

## Native Irish Poetry

Professor Georges Dottin.

1914

[Note. — This chapter was written in French by M. Dottin, who is a distinguished professor and dean at the University of Rennes, France. The translation into English has been made by the Editors.]

By the year 1200 of the Christian era, a time at which the other national literatures of Europe were scarcely beginning to develop, Ireland possessed, and had possessed for several centuries, a Gaelic poetry, which was either the creation of the soul of the people or else was the work of the courtly bards. This poetry was at first expressed in rhythmical verses, each containing a fixed number of accented syllables and hemistichs separated by a pause :

*Crist lim,      Crist reum,      Crist in degaid*  
*Crist indium    Crist issum      Crist úasum*  
*Crist dessum    Crist úasum*

This versification, one of the elements of which was the repetition of words or sounds at regular intervals, was transformed about the eighth century into a 'more learned system. Thenceforward alliteration, assonance, rhyme, and a fixed number of syllables constituted the characteristics of Irish verse :

Méisse ocus Pángar BÁN  
cechtar náthar fria sáindAN  
bith a *ménma* sam fri SEILGG  
mu *ménma* cein im sáincheIRDD.

As we see, the consonants in the rhyme-words were merely related : *l, r, n, ng, m, dh, gh, hh, mh, ch, th, f* could rime together just as could *gg, dd, hh*. Soon the poets did not limit themselves to end-rhymes, which ran the risk of becoming monotonous, but introduced also internal rhyme, which set up what we may call a continuous chain of melody :

is aire caralm DOIRE  
ar a reidhe ar a ghLOINE  
's ar iomad a aingel fIND  
ó 'n CIND go soich aROILE.

This harmonious versification was replaced in the seventeenth century by a system in which account was no longer taken of consonantal rhyme or of the number of syllables.

The rules of Irish verse have nothing in common with classical Latin metres, which were based on the combination of short and long syllables. In Low-Latin, indeed, we find occasionally alliteration, rhyme, and a fixed number of syllables, but these novelties are obviously of foreign origin, and date from the time when the Romans borrowed them from the nations which they called barbarous. We cannot prove beyond yea or nay that they are of Celtic origin, but it is extremely probable that they are, for it is among the Celts both of Ireland and of Wales that the harmonizing of vowels and of consonants has been carried to the highest degree of perfection.

This learned art was not acquired without long study. The training of a poet (*filé*) lasted twelve years, or more. The poets had a regular hierarchy. The highest in rank, the *ollamh*,

knew 350 kinds of verse and could recite 250 principal and 100 secondary stories. The *ollamhs* lived at the court of the kings and the nobles, who granted them freehold lands ; their persons and their property were sacred ; and they had established in Ireland schools in which the people might learn history, poetry, and law. The bards formed a numerous class, of a rank inferior to the *filé* ; they did not enjoy the same honors and privileges ; some of them even were slaves ; according to their standing, different kinds of verse were assigned to them as a monopoly.

The Danish invasions in the ninth century set back for some time the development of Irish poetry, but, when the Irish had driven the fierce and aggressive sea-rovers from their country, there was a literary renaissance. This was in turn checked by the Anglo-Norman invasion in the twelfth century, and thereafter the art of versification was no longer so refined as it had formerly been. Nevertheless, the bardic schools still existed in the seventeenth century, more than four hundred years after the landing of Strongbow, and, in them, students followed the lectures of the *ollamhs* for six months each year, or until the coming of spring, exercising both their talents for composition and their memory.

A catalogue of Irish poets, which has recently been made out, shows that there were more than a thousand of them. We have lost many of the oldest poems, but the Irish scribes often modernized the texts which they were copying. Hence the language is not always a sufficient indication of date, and it is possible that, under a comparatively modern form, some very ancient pieces may have been preserved. Even if the poems attributed to Amergin do not go back to the tenth century B.C., as has been claimed for them, they are in any case old enough to be archaic, and certain poems of the mythological cycle are undoubtedly anterior to the Christian era.

We have reason to believe that there have been preserved some genuine poems of Finn macCumhaill (third century), a hymn by St. Patrick (d. 461), some greatly altered verses of St. Columcille (d. 597), and certain hymns written by saints who lived from the seventh to the ninth century. The main object of the most celebrated of the ancient poets up to the end of the twelfth century was to render history, genealogy, toponomy, and lives of saints readier of access and easier to retain by putting them into verse-form ; and it is the names of those scholars that have been rescued from oblivion, while lyric poetry, having as its basis nothing more than sentiment, has remained for the most part anonymous. After the Anglo-Norman invasion, the best poet seems to have been Donnchadh Mór O'Daly (d. 1244). Of later date were Teig Mac-Daire (1570-1652), Teig Dall O'Higinn (d. 1615), and Eochaidh O'Hussey, who belonged to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The new school, which abandoned the old rules and whose inspiration is now personal, now patriotic, is represented by *caoine* (keens or laments), *abran* (hymns), or *aislingi* (visions), composed, among others, by Geoffrey Keating (d. c. 1650), David O'Bruadair (c. 1625-1698), Egan O'Rahilly (c. 1670-c. 1734), John MacDonnell (1691-1754), William O'Heffernan (fl. 1750), John O'Tuomy (1706-1775), and Andrew MacGrath (d. c. 1790). The greatest of the eighteenth century Irish poets was Owen Roe O'Sullivan (c. 1748-1784), whose songs were sung everywhere, and who, in the opinion of his editor, Father Dinneen, is the literary glory of his country and deserves to be ranked among the few supreme lyric poets of all time.

If, in order to study the subjects treated by the poets, we lay aside didactic poetry and confine ourselves to the ancient poems from the seventh to the eleventh century, we shall find in the latter a singular variety. They were at first dialogues or monologues, now found incorporated with the sagas, of which they may have formed the original nucleus. Thus, in the *Voyage of Bran*, we have the account of the Isles of the Blessed and the discourse of the King of the Sea ; in the *Expedition of Loégaire MacCrimthainn*, the brilliant description of

the fairy hosts; in *The Death of the Sons of Usnech*, the touching farewell of Delrdre to the land of Scotland and her lamentation over the dead bodies of the three warriors ; and in the *Lay of Fothard Canann*, the strange and thrilling speech of the dead lover, returning after the battle to the tryst appointed by his sweetheart. Other poems seem never to have figured in a saga, like the Song of Crede, daughter of Guaire, in which she extols the memory of her friend Dinertach, and the affecting love-scenes between Liadin and Curithir ; or like the bardic songs designed to distribute praise or blame: the funeral panegyric on King Niall, in alternate verses, the song of the sword of Carroll, and the satire of MacConglinne against the monks of Cork.

Religious poetry comprised lyric fragments, which were introduced into the lives of the saints and there formed a kind of Christian saga, or else were based on Holy Writ, like the *Lamentation of Eve* ; hymns in honor of the saints, like *The Hymn to St. Michael*, by Mael Isu ; pieces such as the famous Hymn of St. Patrick; and philosophic poems like that keen analysis of the flight of thought which dates from the tenth century.

At a time when the poets of other lands seem wholly engrossed in the recital of the deeds of men, one of the great and constant distinguishing marks of poetry in Ireland, whether we have to do with a short note set down by a scribe on the margin of a manuscript or with a religious or profane poem, is a deep, personal, and intimate love of nature expressed not by detailed description, but more often by a single picturesque and telling epithet. Thus we have the hermit who prays God to give him a hut in a lonely place beside a clear spring in the wood, with a little lark to sing overhead ; or we have Marban, who, rich in nuts, crab-apples, sloes, water-cress, and honey, refuses to go back to the court to which the king, his brother, presses him to return. Now, we have the description of the summer scene, in which the black-bird sings and the sun smiles ; now, the song of the sea and of the wind, which blows tempestuously from the four quarters of the sky ; again, the winter song, when the snow covers the hills, when every furrow is a streamlet and the wolves range restlessly abroad, while the birds, numbed to the heart, are silent ; or yet again the recluse in his cell, humorously comparing his quest of ideas to the pursuit of the mice by his pet cat. This deep love of inanimate and animate things becomes individualized in those poems in which every tree, every spring, every bird is described with its own special features.

If we remember that these original poems, which, before the twelfth century, expressed thoughts that were scarcely known to the literature of Europe before the eighteenth, are, besides, clothed in the rich garb of a subtle harmony, what admiration, what respect, and what love ought we not to show to that ancient Ireland which, in the darkest ages of western civilization, not only became the depository of Latin knowledge and spread it over the continent, but also had been able to create for herself new artistic and poetic forms !

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## Irish Heroic Sagas

Eleanor Hull

IRELAND has the unique distinction of having presented for mankind a full and vivid literary record of a period otherwise, so far as native memorials are concerned, clouded in obscurity. A few fragmentary suggestions, derived from ancient stone monuments or from diggings in tumuli and graves, are all that Gaul or Britain have to contribute to a knowledge of that important period just before and just after the beginning of our era, when the armies of Rome were over-running western Europe and were brought, for the first time, into direct contact with the Celtic peoples of the West. Almost all that we know of the early inhabitants of these countries comes to us from the pens of Roman writers and soldiers—Poseidonius, Cæsar, Diodorus, Tacitus. We may give these observers credit for a desire to be fair to peoples they sometimes admired and often dreaded, but conquerors are not always the best judges of the races they are engaged in subduing, especially when they are ignorant of their language, unversed in their lore and customs, and unused to their ways. Valuable as are the reports of Roman authorities, we feel at every point the need of checking them by native records ; but the native records of Gaul, and in large part also those of Britain and Wales, have been swept away. Cæsar is probably right in saying that the Druids, who were the learned men of their race and day, committed nothing to writing ; if they did, whatever they wrote has been irrecoverably lost.

But Ireland was exempt from the sweeping changes brought about through long periods of Roman and Saxon occupation ; no great upheaval from without disturbed the native political and social conditions up to the coming of the Norse and Danes about the beginning of the ninth century. Agricola, standing on the western coast of Britain, looked across the dividing channel, and reflected upon “ the beneficial connection that the conquest of Ireland would have formed between the most powerful parts of the Roman Empire,” but, fortunately for the literature of Ireland, if not for her history, he never came. The early incursions of the Scotti or Irish were eastward into England, Wales, and Gaul, and there seem to have been few return movements towards the west. Ireland pursued her path of native development undisturbed. It is to this circumstance that she owes the preservation of so much of her native literature, a great body of material, historical, religious, poetic, romantic, showing marks of having originated at a very early time, and of great variety and interest.

At what period this literature first began to be written down we do not know. Orosius tells us that a traveler named Aethicus spent a considerable time in Ireland early in the fifth century “ examining their volumes”, which tends to prove that there was writing in Ireland before St. Patrick. But the native bard must have made writing superfluous. The man who could, at a moment’s notice, recite any one out of the 350 stories which might be called for, besides poetry, genealogies, and tribal records, was worth many books. Only a few were expert enough to read his writings, but all could enjoy his tales.

The earliest written records that we have now existing date from the seventh or eighth century ; but undoubtedly there is preserved for us, in these materials, a picture of social conditions going back to the very beginning of our era, and coeval with the stage of civilization known in archaeology as *La Tène* or “ Late Celtic”.

To help his memory the early “ shanachie” or story-teller grouped his romantic story-store under different heads, such as “ Táins” or Cattle-spoils, Feasts, Elopements, Sieges, Battles, Destructions, Tragical Deaths ; but it is easier for us now to group them in another way, and to class together the series of tales referring to the Tuatha De Danann or ancient deities, those belonging to the Red Branch cycle of King Conchobar and Cuchulainn, those relating to

Finn, and the Legends of the Kings. The hundred or more tales belonging to the second group are especially valuable for social history on account of the detailed descriptions they give of customs, dress, weapons, habits of life, and ethical ideas. To the historian, folklorist, and student of primitive civilizations they are documents of the highest importance,

It seems likely that the Red Branch cycle of tales, including the epic tale of the *Táin* or Cattle-spoil of Cualnge, which has gathered round itself a number of minor tales, had some basis of historical fact, and arose in the period of Ulster's pre-dominance to celebrate the deeds of a band of warlike champions who flourished in the north about the beginning of the Christian era. No one who has visited the raths of Emain Macha, near Armagh, where stood the traditional site of the ancient capital of Ulster, or has followed the well-defined and massive outworks of Rath Celtchair and the forts of the other heroes whose deeds the tales embody, could doubt that they had their origin in great events that once happened there. The topography of the tales is absolutely correct. Or again, when we cross over into Connacht, the remains at Rath Croghan, near the ancient palace of the Amazonian queen, Medb, testify to similar events. She it was who in her "Pillow Talk" with her husband Ailill declared that she had married him only because in him did she find the "strange bride-gift" which her imperious nature demanded, "a man without stinginess, without jealousy, without fear." It was in her desire to surpass her husband in wealth that she sent the combined armies of the south and west into Ulster to carry off a famous bull, the Brown Bull of Cooley, the only match in Ireland for one possessed by her spouse. This raid forms the central subject of the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*. The motif of the tale and the kind of life described in it alike show the primitive conditions out of which it had its rise. It belongs to a time when land was plenty for the scattered inhabitants to dwell upon, but stock to place upon it was scarce. The possession of herds was necessary, not only for food and the provisioning of troops, but as a standard of wealth, a proof of position, and a means of exchange. Everything was estimated, before the use of money, by its value in kine or herds. When Medb and Ailill compare their possessions, to find out which of them is better than the other, their herds of cattle, swine, and horses are driven in, their ornaments and jewels, their garments and vats and household appliances are displayed. The pursuit of the cattle of neighboring tribes was the prime cause of the innumerable raids which made every man's life one of perpetual warfare, much more so than the acquisition of land or the avenging of wrongs. Hence a motif that may seem to us insufficient and remote as the subject of a great epic arose out of the necessities of actual life. Cattle-driving is the oldest of all occupations in Ireland.

The conditions we find described in these tales show us an open country, generally unenclosed by hedges or walls. The chariots can drive straight across the province. There are no towns, and the stopping places are the large farmers' dwellings, open inns known as "houses of hospitality", fortified by surrounding raths or earthen walls, the only private property in land, in a time when the tribe-land was common, that we hear of at this period. Within these borders lay the pleasure grounds and gardens and the cattle-sheds for the herds, which the great landowner or chief loaned out to the smaller men in return for services rendered. Here were trained in arts of industry and fine needlework the daughters of the chief men of the tribe and their foster-sisters, drawn from the humbler families around them. The rivers as a rule formed the boundaries of the provinces, and the fords were constantly guarded by champions who challenged every wayfarer to single combat, if he could not show sufficient reason for crossing the borderland. These combats were fought actually in the ford itself, and all wars began in a long series of single hand-to-hand combats between equal champions before the armies as a whole engaged each other.

To fight was every man's prime duty, and the man who had slain the largest number of his fellows was acclaimed as the greatest hero. It was the proud boast of Conall Cernach, "the Victorious", that seldom had a day passed in which he had not challenged a Connachtman,

and few nights in which a Connachtman's head had not formed his pillow. It shows the primitive savagery of the period that skulls of enemies were worn dangling from the belt, and were stored up in one of the palaces of Emain Macha as trophies of valor. So warlike were the heroes that even during friendly feasts their weapons had to be hung up in a separate house, lest they should spring to arms in rivalry with their own fellows.

Yet in spite of this rude barbarism of outward life, the warriors had formed for themselves a high and exacting code of honor, which may be regarded as the first steps toward what in later times and other countries became known as "chivalry"; save that there is in the acts of the Irish heroes a simplicity and sincerity which puts them on a higher level than the obligatory courtesies of more artificial ages. Generosity between enemies was carried to an extraordinary pitch. Twice over in fights with different foes, Conall Cernach binds his right hand to his side in order that his enemy, who had lost one hand, may fight on equal terms with him. The two severest combats sustained by Cuchulainn, the youthful Ulster champion, in the long war of the Táin are those with Loch the Great and Ferdiad, both first-rate warriors, who had been forced by the wiles of Medb into unwilling conflict against their young antagonist. In their youth they had been fellow-pupils in the school of the Amazon Scathach, who had taught them both alike the arts of war. When Loch the Great, as a dying request, prays Cuchulainn to permit him to rise, "so that he may fall on his face and not backwards towards the men of Erin," lest hereafter it should be said that he fell in flight, Cuchulainn replies: "That will I surely, for it is a warrior's boon thou cravest," and he steps back to allow the wounded man to reverse his position in the ford. The tale of Cuchulainn's combat with Ferdiad has become classic; nothing more pathetic or more full of the true spirit of chivalry is to be found in any literature. Each warrior estimates nobly the prowess of the other, each sorrowfully recalls the memory of old friendships and expeditions made together. When Ferdiad falls, his ancient comrade pours out over him a passionate lament. Each night, when the day's combat is over, they throw their arms round each other's neck and embrace. Their horses are put up in the same paddock and their charioteers sleep beside the same fire; each night Cuchulainn sends to his wounded friend a share of the herbs that are applied to his own wounds, while to Cuchulainn Ferdiad sends a fair half of the pleasant delicate food supplied to him by the men of Erin. We may recall, too, Cuchulainn's act of compassion towards Queen Medb near the close of the Táin. Her army is flying in rout homeward across the Shannon, closely pursued by Cuchulainn. As he approaches the ford he finds Queen Medb lying prostrate on the bank, unable any longer to guard the retreat of her army. She appeals to her enemy to aid her; and Cuchulainn, with that lovable boyish delight in acts of supreme generosity which is always ascribed to him, undertakes to shield the retreat of the disordered host from his own troops and to see them safely across the river, while Medb reposes peacefully in a field hard by. The spirit which actuates the heroes is well expressed by Cuchulainn when his friends would restrain him from going forth to his last fight, knowing that in that battle he must fall: "I had rather than the whole world's gold and than the earth's riches that death had ere now befallen me, so would not this shame and testimony of reproach now stand recorded against me; for in every tongue this noble old saying is remembered, 'Fame out-lives life.'"

The Irish tales surpass those of the Arthurian cycle in simplicity, in humor, and in human interest; the characters are not mere types of fixed virtues and vices, they have each a strongly marked individuality, consistently adhered to through the multitude of different stories in which they play a part. This is especially the case with regard to the female characters. Emer, Deirdre, Etain, Grainne may be said to have introduced into European literature new types of womanhood, quite unlike, in their sprightliness and humor, their passionate affection and heroic qualities, to anything found elsewhere. Stories about women play a large part in ancient Irish literature; their elopements, their marriages, their griefs and tragedies, form the subject of a large number of tales. Among the list of tales that any bard might be

called upon to recite, the “ Courtships” or “ Wooings” probably formed a favorite group ; they are of great variety and beauty. The Irish, indeed, may be called the inventors of the love-tale for modern Europe.

The gravest defect of this literature (a defect which is common to all early literature before coming under the chastening hand of the master) is undoubtedly its tendency to extravagance ; though much depended upon the individual writer, some being stylists and some not, all were prone to frequent and grotesque exaggerations. The lack of restraint and self-criticism is everywhere apparent ; the old Irish writer seems incapable of judging how to shape his material with a view to presenting it in its best form. Thus, we have the feeling, even with regard to the *Táin Bó Cúalnge*, that what has come down to us is rather the rough-shaped material of an epic than a completed design. The single stories and the groups of stories have been handled and rehandled at different times, but only occasionally, as in the Story of Deirdre (the “ Sorrowful Tale of the Sons of Usnech”), or in the later versions of the “ Wooing of Emer”, or the Book of Leinster version of the “ Wooing of Ferb”, do we feel that a competent artist has so formed his story that the best possible value has been extracted from it. Yet, in spite of their defects, the old heroic sagas of Ireland have in them a stimulating force and energy, and an element of fine and healthy optimism, which is strangely at variance with the popular conception of the melancholy of Irish literature, and which, wherever they are known, make them the fountain-head of a fresh creative inspiration. This stimulating of the imagination is perhaps the best gift that a revived interest in the old native romance of Ireland has to bestow.

#### References :

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#### The Irish Literary Revival.

Horatio S. Krans, Ph. D.

In the closing decade of the nineteenth century and in the opening years of the twentieth, no literary movement has awakened a livelier interest than the Irish Literary Revival, a movement which, by its singleness and solidarity of purpose, stood alone in a time of confused literary aims and tendencies. Movements, like individuals, have their ancestry, and that of the Irish Literary Revival is easily traced. It descends from Callanan and Walsh, and from the writers of '48. It is to this descent that the lines in William Butler Yeats's “ To Ireland in Coming Times” allude :

Know that I would accounted be  
True brother of that company,  
Who sang to sweeten Ireland's wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song.

With the passing of the mid-nineteenth-century writers, the old movement waned, and in the field of Irish letters there was, in the phrase of a famous bull, nothing stirring but stagnation. A witty critic of the period, commenting upon this unhappy state of affairs, declared that, though the love of learning in Ireland might still be, as the saying went, indestructible, it was certainly imperceptible. But after the fall of Parnell a new spirit was stirring. Politics no longer absorbed the whole energy of the nation. Groups of men inspired with a love of the arts sprang up here and there. In 1890 Yeats proved himself a real prophet when he wrote : " A true literary consciousness—national to the centre—seems gradually to be forming out of all this disguising and prettifying, this penumbra of half-culture. We are preparing likely enough for a new Irish literary movement—like that of '48—that will show itself in the first lull in politics."

Responsive to the need of the young writers associated with Yeats, the National Literary Society was founded in Dublin in 1892, and a year later London Irishmen, among them men already distinguished in letters, founded in the English metropolis the Irish Literary Society. From the presses in Dublin, in London, and in New York as well, books began to appear in rapid succession—slender volumes of verse, novels, short stories, essays, plays, translations, and remakings of Irish myths and legends, all inspired by, and closely related to, the past or the present of Ireland, voicing an essentially national spirit and presenting the noblest traits of Irish life and character.

Not content with the organization of the two literary societies, Yeats, with courage and relentless tenacity, cast about to realize his long-cherished dream of a theatre that should embody the ideals of the Revival. In Lady Gregory, and in Edward Martyn, an Irishman of large means, who with both pen and purse lent a willing hand, he found two ardent laborers for his vineyard. George Moore, who in the event proved a fish out of water in Ireland, Yeats and Martyn contrived to lure from his London lodgings and his cosmopolitan ways, and to enlist in the theatrical enterprise. The practical knowledge of the stage which this gifted *enfant terrible* of literature contributed was doubtless of great value in the early days of the dramatic adventure, though Moore's free thoughts, frank speech, and mordant irony brought an element of discord into Dublin literary circles, which may well have left Yeats and his associates with a feeling that they had paid too dear for a piper to whose tunes they refused to dance. Be that as it may, in 1899 Yeats's dream was measurably realized, and the Irish Literary Theatre established, to be succeeded a little later by the Irish National Theatre Society. Enough, however, of the dramatic aspect of the Revival, which receives separate treatment elsewhere in these pages, as does also the dramatic work of certain of the authors considered here.

From what has already been said, it should be plain that in the last decade of the last century the ranks of the Irish Literary Revivalists filled rapidly, and that the movement was really under way. The renascent spirit took various forms. To one group of poets the humor, pathos, and tragedy of peasant life deeply appealed, and found expression in a poetry distinctively and unmistakably national, from which a kind of pleasure could be drawn unlike anything else in other literatures. In this group Alfred Perceval Graves and Moira O'Neill cannot pass unmentioned. Who would ask anything racier in its kind than the former's " Father O'Flynn" ?

Of priests we can offer a charmin' variety,

Far renowned for larin' and piety,  
Still I'd advance you without impropriety.  
Father O'Flynn as the flower of them all.  
Here's a health to you, Father O'Flynn,  
Slainte, [1] and slainte, and slainte agin.  
Powerfullest preacher.  
And tinderest teacher,  
And kindest creature in Old Donegal.

Or was the homing instinct, the homesick longing for the old sod, ever more truly rendered than in Moira O'Neill's song of the Irish laborer in England ?

Over here in England I'm helpin' wi' the hay.  
An' I wish I was in Ireland the livelong day ;  
Weary on the English, an' sorra take the wheat !  
Och ! Corrymeela an' the blue sky over it.

D'ye mind me now, the song at night is mortal hard to raise,  
The girls are heavy-goin' here, the boys are ill to plase ;  
When ones't I'm out this workin' hive, 'tis I'll be back again—  
Aye, Corrymeela in the same soft rain.

Here, too, should be named Jane Barlow, whose poems and stories are faithful imaginative transcripts of the face of nature and the hearts of men as she knew them in Connemara. Finally there is William Butler Yeats, who, on the whole, is the representative man of the Revival. Except in the translator's sphere, his writings have given him a place in almost all the activities of this movement. As a lyric poet, he has expressed the moods of peasant and patriot, of mystic, symbolist, and quietist, and it is safe to say that in lyric poetry no one of his generation writing in English is his superior. We cannot resist the pleasure of quoting here from his "Innisfree", which won the praise of Robert Louis Stevenson, and which, if not the high mark of Yeats's achievement, is still a flawless thing in its way :

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,  
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made ;  
Nine bean rows will I have there, a hive for the honey bee.  
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow.  
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings ;  
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,  
And evening full of the linnets' wings.

In this place, and for convenience sake, it may be permitted to speak of aspects of Yeats's work other than that by virtue of which he is to be classed with the group we have just considered. In his narrative poem, "The Wanderings of Usheen", as well as in his plays and lyrics, he is of the best of those—among them we may mention by the way Dr. John Todhunter, Nora Hopper (Mrs. W. H. Chesson), and William Larminie—who have revealed to our day the strange beauty of the ancient creations of the Gaelic imagination. In prose he has written short stories, a novelette, *John Sherman and Dhoya*, and essays that reveal a subtle critical insight, and a style of beautiful finish and grace, suggestive of the style of Shelley's *Defence of Poetry*. Yeats's plays constitute a considerable and an important part of his work, but these must be reserved for treatment elsewhere in this book. In prefaces to

anthologies of prose and verse of his editing, in the pages of reviews, and elsewhere, he appears as the chief apologist of the aims of the Literary Revival, and in particular of the methods of the dramatists of the Revival. Whatever he has touched he has lifted into the realm of poetry, and this is in large measure true of his prose, which proceeds from the poet's point of view and breathes the poetic spirit. A man of rare versatility, a finished artist with a scrupulous artistic conscience, he has done work of high and sustained quality, and is certain to exert a good and lasting influence upon the literature of his country.

In a literary movement in the "Isle of Saints", we look naturally for religious poetry, and we do not look in vain. This poetry, chiefly Catholic, has a quality of its own as distinctive as that of the writers of the group we have just left. Now it voices a naive, devoted simplicity of Christian faith; now it attains to a high and keen spirituality; now it is mystic and pagan. Among the religious poets, Lionel Johnson easily stands first—perhaps the Irish poet of firmest fibre and most resonant voice of his generation. A note of high courage and of spiritual triumph rings through his verse, even from the shadow of the wings of the dark angel that gives a title to one of the saddest of his poems. Often he strikes a note of genuine religious ecstasy and exaltation rarely heard in English, as in "Te Martyrum Candidatus":

Ah, see the fair chivalry come, the companions of Christ!  
White Horsemen, who ride on white horses, the Knights of God!  
They, for their Lord and their Lover who sacrificed  
All, save the pleasure of treading where He first trod.

These through the darkness of death, the dominion of night,  
Swept, and they woke in white places at morning tide:  
They saw with their eyes, and sang for joy of the sight.  
They saw with their eyes the Eyes of the Crucified.

Among the men of the Revival, no personality is stronger or more attractive than that of G. W. Russel—"Æ" as he is always called—who may be regarded as the hero of George Moore's *Hail and Farewell*, and who alone in that gallery of wonderful pen-portraits looks forth with complete amiability. He is a pantheist, a mystic, and a visionary, with what would seem a literal and living faith in many gods, though strongly prepossessed in favor of the ancient divinities of the Gael, now long since in exile. Impressive and striking by a certain spiritual integrity, so to say, "Æ" unites gifts and faculties seldom combined. He is a poet of rare subtlety, a painter in whose genius so good a judge as George Moore believed, and a most practical man of affairs, who, as assistant to Sir Horace Plunkett, held up the latter's hands in his labors on behalf of co-operative dairies and the like. His poems have their roots in a pantheism which half reveals the secrets of an indwelling spirit, speaking alike "from the dumb brown lips of earth" and from the passions of the heart of man.

Of novelists, both men and women, the Irish Revival can, in the words of "Father O'Flynn", offer a charming variety, and among their novels and short stories are some books of high quality and not a few in a high degree interesting and entertaining. To Standish O'Grady we turn for tales, with a kind of bardic afflatus about them, of the hero age of legendary Ireland—tales which drew attention to the romantic Celtic past of myth and saga, and must have been an inspiration to more than one writer of the younger generation. In contrast to the broad epic sweep and remote romantic backgrounds of O'Grady, are the stories of Jane Barlow, whose genre pictures of peasant life in the west of Ireland, like her poems mentioned above, show how sympathetically she understands the ways of thinking, feeling, and acting of her humble compatriots. A like minute and faithful knowledge is evident in the work of two story-tellers of the north, Seumas MacManus and Shan Bullock. The former's outlook is humorous and pathetic. He tells fairy and folk tales well, and is a past master of the

dialect and idiom that combine to give his old-wives' yarns an honest smack of the soil. Let him who doubts it read *Through the Turf Smoke* or *Donegal Fairy Stories*. If Shan Bullock walks the same fields as Seumas MacManus, he does so with a different air and with a more definite purpose. Sometimes he turns to the squireens, small farmers, or small country gentry, and lays bare the hardness and narrowness that are a part of their life. Or, again, in pictures whose sadness and gloom are lightened, to be sure, with humor or warmed with love, he studies the necessitous life of the poor. *The Squireen*, *The Barrys*, and *Irish Pastorals* are some of his representative books.

In the novel as in poetry the ladies have worked side by side with their literary brethren. Miss Hermione Templeton, in her *Darby O'Gill*, and elsewhere, has written pleasantly and gracefully of the fairies. In a very different vein are the novels of the collaborators, Miss Somerville and "Martin Ross" (Miss Violet Martin), over which English and American readers have laughed as heartily as their own fellow countrymen. *The Experiences of an Irish R. M.* remains, perhaps, their best book. The work of these ladies, be it said by the way, is in the line of descent from that group of older Irish novelists who wrote in the spirit of the devil-may-care gentry, the novelists from Maxwell to Lover and Lever, who were ever questing "divilment and divarshion," and who in their moods of boisterous fun forgot the real Irishman, and presented in his place a caricature—him of the Celtic screech and the exhilarating whack of the shillelagh, the famous stage Irishman who has made occasional appearances in English literature from the time of Shakespeare's *Henry V.*, on through the works of Fielding and the plays of Sheridan, to the present moment of writing.

Of a very different stripe from the work of the collaborating ladies just mentioned are the novels of the recently deceased Canon Sheehan—notable among them *Luke Delmege* and *My New Curate*—rambling, diffuse, and a trifle provincial from the artistic standpoint, but interesting as studies of manners, and for the pictures they afford of the priesthood of modern Ireland in the pleasantest light. If the stories of Miss Somerville and "Martin Ross" are related to the comic stories of the old novelists of the gentry, those of Canon Sheehan must be associated with the work of the older novelists who wrote more or less in the spirit of the peasantry, that is, with Gerald Griffin, the Banim brothers, and William Carleton, less famous than he deserves to be by his *Traits and Stories* and a long line of novels and tales.

No survey of Irish novelists, however brief, can afford to forget the Rev. James Owen Hannay ("George A. Birmingham"), canon of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, whose work is as distinctively Protestant in its point of view as Father Sheehan's is Catholic. His more substantial novels are a careful transcript of the actualities of Irish life today, and in them one meets, incognito but easily recognizable, many Irishmen now prominent in literature or politics in Ireland. Of his numerous books may be mentioned *The Seething Pot*, *Hyacinth*, and *Northern Iron*.

Finally there is George Moore, whose enlistment in the Revival was responsible for the novel *The Lake* and the short stories of *The Untilled Field*, and for a largely autobiographic and entirely indiscreet trilogy entitled *Hail and Farewell*, the separate volumes appearing as *Ave*, *Salve*, *Vale*, and the last of them as late as 1914. George Moore's anti-Catholic bias is strong, but his is the pen of an accomplished artist. He has the story-teller's beguiling gift, and he bristles with ideas which his books cleverly embody and to which the dramatic moments of his novels give point and relief.

Not the least important work of the Irish Literary Revival has been done by translators, who have put into English the old Gaelic romances and the folklore still current among the little remnant of Irish-speaking country folk. Dr. Douglas Hyde is in the forefront of this

group. He it was who organized the Gaelic League, a band of enthusiasts zealous for the revival of the Irish language both as a spoken tongue and as the medium for a national literature, and eager, also, to breed up a race of Celtic scholars. The lyrics in his *Love Songs of Connacht* are full of grace, tenderness, and fire, and indicate the kind of gems which he and his fellow laborers have added to the treasury of poetry in English. But it is Lady Gregory, especially in her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and *Gods and Fighting Men*, who more than any other has found a way to stir the blood of readers of to-day by the romantic hero tales of Ireland. From the racy idiom of the dwellers on or about her own estate in Galway, she happily framed a style that gave her narratives freshness, novelty, and a flavor of the soil. Upon the work of scholars she drew heavily in making her own renderings, but she has justified all borrowings by breathing into her books the breath and the warmth of life, and her adaptation to epic purposes of the dialect of those who still retain the expiring habit of thinking in Gaelic was a real literary achievement. She has, indeed, in sins of commission and of omission, taken liberties with the old legends, but this may render them not less, and perhaps more, delightful to the general reader, however just complaints may be from the standpoint of the scholar.

Even so brief a sketch as this may suffice to bring home to those not already aware of it a realization of the delights to be drawn from the creations of a living literary movement, which is perhaps the most notable of its generation, and which has gathered together a remarkable group of poets, novelists, and dramatists, who, as men and women, are a most interesting company—a fact to which even George Moore's *Hail and Farewell*, with its quick eye for defects and foibles and its ironic wit, bears abundant testimony.

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[1] “Your health.”

The glories of Ireland (1914)

Author : Dunn, Joseph, 1872- ; Lennox, Patrick Joseph, 1862-1943

Subject : Irish; Ireland

Publisher : Washington, D.C. : Phoenix

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : MSN

Book contributor : Kelly — University of Toronto

Collection : kellylibrary ; toronto

Source : Internet Archive

<http://www.archive.org/details/gloriesofireland00dunnuoft>

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

January 16 2012