

A Swarme of Gnats

The Irish and The Sea

By William H. Babcock, LL.B.

The beginning of Irish navigation, like the beginning of everything else, is hidden in the mist of antiquity. Vessels of some kind obviously must have borne the successive waves of immigrants or invaders to the island. Naturally they would remain in use afterwards for trade, travel, exploration, and war. Irish ships may have been among those of the Breton fleet that Cæsar dispersed at Vannes after an obstinate struggle. Two or three centuries later we find Niall of the Nine Hostages making nautical descents on the neighboring shores, especially Britain: and there is every probability that ships of the island conveyed some at least of the "Scots" (Irish) whom Gildas in the sixth century describes as joining the Picts in furiously storming the Roman wall.

The equally adventurous but more pacific work of exploration went on also, if we may judge by that extraordinary series of Irish sea-sagas, the *Imrama*, comprising the Voyages of Bran, Maelduin, the Hui Corra, and St. Brendan—the last-mentioned deservedly the most famous. These vary in their literary merits and in the merits of their several parts, for they have been successively rewritten at different periods, receiving always something of the color, belief, and adornment which belonged to the writer's time ; but under all may be dimly traced, as in a palimpsest, the remote pagan original. At their best they embody a lofty and touching poetry very subtle and significant, as when we read of Bran's summoning by a visitant of supernatural beauty to the isles of undying delight, where a thousand years are but as a day ; his return with a companion who had been overcome by longing for Ireland and home ; the man's falling to ashes at the first touch of the native soil, as though he had been long dead ; and the flight of Bran and his crew from the real living world to the islands of the blessed. At least equally fine and stirring is St. Brendan's interview with the exiled spirit of Heaven, whose "sin was but little", so that he and his fellows were given only the pleasing penance of singing delightfully, in the guise of beautiful birds, the praises of the God who showed them mercy and grace, amid the charms of an earthly paradise. "Then all the birds sang evensong, so that it was an heavenly noise to hear."

It is not very surprising that St. Brendan's legend, with such qualities in prose and verse, made itself at home in many lands and languages, and became for centuries a widespread popular favorite and matter of general belief, also influencing the most permanent literature of a high contemplative cast, which we might suppose to be out of touch with it altogether. Certain of its more unusual incidents are found even in Arab writings of romance founded on fact, as in Edrisi's narrative of the Magrurin explorers of Lisbon and the adventures of Sinbad related in the Arabian Nights; but perhaps here we have a case of reciprocal borrowing such as may well occur when ships' companies of different nations meet.

The most conspicuous, insistent, and repeated feature of all these *Imrama* is a belief in Atlantic islands fair enough or wonderful enough to tempt the shore dwellers of Ireland far away and hold them spell-bound for years. It is easy to ascribe these pictures to sunset on the ocean, or the wonders of mirage ; but all the time, within long sailing distance, there actually were islands of delightful climate and exceeding beauty. These had been occasionally reached from the Mediterranean ever since early Carthaginian times, as classical authors seem to tell us ; why not also from Ireland, perhaps not quite so distant ? It is undoubted that the Canary Islands were never really altogether forgotten, and the same is probably true of the Madeiras and all three groups of Azores, though the knowledge that lingered in Ireland was a distorted glimmering tradition of old voyages, occasionally inciting to new ventures in the same field.

Some have supposed, though without sufficient evidence, that Saint Brendan even made his way to America, and parts of that shore line in several different latitudes have been selected as the scene of the exploit. His first entry into serious geography is in the fine maps of Dulcert, 1339, and the Pizigani, 1367, both of which plainly label Madeira, Porto Santo, and Las Desertas—"The Fortunate Islands of St. Brandan." That there may be no possibility of misunderstanding, the Pizigani brothers present a full-length portrait of the holy navigator himself bending over these islands with hands of benediction. The inscription, though not the picture, was common, thus applied, on the maps of the next century or two, and no other interpretation of his voyage found any place until a later time.

Of course the fourteenth century was a long way from the sixth, when the voyage was supposed to have been made, and we cannot take so late a verdict as convincing proof of any fact. But it at least exhibits the current interpretation of the written narrative among geographers and mariners, the people best able to judge; and here the interval was much less. The story itself seems to corroborate them in a general way, if read naturally. One would say that it tells of a voyage to the Canaries, of which one is unmistakably "the island under Mount Atlas", and that this was undertaken by way of the Azores and Madeira, with inevitable experience of great beauty in some islands and volcanic terrors in others. Madeira may well have been pitched upon by the interpreters as the suitable scene of a particularly long tarrying by the way. Of course magic filled out all gaps of real knowledge, and wonders grew with each new rewriting.

Whatever Brendan did, there is no doubt that Irish mariner-monks, incited by the great awakening which followed St. Patrick's mission, covered many seas in their frail vessels during the next three or four centuries. They set up a flourishing religious establishment in Orkney, made stepping stones of the intervening islands, and reached Iceland some time in the eighth century, if not earlier. The Norsemen, following in their tracks as always, found them there, and the earliest Icelandic writings record their departure, leaving behind them books, bells, and other souvenirs on an islet off shore which still bears their name.

Did they keep before the Norsemen to America too? At least the Norsemen thought so. For centuries the name Great Ireland or Whitemen's Land was accepted in Norse geography as meaning a region far west of Ireland, a parallel to Great Sweden (Russia), which lay far east of Sweden. The saga of Thorfinn Karlsefni, first to attempt colonizing America, makes it plain that his followers believed Great Ireland to be somewhere in that region, and it is explicitly located near Wineland by the twelfth century *Landnamabok*. Also there were specific tales afloat of a distinguished Icelander lost at sea, who was afterward found in a western region by an Irish vessel long driven before the storm. The version most relied on came through one Rafn, who had dwelt in Limerick; also through Thorfinn, earl of the Orkneys.

Brazil, the old Irish *Breasail*, was another name for land west of Ireland—where there is none short of America—on very many medieval maps, of which perhaps a dozen are older than the year 1400, the earliest yet found being that of Dalorto, 1325. Usually it appears as a nearly circular disc of land opposite Munster, at first altogether too near the Irish coast, as indeed the perfectly well-known Corvo was drawn much too near the coast of Spain, or as even in the sixteenth century, when Newfoundland had been repeatedly visited, that island was shifted by divers mapmakers eastward towards Ireland, almost to the conventional station of Brazil. Also, not long afterwards, the maps of Nicolay and Zaltieri adopted the reverse treatment of transferring Brazil to Newfoundland waters, as if recognizing past error and restoring its proper place.

The name Brazil appears not to have been adopted by the Norsemen, but there is one fifteenth century map, perhaps of 1480, preserved in Milan, which shows this large disc-form "Brazil" just below Greenland ("Illa Verde"), in such relation that the mapmaker really must

have known of Labrador under the former name and believed that it could be readily reached from that Norse colony.

It seems altogether likely that “Brazil” was applied to the entire outjutting region of America surrounding the Gulf of St. Lawrence—that part of this continent which is by far the nearest Ireland. Besides the facts above stated, certain coincidences of real geography and of these old maps favor that belief, and they are quite unlikely to have been guessed or invented. Thus certain maps, beginning with 1375, while keeping the circular external outline of Ireland, reduce the land area to a mere ring, enclosing an expanse of water dotted with islands ; and certain other maps show it still nearly circular externally, and solid, but divided into two parts by a curved channel nearly from north to south. The former exposition is possible enough to one more concerned with the nearly enclosed Gulf of St. Lawrence and its islands than with its two comparatively narrow outlets; the second was afterward repeated approximately by Gastoldi’s map illustrating Ramusio when he was somehow moved to minimize the width of the Gulf, though well remembering the straits of Belle Isle and Cabot. There are some other coincidences, but it is unnecessary to dwell on them. Land west of Ireland must be either pure fancy or the very region in question, and it is hardly believable that fancy could guess so accurately as to two different interpretations of real though unusual geography and give them right latitude, with such an old Irish name (Brazil) as might naturally have been conferred in the early voyaging times. That an extensive region, chiefly mainland, should be represented as an island is no objection, as anyone will see by examining the maps which break up everything north of South America in the years next following the achievements of Columbus and Cabot. There was a natural tendency to expect nothing but islands short of Asia.

It seems likely, therefore, that America was actually reached by the Irish even before the Norsemen and certainly long before all other Europeans.

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Irish Precursors of Dante

By Sidney Gunn, M.A.

One of the supreme creations of the human mind is the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, and undoubtedly one of its chief sources is the literature of ancient Ireland. Dante himself was a native of Florence, Italy, and lived from 1265 to 1321. Like many great men, he incurred the hatred of his countrymen, and he spent, as a result, the last twenty years of his life in exile with a price on his head. He had been falsely accused of theft and treachery, and his indignation at the wrong thus done him and at the evil conduct of his contemporaries led him to write his poem, in which he visits Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, and learns how God punishes bad actions, and how He rewards those who do His will.

To the writing of his poem Dante brought all the learning of his time, all its science, and an art that has never been surpassed, perhaps never equalled. Of course, he did not know any

Irish, but he knew Italian and the then universal tongue of the learned—Latin, in both of which were tales of visits to the other world ; and the greater part of these tales, as well as those most resembling Dante’s work in form and spirit, were Irish in origin.

All peoples have traditions of persons visiting the realms of the dead. Homer tells of Odysseus going there ; Virgil does the same of Aeneas ; and the Oriental peoples, as well as the Germanic races, have similar tales ; but no people have so many or such finished accounts of this sort as the ancient Irish. In pagan times in Ireland one of the commonest adventures attributed to a hero was a visit to “ tír na m-beó,” the land of the living, or to “ tír na n-óg,” the land of the young ; and this supernatural world was reached in some cases by entering a fairy mound and going beneath the ground to it, and in others by sailing over the ocean.

Of the literature of pagan Ireland, though much has come down to us, we have only a very small fraction of what once existed, and what we have has been transmitted and modified by persons of later times and different culture, who, both consciously and unconsciously, have changed it, so that it is very different from what it was in its original form ; but the subject and the main outlines still remain, and we have many accounts of both voyages and underground journeys to the other world.

The oldest voyage is, perhaps, that of Maelduin, which, Tennyson has transmuted into English under the title *The Voyage of Maeldune*. This is a voyage undertaken for revenge ; but vengeance, as Sir Walter Scott has pointed out in his preface to *The Two Drovers*, springs in a barbarous society from a passion for justice ; and it is this instinct for justice that inspires the Irish hero to endure and to achieve what he does. Christianity has preserved this legend and added to it its own peculiar quality of mercy ; and this illustrates one of the characteristics of Ireland’s pagan literature—it is imperfectly Christian and can readily be made to ex-press the Christian point of view.

Another voyage of pagan Irish literature is the *Voyage of Bran*. In this tale idealism is the inspiration that leads the hero into the unknown world. A woman appears who is invisible to all but Bran, and whose song of the beautiful supernatural land beyond the wave is heard by none but him ; so that, after refusing to go with her the first time she appears, at length he steps into her boat of glass and sails away to view the wonders and taste the joys of the other world.

In these tales we have two main elements, one real and one ideal. The real element is the fact that the ancient Irish unquestionably made voyages and visited lands which the fervid Celtic imagination and the lapse of time transformed into the wonderful regions of the legends. The stories are thus early geographies, and they show unmistakably a knowledge of western Europe and of the Canary Islands or some other tropical regions ; perhaps also, some have gone so far as to claim, they are reminiscent of voyages to America.

The ideal element is no less important as indicating achievement, for it shows that the Irish poets of pagan times had not only realized, but had succeeded in making their national traditions embody, the fact that love of justice and aspiration for knowledge are the foundations of all enduring human achievement and all perfect human joy. Christianity therefore found moral and spiritual ideas of a highly developed order in pagan Ireland, and it did not hesitate to adopt whatever in the literature of the country illustrated its own teachings, and not only were these stories of visits to the other world full of suggestions as to ways of enforcing Christian doctrine, but the Irish church and men of Irish birth were the most active in spreading the faith in the early centuries of its conquest of western Europe.

For these reasons it is not strange that all the earliest Christian visions of the spirit-world were of Irish origin. We find the earliest in the *Ecclesiastical History* of the “ Venerable Bede,” who died in 735. It is the story of how an Irishman of great sanctity, Fursey by name,

was taken in spirit by three angels to a place from which he looked down and saw the four fires that are to consume the world : those of falsehood, avarice, discord, fraud and impiety. In this there is the germ of some very fundamental things in Dante's poem, and we know that Dante knew Bede and had probably read his history, for he places him in Paradise and mentions him elsewhere in his works.

In Bede's work there is also another vision, and though in this second case the man who visits the spirit-world is not an Irishman, but a Saxon named Drithelm, yet the story came to Bede through an Irish monk named Haemgils ; so it, too, is connected with Ireland, and it also contains much that is developed further in the *Divine Comedy*.

One of the most celebrated of the works belonging to this class of so-called " visionary" writings is the *Fis* or " Vision" which goes under the name of the famous Irish saint, Adamnan, who was poetically entitled the " High Scholar of the Western World." This particular vision, the *Fis Adamnáin*, is remarkable among other things for its literary quality, which is far superior to anything of the time, and for the fact that it represents " the highest level of the school to which it belonged," and that it is " the most important contribution made to the growth of the legend within the Christian Church prior to the advent of Dante."

Another Irish vision of great popularity all over Europe in the Middle Ages is the *Voyage of Saint Brendan*. This is known as the Irish Odyssey, and it is similar to the pagan tales of Maelduin and Bran, except that instead of its hero being a dauntless warrior seeking vengeance or a noble youth seeking happiness, he is a Christian saint in quest of peace ; and instead of the perils of the way being overcome by physical force or the favor of some capricious pagan deity, they are averted by the power of faith and virtue.

The *Voyage of Saint Brendan*, like its pagan predecessors, has a real and an ideal basis ; and in both respects it shows an advancement over its prototypes. It contains some very poetic touches, and is credited with being the source of some of the most effective features of Dante's poem. Its great popularity is shown by the fact that Caxton, the first English printer, published a translation of it in 1483 ; so that it was among the first books printed in English, and for that reason must have been one of the best-known works of the time. Dante undoubtedly knew it, for he was a great scholar in the learning of his day, and especially in ecclesiastical history and the biography of saints.

Another vision of Irish origin that Dante and other writers have borrowed from is that of an Irish soldier named Tundale. He is said to have been a very wicked and proud man, who refused to a friend who owed him for three horses an extension of time in which to pay for them. For this he was struck down by an invisible hand so that he remained apparently dead from Wednesday till Saturday, when he revived and told a story of a visit to the world of the dead that has many features later embodied in the *Divine Comedy*. Tundale's vision is said to have taken place in 1149 ; Dante probably wrote his poem between 1314 and 1321.

The Irish also produced another legend of this sort that was enormously and universally popular, and became the chief authority on the nature of heaven and hell, in the story of *Saint Patrick's Purgatory*. Saint Patrick was said to have been granted a view of heaven and hell, and a certain island in Lough Derg in Donegal was reputed to be the spot in which he had begun his journey ; and there, it was said, those who desired to purge themselves of their sins could enter as he had entered and come back to the world again, provided their faith was strong enough.

This legend was probably known in Ireland from a very early time, but it had spread over all western Europe by the twelfth century. Henry of Saltrey, a Benedictine monk of the Abbey of that name in England, wrote an account in Latin of the descent of an Irish soldier named Owen into Saint Patrick's Purgatory in 1153 ; and this story soon became the subject

of poetic treatment all over Europe. We have several French versions, one by the celebrated French poetess Marie de France, who lived about 1200 ; and there are others in all the languages of Europe, besides evidence of its wide circulation in the original Latin. Its importance is shown by the fact that it is mentioned by Matthew Paris, the chief English historian of the thirteenth century, and also by Froissart, the well-known French annalist of the fourteenth while Calderon, the great Spanish dramatist, has written a play based on the legend. Dante undoubtedly knew of Marie de France's version as well as the original of Henry of Saltrey and probably others besides.

From what has been said it will be seen that Dante's masterpiece is largely based on literature of Irish origin ; but there are other superlative exhibitions of human genius of which the same is true. One of these is the story of Tristan and Isolde. Tristan is the paragon of all knightly accomplishments, the most versatile figure in the entire literature of chivalry ; while Isolde is an Irish princess. By a trick of fate these two drink a love potion inadvertently and become irresistibly enamored of each other, although Isolde is betrothed to King Mark of Cornwall, and Tristan is his nephew and ambassador. The story that follows is infinitely varied, intensely dramatic, delicately beautiful, and tenderly pathetic. It has been treated by several poets of great genius, among them Gottfried of Strassburg, the greatest German poet of his time, and Richard Wagner ; but all the beauty and power in the works of these men existed in the original Celtic form of the tale, and the later writers have only discovered it and brought it to light.

The same thing is true of the Arthurian Legend and the story of the Holy Grail. Dante knew of King Arthur's fame, and mentions him in the *Inferno*. To Dante he was a Christian hero, and the historical Arthur may have been a Christian ; but much in the story goes back to the pagan Celtic religion. We can find in Irish literature many references that indicate a belief in a self-sustaining, miraculous object similar to the Holy Grail, and the fact that this object was developed into a symbol of some of the deepest and most beautiful Christian truths shows the high character of the civilization and literature of ancient Ireland.

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Irish Influence on English Literature

By E.C. Quiggin, M.A.

Among the literary peoples of the west of Europe, the Irish, in late medieval and early modern times, were singularly little affected by the frequent innovations in taste and theme which influenced Romance and Teutonic nations alike. To such an extent is this true, that one is often inclined to think that far-off Iceland was to a greater degree in the general European current than the much more accessible Erin. During the age of chivalry, conditions in Ireland were not calculated to promote the growth of epic and lyric poetry after the continental manner. Some considerable time elapsed before the Norman barons became fully Hibernicised, previous to which their interest may be assumed to have turned to the compositions of the trouvères. In the early Norman period, the poets of Ireland might well have begun to imitate Romance models. But, strange to say, they did not, and, for this, various reasons might be assigned. The flowing verses of the Anglo-Norman were impossible for men who delighted in the trammels of the native prosody ; and in the heyday of French influence, the

patrons of letters in Ireland probably insisted on hearing the foreign compositions in their original dress, as these nobles were doubtless sufficiently versed in Norman-French to be able to appreciate them. But a still more potent factor was the conservatism of the hereditary Irish poet families. A close corporation, they appear to have resented every innovation, and were content to continue the tradition of their ancestors. The direct consequence of this tenacious clinging to the fashions of by-gone days rendered it impossible, nay almost inconceivable, that the literary men of Ireland should have exerted any profound or immediate influence upon England or western Europe. Yet, nowadays, few serious scholars will be prepared to deny that the island contributed in considerable measure to the common literary stock of the Middle Ages.

We might expect to find that direct influence, as a general rule, can be most easily traced in the case of religious themes. Here, in the literature of vision, so popular in Ireland, a chord was struck which continued to vibrate powerfully until the time of the Reformation. In this branch the riotous fancy of the Celtic monk caught the medieval imagination from an early period. Bede has preserved for us the story of Fursey, an Irish hermit who died in France, A.D. 650. The greatest Irish composition of this class with which we are acquainted, the *Vision of Adamnan*, does not appear to have been known outside the island, but a later work of a similar nature met with striking success. This was the *Vision of Tundale* (Tnudgal), written in Latin by an Irishman named Marcus at Regensburg, about the middle of the twelfth century. It seems probable that this work was known to Dante, and, in addition to the numerous continental versions, there is a rendering of the story into Middle English verse.

Closely allied to the Visions are the *Imrama* or “voyages” (Lat. navigationes). The earliest romances of this class are secular, e.g., *Imram Maelduin*, which provided Tennyson with the frame-work of his well-known poem. However, the notorious love of adventure on the part of the Irish monks inevitably led to the composition of religious romances of a similar kind. The most famous story of this description, the *Voyage of St. Brendan*, found its way into every Christian country in Europe, and consequently figures in the South English Legendary, a collection of versified lives of saints made in the neighborhood of Gloucester towards the end of the thirteenth century. The episode of St. Brendan and the whale, moreover, was probably the ultimate source of one of Milton’s best known similes in his description of Satan. Equally popular was the visit of Sir Owayn to the Purgatory of St. Patrick, which is also included in the same Middle English Legendary. Ireland further contributed in some measure to the common stock of medieval stories which were used as illustrations by the preachers and in works of an edifying character.

When we turn to purely secular themes, we find ourselves on much less certain ground. Though the discussion as to the origins of the “romance of Uther’s son”, Arthur, continues with unabated vigor, many scholars have come to think that the Celtic background of these stories contains much that is derived from Hibernian sources. Some writers in the past have argued in favor of an independent survival of common Celtic features, in Wales and Ireland, but now the tendency is to regard all such coincidences as borrowings on the part of Cymric craftsmen. At the beginning of the twelfth century a new impulse seems to have been imparted to native minstrelsy in Wales under the patronage of Gruffydd ap Cynan, a prince of Gwynedd, who had spent many years in exile at the court of Dublin. Some of the Welsh rhapsodists apparently served a kind of apprenticeship with their Irish brethren, and many things Irish were assimilated at this time which, through this channel, were shortly to find their way into Anglo-French. Thus it may now be regarded as certain that the name of the “fair sword” Excalibur, by Geoffrey called Caliburnus (Welsh *caletfwlch*), is taken from Caladbolg, the far-famed broadsword of Fergus macRoig. It does not appear that the whole framework of the Irish sagas was taken over, but, as Windisch points out, episodes were borrowed as well as tricks of imagery. So, to mention but one, the central incident of *Syr Gawain and the Grene Knyght* is doubtless taken from the similar adventure of Cuchulainn

in Bricriu's Feast. The share assigned to Irish influence in the *matière de Bretagne* is likely to grow considerably with the progress of research.

The fairy lore of Great Britain undoubtedly owes much to Celtic phantasy. Of this Chaucer, at any rate, had little doubt, as he writes :

In th' olde dayes of the King Arthour,
Of which that Britons speken greet honour,
Al was this land fulfild of fayerye ;
The elf-queen, with hir joly companye,
Daunced ful ofte in many a grene med.

And here again there is a reasonable probability that certain features were borrowed from the wealth of story current in the neighboring isle. Otherwise it is difficult to understand why the queen of fayerye should bear an Irish name (Mab, from Irish Medb), and curiously enough the form of the name rather suggests that it was borrowed through a written medium and not by oral tradition. On the other hand it is incorrect to derive Puck from Irish *puca*, as the latter is undoubtedly borrowed from some form of Teutonic speech.

So all embracing a mind as that of the greatest English dramatist could not fail to be interested in the gossip that must have been current in London at the time of the wars in Ulster. References to kerns and gallowglasses are fairly frequent. He had evidently heard of the marvellous powers with which the Irish bards were credited, for, in *As You Like It*, Rosalind exclaims :

“ I was never so be-rhymed since Pythagoras' time, that I was an Irish rat, which I can hardly remember.”

Similarly, in *King Richard III*, mention is made of the prophetic utterance of an Irish bard, a trait which does not appear in the poet's source. Any statements as to Irish influence in Shakespeare that go beyond this belong to the realm of conjecture. Professor Kittredge has attempted to show that in *Syr Orfeo*, upon which the poet drew for portions of the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Irish story of Etain and Mider was fused with the medieval form of the classical tale of Orpheus and Eurydice. Direct influence is entirely wanting, and it is difficult to see how it could have been otherwise.

Even in the case of the Elizabethan poet who spent many years in the south of Ireland, there is no trace of Hibernian lore or legend. Spenser, indeed, tells us himself that he had caused some of the native poetry to be translated to him, and had found that it “ savoured of sweet wit and good invention.” But Ireland plays an infinitesimal part in the *Faerie Queene*. The scenery round Kilcolman Castle forms the background of much of the incident in Book V. “ Marble far from Ireland brought” is mentioned in a simile in the second Book, where we also read :

As when a swarme of gnats at eventide
Out of the fennes of Allan do arise.

But Ireland supplied no further inspiration.

The various plantations of the seventeenth century produced an Anglo-Irish stock which soon asserted itself in literature. As a typical example, we may take the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. At his first school at Lissoy, Oliver Goldsmith came under Thomas Byrne, a regular shanachie, possessed of all the traditional lore, with a remarkable gift for versifying. It was under this man that the boy made his first attempts at verse, and his memory is celebrated in *The Deserted Village* :

There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was, and stern to view.

Unfortunately Goldsmith was removed to Elphin at the age of nine, and although he retained an affection for Irish music all his life, his intimate connection with Irish Ireland apparently ceased at this point. "Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain" is doubtless full of reminiscences of the poet's early years in Westmeath, but the sentiments, the rhythm, and the language are entirely cast in an English mould. We may mention, in passing, that it has been suggested that Swift derived the idea of the kingdom of Lilliput from the Irish story of the Adventures of Fergus macLeide amongst the leprechauns. All that can be said is that this derivation is not impossible, though the fact that the tale is preserved only in a single manuscript rather points to the conclusion that the story did not enjoy great popularity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

We have seen that Goldsmith was removed from an Irish atmosphere at a tender age, and this is not the only instance of the frowning of fortune upon the native literature. When the fame of the ancient bards of the Gael was noised from end to end of Europe, it was through the medium of Macpherson's forgeries. *Fingal* caught the fleeting fancy of the moment in a manner never achieved by the true Ossianic lays of Ireland. The *Reliques of Irish Poetry*, published by Miss Brooke by subscription in Dublin in 1789 to vindicate the antiquity of the literature of Erin, never went into a second edition. And although some of the pieces contained in that volume have been reprinted in such undertakings of a learned character as the volumes of the Dublin Ossianic Society, J.F. Campbell's *Leabhar na Feinne*, and Cameron's *Reliquiae Celticae*, they have aroused little interest amongst those ignorant of the Irish tongue.

During the nineteenth century, the number of poets who drew upon Ireland's past for their themes increased considerably. The most popular of all is unquestionably the author of the *Irish Melodies*. But, here again, the poet owes little or nothing to vernacular poetry, the mould is English, the sentiments are those of the poet's age. Moore's acquaintance with the native language can have been but of the slightest, and in the case of Mangan we are told that he had to rely upon literal versions of Irish pieces furnished him by O'Donovan or O'Curry. Of the numerous attempts to reproduce the over-elaboration of rhyme to which Irish verse has ever been prone, Father Prout's *Bells of Shandon* is perhaps the only one that is at all widely known. When the legendary lore of Ireland became accessible to men of letters, owing to the labors of O'Curry, O'Donovan, and Hennessy, and the publication of various ancient texts by the Irish Archaeological Society, it was to be expected that an attempt would be made by some poet of Erin to do for his native land what the Wizard of the North had accomplished for Scotland. The task was undertaken by Sir Samuel Ferguson, who met with conspicuous success. His most ambitious effort, *Congal*, deals in epic fashion with the story of the battle of Moyra. Others in similar strain treat the story of Conaire Mór and Deirdre, whilst others such as the *Tain-Quest* are more in the nature of ballads. Ferguson did more to introduce the English reading public to Irish story than would have been accomplished by any number of bald translations. His diction is little affected by the originals, and he sometimes treats his materials with great freedom, but his achievement was a notable one, and he has not infrequently been acclaimed as the national poet.

Is it perhaps invidious to single out any living author for special mention, but this brief survey cannot close without noticing the dramatic poems of W.B. Yeats, the latest poet who attempts to present the old stories in an English dress. His plays *On Baile's Strand*, *Deirdre*, and others, have become familiar to English audiences through the excellent acting of the members of the Abbey Theatre Company. The original texts are now much better known than they were in Ferguson's day, and Mr. Yeats consequently cannot permit himself the same

liberties. Similarly, it is only during the last twenty-five years that the language of Irish poetry has been carefully studied, and Mr. Yeats has this advantage over his predecessors that on occasion, *e.g.*, in certain passages in *The King's Threshold*, he is able to introduce with great effect reminiscences of the characteristic epithets and imagery which formed so large a part of the stock-in-trade of the medieval bard.

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Irish Folklore

By Alfred Perceval Graves.

Among savage peoples there is at first no distinction of a definite kind between good and bad spirits, and when a distinction has been reached, a great advance in a spiritual direction has been made. For the key to the religion of savages is fear, and until such terror has been counteracted by belief in beneficent powers, civilization will not follow. But the elimination of the fear of the unseen is a slow process ; indeed, it will exist side by side with the belief in Christianity itself, after a modification through various stages of better pagan belief.

Ireland still presents, in its more out-of-the-way districts, evidence of that strong persistence in the belief in maleficent or malicious influences of the pre-Christian powers of the air, which it seems difficult to eradicate from the Celtic imagination. In the celebrated poem entitled *The Breastplate of St. Patrick*, there is much the same attitude on the part of Patrick towards the Druids and their powers of concealing and changing, of paralyzing and cursing, as was shown by Moses towards the magicians of Egypt. Indeed, in Patrick's time a belief in a world of fairies existed even in the king's household, for " when the two daughters of King Leary of Ireland, Ethnea the fair and Fedelma the ruddy, came early one morning to the well of Clebach to wash, they found there a synod of holy bishops with Patrick. And they knew not whence they came, or in what form, or from what people, or from what country ; but they supposed them to be *Duine Sidh*, or gods of the earth, or a phantasm."

Colgan explains the term *Duine Sidh* thus : " Fantastical spirits," he writes, " are by the Irish called men of the *Sidh*, because they are seen, as it were, to come out of the beautiful hills to infest men, and hence the vulgar belief that they reside in certain subterranean habitations : and sometimes the hills themselves are called, by the Irish, *Sidhe* or *Siodha*."

No doubt, when the princesses spoke of the gods of the earth, reference was made to such pagan deities as Beal ; Dagda the great or the good god ; Aine, the Moon, goddess of the water and of wisdom ; Manannan macLir, the Irish Neptune ; Crom, the Irish Ceres ; and Iphinn, the benevolent, whose relations to the Irish Oirfidh resembled those of Apollo towards Orpheus ; and to the allegiance they owed to the Elements, the Wind, and the Stars. But besides these pagan divinities and powers, and quite apart from them, the early Irish believed in two classes of fairies : in the first place, a hierarchy of fairy beings, well and ill disposed, not differing in appearance, to any great degree at any rate, from human beings—good spirits and demons, rarely visible during the daytime ; and, in the second place, there was the magic race of the De Danann, who, after conquest by the Milesians, transformed themselves into fairies, and in that guise continued to inhabit the underworld of the Irish hills,

and to issue thence in support of Irish heroes, or to give their aid against other fairy adversaries.

There is another theory to account for the fairy race. It is that they are angels who revolted with Satan and were excluded from heaven for their unworthiness, but were not found evil enough for hell, and therefore were allowed to occupy that intermediate space which has been called "the Other World." It is still a moot point with the Irish peasantry, as it was with the Irish saints of old, whether, after being compelled to dwell without death among rocks and hills, lakes and seas, bushes and forest, till the day of judgment, the fairies then have the chance of salvation. Indeed, the fairies are themselves believed to have great doubts of a future existence, though, like many men, entertaining undefined hopes of happiness ; and hence the enmity which some of them have for mankind, who, they acknowledge, will live eternally. Thus their actions are balanced between generosity and vindictiveness towards the human race.

Mr. W.Y. Evans Wentz, A.M., of Leland Stanford University, California, and Jesus College, Oxford, has received an honorary degree from the latter university for his thesis, "The Fairy Faith in Celtic Countries : Its Psychical Origin and Nature", a most laborious as well as ingenious work, whose object is to prove "that the origin of the fairy faith is psychical, and that fairyland, being thought of as an invisible world within which the visible world is immersed as an island in an unexplored ocean, actually exists, and that it is peopled by more species of living beings than this world, because incomparably more vast and varied in its possibilities." This may be added as a fourth theory to account for the existence of fairies, and it may be further stated here that the Irish popular belief in ghosts attributes to some of their departed spirits much of the same violence and malice with which fairies are credited. Mr. Jeremiah Curtin gives striking instances of this kind in his book, the *Folk Lore of West Kerry*.

It became necessary, therefore, for the Gaels who believed in the preternatural powers of the fairies for good and ill to propitiate them as far as possible. On May eve, accordingly, cattle were driven into raths and bled there, some of the blood being tasted, the rest poured out in sacrifice. Men and women were also bled on these occasions. The seekers for buried treasure, over which fairies were supposed to have influence, immolated a black cock or a black cat to propitiate them. Again, a cow, suffering from sickness believed to be due to fairy malice, was bled and then devoted to St. Martin. If it recovered, it was never sold or killed. The first new milk of a cow was poured out on the ground to propitiate the fairies, and especially on the ground within a fairy rath. The first drop of any drink is also thrown out by old Irish people. If a child spills milk, the mother says, "that's for the fairies, leave it to them and welcome." Slops should never be thrown out of doors without the warning, "Take care of water !" lest fairies should be passing invisibly and get soiled by the discharge. Eddies of dust upon the road are supposed to be caused by the fairies, and tufts of grass, sticks, and pebbles are thrown into the centre of the eddy to propitiate the unseen beings. Some fairies of life size, who live within the green hills or under the raths, are supposed to carry off healthy babes to be made fairy children, their abstractors leaving weak changelings in their place. Similarly, nursing mothers are sometimes supposed to be carried off to give the breast to fairy babes, and handsome young men are spirited away to become bridegrooms to fairy brides. Again, folk suffering from falling sickness are supposed to be in that condition owing to the fatigue caused by nocturnal rides through the air with the fairies, whose steeds are bewitched rushes, blades of grass, straws, fern roots, and cabbage stalks. The latter, to be serviceable for the purpose, should be cut into the rude shapes of horses before the metamorphosis can take place.

Iron of every kind keeps away malignant fairies : thus, a horseshoe nailed to the bottom of the churn prevents butter from being bewitched. Here is a form of charm against the fairies who have bewitched the butter : "Every window should be barred, a great turf fire should be lit upon which nine irons should be placed, the bystanders chanting twice over in Irish,

‘ Come, butter, come ; Peter stands at the gate waiting for a buttered cake.’ As the irons become heated the witch will try to break in, asking the people to take the irons, which are burning her, off the fire. On their refusing, she will go and bring back the butter to the churn. The irons may then be removed from the fire and all will go well.”

If a neighbor or stranger should enter a cottage during the churning, he should put his hand to the dash, or the butter will not come. A small piece of iron should be sewed into an infant’s clothes and kept there until the child is baptized, and salt should be sprinkled over his cradle to preserve the babe from abduction. The fairies are supposed to have been conquered by an iron-weaponed race, and hence their dread of the metal.

To recover a spell-bound friend, stand on All Hallows’ eve at cross roads or at a spot pointed out by a wise woman or fairy doctor. When you have rubbed fairy ointment on your eyelids, the fairies will become visible as the host sweeps by with its captive, whom the gazer will then be able to recognize. A sudden gust announces their approach. Stooping down, you will then throw dust or milk at the procession, whose members are then obliged to surrender your spell-bound friend. If a man leaves home after his wife’s confinement, some of his clothes should be spread over the mother and infant, or the fairies may carry them off. It is good for a woman, but bad for a man, to dream of fairies. It betokens marriage for a girl, misfortune for a man, who should not undertake serious business for some time after such dreaming.

Fairy changelings may be recognized by tricky habits, constant crying, and other unusual characteristics. It was customary to recover the true child in the following way : The changeling was placed upon an iron shovel over the fire, when it would go shrieking up the chimney, and the *bona fide* human child would be restored. It was believed that fairy changelings often produced a set of small bagpipes from under the clothes and played dance music upon them, till the inmates of the cottage dropped with exhaustion from the effects of the step dancing they were compelled to engage in.

On Samain eve, the night before the first of November, or, as it is now called, All Hallows’ night or Hallowe’en, all the fairy hills or *shees* are thrown wide open and the fairy host issues forth, as mortals who are bold enough to venture near may see. Naturally therefore people keep indoors so as not to encounter the spectral host. The superstition that the fairies are abroad on Samain night still exists in Ireland and Scotland, and there is a further belief, no doubt derived from it, that the graves are open on that night and that the spirits of the dead are abroad.

Salt, as already suggested, is regarded to be so lucky that if a child falls, it should always be given three pinches of salt, and if a neighbor calls to borrow salt, it should not be refused, even though it be the last grain in the house.

An infant born with teeth should have them drawn by the nearest smith, and the first teeth when shed should be thrown into the fire, lest the fairies should get hold of what had been part of you.

Those who hear fairy music are supposed to be haunted by the melody, and many are believed to go mad or commit suicide in consequence.

The fairies are thought to engage in warfare with one another, and in the year 1800 a specially sanguinary battle was believed to have been fought between two clans of the fairies in county Kilkenny. In the morning the hawthorns along the fences were found crushed to pieces and drenched with blood.

In popular belief fairies often go hunting, and faint sounds of fairy horns, the baying of fairy hounds, and the cracking of fairy whips are supposed to be heard on these occasions, while the flight of the hunters is said to resemble in sound the humming of bees.

Besides the life-sized fairies who are reputed to have these direct dealings with human beings, there are diminutive preternatural beings who are also supposed to come into close touch with men. Among these is the Luchryman (*Leithphrogan*), or brogue maker, otherwise known as Leprechaun. He is always found mending or making a shoe, and, if grasped firmly and kept constantly in view, will disclose hidden treasure to you, or render up his *sparan na sgillinge*, or purse of the (inexhaustible) shilling. He can only be bound by a plough chain or woolen thread. He is the symbol of industry which, if steadily faced, leads to fortune, but, if lost sight of, is followed by its forfeiture.

Love in idleness is personified by another pigmy, the *Geancanach* (love-talker). He does not appear, like the Leprechaun, with a purse in one of his pockets, but with his hands in both of them, and a dudeen (short pipe) in his mouth, as he lazily strolls through lonely valleys making love to the foolish country lasses and “gostering” with the idle “boys.” To meet him meant bad luck, and whoever was ruined by ill-judged love was said to have been with the *Geancanach*.

Another evil sprite was the *Clobher-ceann*, “a jolly, red-faced, drunken little fellow,” always “found astride of a wine-butt” singing and drinking from a full tankard in a hard drinker’s cellar, and bound by his appearance to bring its owner to speedy ruin.

Then there were the *Leannan-sighes*, or native Muses, to be found in every place of note to inspire the local bard, and the *Beansighes* (Banshees, fairy women) attached to each of the old Irish families and giving warning of the death of one of its members with piteous lamentations.

Black Joanna of the Boyne (*Siubhan Dubh na Boinne*) appeared on Hallowe’en in the shape of a great black fowl, bringing luck to the home whose *Banithee* (woman of the house) kept the dwelling constantly clean and neat.

The Pooka, who appeared in the shape of a horse, and whom Shakespeare is by many believed to have adapted as “Puck,” was a goblin who combined “horse-play” with viciousness, but also at times helped with the housework.

The *Dullaghan* was a churchyard demon whose head was of a movable kind. Dr. Joyce writes : “You generally meet him with his head in his pocket, under his arm, or absent altogether ; or if you have the fortune to light upon a number of *Dullaghans*, you may see them amusing themselves by flinging their heads at one another or kicking them for footballs.”

An even more terrible churchyard demon is the fascinating phantom that waylays the widower at his wife’s very tomb, and poisons him by her kiss when he has yielded to her blandishments.

Of monsters the Irish had, and still believe in, the *Piast* (Latin bestia), a huge dragon or serpent confined to lakes by St. Patrick till the day of judgment, but still occasionally seen in their waters. In old Fenian times, namely, the days of Finn and his companion knights, the *Piasts*, however, roamed the country, devouring men and women and cattle in large numbers, and some of the early heroes are recorded to have been swallowed alive by them and then to have hewed their way out of their entrails.

Merrows, or Mermaids, are also still believed in, and many folk tales exist describing their intermarriage with mortals.

According to Nicholas O’Kearney, “ It is the general opinion of many old persons versed in native traditional lore, that, before the introduction of Christianity, all animals possessed the faculties of human reason and speech ; and old story-tellers will gravely inform you that every beast could speak before the arrival of St. Patrick, but that the saint having expelled the demons from the land by the sound of his bell, all the animals that, before that time, had possessed the power of foretelling future events, such as the Black Steed of *Binn-eachlabhra*, the Royal Cat of *Cloughmagh-righ-cat* (Clough), and others, became mute, and many of them fled to Egypt and other foreign countries.”

Cats are said to have been appointed to guard hidden treasures ; and there are few who have not heard old Irish people tell about strange meetings of cats and violent battles fought by them in the neighborhood. “ It was believed,” adds O’Kearney, “ that an evil spirit in the shape of a cat assumed command over these animals in various districts, and that when those wicked beings pleased they could compel all the cats belonging to their division to attack those of some other district. The same was said of rats ; and rat-expellers, when commanding a colony of those troublesome and destructive animals to emigrate to some other place, used to address their ‘ billet’ to the infernal rat supposed to hold command over the rest. In a curious pamphlet on the power of bardic compositions to charm and expel rats, lately published, Mr. Eugene O’Curry states that a degraded priest, who was descended from an ancient family of hereditary bards, was enabled to expel a colony of rats by the force of satire !”

Hence, of course, Shakespeare’s reference to rhyming Irish rats to death.

It will thus be seen that Irish Fairy Lore well deserves to have been called by Mr. Alfred Nutt, one of the leading authorities on the subject, “ as fair and bounteous a harvest of myth and romance as ever flourished among any race.”

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