving them a cordial welcome. But, then, her name was to last forever, associated with them and with their destinies. In song and story it was to become one of the most beautiful names in the world. She welcomed the Milesians as her own, as the race over whom she was to be the presiding divinity.

As the Greeks gloried in the name of Hellenes, given them after their god, Hellen, so the Milesians gloried in the name of Eireanaig, taken from that De Danaan goddess away back in the mythological ages.

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Amergin ; his character and office ; Eire’s prophecy. Death of Banba, Fola and Eire. Lug and the games of Taillten. Practice of putting a term to the lives of the gods. Pagan stories have Christian redactions. “ Lir’s lonely daughter.” Paganism has left its mark on place names.

AMERGIN was the eldest son of Miled. He was the ollam, or man of all learning, as well as brehon, or judge and counsellor, to the whole colony. It is very likely that he was also their druid or priest. He was certainly their file or poet ; a kind of primeval poet-laureate, and in this capacity he incited them to battle by his songs, encouraged them by his appeals for the favor of the unseen powers, celebrated their prowess when they were victorious, and recited elegies for them when they were dead. As their ollam, he was the depositary of their highest wisdom and knowledge, the one who preserved their genealogies, and to the old family tree added each new ramification.

At first all these offices were centred in one man ; but in the course of time, rigorous lines were drawn to distinguish them; and we find that the three great, general offices of Druid, brehon and file came each to have its own representative. Strict precautions were taken to prevent the interference of anyone of these personages in the functions of the others.

Donn was next to Amergin in age, and, from the prominence given him in the ancient tales, it is clear that he was the commander-in-chief of the expedition. Eire’s prophecy regarding him came true.

In the course of the magic storm he and his whole crew were lost. The sand hills on which his ship was wrecked on the western coast of Munster still bear his name, and the tradition of the catastrophe is vivid in the minds of the people of that place.

The most ancient copies of the *Libur Gabala*, that we still have, go back to the twelfth century. These tell us that Banba, Fola and Eire were killed with their husbands at the battle of Tailltinn. This ancient place in the County of Meath is Anglicized Telltown. Its ancient name came from the goddess Taillti who was the foster-mother of Lug, one of the greatest of the Tuatha De Danaan gods. In his affection for her, Lug had games and great festivities celebrated here, beginning on the first of August of each year.

On this account, August is to this day called *Mi Na Lugnasa*, or the month of the *Lugnas*; *lughnas* meaning Lug's gathering. The *aonach Tailltinn*, or Fair of Taillti, always brought an enormous concourse of people together in ancient Erin. It is impossible to read much of the ancient Irish literature without noticing the great frequency of the occurrence of the name Lug (*Loo*) or *Lugaid* (*Loeey*).

With regard to the death of the three goddess queens, it is to be observed that the practice of putting a term to the lives of the gods was introduced into Ireland in Christian times. The early Christian converts, in their zeal, wanted to put every thought of the ancient paganism out of the minds of the people, and they thought that one of the best ways to do this would be to destroy the ancient pantheon and reduce the gods to the level of ordinary men and women.

The Fomorians, or African pirates, were gods. The Tuatha De Danaan were gods; and there is no doubt but that all the Milesian chiefs would have reached us as gods, were it not for this process. With all respect for the ancient Christians, we think it regrettable that the ancient pagan tales were tampered with. They could do no harm. Perhaps we ought to be thankful that they were spared to us at all.

To convert them from pagan to Christian classics was impossible. Their Christian redactors appreciated them as literature, and as reflecting the peculiar character of the ancient Irish mind, when it rested on religion; and therefore they would not, if they could, expurgate the paganism out of them altogether. Besides, these pagan tales were comparatively clean as far as the moral conduct of their heroes was concerned.

A very great number of these stories have Christian redactions. The story is generally told in the old pagan way, but new developments are added, by which the hero or heroine, or a whole group of these, is brought down to Saint Patrick's time, and made to receive baptism, and then die.

It is in this way that *Finoola*, "Lir's Lonely Daughter," and her equally ill-fated brothers, *Aod*, *Conn* and *Fiacra*, are made to live at least nine hundred years, and that "Eithne the Fair" after living fifteen hundred years with her fairy companions, is at last made to stray away from them, so that she, like the Children of Lir, received baptism and Christian burial from Saint Patrick or some one of his disciples.

As already indicated these Christian redactions of the old tales were intended to eradicate paganism, and to make the tales themselves conform to Christian ideas.

Paganism has disappeared, but its traces remain; and as Christianity is written in the Irish language all over the face of the old land, in the names of places, so is the ancient paganism written there, also, indelibly.

When the archaeologist goes to explain a place name he will find very frequently that his explanation, to be intelligible, will take on the very form of an old myth or pagan fable. The Tuatha De Danaan, whether they were gods or men, left their footprints, not on the shifting sands, but on the hard bed-rock of the Irish topographical nomenclature.

The Christian redactors of the pagan tales, and many of the annalists, tell us that the gods died. Nevertheless these gods lived on in the popular imagination and acted as the tutelary deities of the districts in which they were buried.

This superstition, if indeed it ought to be taken seriously enough to be called a superstition, suggests a beautiful Christian reflection. Wonderful things have happened, and are always happening, where the bodies of the saints are laid. The typical Irish mind, whether pagan or Christian, had always an exquisite sense of the fitness of things.

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Euhemerism. Gods that were always such, and men who after death became gods. Mythological, heroic and historic cycles easily distinguishable in Irish history. Gilla Keevin and Flann of the Monastery greatest Irish Euhemerists. Some account of their work. Tigernach.

AT the court of Cassander in Macedonia, in the early part of the third century before Christ, there lived a Greek writer named Euhemerus. He wrote a book to prove that the ancient myths were all genuine historical facts, and to show that the gods were all, originally, men who had distinguished themselves in war, or in beneficence to their fellowmen, and who, in consequence, were gratefully regarded as gods after their death, and considered worthy of divine honors.

This writer's success in reducing gods to the level of men was only partial. Every classical scholar knows that the Greek mythology still stands apparently intact, and that there is very little confusion there between gods and men. One never has to ask which is which. But among those who received divine honors after their death he probably wrought some havoc. There is a certain grim humor in the reported conduct of the Roman tax collectors operating in Greece after this country had become subject to Rome. They exempted from taxation all lands belonging to the immortal gods or in any way sacred to them; but refused to regard as immortal gods those who became gods only after their death.

The process of making the gods out to be ordinary men is called euhemerising, after Euhemerus. Many of the ancient Christian writers of Ireland did very much of this kind of work, and in this way threw much obscurity on the lines of demarcation between the mythologic and the heroic or human. They can hardly be considered a help to the historian.

One would imagine they would rather confuse him. The Irish euhemerists never tried to explain away the entire system of mythology. This would have been impossible, and the attempt unworthy of thinking men. But they injured that system a little, by puncturing it here and there, thus causing confusion. It seems to be a new thing in the world to have the mythological, heroic and historic cycles distinguished at all in Irish history; and the fact that these cycles are now distinctly marked is due to the work of the great Celtic scholars of the last seventy years. It is quite natural that this should be so.

Formerly when the Irish historian told us some impossible story as a piece of Irish history, we laughed at him, or we thought how puerile, or silly our fathers were to accept such stuff as history. But now when the profound and discriminating Celtist tells us the same story, and shows us where it fits like a mosaic in one magnificent whole, in one grand system of mythological lore, we no longer laugh; we take it seriously.

We stand in amazement in the presence of a fact that has at last dawned on us that as a distinct race, we appeared on the horizon of history in very much the same fashion as all the other great races that have accomplished great things and fulfilled evident destinies in this world.

Among the great races, it was only in the case of the Jews that God, for His own wise purposes, kept the remotest antiquity as clear, historically, as the present day. No "cloudland" in the divinely inspired history of the ancient world.

According to De Jubainville, the writers who wrought the most destruction in the Irish Pantheon were Giolla Caomghein, pronounced approximately Gilla Keevin, and Flann Mainistreach, both of the eleventh century. In any age or country the erudition and work of these men would have commanded respect. The synchronisms of Flann of the Monastery go back to the remotest ages, and are referred to in highly commendatory language by such writers as Usher, Ware, Lynch, better known as “Cambrensis eversus,” O’Flaherty and Charles O’Connor.

There can be no doubt about the value of a commendation from Archbishop Usher, or Father Lynch, or, in fact, from any one of these men. Charles O’Connor (of Ballyinagar) has not been always a great success in his translations from old Irish. Flann was connected in some way with the Monastery of Monasterboice, and the weight of evidence is to the effect that he was not in Sacred Orders. His synchronisms form an excellent abridgment of universal history down to his own time.

He synchronizes the Kings of the Medes, Persians, Assyrians, Greeks and the emperors, and previous rulers, of the Romans with the Irish Kings ; and, in places, relieves this dry record with scraps of valuable information regarding the countries or the kings. Flann of the Monastery died, A.D. 1050 ; so says O’Curry. Douglas Hyde tells us that “the greatest scholar, chronologist, and poet of this period (Clontarf to Norman Invasion) is unquestionably Flann Mainistreach who died in 1056.”

Giolla Caomghein’s work is very much like that of Flann Mainistreach. He wrote a great chronological poem “giving the annals of all time from the beginning of the world down to his own period.” He also synchronizes Eastern with Irish rulers. He died in 1072. He is also the translator into Gaelic of Nennius’ history of the Britons, a work of the eighth century.

The works of Giolla Caomghein are extant ; but the synchronisms of Flann have suffered from the friction of time, and are only found in a scattered and imperfect way, bound up with other ancient manuscripts. Tigernach, the most brilliant and learned annalist of the eleventh century, has made much use of them.

By way of comparison of these two men O’Curry says : [1] “It is to be observed that Flann was the predecessor of Tigernach ; and without in the least, derogating from the well earned reputation of that annalist, enough of the works of Flann remain to show that he was a scholar of fully equal learning, and a historic investigator of the highest merit.”

Again we are forgetting the fairies ; but we feel perfectly justified in turning aside occasionally to give a short account of the great mortals who either built up or tore down their mansions. In our next chapter we shall begin to give an account of the great Tuatha De Danaan gathering at the famous Brugh on the Boyne.

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The Fairies, De Danaan meeting at Brug na Boinne. Digression on Tain Bo Cuailgne. Cucullain and Ferdiad. “Conquest of the Sid.” The Dagda. Manannan MacLir. Poem of Kinaeth O’Hartigan. The Bulls fight. O’Currys translation of the account of that fight.

AFTER their defeat at Tailti, the Tuatha De Danaan set about reconstructing themselves. Their chiefs held a great meeting to determine precisely what they should do. The place where the meeting was held was the Brugh on the Boyne. Brugh means a fairy palace ; at the present day the form “bruighin,” [2] which is a grammatical inflection of it and is pronounced “breen,” is more generally used. In those parts of the country still most haunted by fairies, the word “side,” for their palaces, is very generally supplanted by “breen.”

We may take occasion here to notice the Tain Bo Cuailgne or Cattle Spoil of Cooley. Notwithstanding the serio-comic name of this story it is the greatest of the Irish Epic tales. As a result of the raid on Donn, the famous brown steer of Cualgne in Ulster, with the object of bringing him to Connaught to add him to the possessions of Queen Meave, and thus establish her supremacy in wealth

over her husband, Ailill, who was the proud owner of the no less famous Finnbheannach, or white horned bull, the King of Ulster, Conor MacNessa, becomes involved in a protracted war with Meave and her Munster allies. This war develops the heroes Cucullain and Ferdiad and a host of others, and astonishes the reader with the keen sense of manly honor and soldierly chivalry in the heart of anyone in ancient Erin who had the courage to call himself a man. Even in their paganism death had no terrors for these heroes, but a breach of chivalrous honor or a failure to stand by their plighted word was the one thing, under heaven, they dreaded.

Anyone reading Mrs. Hutton's English version of this wonderful story or Windisch's German version is forced to the conclusion that all the middle ages did for chivalry was to Christianize it and exalt its motive to the supernatural. But, of course, it is Christianity alone that could do this.

Attached to this semi-historic tale is a short tract called the conquest, or the seizure, of the "sid"; "Gabail Int Sida," meaning literally the capturing of the fairy palaces. The tract is extant and a copy of it in the "Book of Leinster" has escaped euhemerization. There is a Christian redaction of it, but we shall first consult the thoroughly pagan version.

In this version the principal part in the capturing and subsequent distribution of the fairy palaces is ascribed to the Dagda who was, in the Tuatha De Danaan world, what Zeus was to the Greeks and Jupiter to the Romans. His name is interpreted by De Jubainville as the "good god," and if that interpretation be correct, it would be written "Deag-dia" in modern Irish; *deag* being one of the four or five adjectives that come before the noun to which they refer.

His name does not imply that there was a "bad god" as such, but was given him as a reward for great services done for his people. There is no certain proof of a positive pagan Manichaeism having prevailed among the ancient Irish.

The Dagda retained great influence even among the victorious Milesians, who were not entirely able to free themselves from certain disabilities inflicted by the De Danaan, until they succeeded in making a treaty of peace with him. By this treaty they were enabled to gather the corn of their fields and to get and drink the milk of their cows. Both these foodstuffs had been blighted by the incantations of the Tuatha Da Danaan.

The pagan version of the "Gabail Int Sida" also makes the Dagda the leading figure in the deliberations at Brug Na Boinne, the palace of the Boyne, but the Christian redactions of the tale give the greater prominence to Manannan MacLir.

The Dagda is made by the pagan story to reserve this famous palace to himself and distribute the various other underground sids or sidi to the numerous chiefs of the Tuatha De Danaan, after they and their people had decided not to leave Ireland but to retire into this kind of invisible immortality.

A poem attributed to Kinaeth O'Hartigan of the tenth century represents the Dagda as occupying this same palace even before the Milesian occupation of the country. He had dwelt there with his goddess-queen Boana, after whom the famous river is named, and who is really nothing more or less than the Boyne deified.

Here we again digress. We may as well tell our readers something about the bulls we mentioned in our references to the Tain. We may not have so graceful an opportunity soon again. The reader knows very well, in advance, that the bulls fought. We cannot improve on O'Curry's description of it.

In his analysis of the great story as found by him in manuscript form, and after dilating on Meave's satisfaction at having obtained possession of the Donn and punished her old foe, Conor MacNessa, O'Curry continues:—"This wild tale, however, does not end here; for it gravely informs us that when Donn Cuailgne found himself in a strange country, and among strange herds, he raised such a loud bellowing as had never before been heard in the province of Connaught; that on hearing those unusual sounds, Ailill's bull, the Finnbheannach, or White-horned, knew that some strange and formidable foe had entered his territory; and that he immediately advanced at full speed to the point from which they issued, where he soon arrived in the presence of his noble enemy.

“ The sight of each other was the signal of battle. In the poetic language of the tale, the province rang with the echoes of their roaring, the sky was darkened by the sods of earth they threw up with their feet, and from the foam that flew from their mouths ; fainthearted men, women and children hid themselves in caves, caverns and clefts of the rocks; whilst even the most veteran warriors but dared to view the combat from the neighboring hills and eminences.

“ The Finnbheannach at length gave way and retreated towards a certain pass which opened into the plain in which the battle raged, and where sixteen warriors bolder than the rest had planted themselves ; but so rapid was the retreat and the pursuit that not only were all these trampled to the ground, but they were buried several feet in it. The Donn Cuailgne, at last, coming up with his opponent, raised him on his horns, ran off with him, passed the gates of Meave’s palace, tossing and shaking him as he went, until at last he shattered him to pieces, dropping his disjointed members as he went along.

“ And wherever a part fell that place retained the name of that joint ever after. And thus it was (we are told) that Ath Luain, now Athlone, which was before called Ath Mor or the Great Ford, received its present name from the Finnbheannach’s luan, or loin, having been dropped there.

“ The Donn Cuailgne, after having shaken his enemy in this manner from his horns, returned into his own country, but in such a frenzied state of excitement that all fled everywhere at his approach. He faced directly to his old home; but the people of the baile or hamlet fled and hid themselves behind a huge mass of rock, which his madness transformed into the shape of another bull ; so that coming with all his force against it he dashed out his brains and was killed.” We doubt very much if there is in the whole range of the world’s literature anything to compare with this in strenuousness.

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The Fairies. Distribution of the fairy palaces. The Dagda and Oengus. Mac Int Oc. Greek and Irish mythological legends. Food of the gods. Immortality of the gods. Knowth, New grange and Dowth. Monuments of the Cyclops. Cruachan.

THE Conquest of the Sid tells us that although the Dagda kept the palace of the Boyne for himself, it was for ages after known as the Sid Maic Int Oc, or fairy mansion of the Son of the Young.

This Mac Int Oc was Oengus, the son of the Dagda himself and of Boand, and was so called because his parents as well, of course, as himself, were supposed to enjoy perpetual youth or immortality.

How the Brug came to bear his name is explained by an ancient legend. When the distribution of the “ sides” was going on, he was absent. He was at the home of the god Midir to receive an education. His father, in the confusion and hurry of work and business, had forgotten all about him.

When Oengus returned and found that his father had no sid left for him, he was surprised and indignant. As a last resort he asked to be allowed to remain over night in the Brug.

The Dagda graciously assented, saying that to the night he could also add the day, meaning of course the next day. The next day towards evening Oengus discovered that he was expected to leave after the expiration of the day and the night.

Although the legend does not say so directly, it is clear that he was finally ordered to decamp. This he stoutly refused to do, claiming that as the palace was given him a day and a night it was thereby ceded to him in perpetuity, as all time is made up of days and nights.

His father was evidently unprepared for this logic. He had no argument to overcome it, and so he admitted the justice of his son’s claim, and allowed him to hold Brug na Boinne in his own name, which the delighted youth did indefinitely.

A most wonderful place indeed was this palace. Three trees grew there and were always laden with fruit, reminding one of the gardens of the Hesperides, beyond the sunset where the golden apples grew for the gods of ancient Greece ; reminding one also of the garden of Phoebus, at the ends of the earth where Night has her home and where the vault of the heavens begins.

It is remarkable indeed how the Irish mythological legend, by placing fruit trees at the couch of the Dagda, at the Brug on the Boyne, reminds one of the Greek legend that also places trees at the couch of Zeus in the gardens of the gods.

What can we see in it all but a vestige, as it is a distortion, of the Biblical description of the Garden of Eden?

In the palace of the Boyne are also three swine, one living and the other killed and ready to eat ; and alongside this a jar of excellent ale. The swine were the ambrosia and the ale the nectar of the gods of ancient Erin.

No one who tasted of these viands could ever die and they were no sooner eaten than they reproduced themselves, so that the store of provisions, apparently small, lasted indefinitely and fed an indefinite number of gods.

It is clearly seen that the pagan version of the Conquest of the Sid teaches the immortality of the gods without restriction or reservation. It was in later days in manuscripts of the eleventh century and in Christian redactions of other tales as well as of the Sid itself that the Tuatha De Danaan are represented as dying and receiving burial at the Brug on the Boyne.

There are three remarkable mounds on the banks of the Boyne and all three bear evidence of having been artificially constructed. They are the heights of Knowth, Newgrange and Dowth.

Newgrange is identified as the ancient Brug na Boinne where the Euhemerists, or Christian exterminators of the gods, have buried the Dagda and Lug and Ogma and all the great chiefs of the Tuatha De Danaan.

This eminence is unquestionably artificial. It covers two acres and contains one of the largest funeral chambers in western Europe. It is near the place where the battle of the Boyne was fought. This veritable Irish Catacomb was, with Knowth and Dowth, used as a burial ground even in the remotest times.

De Jubainville thinks that all three mounds were raised for this purpose by some colony that antedated far the coming of the Milesians. This would bring the date of their construction back to Tuatha De Danaan times and even farther back still.

He finds a parallel instance in Greek mythology and tells us that “ the Greeks attributed their pre-historic monuments to the Cyclops who were originally mythological beings.”

The monuments raised by the Cyclops, however, were not of earth or loam, but enormous masses of unhewn stone, of which specimens are still to be seen at Mycenae in Greece and also in several places in Italy.

The theory at present about these is that they were built by the Pelasgians, but that on account of their grandeur they were anciently attributed to the fabulous or mythological race of Cyclops.

In historic pre-Christian times the high Kings of Ireland were buried at Cruachan in Connaught on the banks of the Shannon ; but for the first four centuries of the Christian era they were buried at the Brug on the Boyne.

The first high King of the Milesian race to be buried there was Crimthán MacNair, and he very probably owed this distinction to the fact that his wife was of the Tuatha De Danaan race and a fairy.

[1] In his “Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History.”
[2] Often written brúighean.

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