

The Pre-Historic Inhabitants Of Ireland.

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IN the second lecture, I remarked how the name Iberians has been adopted to fill a vacuum as regards the naming of the population which occupied Great Britain and Ireland before the Celtic immigration. This kind of naming is unscientific and misleading. It implies that the ancient population thus artificially named can be identified as a branch of the population which actually bore that name in Greek and Latin literature. From this implied identification other equally unwarranted assumptions are likely to follow. Rhys expended a vast amount of study, ingenuity, and argument in the effort to show that very definite traces of a language akin to modern Basque survived in ancient Ireland and Scotland. On this point it may be remarked that we do not even know that the Basque population was originally Iberian. Ethnologists are agreed that, apart altogether from the Celtic migrations, there must have been a mixture of very distinct races in south-western Europe in pre-historic times. If there was a mixture of races, there was also no doubt more than one language, and if the Basque language has been able to survive the conquests of Celt and Roman and Goth, and last until our own time it may also well have survived the extinction of other languages in south western Europe.

So far as the Iberian theory is not mere vacuum-filling, it appears to rest on a single passage of Tacitus. He is describing the Silures, a British people whose territory was in the south of Wales, and who offered a very fierce resistance to the Romans. "The swarthy complexion of the Silures," he says, "the prevalence of curly hair among them, and their position over against Spain, argue that the ancient Iberians must have crossed over [from Spain] and occupied their territory." We have often heard the occurrence of similar physical traits in the west of Ireland ascribed to a more recent Spanish mixture. It all amounts to this, which Irish tradition bears out, and which nobody questions, that these western isles contain descendants of an ancient dark-complexioned population, probably already of mixed race, which existed in western Europe before the arrival of the fair-complexioned people, whose distinctive features appear by all indications to have originated in the lands forming the basin of the Baltic Sea.

If I am right in suggesting that the Greeks adopted from the Gauls the name Pretanic Islands, as a joint name for Britain and Ireland, it follows that the Gauls themselves supposed the chief population of both islands, before the Celtic occupation, to have been the Pretani, *i.e.*, the Picts. During the early historical period, the Picts are chiefly known as the people of the northern mainland of Scotland, north of the Grampian mountains. The Venerable Bede speaks of their language as still existing in his time, the early part of the eighth century, and as being distinct from the Irish and British languages.

We have abundant and clear evidence that the Picts were at one time widely spread throughout Ireland. Early Irish writings recognise the existence, in their own time, of sections of the population known to be Pictish. The Picts were especially numerous in Ulster. They are described as a subject population, spread over the whole of ancient Oriel, which at that time comprised the counties of Armagh, Monaghan, Tyrone and the greater part of Derry and Fermanagh. There was also a large Pictish element in Connacht, and there were smaller groups, traditionally known to be Pictish, in Munster, Meath, and various parts of Leinster. In Ulster, the ruling or dominant population of a large belt of territory, extending from Carlingford Loch to the mouth of the Bann, is named in the Annals both by the Latin name Picti, and

its Irish equivalent Cruithni or Cruithin, which is the Irish form corresponding to Pretani. They continue to be so named until the eighth century, when apparently their Pictish identity ceased to find favour among themselves. It may be observed, however, that, while some proper names which contain non-Gaelic elements survived in ancient Ireland, no trace has been discovered of any language other than Gaelic continuing to be spoken in any part of Ireland within the traditional memory of the people. From this it will appear that the Gaelic language had become universal throughout Ireland some centuries before Irish history and traditions began to be written. The earliest writing of Irish history still extant belongs to the closing years of the sixth century.

In the case of the Picts, we find an interesting example of the method that recommended itself to the learned folk of ancient Ireland when they desired to fill the vacuum. In the Irish “Nennius,” the Picts are said to have come of the stock of the Geloni, a people of Scythia mentioned by Herodotus. The explanation of this curious piece of history is found in a passage of Virgil, in which he speaks of the *picti Geloni*, i.e., the painted Geloni. They were supposed to dye their skin with some colouring stuff. In one of the versions of the wanderings of the Gaels before they reached Ireland, instead of sailing the Mediterranean they marched from Scythia across Europe. On their way they fraternised with a people called the Agathyrsi, who dwelt in Thrace. They made a compact with these people, with the result that later on a body of the Agathyrsi, having taken the name of Picts, followed in the track of the Gaels and came to Ireland. On their way they passed through a part of Gaul, where some of them remained, and were afterwards known as Pictavi. From these is named Poitou in France. Virgil is at the back of this story also. In a verse of the *Æneid*, he speaks of the *picti Agathyrsi*, “the painted Agathyrsi.”

From these instances, we can see how closely Virgil was read in the ancient Irish schools. We can also see from what materials our ancient scholars could weave their legends of antiquity. And later on we shall see how similar materials and a similar process enabled the Latin scholars of ancient Ireland to construct their accounts — for they have more than one account — of the origin and early wanderings of the Gaelic people.

Another considerable element of the ancient population was the Iverni, as they were called by Ptolemy in the second century. Ptolemy locates them in the middle of southern Ireland. The Irish form of their name in the time of our most ancient writings was 'Erainn, more familiar in later usage in the accusative form 'Erna. They have been sometimes called Erneans in English. In the older heroic literature, the Iverni or 'Erainn are the chief people of Munster. In an important early tract, which gives the names and distribution of the principal subject communities throughout Ireland, the Sen-Erainn are placed in the district of Luachair, i.e., in the north of Kerry and the adjoining parts of the counties of Limerick and Cork. The peoples enumerated in this tract are regarded as being not of Gaelic origin. Sen-Erainn means the old or original Iverni, and the term is used to distinguish them from others also called Erainn, who were of free status and are attached by the genealogists to the Gaelic stock. My opinion is that the dominant element in every part of Ireland during the historical period, including the dynastic families and higher nobility, was Celtic. Otherwise, if we suppose that large communities of pre-Celtic inhabitants continued to exist under rulers and nobles of their own stock down to medieval times, the universality of the Gaelic language as far back as tradition reaches would be hard to account for. I suppose that, when a Celtic dynasty and nobility became established over a non-Celtic commonalty, the old name of the community became attached to them all. So we find that Giraldus calls the nobles who invaded Ireland in his time Angli, giving them the name of the subject people over whom they had ruled in England, though they had been barely a century in England and some of them not nearly so long. I think the same is probably true of the free and dominant Picts in the north-east, i.e.,

that they consisted of a common population of Pictish stock ruled by kings and nobles of Celtic origin.

Not only in Munster but also in Connacht, Meath and Ulster, our ancient genealogists recognise the existence of Ivernian communities. Rhys put forward the view that the Iverni were only a southern division of the Picts, but this view cannot well be reconciled with Irish tradition, which seems always to distinguish between Picts and Iverni, and recognises Picts in southern Ireland and Iverni in northern Ireland. For example, in county Antrim, Dal Riada, the north-eastern portion, was Ivernian, and the rest of the county for the most part was Pictish. We are on safer ground in regarding the Picts and the Iverni as two fairly distinct peoples.

From the Iverni the whole island took the names by which it was known to the ancient Irish, the Britons, the Greeks, the Romans, and therefore no doubt to the Celts in the neighbouring parts of the Continent. But we have seen that the original Iverni, in Irish tradition, were a remnant of the pre-Celtic population. Ireland therefore was named by the Celts, as Britain and Ireland were jointly named, from an older population which the invading Celts found in possession. The Romans changed Iverni into Hiberni, through a process known as popular etymology. Hiberni suggested to them the Latin word meaning "wintry." Though Ireland was known to some Latin writers to be by no means a wintry country, but quite the contrary, this verbal resemblance naturally caught the imagination, and one Latin poet actually speaks of "glacialis Ierne," ice-cold Ireland.

The Irish and Welsh names of Ireland are not directly taken from the name of the Iverni, but evidently from an older form which must have been Iveri. Both the Irish name *'Eire* (formerly *'Eriu*) and the Welsh *Iwerddon* go back to an older name Iverio, and this older name is actually found in the writings of Saint Patrick in the slightly disguised Latin form *Hiberio*. The Irish genealogies corroborate this view that the name *Iverni* is itself a derivative from an older name *Iveri*. A common feature in genealogical lore is the tracing of a people's descent from an ancestor of the same name. It is found in the Bible, in the genealogies of the Arabs, in the legends of the Greeks, and in our own legends, for example, when the Gaels are said to have taken their name from an ancestor named Gaedheal Glas. In like manner all the pedigrees of the Erainn or Iverni in the Irish genealogies are traced to an ancestor named *Iar*. *Iar* is a word of two syllables, and represents an older form *Iveros*. From this and from the Irish and Welsh names of Ireland, I infer that the people called Iverni were at a still earlier period called *Iveri*. The change in the name of a people from a simple to a derivative form is of very common occurrence. Thus, instead of Angles, people now say the English, instead of Scots, the Scotch; in Irish, the names for the English and the Welsh have undergone a similar change; and so with numerous other names in many countries and languages.

Rhys derives the old Celtic name of Ireland, Iverio, from a word cognate with the Greek *piaira*, meaning "fat," and understands Iverio to mean the fat, i.e., the fertile country. This explanation, however, will not hold good if, as I think, the name Iverio means the country of the Iveri, unless we suppose the name Iveri to be Celtic and to mean "the fat people!" But we have seen that, in Irish tradition, the original Iverni were a pre-Celtic people, and we are under no necessity to discover a Celtic origin for their name.

For my part, granted that this people bore the name Iveri, changed afterwards into the adjectival form Iverni, I see no serious difficulty in supposing that this name was a local variant of Iberi, the name by which the people of Spain were known to the ancient Greeks and Romans.

Authorities on Irish archaeology are agreed that the Early Stone Age is not exemplified in the most ancient remains of human occupation that have been discovered in Ireland. The explanation for this is supplied by the geologists. Some thousands of years ago, the conditions of perpetual snow and ice that at present prevail in the Arctic regions extended much farther into the temperate zones. The northern parts of Europe were covered with perpetual ice. Ireland lay entirely within this glacial zone. The southern limit of the ice ran through the south of England and eastward across the Continent. The time during which this southward extension of ice lasted is called the Glacial Period. Already before that time, Europe was inhabited by man, and the Early Stone Age or Palaeolithic Age is held to have preceded the Glacial Period.

The condition of Ireland during that period was like the present condition of Greenland, under a heavy covering of ice formed by the accumulation of snow. By its own weight the ice kept moving from the mountains into the valleys and plains, and from the higher land level into the surrounding seas. Under its moving action, the solid rock-formation of the mountains was ground down and rounded off and scooped into hollows, and great sheets and ridges of stones, gravel, sand and boulder-clay were accumulated on the slopes and low grounds. It is evident that any traces of human life and habitation that may have existed before this process were not likely to be found after it.

The consequence is that the earliest traceable population of Ireland was Neolithic, *i.e.*, belonged to the Late Stone Age. By the Stone Age is meant that time in which the use of metals was still unknown, and in which the most durable material of implements used by men was stone. Needless to say, they also used wood, bone, and any other material that came to hand. The Late Stone Age is distinguished from the Early Stone Age by the use of polished and finely shaped stone implements.

In England, according to eminent authorities already quoted, the descendants of Palaeolithic Man survived and are still the prevalent type. In Ireland, they did not survive, and whatever Palaeolithic blood is in our veins to-day is due to immigration. Regarding the Neolithic population of Ireland, whatever is to be said belongs rather to archaeology than to history. In Britain, we are told, the Neolithic population consisted of at least three distinct races, one which had remained there from Palaeolithic times, and two new races, or rather a mixture of two races, which came in from the Continent. One sees how futile it is to attempt to fix upon such a population a name like Iberian. It is assuming a knowledge which does not belong to us.

The Late Stone Age was followed by the Bronze Age, but between the two came a transitional period now generally recognised, in which copper replaced stone as the most durable material of manufacture. This Copper Period is well exemplified in Ireland. Bronze, the distinctive material of the Bronze Age, was made by adding a small proportion of tin to copper, producing a metal very much superior to pure copper for the manufacture of tools and weapons. So far as I have been able to learn, the presence of tin in quantities that could be worked is unknown in Ireland. There seems to have been no scarcity of bronze, and from this I conclude that during the Bronze Age, Ireland had an import trade in tin, and probably therefore an export trade in copper or some other product. This is the earliest evidence of Irish commerce. Bronze cannot have been the material of ordinary industry, nor, unless the inhabitants were very unwarlike, can bronze have been the material of ordinary weapons of war. It is a very durable material, almost unaffected by the action of the elements during centuries. Numerous as the finds of bronze tools and weapons have been in Ireland, they should have been immeasurably more numerous if tools and weapons of bronze had been in every man's hands throughout the Bronze Age, which, according to Coffey, lasted from about 1800 b.c. to about 350 b.c. In fact. Sir Robert Kane, in his work on "The Industrial

Resources of Ireland,” in a footnote regarding the once extensive copper mines of the Danes’ Island on the Waterford coast, supplies an interesting proof of what otherwise we should reasonably expect to be true, that the ordinary working population of the Bronze Age continued to use the implements of the preceding Stone Age. [1] Weapons and tools of bronze must therefore have been in the hands chiefly of a more opulent class than the general population. Gold was also used for ornaments, and Ireland is noted for the abundance of its gold ornaments dating from the Bronze Age. Native Irish gold was worked from very remote times, but it is also certain that in the early Christian period gold was brought to Ireland by Oriental merchants in exchange for other products of the country. Sickles of bronze bear witness to the tillage of the soil for corn during this period. It will be seen that there was a mixture of various peoples in Ireland at the time. From this we might expect that there were various degrees of civilisation, and so the remains of Bronze Age sepulchres indicate. The simpler and ruder forms of these are found all over the country. The highly elaborate sepulchres of the region of the lower Boyne, its tributary the Blackwater, and the lower Liffey, are indicative of a relatively high civilisation in those parts, the ancient territory of Bregia. Along with these we may take into account an old Gaelic tradition. It tells that when the Gaels came to Ireland many of the fertile plains had still to be cleared of forest, but there was one plain, Magh n-Ealta, stretching northward from Dublin, which was called the Ancient Plain and was already clear of forest before they arrived. Its name is interpreted as meaning “the plain of the flocks of birds,” by which we may understand that it was frequented by the various kinds of gregarious birds which we see in our own time hovering around the plough, rooks, jackdaws, starlings and seagulls. It is worth noting that towards the opposite border of the same region of Bregia there is another plain of the same name, still represented in the name of Moynalty village, about four miles north of Kells and on the Moynalty river, which is a tributary of the Meath Blackwater.

I shall here mention an additional indication that the Gaels were not in occupation of Ireland during the Bronze Age. In ancient Gaelic tradition, the great chambered tumuli of the Boyne are taken to be the tombs or the dwellings of an earlier race.

We pass on now to consider some of the evidence supplied by our ancient literature regarding the population which inhabited Ireland before the coming of the Gaels, that is, according to the conclusions I have already drawn, before the Iron Age. The Gaels occupied Ireland as a conquering and dominant people. During the early centuries of their occupation, whatever language or languages had been spoken in Ireland before them completely disappeared as languages, leaving no doubt some traces behind in the names of places, etc., and probably also influencing to some degree the Gaelic language itself. But for a long time there was nothing like a complete fusion of the old and the new population. The older population remained, not as a mere promiscuous swarm of subject folk, but preserving in a large measure its ancient organisation and subdivisions. This state of things continued during the early centuries of Christianity in Ireland.

Most of the manuscript evidence concerning these ancient communities is still awaiting collection, publication, and study. Some of it is to be found here and there in the old genealogical tracts, which are still unpublished, and some in the annals. There is a good deal of very ancient material on the subject quoted in the introductory part of the great Book of Genealogies by Dubhaltach Mac Fir-Bhisigh. There is one particular tract dealing specially with the names and topography of these ancient subject communities. It exists in a number of MSS., and has been printed by Craigie in the *Revue Celtique* from a single MS. of the Edinburgh collection. From internal evidence I think that this tract is of not later date than the eighth century. I mention these facts to show how much has still to be done before we can claim a near approach to full and accurate knowledge of the existing evidence.

There are, however, some larger divisions of the ancient population, spread over wide areas and comprising in each instance several of the smaller named groups ; and about these larger divisions there is sufficient information to warrant the essaying of some account of them. Chief among these may be reckoned the Picts. The tract just mentioned shows that there were subject communities of the Picts around Cruachain, the seat of the Connacht kings, and all over Mid-Ulster, from Meath to Loch Foyle.

Along the lower part of the Shannon, in the counties of Galway, Tipperary and Limerick, there was an ancient population known as Fir Iboth, or by the adjectival name Ibdaig. These names contain the Irish equivalent of the name by which the western islands of Scotland were known to Greek and Latin writers of the first and second centuries of the Christian era, *i.e.*, Ebudae. The modern name Hebrides originated in a mistaken writing of this name, and it is curious that the most celebrated island of the group got its English name, "Iona," in the same way. Ptolemy makes these islands belong to Ireland not to Britain. Solinus says the inhabitants in his time grow no crops and live on fish and milk. It is possible that an ancient branch of this population preserved their identity by forming, so to speak, a fisherman caste on the banks of the Shannon. There is evidence that something like the Hindu caste system, in so far as it is linked with the occupations of the people, existed among the descendants of the Pre-Celtic population in Ireland. One of these subject communities is known by the variant names Tuath Semon, Semonrige, Semrige, and Semaine. Each of these names contains the Irish word *seim*, meaning a rivet, and may be translated the Rivet-folk. This people dwelt in the Desi territory of Munster, where those copper-mines are found which were worked in the Bronze Age by miners using tools of stone and wood. Taking the facts together, it seems reasonable to infer that the Semonrige tribe were the descendants of the ancient copper-smiths of the district, and that they obtained their name from the commodity in which they paid their tribute to the dominant Celts, for the name is Celtic. It should be well noted here that these Irish metal-workers are presented to us in early Irish records as descendants of the pre-Gaelic population ; whereas, as we have seen, the current theory in British archaeology assumes that the occupation of working bronze was distinctive of the Gaels themselves and was introduced by them.

Another copper-producing district is that of Béarra in West Munster, bordering on Berehaven. Here in ancient times dwelt another "rent-paying" community bearing the significant name of Ceardraighe, "the Smith Folk." There was also either a branch of this folk or another community of the same name situate around the ancient seat of the Munster kings, Teamhair Luachra, a suitable locality in which to find constant employment for a caste of workers in bronze.

According to the tract on the Rent-paying Communities, all over the parts of Munster which, in historical time, were regarded as being specifically Ivernian, including large districts in the present counties of Tipperary, Limerick, Cork and Kerry, there was distributed one of these subject communities which bore the name Tuath Cathbarr, *i.e.*, "the people of helmets." Since there is no record and no likelihood that this subject people were a fighting caste, as undoubtedly some of the subject-communities were in other parts of Ireland, we may infer that they got their name from being employed in the manufacture of battle-gear.

I come now to the most celebrated of all the pre-Celtic folks that inhabited Ireland, the Fir Bolg. In including these among the industrial castes of ancient Ireland, I claim the support of the oldest written traditions, which clearly tell that the Fir Bolg, or "Men of Bags," obtained that name from an industrial connection with leathern bags. The story of the origin of the name, as found in the Book of Invasions, Keating's History, etc., is no doubt well-known. They migrated, we are told, from Ireland to Greece (Greece in ancient Irish writings means the Eastern Empire). There, being outlanders, according to the ideas of our forefathers, they

did not obtain the local franchises and became a serf people. Their occupation was to carry sand and earth in leathern bags and spread a soil over rocky places, as is still done in parts of Ireland, to make fertile land. From this occupation, they were named Fir Bolg. They afterwards used the hides in which they worked to construct ships in the ancient fashion, and in these ships they escaped back to Ireland and liberty.

Quite a different version of the story is found in the Book of Lecan, a book which contains a great miscellany, awaiting most desirable publication, of excerpts from older writings, especially excerpts of material which does not accord with what one may call the received teachings of later times on matters of Irish legend and tradition. This particular passage contains what is doubtless the oldest extant account of the Fir Bolg. Its language, in my opinion, is of not later date than the eighth century. Like the accepted story, it says that they were a branch of the race of Nemed, but unlike the accepted story, it does not say that they left Ireland in a body and came back to it in a body after many years. On the contrary, it tells us that they continued to inhabit Ireland all the time, but carried on a particular trade with the eastern world. The manner of their trade was this. They put Irish earth into leathern bags and exported it to the east, where they sold it to the Greeks to be spread on the ground around their cities as a protection against venomous reptiles. From this trade they got the name of Bagmen. Dubhaltach Mac Fir Bhisigh, in the unpublished introduction to his Book of Genealogies, tells us that Fir Bolg was the specific name of a particular section of the pre-Gaelic population, but became extended in common usage so as to be applied to the whole of that population. Of this statement we have abundant corroboration, with details enabling us to locate the abode of various sections of the Bag-folk properly so called. One section, called Bolgraihe, was the principal Rent-paying community of the ancient Tir Conaill, a territory of much smaller extent than the Tir Conaill of later times. Another section inhabited the district of Sliabh Badbna (Slieve Baune) in the east of County Roscommon, where, I have been told, popular tradition still recognises their descendants. Another section dwelt in the district of Cong in the south of County Mayo, another in Sliabh Eachtgha (Aughty) in the south of County Galway.

The manufacture of bags from hide or leather was no doubt not a highly esteemed occupation, and it was probably out of contempt that the name Fir Bolg was extended to the whole conquered population by the Celtic ascendancy. The subject communities produced not only skilled artisans but men of great piety and learning in early Christian times. Saint Mo-Chuarog, for example, who is called *Sapiens*, “the Learned,” and who introduced a reform into the Irish chronography of his time, was a member of the Rivet-folk, the Seamonraige of the Deisi. But the general attitude of the Gaels towards the older population was undoubtedly disdainful. The passage quoted by Dubhaltach from “an ancient book” is familiar to many in O’Curry’s translation :

“Every one who is black-haired, who is a tattler, guileful, tale-telling, noisy, contemptible ; every wretched, mean, strolling, unsteady, harsh and inhospitable person ; every slave, every mean thief, every churl, every one who loves not to listen to music and entertainment, the disturbers of every council and every assembly, and the promoters of discord among people — these are the descendants of the Firbolgs, of the Galians, of the Liogairne, and of the Fir Domhnann in Eirinn. But the descendants of the Fir Bolg are the most numerous of all these.”

This is fine old ascendancy talk, the sort of language that has served in many ages to justify the oppression of liberty ; and there is plenty of evidence that the older population was in some instances subjected to very harsh treatment — in some instances, not in all, nor were the ancient communities always spoken of in such terms of contempt.

Among them, besides industrial groups or castes, there were also others which appear to have followed the profession of arms. Cu Chulainn, according to one tradition preserved by Dubhaltach, belonged to a non-Gaelic tribe called Tuath Tabhairn, and it will be remembered that he is once described as “ a small dark man.” “ Thou little elf !” his charioteer used to call him, to provoke him to do his utmost in the fight. His rival, Fear Diadh, was a noble of the Fir Domhnann from Connacht, and the Fir Domhnann still existed as a subject community in the times to which the tract on the Rent-paying Folks has relation. They are located in a stretch of country comprising the greater part of the counties of Mayo and Sligo. In the eastern Midlands, from the Shannon to the Irish Sea, the same tract places another of these ancient tribes named the Luaighni — a name still preserved in that of the barony of Lune in Meath. These are represented as forming the chief fighting force of the kings of North Leinster in the heroic period. When Conchobhar sets out to exact reparation for the Táin and the invasion of Ulster, he is met by the forces of the Luaighni at Rosnaree on the Boyne, his heroes one after another are worsted in the fight, his army almost routed, and it is only when their king has fallen in single combat that the Luaighni abandon the field. In the curious story of the revolution brought about by the revolt of the Rent-paying tribes against the oppressive rule of the Gaelic nobility, it is the chief of the Luaighni, Cairbre of the Cat’s Head, who becomes king of Ireland for twenty years.

Still more remarkable is the tribute of the ancient saga to the valour and discipline of the Galians. In the ninth century the Galians are still described by the poet Mael Muru as one of the outstanding sections of the population who are not Gaels. The tract on the Rent-paying Folks divides them into three *tuatha* and gives the location of each. They inhabited the northern parts of old Leinster, in the present counties of Wicklow, Kildare, and King’s County. The story of the Táin tells how the Galians excelled all the other troops that joined Medb on her march from Cruachain for the invasion of Ulster. “ This enterprise,” said the warlike queen, “ will be a barren one for all of us, except for one force alone, the Galians of Leinster.” “ Why blamest thou these men ?” said her consort. “ Blame them we do not,” replied Medb. “ What good service then have they done that they are praised above the rest ?” said Ailill. “ There is reason to praise them,” said Medb. “ They are splendid soldiers. When the rest are beginning to make their pens and pitch their camps, the Galians have already finished setting up their booths and huts. When the rest are still building booths and huts, the Galians have finished preparing their food and drink. While the others are getting ready their food and drink, the Galians have done eating and feasting, and their harps are playing for them. When all the others have finished eating and feasting, by that time the Galians are asleep. And even as their servants and thralls are distinguished above the servants and thralls of the Men of Erin, so shall their heroes and champions be distinguished above the heroes and champions of the men of Erin on this hosting. It is folly then for the rest to go, for the Galians will enjoy the victory.” And in fear and jealousy the queen declared that nothing would please her but to fall upon the Galians and destroy them. Her husband expostulated. “ Shame on thy speech !” he said, “ a woman’s counsel, for no better reason than because they pitch their tents and make their pens so promptly and unwearily.” And Fergus interposing swore that he and his Ulstermen would stand by the Galians to the death. The Galians, he said, are but one division in eighteen of our army. Even so, we shall take care that they shall be no danger to us. And he took and divided the forces of the Galians among the rest so that not five of them were in one place together.

Of this Galian stock came Fionn and Oisín and Óscar and all their kindred, according to some accounts. They were of the sept Uí Tairisigh, one of the three folks who, says Mael Muru, are not of the Gaedhil. This sept dwelt at Drumcree in the barony of Delvin in Westmeath. Their name and existence as a sept is probably not so ancient as the time of Fionn, but we may suppose that in their own time they claimed descent from the family of Fionn, from Clann Bhaoisgne.

Other possible instances of occupation-castes are found in the names Cechtraighe “ plough-folk, Corbraighe and Corbetrighe “ chariot-folk” (Carbantorigion, the name of a town of the Selgovae in southern Scotland), Gruthraighe “ curd-folk,” Lusraighe “ herb-folk,” Medraighe “ weight or balance-folk,” Rosraighe “ linseed-folk, “ Rothraighe “ wheel-folk,” Sciathraighe “ shield-folk.”

The tinker clans of recent times in Ireland and Scotland may well be survivals of some of these ancient industrial communities.

It is certain that ancient tribes remained in every part of Ireland after their conquest by the Gaels, and retained in some measure during the early Christian period in Ireland their ancient organisation, often under their own ancient lines of chiefs. This is matter of strictly historical record, and if any similar records had existed and were still extant in Britain, we should hear less of the cheap and easy history of successive populations, each of them completely exterminating those that inhabited the land before them. Writers on history would not find themselves flatly contradicting ethnologists on the strength of their own gratuitous assumptions, when ethnologists say that the modern English race is largely composed of descendants of the primitive inhabitants.

On this subject of primitive races, there is one point which, in passing, I desire to bring out. One of the founders of the modern study of ethnology, Quatrefages, has given a good illustration of a sort of scientific method akin to some that we have had already under consideration. A glance at the map showed him that Ireland represented a north-western limit of the likely spread of the human race in remote times. The migratory movements of antiquity were thought to have, generally speaking, a western trend in Europe. Ireland besides was an island, which in the distant past must have been reached through Britain. Conclusion : Ireland was the place in which to look for primitive European types, and in Ireland the surest place to find the primitive types must be the extreme north-western part. Accordingly, M. Quatrefages packed his portmanteau in Paris and labelled it for Belmullet. This kind of scientific quest is usually successful. It succeeds after the manner of the school-boy who, before entering into the intricacies of a question in algebra, takes the precaution of providing himself with the answer from the end of the book. M. Quatrefages found the Mayo seaboard swarming with a primitive race of men. I do not propose to examine his discoveries in detail. Anyone who is curious about them is referred to the late Dr. Hogan’s little book on “ The Irish People,” which is the source of my information. In a paper contributed by me to the Royal Irish Academy’s “ Clare Island Survey,” on the Place-names and Family-names of Clare Island, I showed that nearly half of the families now living there could be traced to an earlier home in distant parts of Ireland. I pointed out that in remote ages, the parts of the sea that adjoin the land and the parts of the land that adjoin the sea must have afforded the freest highway for movements of population. It must have been so in the glacial period and during its decline, when the scanty population must have lived a life like that of the modern Eskimos who travel long journeys in their canoes and change their habitation at will. It must have been so in the barren period that succeeded the age of ice, when animal and vegetable food was much more abundant on the sea-shore than inland. And it must have been so in the succeeding forest period, when the inland regions became difficult to traverse. In fact, until men became tillers of the ground and road-makers, the sea-edge was their grand highway. Hence it is that the population of the seaboard is always the most mixed and variable. The place to look for the least movement and least variation is inland, especially in deeply wooded, swampy or mountain areas, which offer the least attraction to newcomers and from which an older population is hardest to dislodge. And this, I think, is also the lesson of ethnological research conducted without foregone conclusions. In all western Europe, there is no region that con-

tains a larger proportion of a late-coming population than the Orkneys, Shetlands and Hebrides and distant Iceland, the uttermost extremes of the north-west.

The ancient legends of Ireland tell of certain peoples which are not represented by territorial groups in the historical record. Most conspicuous among these are the Tuatha De Danann and the Fomori ("Fomorian"). The late D'Arbois de Jubainville showed very clearly that these two peoples belonged to pagan mythology. His work on the subject can be read in the English translation by Mr. Best, "The Irish Mythological Cycle." I cannot now attempt to go over the ground it covers, even in summary, but shall content myself by adding a few cogent proofs to those which it supplies. About the year 1000 the poet Eochaidh O'Flainn wrote a poem on the Tuatha de Danann. He began by setting himself the question, were these folks human or were they demons. He answers that they were mortal men of Adam's race, and we are even told by what deaths they died. The very fact that the question had to be asked is conclusive as to the popular belief. But the poet was not satisfied with having brushed this popular belief, a survival of paganism, to one side. In his concluding verses he protests "I do not worship them, I worship the one true God." So that as late as the year 1000 people in Ireland still spoke of the Tuatha De Danann as objects of heathen worship.

An older writer, quoted in the Book of Lecan, tells a plainer tale. He does not admit the truth of the ancient mythology, and says that the Tuatha De Danann were a remnant of the fallen angels. They assume, he says, bodies of airy substance so as to become visible to men, the better to tempt them. They come at the call of sorcerers and those who practise malevolent incantations by walking in circles lefthandwise. They used to be worshipped, and it was they who invented the spells sung by smiths and druids and wise-women and pilots and cup-bearers. From them druidism came in Ireland.

The poet-historians did not succeed in killing off the Tuatha De Danann. In 1088 the annalist Tigernach died, and in 1084, four years before his death, his chronicle contains an account of a pestilence which visited Ireland at that time. The cause of this pestilence, says the chronicler, was revealed in that year to a certain man, Gilla Lugán, who was in the habit of frequenting a fairy mound at Hallow-tide, the old heathen festival of Samhain. There in the year 1084, Oengus appeared to him and told him that the plague was brought to Ireland by legions of evil spirits from the islands of the northern ocean, who spread it over the country with their fiery breath. And Gilla Lugán himself, says the chronicler, afterwards saw one of these demon legions on the rath of Mullaghmast, and in whatsoever direction their fiery breath came on the land, there the plague broke out among the people.

In *Agallamh na Seanorach*, the rulers of the Tuatha De Danann are still alive in St. Patrick's time, and inhabit the hills associated with their memory. One of them has recently come to life once more in Dublin, Finn Bheara of Cnoc Meadha. From the hills at Tourmakeady you can see Cnoc Meadha, a low round hill, on the eastern horizon. It was pointed out to me by a man who knew all about it. That is where Finn Bheara lives, he said. He is the king of the Good People. He is not always there. When Finn Bheara is living in Cnoc Meadha, it is a good year for the country. When he goes away, it is a bad year.

A poem in *Duanaire Finn* tells how Oengus aided the Fiana in their hostilities with king Cormac, and, like the gods in the Homeric poems, remained invisible while he fought on their behalf.

The passage already cited from the Book of Lecan tells how the Tuatha De Danann arrived in Ireland. They came, it says, without ships or boats and first alighted on Sliabh an Iarainn, in the heart of the country.

The mythology of the Irish Celts was not originally shaped in Ireland. They brought it along with them from central Europe, and just as the ancient scriptures of the Hindus bear traces of having been originally composed in a climate very different from that of Hindustan, so I think the Irish mythology shows some traces of its continental origin. The Fomori of Irish tradition were not inhabitants of Ireland. They always appear as invaders. They come from the north, from the unknown places of the northern ocean. The demons who brought the pestilence to Ireland in 1084 were Fomorians. They are always enemies of the people of Ireland. They were enemies to Parthalon's people, and after them to Nemed's people, the Fir Bolg, and after them to the Gaels. They were a malevolent race of immortals. In the popular view, among heathens, a people expected to be defended by the gods of its own worship. If a hostile people had other gods, these were expected to fight on the other side. Hence there was a natural tendency to regard a double set of immortals, one party being foreign and malevolent, the other domestic and benevolent. But the Irish people, before the Norse invasions, knew no human enemies in the northern ocean. Accordingly, I think that the Fomorians originally belonged to the continental geography of Celtic mythology, and that the sea from which they came was not the ocean to the north of Ireland but the Baltic and the North Sea, and that their islands were originally perhaps Britain and Ireland and the islands of the Baltic and the Scandinavian peninsula itself, which was thought to be an island when it first became known to the Greeks. The Fomorians would be perhaps in part identical with, in part associated with, the gods of the peoples dwelling on the shores of those northern seas before the Celtic expansion northward and north-westward.

We have glanced at the process by which one of our poet-historians endeavoured to transform popular tradition into a kind of history more acceptable to his own school. Christian learning brought into Ireland a double stream of history, derived from the Old Testament and from the Greek and Latin historians. The two streams had already been mingled in one by early Christian historians like Eusebius and Orosius. The works of these writers were well-known in early Christian Ireland. The Chronicle of Eusebius, a history of the ancient kingdoms of the world, written in parallel columns, a column to each kingdom, was known through the Latin translation by St. Jerome and its continuation by Prosper of Aquitaine in the fifth century. It became the basis of the writing of Irish history, and was continued in Ireland, with an Irish section added, down to the early years of the seventh century. By adopting this basis and model, the early Christian historians of Ireland brought themselves inevitably face to face with the task of linking and fitting the old Gaelic tradition to this existing framework of Biblical and Greco-Latin history.

We cannot doubt that the Celts, like the Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Northmen and other ancient peoples, had what is called a cosmogony of their own, an account of the beginning of the world. Cæsar tells us that the Druids expounded the nature of the gods and also of the material universe. This cosmogony could find no place in the new scheme, and it disappeared, leaving perhaps a few traces in the genealogies. In like manner, other parts of the popular tradition and native lore required to be transformed and recast to find a place in the accepted scheme of world history. That is why the Tuatha De Danann became mortals in the teaching of the learned while they remained and still remain immortal in the traditions that come down from heathen times.

The native tradition had its own account of the origin of the Celtic people. That account, as we shall see, was not such as could be adopted into the Christian world-history received from Eusebius and St. Jerome. It was completely rejected by the Irish historians, as completely as modern Irish people reject the substituted account when they say that their ancestors were Celtic.

To provide a theory of the origin of the Gaels more in keeping with the received world-history, a search was made through the Latin historical and geographical writings that were used in the Christian schools of Ireland and suitable discoveries were made. The most serviceable material for the purpose was found in the world-history of Orosius, a Spanish historian who wrote in Latin about the year 400. Quotations from Orosius by name and word for word show that his book was well-known in the Irish schools. It had the advantage of combining a geography of the world with a history of the world.

In those times, the ordinary Latin name for the people of Ireland was Scotti, Scots. It is the name used for them by Orosius, and also by St. Patrick, and it was accepted by all the early Irish writers who wrote in Latin. But this name Scotti does not appear in Latin before the fourth century and gave no direct clue to trace the origin of the Gaels. In the historical and geographical Latin writings to hand, the people's name that most nearly resembled Scotti was Scythi, Scythians. Accordingly, we are told that the Gaelic people were of Scythian origin.

There was an independent and evidently earlier effort to account for their origin in a precisely similar way. The man of learning who undertook this effort fastened his attention not on the name Scotti but on the older Latin name Hiberni, and searched his Latin authorities for a corresponding name of some ancient people. He found that there was an ancient people in the region of the Caucasus mountains who bore the name Iberi, and we have the result in an old tract quoted in the Book of Lecan :

“ Question : what is the true origin of the Sons of Mil [*i.e.* the Gaels] ? Answer : A race there is in the mountains of Armenia, Hiberi they are named. They had a famous king. Mil, son of Bile, son of Nem. He was contesting the kingship with his father's brother, Refellair son of Nem, and he went into exile with the manning of four barks, and twelve married couples to each bark, and a soldier over and above without, wife. . . .” And so the story goes on until the descendants of these Iberi come to Ireland.

It is not unlikely that this account was known to Saint Columbanus of Bobbio. In letters written about the year 600, he speaks of his own people not as Scotti or Hiberni, but as Iberi.

The two accounts appear to have been blended together by making the Scythians, before they reached Ireland, sojourn for a time in Spain, the country of the western Iberi. This gave a satisfactory explanation of both names, Hiberni and Scotti.

The story of their wanderings through the world is itself a geographical description of the ancient world, based in detail on the geographical chapters of Orosius. Of this story also there are two distinct versions. In one they travel overland through the continent of Europe, passing through the various peoples and territories named by Orosius. It was on this journey that they fell in with the Picts, for whom also a close scrutiny of Virgil provided two distinct origins, as already told. In the other account they sailed round the world, and the names of the various places they touched or passed in the narrative are also taken from the geography of Orosius. A noteworthy feature of that geography is that it is based on the early writings of Eratosthenes and Strabo and entirely ignores the much larger and more accurate knowledge recorded by Ptolemy in the second century. For example, according to Orosius, the Caspian Sea opens by a strait directly into the northern ocean, and the river Ganges flows into the eastern ocean on the eastern side of Asia. Accordingly we find in the Irish story that our ancestors sailed right out of the Caspian into the northern ocean, then turning eastward came round by the eastern coast of Asia, and passed on that coast the outlet of the Ganges.

This view of the world's geography continued to be taught in the Irish schools for centuries. It may be remarked here that the rotundity of the earth was also the common teaching of these schools.

It is still more curious to note how the wording of Orosius has supplied some remarkable details in the Irish story. It will be remembered how Bregon, chief of the Gaels in Spain, built a tower on the northern Spanish coast, the Tower of Bregon, and how, one fine evening in spring, his grandson went up to the top of this tower and from it descried the land of Ireland. When the Gaels afterwards took ship and came to Ireland, the place where they landed was Inbhear Scéine. All this comes from the actual phraseology of Orosius.

“The second angle of Spain, he writes, points to the northwest, where Brigantia, a city of Galicia, is situated and rears its lofty lighthouse, of a structure with which few can be compared, looking towards Britain.” The last words might also be taken to mean “for a view of Britain,” and it was in this sense that they struck the imagination of the Irish schoolman. He thought of a tower so tall that Britain was actually visible from it. A few chapters further on he read that “Hibernia is an island situated between Britain and Spain,” a notion of its position due to the fact that ships sailing by the old Atlantic trade route were accustomed to call at some Irish harbour on their voyages between Spain and Britain. If then Britain was visible from the lofty tower of Brigantia, and Ireland lay between Britain and Spain, Ireland must also be visible from the tower. Bregon or Breogan appears to have been a real name in Irish tradition. It resembled the name Brigantia. So we are told that Brigantia took its name from Bregon, the Gaelic chief, and that the tower there was built by him. This impression of Ireland lying within sight of Spain was confirmed by other passages of Orosius. “The ocean,” he says, “has islands which they call Britain and Ireland, which are situated over against one side of Gaul and looking to Spain (*ad prospectum Hispaniae*).” And again speaking of Ireland: “The fore parts of this island, stretching towards the Cantabrian ocean (*i.e.*, the Cantabrian part of the ocean, the Bay of Biscay) behold far away over a wide intervening space Brigantia, the city of Galicia, facing them towards the northwest, especially from that promontory where the mouth of the river Scena is, and where the Velabri and Luceni inhabit.” The tower of Brigantia “looked towards” Ireland, and the south-western parts of Ireland “beheld” Brigantia. It is quite possible that Orosius himself used these expressions in their literal sense. At all events they were so interpreted by his Irish reader. The Irish legend tells us that the Sons of Mil, who was grandson of Bregon, having learned that a land was seen to the north-west from the tower of Bregon, set sail for that land and, after certain adventures, put into a haven called Inbhear Scéine. Where was Inbhear Scéine? Its locality has been the subject of some discussion. If you turn up the name in Dr. Hogan's Onomasticon, you will find that there are no data to enable you to decide which of the havens of south-western Ireland bore that name, and for a very good reason. The name Inbhear Scéine did not belong to Irish topography. It belonged to this story, and is a translation of the words of Orosius, *ostium Scenae*. There is no river of the name and no known record of the name as that of any river in Ireland: nor is there evidence that those who wrote and re-wrote the story of the Gaelic invasion in ancient times had any more definite notion of the locality of Inbhear Scéine than you or I have.

The fact is that the whole story of the origin of the Gaels in Scythia or in Armenia, their wanderings by land and sea, their settlement in Spain, and their landing in Ireland, is an artificial product of the schools, and does not represent a primitive tradition. It must have displaced the popular tradition. If so, can we find any surviving traces of the older native account of the origin of the Irish Celts? I think we can. We have seen that the Tuatha De Danann were an immortal race. They were not all gods. We are expressly told that they were gods and non-gods. They were *tuatha*, *i.e.*, states or communities like those of the ancient Irish people. Their chiefs were gods. When they first came to Ireland, their king was Nuadu

Silverhand. As a god, Nuadu was worshipped also in Britain, as several inscriptions of the Roman period testify. From him, according to several genealogical tracts, the whole Gaelic population of Ireland was descended. Other gods as well as Nuadu are clearly named in the ancient pedigrees.

We have seen how the divine race of the Tuatha De Danann came to Ireland in the clouds of the air, without ship or boat, and alighted on the Iron Mountain in the heart of the country. I have found nothing to show clearly whether their human descendants, the Gaels, were thought to have originated in Ireland or outside of it, except perhaps one scrap of ancient tradition. It was from the northern parts of Europe that the Tuatha De Danann came. The Gaels, according to the learned legend already discussed, came from Spain to south-western Ireland. There is, however, a totally distinct version of their arrival, which says that they first arrived at the opposite corner, in the northeast, in the locality of Fair Head. If this is genuine tradition, it would follow that the Gaels, the offspring of the gods they worshipped, were thought to have originated outside of Ireland, somewhere in northern Europe.

The Book of Invasions, of which a convenient summary is given by Keating, forming the first part of his history, is in its true aspect a national epic which took shape gradually in the early Christian period and under the influence of Christian and Latin learning. It treats the principal elements of the ancient population, both Celtic and Pre-Celtic, as offshoots of one stock, united in ancestry, and it thus symbolises the effective national unity and fusion which had come about. The land of Ireland is the unifying principle, and all the children of the land are joined into one genealogical tree. Some recent writer, I think it is Mr. George Moore, has remarked how Irish people, apparently quite naturally and unconsciously, speak and think of their country as a person. This they have been accustomed to do through all the ages of their literature. The first words spoken by a Gael on Irish soil, in the ancient legend, were an invocation addressed to Ireland herself by the druid Amorgen : “ I entreat the land of Eire,” and the land itself, under its three names, Eire, Fódla, and Banbha, when the Gaels arrived, was reigning as queen over the Men of Ireland. Thus we find the clearly formed idea of one nation, composed of diverse peoples, but made one by their affiliation to the land that bore them — the clearest and most concrete conception of nationality to be found in all antiquity.

[1] “ In the abandoned workings, antique tools have been found, stone hammers and chisels and wooden shovels.”

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