

## Irish History Reader

*To The Teacher.*

1905

The Irish History Reader is intended as an extra Reader for pupils of the fourth and the fifth standards.

The chief events in the history of our country, grouped for the most part around the names of great Irishmen, are treated in language easily within the reach of the limited vocabulary of the young. Extracts from the writings of our national poets will be found intermingled with the text. These verses, when read with elegance, and committed to memory, must tend to keep brightly flaming the torch of love of country kindled at the hearth of every Irish home.

The teacher, in questioning his pupils on the subject matter of the lessons, and explaining the various allusions contained therein, should supplement from his own wide reading of Irish History, the brief details set forth in the Reader. He should dwell with pride, and in glowing words on Ireland's glorious past, her great men and their great deeds ; her devotion through all the centuries to the Faith brought to her by her National Apostle ; and the missionary labours of her children in their zeal to share the gift of God with those who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. He will tell of the culture and learning of her sons, as evidenced by the many names of distinguished Irishmen to be met with in every branch of literature ; the artistic skill of her scribes as seen in those wonderful initial letters and the other ornamentations of illustrated manuscripts ; the refined taste and deftness in execution of her workers in the precious metals who have left the unrivalled Tara Brooch, the Ardagh Chalice, and many more chaste specimens of their craft. Nor is he limited to the distant past, for in recent days, and even in his own time, he can point to the sculptors, the painters, the architects, and the musical composers of the Irish race who stand in the foremost rank of their respective professions. The pupils must be interested in the ruins that stud the land—and especially in the raths and crom-lechs, the ivy-clad abbeys, and the crumbling castles in their own immediate neighbourhood.

Their interest should be aroused in that wide-spread Movement, the creation of earnest men, that has already effected so much for Ireland in the revival of her native language, native music, and native ideals ; they must be taught that Irishmen, claiming the right to make their own laws, should never rest content until, their native Parliament is restored ; and that Ireland looks to them, when grown to man's estate, to act the part of true men in furthering the sacred cause of nationhood.

After religious instruction, there is no more effective instrument in the education of youth than that which the reading lessons present ; and the efficient and cultured teacher will never fail to utilise to the full the advantages which they afford him for cultivating the intelligence and directing the will of his pupils.

Far westward lies an isle of ancient fame,  
By Nature blest, and Scotia is her name ;  
Enrolled in books, exhaustless is her store  
Of veiny silver and of golden ore.  
Her fruitful soil for ever teems with wealth.  
With gems her waters, and her air with health ;  
Her verdant fields with milk and honey flow.  
Her woolly fleeces vie with virgin snow ;  
Her waving furrows float with bearded corn  
And arms and arts her envied sons adorn.  
No savage bear with lawless fury roves,  
Nor ravenous lion through her peaceful groves ;  
No poison there infects, no scaly snake

Creeps through the grass, nor frog annoys the lake :  
An island worthy of its pious race,  
In war triumphant, and unmatched in peace.

*St. Donatus, Bishop of Fiesole in the 5th century.*

Translation by Dr. Dunkin.

•

Ireland.

Whoever would know something of the history of his country should know also something of its geography ; for, as the courses of its rivers to the sea are moulded by the nature of the soil through which they flow, so, the history of a country is affected not only by the character of its people, but also by its situation, its climate, and its physical formation.

An island in the Atlantic Ocean, Ireland is situated in the most westerly part of the European continent. In length it measures about 300, and in breadth 200 miles ; its area is about 32,000 square miles, or over 20,000,000 acres. According to bardic tradition, Ireland, when first discovered, was densely wooded, and even so late as the twelfth century, a great part of the country was still under wood.

The climate of Ireland is mild and healthful. The prevailing winds are from the west and southwest, and the average rainfall reaches nearly forty inches. The soil is so fertile, that it is capable of producing the necessaries of life for a very much larger population than its present one of 4,400,000. Owing to the general humidity of the atmosphere the fields are ever green, hence the country is often styled the Emerald Isle.

Most of the mountains are situated along the coast, the highest being in the west and south. From the mountains many rivers, most of them short and rapid, flow in various directions to the sea, and some slower, longer, and of greater volume, draw off the surplus waters of the lakes. Internal navigation, however, is hindered by falls and rapids. Over 1,000,000 acres of bog form a dreary feature of the central plain.

The western sea coast, broken up by the force of the Atlantic, is formed into hundreds of bays and creeks, many running far inland ; but in some parts, as at the Cliffs of Moher in Clare County, the coast presents for miles an unbroken front of rock to the ceaseless fury of the waves.

A short study of the map will show how the country is broken up into several rather isolated districts ; between these in olden times communication was not easy, and thus the physical formation of the country proved a serious obstacle to the early evolution of national unity.

The principal minerals found in Ireland are iron, lead, copper, silver, and coal. The mines, though now sadly neglected, seem to have been well worked in ancient times.

The coasts of Ireland are the resort of immense shoals of herring, cod, haddock, mackerel, hake, and other kinds of fish ; and the fisheries would prove a mine of wealth to the country were they but developed and worked.

“ Naturee,” says a French writer, “ seems to have bestowed on Ireland her choicest gifts ; she has scattered over her rocky base the most fertile soil in the world ; has given to her sea-coast the most commodious harbours, fourteen of which are capable of receiving ships of the largest size ; and, as if she intended her for a high destiny, has placed her on the outskirts of the continent as an advanced guard, the depository of the keys of the ocean, charged with opening to the vessels of Europe the route to the western world, and presenting to the American mariner the first European port.”

*Dear Land.*

When comes the day all hearts to weigh  
If staunch they be or vile,  
Shall we forget the sacred debt  
We owe our mother isle ?  
My native heath is brown beneath,  
My native waters blue,  
But crimson red o'er both shall spread  
Ere I am false to you, Dear Land !  
Ere I am false to you.

When I behold your mountains bold—  
Your noble lakes and streams—  
A mingled tide of grief and pride  
Within my bosom teems.  
I think of all your long dark thrall,  
Your martyrs brave and true ;  
And dash apart the tears that start—  
We must not weep for you. Dear Land !  
We must not weep for you.

My boyish ear still clung to hear  
Of Erin's pride of yore,  
Ere Norman foot had dared pollute  
Your independent shore ;  
Of chiefs long dead, who rose to head  
Some gallant patriot few ;  
Till all my aim on earth became  
To strike one blow for you. Dear Land !  
To strike one blow for you.

*John O'Hagan.*

The First Inhabitants.

According to bardic tradition, the first inhabitants of Ireland were a colony of Greeks from Macedonia, who were led hither by their leader Parthalon, some three hundred years after the Deluge. Parthalon fled from his native country, where he had brutally murdered his father ; he landed at the mouth of the Kenmare river, and after many years, he and his followers perished miserably by the pestilence, in the plain on which Dublin now stands, and Ireland was now again void of inhabitants. The memory of this event is preserved in the name of the village of Tallaght, for this word, in Irish, means " The Plague Monument." The next colonists arrived from the shores of the Black Sea, under their leader Nemedius, but he, too, and many of his followers, fell victims to a plague. Those who survived engaged in constant warfare with a race of pirates called Fomorians who infested the coasts, and at length, they were all but annihilated in a great battle with these formidable enemies.

For many years, the island remained almost a wilderness, as the few Nemedians who remained retired into the thickly wooded interior of the country. Some of them, however, got back to Greece, where, having fallen into bondage, they were compelled to carry soil in leathern bags from the lowlands, to fertilize the barren hills ; hence their name of Firbolgs or Bagmen. After the lapse of many years, these Firbolgs escaped from their cruel slavery, captured some ships belonging to their masters, and after many adventures, landed in Ireland and again peopled the country, which they divided into five parts, corresponding to the number of their leaders.

The Firbolgs were not long in possession, before their dominion was disputed by a formidable enemy. The new invaders were the Tuatha-de-Dananns, who, like the Firbolgs, were descended from the Nemedians, and according to the Bards, were profoundly skilled in magic. They made use of their magical art to render themselves invisible on landing ; this may be taken to mean that they arrived in the country during a dense fog. After a long march inland, they met the Firbolgs on the shores of Lough Corrib, where a great battle was fought on the plain of south Moytura, near Cong, and the Tuatha-de-Dananns were completely victorious. Some years later, the invaders also crushed the Fomorians at North Moytura, near Sligo, and evidences of these two mighty conflicts are still visible in the numerous cromlechs, cairns, and mounds, which mark the resting places of brave warriors who fought in Erin before the dawn of history.

The Lia Fail, or Stone of Destiny, was introduced into Ireland by the Tuatha-de-Dananns, For many ages this stone was used as a coronation seat by the Irish kings ; it was carried into Scotland in the sixth century, to give more solemnity to the coronation of an Irish prince, who at that period founded a monarchy in Scotland. For many subsequent centuries the stone was kept in the abbey of Scone ; but it was carried into England by King Edward I. in 1300 A.D., and is believed by many writers to be identical with the large stone, now to be seen under the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey ; others, however, say that it is still in Ireland.

The Tuatha-de-Dananns possessed a method of writing by means of notches on the edges of stones which are called Ogham characters from the name of their inventor. Many specimens of this kind of writing still remain, and of late years, they have been deciphered. The alphabet is simple and ingenious, consisting of twenty letters, and the inscription begins at the left-hand corner and is read upwards, being sometimes continued downwards on the right-hand angle of the pillar on the same face. The Tuatha-de-Dananns also established the great fair of Tailtean, now miscalled Teltown, in Meath. It took place annually on the First of August down to the twelfth century, and at it all kinds of athletic games were held.

#### Coming of The Milesians.

The Tuatha-de-Dananns had possessed Ireland for about two hundred years, when the renowned Milesians, the last and by far the greatest colonists, arrived about one thousand years before the Christian era. From these Milesians most of the old families of Ireland are descended.

According to our ancient annalists, after many wanderings the Milesians settled in Spain, and built there the city of Brigantia, believed to be Betanzos in Galicia. Here they lived for many generations, still cherishing a fond hope that at some time or other, they should find the Isle of Destiny, promised to them as they said by no less a man than the Prophet Moses, the great Jewish Law-giver. One of their chiefs., named Ith, a man of an adventurous disposition, having sailed far west into the ocean, accidentally discovered Ireland. He landed, was taken for a pirate by the natives, attacked and mortally wounded, but he was carried by his men to his ship and died at sea ; his remains were brought back to Spain by his son, who stirred up his kinsmen to avenge his death.

The sons of Milesius, the chief of the people, assembled a large force, and headed by their mother Queen Scotia, for their father was now dead, set out on an expedition for the shores of Erin. They landed and marched into the country. The Tuatha-de-Dananns complained that they had been taken unawares, but said that if they re-embarked, and retired nine waves out from the shore, and again effected a landing, they would submit, and the whole country should be theirs. Amergin, the *ollav*, or learned man of the tribe, was consulted as to the answer to be given to this strange proposal, and he decided against his own people. There-upon they all re-embarked, but had no sooner withdrawn than a terrible storm, which scattered and destroyed many of the Milesian ships, was raised by the magical arts of the Tuatha-de-Dananns. Queen Scotia and some of her sons made good a landing in Tralee Bay. They marched southwards for a few miles, and met the natives at Slieve Mish Mountain, near the present town of Tralee. A battle was fought, and the Milesians were victorious, but Queen Scotia was killed. Her grave is still pointed out, at the place now called Gleann Scoheen, or Scotia's Glen. Heremon, another of the Milesian brothers sailed round the coast, and landed at the mouth of the

Boyne ; his brother Colpa was drowned in this river, hence the name Inver Colpa. Others effected a landing elsewhere, and after a short time a battle was fought at Tailtean in Meath, in which the three kings of the Tuatha-de-Dananns were slain and their army routed.

Heber and Heremon, the two surviving sons of Milesius, divided the country between them, and the hopes of their people were now realised in the possession of their beloved Innisfail. From this date to the period of the English invasion, Ireland was ruled by Milesian kings, of the race of Heremon, or that of Heber, and sometimes of the race of Ir, their cousin, from whom Ireland is said to have derived its present name.

*Coming of The Milesians.*

They came from a land beyond the sea,  
And now o'er the western main,  
Set sail in their good ships gallantly  
From the sunny land of Spain.  
“ Oh ! where is the isle we've seen in dreams  
Our destined home or grave ?”  
Thus sung they, as, by the morning's beams.  
They swept the Atlantic wave.

And lo ! where afar o'er the ocean shines  
A sparkle of radiant green.  
As though in that deep lay emerald mines  
Whose light through the waves was seen.  
“ 'Tis Innisfail—'tis Innisfail !”  
Rings o'er the echoing sea.  
While bending to heaven the warriors hail  
That home of the brave and free.

Then turned they unto the Eastern wave.  
Where now their Day God's eye  
A look of such sunny omen gave  
As lighted up sea and sky.  
Nor frown was seen through sky or sea  
Nor tear o'er leaf or sod.  
When first on their Isle of Destiny  
Our great forefathers trod.

*Thomas Moore*

Constitutions and Customs of Milesian Ireland.

In the time of the Milesians, Ireland was divided into five kingdoms—Ulster, Leinster, Connaugh, Munster, and Meath. Each kingdom was governed by its own monarch, but the king of Meath was Ardh Righ, or paramount king of all Ireland. The law of Tanistry governed the right of succession to the throne. During the lifetime of the reigning prince or chief a successor, who was styled “ The Tanist,” was elected from his family. The Tanist should be a chief full twenty-five years old, his figure should be tall, noble, and free from blemish, and he should be able to prove his pedigree from the sons of Milesius.

For he must come of a conquering race,  
The heir of their valour, their glory, their grace.  
His frame must be stately, his step must be fleet.  
His hand must be trained to each warrior feat.  
His face as the harvest moon steadfast and clear,

A brain to enlighten, a spirit to cheer ;  
While the foremost to rush where the battle-brands ring,  
And the last to retreat is a true Irish King. [2]

The men who administered law in Ireland were called Brehons, and hence the ancient law of the country, an elaborate and ingenious, but primitive code, is now known as the Brehon Law. A serious defect of the system was this, that the Brehon did not possess the powers of a judge, but as a lawyer, carefully trained to interpret the code. The enforcing of his decisions depended solely upon the sense of justice of the community, but this was so strong as to render the system quite effective in practice. Capital punishment was rare in ancient Ireland, for the law of *eric* punished all crimes, even murder, by fines ; if the compensation was not forthcoming, in a case of murder, the family of the victim could insist upon the death penalty.

Land was held in Ireland by tribe or family right. All the free members of the tribe or family had a claim, each to his share of the land occupied by the tribe. This system naturally created a sense of self-respect, and mutual dependence entirely unknown under the feudal system. King Ollav Fodhla, many centuries before the Christian era, established the Feis Teavrac or Triennial Parliament. The chiefs of tribes, the bards, the historians, and the military leaders were summoned to this meeting under the penalty of being treated as the king's enemies if they refused to come. The meeting was held at Tara in the great rath, and the first three days were spent in the enjoyment of the king's hospitality. One of the principal functions of this assembly was the inspection of the national records, the writers of which were obliged, under severe penalties, to the strictest accuracy.

All offices among the Irish, such as brehon, bard, druid, or physician, tended to become hereditary. One of the most remarkable customs was that of *fosterage*. The children of the nobles were nursed by the wives of the tenants, and the ties thus formed were often stronger than those of actual relationship. The historian Stanihurst says, "The Irish loved and confided in their foster-brothers more than in their brothers by blood."

#### *Death of Conor Mac Nessa.*

One of the most interesting traditions handed down by our early writers, concerning pre-Christian times in Ireland, is that connected with the death of Conor Mac Nessa, who was king of Ulidia or Ulster at the time of our Redemption. According to this tradition, Conor, in the early days of his reign, made an inroad on Connaught, to punish some outrage against his crown and dignity. The expedition was successful, but the king received a grievous wound from a brain-ball, a species of missile flung from a sling, and was carried back from the battle in an insensible state, with the brain-ball half buried in his forehead. T. D. Sullivan relates the incident as follows : —

His royal physician bent o'er him, great Fingen,  
who often before  
Staunch'd the war-battered bodies of heroes, and  
built them for battle once more ;  
And he looked on the wounds of the monarch, and  
harked to his low-breathed sighs.  
And he said, " In the day when that missile comes  
forth from his forehead he dies.

" Yet long o'er the people who love him King Conor  
Mac Nessa may reign.  
If always the high pulse of passion be kept from his  
heart and his brain.  
And for this I lay down his restrictions—no more  
from this day shall his place  
Be with armies in battles or hostings, or leading the  
van in the chase.

“ At night when the banquet is flashing, his measure  
of wine must be small.  
And take heed that the bright eye of woman be kept  
from his sight above all.  
For if heart-thrilling joyance or anger, awhile o’er  
his being have power.  
The ball will start forth from his forehead, and  
surely he dies in that hour.”

Oh ! woe for the gallant King Conor, struck down  
from the summit of life,  
While glory unclouded shone round him, and regal  
enjoyment was rife.  
Above him the eagle went wheeling, before him the  
deer galloped by.  
And the quick-legged rabbits went skipping from  
green glades and burrows anigh ;  
The song-birds sang out from the copses, the bees  
passed on musical wing.  
And all things were happy and busy, save Conor  
Mac Nessa the king.

So years had passed o’er him when sitting midst  
silence like that of the tomb,  
A terror crept through him as sudden, the sunlight  
was darkened with gloom.  
One red flare of lightning flared brightly, illuming  
the landscape around.  
One thunder peal rolled through the mountains, and  
rumbled and crashed underground.

He heard the rocks bursting asunder, the trees  
tearing up by the roots.  
And loud through the horrid confusion, the howling  
of terrified brutes ;  
From the halls of his tottering palace came screamings  
of terror and pain.  
And he saw, crowding thickly around him, the  
ghosts of the foes he had slain.

Now, as soon as the horrid commotion that shuddered  
through nature had ceased,  
The king sent for Baruch, his druid, and said, “ Tell  
me truly, O priest,  
What magical arts have created this scene of wild  
horror and dread ?  
What has darkened the blue sky above us, and  
shaken the earth that we tread ?  
Are the gods that we worship offended ? What  
crime or what wrong has been done ?  
Has the fault been committed in Erin, and how may  
their favour be won ?  
What rites will avail to appease them ? What gifts  
on their altars should smoke ?

Only say, and the offering demanded, we lay by  
your consecrate oak.”

“ O king !” said the white-bearded druid, “ the  
truth unto me has been shown ;  
There lives but *One* God, the Eternal, far up in high  
heaven is His throne.  
He looked upon men with compassion, and sent from  
His kingdom of light  
His Son, in the shape of a mortal, to teach and to  
guide them aright.  
Near the time of your birth, O King Conor, this  
Saviour of mankind was born,  
And since then in the kingdoms far eastward, He  
taught, toiled, and prayed till this morn.  
When wicked men seized Him, fast bound Him,  
with nails to a cross, lanced His side.  
And that moment of gloom and confusion was  
earth’s cry of dread when he died.

“ O king. He was gracious and gentle. His heart full  
of pity and love.  
And for men He was always beseeching the grace of  
His Father above ;  
He taught them, He healed them. He helped them.  
He laboured that all might attain  
To the true God’s high kingdom of glory, where  
never comes sorrow or pain.  
But they rose in their pride and their folly, their  
hearts filled with merciless rage.  
That only the sight of His life’s blood, fast poured  
from the Cross, could assuage.  
Yet even on the Cross-beams uplifted,. His body  
racked, tortured and riven.  
He prayed not for justice or vengeance, but asked  
that His foes be forgiven.”

With a bound from his seat rose King Conor, the red  
flush of rage on his face.  
Fast he ran through the halls for his weapons, and  
snatching his sword from its place,  
He rushed to the woods, striking wildly at boughs  
that dropped down at each blow.  
And he cried, “ Were I midst the vile rabble, I’d  
cleave them to earth even so,

With the strokes of a high king of Erin, the whirls  
of my keen-tempered sword,  
I would save from their horrible fury that mild and  
that merciful Lord.”  
His frame shook and heaved with emotion, the brain  
ball dropped forth from his head,  
And commending his soul to that Saviour, King  
Conor Mac Nessa fell dead.

*T. D. Sullivan.*

## Cormac Mac Art

Cormac Ulfadha, son of Art, and grandson of Con of the Hundred Battles, ascended the throne of Tara about A.D. 227 ; his reign is generally regarded as the “ golden era” of pre-Christian Erin. Cormac was an accomplished scholar, a brave warrior, a truly wise legislator. From the beginning of his reign, he set himself the task of reducing all the provinces to a due submission to the Ardh Righ, and he soon succeeded in establishing his kingly authority over the whole island. Cormac founded at Tara three academies. In the first, the science of war was taught ; in the second, historical literature, while the third was devoted to the cultivation of jurisprudence. He collected and improved all the existing laws, and published a code which remained in force until the Anglo-Norman invasion, and for centuries after outside the English Pale.

Cormac assembled the Bards and Chroniclers at Tara, and directed them to collect the annals of Ireland, and to continue them from year to year. These annals formed what was called the Psalter of Tara, and contained, together with historical facts, a description of the provinces, clan divisions, and other particulars of all parts of the country.

The grandeur of Cormac’s palace at Tara was in keeping with his power and the brilliancy of his deeds. Having lost an eye in battle he was obliged to abdicate, and in his old age he wrote a book on the Duties of a Prince, which contains admirable rules on manners, morals, and government. Dr. Douglas Hyde, in his *Literary History of Ireland* translates as follows a passage from this book :—

“ If thou attend to my command thou wilt not mock the old, although thou art young, nor the poor, although thou art well-clad, nor the lame, although thou art agile, nor the blind, although thou art clear-sighted, nor the feeble, although thou art strong, nor the ignorant, although thou art learned. Be not slothful, nor passionate, nor penurious, nor idle, nor jealous, for he who is so is an object of hatred to God as well as to man. .... Be not too knowing, nor too simple ; be not proud, be not inactive ; be not too humble, nor yet too haughty ; be not talkative, but be not too silent ; be not timid, neither be severe. For if thou shouldst appear too knowing, thou wouldst be satirised and abused ; if too simple, thou wouldst be imposed upon ; if too proud, thou wouldst be shunned ; if too humble, thy dignity would suffer ; if talkative, thou wouldst not be deemed learned ; if too severe thy character would be defamed ; if too timid thy rights would be encroached upon.”

The benign influence of Christianity had reached Cormac before the end of his life, and it is even said that he professed the religion of Christ, adored the one True God, and attempted to abolish idol worship. He died in the fortieth year of his reign, having been choked by the bone of a salmon. The Druids pretended that this calamity displayed the vengeance of their gods, whose worship he had forsaken. Before death, Cormac commanded that his mortal remains should not be interred at Brugh, the common burial-place of the pagan Irish kings, but rather at Ross-na-ree, near Drogheda, where he had first learned to adore the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. This tradition has been made the subject of a beautiful poem by Sir Samuel Ferguson.

### *Burial of King Cormac.*

“ Crom Cruagh, [3] and his sub-gods twelve,”  
Said Comiac, “ are but carven treene ; [4]  
The axe that made them, haft or helve, [5]  
Had worthier of our worship been.  
But He who made the tree to grow.  
And hid in earth the iron stone.  
And made the man with mind to know  
The axe’s use, is God alone.”

But ere the voice was wholly spent,  
That priest and prince should still obey,

To awed attendants o'er him bent.  
 Great Cormac gathered breath to say—  
 “ Spread not the beds of Brugh for me.  
 When restless death-bed's use is done,  
     But bury me at Ross-na-ree,  
     And face me to the rising sun.  
 “ For all the kings who lie in Brugh,  
 Put trust in gods of woods and stone ;  
 And 'twas at Ross that first I knew  
 One Unseen, Who is God Alone.

“ His glory lightens from the east.  
 His message soon shall reach our shore ;  
 And idol god, and cursing priest,  
 Shall plague us from Moy Slaughter no more.”  
 What though a dying man should rave  
     Of changes o'er the eastern sea,  
 In Brugh of Boyne shall be his grave  
 And not in nameless Ross-na-ree.”

The poet next tells how the nobles and priests, despite the dead king's prohibition, determined to bury him in Brugh, beside his renowned grandfather.

The funeral procession reached the Boyne, but as it was about to cross, the river boiled and swelled to such a degree that the men drew back in the utmost fear. Whereupon, four brave warriors stepped forth saying that they had borne their king before, through an angrier flood than this, and no flood, or demon within the flood, should bar him of his burial dues. Into the swelling flood the veterans strode with their burden, but the waters swept off the bier and “ proudly bore away the king” to Ross-na-ree, where his corpse was found the next morning by some shepherds, and laid to rest with the face towards the rising sun.

“ And life and time rejoicing run,  
 From age to age their wonted way ;  
 Still Cormac waits the Risen Sun,  
 For still 'tis only dawning day

#### The Heroes of the Red Branch and The Fianna.

Military orders, of which the most celebrated were the Red Branch Heroes and the Fenian Militia, and in later times the Dalcassians of Thomond, existed in ancient Ireland. The Red Branch warriors were of Ulster origin, and their most celebrated hero was Cuchulain. The exploits of Cuchulain and his warriors formed the subject of many a beautiful epic in pre-Christian times, and the history of his life, and love, and death, entranced the ears of the great and lowly for many centuries. The wars of this warrior were household words in Brian's great palace at Kincora, and whosoever loved what was great in conception, or who admired the broad sweep of the epic, called upon his bards to recite the loves, the valour, and the deaths of the Heroes of the Red Branch.

Some two hundred years after the era of the Red Branch Knights, and in the time of Con of the Hundred Battles, was established the order of Fenian Militia ; their greatest warrior was Finn MacCumhail, whose renowned exploits were recorded in verse by his son Ossian. Keating says the Fenians were a body of soldiers, permanently retained by the Irish kings for the purpose of guarding their territories, and of upholding their authority therein. Every man who entered the Fenian ranks had to make four promises : (1) never to receive a portion with his wife, but to choose her for her good manners and virtue ; (2) never to offer violence to any woman ; (3) never to refuse any one for any-thing he might possess ; (4) never to flee before less than ten champions. Haverty says : “ There can be no doubt that this militia was admirably trained, and that it was composed of the picked men

of Erin ; but as to its loyalty much cannot be said, for after frequent acts of treason and insubordination, the monarch was finally obliged to disband them, and to call in the aid of other troops to effect this object." This was done by King Carbry , son of Cormac Mac Art, at the bloody battle of Gavra, A.D. 284.

“ The Fenian stories,” says Dr. Hyde, “ became in later times the distinctly popular ones. They were the most intimately bound up with the life and thought and feelings of the whole Gaelic race. No such steady interest was evinced by the people in the Red Branch romances, and in attempting to collect Irish folk-lore I have found next to nothing about Cuchulain and his contemporaries, but great quantities about Finn, Ossian, Oscar, Goll, and Conan. The Red Branch romances then, antique in tone, language, and surroundings, were, I suspect, those of the chiefs, the great men, and the bards ; the others—at least in later times—more of the unbardic classes and of the people.”

#### The Borumean Tribute.

The Borumha, or Leinster cow tribute, was imposed on the province of Leinster by King Tuathal about A.D. 106, as a punishment upon the king of that province who had taken to wife the two daughters of Tuathal, on the pretence when he asked for the second that his former wife was dead. Both ladies died broken-hearted when they discovered the crime.

The tribute consisted, according to the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, of 150 cows, 150 hogs, 150 coverlets, 150 cauldrons, and 150 couples of men and women to draw water in servitude and to do menial services. The proceeds of the tribute were distributed, one-third to Ulster, one-third to Connaught, and the remaining one-third between the queen of the Ardh Righ and the king of Munster. Thus each of the three provinces had an interest in maintaining this odious tax, which of course was with-held, whenever possible, with any probability of success.

King Finnachta the Hospitable, who began his reign in 673, and reigned for twenty years, rendered his name memorable by yielding to the prayers and representations of St. Moling, and remitting the Borumean Tribute. After this good king's death, it was again renewed and led to many sanguinary battles, which caused the estrangement of Leinster from the other provinces in grave national crises. Thus the Leinster-men fought on the side of the Danes at Clontarf, and later Dermot MacMurrough called the Anglo- Normans to his aid. After the English invasion, however, we find Leinstermen taking a manly part in the fight for their country, and producing heroes as distinguished by their zeal for national liberty as those of any other part of Ireland.

#### Expeditions against Foreign Nations.

Niall, surnamed of the Nine Hostages, the ancestor of the great family of the O'Neills, was one of the most famous of the pagan kings of Ireland. He reigned towards the close of the fourth century, and seems to have devoted his energy mainly to hostile expeditions against Britain and Gaul. When the power of Rome declined, and she became unable to protect her outlying provinces, Irish warriors plundered and laid waste the countries no longer protected by the Roman Eagles, and thus became as formidable to their inhabitants, as the Northmen became in subsequent ages.

Allusion is made to these expeditions in the verses of the Latin poet Claudian, who states that Stilicho, the general of the Emperor Theodosius the Great, was sent to drive back the Irish army headed by the adventurous Niall. One of Claudian's passages has been thus translated in Gibson's *Camden* : —

When Scots came thundering from the Irish shores..  
And ocean trembled, struck by hostile oars.

Niall's son, Dathi, led his army to the very foot of the Alps, where he himself was struck by lightning, but his dead body was carried to his distant Irish home by his faithful soldiers. The celebrated Irish historian, Abbé MacGeoghegan, mentions a curious circumstance which tends to prove the truth

of this expedition of Dathi. "I received this account," he says, "from a captain in Lord Mountcashel's regiment, who assured me that it was related by the Marquis De Sales, at Lord Mountcashel's table, that in a very ancient registry in the archives of the house of Sales, it was stated that the King of Ireland had stopped some days at their castle." The Castle of De Sales, the paternal residence of the great St. Francis, is situated at the foot of the Alps.

We may well believe that in one of King Niall's expeditions, the glorious St. Patrick, then a boy, was carried away captive to the Irish shores. Oh ! thrice fortunate expedition which produced such a holy prize ! Irishmen may well exclaim ; for, though the conversion of our country to Christianity, in common with the rest of Europe, was an event which could not have been much longer delayed, yet it is impossible to consider with Catholic feelings, the history of religion in Ireland without being convinced that this country is indebted in an especial manner, under God, to the labours of our glorious Apostle St. Patrick.

*Fate of King Dathi*

From the soft sons of Gaul, [6]  
Roman, and Frank, [7] and thrall, [8]  
Borough, and hut, and hall.  
    Spoils have been torn.  
Over Britannia wide.  
Over fair Gaul they hied.  
Often in battle tried.  
    Enemies mourn.

Fiercely their harpers sing—  
Led by their gallant king.  
They will to Eire bring.  
    Beauty and treasure.  
Britain shall bend the knee—  
Rich shall their households be—  
When their long ships the sea  
Homeward shall measure.

Up on the glacier snow,  
Down on the vales below.  
Monarch and clansmen go—  
    Bright is the morning.  
Never their march they slack.  
Jura [9] is at their back.  
When falls the evening black  
    Hideous and warning.

Little those veterans mind  
Thundering hail, or wind ;  
Closer their ranks they bind—  
    Matching the storm.  
While, a spear cast or more.  
On the front ranks before,  
Dathi the sunburst bore—  
    Haughty his form

Forth from the thunder-cloud  
Leaps out a foe as proud—  
Sudden the monarch bowed—  
    On rush the vanguard !

Wildly the king they raise—  
Struck by the lightning blaze—  
Ghastly his dying gaze.  
    Clutching his standard.

Mild is the morning beam.  
Gently the rivers stream,  
Happy the valleys seem ;  
    But the lone islanders—  
Mark how they guard their king.  
Hark to the wail they sing.  
Dark is their counselling—  
    Helvetia's [10] highlanders

Gather, like ravens, near—  
Shall Dathi's soldiers fear ?  
Soon their home path they clear—  
    Rapid and daring ;  
On through the pass and plain,  
Until the shore they gain,  
And, with their spoil again  
    Landed in Erin.

Little does Eire care  
For gold or jewel fair.  
Where is King Dathi ? where.  
    Where is my bravest ?  
On the rich deck he lies.  
O'er him the sunburst flies—  
Solemn the obsequies,  
    Eire, thou gavest.

See ye that countless train  
Crossing Roscommon's plain  
Crying like hurricane—  
    *Uile lui ai !* [11]  
Broad is his cairn's base.  
Nigh the kings' burial place,  
Last of the Pagan race,  
    Lieth King Dathi.

*Thomas Davis*

[1] The sun, which was adored by the Milesian.

[2] Thomas Davis.

[3] Crom Cruagh, the great idol of the druids, which was surrounded by twelve smaller idols.

[4] Made of wood or from a tree.

[5] Handle or blade.

[6] Gaul, the ancient name of France.

[7] Frank, the name of a German people, that overran Gaul, and gave to it its present name.

[8] Thrall, a slave.

[9] Mount Jura in Switzerland.

[10] Helvetia, ancient name of Switzerland.

[11] *Illiloo ē*. a wailing sound from Ir, *uail*, a cry.

Irish History Reader (1905)

Author : Christian Brothers

Publisher : M.H. Gill & Son

Year : 1905

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

Book from the collections of : New York Public Library

Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/irishhistoryrea00brotgoog>

Edited and uploaded to [www.augty.org](http://www.augty.org)

December 12 2011