

The Otherworld Legend in Ireland

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It is certain that the earlier Middle Ages, as well as the later, possessed many stories dealing with the Otherworld, alike in form of the folk-tale and of the religious apologue. Probably, too, an examination of the ecclesiastical writers of the period would disclose examples of the treatment of the legend as a distinct class of literary composition. Nevertheless, no important contribution to the subject appears to have been made, nor any new departure taken, until the legend entered upon a fresh course on Irish soil.

While the Christian Church of Teutonic England owed its existence, in the main, to the missionary enterprise of Rome, the much older Celtic Churches, and notably the Church of Ireland, were more closely connected with Gaul and the East. It was to Gaul that Ireland was mainly indebted for its original conversion, and the intercourse between the two countries remained close and unbroken. But the Church in the south of Gaul—and it was the south alone that preserved any considerable culture, or displayed missionary activity, in the earlier Middle Ages—had from the very first been closely in touch with the Churches in the East. The great monastery of Lerins, in which St. Patrick is said to have studied, was founded from Egypt, and for many centuries the Egyptian Church continued to manifest a lively interest in Gallic matters. Indeed, not only Lerins, but Marseilles, Lyons, and other parts of Southern Gaul maintained a constant intercourse with both Egypt and Syria, with the natural result that many institutions of the Gallic Church, despite its increasing subjection to Rome, dating from the year 344, bore the impress of Oriental influences. [1] Hence the close relations with Gaul maintained by the Irish churchmen and scholars necessarily brought them into contact with their Egyptian and Syrian brethren, and with the ideas and practices which prevailed in their respective Churches.

Nor was Ireland's connection with the East confined to the intermediary of Gaul. Irish pilgrimages to Egypt continued until the end of the eighth century, and Dicuil records a topographical exploration of that country made by two Irishmen, Fidelis and his companion. [2] Documentary evidence is yet extant, proving that even homekeeping Irishmen were not debarred from all acquaintance with the East. The *Saltair na Rann* [3] contains an Irish version of the *Book of Adam and Eve*, a work written in Egypt in the fifth or sixth century, of which no mention outside of Ireland is known. Adamnán's work, *De Locis Sanctis* contains an account of the monastery on Mount Thabor, which might stand for the description of an Irish monastic community of his day. Indeed, the whole system both of the anchoritic and the cœnobitic life in Ireland corresponds closely to that which prevailed in Egypt and Syria; the monastic communities, consisting of groups of detached huts or bee-hive cells, enclosed within a general wall, the structure of the cells, and of the other earliest examples of Irish ecclesiastical architecture, all suggest a Syrian origin; and Dr. G. T. Stokes holds that 'the Irish schools were most probably modelled after the forms and rules of the Egyptian Lauras.' [4]

But it was not only Egyptian and Syrian influences to which Ireland was subjected by its intercourse with Southern Gaul. The civilisation of that country was essentially Greek, and so remained for many centuries after the Christian era; and this circumstance no doubt contributed to the well-known survival of Greek learning in the Irish schools, long after it had almost perished in the rest of Western Europe. It is not to be supposed that this learning was

characterised by accuracy of scholarship, or by a wide acquaintance with classical literature ; but neither was it always restricted to a mere smattering of the language, or to passages and quotations picked up at second-hand. Johannes Scotus Erigena translated the works of the pseudo-Areopagite ; Dicuil and Firghil (Virgilius, Bishop of Salzburg), studied the Greek books of science ; Homer, Aristotle, and other classical authors were known to some of the Irish writers ; several of the Irish divines were acquainted with the Greek fathers and other theological works. Nor were the Greeks in person unknown to Ireland. Many Greek clerics had taken refuge there during the Iconoclast persecution, and left traces which were recognisable in Ussher's day ; and the old poem on the Fair of Carman makes mention of the Greek merchants who resorted thither.

It is thus apparent that the Irish writers possessed ample means of becoming acquainted with the traditions, both oral and written, of the Greek and Eastern Churches. The knowledge thus acquired extended to the Apocalyptic Visions as is proved by internal evidence furnished by the Irish Visions, both by way of direct reference, and by the nature of their contents. It remains to see how far the predilection which the Irish writers manifested for this class of literature, and the special characteristics which it assumed in their hands, may have been determined by their familiarity with analogous ideas already existing in their national literature.

At the period in question, the traditional literature of Ireland would appear to have entered into the national life to no less a degree than in Greece itself. Indeed, in certain respects, it was still more closely interwoven with the habits of the people and the framework of society than in Greece, for the literary profession was provided for by a public endowment, something like that of an established National Church, and its professors constituted a body organised by law, and occupying a recognised position in the State. One of the most marked characteristics of early Irish civilisation, in its every branch, was an exaggerated tendency towards symmetrical classification and multiplicity of detail. This tendency extended to the social system, and the earliest records of ancient Ireland that have come down to us show that society was arranged according to a very elaborate scheme of ranks and classes, [5] among which the literary profession was remarkable alike for the number of its members, and for the consideration in which they were held. It was divided into several distinct orders, each of which was specially addicted to its own department of study, and of these the place of greatest honour and dignity belonged to the Filid, who combined with other functions the special duty of preserving and transmitting the national traditions. [6] The order of the Filid was further subdivided into seven ranks or degrees, graduated according to the attainments which their respective members were required to possess. For all, however, a knowledge of the romantic literature of their country was an indispensable qualification—the *Árd-Ollamh*, the chief of the order, being required to know two hundred and fifty *prím-scéla*, or principal stories, and one hundred of secondary importance ; and so on in a descending scale through the inferior degrees of the literary hierarchy. These tales, in turn, were likewise grouped, with all the precision of a scientific classification, according to their subject-matter. [7] Two lists are extant giving the titles of the several kinds ; the elder, preserved in the Book of Leinster, is ascribed by M. d'Arbois de Jubainville to the seventh century, or, at latest, the beginning of the eighth century. They are classed under the headings of *Catha*, battles ; *Longasa*, travels (in exile) ; *Imrama*, voyages (voluntary) ; *Tógbála*, conquests ; *Tóglasi*, destructions ; *Airgne*, slaughters ; *Forbasa*, sieges ; *Otti*, tragic fates ; *Tána*, forays ; *Tochmarca*, wooings ; *Uatha*, [adventures in] caves ; *Eachtra*, deeds, adventures ; *Sluaigheadha*, hostings or expeditions ; to which are to be added *Fessa*, banquets ; *Aithidi*, elopements ; *Serca*, love-stories ; *Tomadma*, irruptions or invasions (of recent date) ; *Tocomlada*, colonies ; *Físi*, visions. The subjects of these tales were taken from the national history or mythology, or, oftener still may be, from that traditionary lore which forms a debatable ground between the two. Many of them were more esteemed as authorities for tribal history or genealogy than

upon their purely literary merit, though in others the imaginative element is as frankly recognised as in a historical novel by Scott or Dumas.

The romantic literature of Ireland reached its height about the time of the greatest activity of the Irish Church, and the sacred and secular schools did not fail to exercise a mutual influence, for the Irish clergy by no means despised these relics of Paganism : they possessed a large share of that wise tolerance which we find in many of the great clerics of the Middle Ages, who did not desire the destruction of all the associations that had twined themselves about the lives of the people, but rather to enlist them into the service of the new faith. [8] Two classes of the Irish tales were specially adapted for ecclesiastical treatment, and being thus brought into contact with the general literature of mediæval Europe, have left upon it a deep and traceable impression. These were the *Imram*, or Voyage, and the *Fís*, or Vision, species distinct in kind, but containing in practice much that was common to both ; for the course of the *Imram* lay, for the most part, among the enchanted lands of Celtic mythology, thinly disguised, in later times, by a coating of Christian eschatology; and the *Fís*, though more commonly of Christian origin, and often indited expressly for edification, was indebted to the same source for most of its *mise-en-scène*. Both types of narrative are represented among the legends which recount the adventures met with by Cuchulainn, Cormac Mac Áirt, and other ancient heroes in a purely pagan Otherworld. Starting thence and proceeding through the travel tales, similar in many respects to the foregoing, but more or less imbued with a Christian tinge, which relate the Voyages of Maelduin, of Tadhg Mac Céin, of the Sons of Ua Corra, and the like, we reach, on the one hand, the Voyage of St. Brendan, one of the most picturesque and popular legends of the Middle Ages, and, on the other hand, the visions of the Irish Saints, the stories of St. Patrick's Purgatory, and similar legends which pervaded Western Europe, and passing into Italy would appear to have led up to the story of the wicked Marquis of Brandenburg, and the opening of the *Tesoretto* of Brunetto Latini, which last, again, suggested to Dante the opening passages of the *Commedia*.

A visit to the Otherworld was one of the most frequent subjects of Irish legend. Not that the region visited is always so described ; sometimes it is termed the realm of the Dagda, one of the most primitive culture-deities in the Irish mythology, and, at the same time, the counterpart of Yama and Yima ; [9] sometimes, the island paradise of Manannan Mac Lir, the Sea-God ; at others, the palace of Mider or of Oengus, both of whom shared with Lug many of the attributes of the Greek Apollo. Very often it is merely the rath, or island, or subaqueous abode, of some enchantress or fairy lady, but even then some detail of the story will almost always make it clear that the spot is to be identified with the land of departed spirits, although, in some instances, the authors may have been no more aware than Ariosto in describing the garden of Alcina, or, indeed, than Homer in his islands of the Phæacians, of Circe and of Calypso, that all their imaginary scenes alike had one common origin, the region where the κλυτά εθνεα νεκρῶν have their dwelling. [10]

The conception which the Irish formed of their Happy Otherworld resembled in substance the ideas which most other nations held upon the subject ; but their descriptions of it are frequently remarkable for a poetry, a vivid sense of beauty—in short, for a *gusto*, which are far less common. For all that, however, they do not always reject the grosser—it would, perhaps, be more just to call them the simpler—pleasures which would naturally appeal to the healthy imaginations of a people addicted to a vigorous and somewhat rude way of life. Thus in the subterranean palace of the Dagda (afterwards usurped by his son, Oengus Óg), which was situate within the Brug na Boinne, and is described as a place of unceasing delight, whither death or sickness never came, the god sat beneath three fragrant apple-trees, always laden with ripe fruit, beside an inexhaustible vat of beer ; two pigs were there, one alive and the other ready roasted, turn and turn about, and a caldron brought by the Dé Danann from

Murias ('Sealand'), which was never empty of food, and from which none ever rose unsatisfied, for it gave to each one a portion corresponding to his rightful claims. These gross enjoyments recur even in the truly poetic lines which Mider sings to Béfind (or Etain), wife of King Eochaid Airera, in the story of the Brudin Da Derga, [11] tempting her to follow him to his realm of Magh Mór. This he describes as a wondrous land, traversed by warm sweet streams ; the people thereof are handsome, without a blemish, conceived without sin or lust; their bodies are like the snow, while of skin and black of brow, their hair like tufts of primrose, their cheeks like the foxglove, and their eyes like the blackbird's eggs. But by way of additional attraction Mider promises the lady a cap of gold for her head, fresh pork, soft new milk, wine and mead of the choicest, and ale 'headier than the ale of Ireland.' We learn elsewhere that Mider also possessed a magic caldron [12] like that of the Dagda, and three cows which never ran dry, So, too, Manannán Mac Lir possessed among other highly desirable chattels seven pigs that would suffice to feed all the world, and seven cows whose milk would fill seven tubs, whence all the people of the world might drink their fill. It is interesting to observe how this side of the Irish Paradise received a twofold development ; on the one hand, being subjected to a refining process, as we shall see when considering the *Fis Adamnáin* ; on the other, developing into a veritable Cockayne, in such humorous writings as the Vision of Mac Conglinne. [13]

Perhaps the fullest and most poetic account of the Tir Tairngire is that contained in two poems of great beauty, which occur in the *Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal*, before cited. [14] It must suffice, in this place, to translate such portions as bear more immediately upon our subject.

A lovely maiden appears to Bran, bearing in her hand an apple branch with twigs of silver and golden fruit upon it ; this she places in his hand, and sings : —

' An isle there is afar ; round it sea-horses are flashing ; a free stretch, against which white-sided surges swell ; four pedestals sustain it. A delight of the eye, a glorious array, are the hosts that disport them in the heroes' chariot strife, in the Southern plain of Findarggat (silver-white). Of white bronze are the pedestals beneath it ; throughout the glorious ages, throughout the ages of the world, shines the lovely land, over-snowed with many blossoms. There is a stately tree in bloom ; the birds chant responsive to the [canonical] hours ; at every hour they sing in harmony. Jewels of every hue are gleaming throughout the soft-voiced plain ; perpetuity of joy, with linked melody, is in the Southern plain of Silvercloud. No wailing is known, nor guile, in the land of perpetual tilth ; nothing rough nor harsh, but only sweet music, strikes the ear. No sorrow, no gloom, no death, no sickness at all, nor feebleness,—that is the token of Emain, no rival to it exists, The beauty of the wondrous land, lovely of aspect, a land fair to look upon—never its like was found. Shouldst thou next look on Airctec, bestrewn with dragon-stones and crystals ; Ocean strews upon the land crystal tresses from his mane. Moorlands, thickets of every hue, in [the land of] Calm ; the beauty of freshness, the hearing of music in its sweetness, the drinking of wine the brightest. In Magh Réin [Plain of the Sea] the golden chariots come at flood-tide to meet the sun ; in Magb Mon [Plain of Games] are chariots of silver and of bronze, without a blemish. A herd of horses like yellow gold is there on the strand ; another herd, of purple hue ; after them, yet another herd, of the hue of a pure grey pearl. At the sun's uprising a fair man will come, who illumines the level lands ; he rides over the fair plain whereon the sea beats, he tempers the ocean till it is [as] blood. The host will come across the pure sea ; they show themselves, rowing towards the land ; then they row to a flat rock, well in view, whence a hundred songs arise. It chants melody to the hosts, so that sorrow is not therein ; the music swells from the choirs of hundreds, who look not for return or death. Emain of many forms by the sea, it may be near, it may be far ; therein are women, many thousands, in chequered array, and the

pure sea round about it. When he has heard the music's sound, the note of the birds in Imchiúin, a little band of ladies will come down from the height to the field of games, whereon he stands. Freedom with health shall come to the land on which laughter is poured forth ; 'tis on Imchiúin, at every season, that length of life with joy shall come. A day of serenity unending scatters silver on the land ; a pure white cliff is on the seaboard range, drawing the sun's heat from him. The multitude race their horses along Magh Mon, a glorious sport, not languid ; in the chequered lea-land, all beauty excelling (?), they look not for return nor death.'

We may see at a glance how thoroughly pagan is the conception of the happy region here depicted, though assuredly lacking neither in beauty nor refinement, in which respects the Tir Tairngire need fear no comparison with the Elysium of the Greek poets, which it so strongly resembles. It is equally evident that the lord of this Island Paradise, Manannán Mac Lir, is the Tuatha Dé Danann counterpart of the Fomorian Tethra, king of the dead, who sends his messengers in the guise of beautiful women—*ἀγγελοι* in all literalness—to call his subjects unto him in his realm beyond the ocean. Indeed, Tethra himself appears in a legend, exactly parallel to the foregoing in design, though of more primitive structure, which relates the passing of Connla, son of the famous Árd-Rí, Conn of the Hundred Battles. Connla, like Bran, was visited by a beautiful damsel, who promised to confer upon him a continuance of youth and beauty which should never fail or fade until the Judgment. She then gave him an apple and left him. The virtue of this apple was such that it afforded Connla nutriment enough for a month, at the end of which time the damsel returned, and told him that the ever-living ones had sent for him, having chosen him to become one of the folk of Tethra, there to dwell for ever, in the companies of his forefathers, in the midst of his acquaintance and friends. [15] And Connla followed her to the sea-shore, where a ship of glass awaited them, in which they embarked, while Conn followed them to the shore, weeping, and watched them until they were out of sight.

By far the greater number of the visits which the heroes and heroines of Irish tradition pay to the Otherworld are variations upon the same theme : a supernatural visitant, smitten with love for chief or maiden, induces him or her, by persuasion, guile, or force, to follow to fairy rath or oversea Elysium ; a theme which has survived to our own day in the common legend of the *Leanamhán Sidhe*, or Fairy Lover. The story of Mider and Etain, or Eithne, above referred to, is an instance of this kind, Mider having won Etain of her husband. King Eochaid Airem, at a game of chess. In many cases where a hero's wife is thus abducted the loss is but temporary, the husband, a more martial and more successful Orpheus, winning back his Eurydice by force or stratagem. To this also the modern Irish fairy tales contain many parallels. So numerous are the examples of this type, that it is both impossible and unnecessary to discuss them *seriatim* ; it is enough to select from each of the great tale cycles such instances as may best show the persistence of the theme, and of the original Irish notions concerning the Otherworld, some of which coloured the versions in which the legend appeared in Christian times. The Elysian abodes of the Dagda, of Oengus Óg, of Mider, and of Manannán Mac Lir, which have been described already, pertain to the mythological cycle of Irish legend ; similar visits to the abodes of the Tuatha Dé Danann are recorded in many stories belonging to the greatest of the heroic cycles, namely, the Ultonian cycle.

One of the best and longest of these stories is the *Serglige Conchulaind*, [16] or Sick-bed of Cuchulainn, the principal hero of the cycle in question. We have room only for a brief abstract of this story, giving the details which relate more particularly to our subject.

Once, in dream, Cuchulainn was visited by two ladies of great beauty, who, without vouchsafing any explanation of their conduct, kept smiting him with whips as he lay until

they left him speechless, in which state he remained for nearly a year. At the end of that time Emer, Cuchulainn's wife, and those with her, saw one day a young man sitting by his bedside, singing how he was Oengus, and the dream-ladies were Fand and Liban, his sisters, of whom Fand, wife of Manannán Mac Lir, having been deserted by her husband, had conceived a great love for Cuchulainn, and promised that if he would visit her in the Tír Sorcha (Land of Light), she would make him whole, and give him gold and silver and wine *go leór*. Before complying with this message, Cuchulainn sent Loeg, his charioteer, to inspect and report. Loeg returned with a glowing account of the Tír Sorcha. He had been conducted to the house of Labraid Luathlam-ar-Claideb—Quick Hand on Sword—husband of Liban, where Fand was then residing. The rath was situate in the midst of ‘ a pure lake, whither companies of women resort’; before the door stood three stately trees, pure purple, and the bird-flock singing upon the branches of them without ceasing, ‘ and in the eastern doorway of the *lios* a tree—not paltry the music thereon—of silver, on which the sun shines with exceeding radiance, like gold.’ Within was the usual good cheer, including an inexhaustible vat of mead. Tempted by this account Cuchulainn repaired thither himself, and found that all Loeg had said was true, and more. The beautiful Fand consented to be his, on condition that he would aid her people in war against a rival god-clan ; this done, he brought her back to Ireland. The upshot of it all was that Emer, whom Cuchulainn had always loved most fondly until Fand's spell was on him, became jealous of her rival, and sought to kill her. Cuchulainn objected to this, but Emer's devotion revived the unquenched embers of his flame for her. At the same time, Manannan had found that ‘ what our contempts do often hurl from us we wish it ours again,’ and the piece concludes with the return of all to their *premiers amours*.

The Otherworld of the ancient Irish possessed no Tartarus. Malignant powers, indeed, there were in plenty ; not to speak of a multitude of hags and witches, giants and ogres, goblins and spectres, the divine personages themselves often display a very sinister side of their character, while not uncommonly a brilliant chief or radiant lady of the Tuaiha Dé Danann would be brother or sister to a hideous and savage hag or giant. [17] In like manner, the Irish Wonderland (Tír na n-Longnadh) could show, alongside of its enchanted raths and Elysian pleasantries, scenes of a widely different kind ; seas and lakes haunted by terrible monsters, weird forests, and gloomy, perilous glens, although, it is true, this side of the picture is treated much less fully than the other. Nevertheless, there is no strict line of demarcation between the two, which exist side by side, as might the desert and fertile regions of the same country.

One of the nearest approximations to the gloomy Hades of the early Greeks is found in the realm of Scathach (The Shadowy) whither Cuchulainn was sent by the wizard Forgall Monach, his prospective father-in-law, in the hope of getting rid of him, but on pretext of completing his military education—an instance of the universal article of primitive belief that the ultimate arcana of knowledge are only to be won from the powers of death and darkness. [18] The approach to Scathach's country lay across a plain, to the one half of which the feet of whoso attempted to cross it would adhere, while in the other half the ground would rise and impale the passenger on the grass blades, like spear points, which grew thereon. Cuchulainn was guided across the plain by the familiar agency of a wheel and an apple, given him by a young man whom he found dwelling in a fairy rath, at the outset of his journey, and who thus discharged the office of *psychopompos*, which in one form or other—Sibyl, Michael, Virgil, hag or damsel—almost always appears to be indispensable. The way then led through a narrow glen, peopled by monsters, and over high and perilous mountain passes. Finally, to reach his goal, he had to cross the ‘ Bridge of the Cliff,’ an enchanted bridge, low at the two ends and high at the middle, of such kind that, so soon as one stepped upon either end, the other would rise and throw him back. This, Miss Hull says (*op. cit.*, p. 291), is the earliest occurrence in Irish legend of the bridge episode, which, as we have seen, had previously been a

prominent feature in pictures of the Otherworld, and afterwards appears with almost equal frequency in the chivalrous literature of the Middle Ages. Miss Hull suggests that the idea, in the present case, is borrowed from the Norse ; this, of course, is quite possible, having regard to the prominence in Northern myth of the Bridge of Giöll, crossed by Hermödr on his journey to the Shades in quest of the dead Balder ; while the Wonderland depicted in the Erik Saga and in the Story of Gorm is likewise approached by a bridge. [19] However, without entering into the difficult question of the epoch at which the Balder myth assumed its present shape, or of the respective dates of the Norse and Irish legends in their original forms, the hypothesis hardly seems necessary to account for the introduction of so obvious and so widespread an incident into the Cuchulainn legend, where, moreover, the Bridge of the Cliff differs widely from the Rainbow bridge of Giöll and from the more commonplace bridges of the Norse Sagas. As Miss Hull herself observes, the idea recurs in another branch of Celtic story, the Arthurian legend, [20] and 'belongs to the Hell doctrine of nearly all Oriental religions' (*loc. cit.*). Several of these we have already examined, and have seen how the same idea passed into the eschatology of the Western Church. Neither is it confined to the cultured races, from Vedic India to Iceland ; it occurs also among such primitive nations as the Inuits of Aleutia and the Bagadas of the Nilghiris. From them to Addison's *Vision of Mirza* is a long step in every sense. [21]

Another story connected with the same cycle, the *Echtra Nerai*, Adventures of Nera, otherwise called the *Táin Bo Aingen*, Cattle raid of Aingen, [22] may receive mention here as presenting a feature which frequently recurs in the ecclesiastical visions, while the main outlines of the story are preserved in modern folk-tales. As Ailill, king of Connacht, was keeping the Samhain festival in his rath of Cruachan, he offered to give his gold-hilted sword to any one who should dare to put a withe on the foot of a newly hanged man, who was swinging outside. Nera accepted the challenge, and after several vain attempts (the withe springing off of its own accord) succeeded. The corpse then spoke, and asked Nera for a drink, and Nera obligingly took the corpse on his shoulders, and offered to take him to a house which appeared hard by, standing amid a lake of fire. The corpse declined this offer, which is hardly to be wondered at, and the rest of the story follows the conventional lines of the ordinary folk-tale, but we have here the moat of fire as in the *Fis Adamnáin* and elsewhere.

Visits to the enchanted abodes of the Tuatha Dé Danann—to the Otherworld, that is—are comntoti in the tales belonging to the third great group of heroic tales, second in importance to the Cuchulainn cycle above, namely, the Finn cycle, in which occurs the most celebrated of them all—the visit of Oisín to Niamh Cinn Óir, which so late as the eighteenth century inspired Michael Comyn with his fine poem, the *Laoi Oistin ar d'tír na n-og*. Still, the tales of this cycle, however ancient their materials, would appear to have undergone a somewhat modernising influence, comparatively speaking, in receiving artistic shape, in which last respect they betray more signs of a deliberately literary treatment than their predecessors, while in their treatment of the Otherworld they do not appear to have contributed materially to the evolution of the legend.

Distinct from the Finn cycle, though dealing in part with the persons and events of the period to which Finn has been assigned by tradition, is a group of highly picturesque tales relating to the dynasty of Conn Cedcathach (of the Hundred Battles) Árd Rí of Ireland, according to tradition, in the second century A.D. In the Conn cycle the Otherworld legend figures prominently, the monarch himself, his sons Art and Connla, and his grandson Cormac, all having journeyed thither. These tales, moreover, furnish certain links which connect the *Echtra* with the *Imram* and *Fis*.

It is said to have been Conn's daily wont to make the circuit of Temair (Tara), in company of his Druids and poets, to see that none of the Tuatha Dé Danann, or Daoine Sidhe, alighted thereon. One day, while so engaged, he trod upon a flagstone, which shrieked so loud as to be heard all over Temair and Magh Breg. Conn asked his chief Druid for an explanation of this wonder, but the Druid required a respite of fifty days before he could give it. At the end of that time the king and his suite again repaired to the spot, and the Druid declared that the name of the flag was Fál, and that it had been brought from Inis Fáil by the Tuatha Dé Danann to remain at Temair for ever, and any year the Árd Rí of Éire failed to look upon it, dearth would be on the land. [23] And suddenly a mist fell upon them, and from out of the mist was heard the sound of a horseman, who cast three darts at them. 'Whosoever aims at Conn in Temair will be violating the king's majesty,' exclaimed the Druid; whereupon the horseman came forward and, greeting Conn, invited him to his home. Conn followed, and soon reached a fair plain in which stood a royal rath, and a great tree, as it were of gold, in the doorway. [24] On entering, he saw a lovely damsel, a golden diadem on her head, standing by a silver vat hooped with gold, full of red ale, and a golden can and cup upon it. Beside it was a royal throne, whereon sat a Scál (champion) of majestic stature, and of a beauty never seen at Temair. Conn asked him who he was; he replied, 'No living champion am I, but one of Adam's sons returned from death; I am Lugh Mac Ceithlenn, [25] and I am come to reveal to thee the life of thine own sovereignty, and the sovereignty of every king who shall be after thee in Éire.'—'And the maiden who was present to them in the house was the sovereignty of Éire for ever.' Then were revealed to Conn the names of all the kings of his race who should succeed to him in Éire, a cup of ale being borne to the name of each. The scene, which suggests the similar revelation made to Macbeth in the witches' cavern, closes with a prophecy of St. Patrick—whom God should honour, and who should kindle a torch that would illumine Éire from sea to sea—and of the later races of kings that should rule over Ireland.

Here we have another instance of Christian embroidery upon a thoroughly Pagan stuff; however, the identification of the De Danann Lugh as a son of Adam returned from the dead was true in a fuller sense than the author, probably, was aware.

Another visit of Conn to the Tír na n-Óg is related in a tale known as the *Echtra Áirt*, or Adventures of Árt. [26] The Leanamhán Sidhe, who figures in this story, bears a more sinister aspect than do most of her order in Irish legend, and possesses affinities to the witch-lady or Lamia. She was Bécuma Cneisgel (B. White-skin), wife of the Dé Danann chief Labrad Luathlam-ar-Claideb (Swift Hand on Sword), and having been found guilty of infidelity, had been banished from the Tír Tairngire. Finding a curach on the shore, she stepped in; this 'trim skiff' of the Wonderland 'asked no aid of sail or oar,' and Bécuma, 'leaving it to the heaving of wind over sea,' reached Benn Edair, the Hill of Howth. Here she found Conn, who had retired thither to mourn the recent death of his wife, and introduced herself to him as Delbchaem (Fair-form), daughter of Morgan (Sea-born), come to Ireland from the Tír Tairngire for love of Conn's son Árt. However, it was ultimately settled that she should marry Conn himself, and she returned with him to Temair, having first obtained a pledge from the king, according to the rules of Irish chivalry, that he would grant her the boon she might ask of him, which proved to be the banishment of Árt for a year. Henceforth, all went wrong with the country; the land yielded neither corn nor milk, and the Druids, on being consulted, affirmed that by reason of Bécuma's wickedness the land was under a curse, which could only be removed by sacrificing the son of a sinless couple, and mingling his blood with the soil of Temair. Conn set forth in quest of such a youth; at Benn Edair he found a curach which bore him across the sea, through herds of strange sea-monsters of fearsome aspect, while the waves rose and the firmament trembled, until he came to a strange isle, 'having fair fragrant apple-trees, and many wells of wine, most beautiful, and a fair bright wood, adorned with clustering hazel-nuts, surrounding those welts, with lovely golden yellow nuts, and little

bees, ever beautiful, hovering over the fruits, which were dropping their blossoms and their leaves into the wells' (tr. Best, *loc. cit.*). Hard by was a goodly house, the dwelling of Daire Degamra ; the thatch was of birds' wings, white, and yellow, and blue ; the doors were of crystal, and the posts of bronze. Inside was a crystal throne, whereon sat Segda Saerlabrad, son of Daire. Conn was made welcome ; his feet were washed by an invisible hand, which likewise guided him to the hearth, wherefrom a flame started up of its own accord. Tables laden with various kinds of meat were set before him by invisible attendants, and a drinking horn was set thereon. There was a vat, finely wrought, of blue crystal, and three golden hoops about it, wherein Daire bade him bathe. Then he was bidden fall to ; but it was *geis* to him to eat alone, whereas the inmates told him that it was equally *geis* to them to eat save alone ; however, Segda, to oblige the guest, consented to eat with him. Next morning Conn asked permission to take Segda back with him, having heard that he was that son of a sinless couple of whom he was in quest. His parents admitted that this was so, for they had never come together save at his conception, and so it had been with their own parents. Conn did not divulge why he needed the youth ; nevertheless, his parents refused to let him go, but Segda proving resolute not to deny the king, they consented, putting him under the protection of Conn, and Árt and Finn, and the ' men of art,' for his safe return. The *dénouement*, showing how Segda was preserved from sacrifice, is too long to relate here, having nothing to do with our subject.

The story then goes on to Árt, whose adventures are the ostensible subject of it. Bécuma behaved like the typical stepmother of the folk-tale. In order to procure his absence from Ireland, she challenged him to chess, and on winning—by foul play, being aided by spiritual agencies at her command—put a *geis* on him not to return to Ireland without the before-mentioned Delbchaem, daughter of Morgan, who dwelt in an isle in the sea. Árt, like his father, set out in a curach, and reached an island wherein was a dún similar to that of Daire. In it was a company of fair women, and among them Crede Firalaind (Truly-beautiful). Árt was welcomed and feasted ; he told his tale, and Crede told him that his coming had long been decreed ; she gave him a ' variegated mantle, with adornments of gold from Arabia,' and three kisses, and showed him a crystal bower, wherein was an inexhaustible vat, which straightway became full again, however often emptied. Here Árt stayed a fortnight, and upon his leaving, Crede instructed him as to the way he had to follow. This way was wild and difficult, full of the dangers and obstacles which commonly waylay the hero of romance, though they only call for mention here as constituting, with the realm of Scathach before described, as near an approach to a Tartarus myth as Irish legend contains. The terrors which Árt had to traverse included stretches of ocean filled with sea-monsters that had to be fought and overcome ; a wood, where it was as though spear-points of battle were under the feet, like leaves of the forest ; a venomous icy mountain, with a glen full of toads which lay in wait for passers-by ; an icy river, with a narrow bridge over, defended by a giant whom no weapons would harm, fire burn, nor water drown. Of course, all ended as it should, but the remainder of the story casts no light upon the Other world.

One of the best-known stories belonging to this cycle is that which relates the adventures of Cormac, son of Árt, in the Tír Tairngire. [27] At the dawn of a May morning Cormac was walking on the ramparts of Temair, when he espied a dignified, grey-haired warrior approaching him, bearing on his shoulder a branch of silver and three golden apples on it ; and the music which those apples made when shaken would lull to rest sick folk, and wounded men, and women in the pains of childbirth. After the two had exchanged greetings, Cormac asked the stranger whence he had come. ' From a land,' he replied, ' where there is nought save truth, and there is neither envy, nor jealousy, nor hate, nor haughtiness' (tr. W. S.). They plighted their friendship, and Cormac begged for the musical branch, which the other gave him, exacting in return the promise of three boons which he should crave. A year later the

warrior returned, and claimed his first boon, which was none other than Cormac's own daughter Ailbe. Though loath, Cormac submitted, bound by his promise, [28] and stilled the lamentations of his household by shaking the branch, and casting them into a profound sleep. After a month the warrior returned, and demanded Conn's son, and, finally, his wife. Cormac still felt himself bound to comply, but he started off in pursuit, followed by all his people. Upon their passing beyond the walls a dense mist fell upon them, and Cormac found himself in the plain alone. Before him stood a great dún, with a stockade of bronze about it, and within it a house of silver. The thatch of this house was the wings of white birds. It was half thatched only, and troops of fairy horsemen kept bringing other wings to complete it, but the wind was always carrying them away. After this, he saw a man feeding a fire with a great oak-tree, entire, and as soon as one was consumed he would replace it with another. Then he came to an enclosure also ramparted with bronze, and four houses therein ; one of these was a great palace, ' with its beams of bronze, its wattling of silver, and its thatch the wings of white birds. Then he sees in the garth a shining fountain, with five streams flowing out of it, and the hosts in turn a-drinking its waters. Nine hazels of Buan grow over the well, the purple hazels drop their nuts into the fountain, and the five salmon which are in the fountain sever them and send their husks floating down the stream. Now the sound of the falling of those streams is more melodious than any music that men sing' (W. S. *loc. cit.*). In the house Cormac found a warrior of exceeding beauty, both in face and figure, and a maiden, ' the loveliest of the world's women,' with a helmet of gold on her yellow hair. Her feet, Cormac noticed, were washed by invisible hands, and within a partition was a bath, heated without visible agency, and Cormac bathed there. In the afternoon a man came in, bearing in one hand an axe and in the other a log of wood, and followed by a pig. At the warrior's bidding, the man kindled a fire with the log, killed the pig, and put him in a caldron on the fire to boil. After a while the damsel bade him turn the pig, but he replied that it was useless, for that pig would never be done until a truth had been told for every quarter. Thereupon each one told some truth ; the man how he had obtained the log and the pig, the properties of which were such that after the log had been burnt out at night, and the pig eaten, the pig would be found alive in the morning, and the log whole ; and one quarter of the pig was cooked. The warrior told how there was a field outside the lios, which was found, at ploughing time, to be ready ploughed, harrowed, and sown with wheat ; at harvest time, ready stacked, and so on, and they had been eating of that wheat ever since, and it none the less ; and another quarter was done. The girl said that she had a herd of seven cows, whose milk sufficed for all the people of the Tír Tairngire, and seven sheep whose wool furnished the garments of them ; and the third quarter was cooked. Then Cormac related the reason of his coming, and the pig was cooked entirely. When Cormac's portion was set before him, he said that he never ate unless there were fifty men in his company. Then the warrior sang a strain which sent him to sleep, and on waking he beheld fifty men, and with them his wife, son, and daughter. So they set to upon the food and ale in all mirth and gladness. And a silver cup was placed in the warrior's hand, who, as Cormac admired the workmanship of it, told him that there was something yet more wonderful about it, for when three lies were told under it it would break into three pieces, while the utterance of three truths would make it whole again. He then told three lies, and the cup broke, even as he had said ; then, to restore it, he declared that neither had Cormac's wife nor daughter seen a man, nor his son a woman, since they had left him, and in proof that his words were true, the cup came together, perfect as before. So Cormac received again his wife and son and daughter ; and with them the cup, that he might discern between truth and falsehood in his judgments, and the bell-branch for music and delight. And the warrior declared that he was Manannán Mac Lir, who had allured Conn to the Tír Tairngire that he might behold the wonder of it. And the men who had brought the wings to complete the thatch of the house were ' the men of art in Ireland, collecting cattle and wealth which passed away into nothing' ; the man burning oak-trees was a young lord, paying out of his own husbandry for all that he consumed ; the fountain was the Fountain of Knowledge, and

the five streams issuing thereout the five senses, ‘ And no man will have knowledge who drinketh not a draught out of the fountain itself, and out of the streams. The folk of many arts are those who drink of them both’ (W. S. *loc. cit.*).

The foregoing group of stories from the Conn cycle probably represent a very ancient legend, several of them being manifest variants of a single original, which at some period became connected in turn with the successive members of the dynasty. This is apparent even in several minute points of detail : *e.g.* Conn’s first wife, for whom he mourned, and Cormac’s wife, taken from him by Manannán, were both named Ethne Taebfada (Long-side). The group represents a stage in the theory of the Otherworld in advance of previous conceptions ; [29] and although the ideas which it contains fall far short of an eschatology, properly so called, they yet contain materials which later writers were able to employ in that sense. We can discern here the rudiments of an ethical theory of the Otherworld. In the story of Connla, the land of Tethra appears as a happy place whither the souls of famous chieftains and warriors are borne across the sea, as Achilles was rapt away to the isle of Leuke ; and even this aristocratic Elysium—parallels to which abound from Polynesia to Greece, and from Greece to America—contains in germ a certain ethical idea. The favour of the immortals is reserved for chieftains famous for their birth and qualities, and thus the process is begun which first designates as a ‘ gentleman’ the scion of a noble *gens*, and then goes on to require in such an one qualities worthy of his origin, and to

‘ Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
Privè and apert, and most entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he can.
And take him for the gretest gentelman.’

Thus, in the Adventures of Cormac, Manannán describes the Tír Taimgíre as ‘ a land where there is naught save truth, and there is neither envy nor jealousy, hate nor haughtiness’; a description which is applied in a greatly amplified form to Heaven, at the dose of the *Fis Adamnáin*, and in Other Christian writings. It reminds us of a passage already cited from the Avesta, descriptive of the Var of Yima. Indeed, in Ireland as in Irân, ‘ everything that maketh a lie’ is excluded from the ideal country, even as we have seen a want of fidelity to plighted faith to be the vice most inconsistent with the character of a king.

In the episode of Segda Saerlabrad, and again in the Adventures of Cormac, occurs that idea of chastity in connection with the Tír Taimgíre to which, in its more developed form in the *Voyage of Bran*, we shall have to refer. This group, moreover, is marked by a tendency to conscious allegory which is foreign to the previous cycles. The maiden whom Conn finds in the dún is a personification of the sovereignty of Éire ; and the dún visited by Cormac is a veritable ‘ House of the Interpreter.’ The ethical significance of the wonders seen by Cormac on the way thither, and there expounded to him, is entirely symbolical of the life of this world, wherein the story resembles not merely the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Pilgrim’s Progress*, but the *Tablet of Cedes* and the *Choice of Herakles* among the Greeks, and countless moral apologies, Oriental and mediæval.

[1] See *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, by Dr. G. T. Stokes ; ed. 5 1900, pp. 169-174.

[2] *Op. cit.*, p. 239, and *cp.* pp 215-216.

[3] Edited by Mr. Whitley Stokes in *Anecdota Oxoniensia, Mediæval and Modern Series*, vol. i., part 3.

[4] G. T. Stokes, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-9. For other points of resemblance communication between the Irish and the Eastern Churches, cited by the learned author, see pp. 105 *n.*, 173.4, rSfi.?, 229, and Lecture X., *passim*.

- [5] This classification, in theory at least, regulated the structure of society from top to bottom. There were four ranks of kings, from the *Árd Rí*. High King, or Emperor, of all Ireland, to the *Rí Tuatha*, King of a Tribal Territory. The territories themselves were divided according to a descending scale, analogous to the English division into county, hundred, tithing, etc. There were six grades of princes under the king, classified according to the extent of their lands. Society was divided into nobles, freemen, and serfs, and each of these classes was subdivided into a great number of minor grades. The family was traced to the seventeenth degree, and was grouped into six classes, whose rights and liabilities in matters of inheritance, in the receipt or payment of fines and damages, etc., are defined with the utmost minuteness. The land tenure, and the dues to be paid in respect of each kind ; the circumstances of crimes and civil injuries, and the lines or damages to be paid for each ; in short, all the details of public and private life, were elaborated with similar minuteness. For particulars, the reader may be referred to the ancient legal and customary treatises, and the respective commentaries thereon, printed in the Rolls Series, the *Lebor na g-Cert*, ed. O'Donovan, 1847, and O'Curry's *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish*, ed. W. K. Sullivan, 3 vols., 1873.
- [6] The *Filid* must be distinguished from the *Bárd*, a name often applied to the poetic and literary class promiscuously, but really the title pertaining to a rank far below the *Filid* in dignity. See Dr. Douglas Hyde, *The Literary History of Ireland*, pp. 486, etc.
- [7] It is not to be supposed that so elaborate a system ever existed, or could exist, in its entirety, or that the population of Ireland was ever sorted out into sets of social pigeon-holes with anything like the completeness represented by the chroniclers. The old Irish writers combined two characteristics, which may appear, at first glance, contradictory, though reflection may enable us to see how compatible they are on psychologic grounds, viz. a tendency to run riot in the exuberance of fancy, and an equally excessive love of system and detail. Nevertheless, writing as they did of the state of society in which they lived, and for readers who were acquainted with the facts which they described, they cannot be supposed to have invented their systems and classifications, but rather to have idealised and elaborated their picture of an existing state of things so as to make it accord with their conception of the true significance of the social scheme. Modern writers have often done much the same thing in a different way, in their treatment of the Feudal System, the Imperial Theory, the Renaissance, Reformation, and similar movements etc.
- [8] The Irish writers are further remarkable for not confining their tolerance to traditional practices and the like, but extending it even to the spiritual beings of the national faith. This point has been well put by Mr. Nutt, *Voyage of Bran*, ii. 205 : ' And whereas in every Other European land the ministers of the new faith were as bitterly opposed to the fanciful as to the business aspect of the older creed, in Ireland it is the saint who protects the bard, the monk who transcribes the myth, whilst the bird-flock of Faery, alike with the children of Adam, yearn for and acclaim the advent of the Apostle.' And even when it has seemed necessary to regard these beings as demons, several tales show priest or saint feeling for them the like regretful kindness as Origen, Burns, and Uncle Toby expressed for the chief of the demons. A very striking instance of the eagerness shown by the Christian writers to put the best possible construction upon their pagan predecessors, occurs at the close of ' The Irish Ordeals,' etc., trans. by Mr. Whitley Stokes, *Irish Texts*, III. i. 221 : ' The wise declare that when any strange apparition was revealed of old to the royal lords ... it was a divine ministration that used to come in that wise, and not a demoniacal ministration. Angels, moreover, would come and help them, for they followed Natural Truth, and they served the commandment of the Law.'
- [9] Most of the principal Irish deities include among their functions that of ruler of the dead. One of the most pronounced examples of the Yama. type is Tethra, who is described in the legends as Chief of the Fomorians, whereby his distinctly Chthonian character is asserted ; and, after the defeat of his people at the battle of Mag Tured, as ruler of a land beyond the

ocean, like Varuna, when overcome by Indra (and cp. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 168-9, and Pindar, *Olymp.* ii.), Tbenca, from time to time, he would send beautiful maidens to summon to him the chiefs and heroes of Eire.

- [10] The subject of the Otherworld in Irish literature has been treated very fully by Mr. Nutt in his Essay on the *Irish Vision of the Happy Otherworld, and the Celtic Doctrine of Re-birth*, appended to Professor Kuno Meyer's *Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal*, 2 vols., 1895-7.
- [11] Extracted from the *Lebor na h-Udri*, by O'Curry, *Manners and Customs*, etc., vol. iii.
- [12] A similar caldron was a favourite property of supernatural beings in the heroic tales of Ireland as of Wales; indeed, so desirable a possession enters into the folklore of most nations.
- [13] *Aislinge Meic Conglinne*, 'The Vision of Mac Conelinne,' edited, with translation, notes, and glossary, by Prof. Kuno Meyer, 1892.
- [14] *Ante*, note 3, p. 44. The work is edited, with translation, notes, and glossary, by Prof. Kuno Meyer, who dates the composition of the tale in its present form in the seventh century; Mr. Nutt suggests the eighth century (*op. cit.*, i. 141). Fragments of the tale exist in the L.U. Prof. Rhys identifies Bran with Cernunnos, the divine ancestor of the ancient Celts (Hibbert Lectures, pp. 85-95). Mr. Nutt further suggests an identity with Brons, the Fisher King, and keeper of the Graal (*Studies on the Legend of the Holy Graal*, 1888, p. 208).
- [15] In the disputation between Neid and Fercertue which was to decide which of them should be Ard Ollamh (Chief Doctor) of Ulster, Fercertue put the riddling question, 'What is it that thou traversest in haste?' Neid replied, 'The plain of age, the mountain of youth, the course of the ages, in pursuit of the King in the house of earth and stones, between the candle and its ending, between the combat and the hatred of combat, amid the brave warriors of Tethra.'
- [16] Transcribed into the L.U. before 1103 A.D. from the earlier Book of Slane, now lost: edited without a translation by Professor Windischin *Irische Texte*, vol. i. pp. 197 seq. Professor Windisch, who states that the tale is composed of materials from several distinct sources (*op. cit.*, 102-3), calls attention to the thoroughly pagan character of it, despite the interduction of a passing allusion to Adam on page 219. Portions of the descriptions of the Tir Tairngire contained in this tale and in the story of Mider have been rendered in metre by Dr. Douglas Hyde 'Literary history of Ireland', pp. 202-3.
- [17] As Zeus was brother to Plato, and as the strife between the Olympian and Chthonian powers—the powers of light and darkness—are typified, in most mythologies, by discord between a pair of divine brothers; a conception surviving in such creations of the popular or the lettered imagination as Valentine and Orson, Alcina and Logistilla, etc.
- [18] The episode is contained in the *Tochmarc Emere*, The Wooing of Emer, dated eighth century, by Professor K. Meyer. Miss Eleanor Hull translates the L.U. version in her *Cuchulainn Saga*, pp. 56 sgg. professor Meyer publishes a shorter version, with translation, in the *Revue Celtique*. xi. 441 sq.
- [19] Mr. Nutt gives abstracts of these stories in the *Voyage of Bran*, i. 297 sqq.
- [20] In the Perceval legend, a bridge of glass occurs in Gautier's continuation of the *Conte du Graal* (Nutt, *Studies*, etc., p. 17).
- [21] A similar 'obstacle bridge' occurs in other Irish Sagas. In the Voyage of Meallduin's Curach is a bridge of glass, on which the passenger kept falling backwards. Of this kind must have been the bridge which the celebrated Irish M.P.—real or mythical—described as 'separating' two shores.
- [22] Edited and translated by Professor K. Meyer in *Revue Celtique*, x. 212 sqq., from the MSS. in T. C. D.—H. 2, 16 and Eg. 1782.
- [23] This flagstone, the Lia Fáil, was endowed with the property of shrieking whenever pressed by the foot of a lawful king. Popular tradition identifies the Lia Fáil with the

stone now inside the Coronation Chair at Westminster, stolen by Edward I. from Scone, where the kings of Albion used to be crowned upon it, and whither it was said to have been brought from Tara by the Dalriad Scots. I believe, however, that the identity of the stone so taken to Scotland by the Dalriada with that of Tara has been impugned. The practice of inaugurating a king or chief upon a certain stone survived into late historical times.

- [24] The habitual presence of the great tree outside the raths of the Tuatha Dé Danann is doubtless to be ascribed to the custom which prevailed in Ireland of having in a similar position a public tree of the tribe, round or beside which assemblies were held and games celebrated. The Irish chronicles frequently report the cutting down of such a tree by raiders as an insult to the invaded tribe. This practice was exactly paralleled in the medieval republics of Italy, where an invading array would often put scorn and offence upon a city by cutting down the public tree which stood outside the gates, and was the central point in games and festivals.
- [25] Cethlenn was the wife of Balor of the Mighty Blows, a Formorian chief, and therefore of the Chthonian race of Tethra. She has left her name to Enniskillen, Inis Cethlenn, Cethlenn's Island.
- [26] *The Adventures of Art, son of Conn, and the Courtship of Delbchaem*, *Ériu*, iii. 149 sqq. Edited and translated by Mr. R. I. Best, from the *Echtra Áirt*, one of the *Prím-scéla* of Ireland, preserved in Early Modern Irish in the Book of Fermoy, R.I. A., a MS. of the fifteenth century.
- [27] Edited, with translation and notes, by Mr. Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*, III. i, 183 sqq., from the Book of Ballymote, R.I. A., and the Yellow Book of Lecan, T.C.D., both MSS. of the fourteenth century.
- [28] Another instance of the sacred character with which the Irish code of honour invested a pledge, and which is apparent in the stories, before quoted, of Mider, Conn, Árt, etc. So in the *Baile Mangáin*, a story printed by Prof. K. Meyer as an appendix to his *Voyage of Bran*, Mangáin is obliged to surrender his wife Dubhlaca to the King of Leinster (apparently an euhemerisation of Manannán, who figures in an earlier version, also given by Prof. Meyer (*op. cit.*)) in fulfilment of a like promise.
- [29] At the same time, it is perceptible that incidents of the *märchen* type are more numerous in this group than in the great heroic cycles.

An Irish precursor of Dante ; a study on the Vision of heaven and hell, ascribed to the eighth-century Irish saint, Adamnán (1908)

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