

Gods of the Gaels.

Celtic Mythology and Religion : with chapters upon Druid circles and Celtic burial

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The field of Mythology, strictly defined, embraces the fabulous events believed in by a nation and the religious doctrines implied in these. But the term is for convenience' sake extended so as to include the kindred subject of folk-lore. Now folk-lore includes all those popular stories of which the fairy tales of our nursery are a good illustration, and where the religious element implied in Mythology is absent. The term Celtic Mythology, in these papers, is understood, therefore, to include the popular traditions and legendary tales of the Celts, the fabulous actions and exploits of their heroes and deities, the traditions of their early migrations, their fairy tales, and the popular beliefs in regard to the supernatural world. The scope of the discussion will include an introductory section or two on the general principles of Mythology — its cause and spread, and the connection of the Mythology of the Celts with those of the kindred nations of Europe and Asia.

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Whatever interpretation we give to the *Feru-bolg* and the *Fomorians*, there can be little question as to the fact that the *Tuatha-De-Danann* are the Gaelic gods. The Irish historians, as we saw, represent them as kings with subjects, but even they find it difficult to hide the fact that some of these kings and queens afterwards appear on the scene of history in a supernatural fashion. The myths and tales, however, make no scruple to tell us that the *Tuatha-De-Danann* still live in Fairyland, and often take part in human affairs. In a very ancient tract which records a dialogue between St Patrick and *Caoilte Mac Ronain*, they are spoken of as “sprites or fairies, with corporeal and material forms, but endued with immortality.” Their skill in magic, shown in their manipulation of storms, clouds, and darkness, is insisted on in all the myths, and is a source of trouble to the historians and annalists, who regard them as mere mortals. “They were called gods,” says Keating, “from the wonderfulness of their deeds of sorcery.” To them is first applied the term *Side*, which in modern Gaelic means “fairy,” but which in the case of the *Tuatha-De-Danann* has a much wider signification, for it implies a sort of god-like existence in the “Land of Promise.” The Book of Armagh calls the *Side* “*deos terrenos*,” earthly gods, whom, we are told in *Fiacc's* hymn, when Patrick came, the peoples adored—“*tuatha adortais Side*.” *Sid* was a term applied to the green knolls where some of these deified mortals were supposed to dwell : the word appears in the modern Gaelic *sith* and *sithean*, a mound or rather a fairy mound. The *Tuatha-De-Danann* were also called “*Aes Side*,” *aes* being here used in the sense of “race” and not of “age.” We may remark that the Norse gods were also known as the *Aes* or *Aesir*, one of the many remarkable coincidences in words and in actions between the Irish gods and the deities of *Asgard*.

In attempting to reconstruct the Gaelic god-world from the almost hopeless ruins in which piety and time have laid it, we must not merely remember the Aryan character of it, but also *Cæsar's* brief account of the Gaulish Olympus. There can be little doubt but that the Gaelic and Gaulish Olympi were similar in outline, and probably also in details. We shall, therefore, expect Mercury to be the most important of the Gaelic deities, while Apollo, Mars, Jupiter, and Minerva take rank after him. These deities and others, as was pointed out, represent the personified powers of nature—the wind, the sun, the storm, the sky, and the moon. Not only

are these elements personified as deities and so worshipped, but we also find the elements in their impersonified state, as it were, invoked for aid and for good faith. The classical examples of this are extremely numerous. One instance will suffice : In Virgil, Æneas and Latinus are represented as swearing by the sun, the earth, the sea, the stars, by the Almighty Father and his Spouse, by Mars and Janus, by the spring and rivers, the ether and the deities of the sea. The first instance of such an oath in Irish history is when Breas, the Fomorian, swore by “ the sun and the moon, by the sea and the land, and by all the elements, to fulfil the engagement” which Luga imposed on him. Vows to the heavens and the earth, to day and night, to the rain, the dew and the wind, are exceedingly common, appearing even in historic times both in Ireland and Scotland ; among the Picts and Scots in the 4th century, in Ireland in the 5th, as when Loegaire was made to swear by the elements that he would never again demand the cow-tribute, and with M’Conglinne in the 8th century. It is said that Loegaire forgot his oath, and thus met with an evil end, for “ it was the sun and the wind that wrought his death, because he had violated their sanctity ;” so say the Four Masters, good Christians though they were ! The divine elements are known in Gaelic as *duli*, and one of the oldest and most favourite epithets of the Deity is “ rig na n-dul,” the King of the Elements, to which may be compared “ Dia nan dul” of the Gaelic Psalms : the word for Creator in old Gaelic is *Dulem*, the genitive of which is *Duleman*.

Our description of the Gaelic gods will naturally begin with the Jupiter of the Gaels. This honour belongs most probably to the Dagda, “ inDagda mor,” “ the great good one” (?) as Mr Fitzgerald explains his name. Some interpret the name as the “ good fire.” In any case, *dag* signifies “ good” appearing in modern Gaelic as *deagh*, but what *da* means is yet undecided. Though the Dagda is very often mentioned, yet little information is given about him. He was one of the leaders of the Tuatha-De-Danann from Scythia to Ireland, and he brought with him from “ Murias” a magical cauldron capable of satisfying the hunger of everyone. He is the most renowned of all the Tuatha for his skill in Druidism. With Luga he makes and carries out all the arrangements of the second battle of Moytura, in which, however, he was wounded with a poisoned weapon by the amazon queen Cethlenn. The venom of that wound caused his death 120 years later. For eighty years previous to his death, he ruled the Tuatha as king. There is little in these meagre details to help us to a true notion of the character of the Dagda. It is in the epithets attached to his name, and the incidental references to him, scattered through many tales, that we can hope to understand his position among the gods. He is called Eochaidh Ollathair, that is, Chevalier All-father, and, further, Ruadrofhessa, “ the red one of all knowledge.” The epithet “ Ollathair”—All-father—puts him on a level with Jupiter, Zeus, and Odin ; he is the father of gods and men, king of heaven and earth. Zeus, we know, is the sky-god, the beneficent power of light and life, who regulates the atmosphere and its phenomena—notably, the thunder—for the good of men : Odin is, however, a wind-god more than a sky-god, answering rather to the Roman Mercury and the Greek Hermes than to Jove and Zeus. Is the Dagda a wind-god or a light-god or a fire-god ? Mr Fitzgerald classes him with Odin as a sky- and wind-god, and appeals to the epithet “ Eochaid”—horseman—as confirmation ; for horseman and huntsman are nearly allied, and seem rather to belong to the wind deity, as in the case of Odin they do so apply. Mr Elton makes the Dagda a spirit of heat who ruled all fires in earth and heaven, for he interprets the name after O’Donovan as signifying “ the great good fire.” The view which we will adopt on the matter differs from both the foregoing. The Dagda represents rather the sky-god, exactly the Roman Jove. He is the All-father ; he is the Red-one—the sky in certain states being so, just as at other times he is said to be “ greyer than the grey mist”—who is all-wise ; he is the Dag-da, the good-father or good-one, the deus optimus maximus, the benign providence, who arranges, provides, and superintends everything. His cauldron is interpreted by some as the canopy of heaven ; like the thunder-god, Thor, he possessed a hand-stone which returned of itself to the place from which it was thrown, just as Thor’s hammer—the thunder-bolt—did.

The most important deity in the Gaelic pantheon must have been Mercury : which of the Tuatha-De-Danann was he ? The honour of being the god most worshipped by the Gael must fall to Manannan, the son of Lir. Manannan is always a deity ; he is never a mortal hero like the others. We represented him as god of sea and wind, as opposed to Mr Elton's view, who made him a sun-god. There is little doubt but Manannan is a wind-god : he possesses all the prominent requisites of such a deity. He is the owner of the wonderful steed, Enbarr, of the flowing mane, who is swift as the cold clear wind of spring ; his also is the sword, Frecart, the answerer, from whose wound there was no recovery ; and he possessed the curious mantle that will cause people never to meet again. The three characteristic possessions of Odin are his sword, his mantle, and his horse Sleipnir. The sword is the lightning ; the mantle is the air and clouds, and the grey horse Sleipnir is the rushing grey cloud driven by the wind. Odin is, as already said, mostly a wind-god ; so, too, is Manannan. Both deities, however, usurped features belonging to more departmental gods, in proportion as they took the first place in the worship of the people. Manannan also possessed the wonderful canoe which could hold any number of people, suiting its size to them, and which obeyed the will of those it bore, and swept over the ocean as fast as the March wind. He, too, instituted the " Feast of Age," known as the feast of Gobnenn the smith. Whoever was present at it, and partook of the food and drink, was free ever after from sickness, decay, and old age. The Land of Promise is often identified with *Inis-Mhanann*, or Isle of Man, which was ruled over by Manannan, but his connection with the land of promise is rather more like that of Mercury with the land of shades ; he would appear to have been the psychopomp—the conductor of the shades of men to the happy Isles of the West. He was as we saw, god of merchandise and also god of arts for he is represented as teaching Diarmat in all the arts when he was with him in Fairyland. Why the Celts and Teutons made the wind deity their chief god is fairly clear. The atmospheric conditions of Western and Northern Europe make the wind and storm powers of comparatively more importance than they are in sunnier lands, where the gods of light on the other hand are supreme. Manannan is further very properly denominated the " son of Lir," the son of the sea, for sure enough where else does the wind come from in these islands of ours but from the sea ?

There is little trouble in settling the identity of the Gaelic Apollo. This is Luga Lamfada, surnamed the Ildana ; Luga of the Long Arms, the many-armed one. He appears with a stately band of warriors on white steeds, " a young champion, tall and comely, with a countenance as bright and glorious as the setting sun." But more definite still is the reference to his *sunlike* countenance ; in another place the Fomorian champion, Breas, is made to say in reference to the approach of Luga from the west : " A wonderful thing has come to pass to-day ; for the sun, it seems to me, has risen in the west" " It would be better that it were so," said the Druids. " The light you see is the brightness of the face and the flashing of the weapons of Luga of the Long Arms, our deadly enemy." He also possessed the swiftness and keenness of the ocean-wind-god Manannan, for we are told that he rode Manannan's mare Enbarr of the flowing mane, that is, the driving wind ; his coat of mail—the clouds ; and he is further represented as having Manannan's sword, the lightning flash. But this last is doubtful, for two of the precious jewels that the Tuatha-De-Danann took from the east are Luga's sword and his spear " Gae Buafneach," tempered in the poisoned blood of adders. These weapons are merely the flashing rays of the sun, just as Luga's helmet, Cannbarr, glittered with dazzling brightness, with two precious stones set in it, one in front and one behind. Whenever he took off the helmet, we are told that his " face shone like the sun on a dry summer day." His deeds are also " sunlike" in their character. He first frees the Tuatha from the hated tribute which was imposed on them after a temporary success on the part of the Fomorians. We are told that he put a Druidical spell on the plundered cattle, and sent all the milch cows home to their owners, leaving the dry cows to cumber his enemies. The cows of the sun-god are famous in all mythologies ; they are the clouds of heaven that bring rain and moisture to men, when

shone upon by the rays of the sun. Luga's greatest feat is the overthrow of the Fomorians at Moytura. For years he had been preparing for this great fight. He summoned all the artists and artificers of renown and got arms in readiness. He himself lent his help to each tradesman, for he was a skilled carpenter, mason, smith, harper, druid, physician, cup-bearer, and goldsmith, "one who embodied in himself all these arts and professions," as he described himself on one occasion. When the sons of Turenn slew his father, he made them procure for him as "eric" or fine, several weapons of importance and several salves, with a view to using them in the great struggle against the stormy ocean powers. Such were the apples of Hisberna, which could cure any sickness and would return to the owner even when thrown away ; the pig's skin whose touch made whole ; the spear—"the slaughterer"—whose fiery blazing head was always kept in water ; the steeds and chariot of Dobar—the steeds which travel with equal ease on land and sea ; the pigs of Asal—"whosoever eats a part of them shall not suffer from ill health"—even when killed to-day they are alive to-morrow ; and the hound-whelp Failinis, that shines like, the sun on summer day—before him every wild beast falls to earth powerless. In the battle of Moytura, he killed Balor of the Evil Eye. That worthy had already turned Nuada of the Silver Hand into stone, and many more De-Danann, and just as he was opening it on Luga, the latter flung a "sling stone" at it, which passed through it and Balor's brain. Now Balor was his grandfather, and it had been foretold that he should be slain by his grandson. In view of this he kept his only child, a daughter, Aethlenn, secluded in a tower, where man and the idea of "man" were to be strictly excluded. But in vain. She became the wife of Cian, the son of Diancecht, the physician, and Luga was the offspring. We must note his connection with the god of healing ; that god is his grandfather. In Greek mythology, Aesculapius is the son of Apollo. The name Luga, too, is suggestive ; it is doubtless from the root *luc*, to shine, and it is interesting to observe that the Norse fire-god, also master of many arts, though evil arts, is called Loki. The epithet *Lamfada*, long arms, reminds us of the far-darter Apollo, and refers to the long-shooting rays of the sun—a most appropriate epithet

Cormac informs us in his Glossary that Neith was the god of battle among the pagan Gael, and that Nemon was his wife, information which is repeated in other and later manuscripts with some variations and additions. We are vouchsafed no further information as to Neith's character or actions ; only he appears in some of the inevitable pedigrees, and we are told that Neit, son of Indu, and his two wives, Badb and Nemain, were slain at Ailech by "Neptur (!) of the Fomorians." With Nemain may be compared the British war goddess Nemetona, whose name appears on an inscription along with that of Mars Lucetius. There would appear to have been more than one war goddess ; the names Badb, Nemain, Macha, and Morrigan, constantly recur as those of war deities and demons. Badb signifies, a scald-crow, and may be the generic name of the war goddess rather than a proper name. The crow and the raven are constantly connected in the Northern Mythologies with battle-deities. "How is it with you, Ravens ?" says the Norse "Raven-Song," "whence are you come with gory beak at the dawning of the day. There is flesh cleaving to your talons, and a scent of carrion comes from your mouth. You lodged last night I ween near where ye knew the corpses were lying." The greedy hawks of Odin scent the slain from afar. The ravens also protect and assist heroes, both in Irish and Norse myth. It was a lucky sign if a raven followed a warrior. Of Macha, the third goddess mentioned, little need be said ; she appears afterwards as a queen of Ireland, under the title of Macha Mongruad, or Macha Red-Mane. The goddess Morrigan was also a war deity to all appearance. The name signifies "great queen," and may be, like Badb, a generic name. She is represented as first resisting and afterwards assisting the hero Cuchulainn, appearing to him in various forms. O'Curry makes her the wife of the Dagda, and she is often equated with the goddess Ana. The name is doubtless the same as that of Morgan le Fay, the fairy queen and Arthur's sister. It may be remarked that Morgan le Fay is also wife of Urian Rheged, who and his son Owen, with the army of ravens, are clearly war deities

The goddess Ana or Aine (gen. Anann) has been called the queen of heaven, and connected with the worship of the moon.

Cormac describes her as “mater deorum Hibernensium”—mother of the Irish gods. “Well she used to nourish the gods,” he adds, and in another place he says, “As Ana was mother of the gods, so Buanann was mother of the Fiann (heroes).” Camden found in his time survival of moon-worship. “When they see the moon first after the change,” he says, “commonly they bow the knee and say the Lord’s Prayer, and then, with a loud voice, they speak to the moon, thus—“Leave us whole and sound as thou hast found us.” Keating gives the name of this goddess as Danann, and explains the Tuatha-De-Danann as the worshippers of the gods of Danann, the gods of Danann being, according to him, Brian, Iucharba, and Iuchar. These three gods are known in other myths as the “children of Turenn,” slain, as Keating himself says, by Luga Lamfada. The goddess Buanann, mentioned in connection with Ana or Anann, appears in the story of the great Druid Mogh Ruith as his patron, to whose *Sid* he fares to consult her in his difficulties.

Minerva is the fifth and last deity mentioned by Cæsar as worshipped by the Gauls—their goddess of arts and industry. A passage in Solinus, and another in Giraldus Cambrensis, enable us to decide, with absolute certainty, what goddess answered among the Gaels to the position of Minerva. Solinus (first century A.D.) says that in Britain, Minerva presides over the hot springs, and that in her temple there flamed a perpetual fire, which never whitened into ashes, but hardened into a strong mass. Giraldus (12th century A.D.) informs us that at the shrine of St Brigit at Kildare, the fire is allowed never to go out, and though such heaps of wood have been consumed since the time of the Virgin, yet there has been no accumulation of ashes. “Each of her nineteen nuns has the care of the fire for a single night in turn, and on the evening before the twentieth night, the last nun, having heaped wood upon the fire, says, ‘Brigit, take charge of your own fire, for this night belongs to you.’ She then leaves the fire, and in the morning it is found that the fire has not gone out, and that the usual quantity of fuel has been used.” This sacred fire was kept burning continually for centuries, and was finally extinguished, only with the extinction of the monasteries by Henry VIII. Brigit, therefore, is the Gaelic Minerva. She is goddess of the household fire; her position is that of the hearth goddess Vesta, as much as that of Minerva, for evidently she is primarily a fire-goddess. Her name is probably from the same root as the English *bright*, Gaelic *breo*. The British goddess, Brigantia, is doubtless the same as the Irish Brigit. Mr Whitley Stokes picks out the following instances in proof of her character as a fire-goddess; she was born at sunrise; her breath revives the dead; a house in which she stays flames up to heaven; she is fed with the milk of a white red-eared cow; a fiery pillar rises from her head, and she remains a virgin like the Roman goddess, Vesta, and her virgins—Vesta, whom Ovid tells us to consider “nothing else than the living flame, which can produce no bodies.” Cormac calls her the daughter of the Dagda. “This Brigit,” he says, “is a poetess, a goddess whom poets worshipped. Her sisters were Brigit, woman of healing; Brigit, woman of smith work; that is, goddesses; these are the three daughters of the Dagda.” Doubtless these three daughters, thus distinguished by Cormac, are one and the same person. Brigit, therefore, was goddess of fire, the hearth and the home.

The rest of the Gaelic pantheon may be dismissed in a few sentences. Angus Mac-ind-oc, “he only choice one, son of Youth or Perfection,” has been well called the Eros—the Cupid—of the Gael. “He was represented with a harp, and attended by bright birds, his own transformed kisses, at whose singing love arose in the hearts of youths and maidens.” He is the son of the Dagda, and he lives at the Brugh of the Boyne; in one weird tale he is represented as the son of the Boyne. He is the patron god of Diarmat, whom he helps in escaping from the wrath of Finn, when Diarmat eloped with Grainne. The River Boyne is also connected with

the ocean-god Nuada ; it was called the wrist of Nuada's wife. The literary deity was Ogma, brother of the Dagda, surnamed " Sun-face" ; he invented the alphabet known as the Ogam alphabet, and, as was pointed out already, he is mentioned by Lucian as the Gaulish god of eloquence. Three artisan gods are mentioned : Goibniu, the smith, invoked in the St Gall Incantations of the 8th century ; Creidne Cerd, the goldsmith ; and Luchtine, the carpenter. These three made the Tuatha arms ; when the smith finished a spear-head, he threw it from his tongs towards the door-post, in which it stuck by the point ; the carpenter had the handle ready, and threw it accurately into the socket ; and Creidne Cerd pitched the nails from his tongs into the holes in the socket of the spear. Thus was the spear finished in less time than we can describe the process. Diancecht was the physician of the gods ; at Moytura battle he prepared a medical bath, into which he plunged the wounded, and they instantly came out whole again, and returned to the fight. The three De-Danann queens, Eire, Fodhla, and Banbha, gave their names to Ireland, but the first is the one which is usually recognised. It may be observed that these names, and those of some others of the gods are scattered widely over the topography both of Ireland and Scotland. In the latter country we meet with Eire, and its genitive Erenn in river and district names ; Fodla forms part of Athole, Ath-Fodhla, probably ; Banba appears in Banff ; Angus the Beautiful gave his name to Angus ; Manannan's name appears in the Isle of Man, and as the old name of the district at the mouth of the Forth, still seen in Clack-Mannan.

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The Celtic Elysium,

All the Aryan nations originally believed in the existence, after death, of the human soul. This belief had its root in the " animism" of a more barbaric period of their existence, and held its place in the remnants of ancestral worship we meet with in Rome and Greece, and in the many myths bearing on the land of shades. Evidently, too, the pre-Aryan tribes of Europe were strong believers in the future existence of man's second self, his soul. Their barrows, dolmens, and stone-circles point distinctly to their reverence for the dead, and their belief in their continued existence in another sphere of nature, from which they visited, helped and admonished their living representatives. Ancestor worship clearly was their main creed. Hence the vividness of the belief of the early Northern Aryans—Celts and Teutons—in future existence, and their clinging to ancestor worship so long, may arise from their mingling with a people who was in that stage of belief ; whereas, at the dawn of our era, in Greece and Rome, the whole doctrine of a future state belonged to the region of languid half-belief. The aristocracy and the philosophers entirely disbelieved it. Cæsar, as supreme pontiff of Rome, declared, in his place in the senate, his utter disbelief in another life, and the stern Cato but mildly replied that their ancestors, men, perhaps, as wise as Cæsar, believed that the guilty, after death, were sent to noisome abodes, full of all horrors and terrors. But the classical belief, even at its best—in the poems of Homer—gives but a poor, shadowy, comfortless existence to the spirits of the dead. They lived in Hades, a country which comprised various districts of woe, and of bliss such as it was. The ghost of Achilles says to Ulysses :—
" Rather would I live on earth as a poor man's hireling, than reign among all the dead." The gods lived on the heights of Olympus, aloft in heaven, and far apart from the hated abode of the dead, which lay under the earth and ocean. Mortals were all consigned to the grisly realm of Pluto ; even the demi-god Hercules, though living in Olympus, had his ghostly mortal counterpart in Hades. Among the Romans, ancestor worship had a stronger force than in Greece ; their feast of the dead was duly celebrated in the latter half of February, when chaplets were laid on their tombs, and fruit, salt, corn soaked in wine, and violets, were the least costly offerings presented to them. The deification of the Emperors was merely a further development of this ancestor worship. The remembrance of the festival of the dead is still

kept up in the Roman calendar as the feast of All Souls. The Celts of Brittany preserve still the remembrance of the ancestor worship on this day ; they put cakes and sweet meats on the graves, and at night make up the fire and leave the fragments of the supper on the table, for the souls of the dead of the family who will come to visit their home.

The Celts would appear to have had a much more vivid belief in future existence than either the Greeks or the Romans. We may pass over the Druidic doctrine of transmigration ; it was doubtless not the popular view of future life. We know as much from some side references in one or two classical writers. So realistic was the Celtic belief in existence after death that money loans were granted on the understanding that they were to be repaid beyond the grave ! Valerius Maximus laughs at the Gauls for “ lending money which should be paid the creditor in the other world, for they believed that the soul was immortal” Mela tells us one of the Druidic doctrines that was publicly preached and nationally believed in, namely, that the soul was eternal and that there was another life in the land of shades. “ Accordingly,” he adds, “ they burn and bury along with the dead whatever was once useful to them when alive. Business accounts and debt claims used to be transferred to the next world, and some even willingly cast themselves on the funeral piles of their relatives under the impression that they would live with them hereafter.” Diodorus Siculus informs us that at the funeral of their dead some threw letters addressed to their defunct relatives on the funeral pyre, under the belief that the dead would read them. This intense belief in the reality of future existence must have removed the Celtic other-world from the unreal and shadowy Hades of Greece and Rome. What the exact character of this other world was among the Gauls we cannot well say ; but the later legends in France, Wales, and Ireland go to prove that it partook of the nature of an Earthly Paradise, situated in some happy isle of the West. The pseudo-Plutarch introduces a grammarian Demetrius as returned from Britain, and saying “ that there are many desert islands scattered round Britain, some of which have the names of being the islands of genii and heroes. The island which lay nearest the desert isles had but few inhabitants, and these were esteemed by the Britons sacred and inviolable. Very soon after his arrival there was great turbulence in the air and portentous storms. The islanders said when these ceased that some one of the superior genii had departed, whose extinction excited the winds and storms. And there was one island where Saturn was kept by Briareus in a deep sleep, attended by many genii as his companions.” The poet Claudian evidently records a Gaulish belief in the Island of Souls in the lines : —

“ Est locus extremum pandit quæ Gallia litus,
Oceani prætentus aquis, ubi fœditur Ulixes
Sanguine libato populum movisse silentem.
Illic umbrarum tenui stridore volantum
Fœlebilis auditur questus. Simulacra coloni
Pallida defunctasque vident migrare figuras.”

Beyond the westernmost point of the Gallic shore, he says, is the place where Ulysses summoned the shades (as Homer has it) There are heard the tearful cries of fleeting ghosts ; the natives see their pallid forms and ghostly figures moving on to their last abode. The traditions of Brittany, with true Celtic tenacity, still bear traces of this belief ; at the furthest extremity of that district, where Cape Raz juts into the Western Sea, lies the Bay of Souls, where departed spirits sail off across the sea in ghostly ships to the happy isles. Procopius, in the 6th century, enables us to understand what the peasants of Northern Gaul believed in regard to the Happy Isles, and to Britain in particular. He confuses Britain with a fabulous island called Brititia, one half of which is habitable ; but the other half, divided off by a wall, is set apart to be the home of ghosts. The fishermen on the continent opposite to Brititia performed the functions of ferrymen for the dead. “ At night they perceive the door to be shaken,

and they hear a certain indistinct voice summoning them to their work. They proceed to the shore under compulsion of a necessity they cannot understand. Here they perceive vessels—not their own—apparently without passengers. Embarking, they take the oars, and feel as if they had a burden on board in the shape of unseen passengers, which sometimes sinks the boat to within a finger-breadth of the water. They see no one. After rowing for an hour, they reach Brititia, really a mortal journey of over twenty-four hours. Arrived at Brititia, they hear the names of their passengers and their dignities called over and answered ; and on the ghosts all landing, they are wafted back to the habitable world.”

So far we have discovered among the early Celts an intense conviction in a personal existence in another world, where they “ married and gave in marriage,” and into which business transactions of this world might be transferred. Its locality was to the west—an island in the land of the setting sun, or possibly a i country under the western waves, for the traditions of Brittany, Cornwall, Wales, Ireland, and Scotland continually insist on the existence of such a land. Buried cities are recorded as existing to the westward of every prominent Celtic cape ; that sunken district of Lyonesse which appears in all Brythonic traditions. The very earthly character of the Celtic world of the departed is seen in the surviving remembrances of it still existent, despite all the Church’s efforts, in the mythic tales ; an Earthly Paradise it truly was. We do not find much in Welsh myth bearing on the matter ; it is in Irish and Gaelic tales that we have the material for judging of the character of the Celtic Elysium.

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Welsh and Gaelic Elysium.

The Welsh Hades was known as Annwn. It possessed kings, chiefs, and commons, somewhat like those of this world, only vastly superior—“ the comeliest and best equipped people ever seen.” Pwyll, Prince of Dyved (South-west Wales), while one day out hunting, lost his companions in his eager pursuit of a stag. Hearing a cry of hounds near him, he approached, and saw the stag brought down by other dogs than his own.” Then he looked at the colour of the dogs, staying not to look at the stag, and of all the hounds that he had seen in the world, he had never seen any that were like unto these. For their hair was of a brilliant shining white, and their ears were red ; and as the whiteness of their bodies shone, so did the redness of their ears glisten.” He drove them from the stag, and set on it his own dogs. Immediately there came upon him a man dressed all in grey and mounted on a grey horse, and he reviled Pwyll for his discourtesy in turning off his hounds. Pwyll offered to make reparation, and his offer was accepted. The stranger said that he was Arawn, King of one-half of Annwn, and he was at war with Havgan, the other King. Pwyll, if he liked, could overthrow Havgan, who was to come exactly a year thereafter against Arawn. Would Pwyll change places with him and meet Havgan ? He would give him his own personal appearance, and assume Pwyll’s, and they could govern each other’s kingdoms for a year. This was agreed on. Pwyll took the form of Arawn, and came to Annwn. He never saw anything like the beauty of Arawn’s city and the appointments of his court, “ which of all the courts on earth was the best supplied with food and drink, and vessels of gold and royal jewels.” Suffice it to say that he ruled well during the year, and at the end of it slew Havgan, “ at the ford,” in single combat, and thus made Arawn undisputed master of Hades. Arawn had, meanwhile, conducted the kingdom of Dyved as it never had been before ; his wisdom and justice were unsurpassable. And these two kings made an eternal bond of friendship with each other, and Pwyll was called “ Chief of Annwn” henceforward.

The dogs of Annwn, mentioned in the above tale, are a common feature in mythology. Ossian, on his way to Tir-nan-og, saw a hornless fawn bounding nimbly along the wave-

crests pursued by a white hound with red ears. The Wild Huntsman and his dogs of Teutonic myth belong to the same category ; and these dogs of Annwn were similarly said to rush through the air, and evil was the omen. These are, undoubtedly, the wind-dogs of Hermes, the conductor of souls ; the Wild Huntsman is none other than Odin, sweeping up the souls of the dead in his path. Annwn, or the Lower Regions, possess, in the myth, the same characteristics as this world ; only things are on a grander scale there altogether. The other reference of importance to this Earthly Other-world is in the story of Arthur. Dying on the battle-field of Camlan, he is carried away to heal of his wounds to “ the vale of Avilion,” which Tennyson, catching the true idea of the Welsh mythic paradise, describes thus : Arthur, dying, speaks to Bedivere ;

“ I am going a long way—
To the island-valley of Avilion ;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow.
Nor ever wind blows loudly ; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crowned with summer sea.”

And here Arthur still lives on, destined one day to appear and set free his Cambrians from, the hateful yoke of the Saxon.

The myths in Ireland bearing on the existence of a happy western land are very numerous and important. The names given to this land vary, but they have a general reference to happiness, all save the name Tir-fa-tonn, the “ Under-wave Land.” The names generally met with are Tir Tairngire, “ Land of Promise” ; Mag Mell, “ Plains of Happiness” ; Tir-nam-beo, “ Land of the Living” ; Tir-nan-og, “ Land of the Young” ; and O'Breasail, “ Breasal's Isle.” Whether there is any distinction implied in these names cannot well be said. There would seem to be something of a difference between the Under-wave Land and the Plains of Happiness ; the latter may have rather been the abode of the gods, where Manannan lived with Fann his wife, as the myths have it Tir-fa-tonn looks rather like the Gaelic Hades, the abode of the dead. The Gaelic version of Diarmat's sojourn there gives strong colour to such a supposition, and the early Middle Age legends in regard to St Patrick's Purgatory below Lough Dearg—the precursors of Dante and Milton's descriptions—lend great countenance to such a distinction between Tir-fa-tonn and Mag Mell.

The myths may be grouped in three divisions. There are, first, the myths where a mortal is summoned, in an enchanting song, by a fairy being who has fallen in love with the mortal, to a land of beauty and happiness and ever-youthful life ; second, there are myths which tell how a hero has, Ulysses-like, paid a business visit to the other world ; and, thirdly, the accounts of many voyages of discovery in search of the Happy Isles, and the “ Traveller's Tales” of the wonders seen. To the first class belong three very remarkable Irish myths : the Courtship of Etain, the Story of Condlá Cam, and Ossian in Tir-nan-og. The outline of the story is as follows :—There suddenly appears before a kingly company a fairy being who chants, for some particular person in the company loved by the fairy, a song descriptive of the glories and pleasures of the Land of the Ever-young., The person so addressed cannot choose but love the fairy, and go to the wonderful land. In Ossian's case alone have we got an account of the career of the enchanted one in Tir-nan-og. Niam of the Golden Hair suddenly presents herself before the Feni, tells her love for Ossian, and says : “ I place you under obligations which no true heroes break through—to come with me on my white steed to Tir-nan-og, the most delightful and renowned country under the sun. Jewels and gold there are in abundance, and honey and wine ; the trees bear fruit and blossoms and green leaves all the year round. Feasting and music and harmless pastimes are there each day. You will get a

hundred swords, and robes of richest loom ; a hundred steeds, and hounds of keenest scent ; numberless herds, and sheep with fleeces of gold ; a hundred maidens merry and young, sweeter of mouth than the music of birds ; a hundred suits of armour, and a sword, gold handled, that never missed a stroke. Decline shall not come on you, nor death, nor decay. These, and much more that passeth all mention, shall be yours, and myself as your wife !” Needless is it to recount how Ossian went, the wonders he saw by the way, and the feats he did ; how he found Tir-nan-og all that it was painted by the Princess Niam ; how, after three hundred years, he returned to earth on the white steed, from whose back he was forbidden to dismount ; how he fell from the steed when helping the poor weakly mortals that he found then on earth to raise a huge stone ; and how the steed rushed off and left him, old and withered and blind, “ among little men.”

Visits of the nature of that undertaken by Ulysses, in Homer, to the Land of Shades, were made by at least three great champions of the Gael These are Cuchulainn, Cormac Mac Art, and Diarmat O’Duinn. We have already referred to Cuchulainn’s helping of Fand, wife of Manannan. The story says that, like a wise man, Cuchulainn, when invited to assist Fand, deserted as she was by her husband, sent his charioteer Loeg to “ prospect” and report as to the safety of such a journey. Loeg and his fairy guide “ proceeded until they reached the side of the island, when they saw the bronze skiff waiting for them. They then stepped on to the ship and landed on the island.” There they found Fand and her father waiting them. Professor Rhys very properly compares this passage to the well-known boat and ferry of Charon in classical mythology. “ There can be no mistake,” he says, “ as to its [the Isle of the Blest] being the Elysium of the dead, and that going into it meant nothing less than death to ordinary mortals ; it was only by special favour that a mortal might enter it otherwise.” Passing over Cormac Mac Art’s visit to Manannan, and rescue from death of his wife and two children, we find a double account of Diarmat’s visit to Tir-fa-tonn—one Irish, one Gaelic. The Irish one is in its main features the counterpart of the Welsh Mabinogion, “ The Lady of the Fountain.” Diarmat fights with the Knight of the Fountain, and in wrestling with him they both fall into the fountain. Diarmat, arriving at the bottom of it, finds himself in a most beautiful territory, where he does many deeds of valour, and helps a distressed prince to a throne. The Highland tale represents him as sheltering a loathly creature that turns out to be a most beautiful lady under spells. She is the daughter of the King of the Land under the Waves. After presenting Diarmat with a fairy castle, and living with him some time, she left him for her own country, a slight quarrel having occurred. He followed her, crossed on the “ Charon” boat, much as already described in Loeg’s case, and arrived at an island, where down went the boat to a land under the sea ! Here Diarmat found his love, but she was deadly sick, to be cured only by a drink from a magical cup in the possession of the King of Wonderland. This he procured by the help of “ the messenger of the other world,” who advised him to have nothing to do with the King’s silver or gold, or even with the daughter, an advice which Diarmat took, for after healing her, “ he took a dislike to her.” Diarmat, therefore, was allowed to return from the realms of death.

The “ Voyagers’ Tales” of Ireland can compare for sensuous imagination very favourably with any other country’s “ Travellers’ Tales.” Naturally enough, the tales deal altogether with sea-voyages, generally to some western islands, and they must and do contain many reminiscences of the Happy Isles, where the dead live and the gods reign. Despite the monkish garb they at times assume, for two of the most important are undertaken by monks, the old heathenism peeps out at every turn. Sometimes we hear of a man living in a happy island with the souls of all his descendants as birds giving music around him. Sometimes we get a glimpse of the earthly paradise, where the travellers saw, “ a great number of people, beautiful and glorious-looking, wearing rich garments adorned and radiant all over, feasting joyously and drinking from embossed vessels of red gold. The voyagers also heard their

cheerful festive songs, and they marvelled greatly, and their hearts were full of gladness at all the happiness they saw and heard. But they did not venture to land." They pass occasionally into the regions of spirits, and are brought into contact with the living and the dead. The wonders they meet with often point a moral, for there are punishments for wickedness. On one island was found a man digging with a spade, the handle of which was on fire, for on earth he was accustomed to dig on Sunday. On another island was found a burly miller feeding his mill with all the perishable things of which people are "so choice and niggardly in this world." Islands of lamentation and islands of laughing are visited; gorgeous palaces and towns, both above and below the waves, are seen, and duly described. The principal voyagers were St Brendan, the sons of Ua Corra and Maelduin.

No argument as to the character or the inhabitants of the next world can be drawn from the modern names given to it Flaithefnas or, Gaelic, Flaitheamhnas, meant "glory" in its original sense, being derived from the word "Flaithefn," a lord, with the abstract termination —*as*, "Innis," an island, forms no part of the word, so that the old derivation and its consequent theories—"Island of chiefs"—fall to the ground. In the same way do the many weird speculations upon the place of pain, fail. Uffern, in Welsh, and Ifrinn or Iutharn, in Gaelic, are both borrowed from the Latin word, *Infernum*, much to the misfortune of those Druidic theories that make the Celtic hell an "Isle of the Cold Waves." Both Flaitheamhnas and Ifrinn are Christian ideas, and have no counterpart in the Pagan Mythology of the Celts. Our Celtic myths warrant us to speak but of an earthly Paradise, a home of sensuous ease for the departed soul. The glimpses of places of woe in the "Voyagers' Tales" are too much inspired by Christian thought to render speculation upon the Celtic "prison-house" for the soul possible.

What character of body did the spirits of the dead possess, according to the opinions of the Celts? The sensuous paradise argues a material body capable of both physical enjoyments and sorrows. The gods, of course, had bodies somewhat analogous to those of men; these bodies were celestial, but yet quite as substantial as human bodies. The difference was that they were not subject to the trammels of gravitation and visibility, unless they chose. Their persons were more beautiful and majestic than those of men; a "sublimated" humanity characterised them. They appeared among mortals—sometimes all of a sudden in the midst of an assembly; ate, drank, and acted, like mortals, in every respect. Sometimes they were seen only by one person in the company, though heard by all, as in the story of Condla Cam, whom the fairy enchanted and abducted. These are, however, the Pagan gods as seen in Christian myth. Yet we find the ghosts of departed heroes appearing in much the same way as the *Side* and Tuatha-De-Danann. The ghost of Caoilte is met with in one or two myths representing different times—in St Patrick's time and King Mongan's time—and on each occasion he appears in "his habit as he lived," full of life and colour, not pale and shadowy. Besides, these ghosts can appear in the day time, as Caoilte used to do. The great poem of the *Tain Bo Chuailgne* had been lost by the 6th century and it could be recovered only by raising its composer, Fergus MacRoy, from the dead. And this the Saints of Erin were able to accomplish. "Fergus himself," we are told, "appeared in a beautiful form, adorned with brown hair, clad in a green cloak, and wearing a collared gold-ribbed shirt, a gold-hilted sword, and sandals of bronze." He was evidently a very substantial apparition! St Patrick was also able, though indirectly, to raise the spirit of the great Cuchulainn himself, to meet King Loegaire. The famous champion appeared to him one morning splendidly dressed, with his chariot, horses, and charioteer, the same as when alive. All is minutely described: the charioteer, for instance, was a "lank, tall, stooped, freckle-faced man. He had curling reddish hair upon his head. He had a circlet of bronze upon his forehead which kept his hair from his face; and cups of gold upon his poll behind, into which his hair coiled; a small winged cape

on him, with its buttoning at his elbows ; a goad of red gold in his hand, by which he urged his horses.”

The substantial ghosts of dead heroes are in the myths generally classed as *Side*, among whom also the gods were classed. This, of course, arose from a confusion. The *Side*, I take it, were the ghosts of the glorious dead dwelling in their barrows or tumuli (the *sid*.) At these barrows, doubtless, they were worshipped in accordance with the customs of ancestor worship. This cannot be proved with satisfaction from the Gaelic myths alone, but if we refer to the belief and rites of the Norse peoples, we shall see plenty evidence of the worship of the dead in their barrows. In the *Land nama-bok* we read that at one place “ there was a harrow (‘ high place’) made there, and sacrifices began to be performed there, for they believed that *they died unto these hills.*” The editors of the lately published work “ *Corpus Poeticum Boreale*” bring forward quite an array of evidence in proof of the sacredness of these “ houses” and barrows, and the belief that dead ancestors lived another life there, and took an interest in the living. “ Of the spirit life and the behaviour of the dead,” they say, “ there is some evidence. In the older accounts they are feasting happily, and busying themselves with the good of their living kindred, with whom they are still united in intense sympathy. Of the ritual names of the worshipped dead, the oldest we know is ‘ Anse,’ which survived in Iceland into the Middle Ages, in the sense of guardian spirit or genius of a hill. ‘ Elf’ is another name used of spirits of the dead—of divine spirits generally—as the ‘ Anses’ and the ‘ Elves’ of Loka-Senna. Later, in Christian times, it sinks in Scandinavia to mean ‘ fairy.’ . . . There were *evil spirits*—spirits of bad men—and even vampires and the like, such as the dreadful Glam and unhallowed spirits and monsters.” We may thus argue that the *Side* or *Aes-side* (compare Anse or Aesir above) were properly the divine ancestors, and that the gods, originally in Pagan times quite distinct from them, were afterwards confused with the “ *sidè*,” as we have them in the myths. But a still greater confusion overtook these names and ideas as time and Christianity advanced. The “ *sidè*” got mixed up with the “ *elves*,” the earth and wood powers, just as they did among the Norse ; and the modern “ *sith*” is a mixture of tumulus-dweller and wood-nymph. The gods have almost entirely left the scene ; only the Lares—the Gruagachs and Brownies are left. Of old, among the Pagan-Gael, there were, doubtless, ghosts somewhat analagous to those of present superstitions, but they were clearly those of unhallowed men, as we have seen in the case of the Norse beliefs. The modern ghosts follow the analogy of the dwellers in the Greek Hades, and not of the inhabitants of the Earthly Paradise of the Gaels, that “ *Land of the Leal*” where the sun sinks in the west. They grew up during the Middle Ages under the shadow of the Roman Church.

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