

Letters on Ireland 1775

A philosophical survey of the south of Ireland, in a series of letters to John Watkinson (1778)

Thomas Campbell

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THERE is, perhaps, no country dependent on the British Crown, which Englishmen know less of than Ireland ; and yet it may safely be affirmed, there is none which has a fairer and a stronger claim to their attention.

If civilization has not there been carried to that degree of perfection, which it has attained in England ;—if commerce does not flourish ;—if manufactures do not thrive ;—if agriculture be yet in a rude state ;—if a spirit of discontent and emigration prevails ;—in a word, if the connection between the two islands has not been productive of the greatest mutual advantages, it can only be imputed to a general want of information, and to those mistaken politics, which have, in consequence, influenced the councils of this nation.

But the time seems to be approaching, when the value of Ireland will be better understood, and when the maxims, on which it is now governed, will be found to be too narrow, it not illiberal. To hasten that period is the design of the following letters, and the favourite political wish of the Writer,

London,
May 14 1777.

MY DEAR FRIEND,

Dublin, July 17th, 1775.

ON the 2d instant, I landed on George's Quay in Dublin, after a passage of near thirty hours, which is sometimes made in eight, and generally in less than twelve. The sea was so calm, that though we went aboard at seven in the morning, darkness only made us lose sight of the Head. Before night I grew sickish, and therefore retired to my bed ; but for the last seven or eight hours, I was free from every complaint except hunger, which I felt more keenly than I had done for some years before. This I considered as a good omen ; and my health, I trust, is verging towards a re-establishment, by following your judicious advice.

The sun shone bright as we entered the bay of Dublin ; which was beyond comparison the finest view I had ever seen. It is a spacious amphitheatre, bounded mostly by a high shore. The country all round is spangled with white villas, which being then highly burnished by the sun, had a glorious effect. The city is not seen to advantage from the water, yet the landskip was upon the whole highly picturesque ; being horizoned in some places by mountains, exactly conical, called the Sugar-loaf Hills. I am persuaded you would not grudge a journey hither for this single prospect. It must, however, be owned, that the full enjoyment of it is precarious, since it depends on a number of circumstances, which cati seldom concur, as the season of the year, the time of the day, and the clearness of the sky, when you enter the bay ; and above all, a freedom from pain.

Upon the whole, Dublin is no contemptible city i and we should rather wonder, that, considering its limited trade, it is as well as it is, than that it is not better. It must, however, be acknowledged, that except the new streets, which are paved and flagged like those of London, it is abominably dirty. In this rainy weather, I see the gentlemen of the army, and

others, of the younger sort especially, generally booted ; from which I suppose that boots are the *ton* here.

I, who you know always speak and write from present feeling, cannot describe to you how much I was hurt by the nastiness of these streets, and by the squalid appearance of the *canaille*. The vast inferiority of the lower ranks in Dublin, compared even with those of the country towns in England, is very striking. Seldom do they shave, and when they do, it is but to unmask the traces of meagreness and penury. In a morning, before the higher classes are up, you would imagine that half the prisons in Europe had been opened, and their contents emptied into this place. What must it have been then, even within three years, when near 2000 wretches, much worse, of course, than any now to be seen, exercised the unrestrained trade of begging ? I am told that the nuisance was risen to such a pitch, that you could scarcely get clear of any shop you entered, without the contamination of either ulcers or vermin, from the crowd of mendicants, who beset the door.

In London, one can rarely want amusement, the very streets are an inexhaustible source of it. There is something refreshing in that variety of cheerful objects, which they perpetually exhibit. There is such a cleanness in the streets, such a richness in the shops, such a bussle of business, such a sleekness of plenty, such a face of content, and withal, such an air of pleasure, as infuse the most delicious sympathies. Here, we see but little to cheer, or exhilarate reflection, but much to sadden and depress the spirits. There is, indeed, a motion, but it is such, as when the pulse of life begins to stagnate, or like that of the wheel of some great machine, just after the power which impelled it, ceases to act. Here, to be sure, you meet some splendid equipages, and a large suite of lackeys after a sedan chair ; you see a fair range, or two, of houses, and some rich shops ; and you frequently meet faces fair enough to make Circassia gaze; but all these scarcely compensate for the painful sensations produced by the general mass.

Yet the women say, that the social pleasures are more easily obtained here than in London. They argue, that the English are generally so intent upon business, that they will not spare time for *their* company, and are consequently devoid of all sentimental attachment ; that, matrimony being less the fashion among them, they are for obtaining the favours of the fair, by speedier methods than those of attentions and respects, which, when reciprocal, are among the choicest sweets of life; and that public amusements being less frequent here, domestic entertainments are more in use. These are points I shall not dispute with the ladies, though I am not convinced of the truth of their arguments. I cannot help remarking, however, that the English are not so addicted to the bottle, which is as great an enemy to sentiment and the graces, as either business or pleasure.

Adhering strictly to your advice, I am every day on horseback, and find vast benefit from it. At first, I felt myself fatigued after riding ever so little ; now, after repeated essays, like half-fledged birds, fluttering before they fly, I make excursions of some miles, without being weary. But the roads near the city are very bad, and the streets are so slippery, that I am obliged to have my horse led out of town.

In this extensive city, are but seven or eight coffee-houses, and they are resorted to for tea and coffee only, not as those in London for dinners and suppers. The first day I spent here, I dined at a chop-house in Essex-street, where I found a variety of the best things, and the charges nearly as in London. There are, I am told, three or four more of these equally good -, yet such places are novel in Dublin. Their Hotels have been all set up within a few years, some of which are said to be elegant ; I lay the first night in that of Liffey Street, it being next to me and found it very tolerable.

But you are tired with these unimportant details, which I only set down to impress you more strongly with an idea of the place I write from. Let me then conclude with some account of my expedition to Tarah ; which, by a little variation of its old name Teamor into Temorah, has given title to one of the heroic poems of Ossian, son of Fingal.

This famous hill, situate above eighteen miles from Dublin, was at a distance too great for me to ride to it with pleasure, so I took a post-chaise, accompanied by a gentleman, whose extensive knowledge, and communicative temper, rendered the jaunt very pleasant.

After reading the pompous accounts of the triennial conventions at Tarah, where the monarch, provincial kings, and subordinate toparchs, solemnly assembled to adjust rights, enact laws and promulge them, one would naturally expect that there might still remain at least some mouldering heap of that vast edifice wherein the States-general met. The very same expectation is raised by the etymologist, who assures you that Teamor is, literally interpreted, the *great house*.

How then must you be surprised to hear, that there is not even the vestige of a palace to be traced ; nay, that the very hill itself is evidence enough to prove, that there never could have been a considerable house of stone and lime upon it. The circular forts indeed still remain, in which the several chiefs used either to pitch their tents, or to erect other temporary sheds ; but these very intrenchments evince, that stone buildings were not so much as thought of for this eminence.

I will not pretend to deny that the monarch might have had for his own residence, a stone house, somewhere near this hill ; perhaps at the foot of it, where the earl of Meath's house now stands. But even this is problematical, especially when we consider, that the palace, in which king John entertained the Irish kings, in this very city, was reared by himself, and made of hurdles. From the description of Pembroke Castle, built *ex virgis & cespite tenui*, by Arnulphus de Montgomery, son of the great earl of Shropshire, it is plain that stone buildings were unusual among the Britons about the same period.

Tarah rises majestic in a most extensive plain, north-west of Dublin. From the bottom to the summit, where the royal assembly sat, it is said to be at least a mile in length ; but the acclivity is so very gentle, that it does not appear to be of any great height. In some directions, the eye reaches to an immense distance, and the prospect is upon the whole very pleasant, though by no means rich ; the country being mostly under stock, with but few gentlemen's seats, two steeples, and one town to embellish the landscape. Farewell.

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Having now, I flatter myself, given you a tolerable notion of Dublin and its environs ; I purpose setting out in a day or two to visit the principal places in the south of the kingdom. I prefer a southern to a northern tour, not only as the climate must be better, but because the north is in a thriving state of manufacture, and therefore cannot be supposed to differ so widely from England, as a country where neither manufactures nor agriculture flourish..

A slight sketch of the geography of this country, may enable you the better to trace me without a map. Ireland is divided into four provinces, Ulster, Conaught, Leinster, and Munster. The last is to the S. and the first to the N. Leinster is to the E. and Conaught to the W.

Leinster (in which is Dublin, about midway removed from either extremity of the kingdom) is the most level, and best cultivated ; Ulster the most barren and mountainous, but the most thriving and populous ; Munster the most fertile, yet the least thriving upon the whole,

the increase of people in her cities not compensating her internal depopulation : Conaught is said to increase in numbers, by introducing the linen trade into the parts bordering upon Ulster ; though its capital is declining, and its most fertile parts, like those of Munster, are verging to depopulation.

Let me hear from you soon, and direct to me at Mr. B's, Corke. My future progress will, I hope, furnish materials of more importance, or, at least of more novelty ; for hitherto I have moved in a very beaten path. I shall write from every great town in my route. *Vive & vale.*

Kildare, August 21, 1775.

I set out this morning from Dublin, with only half a dozen shirts in my portmanteau, to leave room for such books, relative to Ireland, as seemed the fittest to prepare me for a local inspection. Sir John Davies's Historical Relations and Spencer's View are my pocket companions ; enow, I presume, to fill up the vacant intervals at an inn.

I purpose giving you sketches of the country through which I travel, that you may have some idea of its present state, whether natural or improved. But lest they should seem overcharged with still life, I shall heighten the prospect with human figures as they present themselves ; and to vary the scenery, retrospective views of manners, customs, and arts shall be interspersed.

You are not to expect either order or method in the arrangement of my observations : I shall set them down as they occur, without much attention to time, place, or other accident. All I shall promise is, fidelity in reporting facts. And if I should sometimes miss my way in tracing causes from their effects, candour will suggest to you in extenuation, how difficult it is for one who is a stranger, and alone, to come in a short time at the knowledge of many things, which the natives might wonder how any one could be ignorant of. There are indeed certain characteristics in this country, which he that runs may read : yet I do not find that any traveller has been at the pains to point them out. I begin to wish I had set out earlier, for my tour must now be limited by the season, and I must either forego the sight of some places I would wish to see, or spend too little time in each to get any satisfactory information.

My object is not only to see the face of the country, and learn its present state, but also to compare this state, with what it has been, and what it might be. And in judging of national character, I would be for making a careful discrimination, between physical and moral causes, between the operations of nature and the influence of government.

This is but a poor town, consisting of a few scattered houses ; the inn however is a very good one. The country for several miles on this side Dublin is flat, like that round London ; but it is not like it either in the multitude or magnitude of the trees, and still less so in the appearance of the houses on the road side. The first village I passed through, about seven miles from Dublin, Rathcool I think they call it, was mostly composed of clay huts, which are sometimes, you know, both warm and neat, but these were so awkwardly built, and so irregularly arranged, that even Wales would have been ashamed of them. It hurt me to see them so near the capital, where the landskip was so prettily chequered by abundance of little white villas, spangling the country all around, and rendering it upon the whole very delightful.

Naas, fourteen miles from Dublin, is but a shabby looking place for a borough and shire town. But there are some pleasant seats near it, and the grounds begin to swell into gentle undulations, which gives a sweet variety to that rich corn country.

On the road hither is the ruin of a magnificent house, begun, but never finished, by Earl Strafford, when Lord Lieutenant. Near this, about thirty of our miles from Dublin, is the

Curragh of Kildare, where all great matches are run. It is the Newmarket of Ireland : and the sportsmen tell you that the turf is equal to any in England, it is a spacious common and sheep-walk. Government gives annually two prizes of one hundred pounds each to be run for here. These were originally given at the suggestion of Sir William Temple ; who, among other schemes for the improvement of Ireland, recommended this with a view of mending the breed of horses.

As this ground was famous for horse-racing long before kings plates were established here, I vainly flattered myself that it took its name from its being a horse-course, and that it was called Curragh from the Latin word *curro*, or rather from some Celtic word of like found and import. Thus you see me delving for the roots of Irish names, though I believe there are few people more thoroughly convinced that etymology is frequently but the excrescence of literature. It degenerates even in the hands of Sir Isaac Newton, for he identifies persons and things, which have nothing in common, but a letter or two of their names.

Certain it is, the most useful things may be abused. But sceptical as I am with respect to etymology, the information I have received inclines me to think that every town and tract of country, nay almost every hill in Ireland, is denominated, either from some history of the place, or some quality of the soil ; some virtue of the water, or some property of the air ; some accident of the ground without, or from some mineral within ; in a word, that each name contains a brief history, or marks out some curiosity of nature or of art.

Several instances of this I have been favoured with by Colonel Vallancey, a gentleman whose acquaintance alone is worth a journey to Ireland. And you will not be displeased when I tell you, that he is our countryman, was bred at Eton, and is now engineer-general of Ireland. At an age when words and other materials of knowledge are generally collected, he betook himself to the study of the Irish language, with a diligence so successful that he soon outstripped his teachers. To him we are indebted for the best grammar of this language, indeed the only one which deserves the name. So that the Irish nation may with little variation apply to him what Cicero says of himself, upon finding out the tomb of Archimedes : *Ita nobilissima Græciæ civitas, quondam vero etiam doctissima sui civis unius acutissima monumentum ignorasset, nisi ab homine Arpinate didicisset.*

At the end of his grammar he has brought to light some very old Irish manuscripts among the rest one, intitled, *Lessons for a Prince*. It was addressed to that celebrated monarch of Ireland, Brien Boiromhe, who exterminated the Danes at the battle of Clontarf. The style, which is not unlike the Proverbs of Solomon, marks the very high antiquity of it, and the fine moral and political spirit which animates the whole piece, sufficiently evinces that civilization had made a considerable progress here before the invasion of our second Henry.

This learned soldier had before favoured the world with an essay on the antiquity of the Irish language ; wherein, from a collation of the Irish with the Punic, he shews it to have a strong admixture of the old Phœnician. His mode of proceeding is very satisfactory : he takes that scene of Plautus, wherein a Carthaginian slave is introduced speaking in his mother-tongue ; and comparing it *verbum verbo* with the Irish, which is now generally acknowledged to be the purest dialed of the Celtic, shews the agreement between the two languages ; which is indeed so striking, that even a person who understands neither may perceive it, by a bare inspection of the words.

And from this close affinity of language he furnishes a strong presumptive, if not decisive proof, that literature was very early introduced here by the Tyrians, either through the medium of that trade which was carried on with all parts of the world then known, or through that colony which migrated hither from Spain ; and from which the old natives are so proud of being called Milesians.

It has been the doctrine of the Irish writers, that they derived their learning from the Phœnicians : their bards tell you of one Phenius a-fear-Saidhe, *i.e.* Phenius the Sidonian man, who taught them letters. The truth, divested of its poetical obscurity, appears to be, that the man who taught them letters was a Phœnician or Sidonian, Tyre being the daughter of Sidon.

O'Connor, who has published some ingenious dissertations upon the history of Ireland, brings a reinforcement of arguments from Newton's Chronology, which wonderfully corroborate this matter. He gives you a table where, in one view, you may see the coincidence of the Irish accounts with the Newtonian amendment. The parallel is very striking.

Spencer thinks that the Irish had their letters from the nation which migrated from Spain ; which, as he proves from Strabo, used the Phœnician letters very early. He is not however decisive on this head, but he says, " It is certain that Ireland had the use of letters very anciently, and long before England."

How comes it then, asks he, that they are so unlearned still being so old scholars ? To which inquiry, as he returns no answer, I shall perhaps in future risk some conjectures respecting it. For without having recourse to any physical incapacities, the dreams of intoxicated speculation, several causes might be specified, which have necessarily obstructed the progress of the arts in this country. In one word, a provincial government has in itself impediments enow, to prevent the attainment of perfection in every department, where the strongest exertion of the human powers is to be called forth. But a full discussion of this question I shall defer till I have more thoroughly digested my thoughts ; for the answer is, periculosæ plenum opus aleæ.

Perhaps you did not know that Spencer spent a great part of his life in Ireland : they tell me the house is still standing wherein he wrote his Fairy Queen ; if it comes at all in my line I should be glad to visit it : there is a pleasure which we cannot account for in the sight of such places. I never was in Stratford that I did not feel an unusual emotion, at sight of that little wooden house, which gave our Shakespear birth. By the way, what think you could have inspired Shakespear, with that odd-looking epitaph ?

Good friend, for Jesus sake ! forbear
To dig the dust inclosed here,
Blest be the man that spares these stones.
And curst be he that moves my bones.

The old man, you know, spent the last years of his life at Stratford, where it was the custom to gather all the bones, skulls in particular, and pile them in heaps. The largest collection in England is still to be seen in the vaults and steeple of that very church, where Shakespear lies interred. It seems more than probable, that it was this, to him offensive, practice which suggested the thought in the above lines. Good night.

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Kildare.

HAVING, in my last, conveyed myself to Stratford and Shakespear, let me, in this, return to Kildare and Spencer. This poet tells us, that he once meditated a treatise upon the antiquities of Ireland. Pity that he never put it in execution ! Under the hands of such a master it would have grown into a piece of entertainment, a quality so rarely to be found in works of that complexion.

The opinion, however, he has given, on this particular subject, should be sufficient to excite the curiosity of an antiquarian. It has, I own, disposed me to give a more impartial hearing to whatever can be offered, in favour of the antiquities of this country, than otherwise I should have been inclined to do. "All the customs, says he, of the Irish, which I have noted and compared with what I have read, would minister occasion of a most ample discourse of the original of them, and the antiquity of that people ; which in truth I think to be more ancient than most that I know of in this end the world. So that, if it were in the handling of some men of found judgment and plentiful reading, it would be most pleasant and profitable."

There must surely be some foundation in truth, for that high antiquity the Irish plume themselves upon ; if not, would Tacitus have said, that "the ports and harbours of Ireland were better known by trade and commerce than those of Britain." And if this same antiquity be a thing so chimerical, as some would represent it, how comes it, That when the ambassador of Henry the Fifth claimed precedence at the Council of Constance, he founded his title upon his matter's being lord of Ireland ?

Orpheus tells us expressly, that the Argonauts sailed near the island *Ierne* ; a testimony prior to any which imperial Rome can produce in favour of her antiquity. Hibernia is comparatively but a modern name. Ireland is the ancient Scotia. In later days, Caledonia, or rather Albania, which had been for many centuries ruled by the descendants of Fergus, brother to the monarch of Ireland, began to be called *Scotia minor*, or *nova*. But this was not till the eleventh century, and Ireland retained the name of Scotia, with the addition of *major*, or *vetus*, till so late as the fifteenth. All which archbishop Usher incontestibly proves, and he gives it as his opinion, that no writer, before the eleventh century, can be produced, who ever pointed out Albany by the name of Scotland.

It is near two hundred years since the learned primate gave this sort of challenge, and during that space, no writer has attempted to answer him ; but on the contrary, Camden, Scaliger, Stillingfleet, Dupin, Prideaux, Rapin, Warner, Whitaker, and all other writers on the subject, except two or three of Scotland, confirm his opinion. It was an attack made upon the antiquities of his native country, which probably excited Usher to treat of them with such copious precision.

Dempster, a Scotchman, under the ambiguity of the name, had laboured to confound the matter. He sent Philip Ferrarius a collection of Scottish worthies, to enrich the Roman martyrology. But this learned and candid Italian betimes discovered the snare, and published an advertisement prefixed to his book, wherein he warned the reader ; "that taking other writers for his guide, he had made some of the Irish saints natives of Scotland. The cause of which, was his being deceived in the name, Ireland being in old times called Scotland, and the Irish Scots ; as we learn from Orosius, Prospero, Isidore, Cogitosus, Adamnanus, Jonas the Abbot, all antient writers ; together with Bede, St. Bernard, and others who have written the lives of Irish Saints. For who does not know that the Saints Brigid, Brendan, Columb-cill, Columban, Gall, Fiacre, Virgil, Kilian, Rumoldus, Dympna, Fufcus, Malachy, and others, were Irish ? who, notwithstanding are called Scots, and said to be born in Scotland ; of which I thought proper to admonish you, that you may be aware of certain *Saint-stealers*.' By which coarse character he branded Dempster. And the only harsh expression in Usher's book, is vented against this man. "*Tarn suspectæ fidei hominem illum fuisse comperimus & toties tesseram fregisse, ut oculatos nos esse testes oporteat, & nisi quod videmus nihil ab eo accipere credere.*"

Nicolson, whom, as the author of the Historical Libraries, we may suppose a competent judge in this affair, and as an Englishman, impartial, is so convinced of Dempster's dishonesty, that in one place, he calls him "the northern rover, who had kidnapped whole scores of Irish saints," and in another place, he takes notice of "the good services done this king-

dom, by Thomas Dempster's robbing it of its saints, and transplanting them into his own Albanian territory. Which raised a just resentment in the antiquaries of Ireland, who forthwith betook themselves to arms, for the recovery of their stolen goods, and proved clearly that the *Scots* of antient times, famed for sanctity and learning, were all of them *Irishmen*."

But all the Scotch writers before Dempster, are so far from denying the Irish extraction of the present Scots, that they seem to glory in it. "It is by many arguments certain, says John Major, that we owe our origin to the Irish. This we learn from the language, for even at this day, one half of Scotland speaks Irish; and a few years ago, a much greater proportion spoke the same language. The Scots brought their speech from Ireland into Britain, as our annals testify the writers of which, have shewn a laudable diligence in these matters. I say, therefore, that from whomsoever the Irish draw their origin, the Scotch derive from the same; not immediately indeed, but as a grandson from a grandsire."

King James I. in one of his speeches, boasts of the Scottish dynasty being derived from that of Ireland. "I have two reasons to be careful of the welfare of that people; first as king of England, by reason of the long possession the crown of England hath had of that land; and also as king of Scotland, for the *antient kings of Scotland are descended of the kings of Ireland*." Conformably to which, Slaytyr, in his *Palai-Albion*, compliments this monarch upon his Irish pedigree,

At quoniam, Arcttoo Scotico rex noster ab orbe.
Nec minus occiduis, perhibent, Scotus ortus Hibernis,
Qui Britonuni parent sceptris; mihi pauca recensens,
Musa age, et Ogygios Iernes referato colonos.

From the above authorities, one would think this question was fairly decided; for, in points of antiquity, authority is the principal, if not the only argument which can be adduced. Yet, up starts another Scotchman still more hardy, who finding no authorities, either at home or abroad, to support the darling antiquity of his native country, is for annihilating all authorities against it; and vainly dares to obtrude upon us, for true history, the inverted sonnets of Hibernian bards,

Whence issued forth at great M'Pherson's call.
That old new epic pastoral Fingal.

This learned gentleman very gravely tells us, that "Fordun was the first who collected the fragments of Scotch history, which escaped the brutal policy of Edward I.—that he, possessed of all the national prejudice of the age, was unwilling that his country should yield in point of antiquity to England, and that, destitute of annals in Scotland, he had recourse to Ireland, *which according to the vulgar errors of the times was reckoned the first habitation of the Scots*,—That the writers who succeeded Fordun, implicitly followed his system; that as they had no new lights, and were, equally with him, unacquainted with the traditions of their country, their histories contain little information concerning the origin of the Scots.—That even Buchanan himself, except the elegance of his style, has very little to recommend him. It therefore appears that little can be collected from their own historians, concerning the first migration of the Scots into Britain."

Thus you see the authority of all Scotch historians is torn up from the very root. Aristotle, they say, destroyed the works of all his predecessors to make way for his own. But in the name of wonder, where were the songs of Ossian, when *Fordun's national prejudice* had recourse to Ireland, to supply the want of materials in Scotland? Would not his filial zeal have gladly laid hold of them for the same purpose with our modern man of antiquity?

In the dissertations before Fingal and Temora, we are told, that “ as the custom of retaining Bards and Senachies was common to both nations ; so each, no doubt, had formed a system of history, it matters not how much soever fabulous, concerning their respective origin.” Now let me ask, if each had formed their systems, wherefore did Fordun adopt the Irish system ? And if “ it was the natural policy of the times, to reconcile the traditions of both nations together, and if possible to deduce them from the fame original stock” why does the following paragraph insinuate that the system was not concerted, but that the Scots were imposed upon ?

“ For the Irish, who for some ages before the conquest by Henry II. had possessed a competent share of that kind of learning, which then prevailed in Europe, found it no difficult matter to impose their own fictions upon the ignorant Highland Senachies. By flattering the vanity of the Highlanders with their long list of Heremonian kings and heroes, they without contradiction assumed to themselves the character of being the mother-nation of the Scots of Britain. At this time, *certainly* was established that *Hibernian system* of the original of the Scots, which afterwards, for want of any other, was universally received.”

It is here, you see, dogmatically laid down, that the Hibernian system was the fiction of the thirteenth century ; and it is also admitted, that it was universally received, for this good reason, that *there was none other*. This ample concession really looks as if the writer had a mind to arrogate to himself the original invention of the Caledonian system ; but his candour should have confessed that it was the happy thought of the last century. The whole state of the case is briefly this :

In the fourteenth century, Fordun *did* collect such remains of antiquity as had escaped the ravages of Edward ; and it is agreed, on both sides, that scarce any escaped, except those in the monastery of Hy Columb-cil. In the fifteenth century, bishop Eiphinstone, chancellor of Scotland, after making the stridest search for old records, lays so little stress upon what he found, that he fairly refers you ad antiquos Hiberniæ scriptures. We have seen what the opinion of John Major was in the beginning of the sixteenth century, towards the close of which Hector Boetius wrote his fabulous history, adhering closely to his predecessors in tracing the origin of the Scots. Buchanan follows him, rejecting his glaring incongruities, and supporting the Hibernian system by the collateral authority of foreign testimonies. To his contemporary Dempster, was reserved the innovating invention of the Caledonian system.

But Sir George M'Kenzie scorned to follow him ; even he who thought it his duty, as advocate general of Scotland, to impugn certain parts of Irish history, in order to lengthen out the royal line, and to prove, for the honour of his Majesty, that his pedigree was derived from sovereign princes, rather than provincial kings. Sir George admits that *the Scots of Britain came last from Ireland*, and so doth Innys, whose more learned labours tend to shorten rather than lengthen the catalogue of Caledonian kings.

What then remains to support the credit of a system, exploded *universally* abroad, and *generally* at home, but the genius, style, and learning of Mr. M'— —n, Which, after all, betray his distrust of it, and cannot secure him from manifest self-contradictions. First, “ the Hibernian system is concerted between the two nations ; next, the one was imposed upon by the other,” then it was neither concerted nor imposed, but “ the true Caledonian system was handed down by tradition ; though a few ignorant Senachies might be persuaded out of their opinion, by the smoothness of an Irish tale, it was impossible to eradicate from the bulk of the people, their own national traditions.”

He sometimes attempts to entrench himself in verbal criticism, a sort, in which, one would have thought, he would have been impregnable ; but even a person who knows nothing of the Irish language, may, with very little attention, perceive the improbability of what he advances. He asserts, what is universally denied by the Irish, that they call their language

Gaëlic-Erinach. They say, that the Irish of both the Scotlands, the old and the new, have all along called their language *Gaëlic* without any addition.

Now to be convinced that this is the truth of the matter, let us only ask ourselves, to what purpose should a mark of distinction be added to the same language, though spoken by different nations ? We use no addition, to discriminate the language of England, from that now commonly spoken in Ireland. No ! we call both the English. And when we talk of the Latin tongue being generally spoken, at such or such a period, we do not say the Latin of France, or the Latin of Germany, but simply, and emphatically, the Latin. An epithet is indeed necessary to distinguish the people of a colony, from those of the mother-country ; as to distinguish the descendants of the Saxons in England, we call them Anglo-Saxons. Accordingly we find, that in the Irish or Gaëlic, a Scotchman is called Albanach Gaël, *i.e.* a Scoto-Hibernian ; but an Irishman is called emphatically Gael.

Another circumstance there is, which tends to throw some light upon this matter ; the songs of Ossian are as familiar to the original natives of Ireland, as they are represented by Mr. M'— —n to be in Scotland. And it is reasonable they should be so. Ossian is mentioned by Keating, Flagherty, and all the other historians of this country, as an Irish chieftain ; but no notice is taken of him by any Scotch historian. Nor is there any mention made by them of Fingal, father to Ossian ; yet all the Irish histories are replete with his exploits. Fin-mac-Comhal (pronounced Finmacoal) *i.e.* Fin the son of Comhal is the great hero, to whom, as a Hercules, the common Irish assimilate all strong and gallant men.

So much, indeed, is virtually admitted by the publisher of Fingal ; and to usher his work with greater plausibility into the world, he takes notice of an advertisement, which had appeared in the Irish newspapers, notifying that a translation of the *Irish Fingal* would soon make its appearance, and requesting the Public, to suspend the purchase of the Scotch translation, as being full of errors, &c. A blunder was sure to be inserted, to make the thing more probable, and go down the better ; for what more natural, than for Irish sagacity to spy out the errors of a work it had not seen ?

But, from all the inquiries I have made, I never could learn that such translation was ever meditated. Colonel Vallancey, who knows every *Irish scholar* in this kingdom, tells me, he never heard of any such work being in agitation. He says, Ossian's poems are all short ballads, not yet collected, to his knowledge, by any one. So you may guess the quarter from whence the blundering advertisement originated.

Yet it has been reported, and by great names too, that the first four books of Fingal were to be seen in the Isle of Sky, written in a fair hand on vellum, and bearing date in the year 1403. But this report proves ill authenticated. Dr. Johnson made the most diligent researches in the Isle of Sky, and elsewhere, for these supposed manuscripts ; but the result of all inquiries issued in this conclusion, that there not only were no such manuscripts in existence, but that it was impossible there should be any such : for that the Erse had never been a written language, till within a century.

In short, the forgery committed in the publications of Fingal and Temora, is so clearly detected by the sagacious and learned author of the *Journey to the Western Isles*, that to oppose the evidence of such fictitious works, to that of established history, would be to persist in a moil audacious insult upon the understandings of mankind. There are, we know, original poems ascribed to Ossian. Mr. M'— —n may have taken their images and sentiments, may have adopted their manner and spirit, but he has so changed the matter and order of the narration, by putting in, and leaving out, and other metamorphosing methods, that his work may be called any thing rather than a translation.

That this is the very method, which Mr. M'— —n has pursued, he in some measure acknowledges ; for when he recommends it to the Irish to give a translation of their Ossian's poems, " he hopes that the translator will chuse to leave something in the obscurity of the original." Now it is to be presumed, that he has too much candor to offer that advice to another, which he would not himself follow.

It is curious enough to see so learned a man as Lord Kaims, a man too, who in other respects seems divested of prejudice, such an advocate for the authenticity of the poems of Ossian in English. But I cannot think this agreeable writer in earnest. For while he tortures his ingenuity to give them a plausibility, which contradicts all his own systematic principles, he seems almost willing to compound for them as a forgery. But the glory of the antient Caledonians is at any rate to be supported ; therefore, rather than it should sink, he is even for recurring to miracle. And upon this ground, he seems ultimately to rest his cause ; a ground, which I thought he never would have chosen.

The refinement of sentiment in Ossian's characters, is so subversive of all that he had been for establishing, that he is utterly at a loss to account for it. " Had the Caledonians, says he, made slaves of the women, and thought as meanly of them as savages commonly do, it could never have entered the imagination of Ossian to ascribe to them those numberless traces that exalt the female sex, and render many of them objects of pure and elevated affection. Without the *aid of inspiration* such refined manners could never have been conceived by a savage."

Now is it not a fact of notoriety, that at this very day, the Highland women are employed in the most servile offices, even in carrying out manure like beads of burden ? Yet, our truly curious fact collector, after some strictures on Ruffian manners, triumphantly asks, " can we suppose that the *ladies and gentlemen* of Ossian's poems, ever amused themselves after the age of twelve, with hide and seek, questions and commands, or such like childish play."

Is not this to furnish laughter with a sneer at Highland manners ? Does not Lord Kaims, arguing *for the aid of inspiration* virtually betray that system he would support ? Let those celebrated epics then be at best considered, but as ingenious Centos culled from Irish Bards ; garbled and transposed, curtailed and interpolated, they are certainly not originals, and consequently they are not Ossian's. Perhaps they are better. If so, let Scotland glory in them ; but, detected as they are by Dr. Johnson, betrayed by Lord Kaims, and self-condemned throughout, they must remain only a monument of the ingenuity of the Editor.

Ossian sublimest, simplest bard of all,
Let English infidels M'Pherson call.

A philosophical survey of the south of Ireland, in a series of letters to John Watkinson (1778)

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