

Stories of the Fianna — Gods and fighting men

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Preface

W. B. Yeats

A FEW months ago I was on the bare Hill of Allen, “wide Almhuin of Leinster,” where Finn and the Fianna lived, according to the stories, although there are no earthen mounds there like those that mark the sites of old buildings on so many hills. A hot sun beat down upon flowering gorse and flowerless heather ; and on every side except the east, where there were green trees and distant hills, one saw a level horizon and brown boglands with a few green places and here and there the glitter of water. One could imagine that had it been twilight and not early afternoon, and had there been vapours drifting and frothing where there were now but shadows of clouds, it would have set stirring in one, as few places even in Ireland can, a thought that is peculiar to Celtic romance, as I think, a thought of a mystery coming not as with Gothic nations out of the pressure of darkness, but out of great spaces and windy light. The hill of Teamhair, or Tara, as it is now called, with its green mounds and its partly wooded sides, and its more gradual slope set among fat grazing lands with great trees in the hedge-rows, had brought before one imaginations, not of heroes who were in their youth for hundreds of years, or of women who came to them in the likeness of hunted fawns, but of kings that lived brief and politic lives, and of the five white roads that carried their armies to the lesser kingdoms of Ireland, or brought to the great fair that had given Teamhair its sovereignty, all that sought justice or pleasure or had goods to barter.

II

It is certain that we must not confuse these kings, as did the mediæval chroniclers, with those half-divine kings of Almhuin. The chroniclers, perhaps because they loved tradition too well to cast out utterly much that they dreaded as Christians, and perhaps because popular imagination had begun the mixture, have mixed one with another ingeniously, making Finn the head of a kind of Militia under Cormac MacArt, who is supposed to have reigned at Teamhair in the second century, and making Grania, who travels to enchanted houses under the cloak of Angus, god of Love, and keeps her troubling beauty longer than did Helen hers, Cormac’s daughter, and giving the stories of the Fianna, although the impossible has thrust its proud finger into them all, a curious air of precise history. It is only when one separates the stories from that mediæval pedantry, as in this book, that one recognises one of the oldest worlds that man has imagined, an older world certainly than one finds in the stories of Cuchulain, who lived, according to the chroniclers, about the time of the birth of Christ. They are far better known, and one may be certain of the antiquity of incidents that are known in one form or another to every Gaelic-speaking countryman in Ireland or in the Highlands of Scotland. Sometimes a labourer digging near to a cromlech, or Bed of Diarmuid and Grania as it is called, will tell one a tradition that seems older and more barbaric than any description of their adventures or of themselves in written text or story that has taken form in the mouths of professed story-tellers. Finn and the Fianna found welcome among the court poets later than did Cuchulain ; and one finds memories of Danish invasions and standing armies mixed with the imaginations of hunters and solitary fighters among great woods. One never hears of Cuchulain delighting in the hunt or in woodland things ; and one imagines that the story-teller would have

thought it unworthy in so great a man, who lived a well-ordered, elaborate life, and had his chariot and his chariot-driver and his barley-fed horses to delight in. If he is in the woods before dawn one is not told that he cannot know the leaves of the hazel from the leaves of the oak ; and when Emer laments him no wild creature comes into her thoughts but the cuckoo that cries over cultivated fields. His story must have come out of a time when the wild wood was giving way to pasture and tillage, and men had no longer a reason to consider every cry of the birds or change of the night. Finn, who was always in the woods, whose battles were but hours amid years of hunting, delighted in the “ cackling of ducks from the Lake of the Three Narrows ; the scolding talk of the blackbird of Doire an Cairn ; the bellow-ing of the ox from the Valley of the Berries ; the whistle of the eagle from the Valley of Victories or from the rough branches of the Ridge of the Stream ; the grouse of the heather of Cruachan ; the call of the otter of Druim re Coir.” When sorrow comes upon the queens of the stories, they have sympathy for the wild birds and beasts that are like themselves : “ Credhe wife of Cael came with the others and went looking through the bodies for her comely com-rade, and crying as she went. And as she was searching she saw a crane of the meadows and her two nestlings, and the cunning beast the fox watching the nestlings ; and when the crane covered one of the birds to save it, he would make a rush at the other bird, the way she had to stretch herself out over the birds ; and she would sooner have got her own death by the fox than the nestlings to be killed by him. And Credhe was looking at that, and she said : ‘ It is no wonder I to have such love for my comely sweetheart, and the bird in that distress about her nestlings.’ ”

III

One often hears of a horse that shivers with terror, or of a dog that howls at something a man’s eyes cannot see, and men who live primitive lives where instinct does the work of reason are fully conscious of many things that we cannot perceive at all. As life becomes more orderly, more deliberate, the supernatural world sinks farther away. Although the gods come to Cuchulain, and although he is the son of one of the greatest of them, their country and his are far apart, and they come to him as god to mortal ; but Finn is their equal. He is continually in their houses ; he meets with Bodb Dearg, and Angus, and Manannan, now as friend with friend, now as with an enemy he overcomes in battle ; and when he has need of their help his messenger can say : “ There is not a king’s son or a prince, or a leader of the Fianna of Ireland, without having a wife or a mother or a foster-mother or a sweet- heart of the Tuatha de Danaan.” When the Fianna are broken up at last, after hundreds of years of hunting, it is doubtful that he dies at all, and certain that he comes again, in some other shape, and Oisín, his son, is made king over a divine country. The birds and beasts that cross his path in the woods have been fighting men or great enchanters or fair women, and in a moment can take some beautiful or terrible shape. One thinks of him and of his people as great-bodied men with large movements, that seem, as it were, flowing out of some deep below the narrow stream of personal impulse, men that have broad brows and quiet eyes full of confidence in a good luck that proves every day afresh that they are a portion of the strength of things. They are hardly so much individual men as portions of universal nature, like the clouds that shape themselves and re-shape themselves momentarily, or like a bird between two boughs, or like the gods that have given the apples and the nuts ; and yet this but brings them the nearer to us, for we can remake them in our image when we will, and the woods are the more beautiful for the thought. Do we not always fancy hunters to be some-thing like this, and is not that why we think them poetical when we meet them of a sudden, as in these lines in “ Pauline” :

“ An old hunter
Talking with gods ; or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos” ?

One must not expect in these stones the epic lineaments, the many incidents, woven into one great event of, let us say, the story of the War for the Brown Bull of Cuailgne, or that of

the last gathering at Muirthemne. Even Diarmuid and Grania, which is a long story, has nothing of the clear outlines of Deirdre, and is indeed but a succession of detached episodes. The men who imagined the Fianna had the imagination of children, and as soon as they had invented one wonder, heaped another on top of it. Children—or, at any rate, it is so I remember my own childhood—do not understand large design, and they delight in little shut-in places where they can play at houses more than in great expanses where a country-side takes, as it were, the impression of a thought. The wild creatures and the green things are more to them than to us, for they creep towards our light by little holes and crevices. When they imagine a country for themselves, it is always a country where one can wander without aim, and where one can never know from one place what another will be like, or know from the one day's adventure what may meet one with to-morrow's sun. I have wished to become a child again that I might find this book, that not only tells one of such a country, but is fuller than any other book that tells of heroic life, of the childhood that is in all folk-lore, dearer to me than all the books of the western world.

V.

Children play at being great and wonderful people, at the ambitions they will put away for one reason or another before they grow into ordinary men and women. Mankind as a whole had a like dream once ; everybody and nobody built up the dream bit by bit, and the ancient story-tellers are there to make us remember what mankind would have been like, had not fear and the failing will and the laws of nature tripped up its heels. The Fianna and their like are themselves so full of power, and they are set in a world so fluctuating and dream-like, that nothing can hold them from being all that the heart desires.

I have read in a fabulous book that Adam had but to imagine a bird, and it was born into life, and that he created all things out of himself by nothing more important than an unflagging fancy ; and heroes who can make a ship out of a shaving have but little less of the divine prerogatives. They have no speculative thoughts to wander through eternity and waste heroic blood ; but how could that be otherwise, for it is at all times the proud angels who sit thinking upon the hill-side and not the people of Eden. One morning we meet them hunting a stag that is “ as joyful as the leaves of a tree in summer-time ” ; and whatever they do, whether they listen to the harp or follow an enchanter over-sea, they do for the sake of joy, their joy in one another, or their joy in pride and movement ; and even their battles are fought more because of their delight in a good fighter than because of any gain that is in victory. They live always as if they were playing a game ; and so far as they have any deliberate purpose at all, it is that they may become great gentlemen and be worthy of the songs of poets. It has been said, and I think the Japanese were the first to say it, that the four essential virtues are to be generous among the weak, and truthful among one's friends, and brave among one's enemies, and courteous at all times ; and if we understand by courtesy not merely the gentleness the story-tellers have celebrated, but a delight in courtly things, in beautiful clothing and in beautiful verse, one understands that it was no formal succession of trials that bound the Fianna to one another. Only the Table Round, that is indeed, as it seems, a rivulet from the same river, is bound in a like fellowship, and there the four heroic virtues are troubled by the abstract virtues of the cloister. Every now and then some noble knight builds himself a cell upon the hill-side, or leaves kind women and joyful knights to seek the vision of the Grail in lonely adventures. But when Oisín or some kingly forerunner—Bran, son of Febal, or the like—rides or sails in an enchanted ship to some divine country, he but looks for a more delighted companionship, or to be in love with faces that will never fade. No thought of any life greater than that of love, and the companionship of those that have drawn their swords upon the darkness of the world, ever troubles their delight in one another as it troubles Iseult amid her love, or Arthur amid his battles. It is one of the ailments of our speculation that thought, when it is not the planning of something, or the doing of something, or some memory of a plain circumstance, separates us from one another because it makes us always

more unlike, and because no thought passes through another's ear unchanged. Companionship can only be perfect when it is founded on things, for things are always the same under the hand, and at last one comes to hear with envy the voices of boys lighting a lantern to ensnare moths, or of the maids chattering in the kitchen about the fox that carried off a turkey before breakfast. This book is full of fellowship untroubled like theirs, and made noble by a courtesy that has gone perhaps out of the world. I do not know in literature better friends and lovers. When one of the Fianna finds Osgar dying the proud death of a young man, and asks is it well with him, he is answered, "I am as you would have me be." The very heroism of the Fianna is indeed but their pride and joy in one another, their good fellowship. Goll, old and savage, and letting himself die of hunger in a cave because he is angry and sorry, can speak lovely words to the wife whose help he refuses. "'It is best as it is,' he said, 'and I never took the advice of a woman east or west, and I never will take it. And oh, sweet-voiced queen,' he said, 'what ails you to be fretting after me? and remember now your silver and your gold, and your silks . . . and do not be crying tears after me, queen with the white hands,' he said, 'but remember your constant lover Aodh, son of the best woman of the world, that came from Spain asking for you, and that I fought on Corcar-an-Dearg ; and go to him now,' he said, 'or it is bad when a woman is without a good man.'"

VI

They have no asceticism, but they are more visionary than any ascetic, and their invisible life is but the life about them made more perfect and more lasting, and the invisible people are their own images in the water. Their gods may have been much besides this, for we know them from fragments of mythology picked out with trouble from a fantastic history running backward to Adam and Eve, and many things that may have seemed wicked to the monks who imagined that history, may have been altered or left out ; but this they must have been essentially, for the old stories are confirmed by apparitions among the country-people to-day. The Men of Dea fought against the mis-shapen Fomor, as Finn fights against the Cat-Heads and the Dog-Heads ; and when they are overcome at last by men, they make themselves houses in the hearts of hills that are like the houses of men. When they call men to their houses and to their country Under-Wave they promise them all that they have upon earth, only in greater abundance. The god Midhir sings to Queen Etain in one of the most beautiful of the stories : "The young never grow old ; the fields and the flowers are as pleasant to be looking at as the blackbird's eggs ; warm streams of mead and wine flow through that country ; there is no care or no sorrow on any person ; we see others, but we ourselves are not seen." These gods are indeed more wise and beautiful than men ; but men, when they are great men, are stronger than they are, for men are, as it were, the foaming tide-line of their sea. One remembers the Druid who answered, when some one asked him who made the world, "The Druids made it." All was indeed but one life flowing everywhere, and taking one quality here, another there. It sometimes seems to one as if there is a kind of day and night of religion, and that a period when the influences are those that shape the world is followed by a period when the greater power is in influences that would lure the soul out of the world, out of the body. When Oisín is speaking with S. Patrick of the friends and the life he has outlived, he can but cry out constantly against a religion that has no meaning for him. He laments, and the country-people have remembered his words for centuries : "I will cry my fill, but not for God, but because Finn and the Fianna are not living."

VII

Old writers had an admirable symbolism that attributed certain energies to the influence of the sun, and certain others to the lunar influence. To lunar influence belong all thoughts and emotions that were created by the community, by the common people, by nobody knows who, and to the sun all that came from the high disciplined or individual kingly mind. I myself imagine a marriage of the sun and moon in the arts I take most pleasure in ; and now

bride and bridegroom but exchange, as it were, full cups of gold and silver, and now they are one in a mystical embrace. From the moon come the folk - songs imagined by reapers and spinners out of the common impulse of their labour, and made not by putting words together, but by mixing verses and phrases, and the folk-tales made by the capricious mixing of incidents known to everybody in new ways, as one deals out cards, never getting the same hand twice over. When one hears some fine story, one never knows whether it has not been hazard that put the last touch of adventure. Such poetry, as it seems to me, desires an infinity of wonder or emotion, for where there is no individual mind there is no measurer-out, no marker-in of limits. The poor fisher has no possession of the world and no responsibility for it ; and if he dreams of a love-gift better than the brown shawl that seems too common for poetry, why should he not dream of a glove made from the skin of a bird, or shoes made from the skin of a fish, or a coat made from the glittering garment of the salmon ? Was it not Æschylus who said he but served up dishes from the banquet of Homer ?—but Homer himself found the great banquet on an earthen floor and under a broken roof. We do not know who at the foundation of the world made the banquet for the first time, or who put the pack of cards into rough hands ; but we do know that, unless those that have made many inventions are about to change the nature of poetry, we may have to go where Homer went if we are to sing a new song. Is it because all that is under the moon thirsts to escape out of bounds, to lose itself in some unbounded tidal stream, that the songs of the folk are mournful, and that the story of the Fianna, whenever the queens lament for their lovers, reminds us of songs that are still sung in country-places ? Their grief, even when it is to be brief like Grania's, goes up into the waste places of the sky. But in supreme art or in supreme life there is the influence of the sun too, and the sun brings with it, as old writers tell us, not merely discipline but joy ; for its discipline is not of the kind the multitudes impose upon us by their weight and pressure, but the expression of the individual soul turning itself into a pure fire and imposing its own pattern, its own music, upon the heaviness and the dumbness that is in others and in itself. When one has drunk the cold cup of the moon's intoxication, one thirsts for something beyond one's self, and the mind flows outward to a natural immensity ; but if one has drunk from the hot cup of the sun, one's own fullness awakens, one desires little, for wherever one goes one's heart goes too ; and if any ask what music is the sweetest, one can but answer, as Finn answered, “ what happens.” And yet the songs and stories that have come from either influence are a part, neither less than the other, of the pleasure that is the bride-bed of poetry.

VIII

Gaelic-speaking Ireland, because its art has been made, not by the artist choosing his material from wherever he has a mind to, but by adding a little to something which it has taken generations to invent, has always had a popular literature. One cannot say how much that literature has done for the vigour of the race, for one cannot count the hands its praise of kings and high-hearted queens made hot upon the sword-hilt, or the amorous eyes it made lustful for strength and beauty. One remembers indeed that when the farming people and the labourers of the towns made their last attempt to cast out England by force of arms they named themselves after the companions of Finn. Even when Gaelic has gone, and the poetry with it, something of the habit of mind remains in ways of speech and thought and “ come-all-ye” s and poetical saying ; nor is it only among the poor that the old thought has been for strength or weakness. Surely these old stories, whether of Finn or Cuchulain, helped to sing the old Irish and the old Norman-Irish aristocracy to their end. They heard their hereditary poets and story-tellers, and they took to horse and died fighting against Elizabeth or against Cromwell ; and when an English-speaking aristocracy had their place, it listened to no poetry indeed, but it felt about it in the popular mind an exacting and ancient tribunal, and began a play that had for spectators men and women that loved the high wasteful virtues. I do not think that their own mixed blood or the habit of their time need take all, or nearly all, credit or discredit for the impulse that made our modern gentlemen fight duels over pocket-handkerchiefs, and set out to play ball against the gates of Jerusalem for a wager, and scatter

money before the public eye ; and at last, after an epoch of such eloquence the world has hardly seen its like, lose their public spirit and their high heart and grow querulous and selfish as men do who have played life out not heartily but with noise and tumult. Had they understood the people and the game a little better, they might have created an aristocracy in an age that has lost the meaning of the word. When one reads of the Fianna, or of Cuchulain, or of some great hero, one remembers that the fine life is always a part played finely before fine spectators. There also one notices the hot cup and the cold cup of intoxication ; and when the fine spectators have ended, surely the fine players grow weary, and aristocratic life is ended. When O'Connell covered with a dark glove the hand that had killed a man in the duelling field, he played his part ; and when Alexander stayed his army marching to the conquest of the world that he might contemplate the beauty of a plane-tree, he played his part. When Osgar complained as he lay dying, of the keening of the women and the old fighting men, he too played his part ; “ No man ever knew any heart in me,” he said, “ but a heart of twisted horn, and it covered with iron ; but the howling of the dogs beside me,” he said, “ and the keening of the old fighting men and the crying of the women one after another, those are the things that are vexing me.” If we would create a great community— and what other game is so worth the labour ?—we must recreate the old foundations of life, not as they existed in that splendid misunderstanding of the eighteenth century, but as they must always exist when the finest minds and Ned the beggar and Seaghan the fool think about the same thing, although they may not think the same thought about it.

IX

When I asked the little boy who had shown me the pathway up the Hill of Allen if he knew stories of Finn and Oisín, he said he did not, but that he had often heard his grandfather telling them to his mother in Irish. He did not know Irish, but he was learning it at school, and all the little boys he knew were learning it. In a little while he will know enough stories of Finn and Oisín to tell them to his children some day. It is the owners of the land whose children might never have known what would give them so much happiness. But now they can read this book to their children, and it will make Slieve-na-man, Allen, and Benbulbin, the great mountain that showed itself before me every day through all my childhood and was yet unpeopled, and half the country-sides of south and west, as populous with memories as are Dundalgan and Emain Macha and Muirthemne ; and after a while somebody may even take them to some famous place and say, “ This land where your fathers lived proudly and finely should be dear and dear and again dear” ; and perhaps when many names have grown musical to their ears, a more imaginative love will have taught them a better service. I need say nothing about the translation and arrangement of this book except that it is worthy to be put beside “ Cuchulain of Muirthemne.” Such books should not be commended by written words but by spoken words, were that possible, for the written words commending a book, wherein something is done supremely well, remain, to sound in the ears of a later generation, like the foolish sound of church bells from the tower of a church when every pew is full.

W. B. YEATS.

I am the last of the Fianna, great Oisín, son of Finn,
listening to the voice of bells ; it is long the clouds are
over me to-night !

I. THE APOLOGY

The Irish text of the greater number of the stories in this book has been published, and from this text I have worked, making my own translation as far as my scholarship goes, and when it fails, taking the meaning given by better scholars. In some cases the Irish text has not been printed, and I have had to work by comparing and piecing together various translations. I

have had to put a connecting sentence of my own here and there, and I have fused different versions together, and condensed many passages, and I have left out many, using the choice that is a perpetual refusing, in trying to get some clear outline of the doings of the heroes.

I have found it more natural to tell the stories in the manner of the thatched houses, where I have heard so many legends of Finn and his friends, and Oisín and Patrick, and the Ever-Living Ones, and the Country of the Young, rather than in the manner of the slated houses, where I have not heard them.

Four years ago, Dr Atkinson, a Professor of Trinity College, Dublin, in his evidence before the Commission of Intermediate Education, said of the old literature of Ireland :—" It has scarcely been touched by the movements of the great literatures ; it is the untrained popular feeling. Therefore it is almost intolerably low in tone—I do not mean naughty, but low ; and every now and then, when the circumstance occasions it, it goes down lower than low. ... If I read the books in the Greek, the Latin or the French course, in almost every one of them there is something with an ideal ring about it— something that I can read with positive pleasure—something that has what the child might take with him as a *Kreixel*—a perpetual treasure ; but if I read the Irish books, I see nothing ideal in them, and my astonishment is that through the whole range of Irish literature that I have read (and I have read an enormous range of it), the smallness of the element of idealism is most noticeable. . . . And as there is very little idealism there is very little imagination. . . . The Irish tales as a rule are devoid of it fundamentally."

Dr Atkinson is an Englishman, but unfortunately not only fellow-professors in Trinity but undergraduates there have been influenced by his opinion, that Irish literature is a thing to be despised. I do not quote his words to draw attention to a battle that is still being fought, but to explain my own object in working, as I have worked ever since that evidence was given, to make a part of Irish literature accessible to many, especially among my young countrymen, who have not opportunity to read the translations of the chief scholars, scattered here and there in learned periodicals, or patience and time to disentangle overlapping and contradictory versions, that they may judge for themselves as to its " lowness" and " want of imagination," and the other well-known charges brought against it before the same Commission.

I believe that those who have once learned to care for the story of Cúchulain of Muirthemne, and of Finn and Lugh and Étaín, and to recognise the enduring belief in an invisible world and an immortal life behind the visible and the mortal, will not be content with my redaction, but will go, first to the fuller versions of the best scholars, and then to the manuscripts themselves. I believe the forty students of old Irish lately called together by Professor Kuno Meyer will not rest satisfied until they have explored the scores and scores of uncatalogued and untranslated manuscripts in Trinity College Library, and that the enthusiasm which the Gaelic League has given birth to will lead to much fine scholarship.

A day or two ago I had a letter from one of the best Greek scholars and translators in England, who says of my " Cúchulain" : " It opened up a great world of beautiful legend which, though accounting myself as an Irishman, I had never known at all. I am sending out copies to Irish friends in Australia who, I am sure, will receive the same sort of impression, almost an impression of pride in the beauty of the Irish mind, as I received myself." And President Roosevelt wrote to me a little time ago that after he had read " Cúchulain of Muirthemne," he had sent for all the other translations from the Irish he could get, to take on his journey to the Western States.

I give these appreciative words not, I think, from vanity, for they are not for me but for my material, to show the effect our old literature has on those who come fresh to it, and that they

do not complain of its “ want of imagination.” I am, of course, very proud and glad in having had the opportunity of helping to make it known, and the task has been pleasant, although toilsome. Just now, indeed, on the 6th October, I am tired enough, and I think with sympathy of the old Highland piper, who complained that he was “ withered with yelping the seven Fenian battalions.”

II. THE AGE AND ORIGIN OF THE STORIES OF THE FIANNA

Mr Alfred Nutt says in *Ossian and the Ossianic Literature*, No. 3 of his excellent series of sixpenny pamphlets. *Popular Studies in Mythology, Romance, and Folklore* : —

“ The body of Gaelic literature connected with the name of Ossian is of very considerable extent and of respectable antiquity. The oldest texts, prose for the most part, but also in verse, are preserved in Irish MSS. of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and go back to a period from one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty years older at least. The bulk of Ossianic literature is, however, of later date as far as the form under which it has come down to us is concerned. A number of important texts, prose for the most part, are preserved in MSS. of the fourteenth century, but were probably redacted in the thirteenth and twelfth centuries. But by far the largest mass consists of narrative poems, as a rule dramatic in structure. These have come down to us in MSS. written in Scotland from the end of the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, in Ireland from the sixteenth down to the middle of the nineteenth century. The Gaelic-speaking peasantry, alike in Ireland and Scotland, have preserved orally a large number of these ballads, as also a great mass of prose narratives, the heroes of which are Ossian and his comrades.

“ Were all Ossianic texts preserved in MSS. older than the present century to be printed, they would fill some eight to ten thousand octavo pages. The mere bulk of the literature, even if we allow for considerable repetition of incident, arrests attention. If we further recall that for the last five hundred years this body of romance has formed the chief imaginative recreation of Gaeldom, alike in Ireland and Scotland, and that a peasantry unable to read or write has yet preserved it almost entire, its claims to consideration and study will appear manifest.”

He then goes on to discuss how far the incidents in the stories can be accepted as they were accepted by Irish historical writers of the eleventh century as authentic history : —

“ Fortunately there is little need for me to discuss the credibility or otherwise of the historic records concerning Finn, his family, and his band of warriors. They may be accepted or rejected according to individual bent of mind without really modifying our view of the literature. For when we turn to the romances, whether in prose or verse, we find that, although the history is professedly the same as that of the Annals, firstly, we are transported to a world entirely romantic, in which divine and semi-divine beings, ungainly monsters and giants, play a prominent part, in which men and women change shapes with animals, in which the lives of the heroes are miraculously prolonged—in short, we find ourselves in a land of Faery ; secondly, we find that the historic conditions in which the heroes are represented as living do not, for the most part, answer to anything we know or can surmise of the third century. For Finn and his warriors are perpetually on the watch to guard Ireland against the attacks of over-sea raiders, styled Lochlannac by the narrators, and by them undoubtedly thought of as Norsemen. But the latter, as is well known, only came to Ireland at the close of the eighth century, and the heroic period of their invasions extended for about a century, from 825 to 925 ; to be followed by a period of comparative settlement during the tenth century, until at the opening of the eleventh century the battle of Clontarf, fought by Brian, the great South Irish chieftain, marked the break-up of the separate Teutonic organisations and the absorption of the Teutons into the fabric of Irish life. In these pages then we may disregard the

otherwise interesting question of historic credibility in the Ossianic romances : firstly, because they have their being in a land unaffected by fact ; secondly, because if they ever did reflect the history of the third century the reflection was distorted in after-times, and a pseudo-history based upon events of the ninth and tenth centuries was substituted for it. What the historian seeks for in legend is far more a picture of the society in which it took rise than a record of the events which it commemorates.”

In a later part of the pamphlet Mr Nutt discusses such questions as whether we may look for examples of third-century customs in the stories, what part of the stories first found their way into writing, whether the Oisín and Patrick dialogues were written under the influence of actual Pagan feeling persisting from Pagan times, or whether “ a change came over the feeling of Gaeldom during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,” when the Oisín and Patrick dialogues in their present form began to be written. His final summing-up is that “ well-nigh the same stories that were told of Finn and his warrior braves by the Gael of the eleventh century are told in well-nigh the same way by his descendant to-day.” Mr Nutt does not enquire how long the stories may have been told before the first story was written down. Larminie, however, whose early death was the first great loss of our intellectual movement, pushes them backward for untold ages in the introduction to his *West Irish Folk Tales and Romances*. He builds up a detailed and careful argument, for which I must refer readers to his book, to prove that the Scottish Highlands and Ireland have received their folk-lore both from “ Aryan and Non-Aryan sources,” and that in the Highlands there is more non-Aryan influence and more non-Aryan blood than in Ireland. He argues that nothing is more improbable than that all folk-tales are Aryan, as has sometimes been supposed, and sums up as follows : —

“ They bear the stamp of the genius of more than one race. The pure and placid but often cold imagination of the Aryan has been at work on some. In others we trace the more picturesque fancy, the fierceness and sensuality, the greater sense of artistic elegance belonging to races whom the Aryan, in spite of his occasional faults of hardness and coarseness, has, on the whole, left behind him. But as the greatest results in the realm of the highest art have always been achieved in the case of certain blends of Aryan with other blood, I should hardly deem it extravagant if it were asserted that in the humbler regions of the folk-tale we might trace the working of the same law. The process which has gone on may in part have been as follows : — Every race which has acquired very definite characteristics must have been for a long time isolated. The Aryans during their period of isolation probably developed many of their folk-germs into their larger myths, owing to the greater constructiveness of their imagination, and thus, in a way, they used up part of their material. Afterwards, when they became blended with other races less advanced, they acquired fresh material to work on. We have in Ireland an instance to hand, of which a brief discussion may help to illustrate the whole race theory.

“ The larger Irish legendary literature divides itself into three cycles—the divine, the heroic, the Fenian. Of these three the last is so well-known orally in Scotland that it has been a matter of dispute to which country it really belongs. It belongs, in fact, to both. Here, however, comes in a strange contrast with the other cycles. The first is, so far as I am aware, wholly unknown in Scotland, the second comparatively unknown. What is the explanation ? Professor Zimmer not having established his late-historical view as regards Finn, and the general opinion among scholars having tended of recent years towards the mythical view, we want to know why there is so much more community in one case than in the other. Mr O’Grady long since seeing this difficulty, and then believing Finn to be historical, was induced to place the latter in point of time before Cuchulain and his compeers. But this view is of course inadmissible when Finn is seen not to be historical at all. There remains but one explanation. The various bodies of legend in question are, so far as Ireland is concerned, only

earlier or later, as they came into the island with the various races to which they belonged. The wider prevalence, then, of the Finn Saga would indicate that it belonged to an early race occupying both Ireland and Scotland. Then entered the Aryan Gael, and for him henceforth, as the ruler of the island, his own gods and heroes were sung by his own bards. His legends became the subject of what I may call the court poetry, the aristocratic literature. When he conquered Scotland, he took with him his own gods and heroes ; but in the latter country the bardic system never became established, and hence we find but feeble echoes of the heroic cycle among the mountains of the North. That this is the explanation is shown by what took place in Ireland. Here the heroic cycle has been handed down in remembrance almost solely by the bardic literature. The popular memory retains but few traces of it. Its essentially aristocratic character is shown by the fact that the people have all but forgotten it, if they ever knew it. But the Fenian cycle has not been forgotten. Prevailing everywhere, still cherished by the conquered peoples, it held its ground in Scotland and Ireland alike, forcing its way in the latter country even into the written literature, and so securing a twofold lease of existence. . . . The Fenian cycle, in a word, is non-Aryan folk-literature partially subjected to Aryan treatment.”

The whole problem is extremely complex, and several other writers have written upon it. Mr Borlase, for instance, has argued in his big book on the Dolmens that the cromlechs, and presumably the Diarmuid and Grania legend, is connected with old religious rites of an erotic nature coming down from a very primitive state of society.

I have come to my own conclusion not so much because of any weight of argument, as because I found it impossible to arrange the stories in a coherent form so long as I considered them a part of history. I tried to work on the foundation of the Annalists, and fit the Fianna into a definite historical epoch, but the whole story seemed trivial and incoherent until I began to think of them as almost contemporaneous with the battle of Magh Tuireadh, which even the Annalists put back into mythical ages. In this I have only followed some of the story-tellers, who have made the mother of Lugh of the Long Hand the grandmother of Finn, and given him a shield soaked with the blood of Balor. I cannot think of any of the stories as having had a modern origin, or that the century in which each was written down gives any evidence as to its age. “ How Diarmuid got his Love-Spot,” for instance, which was taken down only a few years ago from some old man’s recitation by Dr Hyde, may well be as old as “ Finn and the Phantoms,” which is in one of the earliest manuscripts. It seems to me that one cannot choose any definite period either from the vast living mass of folk-lore in the country or from the written text, and that there is as good evidence of Finn being of the blood of the gods as of his being, as some of the people tell me, “ the son of an O’Shaughnessy who lived at Kiltartan Cross.”

Dr Douglas Hyde, although he placed the Fenian after the Cuchulain cycle in his *History of Irish Literature*, has allowed me to print this note : —

“ While believing in the real objective existence of the Fenians as a body of Janissaries who actually lived, ruled, and hunted in King Cormac’s time, I think it equally certain that hundreds of stories, traits, and legends far older and more primitive than any to which they themselves could have given rise, have clustered about them. There is probably as large a bulk of primitive mythology to be found in the Finn legend as in that of the Red Branch itself. The story of the Fenians was a kind of nucleus to which a vast amount of the flotsam and jetsam of a far older period attached itself, and has thus been preserved.”

As I found it impossible to give that historical date to the stories, I, while not adding in anything to support my theory, left out such names as those of Cormac and Art, and such more or less historical personages, substituting “ the High King.” And in the “ Battle of the

White Strand," I left out the name of Caelur, Tadhg's wife, because I had already followed another chronicler in giving him Ethlinn for a wife. In the earlier part I have given back to Angus Og the name of "The Disturber," which had, as I believe, strayed from him to the Saint of the same name.

III. THE AUTHORITIES

The following is a list of the authorities I have been chiefly helped by in putting these stories together and in translation of the text. But I cannot make it quite accurate, for I have sometimes transferred a mere phrase, sometimes a whole passage from one story to another, where it seemed to fit better. I have sometimes, in the second part of the book, used stories preserved in the Scottish Gaelic, as will be seen by my references. I am obliged to write these notes away from libraries, and cannot verify them, but I think they are fairly correct.

PART ONE. BOOKS ONE, TWO, AND THREE

THE COMING OF THE TUATHA DE DANAAN, AND LUGH OF THE LONG HAND, AND THE COMING OF THE GAEL.—O'Curry, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish* ; MSS. *Materials* ; *Atlantis* ; De Jubainville, *Cycle Mythologique* ; Hennessy, *Chronicum Scotorum* ; Atkinson, *Book of Leinster* ; *Annals of the Four Masters* ; Nennius, *Hist. Brit.* (Irish Version) ; Zimmer, *Glossae Hibemacae* ; Whitley Stokes, *Three Irish Glossaries* ; *Revue Celtique* and *Irische Texte* ; *Gaedelica* ; Nutt, *Voyage of Bran* ; *Proceedings Ossianic Society* ; O'Beirne Crowe, *Amra Columcille* ; Dean of Lismore's Book ; Windisch, *Irische Texte* ; Hennessy and others in *Revue Celtique* ; *Kilkenny Archæological Journal* ; Keatinge's *History* ; *Ogygia* ; Curtin's *Folk Tales* ; *Proceedings Royal Irish Academy*, MSS. Series ; Dr Sigerson, *Bards of Gael and Gall* ; Miscellanies, *Celtic Society*.

BOOK FOUR

The Ever-Living Living Ones

I have used many of the above, and for separate stories, I may give these authorities : —

MIDHIR and ETAIN.— O'Curry, *Manners and Customs* ; Whitley Stokes, *Dinnsenchus* ; Muller, *Revue Celtique* ; Nutt, *Voyage of Bran* ; De Jubainville, *Epopée Celtique* ; Standish Hayes O'Grady, MS. lent me by him.

MANANNAN AT PLAY.— S. Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica*.

HIS CALL TO BRAN.— Professor Kuno Meyer in Nutt's *Voyage of Bran* ; S. Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica* ; De Jubainville, *Cycle Mythologique*.

HIS THREE CALLS TO CORMAC.— Whitley Stokes, *Irische Texte*.

CLIODNA'S WAVE.— S. Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica* ; Whitley Stokes, *Dinnsenchus*,

HIS CALL TO CONNLA.— O'Beirne Crowe, *Kilkenny Arch. Journal* ; Windisch, *Irische Texte*.

TADG IN THE ISLANDS.—S. Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica*.

LAEGAIRE IN THE HAPPY PLAIN.—S. H. O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica* ; Kuno Meyer in Nutt's *Voyage of Bran*.

FATE OF THE CHILDREN OF LIR.—O'Curry, *Atlantis*.

PART TWO. THE FIANNA

THE COMING OF FINN, AND FINN'S HOUSEHOLD.—*Proceedings Ossianic Society* ; Kuno Meyer, *Four Songs of Summer and Winter* ; *Revue Celtique* ; S. Hayes O'Grady, *Silva Gaedelica* ; Curtin's *Folk Tales*.

BIRTH OF BRAN.—*Proc. Ossianic Society.*

OISIN'S MOTHER.—Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions Irish Celts* ; Mac Innis ; *Leabhar na Feinne.*

BEST MEN OF THE FIANNA. — Dean of Lismore's Book ; *Silva Gaedelica* ; *Leabhar na Feinne.*

LAD OF THE SKINS.—*Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition* ; Larminie's *Folk Tales* ; Curtin's *Tales.*

THE HOUND.—*Silva Gaedelica* ; Whitley Stokes, *Dinnsenchus.*

RED RIDGE.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

BATTLE OF THE WHITE STRAND.—Kuno Meyer, *Anec. Oxonienses* ; Hanmer's *Chronicle* ; Dean of Lismore ; Curtin's *Tales* ; *Silva Gaedelica.*

KING OF BRITAIN'S SON.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

The Cave of CEISCORAN.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

DONN, SON OF MIDHIR.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

HOSPITALITY OF CUANNA'S HOUSE.—*Proc. Ossianic Society.*

CAT-HEADS AND DOG-HEADS.—Dean of Lismore ; *Leabhar na Feinne* ; Campbell's *Popular Tales of the Western Highlands.*

LOMMA'S HEAD.—O'Curry, *Orc. Treith*, O'Donovan, ed. Stokes.

ILBREC OF ESS RUADH.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

CAVE OF CRUACHAN.— Stokes, *Irische Texte.*

WEDDING AT CEANN SLIEVE.—*Proc. Ossianic Society.*

THE SHADOWN ONE.—O'Curry.

FINN'S MADNESS.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

THE RED WOMAN.—Hyde, *Sgealuidhe Gaedhealach.*

FINN AND THE PHANTOMS.—Kuno Meyer, *Revue Celtique.*

THE PIGS OF ANGUS.—*Proc. Ossianic Society.*

HUNT OF SLIEVE CUILINN.—*Proc. Ossianic Society.*

OISIN'S CHILDREN.—O'Curry ; *Leabhar na Feinne* ; Campbell's *Popular Tales of the Western Highlands* ; Stokes, *Irische Texte* ; Dean of Lismore ; Celtic Magazine ; *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition.*

BIRTH OF DIARMUID.—*Pursuit of Diarmuid and Grania* (Society for Preservation of the Irish Language) ; Campbell's *Popular Tales.*

HOW DIARMUID GOT HIS LOVE-SPOT.—Hyde, *Sgealuidhe Gaedhealach.*

DAUGHTER OF KING UNDER-WAVE. —Campbell's *Popular Tales.*

THE HARD SERVANT.—*Silva Gaedelica.*

HOUSE OF THE QUICKEN TREES.— MSS. in Royal Irish Academy, and in Dr Hyde's possession.

DIARMUID AND GRANIA.— Text Published by S. Hayes O'Grady, *Proc. Ossianic Society*, and re-edited by N. O'Duffey for Society for Preservation of the Irish Language ; Kuno Meyer,

Revue Celtique and *Four Songs* ; *Leabhar na Feinne* ; Campbell's *Popular Tales* ; *Kilkenny Arch. Journal* ; *Folk Lore*, vol. vii., 1896; Dean of Lismore ; Nutt, *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition*.

CNOC-AN-AIR, ETC.—*Proc. Ossianic Society*.

WEARING AWAY OF THE FIANNA.—*Silva Gaedelica* ; Dean of Lismore ; *Leabhar na Feinne* ; Campbell's *Popular Tales* ; *Proc. Ossianic Society* ; O'Curry ; *Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition* ; Stokes, *Irische Texte*.

THE END OF THE FIANNA.—Hyde, *Sgealuidhe Gaedhealach* ; *Proc. Ossianic Society* ; *Silva Gaedelica* ; Miss Brooke's *Reliques* ; *Annals of the Four Masters* ; *Celtic Magazine*.

OISIN AND PATRICK, AND OISIN'S LAMENTS.—*Proc. Ossianic Society* ; Dean of Lismore ; *Kilkenny Arch. Journal* ; Curtin's *Tales*.

I have taken Crania's sleepy song, and the description of Finn's shield and of Cumhal's treasure-bag, and the fact of Finn's descent from Ethlinn, from *Duanaire Finn* now being edited for the Irish Texts Society by Mr John MacNeill, the proofs of which I have been kindly allowed to see. And I have used sometimes parts of stories, or comments on them gathered directly from the people, who have kept these heroes so much in mind. The story of Caoilte coming to the help of the King of Ireland in a dark wood is the only one I have given without either a literary or a folk ancestry. It was heard or read by Mr Yeats, he cannot remember where, but he had, with it in his mind, written of "Caoilte's burning hair" in one of his poems.

I and my readers owe special thanks to those good workers in the discovery of Irish literature, Professor Kuno Meyer and Mr Whitley Stokes, translators of so many manuscripts ; and to my friend and kinsman Standish Hayes O'Grady, for what I have taken from that wonderful treasure-house, his *Silva Gaedelica*.

Gods and fighting men : the story of the Tuatha de Danaan and of the Fianna of Ireland (1904)

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