

The
beauties
of Ireland:
being
original delineations,
topographical, historical, and biographical,
of each county

1825

REMARKS ON THE HISTORY OF IRELAND, AS CONNECTED WITH TOPOGRAPHY AND ANTIQUITIES.

Ireland previous to the entry of the English. — An extensive disquisition on national history would be evidently misplaced in a work like the present. But the due illustration of topographical circumstances and the subjects of antiquarian research, requires a compendious review of those leading transactions which may be said to act as the great land-marks in the annals of the country, and form the chronological link to which local anecdote has a continual reference.

The limited purpose of the present inquiry renders it necessary that we confine our remarks on the early population of Ireland, chiefly to such particulars as stand connected with the tangible vestigia of antiquity. It may, indeed, be presumed that the antiquary renders his best tribute to the muse of history when he endeavours to throw light on her pages (too often clouded and dubious, from unavoidable circumstances) by presenting to consideration those relics which admit of no literary sophistry, and are scarcely liable to literary misapprehension.

It cannot be doubted but that Ireland, in common with Britain and other parts of western Europe, was originally colonized by the CELTÆ. In the language of the country, and in the names applied to rivers, mountains, and other great objects of nature, we find indisputable evidence of this fact. The language is well known to be a dialect of the Celtic ; and a recent erudite philologist has given a very extensive list of names applied to rivers and other natural objects, forming a comparative statement of such names in Ireland and Britain, with the meaning of each appellation, from the Celtic language. [1]

Those antiquities of the country, which from their rudeness must be ascribed to the most remote origin, uniformly approximate in character to the earliest vestiges discovered in Britain, where the Celtæ are known to have been the original settlers. Such are the axes and arrow-heads of stone, or flint, which are strewn so plentifully over the shores of Britain, and every other part of Europe formerly inhabited by Celtic tribes. Those tumuli and cairns which constitute the earliest places of burial, agree in form with the same mounds of earth or stone in Britain ; and their contents evince similar modes of funeral ceremony. In circles composed of upright stones, or simply of an earthen vallum ; in cromlechs, and the various other works often termed druidical, we have also proofs of a coincidence in religious and civil customs between the inhabitants of Ireland and those of Britain, previous to the introduction of Christianity, whether those works were actually carried into execution by the original Celtæ,

or by the Belgic tribes which assisted in forming the early population of the island. Further testimony, as to the settlement of the Celtæ in this country, proceeds from the accounts transmitted by antient geographical writers .

Concerning the country whence the first settlers immediately passed into Ireland, several opinions have been formed ; and probable conjecture is all that the utmost labours of research and ingenuity can afford. It would appear to be indubitable that the great tide of population flowed from the east of Europe to the west ; and as there is fair reason for presuming that early colonists would proceed by land as far as was attainable, before they ventured on the perils of the ocean, many writers have supposed that Ireland received its first inhabitants from the neighbouring coast of Britain.

The aborigines were incapable of maintaining entire possession of the soil. They were disturbed by the BELGÆ (termed FIRBOLGS by the Irish) who came from the northern coast of Gaul, and effected in this country, as in Britain, a permanent settlement. The sympathy which we naturally bestow on those who suffer from the incursions of an invading power, should, surely, be extended to this interference with the quiet occupation of those who first profited by the rich pastures of so fair an island, and were the earliest dwellers amidst its romantic scenery. From the Belgæ or Firbolgs it is, however, probable that the Celtæ, as was the fact with their kindred tribes in the sister-island, obtained a knowledge of several arts which advance mankind in the scale of civilization, and add value to existence.

The Scots are mentioned by many historians as subsequent colonists, and are described by several writers as a Scythian people. “ It is conjectured,” writes Dr. Ledwich, “ that the Scots came to our isle two or three centuries before the Nativity ; and as to their name, that seems not derived from a city or particular place, or ferocity or eminence in war, but from their original country, Scythia. Usher has shewn that they were distinguished by this appellation from the third to the twelfth century, and of course were the dominant people.” We have stated, in our remarks on the various names by which Ireland has been distinguished at different times, that this country was first recognised under the name of *Scotia* in the fourth century. No such word occurs in the map of Ptolemy, to be hereafter noticed. The difficulty obvious in the temporary cessation of a prevailing name, supposing that the Scots were, as has been usually supposed, a distinct nation, entering the island at the alleged early period, has not remained unnoticed by critical writers. “ It is not easy,” remarks Lord Lyttelton, “ to give a satisfactory reason, why, if the Scots were a people of Scythian extraction, who came into Ireland from any part of Spain, in such very early times, that name which denoted their original country, should have been lost and forgotten during so many ages, and revived about the middle of the fourth century, when (as appears by a passage of Ammianus Marcellinus) they were joined with the Picts in making war on the Britons.”

A modern author suggests the following solution of this difficulty. Considering that Tacitus, and other writers previous to Porphyry, who flourished towards the close of the third century, mention nothing of the Scots, though they speak of the tribes inhabiting Ireland, Mr. Chalmers, in the work termed “ Caledonia,” contends that it must be admitted, as a moral certainty, “ that the Scottish people had not acquired their appropriate name during the first and second centuries.” The Scoto-Irish, he affirms, always spoke Gaelic, as their descendants do at the present time ; and, since the lineage of a people is most accurately traced in its language, he believes that the Scots were a Gaelic, and not a Teutonic, race. It is correctly ascertained that Ireland was originally populated by Gaelic tribes ; and “ as there is no proof, whatever chroniclers may say, that the Scots came from abroad,” our author maintains that, “ the *Scotiæ Gentes* must have acquired, within their original island, a ‘ local habitation and a name.’ As the inhabitants of Ireland are indiscriminately called by classic writers *Hyberni* and *Scoti*, after the fourth century, we may infer that the *Hyberni* and *Scoti* were the same

people, under different designations.” As the Scots were indigenous in Ireland, so probably was their name. “From their own language,” continues Mr, Chalmers, “they acquired the appellation of *Sceite*, which signifies, in the Irish, *dispersed*, and *scattered*, and they thus appear to have obtained this characteristic name, from their passion for enterprize during ages of perturbation.”

In addition to the aboriginal Celtæ, and the Firbolgs, or Belgæ, whose settlement in Ireland is ascertained with sufficient precision, Camden reasonably believes that, after the extension of the Roman empire, and the revolutions consequent on such encroachments, great numbers fled to this country from Spain and other districts, and here found an asylum.

The earliest foreign source of intelligence, respecting the distribution of the different tribes which composed the antient population of Ireland, is found in the table, or map, of Ptolemy, who flourished about the middle of the second century. The statements of Ptolemy, together with the modern names of places noticed by him, according to the suggestions of Sir J. Ware and other respectable antiquaries, are mentioned in future pages of this work, descriptive of the counties into which Ireland is at present divided.

Richard of Cirencester [2] has bequeathed to posterity a map and description of Ireland, differing considerably from the table of the Egyptian geographer. Positions widely dissimilar are ascribed to several of the tribes, or nations. It remains to be ascertained whether these variations proceeded from a want of due information in the more recent writer, or whether internal wars had really effected vicissitudes so conspicuous in territorial possession. Many Irish historical manuscripts are now under a course of more attentive examination, amongst able Gaelic scholars, than they have hitherto experienced; and it will be a source of much interest with the antiquarian part of the public, if any of those writings should be found to convey intelligence illustrative of the geographical delineations of Ptolemy and Richard. As the work of the latter author has not been introduced to general notice in Ireland, a brief analysis of the part which relates to this country may not be unacceptable.

Ireland, according to this writer, was “formerly” inhabited by twenty tribes, of whom fourteen lived on the coast. This, in the opinion of Richard, “is the true country of the Scots, who, emigrating from hence (Britain) added a third nation to the Britons and Picts in Albion.” He proceeds to observe that he cannot agree with Bede, who affirms that the Scots were foreigners, but “conceives that they derived their origin from Britain, passed over from thence, and obtained a settlement in this Island. It is certain that the Damnii, Voluntii, Brigantes, Cangi, and other nations were descended from the Britons.”

In what is termed by Richard “a description of the island and the most remarkable places,” he asserts that the tribe called Rhobogdii “occupied the coast next to the Deucalidonian sea,” or that which washes the northern side of Ireland. The metropolis of this tribe was named *Rhobogdium*. In the eastern part of their territories was situated the promontory of the same name; in the western the *Promontorium Boreum*, or northern promontory. “Towards the south, mountains separated them from the Scotti.”

On the coast, between the northern and *Venicnian* promontory, (probably the *North Cape*, south-east of Tory Island, county of Donegal) and as far as the mouth of the Rhebeus, dwelt the Venicnii, “to whom the contiguous islands owe their name.” Their capital was *Rheba*, (supposed to have been seated on the river Barrow). The Nagnatae dwelt “below the Rhebeus, as far as the *Libnius*, (the bay of Sligo) and their celebrated capital was called after them. The Auterii lived in a recess of the bay of *Ausoba*, [3] towards the south, and their chief city was, also, named after them. The Concangii occupied the lower part of the same region, near the southern confines of which flowed the river *Senus*, (the Shannon) a noble river, on

which was situated their chief city, *Macobicum*. Hybernia in this part being contracted, terminates in a narrow point. The Velatorii inhabited the country near the southern promontory by the river Senus ; their metropolis was *Regia*, and their river *Durius*. The Lucani were situated where the river *Ibernus* (the river Kilmare, in the county of Kerry) flows into the ocean.”

The southern side of the Island he describes as lying between the *Promontorium Austriacum*, or Southern Promontory, (probably the present Mizen Head) and the *Sacred Promontory*, (probably Greenore Point). “ Here lived the Ibernii, whose metropolis was *Rhufina*. Next was the river *Dobona*, and the people called *Vodiæ*, whose promontory of the same name lies opposite to the *Promontorium Antivæstum*, in England, at about the distance of one hundred and forty-five miles. Not far from thence is the river *Dabrona*, the boundary of the Brigantes, who have also the river *Briga*,” (the river *Brigus* of Ptolemy is now termed the river Barrow) “ for their limit, and whose chief city is called *Brigantia*.”

Under the description of the “ eastern side” he includes the tract of coast “ which reaches from the Sacred Promontory as far as *Rhobogdium*. The Menapii, inhabiting the Sacred Promontory, had their chief city upon the river *Modona*, (the river Slaney) called by the same name.” The distance between this part and “ Menapia in Dimetia” (St. David’s in South Wales) he states to be thirty miles . Beyond these people, the Cauçi had their metropolis, *Dunum*, (supposed to be Dunamase, in the Queen’s County) and the river *Oboca* (Avonmore) washed their boundaries. “ Both these nations were undoubtedly of Teutonic origin ; but it is not known at what precise time their ancestors first passed over, though, most probably, a little while before Cæsar’s arrival in Britain.”

Beyond the tribes last mentioned were the Eblanæ, “ whose chief city was *Mediolanum*, upon the river *Læbius*. More to the north was *Lebarum* [4] the city of the Voluntii, whose rivers were *Vinderus* [5] and *Buvinda*, (the river Boyne). The Damnii occupied the part of the island lying above these people, and contiguous to the *Rhobogdii*. Their chief city was *Dunum*.”

Having thus noticed the tribes who inhabited the coast, our author proceeds to specify the people who occupied the interior. “ The Coriondii bordered upon the Cauçi and Menapii, above the Brigantes : the Scotti possessed the remaining part of the island, which from them took the name of *Scotia*. Among many of their cities, the remembrance of two only has reached our times ; the one *Rheba*, on the lake and river Rhebius ; the other *Ibernia*, situated at the east side of the river Senus.”

In the preceding pages we have confined our remarks to such subjects concerning the early population of Ireland, as can scarcely be deemed liable to controversy. The antient and existing language ; the names of respective tribes, as stated by Ptolemy ; the appellations of places ; and the character of those emphatical vestiges of antiquity which are spread over the reclude parts of the country ; confirm us in the propriety of believing that Ireland was originally peopled by the Celtæ. From the names of several tribes, and from many other causes connected with the character of remaining antiquities, we are equally justified in concluding that the Belgæ encroached on the first settlers, and obtained a participation in the soil.

There are annals preserved in Ireland which state the settlement of other early colonies. These works are uniformly curious ; and, in regard to later ages than those now under discussion, are often replete with valuable intelligence. Chronicles respecting the infancy of a nation, are invariably mixed with fable. However faithful may be the first tradition, vanity, a luxuriant fancy, or adulation of the powerful, continually induces the alloy of exaggerations and romantic additions ; marvellous, heroic, and calculated to stimulate patriotic ardour in the

early stages of society. In after-times, when judgment obtains the mastery over imagination, the patriot, as well as the scholar, feels it a duty to the genius of his country to discard the fabulous creation which amused the childhood of the state ; and he would rather relinquish two facts, in which the morals and honour of his nation are not concerned, than retain one error.

It must be a grateful task to writers whose limits are not contracted, as are those of the present work, to separate probable fact from the evident blandishments of romance. The nature of our undertaking, and the narrow bounds to which it is confined, render it necessary that we should restrict our notice of these historic materials, as regards the present stage of our work, to a brief description of their literary character, and a statement, equally concise, of the information which they convey.

The early parts of the history of Ireland, as presented by native writers, like the remote history of many other countries, rest chiefly on the genealogical poems of antient bards and senachies. This channel of intelligence (independent of other objections) must naturally be regarded with suspicion ; as flattery towards a patron might obviously induce a fanciful creation, for the gratification of his vanity ; or, in an elective government, for the advancement of his more solid interests. We are told, however, that, in Ireland, some national and very unusual precautions were taken for the preservation of fidelity in historical and genealogical records. The purpose of information on this topic will be best answered by the following abridged extract of the judicious work by Bishop Nicolson, entitled *The Irish Historical Library*.

“ If what Keating and others report of the care taken by the government of the public records be true, it is hardly possible to imagine that any kingdom of the world should outdo Ireland, either in the antiquity, or certainty of her histories . They tell us that Ollamh Fodhla, the twenty-first monarch of the Milesian race (who is said to have reigned about nine hundred years before the birth of Christ) ordained a triennial parliament to be held at the king’s pleasure, throughout all succeeding generations, at Temora, or Taragh ; in which, amongst other state-matters of the highest concern, a special committee was always appointed for the inspecting of all their monuments of antiquity, genealogies, chronicles, &c. Whatever was approved by them as genuine and authentick, was presently inserted in the book of royal records, called thence the Psalter of Taragh. After the kingdom became Christian, such another Parliament was held at the said palace of Taragh ; wherein a like committee of three kings and three bishops (whereof St. Patrick himself was one) was appointed, to review all the antient chronicles : the keeping whereof was afterwards, by the states of the realm, committed to the care and custody of the bishops . These prelates, for its more safe preservation, caused several authentick copies to be fairly engrossed.

“ We are further yet assured, that the Irish had ever so fond an esteem for their own genealogies and histories, that (in the most early ages of their civil state) they had above two hundred annalists and historians, whose families were seized (in fee) of considerable hereditaments for the carrying on of this national concern ; every great lord being obliged to have a set of them, to transmit to posterity all the memorable occurrences in the several descents of his family : yet so, as that all these inferior reports were subject to the forementioned triennial scrutiny in Parliament.”

It will scarcely be expected that any existing manuscript annals, written in Irish, should be of an earlier date than the period at which Christianity was introduced to this island. Some Irish antiquaries, however, contend that their ancestors possessed an alphabet previous to that time, not derived from the Roman, but brought from Spain, at a date many ages antecedent to the christian æra. If this assertion could be incontrovertibly established, it would be not only

curious, but highly useful ; as it would prove that the possible facts, or traces of facts, involved in the confessedly fabulous parts of early chronicles respecting Ireland, were likely to be derived from a better source than that of oral and mutable tradition .

The most important feature in the tomes of history formed from the psalters and records noticed above, as regards the remote ages now under notice, is the supposed settlement in Ireland of a colony which came immediately from Spain, and bestowed on the Irish a numerous race of MILESIAK kings, whose exploits were the glory of the country and the theme of its latest bard. According to some Irish writers these colonists proceeded originally from Asia, “ whence they brought the doctrine taught by Noah to his posterity.” After various migrations they sojourned for nearly one hundred and fifty years in Spain, and thence proceeded to Ireland, where they met with a final resting-place. Their first princes in this Island were Heber and Heremon, sons of Milesius, whose descendants, together with those of Ith, another son of that personage, constituted a race of kings, ending in the person of Roderick O’Conor, who died towards the close of the twelfth century, being the last of the Irish monarchs. Copious accounts of the genealogy of these princes, and of the wars in which they were engaged, are presented in the Bardic compositions.

It is painful to observe that the most flattering page in the Irish annals ascribes to the Milesians no other right of dominion in this country, than that obtained by sanguinary conquest. In the first battle between the Damnonii and the force led by Heber, on the second landing of the invading power, the bards assert one thousand to have fallen of those who defended the soil with desperate patriotism. The words of an “ old poet,” in celebration of this triumph, are thus quoted by the translator of Keating’s History of Ireland :

“ On Sliagh Mis our warlike squadrons stood.
Eager of fight, and prodigal of blood ;
Victorious arms our stout Gadelians bore,
Ruin behind, and terror marched before.
A thousand of the *enchanted host* are slain,
They try their *charms* and *magic arts* in vain.
For with their mangled limbs they cover all the plain. ”

Reserving to a future page a succinct notice of the probable condition of society in these early ages, we proceed to a statement of some circumstances in the ensuing history of the island, which do not altogether depend on any peculiar class of annalists, but are supported by the testimony of writers entertaining dissimilar motives, and connected with the literature of different countries.

Whilst the rude population of Britain experienced the mingled penalties and advantages of an invasion from the Romans, Ireland remained free from the hostile visitation of that august people. We are informed by Tacitus that Julius Agricola had the conquest of this island in contemplation, and that, from the knowledge he had obtained of its internal state, he believed that the design might be carried into execution with one legion and some auxiliary troops. There can be no doubt but that Agricola formed so contemptuous an opinion of the defensible power of the country, from the accounts he had received of the numerous petty states into which Ireland was divided, the whole being continually agitated by jealousy, distrust, and ambitious warfare.

The recal of this able general prevented his carrying the intended invasion into effect ; and we have no determinate proof that the Romans ever debarked on this island, whilst they held Britain as a province, except, perhaps, as merchants, in occasional visits to the maritime parts. Towards the decline of the Roman power in Britain, the Irish, indeed, were enabled to

act on the aggressive. They harassed the Romanized shores of the British island by maritime excursions, and they united with their kindred tribes in the northern and unconquered part of that island, in predatory enterprises beyond the wall of partition. [6]

The introduction of Christianity obviously forms the most important epoch in the history of every country to which its doctrines have been imparted. When we reflect on the zeal of the primitive missionaries, it must appear highly probable that the gospel was communicated to Ireland nearly at the same time as to Britain, where the converts were sufficiently numerous in the early part of the fourth century to call forth the persecuting spirit of Dioclesian. But the great æra in the dissemination of Christianity amongst the Irish, is ascribed to the time of the celebrated apostle of this nation, St. Patrick, [7] who is believed to have been sent hither by Pope Celestine, in the year 432.

Although it cannot be denied that the tenets of Christianity, so transcendantly calculated to harmonize the jarring passions of mankind, failed to effect any observable reformation of public manners, as regards the prosecution of internal warfare conducted with extreme ferocity, those divine doctrines led to some memorable improvements in the national character. The number of ecclesiastics, both secular and regular, speedily became very great ; and the fertile genius of the country, thus happily directed to objects of sacred study, shone forth in numerous scholars, who were the pride of their own age, and, as far as relates to zeal, piety, and industry, claim the admiration of posterity;

The very numerous monastic institutions which were progressively formed, [8] acted as depositories of learning, and schools of instruction, at a period in which a great part of Europe was plunged in a state of political ruin, and in which letters consequently underwent an extreme depression. We are informed by Bede that in the seventh century great numbers of Anglo-Saxons, many of whom were of a noble rank, repaired to Ireland, for the purpose of receiving instruction, or pursuing studies in theology. That venerable writer adds that these visitors were most willingly received by the Scots (thus he terms the Irish) who maintained them at their own charge, supplied them with books, and became their teachers without fee or reward. This passage of Bede should never be quoted without a recollection of the comment presented by Lord Lyttelton, who styles it “ a most honourable testimony, not only to the learning, but likewise to the hospitality and bounty of the Irish nation.”

Amongst the ecclesiastics of Ireland distinguished for such learning as these ages afforded, several are celebrated as successful missionaries to the continent and to Britain. The noble writer before cited, observes, chiefly on the authority of Bede and Camden, that “ great praise is due to the piety of those Irish ecclesiasticks, who (as we know from the clear and unquestionable testimony of many foreign writers) made themselves the apostles of barbarous heathen nations, without any apparent inducement to such hazardous undertakings, except the merit of the work. By the preaching of these men, the Northumbrians, the East Angles, and the Northern Picts, were converted. Convents also were founded by them in Burgundy, Germany, and other foreign countries, where they distinguished themselves by the rigid integrity and purity of their manners ; so that Ireland, from the opinion conceived of their sanctity, was called the *country of saints*.”

It would appear to be indubitable, that the sixth and two following centuries formed that period of history in which Ireland enjoyed her greatest antient prosperity. We have seen that, in ages near the commencement of this period, she was so fearless of a foreign power that she sent forth troops to harass the Romanized Britons ; and for the whole of this term, until the latter part of the eighth century, about which time the Danes, or Ostmen, assailed her shores in formidable numbers, the country experienced no lasting injury from an external foe. During these prosperous centuries it is, indeed, evident that the Danes committed some piratical

and local ravages ; but such as were chiefly confined to the coast. It must be also observed that, in the year 684, Beorht, the general of Ecgfrid, King of Northumbria, led a predatory and merciless band into Ireland. Plunder appears to have formed their chief object, but their incursions were marked by numerous acts of barbarity, amongst which must be noticed the destruction of many churches and monasteries. These troubles, however, lasted but for one season. “ The islanders,” observes Mr. Turner, in his History of the Anglo-Saxons, “ defended their domestic lares with valour, and the Angles retreated.” For such afflictions as Ireland experienced in these ages, she was chiefly indebted to the turbulent disposition of her own princes ; or, rather, to that defective form of government which admitted an equipoise of power, and encouraged continual intestine wars of ambition, avarice, or revenge.

Those northern marauders, who had occasionally landed in small bodies during the ages above noticed, commenced a series of more formidable incursions in the latter years of the eighth, or the early part of the ninth century . By the English they were collectively termed Ostmen ; and have often been recognised by historical writers under the common appellation of Danes ; which latter mode of designation is usually adopted in the present work.

As a general outline of history, it may be desirable to observe that these invaders from the north entered Ireland in a pagan state, and were for many years inveterate destroyers of churches, religious houses, and literary records . They appear to have been partially converted to Christianity as early as the year 853 ; [9] and were never completely ejected from the island, although their power was much lessened by the heroic exertions of Brien Boromh, and his successor, Malachy, in the eleventh century.

Previous to a notice of that important epocha in the annals of Ireland, the entry of the English, in the twelfth century, the due illustration of topography requires that we should present some few observations on the form of political constitution, the laws, and the state of society, in ages precedent to that event.

It appears that, at the earliest period illumined by satisfactory historical documents, Ireland was divided into numerous petty states, subject to their own peculiar kings, who were again subordinate and tributary to a provincial sovereign. The whole of the provincial kings were nominally subject to the power of a monarch, chosen from their own number.

We are informed, by O’Flaherty, that the Irish monarchy was elective, but not without a consideration of hereditary right ; by which, observes Dr. Campbell, “ we are to understand, that the election could fall upon a certain family only, but that the choice of the individual of that family belonged to the people : so that it was *elective as to the person* and *hereditary as to the blood*. These principles, so jarring, were the perpetual sources of discord and contention, which could only be composed by the strongest hand. Accordingly, we find that out of a long line of near 200 Irish monarchs, scarce two in immediate succession have died a natural death.”

In the scale of sovereignty we have seen that there were several degrees. Next in political consequence to the monarch were the provincial kings, each of whom appears to have been virtually monarch, in regard to the several chiefs within his province, who are also usually styled kings. The number of provinces fluctuated at different periods. At an early date of Irish history we are told that the number was five ; but that through many subsequent ages it was limited to four, a portion of each being subtracted to form a domain for the support of the sovereign dignity. This royal territory chiefly consisted of the district at present termed the counties of Meath and West Meath, and must be considered as having really constituted a fifth province.

It is said by Dr. Ledwich, on the authority of Mr. O'Conor, that Ireland, at the arrival of the English in the twelfth century, was divided into "seven principalities ; Desmond under the Macarthies ; Thuomond under the O'Briens ; Hy Kinsellagh, or Leinster, under the line of Cahir ; Uladh, under the O'Dunlevies and Mac Mahons ; south Hy Nial, or Meath, under the Clan Colmans, or O'Melaghlans ; north Hy Nial under the O'Neils and O'Donnels ; and Hy Brune, with Hy Fiachra, or Connaught, under the O'Conors."

The whole of the petty kings appear to have exercised full power within their immediate territories, and to have acknowledged, or at least to have rendered service to, a superior only on the occurrence of public danger, or as interest and ambition might dictate in the prosecution of party quarrels. [10]

The persons who held the fourth rank in the state were denominated *Tiarna* and *Toiseach*. They are described by O'Flaherty as resembling the Saxon Thanes. "The Tiarnas," says Dr. Ledwich, "were what Davies calls *Canfinnies*, the heads of clans. We had our Clanbreasil, Clancarty, Clanaboy, Claneolman, Clanfergal, and many more. In most cases the Tiarna's surname was that of his clan. Macarthy was Riagh, or King of Desmond ; his Tiarnas were the clans O'Keefe, O'Donoghue, O'Callaghan, O'Sullivan, &c."

Each king, and chief of a sept, had his *Tanist*, or successor, who was elected during his lifetime. According to General Vallancey, *Tanistry* was a law of succession, whereby, in attention to the original spirit of the institution, "the oldest male among the near kinsmen of the last ruling prince (legally succeeding) and of the same name and stock, was constitutionally to succeed him, by the right of seniority, unless some natural or accidental infirmity had rendered him manifestly incapable of governing." But, whatever might have been the primitive intention of this custom, it is sufficiently evident that ambition and factious influence generally caused the succession to be obtained by him who possessed the greatest energies and the strongest party.

All the possessions of the antient Irish passed to survivors either by the custom of *Tanistry*, or that of *Gavelkind*. The lands appertaining to the chieftain went, without partition, to his *Tanist* ; but the possessions of all inferior persons were divided, in obedience to the custom termed *Gavelkind*. This custom has been differently represented, but, according to the author of the *Collectanea*, it consisted in parting the lands of the father equally amongst all his sons, natural as well as legitimate, to the utter exclusion of his daughters. So rigorous was this exclusion of females, that, on the failure of male issue, the landed property of the deceased passed to his brothers, or next male heirs. Sir John Davies explains the practice of *Gavelkind* amongst the Irish, in a manner widely dissimilar from the above statement. In the opinion of this writer, who was attorney-general of Ireland in the reign of James I. "by the Irish custom of *Gavelkind* the inferior tenancies were partible amongst all the males of the sept," both illegitimate and otherwise. "And, after partition made, if any one of the sept had died, his portion was not divided among his sons, but the chief of the sept made a new partition of all the lands belonging to that sept, and gave every one his part, according to his antiquity." If this latter account be correct, we find that the *Gavelkind* of Ireland differed, in its essential principle, from that of Britain, and was calculated to restrain the country to a state of military rudeness.

The principal laws of each state and sept were, from a very remote period, committed to writing. These were styled by the English colonists *Brehon laws*, from *Brehon*, the title of the judge who administered them. Like most nations in the infancy of society, the ancient Irish permitted a composition for the most heinous offences, even the shedding of human blood. The fine paid by the offender was termed an *Eric*, and bears an evident similarity to the *Were* of the Anglo-Saxons. It is mentioned by Dr. Leland, as an instance of the lenity of the penal

laws of the Irish, that the eric, or fine, paid to a son for the murder of his father, was twenty-one kine. These laws descended to very minute particulars ; and, in regard to the preservation of property, are said, by the writer last cited, to breathe a spirit of equity and humanity, and to justify the honourable testimony of Sir John Davies and Lord Coke, who affirmed it to be no matter of surprise that a people accustomed to the refinements found in their own laws, should be conspicuous for a love of justice. [11]

The office and property of the Brehon, or judge, were hereditary. His seat of judgment was in the open air, and on a spot either naturally or artificially elevated. Several of the seats attributed to the Brehons are still existing, and will be noticed in future pages.

Under such a government and such laws, the people of Ireland were necessarily very far removed from that state of barbarism that has been attributed to the country by some rash and splenetic writers. But the existence of so many independent states, in an island of moderate population, unavoidably retarded the progress of those arts and sciences, on which not only the real dignity, but the comfort of society depends. The rational calculation of the examiner is here supported by the pages of the annalist. We find, from credible documents, that states so naturally subject to rivalry were continually engaged in wars against each other, which had no aim but ambition or rapine, and no possible end but scenes of carnage, almost equally disgusting whether we view the sanguinary triumph of the successful, or figure the distress of the vanquished. Faint, and of little avail, are the tints of melioration imparted to so dreary a picture by occasional traits of generosity and heroism.

That want of unanimity which prevented the natives from attaining a satisfactory proficiency in many of the arts of peace, exposed them, also, an easy prey, to the arms of neighbouring countries. The history of Ireland presents, through most of the early and middle ages, a succession of invasions, which the utmost chivalry of the nation, when not condensed under one great head of government, was quite unable to resist.

The military character encouraged by the existence of many rival states, and employed, from the same cause, chiefly in domestic warfare, led to a neglect of commerce (the mother of the arts), if not to a disdain of so pacific an avocation. The custom of Gavelkind, although evidently calculated to prevent the durable investment of extensive property, even in the most successful families of warlike ages, still led to an habitual dependance on landed inheritance ; and was, therefore, unfavourable to the cultivation of traffic and the mechanical arts. It is uniformly allowed that the commerce of Ireland, throughout many of the centuries now under consideration, was chiefly carried on by Danish colonists.

We have noticed, with much pleasure, in a previous page, the literary eminence attained by the Irish in the sixth and two following centuries. From the constitution of society it is, however, improbable that the advantages of learning extended far beyond the cloister. In this respect Ireland shared in the condition of neighbouring countries ; and it must be ever remembered, to the credit of national talent and liberality, that she eclipsed all competitors in the literature of those ages, and readily imparted to less favoured districts the benefits she had laboriously acquired.

There are not any traces of antiquity to sanction us in believing that some Irish writers have not enlarged, in terms too florid, on the bardic intimations of splendid courts, and pompous establishments, amongst many Irish kings and their chief nobles. A high degree of military dignity was, undoubtedly, maintained by those personages. Their own fertile island supplied them with numerous materials of rude grandeur ; and the commercial spirit of the northern tribes added many foreign luxuries.

It is observable that no researches have succeeded in proving that the antient Irish had any coinage of their own. It is certain that no coins, unquestionably from an Irish mint, are known to exist ; and the erics, or fines, specified in the Brehon laws, are usually estimated by cumals of cattle. The Danes coined money in Ireland, of which considerable quantities are preserved in different cabinets. That the antient Irish possessed numerous ornaments of gold is, however, correctly ascertained. Many discoveries of such curious and valuable relics are mentioned in future pages ; and from these it will be evident that the Irish, if not sufficiently refined to feel the want of a coinage, were still masters of considerable wealth in the precious metals.

Whilst the political constitution of the country would appear to have been inimical to those pursuits which truly enrich a state, and form its best claim to ascendancy in the scale of nations, there were arts cultivated which were congenial even to a continued state of military contest, and had power to impart a fallacious charm to acts of sanguinary aggression. Poetry and music were these arts ; and both were made to Sympathize with scenes of contention, — with the festival of the victor and the groans of the discomfited. In all those ages during which war was the chief business of society, and commerce was little known, the romantic scenery of Ireland echoed to the strains of her bards. Their songs stimulated the warrior to enterprize, and raised enthusiasm in the hall of triumph. In the same halls the bards formed the genealogists of their patrons, and the historians of public events.

The professors of the divine arts of poetry and music were rewarded with honours and emoluments, proportionate to the value of their efforts to elevate the national feeling, and to eternize the exploits of distinguished warriors. The harp of Ireland, which constituted its pride in prosperity, proved the solace of its adverse hours. It often encouraged a spirit of romance in real life, and added to rational regret a vein of lamentation over scenes of visionary bliss, created by its own powers ; but it likewise assisted in preserving features of national heroism, admirable in the esteem of the brave and the generous of all countries and ages. Until the seventeenth century, representatives of the ancient bards were still protected and cherished in the mansions of the noble and affluent. Although their order be now extinct, their songs and melodies form subjects of exquisite pleasure, and act as emphatic memorials of the national superiority, at an early period, in those arts which “ exalt and enchant the human soul.”

Ireland subsequent to the entry of the English. — Ireland, in the latter part of the twelfth century, had little cause to apprehend the formidable interference of foreign powers, if its strength had been collectively exercised under one efficient head of government. In regard to the quarter whence such an interference took place, it is evident that Henry II. of England had for some time meditated the union of the two islands beneath his own crown ; but it was sufficiently proved, by the events of many succeeding ages, that other objects of policy or ambition, and the unsettled state of its own affairs, prevented the English government from seriously devoting its powers to the reduction of the Irish princes. On deliberate reflection, the patriot of each land will allow that the junction of the two countries must be conducive to mutual interest, whilst such modes of legislation are adopted as are due to an associated, not a conquered, people.

[1] Caledonia, by G. Chalmers, vol. i. p. 20 et seq. In a subsequent page Mr. Chalmers remarks that “ Ireland plainly preserves in her topography, a much greater proportion of *Celtic* names than the map of any other country ; and next to it, in this respect, may be placed North-Britain. The names of towns, villages, churches, parishes, mountains, lakes, rivers, and of other places, and objects, in Ireland, are nearly all *Gaelic*.”

[2] Richard, usually termed Richard of Cirencester, from the place of his birth, was a monk of

St. Peter's, Westminster, and lived in the fourteenth century. His work, entitled *De Situ Britanniae*, contains an Itinerary of Britain, which he states to have been collected from ancient records, now lost. In his map of Ireland he profits by the later intelligence he possessed, and introduces the "Scotti," which word does not occur in the map of Ptolemy. But it will be observed that he considers the Scotias a distinct people, having a determinate position amongst the other tribes, or nations, of Ireland, though he is desirous of deriving their origin from Britain.

- [3] The Ausoba, or Ausona, is described by Ware as "a river which takes its rise out of Lough-Curb (Lough Coirib) and washes Galway."
- [4] Probably the *Laberus* of Ptolemy, the site of which city is now unknown.
- [5] The *Vinderius* of Ptolemy is described by Sir J. Ware as "the bay of Carrickfergus, or the mouth of the river Lagan, which there dischargeth itself into the sea."
- [6] Ammianus, lib. xxvii. ch. 7. The British historian Gildas describes his country, subsequent to the death of Maximus, as "groaning for many years under the incursions of the *Scots from the north-west*, and of the Picts from the north."
- [7] A modern writer on the antiquities of Ireland (Dr. Ledwich) not contented with observing that numerous fabulous circumstances have been insinuated into the biography of St. Patrick, in its descent through illiterate ages, denies that such a person ever existed! We state some of the ideas of Dr. Ledwich on this subject, under the head of Armagh, where St. Patrick sat as bishop; and in the same place we present the arguments of those who controvert the assertions of that writer.
- [8] "It was," observes Mr. Archdall, "towards the close of the fifth century, that St. Patrick established here the monkish profession; simplicity and purity of manners, and the most rigid mortification, were well calculated to inspire Pagans with veneration for such missionaries and their doctrines; and the Irish received, with the rudiments of their faith, a predilection for the monastic state. Congal, Carthag, and Columba, in the sixth century, carried monkery to greater splendour and perfection by their rules and noble foundations, and by their eminent talents, and distinguished zeal. They were the fruitful parents of a numerous progeny of monks, who, in the next century, multiplied to such numbers, that Bishop Nicolson, an excellent judge, pronounces them equal to all the other inhabitants of the kingdom. In succeeding ages, every improvement of dress, or discipline, was quickly adopted here; and the long catalogue of Augustinians, Benedictines, Cistercians, and the rest, grace our monastic annals." *Monas. Hib.* p. x.—xi.
- [9] Sir J. Ware places the conversion of the Danes in the year 948; but Dr. Ledwich affirms, that, "from a coin of Ivar, it appears they were christians in 853." *Antiqs. of Ire.* p. 159.
- [10] Every subordinate prince, "or head of a large tribe and tract of country, amongst the Irish, carried the title of king, and did effectually exercise all sorts of sovereign power in his own territories, and even that of making war and peace, not only with his co-equals, but also with the chief king of the whole province, whenever he found himself able to form a sufficient party against him." — "Amongst the different princes and states of this nation, the chief, and, I may say, the only proper mark of subjection and subordination, was the receiving a certain subsidy called *Tuarasdal*, which literally implies *hire*, or *wages*, in the English tongue, and which, in effect, was only a princely present, and token of generosity and magnificence in the giver. But the prince, or state, that received it first, was deemed inferior and tributary to the prince by whom it was given." In return for these presents the

subordinate princes paid to their monarch different sorts of “ retributions,” or tributes, calculated for the support of his dignity, and for the assistance of the state. Collect, de Reb. Hib. Vol. i, p. .370, 373.

[11] On the final abolition of the Brehon laws in the time of James I. the manuscripts in which they were collected were widely dispersed, and were, perhaps, in many instances intentionally destroyed. Many fragments have survived the ravages of time ; and General Vallancey, in the Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis, has presented the public with a translation of several extracts. It is understood that fourteen volumes of fragments of these laws, now in the possession of the Gaelic Society of Ireland, are preparing for the press, under the direction of Mr. O'Reily. The most valuable and extensive collection is re-positied in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. The fragments translated by General Vallancey, relate to sumptuary and miscellaneous laws. It may be necessary to remark that these curious fragments had baffled all efforts at translation, previous to the attempt of Vallancey. It was suspected that this difficulty arose from an affectation of obscurity in the writer, and was insurmountable without a glossary, or key, that was not to be discovered. The success of General Vallancey, of course, created much surprise; and here we must regret the want of courtesy with which antiquarian discussion was conducted in Ireland, some years back. The strength of language often adopted might, indeed, have induced the native of another country to look with apprehension on the peril of entering lists, where weapons of severe infliction were in use, rather than the rebated lances of the urbane tournament. The paroxysm, however, fortunately for the interests of literature, lasted for a short term only. It was during the prevalence of this unusual bitterness of spirit, that the Author of the “ Antiquities of Ireland,” asserted that “ the translations in the Collectanea must be esteemed a literary imposition on the public,” until the Author produced the glossary, or key, which assisted him in performing the task. In the preliminary discourse to Dr. Leland's history it is asserted, that “ a considerable part of the difficulty which Mr. Llyud, and other inspectors of these books, hitherto experienced, arose, it seems, from not adverting to the proper method of reading them ; as they are written in the manner well known to the Grecian antiquary by the name of BOUSTROPHEDON. The unusual inversion of lines occasioned apparent incoherence and confusion. When this circumstance was once pointed out, the difficulties arising from an obsolete language appeared not so considerable.”

The beauties of Ireland: being original delineations, topographical, historical, and biographical, of each county (1825)

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