

An Island beyond and Island

The Trade Routes of Ireland.

IN MEMORY OF
THE IRISH DEAD

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A DISCUSSION of the Trade Routes of Ireland may seem to some a superfluous and barren task. It has long been a fashion to look on the country as an island, “ remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow.” Writers have pictured it as lying through the centuries in primitive barbarism, an outlying desolation of poverty and disorder. The blame of this desolation is sometimes laid on the savagery of the people, sometimes on the position of the island, at the very “ ends of the earth.” No doubt there has been a certain political convenience in the very usual argument that the geographical position of Ireland, lying so near to Great Britain, makes it immediately dependent on that country alone, so that it could by nature have no real converse with Europe, and no door of civilisation save through England. An island beyond an island—such is reputed the forlorn position of Ireland. We all naturally believe that which we constantly hear or frequently repeat : and it is well from time to time to ask ourselves what reason may lie behind common tradition—in this special case to enquire what geography and history may have to tell us of the natural trade routes of Ireland and of England in former times.

Michelet has pictured Europe with all her main rivers and harbours opening to the west, and the island of Great Britain alone lying as a mighty ship poised on the ocean with her prow fronting the orient. The Thames opens its harbour to the east, the capital looks to the east, and the early trading centres, the Cinque Ports, turn to the sunrising. Thus the natural way of trade and travel from England to the Continent has always been by the narrow seas across the Channel or the North Sea to the convenient river-mouths and harbours of the north European plain. Ireland was in a different case. If the opposite British coast, for the most part inhospitable mountain and forest, offered to her in early times a slender trade and a harsh welcome, she on her side did not turn to it her best natural ports. Those on the east coast from Waterford to Belfast are few ; Dublin, left to itself, is a poor harbour ; and from thence to Belfast there is only one small port, Ardglass, where the entrance is safe at low tide. The chief harbours of Ireland in fact were those that swelled with the waves of the Atlantic Ocean. Her outlook was across its stormy waters, and her earliest traffic through the perils of the Gaulish sea. The English were concerned with the north and east of Europe, the Irish with the south and west, and their paths did not cross.

For Ireland, therefore, the road to Europe did not lie across Great Britain. As far back as we can see into the primitive darkness the inhabitants of the island were all in turn out on the great seas. An old myth or legend tells of the ancient Manannan Mac Lir, “ Son of the Sea,” who was the best pilot that was in the west of Europe, and the greatest reader of the sky and weather : or who in another tale appears a sea-god triumphant over the ocean as his boat raced under him on the immensity of the waters like a chariot on the summer fields, while he sang in his joy—“ That is to me a happy plain with a profusion of flowers, looking from the chariot of two wheels.” Ireland, in times beyond the reach of history, lay on the high-road of

an ancient trade between the countries we know as Scandinavia and Gaul. Even in the Stone age its people cut some of their flint arrows after the fashion of Portugal, or carried them from that peninsula across the Bay of Biscay ; and fragments of stone cups have been found in Ireland, as in Britain, which are said to have come from the Mediterranean by the Gaulish sea. As for the northern traffic, we have traces of it more than a thousand years before the Christian era in burial mounds of the Bronze age, where there are stones carved with a form of ornament which in western Europe is only found in Scandinavia and Ireland.

It was during the Bronze age that the first Gaelic or Goidelic invaders entered Ireland, coming not through Britain but over-sea from Spain and Gaul, from the openings of the Garonne and the Loire, or from the ports of Brittany. And by that open highway sailed also later settlers from southern and northern Gaul. Some relics of these conquering tribes, fine rivetted trumpets of bronze made after the fashion of the continent, of the same pattern as those used in central France about the Loire, show that they kept up intercourse with their people abroad. For centuries, in fact, this intercourse can be traced. An invasion of the Gauls in the third century B.C. left to Leinster its old name of Laigen, from the broad-headed lances which they carried ; and five hundred years later, in the second century A.D., Irish princes used to send to Gaul for soldiers to serve in their wars.

In the time of the Roman Empire therefore Irish trade with Europe was already well established. Tacitus (A.D. 98) tells that its ports and harbours were well known to merchants ; and in the second century the geographer Ptolemy of Alexandria gave a list, very surprising for the time, of the river-mouths, mountains, and port towns of Ireland, and its sea-coast tribes—a knowledge he may have gained from Marinus of Tyre, or the Syrian traders who conducted the traffic from Asia Minor to the Rhone, and thence across the Gaulish Sea. Italy exported her wine in the second century B.C. ; and in the second century A.D., four hundred years later, when wine was grown on the hill sides of Provence it may have reached Irish ports, transported by merchants of Marseilles to the Garonne, or by the valleys of the Rhone and the Loire, and thence across the sea. They travelled in ships built to confront Atlantic gales, with high poops standing out of the water like castles, and great leathern sails—stout hulls that were steered and worked by the born sailors of the Breton coast. From Brittany the passage to Ireland could be made in three days. From the Loire it was two days longer, as we may see from a later Irish story of the sixth century which tells how a ship-load of strangers, five decades of them, came sailing from the lands of Latium on pilgrimage to Ireland. Each decade of pilgrims took with them an Irish saint to guide and protect the vessel, every one in his turn for a day and a night, which gives a voyage of five days and nights. As they neared the Irish coast a fierce storm arose, and St. Senan, who was that day guardian of the company, rose from dinner with a thigh-bone in his hand, and blessing the air with the bone brought the pilgrims safe into Cork harbour. The saint was a practical sailor and pilot, and he had been allotted the best joint, the portion which by Irish law was given to the king or the high poet.

But while traders of the Empire sailed to Ireland, the armies of Rome never crossed the Irish Sea. Ireland therefore lay outside the Roman Empire, while it lay within the circle of imperial civilisation and commerce. Christianity first came from across the Gaulish Sea, and the art of writing, and new forms of ornament. From Gaul the Irish learned to divide tribal land into private property marked by boundary stones. Roman-Hellenistic learning, which spread from northern Italy to Marseilles, crossed the Irish seas with the merchants of Aquitaine carrying the wine of Bordeaux ; or it was brought home by Irish scholars of the fourth century who went to seek learning in Narbonne, where Greek was spoken as a living tongue. The Irish Pelagius, who went to Italy in 400, was able to carry on a discussion in Jerusalem in 415 with Orosius the Spaniard, in which he spoke Greek while Orosius needed an interpreter: if he had not learned Greek in Ireland, Zimmer reminds us, he would not have

been able to learn it in Rome. Nearly two hundred years later, in 595, the Irish saint Columbanus and his companions knew Greek, but Gregory the Great did not know it, though he had twice been Papal nuncio in Constantinople. Ovid and Vergil were known and read in Ireland, where scholars seem to have taken all that Rome had to give of classical culture and philosophy.

It is often assumed that to share in the benefits of an empire it is necessary to be a subject country, lying within its police control, and that the Irish suffered by never having been forced under the authority of Rome. Perhaps, however, we might learn here another lesson—that in matters of civilisation what is really needed is not subjection to force, but free human converse and the willing intercourse of men. We have the spectacle of an island beyond the military rule, the police control, the law, of the Roman empire, willingly adopting all the spiritual good which Rome could give it, and the culture that the intelligence of its people found to suit them. Free to keep her own customs, Ireland could gain this new learning without losing her own civilization and her pride of language, history, and law. It was in seas of blood that such national pride was wiped out by Roman conquerors from the plains of Gaul. But for the Irish at that time there was no violent breach with the traditions of their race, nor any humiliation or bondage to darken their high spirit ; and in the joyful and brilliant activity of the succeeding centuries they illustrated the free and peaceful union of two civilizations.

Ireland had another advantage from her place of freedom on the open highways of the sea. For lying outside the Empire she was saved from the economic ruin that fell on all the Roman dominions when, by the fatal policy of the Empire, enterprise and wealth were sucked to the centre and capital, draining the provinces bare ; so that, for example, witnesses of that time describe the once Wealthy port of Cadiz as a town of great empty warehouses, silent and deserted, save for a few poor old men and women creeping about its melancholy streets. Her position saved her too when the barbarians swept over the Empire. As she had been unconquered by the Romans so she remained unconquered by Teuton or English. Her learning did not perish before invaders ; and if on the mainland every old line of communication was closed or broken, her way of the ocean was still free. It is true that the wars of the English invaders of Britain for some hundred and fifty years (449-597) barred all passage through it to the Continent. But that route had never been of any real consequence. A way to Europe across Britain was no doubt known to the Irish in Roman times, and some pilgrims journeyed by that way across the Empire. But this was not the main route for travellers from Ireland, and it was never the line of their continental trade. There seems to have been little communication on the whole with Britain. Settlers went over from Ireland to Scotland, to Wales, to the Cornish peninsula, and founded Irish colonies. But in the main the Irish troubled themselves very little about Britain at all. In fact from the third century onwards they were accustomed to give to all strangers the name of “ Galls,” from Gallos, the people of Gaul, the chief visitors they knew.

To the Irish the important thing therefore was that the way of the sea was still open. Traders from Gaul sailed along the western coast, and up the Shannon to Roscommon and Loch Cé, and on the eastern side their ships passed by the Irish Sea to what is now Down and Antrim, to Iona, and Cantyre. They still as of old carried the wine of Provence in great wooden tuns, in one of which three men could stand upright ; there still came men speaking Greek, and scholars of the east, and artists of Gaul. At this time indeed the Irish were no reclusive people, living in a back-water or severed from the great world. An Old Irish poem tells of the traditions of Leinster under its ancient kings—“ The sweet strain heard there at every hour ; its wine-barque upon the purple flood ; its shower of silver of great splendour ; its torques of gold from the lands of the Gaul.” The metropolis of Columcille’s church

organization at Iona, the established centre of Irish learning at Bangor in Down, both alike lay in the track of the sailing ships, and in frequent communication with Europe. News of the destruction by earthquake of Ciria Nuova in Istria was brought to Columcille that same year by Gaulish mariners. Columbanus and his companions could take ship from Bangor to Nantes on their mission to Europe (589). Northwards Irishmen sailed to the Hebrides, the Orkneys, the Shetlands. They seem to have traded and married with Scandinavians a century before the invasion of Ireland by the Vikings. Moreover Irishmen had travelled as far as Iceland in 795, where Nadoddr the Norseman heard of them some sixty years later.

Thus the old civilization, rudely interrupted elsewhere, was carried on unbroken in Ireland. Now was the time (500-1000) when the island began to give back to Europe the treasures of learning which she had stored up in the time of the Roman Empire, and had kept safely through the barbarian wars. Missionaries and scholars from Iona and Ireland carried letters and Christian teaching to every part of England, while ship-loads of Englishmen went to Ireland for instruction. Other Irishmen sailed to Brittany, and journeyed east over northern France beyond the Rhine. A greater number travelled by Nantes, Angers, Tours, past the monastery of Columbanus at Lisieux, and thence over middle Europe, or by St. Gall southward through Italy as far as Tarentum, and to the Holy Land. Occasionally pilgrims and missionaries took the road to Europe through Britain, when with the settlement of the English kingdoms and the coming of Augustine (597) a new intercourse had opened between the English and the continental peoples. That is, some few travellers went this way, but merchants still kept to the old sea route, and the greater number of Irish pilgrims and scholars. It was by that way, for example, according to the old story by a monk of St. Gall, that two Scots from Ireland sailed to Gaul in the early days of Charles the Great, and in the market-place, where the merchants trafficked with the crowds, raised their cry of an Irish trade :— “ If anyone is desirous of wisdom, let him come to us and receive it, for we have it to sell.” At last they were brought to Charles himself, who asked what payment they would need ; nothing more, they answered, than convenient situations, ingenious minds, and as living in a foreign country to be supplied with food and raiment ; and the king formed a school for one of them in France, and set the other at the head of the great school at Pavia. Irish monasteries, one after another in rapid order, rose along the main highways of travel, among the ruined heaps of Roman towns where wild beasts alone found shelter, in forest and desert and mountain. Every school had Irish teachers and Irish manuscripts, relics of which still remain in continental libraries. Ireland became the source of culture to all Germanic nations : indeed wherever in the seventh and following centuries education or knowledge is found it may be traced directly or indirectly to Irish influence. It has been justly said that at the time of Charles the Bald every one who spoke Greek on the Continent was almost certainly an Irishman, or taught by an Irishman. By degrees Irish monasteries, built and supported by Irish money, spread over Europe from Holland to Tarentum, from Gaul to Bulgaria.

The Continent was therefore well known to Ireland when about 800 A.D. a new revolution passed over Europe.

Continental trade, as we have seen, had perished with the Roman Empire. Commerce had fallen to its lowest point. There was scarcely any money, nor in any country, neither England, nor France, nor Germany, a native class of merchants ; wandering Jews and Greeks and Syrians, and later Italians, carried on what little buying and selling still survived. On the shores of the North Sea, however, the Frisians had made their town of Duurstede, near the mouth of the Rhine, a centre for traffic carried down the river ; and in their stout, flat-bottomed, high-boarded sailing ships traded across the North Sea and the Baltic. Duurstede became for a time the chief port of western Europe. There Charles the Great coined money, and the lines along which the Frisian traders carried their wares may still be traced by the

finding of the Duurstede coins. But even in the time of the Emperor Charles came the change which was to sweep away the Frisian traders. This was the rise of the new lords of the sea—the Scandinavians—who were to wrest commerce from Frisians and Gauls, and open a new trade for northern Europe.

The Scandinavians got their training in a hard school. They had a thousand miles of stormy shores to practice seamanship, fishing along their mountain coasts, and sailing against Arctic tempests round the North Cape. They had to build better ships than anyone else, and to sail them better. They invented a new kind of vessel where both oars and sails were used. And in a short time the Frisians were outdone both in seamanship and in trade.

East and west the Scandinavians sailed. As early as the eighteenth century colonies of Swedes were passing by the Baltic and the gulf of Finland to settle on the opposite coast about Novgorod and along the Dnieper—the East way, as they called it. They left Scandinavian names along the rapids of the river as their travellers pushed forward, till in 839 they came in contact with the Greeks, and Swedes who had journeyed by the Dnieper were introduced by the Emperor of the East to the Western Emperor Louis the Pious. Their ships were soon the terror of the Black Sea shores—laden with warriors tall like palm trees, ruddy, fair haired, who were in turn traders and plunderers, conquerors and slave-dealers. In 865 two hundred of their vessels appeared before Constantinople ; in 880 they had reached the Sea of Azof, the Don and the Volga ; in 913 they had five hundred ships, each carrying a hundred men, in the Caspian. Novgorod was the mart of their vast eastern commerce. There have been found in Sweden nearly twenty thousand Arabian coins, dating from 698 to 1002 A.D., carried across the Baltic by home-going merchants. Gothland became the general centre of exchange for the Eastway trade, where Danes sailed from their settlements on the Mecklenburg coast and the mouth of the Oder, to buy Russian furs, Greek and Arabian silks, and Indian spices, and here have been discovered thirteen thousand coins of the tenth and eleventh centuries—Byzantine, Arabian, and from central Asia.

Other adventurers from Norway and Denmark turned towards the Atlantic Ocean, trading and plundering in every harbour of the west, as far as Seville and the Spanish coasts. Northward they peopled Iceland and the Orkneys, and in time rounded the North Cape. They fished the Ocean for whales, and opened a trade in whale-meat and in the furs and cod of the White Sea with Normandy and England. The English liked better to buy than to catch whales. “ Can you take a whale ? ” we read in an old West-Saxon dialogue. “ Many,” says the home-loving Englishman, “ take whales without danger, and then they get a great price, but I dare not from the fearfulness of my mind.”

Besides opening out this world-wide trade, the Scandinavians made a revolution also in the manner of trading. Up to this time buying and selling had been carried on by travelling dealers, Syrian and Italian. Now however Norsemen and Danes, who had no towns in their own lands, planted themselves in their new countries in fortified cities ; and, for example, showed their enterprise by forming in the Five Danish Burghs in England the earliest federation of towns known outside Italy. In the new towns a settled class of merchants was established, who learned to group themselves according to the English system of guilds. The Scandinavians learned also to strike coins after the manner of the Frisians. In all these ways, by their new ships, their new trade routes, their money, their guilds, and their settled merchants in towns, the Scandinavians won a preeminence on the sea, which they were to hold in their own hands for some two hundred years.

What was the effect in Ireland of this new peril, an attack on Europe from the sea ? In the first place the highways of the sea, never before closed, were barred by the Scandinavian

free-booters. A few Irish travellers (even from Leinster) did even in 800 and 850 take the old accustomed journey to the Loire and so across France to Germany ; but the passage was now dangerous. The terrors of the sea journey drove travellers to the land route, and the way across England to the Continent became so important that clerics of the tenth century could not imagine that any other way had ever been possible. The new sea-kings, moreover, were not the people to forget the ancient and profitable trade routes of the wine commerce, or the Irish harbours into which trading ships from north and south had sailed for the last two thousand years, or the gold that had been dug from Irish mines in old days. They seized every harbour, sent their boats up every creek and river, plundered the monasteries and wealthy houses, broke into every burial mound for treasure, and put a poll-tax on the men. Scholars and Christian monks fled from the heathen barbarians, carrying to Europe their treasures and manuscripts. The time of mere destruction, however, was not long. The Scandinavians were practical men of affairs, and Norsemen and Danes had settled in Ireland for business. The "Great Island," as they called it, was a natural centre of their new world-wide commerce ; lying within the trade circle formed by the ships that swept from the Orkneys and Hebrides round the Atlantic coast to the Loire and the Garonne, or that traversed the Irish Sea from Cantyre to Devonshire and Brittany. It was the shelter of voyaging ships, the recruiting ground of raiders, the winter-quarters of fleets ; its commerce fell in naturally with the traffic of the western world. Danes and Irish were presently to the full as busy in trading as in fighting. Ireland became a commercial centre, a meeting place of the peoples. There came Grett with the Greek hat to buy captives for the Iceland market. A host of Saxons and Britons were brought over by Olaf and Ivar in 871. Almost every king of Norway sailed his fleet into Irish harbours, to drive off the rival Danish merchants, to broaden his traffic, to spy out some new store of gold, to load up with corn, to sweep the cattle down to the seashore for the "strand-hewing" that was to provision his crews with meat, fresh and salt, for their ocean course. Traders bargained then just as they bargain now. There is a harbour of Ardglass on the coast of County Down where a castle was built many centuries ago to protect the commerce of the port. The other day an Irishman repaired its ruins, and for a sign flew from it the flag of one of the Irish lords of the country, the Red Right Hand of O'Neill. At that very moment a light schooner sailed into the offing and at once flew in answer the Danish flag. The vessel was from Marsthal. Getting into port the crew bargained for herrings, counting out a hundred and ninety-five barrels of them by "chequers," while the Ardglass men checked the number on notched sticks. Neither knew one word of the other's tongue. So the Danes did business and sailed away, exactly as their forefathers had done a thousand years ago.

Between plundering and trading and marriages and alliances Norse and Irish got to know each other well, as we may see by the story of king Olaf Tryggwason and his dog. Olaf the Magnificent, most glorious and far-shining of sea-kings, famed beyond all others for the surpassing perfection of his warships, being married to Gytha sister of Olaf Kuaran king of Dublin, abode in England and occasionally in Ireland. "He happened once," says the Saga, "to be present in Ireland with a large naval force engaged in war. A foray to get stores being necessary, the men went on land and drove towards the shore a multitude of sheep and cattle ; and there followed them a yeoman, who begged Olaf to give him back his cows from among the flock that they were driving off. King Olaf answered : ' Take your cows if you know them, and are able to separate them from the rest without delaying our journey ; but, I think, neither you nor any other man can do that feat among so many hundred cattle as are in the drove.' The yeoman had a big cattle dog with him. So he sent the dog among the herd as they were driven off together, and the dog ran up and down among them all, and soon picked out and put aside as many of the man's cattle as in the yeoman's opinion were there. As these were all marked with one and the same mark, it was evident that the dog must have had a perfect knowledge of them. Then the King said : ' Wonderfully clever is your dog, yeoman ; will you give him to me ?' And the man answered : ' I will gladly do so.' Then the King straight-

way, in return, gave the yeoman a large gold bracelet, and promised him his friendship therewith. This dog, the best and most sensible of all dogs, was named Wigi, and Olaf had him for a long time afterwards." There came a day later when Olaf was entrapped by his enemies in the Baltic, sailing with his fleet on the far-famed Long Serpent—"never warship has been built in Northern lands its equal for beauty and size." "Right and proper is it," said Earl Eric, "that such a noble ship should belong to Olaf Tryggwason, for he is truly said to surpass other kings as much as the Long Serpent surpasses other ships." The King, with shield and helmet overlaid with gold, and red silken kirtle, stood on the ship's prow, a great dragon's head ornamented so that it seemed of gold, and when it gleamed far over the sea as the sun shone upon it, fear and terror were shot into men's hearts. "Lay the big ship more in front. My place in this warlike host is not at the back of all my men," he called. "I had the Serpent built of greater length than other ships that she might stretch the more boldly beyond them in the battle." The conflict of heroes raged long. As his enemies poured over the deck King Olaf, blood falling over his face and arm from under helmet and mail-sleeve, vanished, no man knew how, in the waters. The Long Serpent, sinking in the sea, was of no use to its conquerors. His queen was brought from under the deck weeping bitterly and so sore wounded with grief that she could neither eat nor drink, and died in nine days. Throughout the battle the dog Wigi lay without stirring before the castle of the Short Serpent; it carried him home along with Einar Thambaskelf, the youth of eighteen, hardest shooter of his time, who stood by the King in the Long Serpent, who when his own bow was broken stretched the King's beyond the arrow head and flung it away ("Too weak, too weak, the great King's bow"), who had sprung after the King into the water, and for his courage was given freedom by the victors. As they touched land Einar "before going on shore, went to the dog as he lay there, and said, 'We've no master now, Wigi!' At these words the dog sprang up growling, and with a loud yell, as if seized by anguish of heart, he ran on shore with Einar. There he went and lay down on the top of a mound, and would take no food from anyone, though he drove away other dogs, beasts and birds from what was brought to him. From his eyes, tears coursed one another down his nose, and thus bewailing the loss of his liege-lord, he lay till he died." From that day grief and sorrow lay on Einar. And men remembered the prophecy of the blind yeoman of Moster that in one voyage Norway should lose its four most noble things—the king, whose like had never been seen, the queen, best for sense and goodness that ever came into Norway, the greatest ship ever built in Norway, and the Irish dog, wiser and more clever than any other dog in the land.

In Ireland the power of the Scandinavians was shown in the foundation of two kingdoms, along the two main lines of sea traffic—Dublin on the eastern sea, and Limerick on the Atlantic.

The Norwegian kingdom on the Liffey had its centre in the mound raised by the river-side for its Thing or Moot, near where the Dublin Parliament House rose nine hundred years later. The kingdom stretched over a narrow strip of shore, the memory of which was preserved for a thousand years, till a generation ago, in the jurisdiction of the Dublin Corporation over a long line of coast from the river Delvin below Drogheda to Arklow. Four fiords—Strangford and Carlingford to the north, and Wexford and Waterford to the south—lay outside the actual kingdom of Dublin, but were closely connected with it. Waterford kings were at times of the same family as the Dublin kings, and in the ninth and tenth centuries Waterford was some-times independent and sometimes united to Dublin.

Dublin commanded a double line of commerce—from Scandinavia to Gaul, and by York to Novgorod and the Eastway. The kingdom was in close connection with the Danish kingdom of Northumbria, with its capital at York. For Danish Northumbria, opening on the North Sea by the Humber, formed the common meeting ground, the link which united the Northmen

of Scandinavia and the Northmen of Ireland. A mighty confederation grew up. Members of the same house were kings in Dublin, in Man, and in York. Their descendants were among the chief settlers in Iceland. The Dublin kings married into the chief houses of Ireland, Scotland, and the Hebrides. The sea was the common highway which bound the powers together, and the sea was held by fleets of swift long-ships with from ninety to a hundred and fifty rowers or fighting men on board. The Irish Channel swarmed with ships of the Dublin kingdom. It became the mart of the Scandinavian traders, of Icelandic sailors, and men of Norway, and merchant princes landing from their cruise to sell their merchandise or their plunder. "You must this summer make a trading voyage," said Earl Hakon to his friend Thori Clack, "as is customary now with many, and go to Dublin in Ireland." Far-travelled traders carried from Dublin and York, deep into the inland of Russia, English coins and weapons and ornaments such as were used in Great Britain and Ireland.

"Limerick of the swift ships," looking out to the Atlantic and the Gaulish sea, was a rival even to Dublin. The Norwegians first fortified the town by an earthen or wooden fence, but presently by a wall of stone, "Limerick of the rivetted stones." Behind it lay a number of Norse settlements scattered over Limerick, Kerry, and Tipperary. The first settlers were from the Hebrides where Irishmen and Norse and Danes mingled as one people, interchanging names and mingling speech so that the Norse used Gaelic words for goblets for which they drank their wine, and the oats for their bread. The name *Maccus*, a later form of Magnus, was in the tenth century only used by the reigning families of Limerick, the Hebrides, and the Isle of Man. United by kinship and by trade, the lords of the Isles and the lords of Limerick constantly aided one another, and made joint expeditions. Once more the Gaulish trade was revived, and vessels sailed out from the Shannon to fetch wine and silks from the harbours of the Loire and the Garonne. From every bay and river-mouth between Waterford and Lough Foyle streams of commerce poured into the main current of the Atlantic trade. After a brief interruption in fact Ireland was once more in the ninth and tenth century in the full current of European life, and that in a double way. The lines of merchant vessels carried her trade, while the stream of her professors and scholars and missionaries brought her fame to every court in Europe.

King Ælfred has left his record of the three Irishmen who came "in a boat without oars from Hibernia, whence they had stolen away because for the love of God they would be on pilgrimage, they recked not where. The boat in which they fared was wrought of three hides and a half, and they took with them enough meat for seven nights." On the seventh day they drifted ashore at Cornwall, and were taken on to Ælfred whose captives they had thus become. Perhaps from them that great-hearted and far-sighted English king learned to honour the Irish. He sent gifts to monasteries in Ireland. He noted in his Chronicle the death of Suibhne, anchorite of Clonmacnois, "the most learned teacher among the Scots," said Ælfred.

From this story some may have supposed that the "primitive" Irishmen had not yet got beyond the rude fishing-boats of savage life. But we have here in fact only an instance of the strange contrasts which make Irish history so full of wonder, so rich in human interest. In the midst of a world of furious trade and war, Irish poets and mystics, obedient to the ancient message of their masters, still went down to the sea-brink abiding there "the revelation of knowledge." In the vast solitude of sea and sky beyond which, in which, waited the revelation, the seen and the unseen were confounded and limits of space and time fell away in infinity. The everlasting gates were there, the way of the soul's escape from imprisonment in shadows, the opening of the Eternal Reality. Abandoning will and fear, they cast themselves on Nature and the God immanent in Nature, and summoned by the silent call went out in faith, "they recked not where."

Thus in Ireland old worlds were ever intermixed with new. Pilgrims cast themselves on the sea in currachs, and drifted to the Faroes and to Iceland carrying with them the power of piety and learning. But there were also Irish traders with business minds. They, like the French, learned from the Scandinavians to build ships, and like the French, used Norse words for their new sea-faring vessels, “brown-planked” warships, and merchant ships, ships large and small, and boats ; and for the planks and sides, bottom-boards, row-benches, taff-rail, gunwale, the creaking, of the row-bench, the steersman. They learned too from the Scandinavians their method of raising a navy by dividing the country into districts, each of which had to equip and man so many ships which were to assemble at the summons to arms into the united war fleet—the levy and the fleet both called by Norse words. Sagas of the Danish time tell of “the fleet of the men of Munster,” of “Munster of the swift ships,” six or seven score of them ready to sail to Dundalk or to the Mull of Cantyre at the call of the king of Cashel.

The Irish had also their fleets of merchant ships. An old poem of about 900 A.D. gives a description of the dwellers on the coast from Carn or Mizen Head to Cork (the Irish clan of the O’Mahoneys chief among them)

“High in beauty,
Whose resolve is quiet prosperity.”

a description which has been generally considered quite unsuited to the Irish and more naturally reserved for Englishmen. The merchant princes won for their province the name of “Munster of the great riches.” But the signs of foreign trade, chains and massive links of silver, and brooches of Scandinavia and the eastern world, are found all over Ireland—Belfast, Navan, Monaghan, Limerick, Galway, Cavan, King’s and Queen’s Counties—the patterns wholly unlike Irish work. There were enamelled glass beads, and silks and satins and stores of silver, oriental goods from the Caspian and East Mediterranean, which had been carried across Russia to Swedish and Danish lands and so to Ireland.

“What is best for a king ?” asked an Irish poet of the tenth century.
“Fish in river-mouths.
“Earth fruitful.
“Inviting barks into harbour
“Importing treasures from over-sea.
.
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“Silken raiment.
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“Abundance of wine and mead.
“Let him foster every science.”

Thus it was that the Irish wrested some advantage out of the Danish wars. They profited by the material skill and knowledge of the invaders. They were willing to absorb the foreigners, to marry with them, and even at times to share their wars. They learned from them to build ships, organise naval forces, advance in trade, and live in towns ; they used Scandinavian words for the parts of a ship and the streets of a town. The Irish gave proof of a real national vigour. In outward and material civilization they accepted modern Norse methods, just as in our days the Japanese accepted modern Western inventions.

But in what the Germans call Culture—in the ordering of society and law, of life and thought, the Irish like the Japanese never for a moment abandoned their national loyalty to their own country. During two centuries of Danish wars they did not loosen hold of their old

civilization. "Concealing ancient lore, to hold any new thing fair," they said face to face with the new Scandinavian system, "this is the way of folly." They maintained their schools, their art and literature. They preserved their church. Writers of the ninth century describe the duty of an Irish king : he had to journey over the land and bring each chief under law : "let him enslave criminals" : "let him perfect the proper due of every man of whatever is his on sea or land." On their side the tribes were to have for their protection not only "a lawful lord," but "a meeting of nobles" ; "frequent assemblies" ; "an assembly according to rules" ; "a lawful synod." We read of yet larger Assemblies for the whole country "to make concord between the men of Ireland." If the chief places of the people were captured, they went out into the bog-lands to elect their kings according to their law. Thus when Cashel was held by the Danes the seventeen tribes of Munster gathered in a marshy glen, where the nobles sat in assembly on a mound, and decided to choose one Cennedig as king. But the queen, Cellachan's mother, appeared before them, and in a speech and a lay which she made declared the right of Cellachan. And when the champions of Munster heard these great words and the speech of the woman they rose up to make Cellachan king, "and gave thanks to the true magnificent God for having found him . . . and put their hands in his hand, and placed the royal diadem round his head, and their spirits were raised at the grand sight of him."

Under the power of this national feeling the Irish learned from the Danes not only the new trade, but they learned also the new sea warfare, and understood their lesson so well that they were soon able to drive back the armies and fleets of the Danes, and to become themselves the leaders of Danish and Norse troops in war. It was about 950 A.D. that the Irish won their first famous naval victory. Cellachan, king of Cashel, had been taken prisoner by the Norse, and was carried to Sitric's ship at Dundalk. An army was sent from Munster across Ireland to rescue him. They demanded to have back their king. "Give honour to Cellachan in the presence of the men of Munster !" commanded Sitric in his wrath. "Let him even be bound to the mast ! For he shall not be without pain in honour of them !" "I give you my word," said Cellachan, as he was lifted up, "that it is a greater sorrow to me not to be able to protect Cashel for you, than to be in great torture." "It is a place of watching where I am," he cried, high lifted above them all. "I see what your champions do not see, since I am at the mast of the ship." "Are these your ships that are coming now ?" said he. For on the far horizon rose the masts of his fleet of Munster sailing into Dundalk harbour, six score of them, the full muster of the ships gathered from every sea port between Cork and Galway, from the regions of Bandon and Kinsale, from the land of the O'Driscolls who held the coast from Bandon across Clear harbour to Crookhaven and the river of Kenmare, from the Dingle peninsula, from "Kerry of the rushes" on the Shannon shore, from western Clare, and from Corcomroe and Burren. When the Irish captains looked on their king bound and fettered to the mast, their aspect became troubled, their colour changed, and their lips grew pale. From his place of agony Cellachan watched the onset of his sailors, and heard the rattle of swords and javelins filling the air, like the sound that arises from the seashore full of stones trodden by herds of cattle and racing horses. He saw the Irish fling tough ropes of hemp over the long prows of the Norse ships to hold them fast, while the Norsemen threw stout chains of blue iron. He saw his people, defended only by their "strong enclosures of linen cloth to protect bodies and necks and noble heads," as they dashed themselves into the Norse ships among the mail-clad warriors ; he watched the heroic Failbe springing on the deck of Sitric's battle-ship, and with a high and deer-like leap mount on the mast, his right-hand sword swinging against the crowding enemy, while with the sword in his mighty left hand he cut the ropes that bound king Cellachan. In the moment of his king's salvation Failbe fell dead. As the Norsemen struck off his head and set it upon the prow of the ship, Failbe's foster-brother, mad for revenge, with an eager falcon-like leap sprang into the warship, and since no weapon of his could pierce the armour of the Norse king, he fixed his white hands in the bosom of Sitric's

coat of mail and dragged him down into the water, so that they together reached the gravel and the sand of the sea and rested there. After six hours' battle the remnant of the Scandinavian fleet put out to sea, and, says the old saga, they carried neither King nor Chieftain with them.

After that battle came other triumphs ; the fleet of the kings of Ailech that carried off plunder and booty from the Hebrides : Brian Boru's expedition of the Norsemen of Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, and of the men of Munster, and of almost all of the men of Erin such of them as were fit to go to sea, and they levied tribute from Saxons and Britons as far as the Clyde and Argyle. The spirit of independence rose high, and victorious warriors established again the rule of the Irish in their own land.

But the Danes had no mind to let Ireland and her harbours and her sea routes fall out of their hands. The great conflict of the two peoples came about sixty years after the victory of Cellachan.

The Danes had now held command of the sea for two hundred years. About 1000 A.D., in the glory of success, their kings, like later monarchs in Europe, began to think of their "Imperial Destiny." It seemed time to perfect the whole business and round off the borders of their State. So Swein Forkbeard of Denmark proposed to create a Scandinavian Empire which should extend from the Slavic shores of the Baltic to the rim of the Atlantic, with the North Sea as a lake of this wide dominion. Swein overran England, and his son Cnut ruled from the Baltic to the Irish Channel, lord of Denmark, Norway, England, and the Danes of Dublin (for he minted coins even there), with London as the chief city of the new Danish Empire. The imperial plan was not yet complete. Danish rule was to extend to the outermost land on the Atlantic. But Ireland blocked the way. The Ireland of King Brian Boru—of men who lived (as they said) "on the ridge of the world," men bred in the free air of the plains and the mountains and the sea—left the Scandinavian Empire with a ragged edge on the line of the Atlantic commerce. In the spring of 1014 the Danish army gathered in the Bay of Dublin to straighten out the boundaries of the Empire on the western Ocean. There met a mighty host under the "Black Raven" of the pagans, woven with heathen spells ; "when the wind blew out the banner it was as though the Raven flapped his wings for flight." In that Imperial army there were warriors "from all the west of Europe," from Iceland, the Orkneys, the Baltic Islands, from Norway a thousand men in ringed armour, from Northumbria two thousand pagans, "not a villain of them who had not polished armour of iron or brass encasing their bodies from head to foot." On the night before the battle Woden himself, the old god of war, rode up through the dusk men said, on a dapple-grey horse, halbert in hand, to take counsel with his champions.

But Woden's last fight was come. The full tide of the morning carried the pagan host over the level sands to the landing at Clontarf. The army of King Brian Boru lay before them. From sunrise to sunset on Good Friday that desperate battle raged, the hair of the warriors flying in the wind, says the old chronicler, as thick as the sheaves floating in a field of oats. The Scandinavian scheme of a Northern Empire was shattered on that day, when with the evening flood-tide the remnant of the Danish host put out to sea. The work which had been begun by the fleet of Cellachan in Dundalk harbour sixty-four years before, was completed by Brian Boru where the Liffey opens into the Bay of Dublin. For a hundred and fifty years to come Ireland kept its independence. England was once again, as in the time of the Roman dominion, made part of a continental empire. Ireland, as in the days of Rome, still lay outside the new imperial system.

Clontarf marked the passing of an old age, the beginning of a new. We may see the advent of the new men in the names of adventurers that landed with the Danes on that low shore at Clontarf—the first great drops of the coming storm. There were lords from Normandy, Eoghan Barun or John the Baron, and Richard, with another, perhaps Robert of Melun. There was Goistilin Gall, a Frenchman from Gaul. There was somewhere about that time Walter the Englishman, a leader of mercenaries from England. In such names we see the heralds of the approaching change. A revolution in the fortunes of the world had in fact opened. Scandinavian preeminence on the sea was even now passing away, as that of the Frisians had passed away two hundred years before. New lords of commerce seized the traffic of sea and land when the Normans, “citizens of the world,” carried their arms and their cunning from the Moray Firth to the Straits of Messina, from the Seine to the Euphrates. The Teutonic peoples that now girded the North Sea—Normans, Germans of the Hanseatic League, English—were to supersede Danes and Norwegians. Trade moreover had once more spread over the high roads of Europe, as in the days of the Roman Empire, and the peoples of the south, Italians and Gauls, had taken up again their ancient commerce.

In the new commerce as in the old Ireland was to take her full part. The island lay in the moving life that stirred the great seas, washed by that whirlpool of activity. From every shore she saw the sails of busy traffickers bearing the commerce of the known world, and carrying too its thought and art. The people had not lost their wit. They shared in the enterprise and the profit of the new commerce. The great routes were open, from Scandinavia to Gaul, and down the Irish Channel. The Danish traffic across England was not forgotten, and as the trade of the German coasts developed, busier lines of commerce were opened from the Irish harbours of the south eastward to the North Sea and the Baltic.

It is an unfinished tale I tell. But it may remind us of one gift of Nature to Ireland the freedom of Europe by the sea. We have seen the dim figures of the flint-men, the Bronze-men, the first Gaels, reaching out hands to Scandinavia and to the Mediterranean lands. We have seen Ireland on the borders of the Roman Empire, free and unconquered, busy in trade, busier still in learning, carrying across the Gaulish Sea treasures of classical knowledge. Again Ireland appeared when the barbarians had spread over Europe, still unconquered, sending back across the Ocean the learning she had stored up, the free distributor on the Continent of the classics and science and Christian teaching. We have seen the island again on the fringe of the Scandinavian Empire, even now unconquered, and still in the mid-stream of European traffic. When a new revolution came, and trade swelled under the Normans, every Irish port was full. Irishmen sailed every sea. Their fabrics were sold in every country as far as Russia and Naples. Through the long centuries they never lost the habit of the sea and of Europe. In the middle ages Spanish coin was almost the chief currency in Ireland, so great was the Irish trade with Spain; and in the eighteenth century the country was still full of Spanish, Portuguese, and French money in daily use—the moydore, the doubloon, the pistole, the Louis d’or, the new Portuguese gold coin. So much so that in the Peninsular war Ireland was ransacked for foreign coins to send to the army in Spain and Portugal.

But that story is over. Ireland at last was swept within the orbit of an Empire—not as a free member of a federation, but in full subjection, with every advantage that complete military and police control could afford. Natural geography gave place to political geography, and the way of the Empire ruled out the way of the sea. “I should not presume,” wrote Richard Cox, Esquire, Recorder of Kinsale, in dedicating to their Majesties William and Mary a History of Ireland from the Conquest thereof, which he printed at St. Paul’s Church-yard in 1689. “I should not presume to lay this treatise at your Royal feet, but that it concerns a noble Kingdom, which is one of the most considerable branches of your mighty Empire.

“ It is of great Advantage to it, that it is a Subordinate Kingdom of the Crown of *England* ; for it is from that Royal Fountain that the Streams of Justice, Peace, Civility, Riches and all other Improvements have been derived to it ; so that the Irish are (as Campion says) beholding to God for being conquered.

“ And yet Ireland has been so blind in this Great Point of its true Interest, that the Natives have managed almost a continual war with the English ever since the first Conquest thereof ; so that it has cost your Royal Predecessors an unspeakable mass of Blood and Treasure to preserve it in true Obedience.

“ But no cost can be too great where the Prize is of such value ; and whoever considers the Situation, Ports, Plenty, and other Advantages of Ireland will confess, that it must be retained at what rate soever ; because if it should come into an Enemy’s Hands, England would find it impossible to *flourish* ; and perhaps difficult to *subsist* without it.

“ To demonstrate this assertion, it is enough to say that Ireland lies in the *Line of Trade*, and that all the English vessels that sail to the *East, West and South*, must, as it were, run the *gauntlet* between the Harbours of Brest and Baltimore : and I might add that the Irish Wool, being transported, would soon mine the English clothing Manufacture.

“ Hence it is that all Your Majesties Predecessors have kept close to this Fundamental Maxim, of retaining Ireland inseparably united to the Crown of England.”

The house of Hanover ended what the Tudors had begun. Ireland became an island beyond an island. But the great deep still gives to the country an abiding unity. In ancient days the Irish had a noble figure by which they proclaimed the oneness of the land within its Ocean bounds. The three waves of Erin they said, smote upon the shore with a foreboding roar when danger threatened the island. One wave called to Munster at an inlet of Cork ; two of them sounded in Ulster, at the mouth of the Bann and in the bay of Dundrum. The Ocean bore the same fate to Munster and to Ulster. And in fact so long as the sea surrounds this island, so long all its peoples must be linked in a common fortune. The deep that encompasses Ireland has made this country one, gathering together into the Irish family all races that have entered within its circuit. By the might of that encircling Ocean the men of Ireland are bound together in one inheritance, unchanging amid ceaseless change.

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